

LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON MATERIALS USE AND THEIR LOCUS OF CONTROL: CASE-STUDIES FROM IRAN AND JAPAN

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First received: 10 October 2017

Final proof received: 30 January 2018

Abstract

Teacher belief research has gone a long way to understand the complex mental lives of language teachers with regards to different aspects of the teaching profession. Little, however, is known about the teachers' beliefs on the use of language teaching materials. Similarly, attempts to find literature on EFL teachers' actual use of the materials based on systematic observation meets with great difficulty. The present case study research was therefore designed to contribute to the literature on teacher beliefs and materials use utilizing data from five Iranian and five Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language. Based on questionnaires, observations (50 sessions) and stimulated recall interviews (around 13 hours), it was found that while the Iranian teachers' beliefs were rooted in their learning and teaching experiences besides the syllabus and context imposed standards, the Japanese teachers' beliefs were mediated by their learning and teaching experiences, self-developed theories, SLA informed theories and colleague inspirations. The results of stimulated recall sessions making use of the construct of locus of control as interpretive lens also suggested that while the Iranian teachers mostly held other parties responsible for their pedagogic decisions, the Japanese teachers took responsibility for most of their decision on materials use.

Keywords: Teacher belief; teacher cognition; materials use; locus of control

English language teaching has embraced substantial changes and shifts in methodology since it was recognized as a field of enquiry. It has received much attention by researchers and practitioners who have been trying to theorize the tenets of second language (L2) learning and find ways to make the L2 teaching process more efficient and effective. Given the important role English plays as a lingua franca in nearly all parts of the globe, this could not have been far from expectation. However, a retrospective look at the history of changes in language teaching suggests how the teaching materials have maintained their constant presence in the classroom. In fact there are hardly any teachers who may refrain from using published teaching materials altogether (McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013) and this, once again, underlines the fact that materials play substantial roles in most language teaching contexts worldwide.

Materials are not usually understood with unanimity though (see Tomlinson, 2011). No matter how 'materials' are defined and classified, however, a true picture of how they are implemented in classroom contexts is not achieved without taking into account the important roles of teachers and learners. Studies with such foci have illustrated how materials in general and textbooks in particular play significant parts in the professional lives of teachers (Richards & Mahoney, 1996) and the learning process. Alongside such important roles attributed to

materials and textbooks, materials evaluation has recently gained increasing prominence too. Nevertheless, not much is known about how these materials are used and exploited by language teachers in classroom context. That is, as Tomlinson (2012) notes, "there seems to be very little published on what teachers and learners actually do with materials in the classroom" (p. 156). The idea here is whether teachers take materials as 'scripts' to be meticulously followed, or rather as 'resources' to be used selectively.

The literature provides ample accounts of the advantages and disadvantages of textbook use for teachers (McGrath, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013). Yet, the truth is that besides the generic effects of textbooks on teachers, the way they are utilized can equally influence their ultimate quality. That is to say, there may be a mutual interrelationship between textbooks and the teachers' implementation of the textbooks, not truly investigated thus far. Therefore, the questions seem to be what do the teachers think about using textbooks, and how do they exploit textbooks in classroom contexts?

Answering these two questions can be particularly difficult not the least due to the fact that the teachers' beliefs may not necessarily be congruent with their actual practice. This opens up a discussion of any possible discrepancies between what the teachers think, know, believe, and what they actually do. The relationship among these four

areas has been investigated under the rubric of teacher cognition by Borg (2006) among others.

The present qualitative research, therefore, seeks to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and their materials use. The findings are interpreted in the light of research on Locus of Control (LOC) to shed more light on the nature and process of EFL teachers' decision makings regarding materials use.

Teacher Beliefs

The study of teachers' beliefs can be situated within the broader research area of teacher cognition. Research within teacher cognition has been generally concerned with "what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Thus, it might go without saying that any investigation within teacher cognition entails an analysis of the teachers' mental lives: a construct not readily accessible to researchers (Borg, 2009a).

According to Borg (2009a), any such research necessitates an investigation of teachers' thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs and the way these constructs may influence their classroom practice. It is hence extremely important to consider teachers as active agents making "instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81), and this, in turn, necessitates an investigation of what teachers believe, what they know, their attitudes, and their feelings (Borg, 2012). The accumulated effects of all these variables, possibly among others, may explain how teachers make decisions with regard to different aspects of their teaching profession as well as why they may feature contradictions in their beliefs and practices.

