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# The Role of Peer-Based Feedback in Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction and Willingness to Communicate in EFL Classrooms: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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## Article info

## Abstract

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This study investigated the role of peer-based feedback in relation to EFL learners' Basic Psychological Needs (BPNs) of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and their Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the benefits and challenges of implementing peer-based feedback in classroom speaking tasks were explored. Participants included 55 individuals from four EFL classes, comprising 51 learners and four teachers. Data were collected through narrative framing using sentence completion tasks completed by the learners and autobiographical narratives produced by the teachers, and were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis with MAXQDA 24. Findings indicated that peer-based feedback facilitated learners' transition from reluctance to readiness in communication, enhanced their sense of autonomy and competence, and fostered collaborative relationships, thereby promoting WTC. However, due to the tensions in feedback accuracy and peer interactions, several challenges such as anxiety, peer pressure, and reduced teacher control were also observed. Also, the findings highlight the need for balanced teacher facilitation while providing feedback and supportive classroom environment to optimize both linguistic and psychological outcomes.

**Keywords:** basic psychological needs, EFL learners, peer-based feedback, self-determination theory, willingness to communicate

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## 1. Introduction

Peer-based feedback has emerged as a pedagogical strategy among learners that can support engagement and intrinsic motivation as crucial aspects in EFL classrooms (Shyr et al., 2021). By practicing peer feedback, learners exercise autonomy through active participation, develop competence by critically evaluating language use, and build relatedness through collaborative interactions in language classrooms (Man et al., 2018). Also, Tan and Chen (2022) indicated that peer interactions not only enhance accuracy but also promote a sense of community and shared responsibility among learners with a shared goal. Moreover, the practice of giving and receiving feedback can lead to increased self-awareness and motivation, further contributing to learners' WTC (Jelínková et al., 2023). Thus, considering that peer-based feedback aligns and supports the psychological needs of learners who engage in communicative practices, it might serve as a multifaceted tool to satisfy both their psychological needs and their communicative readiness.

Self-Determination Theory posits that the fulfillment of BPNs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is crucial for an individual to develop one's motivation and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the realm of language teaching and learning, these BPNs influence learners' Willingness to Communicate in a second language (Joe et al., 2017). WTC, as defined by MacIntyre et al. (1998), refers to a learner's readiness and inherent passion to communicate in the target language. According to Namaziandost et al. (2024), when EFL learners perceive their psychological needs as being met, particularly autonomy and competence, their motivation and WTC are notably enhanced. Zarrinabadi et al. (2021) suggested that there is a strong interplay between SDT constructs and WTC, highlighting the importance of addressing these psychological needs to foster communicative engagement and ultimately WTC in EFL classrooms. Regarding the relationship between peer feedback and SDT, this study is significant since it clarifies how peer feedback can shape EFL learners' satisfaction of BPNs, which are central drivers of sustained WTC (Namaziandost et al., 2024). By linking these need-satisfaction processes to learners' WTC, the study illuminates a pathway through which peer feedback practices may foster students' readiness to use the target language.

Hence, this study aimed to explore how EFL learners perceive peer feedback as a means of fulfilling their BPNs and how this perception influences their WTC during speaking tasks, and also the challenges associated with peer feedback for EFL teachers and learners. By examining learners' and teachers' experienced challenges and attitudes towards peer feedback and its possible challenges, the research sought to

uncover the mechanisms through which peer feedback develops BPNs and WTC. To achieve this, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

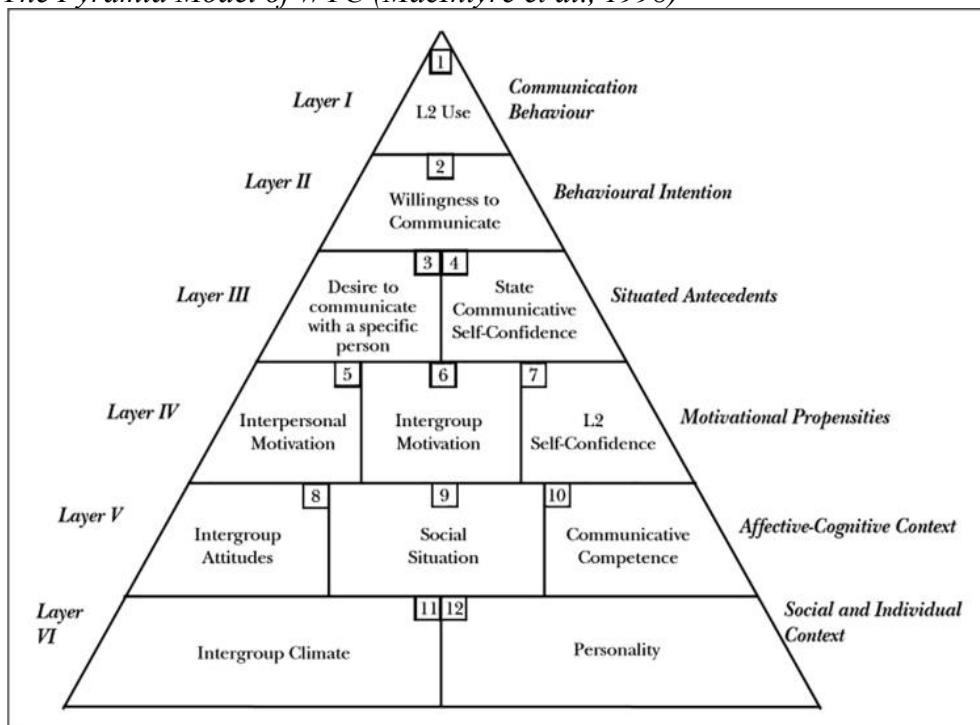
1. How do EFL learners perceive peer feedback in relation to the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) during classroom interactions?
2. In what ways does peer feedback influence EFL learners' Willingness to Communicate in speaking tasks?
3. What types of challenges does the implementation of peer feedback have for EFL teachers and learners?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Background

