The Role of Cognitive Motivation and Personality Traits in EFL Learners’ Group Work Free Riding Tendencies: Teachers’ and Learners’ Attitudes

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Abstract

This study attempted to examine the free riding tendencies of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners performing group work activities. Concerning the pivotal role of individual difference variables in learners’ group work contribution, this study also explored the motivation and personality traits of the learners as well. Furthermore, teachers’ and learners’ opinions with respect to the free riding phenomenon were analyzed. A total of 140 intermediate and upper-intermediate learners and 30 teachers took part in this study. As a mixed-methods study, this study utilized questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews to investigate this topic. Results of Pearson correlations revealed the significant relationship between motivation and low free riding. Moreover, it was found that except for neuroticism, other dimensions of personality could establish significantly negative relationships with free riding. The correspondences between these findings and the participants’ attitudes were further examined and significant pedagogical implications were provided.

Introduction

Group work is one of the most important teaching strategies in EFL classrooms. It adds verity and fun to the teaching/learning process, motivates the learners and enhances their social and language skills. Learners believe that group work clears the concepts more than individual learning. It makes learning more interesting, and learners feel more responsibility of work, commits to success of each member and their group (Akhtar, Kiran, Perveen, Rashid, & Satti, 2012). Shehadeh (2011) points out that group work has become popular worldwide in language classrooms over recent years. Therefore, it is obvious that group work is effective for language learning and teaching (Mutwarasibo, 2013; Razmjo & Hoomanfard, 2012). Hence, many educational institutions and organizations apply cooperative and collaborative group work in their activities. Although this trend has also been welcomed in the Iranian EFL contexts, there are several barriers to effective collaborative work in English classes. For instance, language teaching at the tertiary level is still based on Grammar Translation or Reading methods, “seeking to improve structural competence and reading skills of the learners, ignoring other equally important components of language competence” (Mokhtamia, 2011, p. 2000). There are also other challenges such as a lack of native English speaker teachers, scarcity of technological and innovative equipments particularly in public teaching contexts, inauthentic textbooks, limited hours of instruction, lack of effective teacher training and so forth that limit the adoption of effective teaching methods such as collaborative work and thereby lessening learners’ motivation to participate in group/pair work (Khezrlou, 2012a, 2012b).

Although it is a successful way of teaching, the general success of the group largely depends on the attempt of the group members in the group efforts. It is also expected that learners can gain new knowledge using group work and interaction with group members (Baleghizadeh & Golbin, 2010). However, literature and practical experiences have also shown negative side effects of working in teams, resulting in lower group performances. One of the most striking effects is that workings in teams give some group members the opportunity to free ride. Free-riding, defined as “a behavior pattern wherein an
individual working in a group setting fails to contribute his or her fair share to a group effort as perceived by group members” (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008, p. 256), negatively impacts group work projects. For this reason, it is important that free-riding is understood and students are prepared to deal with free-riding within their group projects. In order to better understand this phenomenon and to reduce it in group activities in the English language classes, the present study was conducted to explore free-riding among low-intermediate and upper-intermediate learners particularly with regard to personality and motivation factors. More importantly, the attitude of the learners and teachers were also examined to gain richer insights into the reasons for the occurrence of free-riding.

Free-Riding

Most educators engaged in group work projects are aware of the problem of free-riding. However, despite previous studies that have examined this issue (e.g., Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008), it is still an ongoing problem that negatively affects the benefit of group projects. By not confronting and resolving the issue of ‘free-riding’, also referred to as ‘social loafing’, group projects may have an adverse effect on their intended outcomes as research has shown that free-riding not only negatively affects students’ enjoyment of study but also their ability to learn content-related information (Bacon, 2005). Thus, the benefits of group work may be overshadowed by students’ negative experiences which are often related to free-riding (Lima et al., 2007).

In terms of dealing with the free-riders, Maiden and Perry (2011) provide a number of suggestions to be taken into account: proper design of the group work, empowerment of students to monitor their own group work, effective use of peer review in group work, and helping the free riders. When it comes to helping the free riders, they argue that low-status members of the group change to be more polarized within the group thereby not being able to contribute properly to the group work. Therefore, students should be taught about how to work in a group and handle its dynamics properly.

