



Iranian and Japanese Language Teachers’ Operationalization of Materials Mode and their Pursuit of Immunity

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Abstract

Language teaching materials play substantial roles in language classes around the world. However, it is the quality of materials along with the teachers’ use of them that determine the ultimate success of courses. Teachers are hence encouraged to constantly evaluate and adapt the materials they use. Few studies have systematically observed materials adaptation by teachers considering contextual factors affecting them though. Contextual pressures can potentially provoke internal conflicts and in turn cause teachers severe emotional distress. Yet, teachers often manage to overcome such conflicts through self-organization and the construction of narratives of immunity. The present study is hence designed to shed more light on how language teachers conceptualize and practice materials use. Maintaining a case-study research structure, it draws on in-depth data collected from four Iranian and four Japanese EFL teachers to make sense of how context alters practice. The results of the analysis of classroom observation data indicate that while the Iranian teachers are more dependent on the published materials, the Japanese teachers frequently adapt them. Stimulated recall interviews also unravel qualitative intricacies regarding how they justify their materials and how they self-organize and construct narratives of immunity to shield themselves and their materials use against third-party criticism and blame.

1 Introduction

Materials are believed to construct a very important part of language teaching in general. Most language teaching programs assign key roles to the application of materials in their many different forms. This is particularly true of EFL settings where language learners have very limited chances to receive input outside classroom. In other words, it can be argued that, in such settings, the instructional materials in use are the basis of much of the input the learners receive. Materials also play very important roles in preparing teachers for the classroom. Inexperienced teachers can make the most of the materials they are using, since they give them the chance to learn how to plan and teach lessons (Richards, 2001). What these points imply is that materials and textbooks are such support for both learners and teachers that it is really difficult to think of a classroom without them and there are hardly any teachers who may refrain from using published materials during their teaching career (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2013). Richards (1998) points to this fact

saying that “the most commonly found elements in second and foreign language classrooms around the world are teachers, learners and textbooks” (p. 125).

Among the three, it may be easier to define language teachers and learners though they might have variations as well. Language teaching materials, however, are not usually understood in a unitary fashion, resulting in the proposition of multiple definitions for them in the field (see Tomlinson, 2011, for a review). Although materials are frequently associated with language textbooks, as Tomlinson (2011) posits, they include “anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language” and “can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners’ knowledge and/or experience of the language” (p. 2). Such a broad definition can encompass a wide range of materials including linguistic, visual, auditory or kinesthetic, which can be presented in print, through live performance or display, or on cassette, CD-ROM, DVD or the Internet (Tomlinson, 2001).

Materials are also categorized in terms of the goal they pursue and with regard to who is in charge of producing them. Focusing on text materials, McGrath (2007), for instance, distinguishes between four categories:

[...] those that have been specifically designed for language learning and teaching (e.g. textbooks, worksheets, computer software); authentic materials (e.g. off-air recordings, newspaper articles) that have been specially selected and exploited for teaching purposes by the classroom teacher; teacher-written materials; and learner-generated materials. (p. 7)

Another categorization, particularly of significance as far as the role of the materials is concerned, is Tomlinson’s (2001) four-way classification, according to which materials can be instructional informing learners about the language, experiential providing exposure to the language in use, elicitive stimulating language use, or exploratory facilitating discoveries about language use.

However we define teachers, learners and materials, a glance through the literature shows that research within applied linguistics has not equally addressed all the three. Compared with research on teachers and learners, little has been published on materials; and even when materials have been attended to, the studies seem to have been too narrowly focused (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010a). The focus has been too narrow since the interconnected dynamic interactions among materials, learners and teachers have not been investigated thoroughly (McGrath 2013). For example, publications on materials evaluation have often failed to hand in realistic and comprehensive views, since they tend to evaluate textbooks in the absence of teachers. Yet, it is understandably tenable to say that the quality of materials is closely interrelated with how they are selected and used by teachers. That is why it is believed that although research needs to focus on making improvements in published materials, preparing and empowering teachers to be able to make the most of the materials should not be taken for granted (McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010b). Materials have to be evaluated and analyzed, but analyzing materials in action offers new insights and opportunities and has to be taken more seriously (Littlejohn, 2011).

The abovementioned interrelationship among teachers, learners and materials is by no means an exhaustive one. The language classroom cannot be regarded as an autonomous institution by itself. That is the number of the stakeholders of the language pedagogy process for sure surpasses that of students and teachers. School principals, supervisors, ministries of education, curriculum designers, and so on can all exercise influences on how language is taught inside a classroom. Teachers do not necessarily make all of the educational decisions themselves. The same holds true to the selection and use of language teaching materials. McGrath (2002) even keeps the circle wider by righteously including publishers and textbook writers. Therefore, research on language teaching materials has to see through a wider lens trying to recognize the micro and macro influences on the overall quality of published materials.

The issue can have clear implications for language teacher education, too. An appreciation of teachers as professionals operating within a wider social and even political context is necessary to better understand different aspects of teachers’ practices including their use of the materials. The influences exerted on teachers by both micro and macro contexts of teaching are constantly marginalizing or disempowering teachers (Benesch, 2012; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gu & Benson, 2014).

There are constraints always in place that tend to restrict teaching autonomy by mandating targets and demanding constant increases in teachers' professional knowledge while supporting them minimally (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017). However, a closer look at the literature published on teachers and their professional identity suggests that the majority of teachers will manage to adapt themselves and survive against all adversities caused by increased pressures and deteriorating conditions of teaching contexts worldwide (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). How teachers manage to do so, however, does not seem to have been thoroughly investigated so far. Teachers seem to be able to develop resistance mechanisms that keep them safe from "stress and emotional overload, and allow them to function productively" (Hiver, 2015, p. 215).