#### 2.1.1 *Willingness to Communicate*

According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), WTC refers to an individual's readiness to engage in communicative practices. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) also suggested that WTC is rooted in first-language research that was first introduced as a personality trait influenced by communication apprehension (CA)—fear of speaking—and self-perceived communication competence (SPCC)—confidence in one's ability to communicate effectively (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). However, in a second language context (L2), WTC was expanded into a dynamic, situational construct by MacIntyre et al. (1998), proposing a heuristic model that integrates psychological, linguistic, and social factors. Their pyramid model recognizes six different layers influencing WTC, ranging from broad sociocultural influences to immediate situational factors before culminating in the decision to speak (MacIntyre et al., 1998; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021). This model (Figure 1) highlights the interplay between enduring traits (e.g., introversion) and transient states (e.g., classroom anxiety), making WTC a critical predictor of language learning success (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre, 2020). Zoltán Dörnyei has been one of the key researchers in clarifying the concept of WTC, and linked it to motivational psychology, emphasizing how learners' goals and self-confidence dynamically affect their communication choices (Dörnyei, 2006).

**Figure 1***The Pyramid Model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)*

The pyramid model of WTC (Figure 1) was later refined by examining moment-to-moment fluctuations in communicative practices during classroom interactions. Moreover, regarding the psychological dimensions of WTC, Dewaele (2019) emphasized the importance of considering emotional and multilingual factors, as positive emotions can significantly enhance an individual's WTC. Furthermore, pedagogical applications suggest that creating low-anxiety environments, implementing task-based learning, and fostering self-confidence are effective strategies for increasing WTC (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Peng, 2019). Ultimately, WTC acts as a crucial bridge between individual differences and actual language use, explaining why some learners actively engage in communicative practices and in-class interactions while others remain hesitant (Huang & Zhang, 2025).

### ***2.1.2 Self-Determination Theory and Willingness to Communicate***

Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), refers to a comprehensive framework to understand individuals' motivation, specifically in the context of education. SDT indicates that for an individual's optimal motivation or psychological well-being, his BPNs of

autonomy, competence, and relatedness should be developed (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Autonomy is the volitional sense of freedom when doing an action. Moreover, they referred to relatedness as the sense of belongingness of individuals when engaging in an action, and competence denotes a feeling of effectiveness when the desired outcome of an action is achieved (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, regarding second language acquisition (SLA), the BPNs play an important role considering the WTC of language learners since WTC requires an initial feeling of preparedness for individuals to engage in communicative practices (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Moreover, when learners realize that their classroom environment is supportive of their BPNs, there will be higher chances of displaying a high WTC on the part of learners since their motivation is self-determined rather than being affected by external factors (Noels et al., 2019). Also, Joe et al. (2017) posited that this intrinsic motivational force develops continuous and sustained engagement of individuals in language use, leading to lower anxiety and increased confidence in engaging in communicative practices and tasks.

Furthermore, the relationship between SDT and WTC is specifically crucial in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, in which affective factors heavily influence the communicative behaviors of learners. Javidkar et al. (2022) and Yashima et al. (2018) mentioned that when learners feel autonomous while learning a foreign language, their WTC increases because they perceive communication as a personally meaningful practice. Moreover, Zhou et al. (2021) suggested that competence support in language classes greatly enhances the individuals' self-efficacy, making them more willing to experiment with the language and take risks in oral and communicative practices. Additionally, Dörnyei (2006) referred to relatedness as one of the key factors in enhancing WTC since it provides a safe environment for individuals where they feel socially connected and related to their peers and instructors. Studies applying SDT to language learning context confirm that promoting BPNs brings about higher rates of participation for learners in communicative tasks; thus, leading to a higher rate of WTC in language learning classes (Papi & Khajavy, 2021).

## ***2.2. Conceptual Framework of the Study***

The pyramid model of WTC represents 12 sub-layers which fall in six main layers (Figure 1) that are considered crucial for an individual to engage in communicative practices. Moreover, SDT posits that the satisfaction of BPNs results in a motivated individual to take an action. Regarding the intersections between SDT and WTC, specifically layers such as situated antecedents (Layer III), motivational propensities (Layer IV), affective cognitive context (Layer V), and social and individual context (Layer VI), an inherent interplay among SDT and WTC was apparent. In other words,

developing the BPNs of an individual to communicate might fall within the layers and sub-layers of the WTC pyramid model. Also, as peer feedback requires a great extent of interaction among its practitioners, it aligns with several layers of WTC such as layer III, IV, V, and VI. Therefore, if the participants (EFL teachers and learners) practiced peer feedback in their EFL classrooms, first and foremost, the BPNs of the EFL learners would be triggered and would fall within the layers of WTC, and consequently, it would result in a higher WTC among the target group (EFL learners) in the long term.