Teacher belief, according to Borg (1999), consists of a set of self-defined practice-oriented understandings of teaching and learning, which is concurrently context sensitive (Borg, 2003) and dynamic (Feryok, 2010). On the other hand, teacher's practice refers to the actual teaching behavior as observed in the classroom, covering a wide range of activities such as teaching, questioning, giving exams, and particularly important to this study, materials use. Also, a glance through the literature implies that teacher cognition can be traced back to an array of different sources including teachers' own experience as language learners, experience of what works best based on their own teaching experience, established practice (pre-defined), personality factors, educational/research based principles, and principles derived from an approach or method (Farrell, 2007; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

According to Phipps and Borg (2009), beliefs are likely to operate within a complex network and

that is why drawing solid conclusions about one's beliefs on a particular subject often turns out to be very difficult if possible at all. Along the same vein and looking at teacher cognition from a complexity point of view, Feryok (2010) also concluded that the mismatch between teachers' practice and their beliefs is because of the complex and dynamic nature of teachers' cognition.

Basturkmen, Loewn, and Ellis (2004) studied the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom performance during their communicative teaching lessons. They detected inconsistencies in the teachers' stated beliefs. The result of their study showed a weak relationship between what teachers think and what they actually do in practice.

Such inconsistencies may be justified by distinguishing teachers' technical knowledge from their practical knowledge. It is argued in the literature that teachers are more willing to rely on their technical knowledge when asked to express what they know or what they believe, whereas it is their practical knowledge on which they rely while teaching in classroom context (Basturkmen et al., 2004). The distinction between these two knowledge types, however, must be treated with caution since technical knowledge can be transformed into practical knowledge, for instance, through reflective pedagogy (Warford, 2011).

Teacher cognition research has been the most proliferate in L2 Grammar teaching (Borg, 2009b), enhancing the understanding of how teachers teach grammar and the beliefs behind their practices. Reading and writing have also been the focus of some studies. However, areas such as vocabulary, listening, speaking and, as with the focus of the present research, materials use have been less explored within a teacher cognition framework.

Materials Use

As will be reviewed in detail in the following, a look back at the annals of the attitudes towards materials and textbooks in language teaching might clearly imply that while there has been support for the beneficial roles textbooks play, there are equally weighed challenging voices shedding doubt on the advantages of textbook use too. As far as the former of the two sides is concerned, arguments revolve around the way textbooks can help teachers and learners (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994), for instance, by reducing the workload or providing a coherent work plan (McGrath, 2013).

Conversely, there exist broad disagreements on the merits of textbook use with the argument that using textbooks may have detrimental effects on both language teachers and learners. Swan (1992), for instance, warns that over-reliance on textbooks deprives teachers of the opportunity to have a say in the materials development process and absolves

them of a sense of responsibility towards what they are teaching.

Similarly, McGrath (2013) underlines the risk of teacher marginalization caused by adhering to the textbook prescriptions and strictly following them. The idea was initially postulated by Shannon (1987, cited in Richards & Mahoney, 1996) who warned against the threat of teachers' de-skilling, a process through which teachers lose their role as decision makers and succumb to inferior roles such as technicians obeying textbook instructions. Handing over the responsibility to the textbook may create a sense of security for the teachers; yet Swan (1992) warns against this false sense arguing that published materials cannot be deemed as flawless.

Richards and Mahoney (1996) call this reverence towards the textbooks *reification* and claim that if such a thing occurs it "results in teachers' failing to look at textbooks critically and assuming that teaching decisions made in the textbook and teaching manual are superior and more valid than those they could make themselves" (p. 43). As a response to such criticisms, Harmer (2001) suggests the use of textbooks as springboard rather than scripts. He defies criticisms on textbooks and asserts that teachers, and not textbooks, are to blame because should teachers be engaged enough, they can turn the straightjackets of textbooks into sources of creativity. But how are teachers actually using textbooks?

Unfortunately, as Tomlinson (2012) posits, most of the accounts of how teachers exploit textbooks have been speculative and based on teacher self-reports rather than systematic observations. The point also opens up a new concern on why teachers use textbooks the way they do. The answer to this question might be seeded in institutional management or the context of teaching and teacher education (McGrath, 2013).