The effects of the intervention on student learning were reported in different studies. In a research done by Suherman (2018) on Indonesian writing classroom, three main points were revealed: First, the teacher's interventions were mostly on grammatical errors, inappropriate vocabularies, and content structures, second facilitated by the teacher's interventions, more than 50% of the peer feedbacks were integrated by the students in their revision, and finally, the students generally confirmed the usefulness of interventions deployed by the teacher on peer feedback. All in all, it was understood that peer feedback, supported by teacher interventions, can be developed to benefit learning English writing. In a similar fashion, the results of a study conducted by Naghdipour and Koc (2015) investigated the effect of teaching intervention on the writing of Iranian University students majoring in English, and found out that the treatment group outperformed the control group in both paragraph and essay writing performances.

Moreover August, Branum-Martin, Cardenas-Hagan, and Francis (2009) showed that the Quality English and Science Teaching intervention had a positive effect on the performance of the students, regardless of their status as English Language Learners or native speakers of English. In addition, the Quality English and Science Teaching intervention produced positive effects for both Science and Vocabulary outcomes.
of the students. These studies, therefore, give credence to the significance of scaffolding different learners’ collaborative work efforts in bringing about effective language learning outcomes. Put differently, learners’ from diverse backgrounds and majors seem to benefit from teacher intervention.

Teachers’ motivational intervention via utilizing group work was investigated by several researchers. The results of a study conducted by Krek (2018) showed that students feel more interested in the English language when they are working in groups. Although there are many problems accruing with group work activities such as free-riders problem, the teachers can focus on them and address them properly. Similarly, Alrabai (2016) revealed that the motivational intervention in the experimental group led to increased learner motivation, which in turn provided higher achievement levels for learners in the experimental group than for those in the control group. However, Daba, Ejersa and Aliyi (2017) found that biology students had misconception on objectives of group work as a motivational intervention strategy since they perceived it as a means of getting pass mark rather than learning cooperatively through group work.

Unlike the results of previous studies in terms of the positive effect of teacher intervention in learning progress of learners, Lynch (1997) discussed extracts from three adult EFL classes, where learners resorted to conversational repair in order to clarify faulty expressions used in speaking activities. In two cases the teachers used different repair tactics to ‘nudge’ the group towards a successful resolution. In the third case, the effect of the teacher’s intervention was to stifle a learner’s attempt at repair. The results suggested that teachers should resist the temptation to step in as soon as learners encounter communication problems, and that any eventual intervention needs to be tailored to the specific difficulty.

In sum, as the review of the literature depicts, although the issue of teacher intervention in encouraging collaborative work has demonstrated promising results, questions still remain with respect to understanding learners’ reasons for free-riding and their free-riding tendencies in relation to individual difference variables. The present study was therefore an endeavor to gain richer insights about these notions.

Cognitive Motivation

Learner motivation is a significant and somewhat controversial area of investigation in second language research. As Ellis states, “There is widespread recognition that motivation is of great importance for successful L2 acquisition, but there is less agreement about what motivation actually consists of” (1994, p. 36). It needs to be noted that learners’ motivation plays a significant role in determining the learners’ free-riding tendencies in group works in the classroom.

The study of learner motivation is informed by a multitude of theories, but no one theory can yet account for all the factors involved (Dörnyei, 1997; Gardner & Tremblay, 1995; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Gardner developed the socioeducational model of second language acquisition (see Figure 1). The three characteristics of motivation in this model are motivational intensity (effort expended), desire to learn and attitudes towards learning the L2 (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic, 2004).
Gardner developed the distinction between two main categories of motivation. The first is integrative motivation, which reflects the learner’s desire to become an active member of the L2 community or degree of identification with it. The second, instrumental motivation, is the potential rewards the learner will gain from learning the language, such as improved job prospects or university entrance (Noels, Pelletier, Clement & Vallerand, 2000).

These are broad motivational categories, encompassing a large number of factors, but integrative motivation is thought to play a key role in L2 learning because of its relationship with the learner’s identity (Gardner et al., 2004). In a study of university students learning French as a foreign language, Gardner et al. (2004) found that while integrative orientation is relatively stable, other factors affecting motivation, such as attitude towards the learning environment may be affected by the learner’s achievement in the L2.