### **2.3. Empirical studies**

Recent studies have found that WTC and SDT are two concepts tied closely to one another in educational settings. For example, Joe et al. (2017) indicated that a supportive classroom's atmosphere enhances learners' self-determined motivation, which in turn increases their WTC and language achievement. Similarly, Zarrinabadi et al. (2021) found that autonomy support positively influences learners' language mindsets, fostering greater communicative competence and WTC in EFL classrooms. Moreover, Namaziandost et al. (2024) revealed that learners' academic engagement and autonomy significantly predict higher levels of WTC, foreign language learning self-esteem, and perseverance. Together, these studies indicated the crucial role of autonomy, motivation, and social support in promoting learners' active communication in EFL settings.

Also, the benefits of peer feedback in educational settings and EFL context have been increasingly recognized for their positive impact on learners' development. For instance, Shyr et al. (2021) demonstrated that a peer-based instant response system enhanced learning performance, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation. Building on the importance of feedback, Jelínková et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review examining various feedback types, including peer feedback, on learners' WTC in foreign language learning. Their review highlighted that emotional barriers like fear of making mistakes or losing face can hinder WTC, and crucially, effective feedback strategies can address these by promoting greater communication. This aligns with pedagogical implications suggesting that thoughtful feedback strategies, including peer feedback, can be beneficial for enhancing WTC, despite potential challenges. Furthermore, the effectiveness of peer feedback extends to specific skills like writing. Al Abri et al. (2021) reported that web-based peer feedback in EFL essay writing improved writing skills through constructive peer interaction. Similarly, Ashraf and Mahdinezhad (2015) found that peer-assessment, compared to self-assessment, fostered learner autonomy and awareness in writing tasks among Iranian EFL learners. Beyond skill development, peer interactions also affect learners'

psychological states and strategy use. Bürgermeister et al. (2021) found that peer feedback increased students' self-efficacy and supported learning strategies, noting that structured feedback and assessment, often enhanced by digital tools, enhance the quality of peer feedback. Complementing these findings, Ducker (2021) explored how peer-to-peer sharing of language learning strategies sustains learners' WTC through approaches like self-improvement, relatedness, and personal reassurance.

Moreover, regarding the challenges raised by implementing peer feedback, Wang (2015) identified several challenges for EFL writing, including students' lack of confidence and limited positive feedback from peers. He indicated that tactics such as student training, reasonable group organization, and timely teacher interventions can greatly improve the meaningfulness of peer feedback. Similarly, Niu et al. (2021) investigated the effectiveness of multiple sources of feedback, including teacher-written feedback, peer feedback, and automated feedback in EFL learners' writing skill. Their results revealed that learners value a combination of feedback types, with preferences shifting across different stages of the writing process to seek clarity and usefulness in receiving feedback. They concluded that integrating diverse feedback sources improves the effectiveness of feedback on EFL writing performance with regard to learners' varied needs and learning contexts.

Although numerous studies have confirmed the interrelated nature of WTC and SDT, and also the usefulness of peer feedback in the improvement of language skills (specifically writing) and learner's WTC and psychological well-being, few have contributed directly to the relationship between SDT components and peer feedback in EFL classes, and whether this leads to a higher WTC. Moreover, none of the previous studies have focused on the challenges that practicing peer feedback may have in communicative tasks for both EFL learners and teachers. Thus, this study sought to see if the implementation of peer feedback in EFL classes can enhance BPNs, and WTC of learners. Also, the challenges that the implementation of peer feedback may have for EFL learners and teachers were another focus of the present study.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. The Design of the Study

A qualitative methodology was chosen with a narrative inquiry approach to explore the role of peer feedback in improving BPNs and WTC, along with the challenges raised by practicing peer feedback. Qualitative research was particularly appropriate for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and the meanings they assign to social interactions through narrative inquiry, which

could not be fully perceived by quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design permitted flexibility and rich, contextualized data collection, essential for capturing the complex and dynamic processes involved in peer-based feedback interactions (Ary et al., 2014).

### 3.2. Participants

The participants included 51 EFL learners (28 females, 23 males) and four EFL teachers (teachers of four EFL classes) from Zanjan, Iran. Purposive sampling technique was used to meet the required conditions of the study (Ary et al., 2014). Eight teachers were interviewed in advance; consequently, four were selected. The reason to choose four teachers out of eight interviewees was the way feedback was provided in their classes, and those teachers who solely implemented teacher-to-learner feedback in their EFL classes were selected. The main series of books taught in the institution was *American English File series*. Teachers' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 8 years (5.5 years on average) and they were aged between 24 and 29. The age range for learners was between 17 and 33 (25 on average). The researchers reached data saturation using three classes (40 EFL learners and three teachers), but used the data from the rest of the participants to confirm the findings. Hence, a total of 55 participants (four EFL teachers, 51 EFL learners) took part in the study.