The present article, therefore, seeks to look into language teachers' self-constructed narratives of resistance and immunity against contextual constraints on their adoption and adaptation of language teaching materials. While studies on language teaching materials have been proliferate with regard to materials development issues, little seems to have been published systematically investigating language teachers' actual use of the materials and exploring their aspirations and motivations to do so. Most of what we currently know about the issue has been either "anecdotally reported" (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 157) or based on teachers' self-reports rather than principled observations. The present research, thus, will hopefully be a small step in bridging this gap.

2 Literature review

A review of the related literature on language teaching materials makes it clear that textbooks, alongside other materials, have remained very popular among language teaching practitioners and professionals for a variety of reasons. For the most part, textbooks are believed to benefit both teachers and learners in a number of ways. McGrath (2013) summarizes the advantages usually associated with textbooks arguing that they lower teachers' workload by reducing the time needed for lesson preparation. They are good support for the teachers providing them with coherent programs of work that guide them through. Textbooks are also visually appealing cultural artifacts which contain a wealth of extra material.

There are criticisms against textbook use as well, which mostly target the negative influences they exert on teachers: an effect termed as teacher marginalization by McGrath (2013). According to this view, adhering to the prescriptions of the textbook and strictly following them marginalize language teachers. The idea was initially proposed by Shannon (as 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 following textbook instructions. Handing over the responsibility to the textbook may create a sense of security for the teachers, yet Swan (1992) warns against such a false sense of security arguing that textbooks are not necessarily flawless.

"Textbook reification" is the term used by Richards and Mahoney (1996) to clarify this point by which they mean that undue reverence for published materials "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). To avoid such degradations, teachers need to play more active roles in the selection or use of the materials positioning themselves as professionals rather than technicians. Masuhara (2011) highlights the importance of teacher empowerment by assigning them more central roles in all phases of materials development, use and evaluation. In order to achieve this, teachers should be asked (or allowed) to adapt materials creatively rather than to follow them scripturally.

Teachers might not always have a say in the selection of materials, yet adaptation of the materials can always be an option for them. Grammatosi and Harwood (2014), for instance, report the results of a study based on data collected via observations and interviews, showing how teachers may be able to adapt materials despite being forced to use specific titles by program directors or other people in charge in an educational setting. Ideally, the selection of materials can give teachers ultimate power in the process of teaching, but when it is not possible, adaptation can be a suitable substitute.

According to Mishan and Timmis (2015), adaptation can be ad hoc (impressionistic) or principled. Ad hoc adaptations are usually driven by teachers' preferences and motivations whereas principled adaptations are informed by prior evaluations and experiences. However it is made, nevertheless, its overall purpose would be "to make the material more suitable for the circumstances in which it is used [and] to compensate for any intrinsic deficiencies in the materials" (McGrath, 2002, p. 62). To put it in other words, the aim is "to maximize the appropriacy of teaching materials in contexts, by changing some of the internal characteristics of a coursebook to suit [...] particular circumstances better" (McDonough, Masuhara, & Shaw, 2013, p. 67).

Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) believe that a typical adaptation process would start with getting to know in detail the profile of the teaching context. This first stage will probably take more than a short time as a matter of fact, since it requires knowledge of many issues including learners, the available materials, any potential syllabi, and so forth. Then, it would be necessary to come up with reasons for adaptation. Having known both the teaching context and the potential reasons for adaptation, one could conduct an evaluation of the materials next. The evaluation should be done with a specific group of target learners in mind, as a result of which one can come up with a list of objectives. It will now be the time to actually adapt the materials and then proceed to teach them. The feedback received from the teaching of the adapted materials can guide further adaptations in turn. The last stage in Tomlinson and Masuhara's (2004) adaptation process is in fact a very important one in that it gives the teachers the chance to rethink the adaptations they have made and decide how they want to use the materials later accordingly.

Islam and Mares (2003) emphasize the importance of adaptation, saying that even if a textbook is selected with regard to the immediate needs of the setting and the learners, teachers will have to make conscious adaptations. To say, however, that all teachers do make adaptations is rather optimistic, since views differ widely on what kind of teachers under what circumstances tend to adapt the materials. Factors such as teaching experience and teacher's own preferred teaching style seem to have great influences on the adaptations made on materials (Senior, 2006).

The importance of adaptation can be justified by the fact that most publishers do not have a clear image of the target learners for whom the materials are prepared. The widespread application of globally produced materials has for sure undermined the significance of catering for the needs of learners and teachers in local settings. Ottley (2016), for instance, criticizes such ELT materials on the grounds that they are usually "produced for an international market, for international students, and, this being the case, they too frequently rely upon a one-size-fits-all philosophy" (p. 265). Similarly, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2013) argue that most globally published materials target "aspirational, urban, middle-class, well-educated, westernized computer users" (p. 248). Not all learners can be categorized so, however. Researching materials adaptation in Bahrain, as a case in point, Al Majthoob (2014) claims that the use of global English has created learners who cannot be simply categorized even as EFL or ESL ones. She then goes further arguing that the existing traditional materials can no longer meet the needs of all learners and therefore have to be either systematically adapted or replaced with more locally tailored materials.

The use of global materials without change is particularly frowned upon in the literature (López-Barrios & de Debat, 2014), often on the grounds that they do not facilitate language acquisition (Tomlinson, 2016). This does not, however, mean that they cannot bring any benefit to the learners, since they are usually reported to facilitate learning in the case of being appropriately modified or supplemented by teachers (Tomlinson, 2015). In fact, training, supporting and "advising teachers to adapt their materials in ways which research has shown to promote students' language development would seem entirely feasible, affordable and beneficial" (Foster & Hunter, 2016, p. 290).

