Brazilian English as foreign language teachers' beliefs about grammar-based feedback on L2 writing

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Brazilian English as foreign language teachers’ beliefs about grammar-based feedback on L2 writing

by

Katia Silene Ferreira de Mello Paiva

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Teaching English as a Second Language (Computer Assisted Language Learning)

Program of Study Committee:
John Levis, Major Professor
Constance Post
Tammy Slater

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2011

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ABSTRACT

Empirical findings have suggested that what teachers do in the classroom mirrors what they believe and these beliefs often influence their instructional decisions (Farrell & Lim, 2005). Research in teacher belief is vast and diverse (Borg, 2003) as is investigation about the effectiveness of written corrective feedback *per se* (Ferris, 2006; Truscott, 2009); however, little is known about teachers’ beliefs about written corrective feedback (Lee, 2009). Therefore, this study aimed at investigating Brazilian EFL teachers’ beliefs about grammar-based feedback on L2 writing and the extent to which their beliefs are related to their perceived classroom practice. Fifteen Brazilian EFL teachers answered a five-point Likert scale survey composed of twenty-two statements that covered key issues related to written corrective feedback. Results suggest that Brazilian teachers tend to believe that form-focused correction is a recommendable instructional approach. In addition, the qualitative analysis of the teachers’ perception of classroom practice in regards to written feedback provision implied that their pedagogical decisions are likely to be shaped by beliefs and contextual factors related to their working settings.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement among educational and language teaching scholars that what teachers do in the classroom is mirrored by what they believe, and their beliefs often operate as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made (Farrell & Lim, 2005). In language teaching, empirical studies world-wide have indicated teachers’ belief in corrective feedback as an optimal pedagogical practice because it minimizes grammatical errors in written production and promotes language learning (Borg, 1999; Schulz, 1996, 2001).

This thesis explores teachers’ beliefs about corrective feedback in foreign language (L2) writing. Specifically, this thesis comprises a cross-sectional survey study which seeks to investigate Brazilian language teachers’ beliefs.

Statement of Problem

When questioned about her perspective on the role of grammar in overall language learning, an English language learner (ELL) teacher in Brazil answered:

I think we tend to expect that students speak accurately; in order to speak accurately and write accurately, they have to know grammar.... we don’t want our students to go talking, ‘Me Tarzan, you Janna,’ because people will laugh at them. They will understand, but they will think that they have no background...So I think grammar is very important, I teach grammar; I’m not afraid of teaching grammar. I show form, I show meaning, because I think we expect them to talk like that. (Mello, 2003, p. 83)

It is not unusual to come across such emphasis on grammar study in language classes. Studies have revealed that language teachers tend to believe that grammar knowledge is most
responsible for learners’ positive performance in language production (Borg, 1999; Mello, 2003; Schulz, 2001). This perspective influences other facets of language teaching, including writing assessment. For instance, teachers’ final decisions on grading learners’ written production tend to be based on students’ grammar accuracy (Mello, 2003; Shohamy, 2001). For this reason, some language teachers scrutinize students’ grammatical errors.

The prominence that grammatical errors have had in English Language Learners’ (ELL) writing, both as daily classroom feedback and as an assessment criterion, has been thoroughly debated (Chandler, 2003, 2004; Ferris, 1999, 2004; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009). While some scholars suggest that grammar feedback on L2 writing should be abandoned (Truscott, 1996, 1999), others insist on the beneficial aspects of using this approach in an L2 writing class context (Ferris, 1999; Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

One critical issue in this ongoing debate is presented by Truscott (1996, 1999), who claims that corrective feedback may help with subsequent drafts but does not promote language acquisition. Ferris (1999), on the other hand, insists that careful and consistent feedback is a potential tool for language acquisition.

Another key issue in this debate relates to the supposition that by placing too much emphasis on learners’ grammar-based errors, instructors may send ELLs the message that it is on their sentence-level errors that they must focus most of their attention (Truscott, 1996). Accordingly, it has been argued that such a practice, highlighting ELLs’ grammatical errors when evaluating their written production, may add force to the misconception that once grammatical competence is improved, ELLs will certainly produce well-written texts (Ferris, 1999; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Truscott, 1996, 1999). Such belief (or “misbelief”) has
certainly been of great concern for these and other language writing researchers. Such a sentence-level approach has been criticized recently; many scholars encourage language teachers to use a discourse rather than a sentence-level approach when they evaluate ELLs’ texts (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; McCarthy, 1991; Mohan, Leung, & Slater, 2010; Low, 2010).

The sentence-oriented approach mirrors the traditional grammar concept of language as a set of rules and language learning as acquiring correct forms (Mohan & Slater, 2004). That is, it is based on whether language rules are violated or not and treats sentences as isolated pieces. Conversely, discourse-oriented feedback mirrors the concept of “language as a resource for meaning rather than a system of rules” (Mohan & Slater, 2004, p. 255) and language learning as extending resources for creating meaning. Within this perspective, learners’ production is examined with a focus on “knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase and sentence” text (Paltridge, 2006, p. 2), in other words, at the level of a text. Thus, examiners’ feedback focuses on the relationship between sentences in discourse and “shifts from what learners cannot do to what learners can do” (Mohan & Slater, 2004, p. 258).

**EFL writing instruction in Brazil**

As a Brazilian EFL instructor in language institutes and universities in Brazil, I have witnessed the traditional practice of writing assessment mirrored by the traditional grammar concept of language as a set of rules which stresses mechanical errors in learners’ production and neglects rhetorical aspects of their writing. For instance, process writing is sometimes misunderstood as merely the correction of grammatical errors. Learners usually receive their written production marked with codes that show sentence-level correction, with an emphasis
on their lack of adherence to grammar rules. They are instructed to correct each marked error and return the text to be re-evaluated. Once all local errors are fixed, the students receive a successful final grade.

Besides the emphasis on learners’ errors, teachers neglect feedback on learners’ needs to enhance rhetorical skills. Often the main problem in a learner’s text relates to organizational skills such as coherence and cohesion; however, these aspects are sometimes ignored. An example of this type of pedagogical practice in Brazil was verified through a project that I conducted toward fulfilling the requirements for a graduate course in discourse analysis (Paiva, 2009). A Brazilian learner’s movie review was examined after the teacher’s correction, and results of the analysis revealed a sentence-level feedback approach totally focused on mechanical errors, with no comments on the learners’ organizational skills. An implication of this type of practice is that learners begin to view their own texts solely as evidence of grammar accuracy, and all they expect from their teachers is to verify their use of correct forms rather than their use of the target language as a resource for expressing meaningful communication.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

Research on teachers’ beliefs has suggested that, among other things, teachers’ principles, theories and beliefs are factors that shape their pedagogical practice (Borg, 2003; Farrell & Lim, 2005). Examining Brazilian EFL teachers’ beliefs can shed light on their pedagogical practices and consequently contribute to language teacher education in Brazil. Therefore, my knowledge of the context of writing assessment in EFL teaching in Brazil, plus my understanding that an optimal discourse-based approach can be used rather strictly on a sentence-level method, and my findings from the graduate project on discourse analysis
with its focus on Brazilian EFL writing assessment have all combined to motivate me to conduct the current research.

As mentioned above, there has been a lot of discussion about whether or not sentence-level feedback on L2 learners’ texts is a beneficial approach in language classes; however, little empirical research has been done about teachers’ beliefs in using this approach. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate Brazilian teachers’ beliefs about grammar correction in L2 writing in light of the following research questions (RQ):

1. What are Brazilian EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding grammar-based error feedback on L2 writing?
2. How are their beliefs related to their perception of their classroom practice?

