Influence of Contextual Factors on EFL Mexican Teachers' Beliefs and the Use of Textbooks

La influencia de factores contextuales en las creencias y en el uso de libros de texto de profesores de lenguas mexicanos*

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While much has been written about the use of instructional materials in the field of language education, very few studies have actually studied the impact of the context in the use of materials in teachers' practices. This work shows the findings of a study about the contextual factors that a group of experienced Mexican teachers believe shaped their lessons. Drawing on qualitative data, the study shows that factors such as the length of courses and lessons, the school facilities, the institutional practices to select textbooks as well as the institutional procedures to supervise teachers' practices and assessment, explicitly emerged as the most influential in the teachers' lessons.

Key words: Educational context, instructional materials, language lessons, teachers' beliefs, textbooks.

Mientras en el área de la enseñanza de lenguas mucho se ha escrito acerca del uso de materiales de instrucción, poco se ha investigado acerca del impacto del contexto en el uso de materiales en las prácticas de los profesores. Este trabajo muestra los hallazgos de un estudio acerca de los factores contextuales que un grupo de profesores mexicanos experimentados cree que determinan sus clases. Usando

datos cualitativos el estudio muestra que factores tales como la duración de los cursos y las clases, las instalaciones, los mecanismos institucionales para seleccionar los libros de texto así como para supervisar las prácticas docentes y la evaluación fueron explícitamente mencionados como los más influyentes en las clases de los profesores.

Palabras clave: contexto educativo, creencias de los profesores, cursos de lengua, libros de texto, materiales de instrucción.

Introduction

This study explores the perceptions of six Mexican teachers of English regarding the effect of contextual factors in their use of instructional materials. The teachers under study are organized into two sub-sets of three less experienced teachers and three who are more experienced. Drawing on interview data, the study identifies the contextual factors that determine the teachers' beliefs and their use of instructional materials. The study therefore addresses the following research questions.

- What are the contextual factors that teachers believe shape the use of textbooks?
- How do teachers' beliefs influence the use of alternative and replacement materials?

This paper is organized into four sections: The first analyses the literature related to instructional materials in English language teaching (ELT) and teacher beliefs and practices; the second describes the research methodology, participants, and instruments used; the third reports the findings and the fourth the conclusions of this research.

Instructional Materials in English Language Teaching

Given the focus of this study, the discussion about materials in language classrooms is key to make sense of this investigation. Tok (2010) maintains that instructional materials continue to be key components in language classrooms for both teachers and learners. Tomlinson (2003) describes language teaching materials as follows:

> anything that can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. They can be linguistic, visual auditory or kinaesthetic or they can be presented in print, through live performance or display, or on cassette, CD-ROM, DVD or the internet. (p. 2)

From McGrath's (2002) perspective:

> materials could include "realia" (real objects such as a pencil, chair or bag) and representations (such as a drawing or a photograph of a person, house or scene) . . . text materials (e.g. textbooks, work sheets, computer software); authentic materials (e.g. off-air recordings, newspapers, articles), teacher-written materials and learner-generated materials. (p. 7)

Also Tok (2010) described instructional materials simply in terms of being either printed or non-printed. In fact, every time researchers attempt to describe the existing materials, they find out that new resources have appeared which makes listing them all a rather complicated task. Nonetheless, the definitions of materials above help us make sense of the broad range of possibilities available in the market to help teachers teach their lessons. For the purposes of this study, we discuss the relevance of textbooks in language classrooms today.

Language Textbooks in the Context Under Investigation

In this study, the term *textbook* refers to the book or book set used as the main material in the teaching of an English language course. Textbooks have become one of the most evolving tools in English language teaching. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) affirm the textbook "has become an almost universal element of ELT" (p. 315), playing a significant part in the language teaching and learning processes (Rubdy, 2003). Zacharias (2005) also asserts: "whether used in conjunction with other texts or materials or as a sort of surrogate curriculum, textbooks tend to affect the teaching and learning process in the classroom" (p. 23).

In most ELT contexts, "course books are perceived by many to be the route map of any ELT programme" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 238). Even though it was made nearly three decades ago, this assertion is still true in several language teaching contexts, including that which this research focuses on, where textbooks have gained such importance that they have even replaced the institutional syllabuses in the formation and planning of courses.