During the group process, its self-interest or its goal-directed behavior can change. This will result in less motivation, lower contribution in group process and free riding and shirking. According to rational choice theory, motivation is an important driver of behavior. Researchers also have found less motivation and efforts at lower educational level (Sanna, 2001 et al.). Cognitive motivation, also known as ‘Need for Cognition’ (NFC), is defined as “people's tendency to seek, engage in, and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors” (Cacioppo et al., 1996, p.197). Cacioppo and Petty (1982) conceptualized NFC as a motivational tendency which is general (not domain specific), intrinsic, stable (but it can be developed or changed), that is distinguishable from intellectual ability (e.g., modest relations with verbal intelligence, no relation with abstract reasoning (for an overview, see Cacioppo et al. 1996). This is personality variable that has attracted attention of many social scientists. It measures to what extent people enjoy thinking and have a positive attitude toward tasks that require reasoning or problem solving.

The cognitive motivation, in Bandura and Cervone’s (1986) definition, refers to the capacity to practice self-influence by individual challenge and response to one’s own accomplishments that affords a crucial cognitive mechanism of motivation. Motivation according to goals includes a cognitive comparison process. When individuals commit themselves to explicit objectives, the recognized negative differences between performance and the goal that they aim at achieving create self-disappointment that acts as a motivational stimulus for better effort (Bandura & Cervone, 1986). Instigation of self-evaluative responses by internal evaluation demands both individual goals and knowledge about one’s performance level. When these principal elements are systematically varied, neither knowledge of performance without goals nor goals without knowledge of performance has enduring motivational influence (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). Hence, the self-influence in the regulation of motivation involves the objectives individuals develop for themselves in reaction to feedback about their achievements. When applied to the purpose of the present study, this signifies the importance of enabling learners to understand their own collaborative work problems in comparison to their performance. Thus, as a crucial factor in determining the success or failure in collaborative work, cognitive motivation needs be investigated in relation to free-riding. In other words, there is a necessity to understand whether cognitive motivation is related to learners’ free-riding tendencies which has been largely overlooked in the literature as of yet.
Personality Factors

There are many personality theories which are concerned with factors that determine and explain different individual's personalities as they are. All these different personality theories present their own definitions based on their theoretical positions and field of study. These definitions are defined as a particular combination of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral response patterns of an individual (Gosling et al., 2003; Khezrlou, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Khezrlou, Ellis & Sadeghi, 2017; Rammstedt, & John 2007). Moreover, in many theories, an individual is viewed as “structured entity with defined contents, what is called personality maintains its character despite circumstances” (Gandlin, 1994, p. 1).

One of the most acceptable theory in psychological and behavioral research is the ‘big five theory’ (Hazrati-Vari et al., 2012) that was first given by Costa & McCare (1992). It organizes individual differences in social and emotional life into five dimensions, labeled as extraversion, neuroticism (or emotional stability), agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Extraversion indicates the sociability of the person and the experiences with positive impacts while neuroticism represents the impact of negative experiences like depression and anxiety (Dalpé, J. et al., 2019). Agreeableness represents the degree of friendliness, compliance, and consistent growth of attending in class, (Lounsbury et al., 2003). Raza and Shah (2017) state that conscientiousness shows how much a person is organized and careful, and finally openness shows the priorities of a person in different situations, her /his imagination and curiosity.

A number of interesting theories that deal with the underlying problems have been developed which mostly suggest that free-riding is not simply a blatant effort (or lack thereof) to avoid doing work. For example, Webb (1997) suggests that free-riding may be involuntary and a result of feeling inadequate or not competent to complete the assigned tasks. This may especially be true for those with concerns about their communication skills, such as some international students for whom English (if English is the medium of instruction) is not their first language. International students may be doubly tasked with the project requirements as well as communication issues. An even simpler situation, such as a shy student not fully understanding project or task requirements, could also explain an instance of free-riding. Dommeyer (2007) also suggests that feelings of inadequacy could lead a student to believe that his or her lack of contribution to the project would go unnoticed. Instead, group members may believe it to be intentional free-riding.

To summarize, these different personality dimensions can potentially affect learners’ tendencies to avoid dynamic contribution to the collaborative activities in the classroom. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to examine the personality dimensions of EFL learners in relation to their free-riding attitudes.