A great bulk of publications on materials adaptation is devoted to the principles and procedures of adaptation and little seems to have been published systematically exploring how teachers actually adapt materials (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). However, the few existing publications on actual materials use show that teachers can be categorized along a continuum with those who use multiple resources selectively at one end and the teachers who make no changes in the materials they use at the other end. For example, Shaver (2010), drawing on data collected through pre-observation and

post-observation, interviews, observations as well as group interviews suggested that there could be three groups of teachers regarding how they make use of materials. The first group is *curriculum makers* who select various materials, prepare their own materials and avoid using one single textbook, based on the needs assessment they conduct in their classes. The second group includes teachers who are *curriculum developers* and make flexible use of materials, for example, by adapting or supplementing them with teacher-made materials, if they find them unsatisfying. However, they are different from the first group, since the basis for their teaching might still be one textbook. Finally, teachers can be *curriculum transmitters* who simply use the materials they are given by the school they teach for on a page by page basis. Good support for this categorization can be found in Bosompem's (2014) study conducted in Ghana. The participant teachers' responses to the questionnaires in this study revealed that most of them held very positive attitudes towards materials adaptation. However, self-reports of their materials use indicated that they widely varied from each other regarding the extent they made changes in the textbooks. Other studies also support this stance. Based on data collected via questionnaires, observations and interviews in the Middle East, Tasserou (2017) found that most teachers adhered closely to the coursebook scripts while teaching grammar prescriptively. Yet, he also found that some other teachers supplement coursebooks with additional worksheets.

How materials are used, however, may not be solely driven by the teachers' pedagogic choice. Multiple publications have emphasized the "effect of social, cultural, and economic contexts on teaching" (Fenwick & Cooper, 2013, p. 96) and decisions made by language teachers regarding the use of materials are by no means an exception. Curricular demands, learner needs, large scale testing requirements and school level pressures can greatly influence teachers' pedagogic decisions (Cuayahuitl & Carranza, 2015). Loh and Renandya (2016), as a case in point, drew on questionnaire, observation, artefact analysis and interview data to compare the use of materials in two schools in Singapore. They found that there were noticeable differences between the two schools in terms of materials adaptation arguing that the teachers in one of the schools were restricted in their use of materials due to school-based curricular demands. This supports the idea that teachers' use of the materials should be viewed within the wider context where they are working and not in isolation. The way teachers make use of materials may be a function of their constant interactions with the contextual factors. It can equally be considered as a way to circumnavigate the pressures exerted on them from the micro and macro contexts of teaching. Adopting this latter perspective, one can extend the argument to the issue of *teacher immunity* as put forward by Hiver (2015).

According to Hiver (2015) and also Hiver and Dörnyei (2017), teachers in general and language teachers in particular are constantly pressurized and emotionally overloaded by the responsibilities imposed on them in the workplace. Such responsibilities and often high expectations may turn out to be at odds with the teachers' pedagogic beliefs. This worsens the situation due to the internal conflicts it can potentially cause for the teachers. It would not be far from expectation to see that teachers fall apart under all these pressures. However, research reports show that this hardly ever occurs (Day et al., 2006). Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) draw upon Dynamic System Theory (DST) to explain how teachers manage to *self-organize* and make adaptive pedagogic decisions that help them overcome the crises described above. They align themselves with contextual expectations and develop a narrative of *immunity* that enables them to do so.

The present study, therefore, is designed to contribute to the ongoing research on materials use in L2 teaching by investigating the participant teachers' use of materials keeping an eye on the contextual constraints they face to do so. The participant teachers' use of materials and their reasons to use them the way they do will be also analyzed in terms of the narratives of *immunity* they develop. Materials use, however, is but one aspect of teaching and, clearly enough, being a language teacher comprises many other aspects. In order to maintain the focus on the use of materials, Walsh's (2006) distinction of different classroom modes will be used in this study. That is, the present research will keep a focus on the materials mode as stipulated by Walsh (2006) and not the other modes of classroom teaching.

Walsh (2006) considers the L2 classroom as multi-layered comprising different interactional patterns and pedagogical goals in each of the layers. Accordingly, he distinguishes four modes in the classroom: managerial, materials, skills and systems, and classroom context. Table 1 summarizes Walsh's (2006) categorizations of the classroom modes based on their pedagogic features.

Table 1. L2 classroom modes (adopted from Walsh, 2006)

| Mode | Pedagogic goal | Interactional features |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Managerial | To transmit information To organize the physical learning environment To refer learners to materials To introduce or conclude an activity To change from one mode of learning to another | A single, extended teacher turn which uses explanations and/or instructions The use of transitional markers The use of confirmation checks An absence of learner contributions |
| Materials | To provide language practice around a piece of material To elicit responses in relation to the material To check and display answers To clarify when necessary To evaluate contributions | Predominance of IRF pattern Extensive use of display questions Form-focused feedback Corrective repair The use of scaffolding |
| Skills and systems | To enable learners to produce correct forms To enable learners to manipulate the target language To provide corrective feedback To provide learners with practice in sub- skills To display correct answers | The use of direct repair The use of scaffolding Extended teacher turns Display questions Teacher echo Clarification requests Form-focused feedback |
| Classroom context | To enable learners to express themselves clearly To establish a context To promote oral fluency | Extended learner turns Short teacher turns Minimal repair Content feedback Referential questions Scaffolding Clarification requests |

As indicated in Table 1, the four classroom modes have different pedagogical goals and, as a result, feature different interactional patterns. The present study, however, takes the materials mode as the unit of analysis for the participant teachers' classroom practice. According to Walsh (2006), materials are the predominant referent in the materials mode. Teachers seem to have total control over the initiation, response and feedback (IRF) sequences with the learners, only minimally contributing to the response slot in these sequences. The mode features an abundance of form-focused and corrective feedback by the teacher and very little initiation space is allowed to the learners.