**Structure of the Study**

This study is organized into four subsequent chapters that contain a review of relevant literature on the topics covered in this thesis (chapter 2), a detailed account of selected methodology for the research (chapter 3), the quantitative and qualitative data results in response to RQ1 and RQ2 (chapter 4), and the implications and limitations of this research, plus recommendations for future research on the topic of teacher beliefs about corrective feedback in L2 writing (chapter 5).
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a theoretical framework on which the study is based and provides an overview of the relevant literature concerning teacher beliefs and cognition, teacher beliefs in grammar instruction, and grammatical error feedback. The review first addresses the relevance of investigating teacher beliefs and the factors that shape language teacher principles and pedagogical decisions, then examines teacher beliefs in grammar teaching, revealing language teachers’ conflicts between their stated beliefs, and their observed classroom practice, then moves to teacher beliefs about grammar-based error feedback, and concludes with research findings about the effectiveness of error feedback. Particular emphasis is placed on the corrective feedback literature used to develop the questionnaire designed as the instrument of data collection in this study and an ongoing debate about whether corrective feedback should be provided in second and foreign (L2) writing classes.

Teacher Beliefs

There is general agreement among educational and language teaching scholars that what teachers do in the classroom is mirrored by what they believe and their beliefs often operate as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made (Farrell & Lim, 2005). This impact of teacher beliefs on their instructional decisions has been discussed in mainstream educational research in the last 25 years (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001). Within language teaching, research on teacher beliefs emerged in the 1990s with its momentum being in the second half of the decade (Borg, 2003). However, due to its contribution and relevance to teacher education programs,
Relevance of Investigating Teacher Beliefs

There are numerous factors that justify the relevance of investigating teacher beliefs. First, it offers insights to teacher education programs in that it enables research to go beyond classroom practice descriptions toward the understanding of teacher action (Johnson, 1992). Second, it can inform curriculum policy in relation to any innovation plausible to particular situations (Burns, 1992). Third, “it can generate grounded alternatives to the ‘accepted wisdom’ originated from academic traditions and institutions” (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver & Thwaite, 2001, p. 472) because data come directly from classroom work in different contexts. Fourth, it contributes to the notion of reflection on teacher action and helps teachers make their beliefs more explicit at institutional and societal level (Gimenez, 1999). Finally, it helps understand how teachers conceptualize their work (Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). As Freeman and Richards (1996) state, “understanding teachers' conceptualizations of teaching, their beliefs, thinking, and decision-making can help us better understand the nature of language teacher education and hence better prepare us for our roles as teacher educators” (p. 5).

Factors that Influence Language Teacher Beliefs

Research on the beliefs of language teachers has demonstrated that their beliefs are shaped by a range of factors including their experience as teachers, as learners and as participants in teacher educational programs. For instance, Phipps and Borg (2009) found that teachers’ experiences helped shape their deep-rooted belief in the importance of fulfilling students’ expectations. If teachers had successful teaching experiences in using a
traditional grammar approach, they preferred to use it rather than innovating their pedagogical instructions with context-based grammar teaching. The teachers explained that as the traditional grammar instruction was preferred by their learners, they believed that using it would facilitate class discipline. Their experience led them to decide to use the traditional rule-based approach in their classes when they perceived that their learners expected a teacher-centered method and were more disciplined with traditional teaching. Phipps and Borg concluded that their deep-rooted (core) beliefs in the importance of meeting their students’ expectations and controlling discipline in the classroom were shaped by their experience as teachers and became more influential in the teachers’ pedagogical decisions than the peripheral belief in an innovative approach to grammar teaching.

Teachers’ experience as learners has also been found to influence their beliefs. For instance, Numrich (1996) found that novice participant-teachers decided to abandon error correction and grammar teaching because these techniques had been used by their language teachers and had inhibited them from speaking. Other scholars have found a similar effect of experience as learners. For instance, Farrell (1999) reported five teachers’ past language learning experience in Singapore as an influential factor on their beliefs about grammar teaching methods. Positive or negative experiences were the basis for these teachers to decide to use an inductive approach to teaching grammar. Their decisions were based on different reasons; some had been taught through a deductive approach and identified undesirable consequences in their learning. For this reason, they decided to use the inductive approach in their teaching. Others decided to use the same approach through which they had been taught because they had had positive experiences with it.
These results are congruent with recent research. Barcelos’s (2006) Brazilian participants revealed in their narratives about language learning experiences that regular schools and language institutes in Brazil provide learners with totally difference experiences with the new language. Their experiences as learners in both environments seemed to have shaped their belief that language institutes in Brazil are motivating and efficient but the regular schools are traditionalist and incompetent.

Finally, teacher education programs seem to be another factor shaping teachers’ beliefs. Research on teacher beliefs, knowledge, and cognition has revealed that both novice and experienced teachers can shape their beliefs about language learning through teacher education (Borg, 2003). This is probably the most common finding discussed within Brazilian research on teacher beliefs. It has been argued that while exposed to innovative theories, teachers experience a cognitive process that leads them to reflect upon their core beliefs and compare new to old assumptions (Pessoa & Sebba, 2006). For instance, Vieira’s (2006) longitudinal study, which investigated student-teachers’ beliefs in the beginning and at the end of participation in an educational program, revealed that the student-teachers seemed to have changed their view of teaching and learning. She reports that in the beginning teachers defined teaching as transmission of knowledge and learning as absorption of new knowledge, whereas by the end of the teacher education program they expressed their view of teaching “as creating opportunities for learning creatively” and “learning a foreign language as a critical act” (p. 95).

**Teacher Beliefs about Grammar Instruction**

One facet of teacher belief research is teachers’ perception of grammar instruction. Research on teacher cognition has found that a common sense idea among language teachers
worldwide is that grammar teaching is essential in a language course syllabus (Borg, 1999; 2001; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Schulz, 1996; 2001). However, how grammar is taught is sometimes an issue. Conflicts may arise due to teachers’ uncertainty about the usefulness of formal grammar instruction to promote language acquisition (Burns, 1992). Nonetheless, it seems that even though teachers are often unsure about the role of formal grammar instruction in language development, they are reluctant to dismiss traditional grammar teaching (Farrell & Lim, 2005). Cross-cultural empirical studies have revealed the existence of tensions between grammar teaching beliefs and classroom practices because even though teachers claim that they believe in alternative approaches to grammar instruction, their pedagogical decisions turn out to reflect traditional grammar teaching, practices which lead to teacher-center lessons, mechanical exercises, and direct feedback on grammar-based oral and written errors (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

Formal grammar instruction is the central theme discussed in teacher cognition research. It is now generally accepted that some careful attention to grammar can have a beneficial impact on learning and some general pedagogical guidelines for formal instruction have been proposed (Phipps & Borg, 2009). These guidelines generally encourage meaning-oriented activities and tasks which give immediate opportunities for practice and use (Mitchell, 2000). Nonetheless, traditional teaching which exposes learners to explicit grammar instruction is still commonly observed world-wide (Borg & Burns, 2008). Teachers’ stated beliefs express how unsure they feel about abandoning traditional practices. Borg and Burns (2008) found that nine of the 15 statements related to aspects of grammar teaching elicited over 20 per cent of ‘unsure’ responses.
Teachers’ tensions in choosing between traditional and alternative methods of grammar instruction derive from various facets of language learning. One of them lies in teachers’ willingness to fulfill students’ expectations about grammar teaching. Previous research has indicated that language learners assertively expect explicit grammar instruction (Schulz, 1996, 2001). Thus, teachers’ willingness to conform to their students’ expectations and beliefs sometimes impede their use of innovative approaches to grammar instruction. Some teachers have claimed that grammar teaching works as “packaging function in that it tells students that the teacher is aware of their expectations and it creates positive attitudes on the part of the students” (Borg, 1999 p. 159).