On his studies of learning materials Tomlinson (2003, 2009) has recognized the textbook as a key component in language learning and language teaching. McGrath (2002, pp. 10-11) suggests the following reasons to use a textbook in language teaching:

Why teachers and learners need a textbook:

- A course book is a map; it shows where one is going and where one has been.
- It provides language samples.
- It offers variety.

Why learners need a textbook:

- It defines what is to be learned and what will be tested.
- It reinforces what the teacher has done and makes revision and preparation possible. It thus offers support for learning outside class.

Why teachers need a textbook:

- It provides a structure for teaching.
- It saves time. To prepare materials from scratch for every lesson would be impossible.
- It offers linguistic, cultural, and methodological support.

- It is easy to keep track of what you have done and to tell others where you have reached (e.g. when reporting to the head of a department or briefing a substitute teacher).

Similar to McGrath (2002), Ansary and Babaii (2002, p. 2) suggest a checklist of arguments for using a textbook:

- A textbook is a framework which regulates and times the programs.
- In the eyes of learners, no textbook means no purpose.
- Without a textbook, learners think their learning is not taken seriously.
- In many situations, a textbook can serve as a syllabus.
- A textbook provides ready-made teaching texts and learning tasks.
- A textbook is a cheap way of providing learning materials.
- A learner without a textbook is out of focus and teacher-dependant, and perhaps most important of all, *for novice teachers a textbook means security, guidance, and support.*

In the late 1980s, Sheldon (1988) noted the relevance of textbooks in language classrooms, and, in the following decade, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) pointed out the growing influence of ELT textbooks in language teaching contexts. In the early 2000s, textbooks continued to be a preferred tool for language instruction (Gray, 2000). More recently, Zacharias (2005) affirmed that textbooks have become a central pedagogical element in language classrooms. Thus, there is evidence to affirm that the textbook's central role has remained unaltered over the years. Furthermore, teachers' beliefs about the textbook have also remained unchanged over the years (Harwood, 2013).

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Research exploring beliefs has become challenging due to the "difficulty caused by definitional problems, poor conceptualizations and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures" (Pajares, 1992, p. 307). In describing the complexity of defining the concept "beliefs," Pajares affirms:

> Defining beliefs is at best a game of player's choice. They travel in disguise and often under alias—attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in literature. (p. 309)

Furthermore, he maintains that choosing a suitable definition of *belief* for a particular research project is a matter of selecting among a wide range of existing positions and interpretations, in which the most suitable is that which fits the particular features and goals of that particular study.

Beyond the terminology used to designate this term, most research in the field of teacher education has attempted to provide a definition of this construct. Johnson (1994) notes that "cognitive psychology defines beliefs, as one's representation of reality that guides both thought and behaviour" (p. 439). She further asserts that beliefs contain a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioural component, each of which influences what one knows, feels, and does. This assertion then strengthens the idea that what teachers think is reflected in their practices.

In exploring the nature of beliefs, Richardson (2003) describes them as one form of cognition, while Nespor (1987) refers to beliefs as a form of knowledge. The term *belief* nonetheless, holds particular features when it refers to the beliefs of teachers. To distinguish the study of teachers' beliefs from other kinds of studies of belief, Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001) note:

> The study of teachers' beliefs forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work. In order to understand how teachers approach their work it is necessary to understand the beliefs and principles they operate from. (p. 43)

This suggests that to examine teachers' beliefs, these should necessarily be articulated by teachers themselves. Richardson (2003) defines teachers' beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or prepositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 3), and suggests three major sources for them: "personal experience; experience with schooling and instruction; and experience with formal knowledge—both school subjects and pedagogical knowledge" (p. 5). Another view about the foundations of teachers' beliefs suggests that:

> Teachers' beliefs systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and processes of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it. (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 30)

Richards and Lockhart (1994) have also shed light on the foundations of belief systems. They suggest the following sources of teachers' beliefs (pp. 30-31): the teachers' own experience as language learners, the experience of what works best, established practice, personality factors, educationally based or research-based principles, as well as principles derived from an approach or method.