In order to achieve a more comprehensive outlook on the way context may influence teachers' materials use and the construction of their narratives of immunity, the present study has collected data from eight language teachers in the two distinct Asian teaching settings of Iran and Japan. The following questions, therefore, are posed:

1. What proportion of the classes is dedicated to the operationalization of materials mode by the case study Iranian and Japanese teachers?
2. How is the materials mode operationalized by the case study Iranian and Japanese teachers?
3. How do the case study Iranian and Japanese teachers justify their materials use?

3 Methodology

The present research was an attempt to provide comparative data regarding the use of materials in Iran and Japan in light of case study data independently collected in the two research sites. The overall aim was to investigate, with a data-driven approach, L2 teachers' practices within the materials mode of their language classes. The results, however, were not meant to be generalized to the whole Iranian and Japanese language teaching contexts. The aim was rather, as with all case studies, to provide an in-depth account of materials use by the case study teachers and investigate their personal narratives of immunity as understood within the context of their work places. The selection of the two research sites was driven by one of the authors' experience of language teaching in the two EFL contexts of Iran and Japan, which made the collection of data in these two settings possible. In other words, a convenience or availability sampling (Dörnyei, 2011) strategy was devised in the selection of research sites.

3.1 Participants and materials

Four Iranian and four Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language teaching in private language schools in Iran and Japan participated in this study. All participants were female and held master's degrees in language related fields. To observe the ethical codes of research, the participants were referred to with pseudonyms of IrT1 to IrT4 for the Iranian and JpT1 to JpT4 for the Japanese teachers. Table 2 summarizes the background information for the participants:

Table 2. Participants' background information

| Teachers | Age | Teaching Experience (years) |
|----------|-----|-----------------------------|
| IrT1 | 33 | 9 |
| IrT2 | 31 | 5 |
| IrT3 | 29 | 7 |
| IrT4 | 27 | 5 |
| JpT1 | 35 | 10 |
| JpT2 | 29 | 5 |
| JpT3 | 30 | 8 |
| JpT4 | 27 | 5 |

The participants were selected following a purposive sampling procedure and not a random one. The reason for this was twofold. First of all, qualitative and more specifically case study research is usually conducted with fewer participants and hence it does not make sense to select too few individuals randomly from a big population. In the case of this research, for instance, apart from feasibility concerns, even if four Iranian and four Japanese teachers were randomly selected, the sample would be far from representative of the target populations. Second, attempts were made to select teachers with comparable features to investigate the influence of context on their practice. Although the researchers could not find teachers and language schools in the two research sites using the same sets of textbooks, the two language schools in Iran and Japan made use of materials which could be categorized as global materials (refer to the literature review for details of how global materials may differ from local ones) produced by two internationally known publishers. Furthermore, both textbooks targeted young learners and those in their early teens. The age range of learners in all of the observed classes was between 11 and 15.

The Iranian language school was a private language institute which operated independently from the Iranian public school system and made use of the *English Time* series published by Oxford University Press (Rivers & Toyama, 2001). Private language institutes are popular among Iranian students who wish to develop their language skills beyond what public schools can afford to offer. In the case of the Japanese school, although teachers seemed to be allowed to use any published materials they deemed useful, the official textbook introduced by the school was the *Super Kids* series published by Longman Asia ELT (Krause & Cossu, 2005). The Japanese school could be best

described as what is called in Japan an *Eikaiwa* or an English conversation school. The kind of language training offered by such schools in Japan is thought to be different from the Japanese primary and secondary education system. In other words, Eikaiwas are fee-paying private schools that attract students from different age groups who plan to learn more practical English skills. The two textbook series used in these schools shared structural similarities and are hence comparable. It should also be noted that while materials can be defined in a number of ways (see literature review above), in the present study, the analysis was limited to published textbooks (student book, work-book, activity book) and their accompanying audiovisual supplements used by the participants.

3.2 Data collection

This study draws upon data collected from the observation of 40 classroom sessions (almost 52 hours) and more than 10 hours of interview with eight language teachers in two research sites and over two separate periods of time. Data collection started in Iran in January 2016 and went on for two and a half months ending in March 2016. Data collection in Japan was conducted later during the 2016 summer from July to September. The two main data collection instruments for this study were classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews.

Five sessions of classes taught by each of the eight participants in Iran and Japan were observed by one of the researchers. The sessions were randomly chosen to minimize the observer or Hawthorne effect. Dörnyei (2011) defines Hawthorne effect as participants over-expressing desirable attitudes in their survey answers, deficient class dynamics, or ineffective teacher behavior. By randomly choosing the sessions and not letting the participants know which sessions of the classes were to be observed, researchers attempted to minimize any such effect. It might go without saying, of course, that the participants' permission to access all sessions without prior notice were sought right from the beginning in the preliminary consent forms in order not to violate their rights as teachers and participants. All sessions were audio recorded, and the data were stored for further analyses. It is also worth mentioning that the researcher retained a non-participant role (Ary, Javobs, Sorensen, & Razavie, 2010) throughout the observations.

As a retrospective instrument in qualitative inquiry, stimulated recall interview was used to prompt participants to comment on and further explain what they were thinking about while doing a particular activity. As Gass and Mackey (2000, p. 17) put it, the assumption was that "some tangible (perhaps visual or aural) reminder of an event will stimulate recall of the mental processes in operation during the event itself." The technique was hence used to delve deeper into the participants' thoughts on their use of the materials in the classroom. Selective audio excerpts of their classroom practice were played back to them and they were prompted to elaborate on their thoughts and beliefs at the very moment of teaching. Their responses in these interview sessions were audio-recorded as well and transcribed to undergo thematic analyses.