The issue of the effects of contextual factors on teachers' use of materials, as brought up above, can create a link to teacher cognition topics. Within teacher cognition research, it is argued that teachers' practice cannot be viewed in a vacuum. That is, many other factors including their individual attributes and beliefs as well as a variety of contextual factors may affect the way teachers act in the classroom (Zheng, 2015).

However, no matter how we approach the views for and against the way language materials are used by EFL teachers, there seems to remain an incontrovertible argument: teachers' decision makings regarding materials use can have profound effects on their classroom practice (Freeman, 2016). But what is the nature of the processes involved in these decision makings? Pajaras (1992) argued that among many other factors, teachers' locus of control (LOC) can determine their decision makings and practice. Nevertheless, very little, if any, seems to have been published on the teachers' LOC and its

role in their decision makings regarding materials use. The following section will review LOC and its origins in brief.

Locus of Control

Locus of control (LOC) was originally developed back in the 60s by Rotter (1966) as a cognitive-behavioral psychological attribute to describe a person's distinctive approach to perceiving the world indicating the extent of control individuals perceive they have over the expectancies of reinforcement or outcomes in their lives. Rotter expanded his initial definition of the concept by distinguishing internal LOC from external LOC where the former refers to a generalized expectancy for self-initiated change orientation and the latter indicates expectancy for changes initiated by a source or power outside the person over behavior outcomes. Individuals with internal LOC orientation, as a result, may subconsciously believe that the ability to influence outcomes resides within themselves being the direct result of their efforts, personality strength, and intensions (Luo & Tang, 2003). On the contrary, individuals with external LOC orientation attribute outcomes to forces beyond their control (Rotter, 1966). Individuals within the latter group, in other words, tend to appraise life events by looking for another individual or circumstance to hold accountable for undesirable outcomes.

The concept of LOC has been investigated in a good number of areas within cognitive psychology. However, in the present study, it is used as an analytic lens to interpret the data collected from five Iranian and five Japanese case study teachers of English as a foreign language concentrating on their beliefs and classroom practice regarding the use of language teaching materials. The study does not seek, however, to claim any generalizations to Iranian and Japanese teachers. It rather intends to provide in depth descriptions and interpretations of the decisions made by these two groups of teachers to shed light on potential contextual variables influencing teachers' beliefs and practice.

In line with the purpose of the study, the following questions were posed: What are the sources of the Iranian case study EFL teachers' beliefs on materials use? How do the Iranian case study EFL teachers use materials? What are the sources of the Japanese case study EFL teachers' beliefs on materials use? How do the Japanese case study EFL teachers use materials? How can the Iranian and Japanese case study teachers' decision makings on materials use be interpreted in terms of their LOC?

METHOD

The overall purpose of the research was to investigate similarities and/or differences in the way

language teaching materials were conceived of and used by individual teachers in the two mentioned research sites. The study was designed to explore in depth a bounded system (in this case ten individuals teaching in different settings) through extensive data collection.

Data Collection

The study draws on data collected from five Iranian and five Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language in private language schools in Iran and Japan. The data was collected by one of the researchers both in Iran and Japan over two separate time spans. All participants filled in consent forms and were reassured that the data would be analyzed and reported anonymously. In line with this policy, from now on the Iranian teachers will be referred to as IrT1-IrT5 and the Japanese teachers as JpT1-JpT5. All of the ten participants held master's degrees in language related fields. Their language teaching experience also ranged from five to ten years.

Three main instruments were used in data collection: pre-observation open ended questionnaires, classroom observations, and post-observation stimulated recall interviews. As with the first instrument, Zhang's (2008) questionnaire focusing on EFL teacher's beliefs and practice regarding vocabulary instruction was adopted. Adaptations, however, were made to make it better suit the purpose of this study. Classroom observation was done by audio-recording five random sessions of classes taught by each of the participants in Iran and Japan (50 sessions) yielding more than 68 hours of audio data. Finally, stimulated recall interviews were done to retrospectively and albeit partially access the participants' mental processes while performing particular classroom tasks.

Data Analysis

In line with the qualitative nature of the study, data analysis was done with an inductive bottom up approach. Data collected from the three instruments were thematically analyzed. Data coding was done through successive stages starting from open coding for indexing and classifying the whole data set. It then moved to axial coding to classify the data into categories and find relationships among them, and finally towards finding the final themes to be reported.