Besides students’ expectations, there are other obstacles to using innovative grammar teaching approaches including time constraints. For instance, some language teachers in Malta have attached importance to the process of discovery to learn grammar, but they highlighted that not all grammar points allows for this method and it is time-consuming both during class and preparation time (Borg, 1999). Similarly, in Singapore, primary school language teachers justify their preference for traditional grammar teaching approaches by affirming that it is straightforward, parents and students like it, and it is less time-consuming (Farrell & Lim, 2005).

Language teachers in different contexts have stated less conventional beliefs. For example, in Colombia and in the US, English as Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers stated that “it is generally more important to practice a foreign language in simulating real life than to analyze and to practice grammatical patterns” (Schulz, 2001). Nonetheless, teachers’ desire to combine grammar instruction with communicative tasks and integrated activities seems to show up in their stated beliefs but not
in their classroom practice. As mentioned before, studies which have compared stated beliefs about grammar teaching and pedagogical practice have revealed that teachers’ instructional decisions are likely to mirror traditional grammar teaching despite their belief that innovative approaches are valuable (Andrews, 2003; Borg, 1999, 2001; Richards and Pennington, 1998). Some scholars have suggested that this shows that the teachers’ core beliefs are connected to contextual factors such as class size, institutional policies and parents’ and students’ expectations (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Breen, Hird, Milton & Thwaite, 2001).

**Teacher Belief in Grammar-based Error Correction**

One aspect of grammar teaching relates to grammar-based error correction. As errors are usually unwanted because they are interpreted as evidence of language use ineptitude, grammar instruction methodology is often questioned in terms of how grammatical errors are dealt with (Schulz, 1996, 2001). There seems to be a strong relationship between traditional grammar teaching and grammatical error feedback provision. Some teachers tend to think that students become aware of grammar rules when they receive grammar-based error feedback (Borg, 1999). Research findings have indicated that teachers and students agree that grammatical errors should be corrected by teachers and reported to students (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Ng & Farrell, 2003; Schulz, 1996, 2001). Sometimes teachers’ choice for this practice is reinforced by their willingness to fulfill learners’ expectations. For instance, Schulz (1996, 2001) indicates that students feel cheated when teachers do not correct their errors on written assignments and teachers agreed that students’ written errors should be corrected before returning students’ assignments.

Corrective feedback research has revealed tensions between teachers’ stated beliefs regarding error feedback provision and their classroom practice. Lee (2009) identified
numerous mismatches between teacher stated beliefs and classroom practice of providing feedback on L2 writing. The results of Lee’s (2003, 2004, 2007, 2009) studies, conducted with secondary teachers in Hong Kong, revealed conflicts between beliefs and practices with regards to attention to language form, use of comprehensive versus selective error feedback, and provision of error codes on students’ texts. Lee concluded that whereas teachers’ stated beliefs embedded innovative theories with regards to L2 writing feedback, their examined feedback revealed traditional tendencies which focused on students’ errors which were used as instrument of summative assessment.

Such discrepancies between belief and practice have been explained by the fact that contextual factors can become influential tools in teachers’ instructional decisions. Lee (2003) suggests that despite the fact that her Chinese participant teachers provided comprehensive feedback on students’ writing, for example, they did not seem to be convinced that their effort paid off in terms of students’ improvement. Their teaching approach choice was justified by institutional contexts such as exam pressure and school policy. Lee’s findings indicate that teachers’ beliefs and classroom practice are constantly in tension due to a range of influential factors. Except for Lee’s findings, not much is known about teacher beliefs about error feedback in L2 writing classes. Yet there is abundant research interest in the role of corrective feedback in language writing classes by itself.

**Corrective Feedback on L2 Writing**

Error feedback is a central aspect of L2 writing programs across the world; however, research has not been plainly positive about its role in writing development, and teachers often have a sense that they are not making use of its full potential (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).
The efficacy of grammar correction in L2 writing has long been debated. Such controversy lies in the fact that many questions relating to written feedback remain unanswered. These questions refer to which error should be corrected, how this correction should be displayed, who should provide feedback, and even whether or not such practice should be recommended. A new debate on whether or not written corrective feedback is a useful pedagogical tool in writing classes seems to have been triggered by Truscott (1996). Among other arguments, Truscott assertively argues that grammar correction in L2 writing does not promote language acquisition and for this reason it should be abandoned. His argument is based on his claim that there is empirical evidence that grammatical feedback is ineffective in first, second and foreign writing contexts. Truscott relies on research results that have found grammar correction to have little or no effect on students’ writing ability in L1 (Hillocks, 1986; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Krashen, 1984; Leki, 1990) and in L2 writing (Hendrickson, 1981; Krashen, 1992).

Second, Truscott appeals to theories which reinforce the exclusion of this teaching approach. For instance, he points out that syntactic, morphological and lexical knowledge are acquired in different manners (Schwartz, 1993); thus, no single form of correction can be effective for all three. For Truscott, teachers would have to develop separate approaches to provide adequate feedback for the three areas. Simply providing grammar correction does not necessarily help learners to acquire this knowledge. Another claim that Truscott makes is the developmental sequence which suggests that when learners are corrected on a point for which they are not ready yet, the correction is not likely to be valid. For this reason, even

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1 Even though the meaning may be interpreted differently elsewhere, the words “corrective feedback,” “grammar correction” and “grammar-based feedback” will be used interchangeably in this paper; in addition, all will refer to “writing” unless additional specification is mentioned in the text.
selective correction is not effective unless it focuses on students’ individual stages of development, a hard or even impossible task for teachers.

Third, Truscott says that grammar correction is not only ineffective but also harmful. He suggests that researchers have paid insufficient attention to the side effects of grammar correction on learners’ writing. For example, he brings to light the fact that grammar correction is stressful for both teachers and learners. To support his argument, Truscott mentions Knoblauch and Brannon (1981) and Hillocks (1986) who found evidence of L1 students’ shortening and simplifying their writing in order to avoid corrections.

Finally, Truscott opposes various arguments in favor of corrective feedback. One argument assumes that teachers should provide grammar correction because students like it. Truscott argues that students want corrections because teachers encourage learners to believe that they are helpful when they provide grammar corrections on their writing. Truscott points out that although students say they like corrections, they tend to be reluctant to work seriously with the corrections they receive.

**Debate on the Efficacy of Corrective Feedback as a Teaching Tool**

Truscott’s first article and subsequent papers (1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009) generated a long-term debate with Ferris (1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006) and her supporters (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, 2008; Chandler, 2004; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008). First, Ferris and her supporters believe it is important to consider students’ expectations because research on students’ preferences about corrective feedback has found that they feel frustrated when their expectations are not fulfilled and they can lose confidence in the writing classes when it happens (Chandler, 2004; Cumming, 1995; Ferris 1999; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Second, they argue that error correction in L2 writing, in fact, works for
language acquisition. They claim that clear and consistent correction in learners’ writing can improve accuracy at least on a long-term basis (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999). They appeal to findings which suggest learners’ accuracy improved after target structure corrective feedback (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Bitchener, 2008; Sheen, 2007). For instance, Bitchener (2008) found that accuracy improvement occurred two months after provision of corrective feedback on “the” and “a” articles as anaphoric referentials.