3.3 Data analysis

In line with the nature of the data collected, there were several stages of data analysis. The observation data were first coded with regard to Walsh's (2006) classification of classroom modes (see Table 1 above and Extracts 1–4 below) in order to achieve a descriptive quantification of the amount of the use of materials. Second, the data were also coded according to McDonough et al.'s (2013) materials adaptation framework. Within this framework, teachers' use of materials is classified in a number of ways. Teachers may use materials with no change (NC), add to activities (AD), delete any of the components (DL), modify the activity (MD), simplify the content (SP), or reorder the flow of the activities (RO). The framework can classify teachers' practice in the materials mode over a continuum ranging from passive, with no or only minimal changes (NC), to creative, with frequent adaptations.

The data collected from stimulated recall interviews underwent thematic analysis. The analysis started by open coding of the data 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 selective coding to find the final themes to be reported. Besides, research questions of the study also entailed statistical description of the time allocated to materials mode as operationalized by the participant teachers. It is also worth mentioning that all data coding was done by two researchers independently to ensure inter-coder reliability.

4 Findings

In the following sections, findings of the study will be presented providing answers to the research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be presented here since, while the first research question required descriptive statistical measurements, the other two questions entailed a more in-depth qualitative analysis. The first research question is therefore answered via the classroom observation data. As with the second and third questions, data collected via observations and the interviews were utilized.

4.1 Coding and statistical description

The first step in the statistical description of the data was to classify the classroom observation data into the four classroom modes according to Walsh's (2006) modes (refer to Table 1 above). To clarify the coding process, examples for each of the four modes will be given below in the form of extracts from the participants' classroom practice. All names used in the extracts are pseudonyms. (see Appendix 1 for the transcription guide).

Extract 1. Managerial Mode (JpT2)

1. T: Naoki, Miyu and Kaho, will you please join your friends in the front?
2. S1: Me too?
3. T: Not you (laughs) you can relax just there.
4. Ss: (inaudible, in Japanese) [students change seats]
5. T: Hurry up Kaho will you? [asking a student to come to the front]
6. T: Ok. Listen to me everyone. Now we are going to write a letter. Ok? Write a letter to your friends and invite them to the international fair. Fair. You know fair?
7. Ss: yes yes
8. T: Ok then you have 10 minutes for this.

Extract 1 is an example of the managerial mode from JpT2's class. The teacher is setting up groups in the class asking some of the students to join others in the front seats. The whole extract is characterized by longer teacher turns as opposed to minimal contributions from learners. In Line 6, the teacher instructs learners on an activity she wants them to do. In the same line, two instances of comprehension checks can be noticed (*Ok?* and *You know fair?*) which is characteristic of the managerial mode. The following extract, taken from IrT1's class, exemplifies the materials mode.

Extract 2. Materials Mode (IrT1)

1. T: Ok now repeat please. Swim.
2. Ss: Swim.
3. T: Ok louder. Fly a kite.
4. Ss: Fly a kite [louder voice]
5. T: Ok. Sahar fly a kite [calling on a student's name and looking at her]
6. S: Fly a kite.
7. T: Good. Fly a kite everyone.
8. Ss: Fly a kite.
9. T: do a cartwheel.
10. Ss: do a carteel (mispronounced)
11. T: cartWHEEL (pronounces emphatically)
12. Ss: cartwheel (repeat emphatically)

13. **T:** Great. Do a cartwheel.
 14. **Ss:** Do a cartwheel.

Extract 2 is coded as material mode, since the whole interaction revolves around a textbook exercise. The teacher asks all students to repeat the words and phrases she is reading from the textbook and the students do so. The extract clearly illustrates how the interaction is framed within a lockstep teacher initiation student response and teacher feedback (IRF) sequence. In Lines 7 and 14, teachers' use of the two case closing tokens of *good* and *great* are examples of the feedback step in the IRF sequence. The teacher is the sole distributor of turns who provides scaffolding, if necessary, such as in Line 11 where IrT1 corrects the pronunciation error by emphatically pronouncing the mispronounced syllable. The following extract is an example of skills and systems mode.

Extract 3. Skills and Systems Mode (IrT4)

1. **S1:** Teacher [raises her hand] I don't know *fed a horse* [referring to a question in the textbook]
2. **T:** aha this one? Fed the horse. Does anyone know? [no one responds] ok look [writes on the whiteboard] have you ever eaten an apple? [looks back at students] have you?
3. **Ss:** Yes
4. **T:** ok. Do you have a pet? [no one responds] No? If you have a pet you should give it food when it is hungry. You should FEED it. You do what?
5. **Ss:** [some students] feed
6. **T:** yes you feed you give food. Now it is the same as eaten an apple. Have you ever FED a horse? You have given food? Fatemeh have you ever fed a horse? [calls on a student to answer]
7. **S2:** no (laughs)
8. **T:** no what? No I have never?
9. **S2:** no I have never feed a
10. **T:** Fed. Fed a horse. Like eaten.
11. **S2:** Fed a horse.

IrT4's interaction with her students in Extract 3 is a good example for skills and systems mode. The extract starts with a student's question who did not understand the phrase *fed a horse*. What follows in Line 2 is the teachers' elaboration on the past participle form by giving an extra example: *eaten an apple*. The teacher's turns are noticeably longer than those of students and students seem to fill only the response slot of the IRF sequence. The teacher keeps a focus on form by teaching the present perfect grammatical point and trying to elicit the correct response from a student she has called on in Line 6. The student makes another mistake in Line 9 which receives a direct and immediate repair from the teacher who scaffolds the learner in Line 10 until she makes sure that the correct form is produced. All of these are features of skills and systems mode. Extract 4 illustrates JpT4's interaction with her students in the classroom context mode.