As with the classroom observation data, McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara's (2013) materials adaptation framework was employed. The framework provided a criterion against which to judge how the participant teachers were actually using any single activity in the language teaching materials they were employing. According to this framework, materials adaptation comprises a range of measures taken by a teacher including adding (AD), deleting (DL), modifying (MD), simplifying

(SP) and reordering (RO). If none of these applies to a teacher's use of the materials, then the teacher is adopting rather than adapting them (NC; no change).

FINDINGS

In the following sections the findings of the study for each of the two participant groups will be separately presented.

The Iranian teachers

Pre-observation questionnaire

A thematic analysis of the Iranian teachers' responses to the pre-observation questionnaire revealed four main themes (sources) for their beliefs regarding language teaching profession in general and materials use in particular. These four themes did not appear to bear identical weights though. Table 1 shows the four themes emerging from the Iranian teachers' responses and the frequency of codes associated with each of the themes.

Table 1. Thematic analysis of the Iranian teachers' stated beliefs on teaching and materials use

Themes	Frequency of codes
Learning experiences	35
Teaching experiences	22
Syllabus-imposed theories	43
Other-imposed theories	49

As the table indicates, Iranian teachers' stated beliefs regarding language teaching and materials use seem to have been influenced by the four themes of learning experiences, teaching experiences, syllabus-imposed theories, and other-imposed theories. Similar weights, however, could not be applied to all themes. As the frequencies of the codes suggest, other-imposed and syllabus-imposed theories seem to have had the biggest influences on their stated beliefs. The following sections will provide more elaborate accounts of these themes accompanied by the extracts from participant responses.

Learning experiences

IrT3 stated that she started learning English as a young learner in the very same language school she is teaching at now. This, she believes, has been a chance for her since before starting her teaching career there, she already knew a lot about the methodology of teaching and the textbooks in use:

During my learning days as a student there was a student book, a notebook and a workbook. More or less the same materials are used now. The only thing is we used to have audio cassettes and now there are CDs. The teachers would play the cassettes every day and I play the CDs every day.

Elaborating on how she became a teacher at the school, IrT1 also said how her background as a

student at the school helped her go through the screening stages:

I think I knew how to teach the books they use there. I once studied them. I was a good learner and praised my teachers back then and had a high opinion of them. I almost remembered everything about how they taught us. This gave me the cutting edge in the entrance tests. It still gives me comfort. I don't need to prepare myself for each class.

Teaching experiences

Apart from their experience as learners of English, the participants believed that their experience as teachers has taught them how to be a better teacher as well. IrT2, for example, believed that being a good teacher requires one to possess “a sharp sense of understanding and intuition” and one cannot acquire these without “actually teaching and experiencing the classroom.” Through experience, she believes, she has come to the understanding that:

[b]ooks are essential parts of teaching a language. You cannot organize the things you want to teach them if there is no book. The workbook is great because the students don't study at home if they don't have it.

Syllabus-imposed theories

In multiple occasions, the Iranian teachers mentioned that teachers in their workplace were not allowed to choose the textbooks or to use them the way they think is appropriate. However, tacitly, IrT1 also mentioned that as a teacher, her colleagues and she herself are more comfortable doing so:

The syllabus in the teachers' room is always there for us to check before the class what to teach and how to teach. In other institutes I had to have my own syllabus for every session which was a demanding thing to do. Now, everything is already there. We [teachers] all like it.

Other-imposed theories

Responses within this theme refer to a variety of contextual constraints imposed on the teachers. More particularly, the participants believed their decision makings were constantly constrained by the school teaching observer (inspector), young learners' parents, time and test content. Here is an example:

There are observers who play the role of inspectors checking whether or not teachers follow the syllabus and the methodology. The observer decides if we are qualified to be promoted. They do not tolerate deviations from methodology. We can be demoted if do not follow. (IrT3)

Classroom observation

Classroom observation data were analyzed within McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara's (2013) materials adaptation framework to see whether the materials are adapted or used without change (refer

to data analysis section for details). Table 2 summarizes the Iranian teachers' materials use across the twenty five observed sessions.