### 3.2. Materials and Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect the data. The first source was autobiographical narratives produced by the first group of participants (EFL teachers) about their experience with peer feedback and the challenges they faced while engaging in such a practice. According to Coates (2015), autobiographical narratives are stories and reports produced by the people about their experiences. The autobiographical narratives were then analyzed based on Riessman's (2008) model. Totally, 12 narratives with an average word count of 3000 were gathered from the first group of participants.

The second instrument was the use of narrative frames in the form of incomplete sentences (prompts) to be completed by the participants. A narrative frame is a structured storytelling device or outline that aids participants to tell their stories about a particular topic or experience in a consistent format (Barkhuizen et al. 2014); it was used for the learner participants who practiced peer-based feedback in their EFL classes. It helped the researchers capture experiences, reflections, and meanings in participants' own words. Moreover, it balances structured responses with freedom of responses since the sentence stem guides the response topic with the openness that enables participants to share their unique perspectives, making it especially useful for exploring the motivational shifts related to

SDT, development or reduction of their WTC, and the challenges they faced while practicing peer feedback. Totally, 53 papers that contained eight completed sentences (Appendix A) were gathered, with word count ranging from 700 to 1100.

### 3.3. Procedure

As mentioned in the previous sections, the data were gathered from two groups of participants, namely G1 group (EFL teachers) and G2 group (EFL learners), hereafter for ease of explanation. The G1 group was asked to reduce the number of times that teacher-to-student feedback was provided, and it was gradually replaced with peer feedback in their classes in five to ten sessions to prevent experimental effect (Ary et al., 2014). The first set of narratives was collected from the G1 group about the emotional and motivational shifts of the G2 group after ten sessions (about a month). The second and third sets of narratives were gathered from the G1 group every ten sessions for the following two months. They produced narratives about their students' motivational shifts and their improvements in communication skills, if there were any. Moreover, the fourth set of data, which was the most important data for the study, was gathered after about 30 sessions (three months). The G2 group (EFL learners of the G1 group) were required to fill eight incomplete sentences (Appendix A) that were assigned to them by their teachers (G1 group). They were asked to take the papers home and complete the incomplete sentences attentively and thoroughly. Then the G2 group was required to give them back to their teachers in order to be collected by the researchers.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2020) inductive-deductive reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), MAXQDA 24 was used to analyze the data. In the first stage of RTA, the data were entered into MAXQDA 24 software and were classified into two groups of G1 (narratives) and G2 (completed sentences). For the deductive analysis, the parental code of SDT included subcodes of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As for the inductive part, relevant and frequent sub-codes, such as reduced control of teachers and peer-pressure (psychological loads, fear of judgement) were induced for the challenges of practicing peer feedback. Likewise, strategic communicators and situational initiators of communications were induced as sub-codes for WTC. Then, the intersecting points were located by re-reading and re-listening to the data, and the themes were extracted. Consequently, by re-analyzing the data and reviewing the literature, the themes were named and used for the explanation of the relationship between peer feedback in SDT and WTC of EFL learners. However,

the analysis also considered the complexities and challenges associated with peer feedback implementation for learners and teachers.

### **3.5. Rigor of the Study**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were used to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, as data were collected over three months, which allowed for in-depth exploration of peer feedback experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the context, participants, and procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other similar settings (Shenton, 2004; Tisdell et al., 2025). Dependability was ensured through documenting and recording all methodological decisions and data analysis processes (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability was addressed by maintaining reflexivity, where the researchers' biases and assumptions were acknowledged and mitigated through peer debriefing with colleagues (Tracy, 2010). Finally, all research decisions, including coding in MAXQDA 24 and rationale for theme extraction (Nowell et al., 2017) were explained to a second researcher, and Inter-coder reliability was achieved by having the second researcher code 20% of the data independently, achieving an 85% agreement rate (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Results**