Extract 4. Classroom Context Mode (JpT4)

1. **T:** If you could choose to live on another planet which one would it be Momoka? [calls on a student to answer]
2. **S1:** erm maybe I will go Saturn (laughs)
3. **T:** (laughing) Saturn? So far. Why Saturn?
4. **S1:** It is beautiful it has erm *maru* (Japanese word for circle)
5. **S2:** But doesn't has air (laughs)
6. **S1:** yes only earth has

Extract 4 can best be described by the presence of referential questions and a focus on content rather than form. Another feature is the students' self-selection of turns as done in Line 5 by a student who was not nominated by the teacher to respond. Both students make grammar mistakes in their utterances (Lines 2 and 5) but these remain uncorrected by the teacher who is probably more concerned with the content of the interaction. Now that coding criteria are made clear, it is time to see the distribution of these four modes in the classroom practice of the participants in this study.

A total of 1,626 minutes of the Iranian teachers' classes and 1,490 minutes of the Japanese teachers' classes were observed. As Table 3 indicates, for both groups of participants, materials mode comprised the biggest share of the classroom activities.

Table 3. Proportion of time allocated to each mode by Iranian and Japanese teachers

| Classroom modes | Iranian Teachers | | Japanese Teachers | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Time (minutes) | Percentage | Time (minutes) | Percentage |
| Managerial | 355 | 21.83 | 280 | 18.79 |
| Materials | 728 | 44.77 | 614 | 41.20 |
| Skills and systems | 298 | 18.32 | 284 | 19.06 |
| Classroom context | 230 | 14.14 | 300 | 20.13 |
| Uncertain | 15 | 0.92 | 12 | 0.80 |
| TOTAL | 1626 | 100 | 1490 | 100 |

As shown in Table 3, the Iranian and Japanese teachers participating in this study operated within materials mode more than any of the other three modes. As with the Iranian teachers, materials mode comprised 44.77 percent of the total observed sessions, which is arguably a bigger share compared with the 21.83 percent of the classroom activities coded under managerial mode. Skills and systems mode ranked the third with 18.32 percent and classroom context came last with only 14.14 percent. The use of the materials and discussions surrounding them comprised the largest share of classroom activities for the Japanese teachers as well with 41.20 percent. Second came, however, the classroom context with 20.13 percent. Managerial mode ranked third, and skills and systems mode ranked fourth with percentages of 18.79 and 19.6, respectively. Less than one percent for both groups has been coded as uncertain, since the researchers could not come to an agreement on how to code these excerpts.

The figures in Table 3 suggest maximal use of materials. Teachers' practice within the materials mode (see Table 1) is characterized by attempts to provide language practice around the activities included in the material, to elicit responses from learners in relation to the material, to check responses and display answers, to clarify the materials when necessary, and to evaluate learner contributions on material topics (Walsh, 2006).

Yet, the fact that both Iranian and Japanese teachers operated within the materials mode more than the other ones does not reveal the intricacies involved in their use of the materials. *How much* materials have been used does not answer *how* they have been used. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the teachers' use of materials, McDonough et al.'s (2013) materials adaptation framework (refer to data analysis) was used to code the whole data set. The framework can be used to classify teachers' use of the materials on a scale ranging from passive to creative. Table 4 summarizes the Iranian teachers' use of materials in the observed sessions.

Table 4. Iranian teachers' use of the materials

| Observation | NC | AD | DL | MD | SP | RO | Total |
|---------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Session 1 | 30 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 31 |
| Session 2 | 26 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| Session 3 | 30 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 32 |
| Session 4 | 30 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 32 |
| Session 5 | 29 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 32 |
| All Sessions | 145 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 157 |

As shown in Table 4, from among the total of 157 instances of materials use by the Iranian teachers counted with reference to the number of activities or tasks offered by the textbooks in use, 145 were done with no change. This might indicate the teachers' preference to meticulously follow the textbooks at hand. No extra activity was added by the teachers throughout the 20 observed sessions. However, in seven instances, activities were deleted, and in four, more modifications

were made in activities. There was also one instance of simplifying the activity, but nothing was observed in terms of reordering the flow of activities. Overall, the figures in the table seem to indicate that the Iranian case study teachers used the materials as they were in 145 out of 157 instances, which accounts for 92.35 percent of the whole lot. Things were somewhat different with the Japanese case study teachers though, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Japanese teachers' use of the materials

| Observation | NC | AD | DL | MD | SP | RO | Total |
|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Session 1 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 18 |
| Session 2 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 14 |
| Session 3 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 20 |
| Session 4 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 20 |
| Session 5 | 8 | 10 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 24 |
| All Sessions | 30 | 30 | 6 | 18 | 6 | 6 | 96 |

As suggested in Table 5, the four Japanese case study teachers used a total of 96 activities during the 20 observed sessions. Interestingly though, only nearly a third of these activities (31.25%) came directly from the textbooks in use. In other words, while they used only 30 activities without making any changes in them, the teachers added 30 more activities (31.25%) in the form of either handouts given to students, power point slides, or copies of other textbooks. The remaining 36 activities were not used without changes either. As the figures indicate, the Japanese teachers made modification in 18 of the activities offered by the textbook and made simplifications in the six other activities. There were also six activities which were reordered, while the remaining six were deleted altogether.

4.2 Thematic analysis

Statistical descriptions per se do not provide an adequate explanation of the participant teachers' motivations to make pedagogic choices regarding the use of materials. Stimulated recall interviews conducted after the analysis of classroom observations were better equipped to provide more credible results. The results of thematic analysis of the interview sessions revealed different justifications provided by the two groups of case study teachers for their use of the materials. Table 6 summarizes the emerged themes from the participants' responses and is followed by extracts from the interviews.