Research in the field of teachers' beliefs has found a close relationship between what teachers think and do (Borg, 2006; Contreras, 2008; Prieto, 2008), and the conceptualization of teachers' beliefs maintained in this study assumes that "the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgements which in turn affect their behaviour in the classroom" (Pajares, 2003, p. 307). In other words, "teachers' beliefs precede teachers' actions in the classroom" (Usó, 2009, p. 2).

Since this study explores how the context influences teachers' beliefs and how these in turn shape their practices, it will be critical to discuss the significance of the context in teaching.

Why Explore the Teaching Context

Within the framework of education, the context in general may have several interpretations and implications. It may concern the classroom itself and every component within this setting, for instance, facilities, materials, and physical resources (e.g., room, board, markers, equipment, and environmental conditions such as temperature, ventilation, and location in respect to other classrooms). Institutional context may refer also to the school regulations, philosophy, materials, facilities, libraries, and whatever other component exists of the school beyond the classroom that affects teachers and their practices. Context, from a broader perspective, can also refer to the atmosphere outside the school, for instance school location, neighbourhood, and norms, to mention just a few. Institutional contexts can, therefore, be viewed from different perspectives, as they play an important role in relation to teachers' work.

Numerous theorists and researchers, working in the field of education, have emphasised the "effects of social, cultural, and economic contexts on teaching and learning" (Fenwick & Cooper, 2013, p. 96). Borg (2006) maintains there are relationships between teachers' beliefs, practices, and context. He explains that these relationships are not unidirectional or linear, and thus this may occur in a variety of ways in an infinite possibility of contexts and situations. In discussing the impact of context on language teachers' practices in particular, Borg (2006) notes:

> The social, institutional, instructional, and physical settings in which teachers work have a major impact on their cognitions and practices. The study of cognitions and practices in isolation of the contexts in which they occur will inevitably, therefore provide partial, if not flawed characterizations of teachers and teaching. (p. 275)

Some studies have explored the relationships among the context, teachers' beliefs, and teachers' practices (e.g., Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Moini, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2007). For instance, the Johnson et al. (2012) study draws on a questionnaire with 87 items and examines the views of over 25,000 teachers across the United States. Outcomes from the study showed that work context has a strong influence on teachers' work, even more than financial considerations. The study further showed that contextual factors were a primary reason for teachers moving to other schools, as they affected career plans and were acknowledged as the most influential factor in teachers' choices. All in all, contextual factors emerged as a key variable in teachers' choices, not only within the boundaries of the classroom, but also in their teaching careers. Another study developed in Colombia (Galvis, 2012), and based on the

assumption that teaching is shaped by context and culture, explored the impact of teachers' beliefs on the use of computer technology. The theory based study showed that teachers' beliefs have a strong influence on their use of technology; however factors such as age and the lack of training strongly influenced the way teachers used technological tools.

In contrast to the studies above, where context and culture shape teachers' perceptions about their work, in the present study, contextual factors play a significant role on the teachers' use of textbooks. The relationships between contextual factors and teachers' beliefs and between teachers' beliefs and the use of materials are discussed later.

Participants

A group of six language teachers was chosen as participants in this study: three teachers with between five to ten years' experience in language teaching, that we will refer to as LETs (less experienced teachers), and three more experienced teachers with between 15 to 20 years' experience in teaching English at university level that will be referred to as METs (more experienced teachers). All the teachers hold a bachelor degree (BA) in ELT.

To recruit the six participants, we followed a criterion called *purposive sampling* which, according to Bryman (2008), is "essentially strategic and entails an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling. In other words, the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions" (pp. 333-334).

Thus, we looked for individuals in whom the processes being studied were most likely to occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The six teachers were also chosen because their profile suited the aims of this research, especially in terms of years' experience, area of teaching speciality, and issues of accessibility and willingness to be, for instance, interviewed after their classes.

Context of the Study

In terms of the facilities available to support language teachers' practices, the department where this study was undertaken offers a variety of resources, which include: (1) a central library, where teachers can access a range of reading materials and ELT literature; (2) an open self-access centre (*Centro de Auto Acceso y Tecnología*, or CAAT), which comprises a video room, an audio room, a reading room, and an information and communications technology (ICT) room. The CAAT allows language teachers, along with instructors, to provide special training to students in specific areas or skills. Finally, and as a key resource, classrooms are equipped with large screens and video and audio recorders, as well as computers with internet connection. This description may help the reader make sense of the extent to which such electronic resources, among many others mentioned by the teachers, contribute towards the teaching of English.

