



Cognizance of Rational Choice Theory and Teachers' Intervention in Reducing EFL Learners' Free Riding



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ABSTRACT

The enlargement in popularity of group work in English language classrooms has been associated with a raise in the frequency of reports of learners not equally contributing to work in the groups. Termed as free-riding, the impact of this behavior on other group members can make group work an unpleasant experience. Informed by the Rational Choice Theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this study investigated the degree to which English as a foreign language learner could be directed towards effective group cooperation. For this purpose, a total 140 intermediate ($N = 70$) and upper-intermediate ($N = 70$) learners were engaged in picture-cued oral narrative tasks in groups. The teacher familiarized the learners with the tenets of rational choice theory and the effective group work. The classes were observed and learners filled out a free-riding questionnaire. Results statistical analysis demonstrated the effectiveness of knowledge about rational choice theory in the reduction of free-riding. Furthermore, qualitative analysis of the observations revealed that learners particularly those in the low-intermediate group were more inclined towards free-riding. The reasons underlying learners' lack of interest in group work and possible strategies to reduce this concern were further specified. It is suggested: Teachers should clearly state the goals of the group activities according to the theory of rational choice and clarify the specific goals of the course. By having a clear view of the course objectives and understanding the role of teachers and learners in group work, learners are better placed to meet their expectations and goals.

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1. Introduction

In any language learning context, there exists factors that facilitate or debilitate the flow of learning. One of the concepts which has been proved to facilitate the process of learning a language is group work in which active interaction exists among the students and learners' diverse abilities and backgrounds are shared. Although working in groups seems to be an improving factor in learning context, it might create hindering situation as well. One of the limitations of group work is the emergence of free riders.

Considering that group work provides a crucial element in today's learner-friendly environments and is expected to lead to better learning results, it needs to be engaging to all of the group members. Although this issue is of utmost significance in language learning contexts, it has not been investigated systematically particularly in the Iranian context where there is a slow movement away from the traditional teaching methods ([Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2016](#); [Sadeghi et al, 2017](#)). Hence, identifying the reasons behind the learners' tendency to free ride constitutes a significant issue in second language acquisition research. In order to fill the abovementioned gaps in the literature on group-work, the current research attempted to investigate the many factors that may be involved in free riding and the ways in which those who facilitate such groups, including teachers and educators and learners, to recognize and respond to it.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Free-Riding

One of the most deeply researched and widely used teaching approaches in the educational settings is group work ([Wilson et al 2018](#)). Studies ([Dingel et al, 2013](#); [Pfaff & Hulleston, 2003](#); [Gueldenzoph & May, 2002](#)) have shown that group work

offers great possibilities for deeper learning compared to some more traditional teaching format, but like every other approach, working in groups might also have some pros and cons ([Fartash & seifoori, 2019](#)) that it can lead to some new problems such as free riding. Group dynamics has long received attention among scientists, teachers, and business people working and learning in groups, and is found to be more effective than doing them individually ([Hurley & Allen, 2007](#)). Learning in group provides a positive learning setting for learners to have greater opportunities in communication ([Duxbury & Tsai, 2010](#)).

Students should be active participants and autonomous agents; moreover, in a cooperative learning context, teachers should facilitate and guide students on how to be successful. So, what if a team member participates significantly less than others? This type of team member may affect all the group's attempts and dynamic when the other group members lower their attempts on perceiving that they do all of the work. They try to take the benefits of the others' work in their team ([Vela & Alvarado, 2013](#)). This is one of the main obstacles that affects team performance ([Valentine et al, 2007](#)), success of group work and cooperative learning ([Khezrlou, 2012](#)).

This obstacle is called 'Free riding' or 'The Free-Rider Problem'. "It is a common problem and well researched by sociology, business" and educational scientists who refer to this concept as an undesired behavior. Students' reaction to free riders may result in social loafing ([Davies, 2009](#)), that causes another group member become a free rider too. He states that a group member that does not have the feeling of belonging to the group may become a social loafer who reduces the attempt of the group members. Social loafing can result in several other problems that impact an organization's triumph ([Luo](#)

et al, 2013) which leads to decreasing the performance of the group members.

One solution to this problem can be non-proportional distribution of power or designation of a team leader who has the power for incentive alignment and is legitimized for monitoring (Gulati & Singh, 1998). In this case, the significance of the teacher's role in group learning settings is of utmost importance (Khezrlou, 2020; Saeedakhtar & Seyedasgari, 2018). Teachers can assign duties and guide students and this issue requires skills for having more effective group members (Hassanien, 2006). Furthermore, Joyce (1999) argues that motivation is an important factor in collaboration and reduces free-riding. He suggests that motivation will be high when one forces group member to rotate. However, there are also downsides in this solution and many teachers, managers, and leaders have their own reasons by keeping themselves empowered (Khezrlou, 2019).