Attitudes towards Group Work

Group work has developed into an increasingly valuable component of all education levels (Hall & Buzwell, 2013) providing students with pseudo-workplace projects that allow the opportunity to gain valuable teamwork experience and has the potentiality to enhance abilities such as communication and
group skills (McCorkle et al., 1999). Group work has always been an inseparable part of our life from the very early history of human, from hunting and battles to surviving by our ancestors. Singh, Wang and Zhu (2018) state that social groups have significant values in social media to pass free time or to share information and to promote learning in every field of educational system. A number of factors make group projects an attractive method of teaching, learning and assessing. First, recent decades have seen changes in pedagogy following an increase in popularity of experiential student-centered learning over teacher-centered learning. This shift from a traditional rote-learning method to styles in which students are more able to play an active role in their learning allows them to ‘learn by doing’ (Allen & Seaman, 2006).

As indicated, the benefits of group work are many and its usage is proving to be an increasingly integral component of a well-rounded tertiary education. This belief is also considered so important by students since they stated that they believe group work to be valuable and to have many benefits (Lima, Carvalho, Assunçao Flores, & Van Hattum-Janssen, 2007; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014; Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2016; Sadeghi, Khezrlou & Modirkhameneh, 2017). However, it is reported in the literature that for a number of students, group work can be an unpleasant and preferably avoidable element of study – primarily due to experiences of working in dysfunctional groups (e.g., Aggrwal, O’Brien, 2008; Dommeyer, 2007; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003). Murphy (2017) explores the reversible trend of collaborative works’ effect on increasing job union membership. The research by Choi and Mantik (2017) evaluates group learning models’ pros and cons to promote level of learning in EFL classes. The literature also states that the primary grievance of group projects is not necessarily the project itself but rather the belief that some fellow group members receive a ‘free-ride’ by contributing little but receiving the same mark as other group members (Hurley & Allen, 2007). Nevertheless, there is apparently a need to explore whether the individual difference variables such as personality factors and cognitive motivation play a role in learners’ free-riding tendencies. Besides, the free-riding picture would be complete if we attempt to gain insights into both teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of it. The present study was an attempt to bridge these gaps.

**Methods**

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. 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. In sum, this study was guided by the following research questions:
RQ1: Is there any significant relationship between cognitive motivation and free riding tendency of low-intermediate, and upper-intermediate EFL learners?

RQ2: Is there any significant relationship between the big five factors of EFL learners’ personality traits and their free riding tendency?

RQ3: What are Iranian EFL learners’ attitudes and beliefs towards group work?

RQ4: What are Iranian EFL teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards group work?

Design of the study

The present study adopted a mixed-methods design to provide answers to the research questions. According to Greene et al. (1989), MMR studies with a complementarity purpose endeavor “elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method” (p. 259), attempting to reach a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of research results. As a result, they are distinct from those studies that have a triangulation objective, which aim at “convergence, corroboration, correspondence of results from the different methods” (p. 259), in order to boost the credibility of research findings. Nevertheless, both triangulation and complementarity designs are similar to what Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as well as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) call “parallel” designs, as quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed at the same time and autonomously until the interpretation stage, where inferences from the two types of data are combined, resulting in “meta-inferences” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 152). Distinct from these parallel designs, MMR research establishes the development and use of one research part through the use of one method (qualitative or quantitative) on the information obtained from a prior part using another method (Greene et al., 1989). They are thus “sequential exploratory mixed-methods” designs of Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 71) as well as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 153).

Participants

Participants in this study comprised 140 intermediate and upper-intermediate English as a foreign language (EFL) learners as well as 30 EFL teachers both in language schools of Boukan and Urmia. The convenience sampling was used in this study for the selection of participants based on the first researcher’s access to the participants. The participants included both male (N = 83) and female (N = 57) learners who varied in age from 15 to 25. Similarly, the teacher participants also included both genders (i.e., male (N = 11) and female (N = 19)) who were within the age range of 22 to 47. The first language of all participants was either Kurdish in Boukan or Azeri in Urmia. Learners’ language proficiency was determined through the Oxford Quick Placement test as a result of which low-intermediate (N = 70) and upper-intermediate (N = 70) groups were identified.

Picture-cued Oral Narrative Tasks
In order to examine learners’ group activities in the classroom, a series of picture-cued oral narrative tasks from Heaton (1975) were implemented. Participants in each group were asked to figure out the events taking place in the pictures and then narrate their part of the story (two out of six pictures for each group member) to the classroom. Participants could look at the picture during the narration. It is expected that the group activity narrative telling stimulated the meaning-focused activities in classroom context.