Table 2. The Iranian teachers' use of the materials

Session	N	A	D	M	S	R	Total
	C	D	L	D	P	O	
Session 1	37	0	1	0	1	0	39
Session 2	34	0	2	2	0	0	38
Session 3	38	0	2	0	0	0	40
Session 4	38	0	1	1	0	0	40
Session 5	38	0	1	1	0	0	40
All	185	0	7	4	1	0	197

The textbooks used by the Iranian teachers in the private language school where the data was collected proceeded in an almost linear fashion offering four activities per page. Two pages per session were covered by each teacher on average which makes eight activities per session for each participant and 40 for all participants per session. From among the total 197 activities, 185 were done without change. This may indicate the teachers' will to obediently follow the textbook. They did not add any activities to those of the textbook throughout the 50 observed sessions. However, in seven instances activities were deleted and in four others modifications were made. There was also one instance of simplification, but nothing was observed in terms of reordering the activities.

Post-observation interview

Audio excerpts from the participants' classroom practice were played back to them during the stimulated recall interviews. The two broad themes of internal and external causes of action emerged from their responses. Internal causes of action, as shall be illustrated below, refer to the teachers' actions as guided by their own professional decisions untouched by other parties. External causes, on the other hand, refer to other-initiated decision makings, or instances when the teachers justified their actions resorting to outside motivations. Table 3 summarizes the frequency of codes associated with these two broad themes.

Table 3. Themes emerging from the Iranian teachers' interviews

Themes	Frequency of codes
Internal causes	16
External causes	42
Total	58

As the table suggests, two general themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the Iranian teachers' responses in the stimulated recall sessions. 16 codes were recognized as pertinent to the internal causes of action while the 42 other ones formed the theme of external causes of action.

In the following extract, as a case in point, having listened to an extract of her classroom

including an instance of “deleting” an activity, IrT3 comments that:

I sometimes do not understand why students have to listen to these songs [from the textbook]. Some of the songs do not suit my students' age. I do not always play them. I am sure there is a purpose but maybe not for my students here [referring to the audio player].

In the majority of instances though, as Table 3 indicates, the participants seemed to be justifying their actions rather than accepting their responsibility. In the following extract a section of IrT5's class where she does not make any change in the activity is played to her. The teacher's presentation of this activity is characterized by undue haste. It was a substitution drill and the teacher was asking 8 students to place the given words in a model sentence from the book written on the board. The whole activity was done very quickly. Here is IrT5's comment on why she did not delete or modify the activity:

Substitution drills are boring for the students and me. But we were told to do them all in the TTC course and the syllabus says so too. The book is written by native speakers. Maybe they knew how many words are needed.

In another instance an audio extract was played to IrT3 when she seemed to be simplifying an activity by substituting a difficult word by an apparently easier one. Her reason to do that, however, does not seem to come from her own teaching values:

This is what I was told to do when I was observed last term. He [the school observer] said it's better to change the word because it's difficult for some students.

As the results of the data analyzed in this section suggest, the Iranian case study teachers' decisions on materials use seem to be more externally oriented indicating their external locus of control to some extent.

The Japanese teachers Pre-observation questionnaires

The five Japanese teachers' responses to the pre-observation questionnaire revealed five umbrella themes regarding the sources of their beliefs on teaching a language and using materials. Table 4 summarizes the corresponding codes and their frequencies.

According to the table, the greatest influence seems to have come from the participants' teaching experiences. Other factors influencing their beliefs on teaching a foreign language and using materials include their self-developed theories of teaching, their experiences as language learners as well as the

SLA theories they knew of. They also believed that they were influenced by the ideas they received from their peers throughout their teaching career.

Table 4. Thematic analysis of the Japanese teachers' stated beliefs on teaching and materials use

Themes	Frequency of codes
Learning experiences	31
Teaching experiences	35
Self-developed theories	32
SLA theories	18
Colleague inspirations	17

Learning experiences

Japanese teachers' decision makings regarding the use of materials in their classes seem to be guided in part by their experiences as learners of English. In the following excerpt, for example, JpT3 says although she uses a textbook she does not consider herself bound to it:

I learned English at junior high school and outside at language schools. Teachers at junior high school used the same books for all classes and students in Kansai region, but at the language school there were multiple books. I thought maybe it's not a good idea to teach all with only one book. I liked the school but I liked language school better.