Instructional Materials

The terms *instructional materials* or *teaching materials* in this investigation are used to refer to whatever tools are used by teachers to facilitate language learning, and may include textbooks, magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, wall charts, real life objects, videos, audio recordings, photocopies, and the internet. They may also include classroom discussions, teachers' presentations, activities, games, and other electronic resources, "in other words they can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners' knowledge and/or experience of the language" (Tomlinson, 2009, p. 4). From all the possible resources in the BA ELT programme, no doubt the textbooks are the most used and the most prevalent materials in the language lessons.

Method

This study was designed on the basis of a qualitative approach and explored the contextual factors shaping the teachers' use of materials. The methodology was chosen in order to better understand teacher practices and beliefs. The study focused on the language lessons which are central to the BA ELT under investigation. Therefore, the study explored from beginners to advanced courses. The study drew on semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to get a broad view of the teachers' use of materials. Each teacher was interviewed three times and observed three times. In all the cases, the interviews were based on issues observed in the teachers' practices. The intention of spreading both the interviews and observations over three weeks was to get a broad picture of the situation being studied. In other words, it was intended to capture key issues relating to the teachers' use of materials in three different moments.

The first interview aimed to obtain background information about the teachers. It explored issues about the use of materials and also served to establish a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees. A second more focused and in-depth interview was based on relevant issues emerging from the second observation, and a third interview aimed to explore in depth relevant issues emerging from the third observation and from the first two interviews. This closing interview was also an opportunity to hear the teachers' reflections about their teaching and their use of materials.

Findings

The findings are organized into two sections. The first part provides information about the main materials used in the teachers' lessons as well as the rationales for using such materials. The second part shows the contextual factors that most LETs and METs affirmed

influenced their classes. Table 1 illustrates the main materials observed in LETs' and METs' classes as well as the rationales guiding their choices.

Since textbooks were adopted by nearly all the teachers as central materials, most of their decisions about using further materials were in relation to the use of textbooks. In this regard it is important to note that despite the supportive help of the central library and the CAAT, the teachers still preferred to design their lessons based on the official textbook. These decisions seem to be based on the teachers' beliefs that (1) the materials offered by the library would not help them achieve the course objectives as effectively and promptly as their own alternative or complementary materials, and (2) since the teachers' main concern was to accomplish the grammar objectives, the materials and skill practice offered by the CAAT seemed to be unattractive for the teachers.

Table 1. Teachers' Use of Alternative and Complementary Materials

Participants	Materials used to replace textbooks		Materials used to complement textbooks			
	Anthology	Handouts	ICT materials	Grammar book	Dictionary	Worksheets
	Rationales for using alternative materials		Rationales for using complementary materials			
	Time constraints. Large volume of textbook content.	Time constraints	Provided real English, listening, and vocabulary	Provided further practice.	Provided vocabulary and pronunciation.	Clarified grammar. Gave a variation to textbooks.
LET1	✓		✓			
LET2				✓		
LET3		✓			✓	
MET1						✓
MET2						
MET3						

Table 1 shows two main groups of materials. The ones used for complementing the textbook and the ones used for replacing the textbook. In each case, the teachers' reasons for using such materials are mentioned. It is worth pointing out that two of the METs did not use any further materials in their lessons, but only the official textbook, which is surprising given their broad experience in using a range of materials. The teachers' decisions to use the book or put it aside, however, were shaped by contextual factors which are discussed below.

Contextual Factors and Teachers' Lessons

Along with the reasons that teachers stated for using a number of materials, they raised a number of contextual factors that they felt justified the use of such materials. To better understand how contextual factors influenced teachers' use of materials, Table 2 shows the factors stated by the teachers as the most influential.

This study identified, on the one hand, some contextual factors that actually influenced the teachers' perceptions about the textbooks. On the other hand, the study also identified the teachers' beliefs and theories about the textbooks. Both teachers' beliefs and contextual issues guided their decisions to draw on complementary and alternative materials.