**Cognitive Motivation Questionnaire**

The researcher adopted a questionnaire developed by Schmidt, Boraie, and Kassabgy (1996), respectively. The questionnaire was designed on a 6-point Likert-scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” with values 1-6 assigned to each alternative. There are 50 items on the whole. The whole questionnaire was completed in a self-report style, with some demographic questions before the survey. Participants were asked to report their gender, years spent in English language learning until present, and their age. It needs to be noted that all of the questionnaires in this study were provided in two language versions, English and Persian in order to facilitate their understanding the meaning during the process of completing the survey. This is because the accuracy of comprehending the meaning of questions plays an important role in the process and results of the response. Since the Persian version of the questionnaire was examined and confirmed for its reliability as an equivalent measure to the original English version, participants could freely choose either language version to complete the survey. The reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha is reported in Table 2.

**Free Riding Tendency Questionnaire**

To examine the learners’ free riding, a questionnaire was developed by the researcher which explored if learners had ever encountered free-riding in their classes or not. The questionnaire also examined the learners’ responses in confronting free riders. Additionally, by using statements which delineate the free riding in group work and demanding the learners to explain their attitudes towards them, it was also made possible to look into free-riding tendency with more depth. The questionnaire comprises 12 items on a 6-point Likert-scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. It was subject to reliability analysis in a pilot study, the results of which are reported in Table 2.

**Attitudes toward Group Work Questionnaire**

Feelings toward Group Work Questionnaire is a 18-item questionnaire developed by Cantwell and Andrews (2002). Each item of the questionnaire is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” with values 1-5 assigned to each alternative. There are no reverse scoring for this questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire predict how students’ attitudes toward group work influence their learning and motivation. The reliability results of this questionnaire are presented in Table 2 below.

**Semi-structured Interview**
For the qualitative part of the study, more data were collected through the use of semi-structure interviews in order to obtain insights about student’s and teachers’ attitude toward free riding. The interviews were conducted with 10 percent of the learner participants and all teachers individually in a quiet room. The interview included three questions adapted from Brown (2008) for the purpose of the study. The results of the questionnaire predict how learners’ and teachers’ attitudes toward group work influence their learning and teaching respectively. The interview lasted for 15 min for each participant and their responses were recorded using a digital voice recorder. If they did not consent to the recording of their responses, the researcher took notes of the interviewees’ responses in a detailed format. In addition, the inter-rater reliability of the interview questions was computed using Cohen's Kappa test. The resulting Kappa of .97 and .98 indicate that both raters provided similar information about the learners’ and teachers’ interview questions, respectively. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1.  
**Inter-rater Reliability Results for Learner Interview and Teacher Interview**

|                         | value  | Asymp. Std. Error | Approx. T | Approx. Sig. |
|-------------------------|--------|-------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Learner Interview       | Measure of Agreement | .978   | 0.54         | 11.163       | .000         |
|                         | N of Valid Cases      | 2      |             |              |              |
| Teacher Interview       | Measure of Agreement | .983   | 0.59         | 12.325       | .000         |
|                         | N of Valid Cases      | 2      |             |              |              |

**The Big Five Factor Questionnaire**

The Big Five Factor Questionnaire (BFPTSQ) was used to measure the personality traits of the participants which is designed by Morizot (2014). The questionnaire includes 50 items and has been constructed to assess five areas of personality traits namely: Agreeable, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism, openness (10 items for each personality trait). The introduction sentence, “I see myself as someone who,” is presented at the top of the questionnaire items. The items appear on a 5-point Likert scale with labels from 1 to 5 (totally disagree = 1, disagree a little = 2, neutral opinion = 3, agree a little = 4, totally agree= 5). Learners were given 30 min to provide answers to this questionnaire. The results of Cronbach’s alpha for all questionnaires are presented in Table 2.
Table 2. 
**Reliability Results**

|                                | Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------|
| Personality Questionnaire      | .881             | .883                                        | 50         |
| Cognitive motivation questionnaire | .826             | .834                                        | 50         |
| Free-riding questionnaire      | .920             | .921                                        | 12         |
| Attitude questionnaire         | .940             | .942                                        | 18         |

In addition to the reliability analyses, the validity indexes of the questionnaires were also examined using exploratory factor analysis with a principal components analysis (see Appendix). After the varimax rotation, a five-factor solution for the cognitive motivation questionnaire, a four factor solution for the free-riding tendency questionnaire, a two factor solution for the attitude questionnaire, and a five factor solution for the personality questionnaire was found which accounted for 73.40%, 88.13%, 67.31% and 75.09% of the total variance respectively. These items met the criterion of loading above 1.0 on their related factor.