Third, Ferris and her supporters argue that error feedback practice can enhance learners’ editing skills and may prevent learners from fossilizing wrong structures; once it is abandoned, it can inhibit learners’ editing capacity and facilitate fossilization of grammatical errors (Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2004; Ferris, 1999; 2006). Ferris (2006) discovered that about 80 percent of students in her L2 sample were able to successfully edit errors marked by teachers in subsequent drafts, with only 10 percent making incorrect changes. Finally, it has been argued that even though feedback alone may not be responsible for improvement in language accuracy, it is likely to be one important factor (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Nonetheless, Truscott insists that grammar correction is not an important factor. In his 2007 article, Truscott evaluates and synthesizes research which focuses on error correction impact on learners’ ability to write accurately. His concluding thoughts are that “the best estimate is that correction has a small negative effect on learners’ ability to write accurately, and that there should be 95% confidence that if it has any actual benefits, they are very small.” (p. 255). Truscott and Hsu (2008) discuss the role of corrective feedback on revision stages as an indicator of learning. They conducted a longitudinal study on corrective feedback in which learners first wrote an in-class narrative and then revised their writing during the next class. Half the students had their errors underlined and used this feedback in
the revision task while the other half did the same task without feedback. Results matched those of previous studies: the treatment group was significantly more successful than the control group. One week later, all students wrote a new narrative as a measure of (short-term) learning. Results showed that the students who had received correction on the first narrative and were more successful in reducing their errors during revision did not differ from the students who had received no correction. In other words, no relation was found between success on the revision task and learning as measured by performance on a new writing task. The researchers suggested that error reduction during revision should not be considered a predictor of learning. They explain that these results suggest that studies which looked specifically at error reduction during the revision process and did not include a second, independent writing task do not provide evidence on the value of error correction as a teaching device.

In sum, two fundamentally opposed views of the role of corrective feedback on L2 writing have been put forward. On the one side, there is the claim that correcting learners’ errors in a written composition may enable them to eliminate the errors in a subsequent draft but has no effect on grammatical accuracy in a new piece of writing. The other side argues that there are different types of correction, which can be appropriate as written feedback, so simply dismissing correction in general is not recommendable. Hence, if the correction is clear and consistent it may promote language acquisition. In agreement with this, recent studies have suggested that corrective feedback would work for acquisition (e.g., Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Sheen, 2007). Still, this controversy remains open; as Hyland and Hyland (2006) point out “it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions and generalizations from the literature as a result of varied populations, treatments and research
designs” (p. 84), which suggests the extent to which contextual factors can influence the efficacy of corrective feedback (Ellis, 2009).

The goal of this literature review has been to report on the studies relevant to the issues covered in this thesis, namely teacher beliefs, grammar teaching, and corrective feedback. The conflict described above shows the relevance of investigating teachers’ beliefs because they impact teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Findings suggest that language teachers’ classroom practice reflects traditional theories of grammar teaching including grammar-based error correction which focuses on students’ weaknesses rather than their strengths. In returning to the two research questions for this thesis, one addressing Brazilian teacher beliefs about corrective feedback and the other addressing the relationship between their beliefs and their perception of their classroom practice, it is apparent that studies have discussed the efficiency of corrective feedback approach per se; however, not much is discussed about teachers’ beliefs about corrective feedback in L2 writing. In Brazil, particularly, teacher belief research has most often focused on the impact of teacher education on teachers’ beliefs; however, it seems that no research has been conducted to investigate teachers’ beliefs regarding grammar-based feedback on learners’ writing. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate Brazilian teachers’ beliefs about grammar correction in L2 writing in light of the research questions displayed above.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the methodology used in the research study. The chapter gives a description of the subjects participating in the study, the material used as a tool of data collection, a summary of study procedures from participants’ recruitment to data collection. The chapter closes with an explanation of the analysis of data regarding the research questions in terms of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Participants

Thirty EFL teachers in Brazil participated in this study but only 15 teachers, ten females and five males, completed the questionnaire. They were given fictitious names to ensure anonymity. Their academic background varied from Master’s in TESOL to Doctorate in Applied Linguistics, except for one who had completed only the undergraduate course of “Letters,” Modern Languages and Literature, a course that all the other participants had accomplished before. Seven teachers had finished a Master’s degree and four were still pursuing the program, except for one who had pursued both a Master’s degree in TESOL and in Education. Among the other three teachers, two were already Doctors in Applied Linguistics and one was a PhD student in the same field.

All teachers were experienced EFL instructors. Their experience varied from twelve to 33 years. These instructors were teaching or had taught English in diverse contexts including English for Academic purpose (EAP), English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and preparatory courses for TOEFL, FCE, and Michigan exams. Some of them had taught English using traditionalist methods such as Grammar-Translation (GT), very common in
regular schools\(^2\) in Brazil; and most of them described their experience in General English (GE) courses which attempt to integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 1 below displays a detailed description of the participants’ profiles.

**Table 1**  
*Participants’ profile*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
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<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
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<table>
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<th>20-16 years</th>
<th>15-12 years</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Context</th>
<th>Regular schools</th>
<th>GE</th>
<th>EAP/ESP</th>
<th>TOEFL/FCE/Michigan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Materials**

This research uses a cross-sectional survey; this allows data to be collected economically, and in a standardized manner (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). Questionnaires (particularly when administered electronically) also facilitate data collection from geographically diverse samples (Couper, 2005), and this was an important consideration in this study as participants and researcher were in different locations.

---

\(^2\) Regular schools refer to elementary, secondary, and high school teaching, which, in Brazil, differ from language institutes. The former tend to be more traditionalists and use the Grammar –Translation (GT) method, while the latter tend to follow communicative language teaching and focus on conversational skills.
The questionnaire had three sections (see Appendix A). Section 1 collected participants’ information regarding their background experience in English teaching, and their academic background. Section 2 presented 22 statements about grammar correction in L2 writing for responses on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The statements covered a range of key issues in regards to grammatical corrective feedback as a pedagogical tool which were drawn upon the debate between Truscott (1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009) and Ferris (1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006). Ten statements were categorized as reflecting aspects that support the practice of grammar correction in L2 writing. These statements surveyed teachers about fulfilling students’ expectations, editing skills enhancement, writing skills enhancement, fossilization prevention, and fulfillment of professors’ expectations. Twelve statements focused on aspects related to grammar-based feedback on L2 learners’ writing. They provided justifications such as time-consuming approach, learners’ lack of attention to corrections, lack of focus on students’ individual developmental sequence stages, and the need to prioritize organizational and rhetorical writing skills. Some of these justifications were repeatedly embedded in some statements because they appeared more often in the debate mentioned above, while others were not.

Finally, the last part of the survey contained two open-ended questions which aimed to compensate for the fact that there were no interviews conducted with the participants. The first question requested participants to choose three statements in the survey and provide reasons to support their choices; the second question was divided into two parts: the first part prompted participants to react to a hypothetical change with regard to L2 writing assessment in the current school where they were working. This part suggested that the principal of the
school had decided to prohibit grammar correction in learners’ writing. Finally, the second part requested teachers to predict their students’ reactions to such change.