She distinctly refers to her learning experiences as well:

Some teachers I had and I liked them a lot gave us more exercises and copies of other books sometimes. It all sounded very interesting to me. We could take the exercises home or we could do them together.

Teaching experiences

It is also implied in the Japanese teachers' responses that they believe to have learned a lot from their experiences as teachers. More particularly, as with the use of materials, JpT2 says she has been in a state of “*trial and error*” for long:

I like to try different textbooks. The trouble is there are many of them. You can't spend all your time trying them all but I sometimes do. I try a book in a class and if it doesn't work maybe I change it. Not very often though, but at least I try some parts of a book that looks appealing.

Self-developed theories

These participants also referred to their own language teaching theories. Such theories can be best defined as sets of values and beliefs individual teachers have developed to cope with repeatedly arising teaching issues:

I guess you have to expose your students to various ways of doing things. Not every student can get what you are teaching. Not every student understands the

grammar points in the book. It's the teacher's job to recognize when the book stops being helpful. (JpT3)

In another instance, elaborating on her views regarding group work she also says:

[y]ou like them [students] to do it together and they do it well here in Japan. But who gives you the answer? Always one of them! There are group activities in books and some are good but I change them to individual tasks. We have had enough of group work. (JpT3)

SLA theories

Apart from the theories the Japanese participants seem to have developed themselves, there are instances in their responses where reference is made to SLA research either directly or indirectly. In the following excerpt, JpT4 seems to be elaborating on the concept of "noticing" by learners while learning grammar, not directly referring to the term though:

Some activities are not designed to help my students notice the point. They want them to repeat and repeat grammar structures without telling them what it is that they are learning. A good activity should start with clear examples.

Colleague inspiration

The participants also referred to other teachers as sources of inspiration for how they teach and what they do with the materials:

There is a class profile in the staff room for each of the classes at this school. All teachers are required to write about the class they are teaching every session. I sometimes take my time and read the previous teachers' notes. They give me fresh ideas. (JpT2)

You sometimes think smart phones should be banned in the class. But there is a teacher here who is using the device instead of the book. All students come with smart phones these days. I may use it sometime. (JpT1)

Classroom observation

The Japanese participants' classroom observation data were also coded with the materials adaptation framework detailed in data analysis section above and Table 5 summarizes the results.

Table 5. The Japanese teachers' use of the materials

Sessions	N	A	D	M	S	R	Total
	C	D	L	D	P	O	
Session 1	6	7	2	2	2	2	21
Session 2	7	5	1	2	1	2	18
Session 3	8	4	4	6	0	2	24
Session 4	9	7	2	4	2	1	25
Session 5	11	10	0	4	2	0	27
All	41	33	9	18	7	7	115

As Table 5 suggests, the Japanese teachers used a total of 115 activities during the 25 observed

sessions. Interestingly though, nearly a third of these activities (33 activities) did not come directly from the main textbook in use. That is, while 41 activities were used without change, 33 more activities were added in the form of either handouts, copies from other books or slides. Nine activities were totally dismissed but the remaining activities also underwent changes. The Japanese teachers made modification in 18 of the activities offered by the textbook and made simplifications in the seven other activities. There were also seven activities which were used the same way the textbook suggested yet in a different order.

Post-observation interview

The analysis of the data from stimulated recall session with the Japanese participants done with a focus on LOC revealed two main driving forces for their pedagogic decisions as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Themes emerging from the Japanese teachers' interviews

Themes	Frequency of codes
Internal causes	47
External causes	16
Total	63

From among a total of 63 codes assigned to the Japanese teachers' interview responses, 47 concerned internal causes while only as few as 16 codes reflected external causes for action, meaning that in the majority of cases these participants shouldered the responsibility of their pedagogic decisions.

In the following extract, an excerpt from JpT3's classroom data is being played to her when she seems to be reordering an activity. While the textbook instructs the students to read a passage first and answer the questions later, JpT3 asks the students to read it and answer the questions at the same time:

I guess we didn't have time here. Maybe I was in hurry but I wanted to end the activity. Time was running out and we couldn't go like one by one.

Shortage of time seems to be the reason JpT3 has changed the order of a textbook activity. In many other cases, however, the Japanese participants seem to believe that they have been in control making conscious decisions. In the following extract, as an instance, JpT5 is explaining why she has given students a handout with extra grammar practices:

I already knew that those 4 exercises would not do. I mean they were not enough for the students to master like such a difficult grammar point. I could already guess that, so I copied the page from another book.