**Procedure**

Preliminarily, the Oxford Quick Placement Test was administered to ensure the proficiency level of participants. Following this, in order to ensure that the questionnaires that used in the study were reliable, a pilot study was carried out with a small sample group of learners (randomly chosen, N = 20) from among the participants.

In the second session, picture-cued oral narrative tasks were used as group activities. In the third session, the attitudes questionnaire was administered to the participants (both learners and teachers) in order to investigate their beliefs and attitudes towards the concept of free riding. To collect more data through direct contact, semi-structure interviews were conducted to inquire about both teachers’ and students’ attitude toward free riding. Participants were asked 3 questions and then they were asked about their attitude toward free riding and all their comments were recorded by voice recorder. 10% of each level of participants was interviewed.

In the fourth session, the second questionnaire which is about cognitive motivation was administered to the EFL learners and students were asked to fill out the questionnaire to make it clear if they were cognitively motivated or not. As the other phase of the study dealt with investigating what type of personality traits the learners had, in the same session, namely session 4, the big five factor questionnaire was administered to the learners. During these sessions the researcher attempted to find out about the
individual difference that explain the probable helpful personality factors in improving group work and reducing free riding problems.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative research questions, a series of Pearson correlation coefficients were carried out. These were run after ensuring the normal distribution of the scores through the conduction of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests which verified the normal distribution (p > .05).

The interviews were transcribed and their content was analyzed through content analysis of the attitude of the participants toward group work activities, and they were compared to each other. The constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as a flexible approach to content analysis was used in this study as is shown in Figure 2.

Results

To investigate the first research question on the relationship between cognitive motivation and free riding tendency of low-intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners, a Pearson correlation coefficient was carried out. First, the results of descriptive statistics for the low-intermediate learners are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Free-Riding and Motivation for Low-Intermediate Learners

|                | Mean  | Std. Deviation | N  |
|----------------|-------|----------------|----|
| Free-riding    | 41.3714 | 12.84825       | 70 |
| Motivation     | 175.3714 | 53.38218       | 70 |

Table 4.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results for Free-Riding and Motivation for Low-Intermediate Learners

|                | Free-riding | motivation |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Free-riding    | Pearson Correlation 1 | -.829**    |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed) .000   | .000       |
|                | N 70         | 70         |
| motivation     | Pearson Correlation -.829** | 1         |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed) .000   | .000       |
|                | N 70         | 70         |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
As Table 4 shows, there is a significant, negative, and large ($p = .000, r = -.82$) relationship between the low-intermediate learners’ motivation and their free-riding tendencies.

The results obtained from the relationship between the cognitive motivation and free riding tendency of upper-intermediate learners are exhibited in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5.

**Descriptive Statistics for Free-Riding and Motivation for Upper-Intermediate Learners**

|          | Mean   | Std. Deviation | N  |
|----------|--------|----------------|----|
| freeriding2 | 44.6000 | 11.22032       | 70 |
| motivation | 167.6857 | 53.30893      | 70 |

Table 6.

**Pearson Correlation Coefficient Results for Free-Riding and Motivation for Upper-Intermediate Learners**

|          | Free-riding | motivation |
|----------|-------------|------------|
| Free-riding | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.782** |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | | .000 |
| N | 70 | 70 |
| Motivation | Pearson Correlation | -.782** | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| N | 70 | 70 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As Table 6 shows, there is a significant, negative, and large ($p = .000, r = -.78$) relationship between the upper-intermediate learners’ motivation and their free-riding tendencies.

To investigate the second quantitative question on the relationship between the big five factors of EFL learners’ personality traits and their free riding tendency, a Pearson correlation coefficient was carried out. Results are demonstrated in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7.