Table 6. Iranian and Japanese teachers' justifications of their materials use

| | Iranian teachers | Japanese teachers |
|--------|--|---|
| Themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints • Workload • Test preparations • Professionalism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner needs • Relevance • Professionalism |

As shown in Table 6, the two groups of participants had different justifications for their practice in materials mode. As with the Iranian teachers, time constraint and workload were in fact the most recurrent themes. They generally believed that following a textbook saves them a great amount of time and given the fact that teaching is a very demanding job, they would prefer to do so:

Sometimes making changes in the activity of the book needs too much time. We don't have the time here. The syllabus says four pages per session and you don't have the time to do anything else. (*IrT2*)

I don't say it's a bad idea [to adapt materials] but I just don't have the time. Imagine for every session before the session I should prepare new materials. It's good but not always possible. (*IrT1*)

Preparing the learners for the tests was another recurrent theme in the Iranian teachers' responses. The argument seemed to be that the final examinations will be based on the materials and hence they need to be meticulously followed:

We [teachers] don't make the exam questions here. They come from Tehran [the central branch] and they design them based on this book. So if you say I can change the book or skip what I don't like I don't think it's fair to the students. (*IrT1*)

Professionalism was the other theme emerged, but interestingly it was a common theme among the Iranian and the Japanese teachers. However, a closer look at the responses coded as pertinent to the theme of professionalism yields more intricacies. That is, although both groups of teachers believed professionalism is a driving force for them to use the materials the way they do, they had very different conceptualizations of the term. The Iranian participants defined professionalism as compliance with the rules of the school they are working for and its principals, observers/inspectors and syllabus. For the Japanese teachers, however, professionalism equaled taking full responsibility for their learners and engaging with the teaching job actively and creatively. Compare the following extracts coded as an instance of professionalism by an Iranian and a Japanese teacher:

A teacher is observed by an external observer [school inspector] at least once a term here and the observer will not promote you if you make a mess of the book. He wants you to follow the syllabus and the syllabus is based on every task in this book. (*IrT4*)

As a teacher I think this is what I am supposed to do. I ask other teachers and search for other materials to help my students improve. It's part of my job. It's like testing. It's like correcting. *This* is teaching. (*JpT1*)

The other two themes that emerged from the Japanese teachers' responses were relevance and learner needs. In other words, they believed the reason they make constant adaptations in the materials is to make them more relevant to the purpose of the course and more suitable to their learners' needs:

I know the book I'm using is a good one. It's written by professional native speakers I guess. But if it is not related to what I plan to do, and in many cases it is not, I simply delete and change activities. (*JpT1*)

Whenever I see the students not feel good about the activity I ask myself do they have to do it? And in many cases I answer no! Sometimes it's boring to them or way above their heads. (*JpT2*)

4.3 Narratives of immunity

Borrowing the term from Hiver and Dörnyei (2017), we discussed in the review of the literature how teachers come to acquire immunity, through developing self-constructed narratives that help them survive against all adversities in their teaching context. The analysis of the data collected from stimulated recall interviews, which primarily aimed at exploring the teachers' justifications of their use of materials, had some implications for the concept of teacher immunity too.

A look back at Table 6 and the themes that emerged from the teachers' justification of their materials use implies how they construct narratives that allow them to operate as teachers without enduring excessive pressures. The case particularly holds true to the Iranian teachers who, compared with their Japanese colleagues, seemed to have been constrained by more contextual factors, or rather at least believed that they have been constrained by such factors. Take the following two extracts from two Iranian teachers coded respectively as instances of professionalism and workload as examples:

They [institute principals] did not come to ask me to teach here. I decided to come here and I knew teachers here had to follow the syllabus word by word. You may ask I may not like the syllabus and I say yes I know it doesn't work. But I like my job more. (*IrT3*)

Most teachers teach eight classes which makes 16 sessions per week here. It is already too much the way it is. I sometimes do not have the time or energy to follow this book let alone going to look for supplementaries. I am a human [laughs]. (*IrT1*)

In both extracts, the interviewees refer to potential instances of disruption in their jobs. In the case of *IrT3*'s comment, for instance, there seem to exist concerns regarding losing the job. The respondent seems to have overcome internal conflicts originating from the mismatch between her beliefs and what was imposed on her from the school or an observer. She seems to have constructed a narrative of *obedience* positioning herself as a person who has managed to pass these conflicts and accept that she has to abide by the rules.

In the second extract, *IrT1* generalizes her dilemma to "most teachers" in the institute and refers to her responsibilities as a teacher who has to teach 16 sessions in a week. She goes further justifying her passive use of the textbook by arguing that she and probably "most teachers" do not have enough time to supplement their materials and hence should not be expected to do so. The teacher, seemingly, is trying to construct a narrative of *busy teacher* or even *victimhood*.

Different narratives could also be found in the Japanese responses. Consider the following extract coded as learner needs:

My students never say that they dislike the activity. At least they have never told me. It's a Japanese trait after all [laughs]. But I get a sense that such and such activity doesn't interest them. They don't complain but I know they would if they could. I don't want them to criticize me for what another author has failed to do you see? (*JpT2*)

The teacher's apparent deletion of some activities from the textbook seems to have been based on her "sense" that her learners do not like it. She has never heard any complaints though. What she is seemingly doing is to shield herself against any potential criticism by learners, even if unuttered. By constructing a narrative of *learner centrism*, *JpT2* seems to have been able to immune herself from the threat of criticism and complaint.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The present case study was designed to investigate four Iranian and four Japanese language teachers' use of materials in their classes. The findings indicated that for both Iranian and Japanese teachers, materials use comprised a great proportion of classroom practice. Yet, the two groups of teachers differed substantially in *how* they operationalized the use of materials. That is, while the Iranian teachers seemed to use the materials passively and mainly as they were, the Japanese teachers seemed more willing to adapt materials and make changes in them for a variety of reasons. Rather than making any undue generalization, however, it is important to bear in mind that these results may only be valid in the two schools investigated in Iran and Japan. For sure, variations in school types, for example, public schools offering primary and secondary education in the two research sites, may yield different results. It may well be argued that in Iranian and Japanese public schools, for instance, teachers use materials in different ways. However, instead of contradicting the results of this study, such an argument provides further support for it in that the use of materials is not necessarily teacher-led and contextual factors such as schools and the educational setting can affect teachers' implementation of materials. Similarly, cultural expectations from teachers regarding the use of materials can influence their materials use as well. Culture, however, can be defined either broadly as the norms and expectations shared by a nation, or locally as the standards and expectations shared by small groups of individuals working in a place such as a school. Both of these definitions can be valid, meaning that a teacher's pedagogic decisions may be driven by both types of expectations.