Assigning group works needs more than changing the seating arrangement (Ruiz et al, 2016). The importance of teachers' thoughts and perceptions that affects every interpretation of group work should be highlighted (Woods & Çakır, 2011). Therefore, teachers remain in the power position and the students can only report to the teacher in case of a problem like the free rider problem. However, without these solutions, the tendency to free ride will increase due to the fact that students do not have the ability or position to punish others quickly and effectively.

Free riding has long received attention among social, business, and educational researchers. In recent years, social and business scientists studied the role of personality and human nature in free riding (Nov & Kuk, 2008). Murphy (2017), in his article named Call my Rep! How Unions Overcame the Free-Rider Problem, explains how using model membership and media increased membership in the unions in some jobs despite the chances to free ride on traditional union benefits. The research

shows that for every five reports for instance, teachers are % 2.5 points more likely to be union members in the following year. It even shows larger effects when they share the progress membership.

Choi and Mantik (2017) compare cooperative learning methods Scaffolder Think-Group-Share learning with those in Group Investigation and Learning Together learning. The findings show that Scaffolder Think-Group-Share learning has the capability to increase satisfaction of the learners and comprehension in EFL classes (Choi & Mantik, 2017).

This study consisted of surveying 205 learners from all faculties of an Australian university in which learners were asked to offer their attitudes towards group work. Learners' responses were thematically analyzed and it was found that free-riding was the utmost concern across all disciplines. The quantitative data from the survey revealed that on the whole, learners found group work to be a positive experience, although the free-text response analysis indicated that a considerable number of learners experienced difficulties with numerous aspects of group work.

2.2. Rational Choice Theory

In the literature many scientists refer to free riding as an undesired behavior. This kind of behavior affects not only the performance of a group (Allen & Hurley, 2007) but also the performance and motivation of others (Joyce, 1999). The tendency of free riding could be explained by using economic or rational perspective. These perspectives can be linked at the rational choice theory and transaction cost theory. According to the rational choice theory, individuals are naturally rational.

3. Method

the present study is an attempt to evaluate the effect of instruction and mediation through the teacher's active role in building up learners' knowledge by means of scaffolding, observation, mediation by the teacher and peers to see whether it can be an optimal condition for

reducing the number of free riders and increase learners' motivation.

3.1. Design of the study

The present exploratory study included three parts to answer several questions. Initially, questions related to how cognizance of rational choice theory may influence free riding problem and language proficiency was dealt with. Subsequently, answers were provided to teacher intervention's inquiries based on sociocultural theory. The data were analyzed qualitatively based on the interpretivist paradigm from various social perspectives as well as studying numerical data to study the relationship among variable. In sum, this study adopts a mixed-methods research (MMR).

3.2. Participants

The total number of the participants of the present study included 140 intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners (70 from each level of proficiency) and 30 EFL teachers studying and teaching in language schools of Boukan and Urmia. The EFL learners were from both genders (i.e., male (N = 83) and female (N = 57)) and they were within the age range of 15 and 25. Furthermore, EFL teachers were from both genders (i.e., male (N = 11) and female (N = 19)) and within the age range of 22 to 47. All the participants knew at least two languages except English since the mother tongue of most of participants in Boukan and Urmia are Kurdish and Azeri, respectively. Their English language learning was largely limited to a formal classroom setting. They had been learning English in the home country and therefore hardly had any overseas English learning experiences.

3.3. Instruments

Oxford Quick Placement test. The Oxford Quick Placement Test is a quick and reliable assessment for placement testing.

As the name suggests, it is developed by the Oxford University and includes 60 questions which should be answered in 30 minutes. Questions are in multiple choice formats and cover grammar, vocabulary as well as communication understanding. The results of the learners' performance in this test revealed whether the participants of this study were intermediate or upper-intermediate.