**Descriptive Statistics for Free-Riding and Personality Traits**
Table 8.

Correlation Results for Free-Riding and Personality Traits

|                     | freeriding2 | agreeable | conscientiousness | extroversion | neuroticism | openness |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|-------------|----------|
| Free-riding         | 1           | -.863**   | -.830**           | -.785**      | .761**      | -.849**  |
| Agreeable           | .000        | .000      | .000              | .000         | .000        | .000     |
| Conscientiousness   | .000        | .000      | .000              | .000         | .000        | .000     |
| Extroversion        | .000        | .000      | .000              | .000         | .000        | .000     |
| Neuroticism         | .000        | .000      | .000              | .000         | .000        | .000     |
| Openness            | .000        | .000      | .000              | .000         | .000        | .000     |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results of Table 8 highlight the significant, negative and strong relationship between free-riding and agreeable (p = .000, r = -.86), free-riding and conscientiousness (p = .000, r = -.83), free-riding and extroversion (p = .000, r = -.78) and free-riding and openness (p = .000, r = -.84). These findings imply that learners’ agreeable, conscientiousness, extroversion and openness are negatively related to free-riding. Results for neuroticism, on the other hand, reveal a positive and significant relationship (p = .000, r = .76) with free-riding.

RQ3: What are Iranian EFL learners’ attitudes and beliefs towards group work?

The results of semi-structured interview analysis as well as the attitude questionnaire were used to provide an answer to this research question. Tables 9 and 10 present the results of descriptive statistics for learners’ responses to the questionnaire items.

Table 9.

Descriptive Statistics for Attitude Questionnaire of Low-Intermediate Learners
| Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. I enjoy working within a group. | 1.00 | 9 | 12.9 | 12.9 |
| 2.00 | 32 | 45.7 | 45.7 | 58.6 |
| 3.00 | 20 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 87.1 |
| 4.00 | 5 | 7.1 | 7.1 | 94.3 |
| 5.00 | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 2. I sometimes feel nervous when I have to give my ideas or communicate within a group. | 1.00 | 5 | 7.1 | 7.1 |
| 2.00 | 11 | 15.7 | 15.7 | 22.9 |
| 3.00 | 16 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 45.7 |
| 4.00 | 23 | 32.9 | 32.9 | 72.9 |
| 5.00 | 19 | 27.1 | 27.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 3. I understand information better after explaining it to others in group. | 1.00 | 2 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| 2.00 | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 8.6 |
| 3.00 | 16 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 31.4 |
| 4.00 | 25 | 35.7 | 35.7 | 67.1 |
| 5.00 | 23 | 32.9 | 32.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 4. I often find it difficult to understand what the group task is. | 1.00 | 3 | 4.3 | 4.3 |
| 2.00 | 8 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 15.7 |
| 3.00 | 19 | 27.1 | 27.1 | 42.9 |
| 4.00 | 23 | 32.9 | 32.9 | 75.7 |
| 5.00 | 17 | 24.3 | 24.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 5. I like to work alone even when placed in a group. | 1.00 | 17 | 24.3 | 24.3 |
| 2.00 | 29 | 41.4 | 41.4 | 65.7 |
| 3.00 | 16 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 88.6 |
| 4.00 | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 94.3 |
| 5.00 | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 6. I prefer to work within a group rather than work alone. | 1.00 | 6 | 8.6 | 8.6 |
| 2.00 | 15 | 21.4 | 21.4 | 30.0 |
| 3.00 | 13 | 18.6 | 18.6 | 48.6 |
| 4.00 | 16 | 22.9 | 22.9 | 71.4 |
| 5.00 | 20 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 7. I often have a strong satisfaction feeling when I become totally involved in a group achievement. | 1.00 | 2 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| 2.00 | 7 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 12.9 |
| 3.00 | 22 | 31.4 | 31.4 | 44.3 |
| 4.00 | 18 | 25.7 | 25.7 | 70.0 |
| 5.00 | 21 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| 8. It is important that other group members take responsibility | 1.00 | 2 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| 2.00 | 3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 7.1 |
| 3.00 | 9 | 12.9 | 12.9 | 20.0 |
| 4.00 | 24 | 34.3 | 34.3 | 54.3 |
| 5.00 | 32 | 45.7 | 45.7 | 100.0 |
|                                                                 |   |     |     |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|
| 9. I usually make a strong personal contribution to group work. |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| 2.00                                                             | 9 | 12.9| 12.9| 18.6|
| 3.00                                                             | 7 | 10.0| 10.0| 28.6|
| 4.00                                                             | 29| 41.4| 41.4| 70.0|
| 5.00                                                             | 21| 30.0| 30.0| 100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 10. I am often afraid to ask for help within my group.           |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.3 |
| 2.00                                                             | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 10.0|
| 3.00                                                             | 6 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 18.6|
| 4.00                                                             | 34| 48.6| 48.6| 67.1|
| 5.00                                                             | 23| 32.9| 32.9|100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 11. I like group work more when we can make up our own groups.   |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 1 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| 2.00                                                             | 6 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 10.0|
| 3.00                                                             | 15| 21.4| 21.4| 31.4|
| 4.00                                                             | 20| 28.6| 28.6| 60.0|
| 5.00                                                             | 28| 40.0| 40.0|100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 12. I do not like to study within a group.                       |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 15| 21.4| 21.4| 21.4|
| 2.00                                                             | 30| 42.9| 42.9| 64.3|
| 3.00                                                             | 12| 17.1| 17.1| 81.4|
| 4.00                                                             | 6 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 90.0 |
| 5.00                                                             | 7 | 10.0| 10.0|100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 13. I can usually understand other group members’ ideas.         |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 8 | 11.4| 11.4|11.4 |
| 2.00                                                             | 12| 17.1| 17.1|28.6 |
| 3.00                                                             | 15| 21.4| 21.4|50.0 |
| 4.00                                                             | 17| 24.3| 24.3|74.3 |
| 5.00                                                             | 18| 25.7| 25.7|100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 14. When groups are well-organized, I don’t believe there is a more effective way of using class time. |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 12| 17.1| 17.1|17.1 |
| 2.00                                                             | 21| 30.0| 30.0|47.1 |
| 3.00                                                             | 13| 18.6| 18.6|65.7 |
| 4.00                                                             | 13| 18.6| 18.6|84.3 |
| 5.00                                                             | 11| 15.7| 15.7|100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 15. It is best when each person helps each other within a group. |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 4 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| 2.00                                                             | 6 | 8.6 | 8.6 |14.3 |
| 3.00                                                             | 16| 22.9| 22.9|37.1 |
| 4.00                                                             | 15| 21.4| 21.4|58.6 |
| 5.00                                                             | 29| 41.4| 41.4|100.0|
| **Total**                                                        | 70| 100.0|100.0|100.0|
| 16. I often think the work becomes too confusing when done in a group |   |     |     |     |
| 1.00                                                             | 17| 24.3| 24.3|24.3 |
| 2.00                                                             | 27| 38.6| 38.6|62.9 |
| 3.00                                                             | 12| 17.1| 17.1|80.0 |
| 4.00                                                             | 7 | 10.0| 10.0|90.0 |
rather than individually.