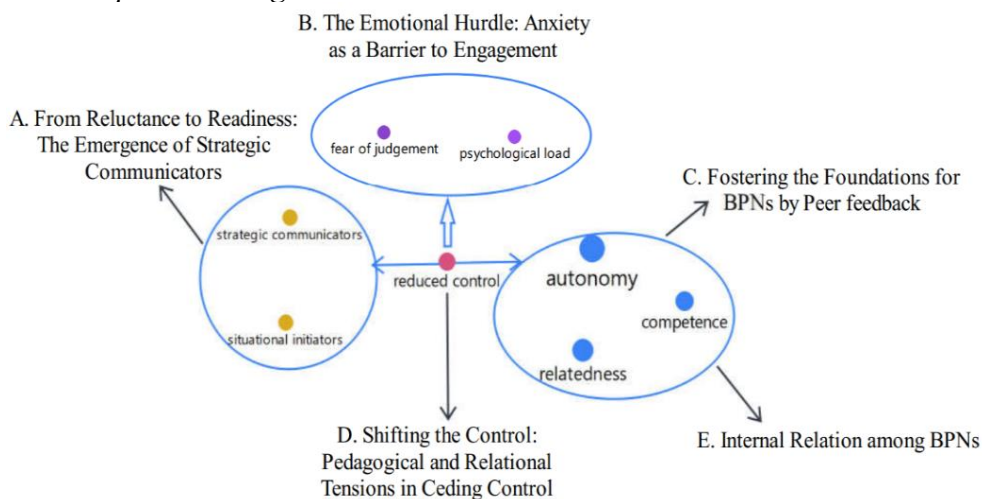
Having collected the data using autobiographical narratives and narrative framing, the researchers used the components of BPNs (autonomy, relatedness, competence) as deductive sub-codes for SDT. The rest of the codes related to WTC and peer feedback were induced using re-reading and the frequency of their occurrence. Then, the researchers launched a Code Matrix Browser (CMB) using MAXQDA 24 to check if the codes exist within the collected data. The results of the CMB (Appendix B) showed that all the codes were available within the collected data. The CMB, however, does not show the co-occurrence of the codes and also how they are related. Therefore, Code Map (CM) was generated to illustrate how the codes are related to each other.

Using the CM, the reflexive deductive-inductive thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2020) was performed to visualize the co-occurrence of the codes. Unlike the CMB, which only shows the presence of the codes within the data, closer proximity of the codes in the CM shows a stronger relationship among them. It was concluded that there are strong ties among peer feedback, BPNs, and WTC. It was also concluded that peer feedback led

to some challenges, such as reduced control of teachers and peer-pressure for EFL learners. Using the CM (Figure 2), three clusters emerged, helping the researchers induce five themes.

## Figure 2

### Code Map: Extracting the Themes



As shown in Figure 2, sub-codes induced for WTC (strategic communicators, situational initiators) and sub-codes analyzed deductively for SDT (autonomy, relatedness, competence) were clustered into two zones and were connected using the sub-code reduced control (reduced control of EFL teachers was caused by solely depending on peer feedback). Moreover, fear of judgement and psychological load (induced as challenges for EFL learners who practice peer feedback) were clustered in the proximity of the other zones. These zones helped the researchers induce five themes: (1) From reluctance to readiness: The emergence of strategic communicators, (2) The emotional hurdle: Anxiety as a barrier to engagement, (3) Fostering the foundations for BPNs by peer feedback, (4) Shifting the control: Pedagogical and relational tensions in ceding control, and (5) Internal relation among BPNs.

#### 4.1.1. From Reluctance to Readiness: The Emergence of Strategic Communicators

In response to the first and second research questions of the study, this theme captures the transformation that EFL learners experienced from initial hesitations and doubts in communication to becoming strategic communicators, and eventually gaining competence in speaking tasks through peer feedback. Based on the narratives from the G1 group (EFL teachers), it was reported that initially the G2 group exhibited reluctance to

speak because of anxiety and lack of confidence in their language abilities. However, as learners practiced peer feedback, they gradually developed strategies and communication competencies that enabled them to initiate and sustain interactions actively. Furthermore, the cooperative nature of peer feedback also encouraged learners to prepare strategically for interactions in the class (e.g., use of turn-taking or taking time to think and respond), fostering a heightened awareness in communication situations. This engagement led to readiness and competence to communicate by transforming learners' perceptions of speaking tasks from difficult challenges into manageable and purposeful activities. Moreover, peer feedback encouraged learners to feel responsible for both their own and their peers' learning by identifying strengths and areas for improvement, which enhanced their sense of autonomy and relevance. Extracts 1 and 2 from participants B and A (G1 group) are vivid examples.

Extract 1 (week eight, after about 20 sessions)

*...I thought the results won't be acceptable as even those active participants had gone silent in the class...Later I found out that they are using those times to prepare themselves for speaking tasks with less mistakes and errors...Some of them were guiding their peers' speaking tasks to help them get a better score...*

Extract 2 (week four, after about 10 sessions)

*...The students were continuously turning the speaking tasks into group discussions and they were taking turns in order to talk...Some were simultaneously correcting their peers' utterances as they were speaking...Some others were waiting for an appropriate time between tasks to correct their peers...The cooperation among them had resolved the anxiety felt by some of the peers...*

Moreover, the emergence of strategic communicators signified an important motivational shift in line with the framework of SDT. As peer feedback fulfilled learners' BPNs, especially autonomy and relatedness, learners were more intrinsically motivated to participate in communicative tasks. It was reported that they moved from being passive participants to active participants who consciously employed communication strategies, such as planning turn-taking, selecting appropriate time to speak, and seeking clarification. Additionally, the enhanced readiness was accompanied by increased self-efficacy, where learners felt more competent and confident to take risks in language use. Extracts 3 and 4 from the G2 group are the examples.