Free riding tendency questionnaire. In order to evaluate the extent to which EFL learners are inclined towards free riding, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher which examined if learners had ever faced free-riding in their classes or not. Furthermore, the reaction of the students was assessed in confronting free riders. Also, by implementing statements which describe the free riding in group work and asking the learners to talk about their attitudes towards them, the researcher was able to evaluate their tendency. The questionnaire includes 12 items on a 6-point Likert-scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". It was subject to reliability analysis through the conduction of Cronbach's alpha which provided satisfactory results ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Observation checklist. As for the last but not least instrument of this study, the researcher took part in all sessions of the present study and filled out the checklists on their performances concerning their interaction in the group work and teachers' intervention in the tasks. To this end, observation checklists were used that were combined from different sources of materials. The checklists consisted of different factors of implementation of the group work inside the classroom.

Picture-cued oral narrative tasks. In order to induce learner involvement and collaboration in the classroom, a series of picture-cued oral narrative tasks from Heaton were used in the study. Learners in each group were instructed to try to find out

the events happening in the pictures and then tell their part of the story (two out of six pictures for each group member) to the classroom. Learners were allowed to hold on to the picture and look at it when telling the story. It is presumed that the use of group work for the production of narratives triggered the meaning-focused activities in classroom settings."For the oral narrative tasks, the research has investigated which aspects within task characteristics have the most prominent impact. Narrative performance can be highly influenced by the contextual support provided in the tasks such as the use of pictures, picture books, memory, and films" ([Asadollahfam, & Ahmadvpour, 2018, p. 57](#)).

3.4.Procedure

Firstly, the proficiency test was administered to the 140 EFL learners (70 low-intermediate and 70 upper-intermediate) studying English in language schools. Although the participants were already attending low-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of study, the Oxford Quick Placement Test was administered to ensure the proficiency their right level of proficiency. Before the main process of the study, and in order to make sure that the questionnaires that were used in the study would be valid and reliable, a pilot study was carried out with a small sample group of learners (randomly chosen, N = 20) from among the participants. After getting assured of the reliability of the questionnaires, in the first two sessions of the process of collecting the data, the observation checklist was used to observe the classes, while learners were using the picture-cued narrative tasks for the collaborative work, to observe any possible significant change in free riding during the research. The group work during the whole research sessions were observed and checked. Picture-cued oral narrative tasks were used as collaborative activities during which learners were exposed to both the teachers as well as peers' scaffolding and negotiation of meaning. Throughout the oral narrative tasks, the teacher scaffolded and mediated the learners' conduction of activities.

The researcher passed leaflets about rational choice theory in order to make students familiar with RCT. The leaflet included information and pictures that were in line with the learners' level of understanding. After explaining and clarifying the leaflet, some questions were asked from the students in order to assure that they had fully understood the concept of RCT. Having been over with this, which took 4 sessions' time, the researcher observed the learners in a step- by- step fashion to realize if their tendency to free riding was affected or not after the consciousness-raising practice.

In order to investigate the role of teachers' intervention in EFL learners' performance, the researcher needed to monitor and observe EFL classes to see if learners' performance would be affected or not. First of all, the objectives of the observations were clarified to the teachers and they were asked to manipulate group work in their classes. Furthermore, the teacher could intervene in some of those group work activities. The researcher observed 8 sessions (4 low-intermediate and 4 upper-intermediate classes). This process took one and a half hours' time. In addition, in order to explore teachers' intervention in learners' performance, students' free riding while performing the group tasks was examined.

3.5.Data Analysis

3.5.1. Qualitative Data Analysis (analysis of the process of group work)

To analyze findings about teacher intervention, the researcher analyzed the findings from observation check list based on the socio-cultural theory. Interpretive content analysis was used to identify the main themes and instructional moves used by the teachers throughout the observation period. The constant comparison method ([Strauss & Corbin, 1990](#)) as a flexible approach to content analysis was used in this study as is shown in Figure 1.