**Procedures**

Brazilian EFL teachers were recruited via an electronic list of EFL teachers who work in regular schools and universities in a state in the Midwest region of the country. Other EFL teachers from a state in the South of Brazil were also recruited directly via email. Thirty teachers accepted the invitation. The questionnaire was emailed to each of them separately to ensure anonymity; however, only fifteen teachers, in fact, returned the questionnaire.

**Analysis**

This study is a mixed methods cross-sectional survey research in that it draws on qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis to address the research questions. Its quantitative aspect lies in a descriptive statistics analysis of mean, range and standard deviation of the participants’ responses to the five-point Likert scale; SPSS was the statistics software used to run the descriptive analysis.

Some data related to section 2 of the questionnaire (the five-point Likert scale statements) were re-oriented in the analysis so that questions asked from polar opposite viewpoints could be considered together on the same scale. For example, while respondents’ choice for statement 1 (*Grammar correction must be part of writing courses*) was coded using a scale of 1 (highly agree) to 5 (highly disagree), their choice for statement 2 (*Grammar correction in writing courses should be abandoned*) was recoded using a scale of 1 (highly disagree) to 5 (highly agree). All statements which were recoded are displayed in the result section as “recoded.”
As for qualitative aspects, this analysis focused on the open-ended responses. This section of the questionnaire meant to relate the participants’ open-ended responses to the Likert scale survey results as well as to confirm and explain their choices as an attempt to compensate for the fact that no interview was conducted due to time and location constraints.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes the results of quantitative and qualitative data analyses to answer the study's two research questions. The analyses are organized according to the corresponding research question they are intended to answer. A discussion of the results follows each analysis.

Research Question #1

The first research question asked, “What are Brazilian EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding grammar-based error feedback on L2 writing? Four beliefs related to written feedback were identified.

Belief 1: Grammar correction in L2 writing is necessary in writing classes. From both quantitative and qualitative analysis it became noticeable that the Brazilian English teachers would disagree with Truscott’s (1996) recommendation of banning grammar correction in L2 writing. Their response to statements 1 and 2 in the survey seemed straightforward regarding this view. See the survey statements followed by the quantitative results from Table 2.

Statement 1: Grammar correction must be part of writing courses.

Statement 2: Grammar correction in writing courses should be abandoned.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2R</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</table>

Note. R indicates that the statement was recoded.
Statements 1 and 2 were asked from polar opposite viewpoints, so Statement 2 was recoded to be considered on the same scale as Statement 1. Table 2 above shows that most teachers highly agree with Statement 1; the standard deviation shows how positively skewed the responses were to the mean, and all teachers highly disagree with Statement 2, which was meant to express exactly the opposite view of the first statement. Therefore, these findings suggest that these teachers consider grammar correction in writing classes an effective teaching approach.

The qualitative analysis confirms the results above. The fifteen participants explicitly manifested their agreement with such an assessment approach in the open-ended responses. See Debbie and Bill’s responses to the open-ended question 2A, which asked teachers to write a reaction to a hypothetical situation in which the teachers in their current schools were told that their supervisor had announced that from that moment on the teachers would not be allowed to provide grammar correction on students’ L2 writings.

**Debbie:** “...in case the supervisor said it would just have to be neglected I would think the school was being rather irresponsible towards the full development of learners’ potential in thinking things could be handled in reductionist terms.”

**Bill:** “Say nothing and continue doing what I believe in, grammar correction included. I’ve seen this happen in every school I’ve worked (both as teacher and supervisor) and not just when it comes to grammar. Everybody talks the talk, but when doors are closed, few professionals walk the talk.”

Debbie’s and Bill’s responses to question 2a confirm teachers’ choices for Statements 1 and 2 in the survey. Both wrote a very expressive reaction to the proposed situation, indicating how convinced they seemed to be about using grammar correction on their
students’ writing. Responses to the first open-ended question, which asked teachers to provide comments on three statements of their choice, also revealed assertive statements about this matter. Kim’s comments are an example:

Kim: “Grammar normatizes the written language, and this way, makes a text more understandable…grammar correction must be part of writing courses…”

The teachers’ optimistic opinions about written corrective feedback seem to lose strength when the issue of time comes into play; however, their opinions indicate that this approach is worthwhile despite its time constraints. This is what Belief 2 indicates.

Belief 2: Providing corrective feedback on learners’ writing is time consuming, but it is worthwhile. The teachers’ choices to statements related to time issues were less assertive. It may be because they recognize that this task is time consuming; some of them indicated this as a problem in the open-ended responses. The descriptive analysis results of statements 3 and 8 displayed in Table 3, as well as most teachers’ comments on these statements, are informative about this matter.

Statement 3: The time teachers spend on L2 writing grammar correction is worth it.

Statement 8: Time spend on grammar correction takes away time that would be better spent on organizational and logical development of arguments.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8R</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R means “recoded.”
Statements 3 and 8 entail contradictory views, and Table 3 above shows that these Brazilian teachers partially agree with the former and partially disagree with the latter, meaning that they were not very assertive this time. The standard deviation becomes high when the mean indicates uncertainty, (2.67) on a scale from 1 to 5, wherein 3 indicates “no opinion.” These findings suggest that the teachers agree with the grammar correction approach although they are not totally sure. Perhaps they feel that grammar feedback is important, but also realize it is not the only factor needed to help students enhance their writing skills. As Kate points out in her comments on this statement:

“I don’t think how things can go separately…writing pieces need to be cohesive, coherent, interesting and to some extent (according to student’s level) accurate, so time should be planned so as to accomplish writing, editing, and grammar (when necessary).”

When other aspects of feedback come into play, such as organizational skills, teachers hesitate to stress the role of grammar correction. It seems that they reflect about the importance of other facets of writing feedback and end up choosing a less assertive option.

Their open-ended responses provide more details about their opinions, and they indicate that time does not become an issue for them when they correct learners’ grammar errors. See Tom’s and Debbie’s comments below.

*Debbie:* “I don’t think it is a matter of saving time. I think students’ grammar is necessary, although not the most important part, once the objective is to engage into writing of meaningful pieces, but if we don’t tell them, or help them find out by themselves there’s something wrong with the writing, they might take too long to figure out by themselves and go on writing pieces that sometimes may fail to convey the expected meaning due to poor grammar.”
Debbie seems to believe it is her job to point out students’ grammar errors and that it is more important to help students with their grammar errors than to worry about the time she spends on this task. She shows some concern regarding students’ need to write accurately to express their ideas meaningfully. In addition, Debbie’s words emphasize the need to provide grammar-based feedback because students may take too long to find their errors themselves.

Other teachers expressed agreement with Debbie by emphasizing that time may not be the most important factor to be considered. However, their words still suggest that time spent on correcting students’ written errors should be used more effectively.

Tom: “It is not that the time spent on correcting grammar mistakes and errors is a waste of time: we need to come up with a more time effective way to make these corrections and communicate them in a way that helps students improve, both individually and collectively....”

Tom’s comment on Statement 8 suggests some level of uncertainty concerning the time he spends providing corrective feedback. His comments display his agreement with this approach, but they also point to the need for more efficient use of time.

Belief 3: Grammar feedback on L2 writing does not necessarily help learners write well, but it can help them write accurately. Both teachers’ comments on some statements and the descriptive statistics analysis give the impression that the teachers perceive that correcting students’ grammatical errors will help them write correctly; however, they do not seem to be sure whether helping with accuracy will help learners write well. Statements 16 and 19 associate grammar correction with grammar accuracy, whereas statements 10 and 20 refer to writing ability in itself.
Statement 16: Grammar correction in L2 writing is beneficial because it helps students write correctly.