Extract 3

*Compared to receiving feedback only from the teacher, peer feedback made me feel less pressured to make mistakes since I knew that my peer will help me correct myself even after the task is over...we were waiting for the right*

*time to engage in the activities that were our strength, I mean making imaginary situations...*

Extract 4

*My relationship with my classmates had been affected positively by peer feedback because our teacher was scoring us as groups...so we decided to pre-plan for the following sessions in-advance and work on our probable mistakes at home to get a good grade...*

#### **4.1.2. The Emotional Hurdle: Anxiety as a Barrier to Engagement**

In response to the third research question, anxiety emerged as a significant emotional barrier among EFL learners practicing peer feedback, which affected their WTC negatively. Based on the data, G2 participants (12 participants) reported feelings of fear and apprehension related to being judged negatively by their peers. The participants even mentioned that they were negatively treated by their peers as they were frequently making errors of the same kind. Moreover, the fear of being evaluated by their peers created psychological pressure, leading to hesitation and doubts in both giving and receiving feedback. Moreover, peer feedback was totally halted as the anxiety was compounded by concerns over peers' language proficiency and the accuracy of corrections, which triggered a reluctance to participate actively. This emotional impediment highlighted the complex affective dimensions of peer feedback. Such a peak in anxiety deteriorated learners' sense of relatedness and competence, which are critical for intrinsic motivation. Based on the data, the psychological pressure felt in some groups completely halted the WTC of those peers, specifically those peers who were competitive learners in the class. Extract 5 from participant C (G1 group) and extract 6 from a G2 participant are the examples.

Extract 5 (week four, after about 10 sessions)

*...No matter how I changed the grouping of the students, two of my students were showing extreme senses of disapproval of accepting peer-feedbacks...she was no longer engaging in communicative activities as she was afraid and anxious of being corrected or guided by her peer...Maybe that wasn't fear or anxiousness and it was sheer reluctance...*

Extract 6

*My relationship with my classmates has been affected negatively by peer feedback because I could not accept my classmates' feedbacks. What if what she is suggesting is wrong? It will affect my grade in the group...The idea of correcting a classmate's mistakes makes me feel anxious since I cannot accept her feedbacks because she had been a weaker student than me in the class...*

#### **4.1.3. Fostering the Foundations for BPNs by Peer Feedback**

As for the first research question of the study, peer feedback played a pivotal role in satisfying G2 participants' BPNs, which are central to fostering the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of individuals. Based on the data, it was frequently reported that the autonomy of G2 group members was addressed as learners actively participated in evaluating and reflecting on peers' language use, which initiated and sustained a sense of control over their learning without receiving teacher feedback. Furthermore, the individuals' competence was developed through opportunities that were created to practice the language while giving and receiving feedback from their peers. Additionally, their relatedness was developed as a result of the collaborative nature of peer interactions. It was reported that the learners built a sense of mutual trust, which was effective in reducing communication apprehension and increasing motivation to speak. Extract 7 is a vivid example.

Extract 7

*The idea of correcting a classmate's mistakes made me feel an independent learner...my peer and I were repetitively trying to support each other when it was our turn to participate in speaking tasks...I was murmuring the correct sentences in his ears so that he makes less mistakes in his speaking...*

Furthermore, the collaborative and reciprocal nature of peer feedback enhanced learners' relatedness and autonomy by engaging them in a social context where each peer had shared responsibilities. Based on the data, the interactive process of giving and receiving feedback allowed G2 group members to convey their knowledge to their peers, leading to a multifaceted understanding of communicative skills. Finally, as it was reported by the G1 participants and in response to the second research question, the collaborative learning context caused by peer feedback enriched the classroom atmosphere, turning peers into co-constructors of knowledge. Consequently, as these needs were increasingly met, the G1 group reported a higher extent of motivation and willingness to engage in speaking tasks with enthusiasm and decreased anxiety. Extract 8 from participant B (G1 group) vividly shows this theme.

Extract 8

*...Compared to previous speaking tasks and discussions, voluntary participations had increased and the groups were striving to be the first to speak...it was interesting that before engaging in the speaking tasks my students were planning and dividing the speaking tasks among themselves...some even were assigning responsibilities for each other to take turns to speak to complete their utterances...the atmosphere of speaking tasks was more engaging with more participation than the past...*

#### **4.1.4 Shifting the Control: Pedagogical and Relational Tensions in Ceding Control**

In response to the third research question, this theme reflected the pedagogical shift from teachers to learners, creating new challenges and tensions in EFL classrooms. Based on the data, while peer feedback empowered learners' BPNs and WTC by giving them the responsibility for evaluating and improving their peers' language use, teachers faced difficulties in sustaining control over the feedback as they were worried about the quality and accuracy of feedbacks. As it was reported by all of the G1 members, about half of the peer feedback practices needed supervisions and revision by the teachers, which was regarded as an excessive workload for them. Extract 9 from participant C (G1 group) is a clear example.

Extract 9 (week 12, after about 30 sessions)

*...The fact that they were given the chance to correct each other and work in pairs in order to provide feedbacks to each other in speaking tasks turned out to be very encouraging for most of the learners...but the drawback was that most of the feedbacks were incorrect grammatically and needed further supervision that was time consuming...even some of the learners knew that their peers are not competent enough and they were ignoring their corrections and feedback...*

Nevertheless, this shift offered opportunities for relational growth within the classroom. Although ceding control fostered a collaborative learning context encouraging learner autonomy and peer support, a complete halt of teacher-to-student feedback was detrimental. It was reported by the G1 group members that they had to act more as facilitators, which led to the development of student engagement and ownership of learning. Moreover, almost all of the participants in the G2 group mentioned that even though the peer feedback made them feel more engaged and active in the class, they still sought teacher confirmation on the feedback by their peers. Extract 10 from a G2 member refers to this theme.