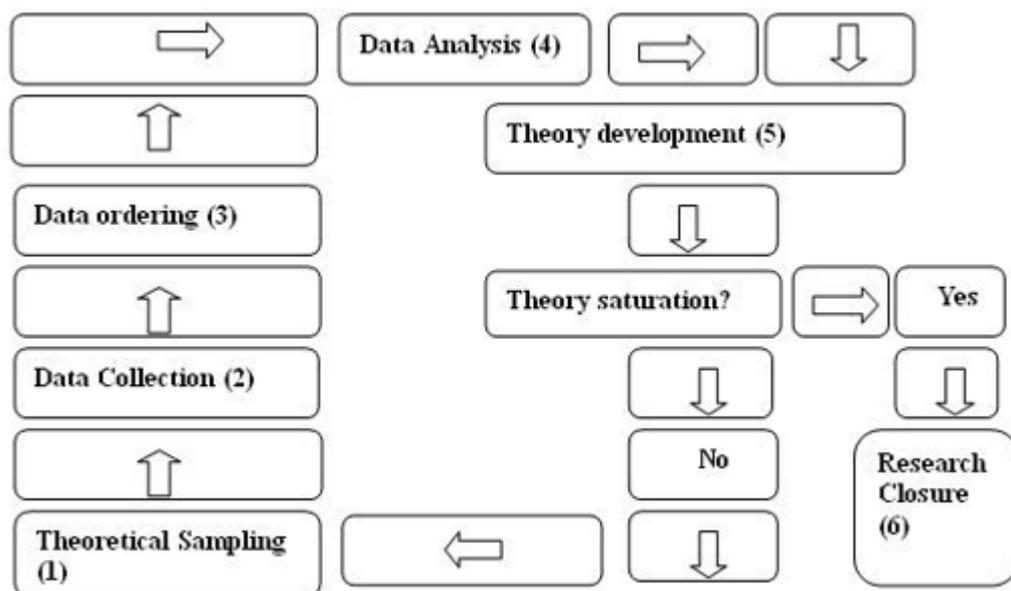


Figure 1. Constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

3.5.2. Quantitative Data Analysis (analysis of the product of group work)

Firstly, the normal distribution of the scores obtained from the questionnaires and tests were ensured through the conduction of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. Following this, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics through the paired samples t-tests were run.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Qualitative Findings

RQ1: How does Iranian EFL learners' awareness of rational choice theory (RCT) affect their tendency to free-riding?

In order to understand whether and how the learners' awareness of rational choice theory could influence their free-riding behaviors in group work, the researcher observed the whole treatment sessions. The teacher became involved in different types of interventions such as behavioral (e.g., positive behavioral

interventions and supports) and linguistic involvement (scaffolding and ZPD).

The results of observation analysis revealed that in the first few sessions of the study, the linguistically weak group members were more inclined towards remaining silent and passive in group activities. The reasons identified included:

- Low linguistic capability which was particularly true in the case of low-intermediate participants
- Low self-esteem and motivation levels
- Apprehension from committing errors
- Attempting to maintain their positive face by not being ridiculed by their peers
- Not assuming the importance of communicating language in order to learn it in meaningful ways.

However, the teachers' intervention in terms of both boosting learners' motivation and self-regulation by encouraging learners to act in line with their personal preferences and not being petrified of asking questions

and making errors was successful in terms of bringing about more participation on the part of more passive group members. In addition to the behavioristic aspect of the intervention, the teacher attempted to clarify any ambiguities to the learners by giving feedback mostly in the form of recasts and indirect feedback and trying to empower the more capable group members to help the low capability learners understand the linguistic issues. All in all, this emotional as well as linguistic support succeeded in enabling the learners to increase their participation and stay away from free-riding to a large extent, as observed throughout the treatment period.

In group activities, the teacher helps learners how to learn more effectively by teaching their learners collaborative or social skills so that they can work together more effectively. Again, group working necessarily entails learners in working together in groups. Yet, it needs to be noted that it is not the group or pair work that makes group work distinctive; it is the way that learners and teachers work together and can become capable of communicating language that is important.

In sum, these findings seem to suggest that the teachers are also aware of the importance of involving learners in the process of learning and teaching. Hence, learners are likely having a positive attitude towards learning. Hence, raising learners' awareness of the value of working in groups based on their own interests and capabilities is of great benefits to them because this would motivate them to participate more.

RQ2: What is the role of teachers' intervention on free riding tendency of the low-intermediate, and upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners based on socio-cultural theory?

The results of observation analysis revealed that although the teacher intervention could result in greater learner participation in group activities, it was more successful in the low-intermediate group. The results of observation analysis highlighted a number of issues which are presumed to underline

this finding. These causes are explained below.

Firstly, learners did not demonstrate any anxious learner during group work following the teacher intervention. This factor was significantly more prominent in the low-intermediate group than the upper-intermediate one. This is attributed to the communication experience of the learners and the comparatively low linguistic level of the former group.

Another reason likely to contribute to the success of the intervention in the low-intermediate group compared to the upper-intermediate group is that the former became more used to interactive classroom activities. This routine helped them change from being quiet to being (more) active, a behavior not only reported by the learners themselves, but also observed by the researcher.