With a comparison of the frequency of codes attributed to internal and external causes for the Japanese participants' decisions, it can be tentatively concluded that overall, they have featured more characteristics of an internal rather than external locus of control.

DISCUSSION

The present research was intent on exploring two groups of case study teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the use of language teaching materials and interpreting the data with an eye on the psychological construct of locus of control. Along the same vein, the discussion of the results situating them within the body of existing literature can comprise three main sections. The results will hence be reviewed here in the light of ongoing research on teacher beliefs, materials in use and locus of control.

In multiple publications, teacher cognition in general and teacher beliefs in particular have been introduced as complex and dynamic concepts (Borg, 2003, 2009). The complexity of the constructs could be better appreciated in Borg's (2003) view of teachers as active decision makers drawing on complex personalized and context-sensitive webs of knowledge and beliefs. The findings of this study seem to illustrate Borg's position. Both the Iranian and the Japanese case study teachers' beliefs and practice regarding the use of materials in their classes seemed to be influenced, by and large, by their personal experiences as learners and teachers of language as well as the specifications of the very contexts they were teaching in.

The fact that beliefs are contextually situated and dynamic (Feryok, 2010) could also be traced back in the findings of this study, where the case study teachers' beliefs on materials use seemed to be a function of multiple and seemingly independent factors. The Japanese teachers' beliefs, as a case in point, seemed to have been influenced by their experience as learners and teachers, yet at the same time by their own self-developed theories of teaching besides what they knew from SLA research and what their colleague teachers had to offer them at the workplace. As with the Iranian teachers too, the influences exerted on them from the syllabus and other stakeholders of their language teaching community were not negligible by any means.

This also corroborates Farrell's (2007) position on the sources of teacher cognition. According to him, personality factors along with learning and teaching experiences can play important roles in shaping a teacher's cognition. The Iranian teachers' justifications of their actions making references to external causes, featuring their external locus of control, and the Japanese teachers' more frequent references to the primacy of their own views in the decisions they had made, implying their internal

locus of control, may illustrate the importance of personal psychological factors (Golombek, 2015).

Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, and Thwait (2001) distinction between core and peripheral beliefs may also be interesting in the interpretation of the results of this study. According to this distinction, while core beliefs evolve over years and are more of a solid nature, peripheral beliefs are highly context sensitive and are characterized by a state of constant change. The important role of context in the teachers' beliefs could be well observed at least in the Iranian teachers' responses where they more frequently referred to contextual constraints on their actions. As for the Japanese teachers, however, context did not apparently play a major role.

As far as teacher cognition and teacher belief on the use of materials are concerned, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, nothing could be found in the literature. This seems to be supportive of Crookes' (2015) criticism on the current prematurely narrow analytic vision of teacher cognition research. His main argument is that teacher cognition research boundaries need to be redrawn to realize the full potentials of this area of inquiry. A similar logic can be found in Kubanyiova and Feryok's (2015) position towards the territory of research in teacher cognition. However, the present study was in part a response to Tomlinson's (2012) criticism on the mere anecdotal nature of reports on materials use by teachers who cries for the need to systematically observe language teachers' use of the materials instead of depending on self-reports.

The findings of this study seem to bear resemblance to what the literature on materials use in general has offered. Both teacher groups in this study seemed to use textbooks giving them either central or marginal roles. McGrath's (2013) summary of the benefits of the use of textbooks could be in part traced in the responses provided by the two case study teachers who argued that textbooks could help them reduce pressure of time for preparation and organize the delivery of materials. However, the way these benefits were experienced seemed to be very different between the two teacher groups.

As a matter of fact, Swan's (1992) argument on the issues arising from teacher's overreliance on textbooks could be illustrated in the Iranian case study teachers' use of materials in this study. According to him, overreliance on textbooks can end up in the minimization of teacher's role to that of a "technician" rather than a professional. Similar arguments were deployed by Richards and Mahoney (1996) who believed such overreliance could lead to teacher "de-skilling."