Statement 19: Grammar correction in L2 writing courses should not be a teaching device because it does not help students improve their ability to write accurately.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar Correction Helps Students Write Correctly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R refers to statements that were recoded.

Statements 16 and 19 entail contradictory views, so Statement 19 was recoded. As Table 4 shows, the teachers seem to be sure that grammar correction is an optimal teaching device because it helps with accuracy. The mean results show their agreement with Statement 16 and disagreement with Statement 19. It seems that they were even more assertive and inclined to highly disagree with Statement 19, which neglects grammar correction as a teaching device, as indicated by a higher standard deviation.

The teachers believe that correcting students’ grammar-based errors in their writing helps students write more accurately. Teachers’ comments on these statements apparently confirm the descriptive statistical results. See Kim’s and Mary’s reaction to Statement 19:

*Kim “…grammar correction must be part of writing courses; it can HELP students write accurately; it can promote improvement…”*
Mary: “Totally disagree. It is one of the available devices a teacher has to help students, as well as peer correction and self-correction.

Statements 10 and 20 suggest that grammar correction can help learners write well. Teachers show how uncertain their opinions are about this matter. See the revealing mean and standard deviation results are in Table 5.

Statement 10: Grammar correction in L2 writing makes students better writers.

Statement 20: There is a large connection between receiving grammatical correction and learning to write.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 results reveal teachers’ uncertainty about the role of grammar correction in students’ writing skills as a whole. Statements 10 and 20 entail the assumption that by receiving corrective feedback, students tend to write better. The teachers’ choices were between “partially agree” and “partially disagree” or “no opinion.” The standard deviation results for both statements show how diverse their opinions are. These results indicate that they do not necessarily agree that grammatical feedback will enhance students’ writing skills.

3The teachers’ responses to the open-ended questions were identically transferred to this paper. Therefore, capital letters, underlined sentences, when displayed, should be understood as the teachers’ written choice of expressing their thoughts.
Therefore, results seem to suggest that the teachers believe that students can improve accuracy in their writing with grammatical feedback, but it does not necessarily mean that they think students will write better.

The teachers’ comments on these statements confirm the descriptive statistical results. See Tim’s and Daisy’s comments on statements 10 and 20:

Tim: “I don’t believe that correction on writing will make better writers, but it does help.”

Daisy: “Grammar correction does not improve writing, but it helps…”

Therefore, the teachers’ comments on statements 10 and 20 reveal that they relate grammar correction to language accuracy, but not to writing ability.

Belief 4: Grammar correction in L2 writing is useful because students expect it from teachers. These teachers tend to agree that grammar correction in L2 writing is beneficial because it fulfills students’ expectations. Their choices in statements 6, 21 and 22 indicate this point of view.

Statement 6: Teachers must provide grammar correction in L2 writing because learners expect to be corrected.

Statement 21: Grammatical error correction is discouraging because people do not like to be told that they are wrong.

Statement 22: Grammar correction feedback in L2 writing is useful because learners believe they can improve their writing by revising the grammar errors that the teacher identified.
Table 6

*Grammar Correction Fulfills Students’ Expectations*

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<th>Statement</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<td>1.87</td>
<td>.743</td>
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</table>

*Note. R means “recoded”*

Results displayed in Table 6 reveal the extent to which these teachers value students’ expectations. They seem to view grammar correction in L2 writing as beneficial because it fulfills students’ expectations. The mean results reveal that the teachers agree with statements 6 and 22, but disagree with Statement 21. The latter was asked from polar opposite viewpoint, so teachers’ disagreement with this statement reinforces their choices for statements 6 and 22. Thus it reveals their perception that their students like to be corrected.

The qualitative analysis corroborates the quantitative analysis. Two parts of the open-ended questions provided evidence that teachers value students’ expectations. One of the parts refers to Question 2, which prompted teachers with a hypothetical situation of a sudden change to the grammar-correction-free approach in their school. Part B of this question prompted teachers to suggest their students’ reactions to such change. These were some of the responses the teachers provided about their current students’ and parents’ opinions:

*Parents would be disappointed.*

*Students would question accuracy improvement.*

*Students would be sad.*

*Students would think they would learn less.*

*Students would disagree because they’re used to traditional methods of teaching.*
They would complain.

They would find it hard to accept

They would not feel comfortable.

They would feel discouraged.

One participant, Sara, added how she would feel about her students’ reaction: “Well, so how can we know what to do? Aren’t teachers supposed to provide students with relevant information? These are probably some reactions they will have and I’ll feel I’m not doing part of my job.”

Teachers’ comments on statements 6 and 22 also reveal the extent to which they relate grammatical feedback to learners’ expectations:

Sara: Students expect to be shown their mistakes or errors. It’s up to the teacher how this is going to happen. You can lead learners to find out what is wrong on their own or spoon-feed them.

Mary: Teachers must provide grammar correction in L2 writing because learners expect to be corrected.

Tim: This is cultural: students expect teachers to give some sort of correction on their writing.

Amy: According to the experiences I’ve had, some students feel discouraged when their pieces of writing are not corrected.

Kim: It’s amazing how often I’ve heard from students that one or another mistake they make is due to never having been properly corrected by previous teachers. On the other hand, a good deal of students have reported that they recall a former
teacher who would be on their heels every time there was a grammar mistake and how positive this was to their actual writing skills.

Therefore, qualitative analysis confirms quantitative results in revealing the extent to which these teachers value their students’ expectations. This finding corroborates that of Phipps and Borg’s (2009) in two ways: both studies investigate experienced teachers, and the teachers in both studies indicated that fulfilling learners’ expectations is such an important factor that it can guide their pedagogical decisions.

In sum, qualitative and quantitative results contributed to the identification of the four beliefs discussed above. The analysis focused on the most frequent choices found in the five-point Likert scale survey as well as on their open-ended responses. Some statements are not mentioned in this analysis because teachers’ responses were not revealing either because their opinions were diverse or because they did not make noteworthy comments on the statements. However, the full results are shown in Table 7 in Appendix B.

**Research Question #2**

Research Question Two asked: “How are their beliefs related to their perception of their classroom practice?” The design of this question was an attempt to relate teachers’ beliefs to their classroom practices. Thus, the best way to begin answering this question is to review the beliefs that were identified as responses to Research Question One. In sum, these beliefs show teachers’ assumptions that even though grammar correction in L2 writing may be time consuming, it is a beneficial approach because it helps learners write more accurately and because it fulfills students’ expectations, namely that they should be corrected.

Question 3 in Part 3 of the survey was designed to collect data for Research Question Two. This question asked teachers to provide the most frequent method of corrective
feedback they have used in case they use a particular approach in their writing classes. The following were the most frequent responses:

*Indicate the mistakes and give back their papers many times until they can find them.*

*Use symbols to describe the problems (spelling, grammar, coherence, etc.) and ask them to rewrite the text.*

*Individual Conference.*

*Feedback on repetitive errors.*

Teachers’ perceptions of their classroom practice in regard to corrective feedback seem to indicate that they act on their beliefs. That is, they believe in written feedback about grammar, and their stated actions indicate that they use this approach in their classes. Their responses suggest that they perceive their classroom practice as providing indirect error feedback. They spend some time on providing grammatical feedback because they review subsequent drafts and provide individual conferences.