Thirdly, the low-intermediate learners welcomed peer and teacher feedback more than the upper-intermediate learners. It is believed that the upper-intermediate learners could handle the task more independently and effectively and were less reliant upon others to complete the task. On the other hand, the low-level learners needed more support in order to complete the task and interact more effectively. For instance, one low-intermediate learner emphasized the benefits that would accrue to the provision of feedback: "talking with others and learning their ideas can help me reflect on my own language and my ways of telling the story. ... I enjoyed the narrating process a lot as I could really learn from my classmates". On the other hand, the upper-intermediate learners, as noted in the observations, sought explanations or clarifications from others to a lesser extent. They were mostly oriented towards the product rather than the learning process.

Finally, first language (L1) use in understanding peer feedback was noted facilitate the low-intermediate learners' group work to a large extent. As captured in the observations, the medium of communication in most of low-intermediate groups was primarily Farsi, which was used

to sustain the dialogue among group members, demonstrate the mistakes and problems in the stories, express ideas, request for information, seek clarification, and sometimes argue with peers. Upper-intermediate learners, in contrast, did not use Farsi in their interaction to a large extent. L1 use by low-level learners could foster the engagement and performance, thereby leading to more engagement and contribution by the passive and reticent learners. In this way, they could take advantage of using Farsi to fully and clearly express their opinions and comments, and thus contributed to the completion of the narratives by fulfilling their roles in the activity. For instance, a low-intermediate learner said: “It is more beneficial to use Farsi than English in our group work. Because through Farsi we can achieve our purpose soon. We may feel uncomfortable if only English is used by us. That would feel weird”. Another learner from this proficiency group added: “I think it is better to use Farsi. Otherwise, if we use English there will be many mental translations between Farsi and English”.

In brief, these sets of factors – low—intermediate learners’ low anxiety levels, exposure to more group work and communication, positively welcoming feedback and scaffolding from other knowledgeable peers, and resorting to Farsi when needed – were found to impact their learning when engaged in group work narrative activities.

RQ3: How does the Iranian EFL learners’ level of language proficiency (low-intermediate, and upper-intermediate) affect their free-riding tendency?

The results from the observation analysis make it clear that learners’ level of proficiency was certainly a mediating variable in the learners’ tendency to free-riding. As already noted in the previous question, teachers’ intervention could direct low-intermediate learners towards active participation more than the upper-intermediate learners due to a number of reasons.

The upper-intermediate learners’ independence and autonomous work, their better linguistic abilities to cope with the demands of the task, their more exposure to language use and thus low levels of anxiety and nervousness might have been the factors that made them already more prone to better group work. On the other hand, low-intermediate learners were more vulnerable to group failures and were more dependent on the help and support of both the teacher and other group members to complete the task. As already touched on, they developed the strategy of using L1 in order to attain a fuller understanding of each other’s intentions and feedback to complete the task goals in the allowed time. All these factors seem to underscore the significance of learners’ level of language proficiency in enhancing their group effectiveness.

4.2. Quantitative Findings

In order to check the normality of distribution for scores, Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was conducted (Table 1). This assesses the normality of the distribution of scores. A non-significant result ($p > 0.05$) as is observed here indicates normality for the scores in this study.

Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results

		Freeriding pre-intervention	Freeriding post-intervention
N		140	140
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	49.1214	42.9857
	Std. Deviation	11.95343	12.12702
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.096	.111

	Positive	.060	.067
	Negative	-.096	-.111
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.137	1.318
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.151	.162

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Free-Riding Tendency of Learners Prior to and Following the Intervention

Results of paired samples t-test for the third research question which sought to examine whether learners' awareness of rational choice theory (RCT) significantly affected their tendency to free-riding are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Free-riding before intervention	49.1214	140	11.95343	1.01025
	Free-riding after intervention	42.9857	140	12.12702	1.02492

Table 3. T-test Results for Free-Riding Tendency of Learners Prior to and Following the Intervention

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-free-riding – post-free-riding	6.13571	12.00852	1.01490	4.12907	8.14236	6.046	139	.000

The results of paired samples t-test show statistically significant differences, $t(139) = 6.04$, $p = 0.000$, between the free-riding tendency of learners before and after gaining awareness about rational choice theory. This result means that understanding the tenets and importance of this theory made learners more careful and motivated to attempt to contribute to group work and reduce their reticent behavior in group work.

Results of observation analysis further revealed that teachers' intervention and learners' knowledge of Rational Choice Theory benefitted the low-intermediate level learners more than the upper-intermediate learners. One of the reasons for this was related to the fact that the low-intermediate learners could lower their anxiety levels

after the intervention. Although it did not help them get rid of the anxious feeling, knowledge of proper group work and its benefits indeed enabled some learners to feel better. It was noted that the majority of upper-intermediate learners did not feel nervous at all whether with or without teacher intervention, mainly because of their strong self-confidence.