However, as Harmer (2001) warns, one needs to be wary of leveling criticism against textbooks and exonerating teachers who are actually implementing them. Harmer (2001) believes it is the

teacher who is to blame not the textbook itself if the teacher is relying too much on it. This argument can be furthered by the findings of this study. The only caveat is that the use of the textbook, or rather how to use the textbook, does not seem to be under the teachers' complete control in all teaching contexts. This implies the fact that a third party could be involved in the process too. As the case with the Iranian teachers in this study showed, teachers may not have a say in choosing textbooks or even in how to use them. Contextual constraints may be in place. Such constraints need to be identified and removed to empower the teachers (Masuhara, 2011). This also further illustrates how omitting context from teacher related research can render it meaningless and useless (Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015). In order to grasp a comprehensive view of what is going on inside the language classroom, all aspects of the teaching process have to be equally understood.

As far as locus of control is concerned, it seems that little can be found regarding the language teachers' decision makings on materials use. However, findings of the literature on this psychological construct in general can be very informative in interpreting the data from this research. The two teacher groups participating in this study exhibited somewhat different patterns in justifying their classroom practice with regard to the use of materials. That is, while the Iranian case study teachers' decisions were justified drawing on external causes such as syllabus and school observer pressures, the causes of the Japanese teacher's decisions were traceable to their personal beliefs and standards. Although these differences could have possible consequences for individuals as teachers or for the whole teaching and learning process, a word of caution is necessary to be offered at this point. The results of this research should be treated with caution since no generalization to either the Iranian or the Japanese language teaching contexts is intended to be drawn from them.

In the case of the teachers possessing internal locus of control, Butler-Sweeney (2007) and Harsch (2008) believe that they are better equipped to cope with problems featuring higher levels of self-efficacy and self-worth. These features, in turn, allow teachers to assume greater control over their own and their students' performance. Norton (1997) also argues that these teachers are more reflective and as a result more responsive to the needs of individual students of theirs. Varying the materials in use in order to suit the needs of the learner seems to be a critical need for learners (Ottley, 2016) and the Japanese teachers' constant adaptation of the materials with reference to their students' ongoing needs could be an example for this point. Similarly, the two teacher groups' materials use and their justifications of those actions interpreted in the light of locus of control can bolster Bulus' (2011) claim

according to which internal locus of control contributes to the realization of one's teaching competence and achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study drew on data collected from ten EFL teachers in Iran and Japan. The study was intent on exploring the potential differences and/or similarities in the beliefs and practices of the two groups of teachers regarding the use of materials. In so doing three main data collection instruments were utilized. First, the participants filled in questionnaires aimed at eliciting their stated beliefs regarding different aspects of teaching and materials use. Five sessions from each of the participants' classes were then observed to explore their use of the materials in action. Finally, stimulated recall interviews were conducted with them to shed light on the process of their decision makings.

The results suggested that the two groups of participants' beliefs on teaching and materials use were affected by different factors. While the Iranian teachers' beliefs were influenced by their learning and teaching experiences and syllabus and other imposed theories, the Japanese teachers' beliefs seemed to be mostly determined by their personally developed theories of teaching, SLA theories, colleague inspirations, as well as learning and teaching experiences. Differences were also observed in their stated reasons and justifications for their pedagogic decisions. In other words, while the Iranian teachers' decisions seemed to be mostly made due to contextual factors (external locus of control), the Japanese teachers seemed to rely mostly on their own values in making decisions (internal locus of control).

These findings can be informative for language teacher cognition and language education research in a number of ways. Firstly, teacher cognition research does not seem to have touched upon language teachers' materials use. The study can be a starting point for further investigations on the teachers' decision makings regarding materials use. Second, as Tomlinson (2012) has pointed out, language teacher educators and material developers currently know very little about how teachers actually make use of materials. Such information can be hopefully useful to those in charge of developing materials and more particularly local as opposed to global materials. Knowledge of the teachers' materials use and the psychological and contextual variables involved in their complex decision makings can guide and revisit our current understanding of materials development.

The study, however, has been a small scale case study in the two contexts of Iran and Japan and can by no means be regarded as representative of these two settings. Drawing any generalized conclusion may undermine the very purpose of case

study research as such. Instead, the aim has been to explore deeply ten individual teachers' beliefs and practices operating in these two contexts and comparing their narratives as active agents in charge of classroom decision makings. Therefore, further research utilizing data collected from greater number of participants and making use of psychological inventories is needed to hand in generalizable findings.

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