The data collected did not provide information about learners’ language proficiency levels, but on the basis of the teachers’ institutional settings I was able to speculate that contextual factors seem to have been highly influential regarding teachers’ opinions about their classroom practices. See teachers’ responses in regard to their classroom practices and further discussion about their institutional contexts.

*Sara: Underline the mistake and provide the correct answers due to time constraints and the large number of students in class.*

*Tom: I ask students to sit beside my desk and go over their texts with them, highlighting the most frequent mistakes & errors, and guiding them into observing*
the kinds of mistakes & errors that can cause confusion in the reader’s mind and the grammar that can help misunderstanding.

As the data show, Sara and Tom describe opposite directions in regard to grammatical feedback provision. While Sara describes a direct corrective feedback approach which underlines students’ mistakes and provides correct answers, Tom reports that he asks students to sit beside his desk and go over their texts with them. Sara’s current working institution is test front-based, where students usually cram for university high-stakes, discrete-point item entrance examinations. Thus, the students’ main goal does not necessarily include discourse competence. These institutions tend to have a hundred students in a large classroom, which is designed as an auditorium; the teacher usually uses a microphone and stands on a small stage close to the board. On the other hand, Tom teaches Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) courses for undergraduate students whose main objective after graduation is to teach English. That is, these learners are interested in all four skills as well as specific aspects of the English linguistic system, because they will teach this language some day. Thus, Sara’s and Tom’s students’ expectations are very different, and contextual factors are likely to play a role in their pedagogical decisions.

The qualitative data also revealed that teachers’ beliefs can be a factor that shapes their pedagogical practices. Kate, who teaches to undergraduate students, seems to relate her classroom practice to the belief that error is a negative sign during the language learning process. See her response to Question 3.

Kate: I try to give a follow-up class, trying to show the most serious errors...I do not emphasize who made that error, I teach it to the whole class. I usually give the
Kate has taught EFL for 31 years and her academic background includes a master’s degree in Applied Linguistics. She teaches at an EFL department of an undergraduate level program of language and literature teaching. Despite Kate’s vast experience and academic background in TEFL, her response apparently entails a traditional grammar-based teaching perspective which envisages errors as a bad sign. Kate emphasizes that “she does not emphasize who made the error;” she “usually give[s] the correct form;” she “do[es] not write the ‘bad sentence’ on the board.” It is insightful to observe Kate’s stated attitude of hiding an error from the student who made it, which seems to indicate that her pedagogical instruction is shaped by her belief in traditional theories of language acquisition, which view learners’ errors as a sign of failure in learning the target language. This approach differs from recent approaches to language learning, such as communicative language teaching, which places the role of the error as a natural outcome of the development of communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Discussion

Although there was a relatively small number of teachers involved in this study, these findings either corroborate or contradict previous empirical findings. Much can be learned from this Brazilian community of English teachers, and these findings can serve as insights to future research about other communities of teachers.

The results will be discussed in terms of teacher belief as a strong influential factor on stated pedagogical decisions, teaching context as an influential factor in classroom practice, teaching beliefs in agreement and disagreement with previous empirical findings, and
teachers’ experience and educational background as contributors in shaping teachers’ beliefs and pedagogical decisions.

The findings in this study indicate the extent to which some of these teachers’ beliefs became an influential factor in their stated pedagogical decisions. To illustrate this point, I would like to review Bill’s reaction to Question 2a, on page 20, when he assertively reports that if the school policy change is different from what he believes, in this case “grammar correction included,” he would say nothing and continue doing what he believes. Bill’s response shows a conflict between his belief and school policy. In his case he stated that he would follow his belief. Such a finding diverges from Lee’s (2003) results in which teachers reported that their teaching approach choice was justified by institutional contexts, such as exam pressure and school policy. This incongruence may be due to contextual factors. It may be that Bill’s institutional setting follows less strict rules and gives teachers more autonomy as he works with adult education. This is very different from Lee’s participants’ work environment, which focuses on secondary education.

Another factor that seemed to have influenced these teachers’ pedagogical decisions about providing grammar-based feedback was their belief that students expect to be corrected. It seems that these teachers’ choice of providing corrective feedback is not only based on their belief in the effectiveness of this teaching approach, but is also based on a deep-rooted belief that learners’ expectations should be fulfilled so that they can feel more motivated. These findings corroborate Phipps and Borg’s (2009) discovery that teachers’ core beliefs that their students’ expectations can influence their learning process were more influential on their decision to use traditional methodology of grammar teaching in their classes.
Another finding in this study that is in line with previous empirical studies concerns the role of contextual factors as contributors to teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Some teachers in this study reported different actions in relation to written feedback provisions, and their teaching contexts were different. Thus, it might be that contextual factors played crucial roles in their instructional practices.

Finally, it is worth bringing to light teachers’ agreement with the assumption that grammatical feedback may not help students write well, but helps them write accurately. This finding seems to underscore Truscott and Ferris’s controversy about the effect of corrective feedback on language acquisition. The quantitative analysis of this study seems to suggest that these teachers’ opinions are divided, and there were also cases of “no opinion” when other facets of writing development (e.g., cohesion, coherence) come into play as classroom practice. The teachers’ divided opinions seem to support the ongoing controversy that exists between L2 writing teachers and researchers. They seem to agree with Ferris (1999) that grammatical feedback is important because it helps learners write correctly and fulfills students’ expectations; thus, it cannot be banned. However, their responses also suggest that they agree with Truscott that corrective feedback does not necessarily make students better writers.

In the introduction, a Brazilian teacher’s strong claim in defense of grammar teaching was displayed, and some empirical findings reported in Chapter 2 show that language teachers from different parts of the world support traditional methods of grammar teaching described as grammar rules memorization and mechanical exercises. Hence, language teachers tend to uphold the belief that grammar is most responsible for learners’ good performance in the target language. EFL language teachers are likely to be very familiar with
grammar rules because their experiences as learners usually mirror traditional practices of grammar teaching. Therefore, it might be that EFL teachers end up emphasizing grammar feedback because it is easier for them to do so. Also, errors can be verified objectively, so error feedback is a concrete pedagogical approach that easily justifies an unsuccessful grade, whereas discourse-level feedback turns out to be difficult due to the subjectivity that it involves. At times we teachers do not know how to write well, even though accuracy may not be an obstacle for us in our writing. While this may be true, at the same time it is difficult to tell someone else that they are not writing well based on lack of organization or inadequate rhetorical aspects because it is simultaneously difficult to explain why some sentences are incorrect. Sometimes inaccurate papers are more interesting than accurate ones and sometimes accurate papers are not interesting at all (Levis, personal communication, 2011).
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Overview of Findings

This cross-sectional survey research investigated Brazilian EFL teachers’ beliefs about grammar-based corrective feedback on L2 writing and the extent to which their beliefs related to their perceptions of their classroom practices. As the literature discussed in this paper suggests, teacher beliefs, experiences, educational background and contextual factors at work are influential factors that shape teachers’ instructional decisions. In addition, the literature reviewed on corrective feedback on learners’ writing pointed to an ongoing debate among scholars about the impact of corrective feedback on language acquisition. While some maintain that grammatical feedback does not enhance language development and for this reason should be banned, others insist that learners can benefit a lot from careful and consistent corrective feedback. Quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted in this study suggest that this community of teachers agrees with four beliefs about corrective grammar in writing classes.

Belief 1: Grammar correction in L2 writing is necessary in writing classes.