Table 2. Main Contextual Factors That Teachers Felt Shaped Their Lessons

Contextual Factors					
Time constraints: *Course and lessons length.*	Course content: *Too much content.* *Contents did not match textbooks.*	Features of the group: *Group size.* *Particular features of the students.*	Textbook selection: *Teachers not involved in its selection.*	Textbook features: *The book was not appropriate.* *Book contents too dense.*	Freedom to use materials: *Teachers felt free to use materials.* *Teachers felt forced to use materials.*
LET1	Replaced the textbook with an anthology.				
LET2	Used textbook occasionally.				
LET3	Replaced textbook with worksheets.				
MET1	Used textbook and worksheets.				
MET2	Used the textbook only.				
MET3	Used the textbook only.				

Since some of these factors were pointed out by more than one teacher, Table 2 then has grouped the teachers and the contextual factors. In this respect, each contextual factor is discussed individually below.

It is interesting to note that teachers had different perceptions about the textbook, the context and its utility, that eventually led them to use complementary or alternative materials. To understand the teachers' decisions about the textbook and use of materials, it is critical to highlight a few key facts about the textbook:

- The language courses normally followed a textbook-based syllabus.
- The use of textbooks is compulsory in the language lessons.
- The institutional assessment is normally textbook-based.

Although there is a BA ELT coordinator, in practice nobody keeps track of the teachers' lessons and use of materials. To get insight into teachers' classes and to get a taste of the rationales behind their decisions, some extracts of the interviews are included.

Time constraints. According to LET1 and LET3 the course and the lessons length hindered their opportunities to use the official material properly. In this concern, LET1 said:

> I didn't follow those guidelines (textbook) because I thought this was a kind of a different course because of different reasons, and the first one, it's too short, it is a summer course.

> Six weeks for me was horrible in the sense that I felt all the time in a rush...you know, a four hour session five days a week for eight weeks...the schedule from two to six. At two o'clock some students need to eat something, it was really hard.

It is interesting that only two teachers (LET1 and LET3) felt short of time to teach the contents suggested by the syllabus. LETs' lack of time may have been a perception based on the methodologies they followed in using the textbook which contrasted with the METs, whose experience allowed them go only through the contents that would help their students pass the course.

Course content. The issue about the course content may be uncertain and debatable since some teachers believed the textbook was the program. In describing the challenges with course contents, LET3 asserted:

> Well, the main reason why I didn't use the textbook is that it was a short course [six weeks] and we were not going to be able to finish the book...also the units or modules are very long, so I was going to spend a lot of time teaching every unit, so I thought I needed quicker ways to cover the content.

As commented on above, the teachers' perceptions about covering the course content or the textbook content were certainly shaped by their experience and perception about language teaching. LET1 and LET3 sure expected to cover every single exercise in the

textbook so this may have been the reason why they felt they would not finished the course on time. In explaining his use of materials LET3 explained:

> As it was a short course [6-7 weeks], they [handouts] would help me get the contents quicker than the book...I took the content of the book which is the syllabus...and I took all these structures but using different materials, maybe some other books.

Overall the teachers felt the contents suggested by both the syllabus and the textbook were too dense to be covered in the few weeks allocated to the course.

Features of students. A few teachers also felt that their students or their groups held some features that made them different from other students, so they pointed out specific issues about their students. MET1 for instance noted:

> My students are not in the right levels, and this has been a problem...I am struggling with two different kinds of levels and I am struggling with the dates that we are supposed to match with the mid-term exams and the final exams...I am struggling with the students that do not even speak, and they are going to become teachers...I am working with attitude problems and I am working with skills that are not into practice.

LET1 similarly felt the size of his group was significant to make substantial changes. So he explained:

> The fact that I had six or seven students which is not normal...we usually have from 15 to 20 or 25 students in each classroom, you know...that made me think about how easy it would be for me to try to implement an alternative for material...because it was not a large number of students that I needed to convince in a way...in this point I thought yeah, it's only six I can deal with this.

What is significant here is the fact that both the size of the group and the features of the students drove the teachers' decisions to use further materials or to replace the textbook with other materials.