Another reason which was found to help learners reduce their free-riding tendency was the use of first language (L1) among most of low-intermediate level learners. It was observed that the use of L1 advanced peer communication and achievement of task purposes. Put differently, the findings suggest that use of the L1 as the medium of group work facilitated the engagement and contribution of learners particularly those at the low-intermediate groups, in turn resulting in

lesser free-riding. As a significant scaffolding technique and the major semiotic tool of mediation, L1 use can help learners sustain control of the task and enhance their scaffolding roles in learners' ZPDs ([Kim, Song & Kellog 2021](#)).

The findings of this study constitute evidence that free-riding is not simply a deliberate attempt (or lack thereof) to avoid carrying out work. It can relate to a number of factors one of which can be learners' lack of communicative abilities. As [Webb \(1997\)](#) has also contended, free-riding may be involuntary and due to feeling inadequate or not competent in the target language to complete the assigned tasks. This may particularly be true for those learners with worries about their communication skills, such as the low-intermediate learners of the present study who had limited exposure to interaction in group work. It is presumed that their lower level of English doubly challenged them with the task requirements as well as communication issues ([Huensch & Nagle, 2021](#)). An even simpler context, such as an embarrassed learner not completing comprehending the task requirements, could also clarify an example

of free-riding. [Dommeyer \(2007\)](#) also recommends that feelings of incompetence could lead a learner to believe that his or her lack of contribution to the group work would go unobserved, while the group members may consider it to be intentional free-riding. The results of the present study provided promising evidence that if learners become more aware of the purpose of group work and their roles, they can ward off feelings of inadequacy and reticence for example, [Dewild, Brycebart, & Eckman \(2021\)](#). In addition, these results confirm rational choice theory that some goals can only be achieved jointly, which brings people together in a group.

5. Conclusion

Obviously free-riding is a serious and common phenomenon in English-language classes that aim at employing group work in the classroom. In order to boost learners' participation and ultimately enhance their language competence, both EFL teachers and learners need to take some measures. As revealed in the present study and several others ([Zou, 2004](#)), learners may be directed towards free-riding in group work which can be attributed to several factors such as an uneven share of work, different levels of proficiency, learning

goals and so forth. Therefore, EFL teachers need to clearly spell out the aims of the group activities in light of the rational choice theory and clarify particular course objectives. With a lucid opinion of course objectives and an understanding of teachers' and learners' roles in group tasks, learners will be better positioned to adapt their own expectations and objectives. They will also have a better idea of what they require in order to be successful.

It is also worthwhile for EFL teachers to create a relaxing, welcoming, and supportive classroom learning environment, as proposed in previous studies of free-riding in Asia (Zou, 2004). To advance learners' active participation in English-language lessons, it is also vital for teachers to improve learners' interest in and motivation to communicate using the target language. Scaffolding topics such as providing a list of challenging vocabulary and sentence structures followed by role-playing might help lead learners to feel more relaxed, less nervous, and more willing to contribute to group work (Prégent, 1994). In view of these findings, it would seem that the nature of the group task needs to be considered when teachers decide whether learners' L1 can be used in group work.

I. The present study has a number of limitations which should be taken into account. Firstly, all the factors which might have affected free-riding tendency were not covered. It should be noted that the conduction of a study in the classroom gives it a high degree of ecological validity while the disadvantage would be that not ever variables can be strictly controlled. Furthermore, learners' narrative task performance was not investigated since the main objective of this study was to understand learners' free-riding tendencies prior to and following the introduction of Rational Choice Theory. Lastly, it should be stated that the individual difference variables of the learners such as their anxiety, willingness to communicate, working memory and aptitude were not taken into account due to the scope of the study. It is now well-known that individual difference variables play a crucial

determining role in the efficacy of a particular pedagogical program and need to be taken into account.

To conclude, in order to understand free-riding better in second- or foreign-language classrooms, further research using both quantitative and qualitative methods should be conducted with different groups of learners in different of environments. Future studies are encouraged to investigate the multiple reasons of free-riding and look into the potential coping strategies to help learners become more confident, active learners of the target language. More specifically, longitudinal studies are needed to obtain clearer understandings of learners' free-riding over time to communicate in group works. This would offer a more inclusive picture of the learning context as learners' proficiency level (and confidence) improves.

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