Extract 10

*If I could change one thing about how we do peer feedback, it would be the way the feedback is provided. I prefer the feedback given to or received from my peers to be verified by the teacher since...the main challenge for me when giving feedback to a peer is that I do not know if my feedback and suggestions to my peers are correct...*

#### **4.1.5 Internal Relation Among BPNs**

In response to the first research question, this theme referred to the dynamic interrelations among autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the BPNs according to the SDT theory. Based on the data, there was a mutual reinforcement among BPNs of the G2 group members while practicing peer

feedback. In other words, when learners experienced autonomy through active participation in peer feedback, their competence was also boosted since they were frequently engaging in the practice of using and evaluating correct and appropriate language. Moreover, enhanced competence fostered confidence in communication, promoting a stronger sense of relatedness as learners engaged more meaningfully and with a specific purpose with their peers. Similarly, a supportive peer environment, which fulfilled relatedness, provided the emotional security necessary for learners to take communicative risks and exercise both autonomy and competence. This cyclical relationship suggested that satisfying one basic psychological need could positively influence others, creating a motivational circle that enhanced their motivation. Extract 11 from a G2 group member vividly refers to this theme.

Extract 11

*The idea of correcting a classmate's mistakes makes me feel as someone who has control over his actions. I mean I could search for the missing information by myself and explain it to my teacher...My relationship with my classmates has been affected positively by peer feedback because I am now held responsible for their (peers) utterances as we will be scored as a group...however, the feeling was mutual and my peers also cared more about my speaking ability and the mistakes I was making...*

#### **4.2. Discussion**

The present study aimed to explore how peer feedback supports EFL learners' BPNs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and how these processes influence their WTC. The findings revealed a complex interplay between BPNs, emotional challenges, and pedagogical tensions that the implementation of peer feedback caused in classroom communicative activities. The data helped the researchers induce five themes that were interpreted in relation to SDT and WTC frameworks regarding the implementation of peer feedback in EFL classes.

The first theme of the present study was the transformation of initially hesitant learners to strategic communicators who gained competence to actively engage in classroom interactions. This aligned with MacIntyre and Legatto's (2011) idea of WTC as a dynamic construct that shifts with learners' understanding of competence and autonomy. Furthermore, learners' readiness to communicate emerged through strategic turn-taking, pre-task planning, and collaboration, all of which align with Ryan and Deci's (2017) argument that autonomy-supportive contexts foster intrinsic motivation. Additionally, this theme is also in line with Joe et al.'s (2017) findings, which indicated that a supportive classroom atmosphere enhances the motivation and communicative skills of individuals. Moreover, this finding also extends Zarrinabadi et al.'s (2021) findings, suggesting that autonomy support

promotes both language use awareness and communicative competence. Moreover, the data suggested that learners were exercising autonomy and agency through peer interactions (peer feedback). This aligned with Mercer and Dörnyei's (2020) observation, suggesting that language learners benefit from developing self-directed communication strategies within supportive environments.

The second theme revealed that peer feedback practice in EFL classes was not without challenges. Despite the positive developments of WTC and BPNs, findings revealed that it also generated anxiety among peers, particularly fear of negative evaluation by peers and even some learners doubted the accuracy of the feedbacks by their peers further reducing their willingness to practice peer feedback. This barrier tackled learners' WTC development, echoing MacIntyre's (2007) work on communication apprehension as a critical inhibitor of WTC. In addition, this theme aligned with Jelínková et al.'s (2023) systematic review, which referred to loss of face and fear of making mistakes as common obstacles to WTC in peer contexts. Similarly, Dewaele (2019) highlighted the role of emotional factors, noting that negative emotions reduce learners' desire to participate. The findings also reflect Gregersen and MacIntyre's (2014) suggestion that high-anxiety classrooms impede communication and lead to a reluctance to engage in communicative activities. More importantly, data showed that anxiety was not evenly distributed. Competitive learners, in particular, illustrated more resistance to peer feedback, suggesting that motivational orientations interact with classroom dynamics in complex ways. This resonates with Khajavy et al. (2016) and Derakhshan et al.'s (2022) findings that learners' perceptions of peer relationships significantly mediate the link between motivation and WTC.

The third theme suggested that peer feedback satisfied learners' BPNs by enhancing autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy was fostered as learners assumed control over evaluating peers' performance, competence was strengthened through repeated practice of language to provide feedback to their peers, and relatedness was deepened through collaborative support. These findings strongly support SDT's central claim that satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are foundations of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theme also confirms Noels et al.'s (2019) findings, who argued that self-determined motivation leads to sustained communicative engagement. Likewise, Yashima et al. (2018) demonstrated that learners who experience autonomy and relatedness show higher WTC in EFL contexts. Moreover, from a pedagogical perspective, this theme highlighted how peer feedback can transform classrooms into collaborative communities of practice. This aligned with Tan and Chen's

(2022) claim that peer interaction enhances both accuracy and a sense of shared goal.