Textbook selection. The issue about the selection of the textbook is perhaps the most sensitive in this study. Although no teacher affirmed to be discontent for not being involved in the selection of the official textbook, it was evident that there was a feeling of displeasure for not having had a word in the process of choosing textbooks. In this regard, MET1 and LET1 explained:

> Whatsoever it is obligated that we have to use certain book...sometimes they [coordinators] don't even ask for opinions…"do you agree with this textbook? How do you see it? What do you need?," and many times they end up choosing a book for us, for the teachers, and then that makes it a problem...it makes it a problem because teachers are not happy with the book, so we have to look for other complementing materials. (MET1)

> Teachers, most of the times, are never asked about the books...well, I think it affects when, like, your opinion is not taken, of course, it's very likely that you have a very negative attitude towards

something you were not asked for...they just told us, "this is the book you are going to be using."
They didn't ask for your opinion. (LET1)

The teachers' feelings of discontent are evident, and although they never associated their
feelings with their decisions about materials, very likely this fact influenced teachers' decisions
about textbooks.

Textbook features. Most teachers identified issues in the official textbook that they
considered inappropriate for their students or that simply were not aligned with their beliefs
about textbooks. For example in explaining her feeling about the textbook, LET2 said:

> Honestly and personally speaking I do not like to use the book, particularly this book, we are using
> *Headway*...I do not like it because I consider the content is not appropriate for the students or the
> kind of students we have. The readings for example are completely out of the frame of my students.
> For instance, next week we have to cover something about holidays...not because I don't believe
> eventually one of my students will be able to visit Japan, it's extremely hard and out of their context
> to visit Japan.

Clearly LET2's opinion about the textbook was based on a personal perception about the
textbook and its relation to the students' realities. Similarly LET1 asserted:

> I have used that book, *North Star*, before in regular courses. I like the book but not this time, I think
> it would be very tedious for me and the students...I have asked from other students about the book
> and they say, "yeah it is kind of too much, too much to grasp." It is packed with information, and
> you have to read and read again . . . is like following the same procedure unit after unit.

As for LET1's perception about the book, it clearly shows that he perceived the book as
monotonous and too dense for his particular learners. Overall, he felt his students needed
other complementary materials.

Freedom to use materials. Teachers' perceptions about the freedom to make decisions
on their materials are particularly contrasting between LETs and METs. It is interesting that
some teachers felt free to use whatever materials while others felt forced to use the materials
prescribed by the faculty. The opinion of LET2, who said:

> I really don't like the idea of having the programme based on the book...but here it is the way it
> works, so we have to follow the book, the book is really the course, so I have to take the book as the
> first point of reference.

contrasted with that of MET1's, who said:

> I am very happy with this freedom because I have worked in many universities that they don't want
> to see other books except their own textbook.

It is critical to highlight that while LET2 felt the use of the official textbook was
compulsory, MET1 felt free to use other books in her lessons. These contrasting opinions
between a less experienced and a more experienced teacher may suggest that the teachers'

experience influenced their perceptions about their work context. Similarly, the teachers' experience should have been critical in the perceptions that they had about the course, the lessons, the students, the textbooks, and the freedom to use further materials.

Main Findings of the LETs and METs

The main issues identified collectively in LETs' teaching practices show that the dominant theme was the use of materials other than textbooks and the repercussions that this use had in their teaching practices. From the opinions of the LETs, we can assert that they felt completely free to make decisions about their teaching materials. Two of them exercised this sense of freedom to deviate substantially from the officially sanctioned material in their use of their own materials.

The main issues identified collectively in METs' teaching practices show that the dominant theme is clearly the use of textbooks. Despite the differences in their claimed approaches and materials, the textbook was always a relevant tool in their teaching practices. Their opinions show that the book was compulsory; and they relied on the book because they felt it would help their students pass the centrally designed tests.

Conclusions

As described above, the LETs' and METs' perceptions about their context were significantly dissimilar. Although this study is not aiming to compare teachers' use of materials in light of their experience, it is worth saying that the experience factor definitely plays a significant role here. The study uncovered contextual factors such as the time allocated to courses and lessons, the institutional mechanisms for the selection of textbooks, the teachers' perceptions about the group size, and the lack of mechanisms to watch over the teachers' practices which made the teachers feel free to use further materials. Overall, this study showed that in practice, contextual factors were influential in the teachers' beliefs which in turn shaped their instructional decisions.

Contextual factors along with teachers' experience, age, teachers' theories about the use of materials, and their seniority in the teaching staff, to mention just a few, surely contributed towards the consolidation of teachers' beliefs and their perceptions about the use and utility of instructional materials.

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