Belief 2: Providing corrective feedback on learners’ writing is time-consuming but worthwhile.

Belief 3: Grammar feedback on L2 writing does not necessarily help learners write well, but can help them write accurately.

Belief 4: Grammar correction in L2 writing is useful because students expect it from teachers.
Teachers’ perception of their pedagogical practice was also examined in a small scope in this study due to location constraints. Results revealed some congruence with previous empirical studies in that teachers’ beliefs, contextual factors, experience, and educational background might have shaped their pedagogical practices, at least those reported by the teachers in this study.

In conclusion, in light of the findings in this study, it seems valid to claim that language teachers’ perceptions about the usefulness of corrective feedback with respect to grammar in writing classes seem to mirror a conflict between holding that this practice cannot be abandoned and a corresponding doubt about whether grammar correction actually contributes to learners’ writing development.

**Pedagogical Implications**

The debate about whether or not grammar-based feedback has a positive impact on language acquisition suggests that a pedagogical choice to avoid form-based feedback should certainly be based upon a body of convincing empirical research that indicates that corrective feedback is harmful for ELLs. Until then, teachers have to make their own decisions about whether they put students’ learning processes into the risk of “harmful” effects or still dare to abandon a teaching approach that may help their students acquire the target language.

Findings from this study will certainly contribute to future teacher educational programs in Brazil, in that it brings to light theories, concepts, and principles that guide teachers’ instructional practices.
Limitations

It is clearly a limitation of this study that only one method of data elicitation was used, which limits an argument for data triangulation. An attempt to minimize this problem was the design of the open-ended questions, which in this case, richly addressed teachers’ opinions about this matter. However, surveys and questionnaires have a number of disadvantages, particularly when used to examine respondents’ beliefs. Questionnaires do not measure action, but rather, only respondents’ reports about their own actions. Therefore, I recognize that the conclusions drawn from this research were based on teachers’ stated beliefs and reported practices.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for further research on teachers’ beliefs about corrective feedback in Brazil that addresses their classroom practices more directly, whether by interviewing teachers or by examining their feedback about students’ writing. Data elicitation of this type may provide more information about their beliefs and about factors that shape their pedagogical practices. In addition, students’ voices can also help researchers identify their needs and examine the extent to which teachers’ decisions are shaped by their expectations.

Many questions remain unanswered about teachers’ beliefs with regard to corrective feedback on L2 writing. Narrative inquiry based on teachers’ experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), as well as think aloud protocols (Lumley, 2002), can be used to investigate the complex cognitive process that teachers experience when they evaluate learners’
outcomes. These research methods are likely to facilitate in-depth insights about the extent to which teachers’ beliefs are intertwined with their classroom practices.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY

This study aims at understanding English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ perspectives on L2 writing feedback. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can decline your participation at any time. The study is being conducted by Katia Paiva, a graduate student at Iowa State University. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a teacher of English as a foreign language. To ensure confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym so that your identity will not be revealed at any time during the study. This email was sent to each participant’s email account individually to protect your privacy. By answering the following questions and replying to this email, you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Background Information

1. Name: ________________________________________.

2. Name of the institution you work for: ________________________________________.

3. Indicate your academic status:

   (   ) Undergraduate          (   ) Master’s incomplete          (   ) Master’s complete
   (   ) Doctorate incomplete   (   ) Doctorate complete          (   ) Post doctorate
   (   ) Other________________________

4. What is your major?

   (   ) Linguistics          (   ) Applied Linguistics          (   ) Education          (   )
   other___________

5. How long have you taught EFL? ________________________________.

6. How do you define the language classes you teach or (have taught)? Please check all that apply:

   (   ) EAP (English for academic purpose, for example, academic writing)
   (   ) ESP (English for specific purpose, for example, English for flight attendant professionals)
   (   ) General English (for example, integrated-skill language courses)
   (   ) elementary/ high school EFL program with focus on grammatical issues
7. Choose the option that best describes your experience in teaching and evaluating L2 writing.

( ) large experience  ( ) some experience  ( ) little experience  ( ) no experience

7.1 Would you like to add any further details about your experience in teaching and evaluating L2 writing?

For the following part, please consider:

1. **L2** as a foreign or second language

2. **“Writing”** as students’ papers, essays, compositions, reports, etc, not necessarily short responses to grammatical exercises.

Please continue on the next page
Please, read the statements below and choose the option that best represents your opinion about grammar correction in L2 writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Highly Agree</th>
<th>Partially Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Partially Disagree</th>
<th>Highly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grammar correction must be part of writing courses.</td>
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<td>2. Grammar correction in writing courses should be abandoned.</td>
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<td>3. The time teachers spend on L2 writing grammar correction is worth it.</td>
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<td>4. Grammar correction practice in L2 writing classes is inappropriate because teachers do not know when students are ready to learn particular grammar points.</td>
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<td>5. Grammar correction-free approach in L2 writing discourages students from improving their editing skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Teachers must provide grammar correction in L2 writing because learners expect to be corrected.</td>
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<td>7. Teachers should not correct every single grammatical error in L2 writing; however, they must provide feedback on repetitive grammar errors.</td>
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<td>8. Time spent on grammar correction takes away time that would be better spent on organizational and logical development of arguments.</td>
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<td>9. The time teachers spend on grammar correction in L2 writing should be dedicated to preparing activities which will enhance writing skills.</td>
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<td>10. Grammar correction in L2 writing makes students better writers.</td>
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<td>11. Grammar–based error feedback is a waste of time because students often pay no attention to the grammar correction given on their papers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Time spent on grammar correction is not worth it because learners tend to forget the grammatical corrections provided on their papers quickly and repeat the mistake over and over again.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. L2 learners will develop fossilized bad grammar if they do not receive grammar correction in their writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Teachers should spend their time on rhetorical-oriented feedback rather than on grammar-based error feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Grammar correction is harmful because students tend to shorten and simplify their writing in order to avoid correction.</td>
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<td>16. Grammar correction in L2 writing is beneficial because it helps students write accurately.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Grammar correction in L2 writing is necessary because instructors from English speaking countries tend to be intolerant to non-native students’ grammar errors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Grammar error correction diverts teachers’ and students’ attention from more important aspects of writing such as content and organization.</td>
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</table>
19. Grammar correction in L2 writing courses should not be a teaching device because it does not help students improve their ability to write accurately.

20. There is large connection between receiving grammatical correction and learning to write.

21. Grammatical error correction is discouraging because people do not like to be told that they are wrong.

22. Grammar correction feedback in L2 writing is useful because learners believe they can improve their writing by revising the grammar errors that the teacher identified.

Open ended questions

1) From the statements above, please choose the three most appealing in your opinion and explain why you agree or disagree with them.
2) Your supervisor announces that from now on teachers will NOT be allowed to provide grammar correction on students’ L2 writings in your school.

A) Please write your reaction to this new decision.

B) Please write your opinion about your current students’ reactions to this new decision.

3) Do you provide grammar correction in your students’ writing? ( )yes ( ) no
   If your answer was Yes, please describe the most frequent method you use.

Thank you very much for your invaluable participation!
APPENDIX B: FULL STATISTICAL RESULTS

Table 7

Full Statistical Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2R</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4R</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.223</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>8R</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>9R</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>3.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12R</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.60</td>
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<td>1.87</td>
<td>.743</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R refers to statements that were recoded. Statements 14 and 20 are missing one participant’s answer.
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