The findings support previous research in the field in a number of ways. First, the study showed once again the central role of materials in language classes. Both groups of teachers in this research allocated a great proportion of their class time to the use of materials in general and textbooks in particular. Some teachers, however, were more reliant on their textbooks. Such scriptural uses of

materials are reminiscent of Swan's (1992) warning against issues arising from teacher's overreliance on textbooks: a pitfall which may eventually end up in relegating language teachers to mere "technicians" rather than professionals. In a similar vein, Richards and Mahoney (1996) posit that an overreliance as such may lead to teacher "de-skilling." The Iranian participant teachers' use of materials, which was characterized by meticulously following textbooks and allocating a big proportion of their class time to textbook activities, seems to illustrate the point.

The majority of criticism in the literature on materials has targeted textbooks and their developers. Harmer (2001), however, highlights the need to distinguish materials and their problems from the problems arising from materials use. Such a distinction could be essential in appreciating the important roles language teachers can play in realizing the potentials of the textbooks they employ or rather compensating for their drawbacks. This seems to be in line with the findings of the present research: teachers use textbooks differently and this very difference may well alter what they can achieve in their classes. The results, of course, have shown how various pedagogic decisions in the language classroom may not necessarily be made solely by teachers. In other words, decisions may be made within an intricate and complex network of stakeholders signifying the effects of contextual factors. In this study, for instance, the Iranian participant teachers' materials use seemed to be constrained by the school supervisor, syllabus and other factors such as time and test demands, and this bears resemblance to Loh and Renandya's (2016) observations in Singapore. Identifying and confronting these contextual constraints, as Masuhara (2011) believes, is an important prerequisite of teacher empowerment. Should that be true, it also seems tenable to argue that, as Burns, Freeman, and Edwards (2015) put it, doing research on language teachers without taking into account the myriad contextual variables involved would be meaningless and useless.

Following on Harmer's (2001) distinction between scriptural use of textbooks and using them as springboards, it can be argued that while the former characterizes Iranian teachers' use of materials, the latter has more to do with Japanese teachers' materials use. Harmer (2001) believes that teacher education must focus more on materials use rather the quality of the materials. The findings of the present research also corroborate the fact that materials use can be as important as, if not more important than, the quality of the materials. Similar results were reported by Richards and Mahoney (1996) and Katz (1996).

As with the findings concerning narratives of immunity, it can be argued that they have been in line with propositions made by Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) and Hiver (2015). They believe that teachers being able to self-organize in the face of chaos and difficulty manage to develop narratives that immunize them against various external and internal pressures, which enables them to operate with minimum emotional distress. According to this view, the process of self-organization initiates with a triggering stage when a destabilizing incident takes place. An example for this would be the participants who seemed to have experienced discrepancies between their internal beliefs and the contextual standards. Teachers, however, do not surrender and, passing through linking and realignment stages, come to a new stable state and become self-organized. They make constant decisions during the two middle stages and analyze the feedback they receive from the context and finally manage to stabilize their emotional state by internalizing new values, letting go of older destabilizing ones, or striking a balance between the two. Self-organization may turn costly too, however. Although immunity functions as a defense mechanism protecting teachers against emotional imbalance, it can be thought of as a "double-edged sword" which can inhibit "teacher change and growth [and contribute] to the pervasive conservatism and rigidity in the language teaching profession" (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017, p. 419). Immunity, therefore, has to be constantly challenged through reflective practice before it turns into a destructive aspect of teachers' professional identity.

The findings of this study can be useful for teacher education (Freeman, 2016) and materials development researchers and practitioners. As Tomlinson (2012) has pointed out, language teacher educators and materials developers currently know very little about how teachers actually make use of materials. Such information can be very useful to those in charge of developing materials. Knowledge of teachers' use of materials and their personal theories on how to do so can prove informative for teacher development research as well. As Tomlinson and Masuhara (2018) state,

materials adaptation research can have even wider implications for curriculum development and implementation. They believe that “there is cross-sectional and interdisciplinary potential between materials development studies and those of teachers’ practice in classrooms in curriculum development and teacher education” (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018, p. 89). The findings of this study and any similar study on materials use can therefore be useful not only for the contexts they have been conducted in, but also for raising awareness towards potential constraints and recourses language teachers are faced with in other EFL settings.

One important caveat to be wary of is the fact that the present research has only 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 contexts. Drawing any generalized conclusion may undermine the very purpose of case study as such. The aim, alternately, has been to explore in more depth the eight participant teachers’ operationalization of the materials mode and the intricacies involved in their use of the materials. Without making generalizations, however, it can be said that the findings of this study can raise awareness towards the relation between EFL teachers’ materials use and their construction of narratives of immunity in EFL contexts other than Iran and Japan. Therefore, further research investigating language teachers’ use of materials, collecting data from a bigger sample of teachers, and operating in diverse teaching settings is encouraged. Diversity in the collection of data both in terms of instruments and research setting can shed more light on the issue of materials use.

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Appendix 1

Transcription guide

T: Teacher

S1, S2: Student 1, Student 2

Ss: Students

(...): State and nonverbal communication

[...]: Researcher comments

CAPITALS: Emphatic pronunciation