Regarding the fourth theme, while peer feedback enriched learners' experiences, it also created challenges for teachers, who expressed concerns about the accuracy of feedback, which resulted in excessive workload. This reflects Wang's (2015) observation that untrained peer reviewers often produce erroneous feedback requiring teacher intervention. Similarly, Niu et al. (2021) emphasized the need to balance peer and teacher feedback for optimal learning outcomes. This theme also highlighted a central tension, which empowering learners through peer feedback may reduce teacher authority and generate relational challenges. However, this relational shift also aligns with Dörnyei's (2006) view that fostering learner autonomy requires teachers to adopt more facilitative roles than having teacher-centered classes. Yet, EFL teachers in this study described a need to modify their roles from being primary evaluators to facilitators of peer interaction, which, despite challenges, encouraged greater learner ownership of communication. Thus, while teachers' roles in providing feedback remain essential, the findings suggest that carefully scaffolded peer feedback systems can distribute responsibility equally between EFL teachers and learners.

Finally, the last theme revealed a cyclical reinforcement among autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As learners experienced autonomy in peer feedback, their competence grew, which in turn fostered greater relatedness with peers. This mutual and dynamic development reflects Ryan and Deci's (2019) argument that psychological needs are interdependent rather than a stand-alone component. Similarly, this mutual relationship and coherence were earlier implied by Sardabi et al. (2023). Also, Meihami and Husseini (2022) mentioned that there are several two-way and a three-way relationship among SDT components. Additionally, as noted by Papi and Khajavy (2021), motivational mechanisms are rarely linear but operate through dynamic feedback loops that amplify learners' engagement. The current findings provided empirical support for this claim, illustrating how addressing one psychological need can stimulate others as well, ultimately enhancing WTC.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

The present study aimed to find the role that peer feedback plays in fostering both BPNs and WTC, along with the challenges that may be associated with its implementation. The findings indicated that peer feedback acted as a catalyst for fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Learners' transition from initial reluctance to active, strategic communicators underscored the potential of peer feedback to promote both their BPNs and WTC. Also, the ability to evaluate and support peers

not only developed individual competence but also cultivated a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration, directly addressing the need for relatedness and autonomy in the learning process. However, the practice of peer feedback was not without its hurdles. The emergence of anxiety, stemming from fears of negative peer evaluation and concerns about feedback accuracy, presented a significant challenge that could impede WTC. Furthermore, the pedagogical shift required from teachers, moving towards a facilitator role and managing the increased workload associated with supervising peer feedback, introduced another layer of complexity. The study also highlighted the critical need for a balanced approach, where teacher guidance and a supportive classroom environment were meticulously integrated with peer interactions. This balance was crucial for optimizing both linguistic outcomes and learners' psychological well-being, ensuring that the benefits of peer feedback were maximized while its potential drawbacks were effectively mitigated.

As for the theoretical implication of the study, the current study contributes to both SDT and WTC frameworks in several ways. First, the findings demonstrate how peer feedback functions as a means for SDT's needs satisfaction, offering concrete pedagogical practices that operationalize autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Second, the findings can be used to extend MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC pyramid model's sub-layers by highlighting peer interactions as a situational factor that influences learners' communicative readiness. Finally, the findings of the present study can have pedagogical implications for EFL stake holders, teacher trainers, and teachers. EFL stake holders can provide chances for teacher trainers to hold workshops for pre-service and in-service EFL teachers to make them aware of the merits that balanced peer feedback can offer to their EFL classes to foster their learners' WTC and SDT. However, the study had some limitations too. Firstly, even though all the expected 12 narratives were gathered and used in the data analysis, due to the busy schedule of the EFL teachers (G1 group), they could not deliver the narratives before the deadlines set for them. Secondly, a few of the EFL learners (seven participants) provided rather biased data and the researchers had to exclude them from the data analysis. Consequently, future research on the role of peer feedback with regards to SDT, WTC, or other affective factors in EFL learning could consider a longer time span and conduct a longitudinal study to allow extended submission periods or integrate reflective prompts over time that can yield richer, less pressured narrative data.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Incomplete Sentences Given to G2 Group*

1. When my classmate gives me feedback on my speaking, I feel...
2. The main challenge for me when giving feedback to a peer is...
3. Compared to receiving feedback only from the teacher, peer feedback makes me feel...
4. After engaging in several peer feedbacks, my speaking ability in English has...
5. The idea of correcting a classmate's mistakes makes me feel...
6. My relationship with my classmates has been affected (positively/negatively) by peer feedback because...
7. When I think about speaking English in class now, I am (more/less) eager to start...
8. If I could change one thing about how we do peer feedback, it would be...

**Appendix B***Code Matrix Browser Generated by MAXQDA 24*

Code System	G1	G2
▼ challenges		
▼ peer-pressure		
fear of judgement		●
psychological	●	●
reduced control	●	●
▼ WTC		
situational initiators	●	●
strategic communicators	●	●
▼ SDT		
relatedness	●	●
competence	●	●
autonomy	●	●