|                                | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
|--------------------------------|----|-------|-------|-------|
| 17. I rarely feel relaxed within a group. | 1.00 | 11    | 15.7  | 15.7  | 15.7 |
|                                | 2.00 | 20    | 28.6  | 28.6  | 44.3 |
|                                | 3.00 | 9     | 12.9  | 12.9  | 57.1 |
|                                | 4.00 | 15    | 21.4  | 21.4  | 78.6 |
|                                | 5.00 | 15    | 21.4  | 21.4  | 100.0 |
| Total                          | 70  | 100.0 | 100.0 |       |

|                                | 70 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
|                                | 1.00 | 9     | 12.9  | 12.9  | 12.9 |
|                                | 2.00 | 24    | 34.3  | 34.3  | 47.1 |
|                                | 3.00 | 15    | 21.4  | 21.4  | 68.6 |
|                                | 4.00 | 12    | 17.1  | 17.1  | 85.7 |
|                                | 5.00 | 10    | 14.3  | 14.3  | 100.0 |
| Total                          | 70  | 100.0 | 100.0 |       |

Table 10.

*Descriptive Statistics for Attitude Questionnaire of Upper-Intermediate Learners*
| S. No. | Item                                                                 | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1.    | I enjoy working within a group.                                       | 1.00      | 7       | 10.0          | 10.0              |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 22      | 31.4          | 41.4              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 20      | 28.6          | 70.0              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 12      | 17.1          | 87.1              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 9       | 12.9          | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 2.    | I sometimes feel nervous when I have to give my ideas or communicate within a group. | 1.00      | 13      | 18.6          | 18.6              |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 27      | 38.6          | 57.1              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 17      | 24.3          | 81.4              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 8       | 11.4          | 92.9              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 5       | 7.1           | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 3.    | I understand information better after explaining it to others in group. | 1.00      | 6       | 8.6           | 8.6               |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 13      | 18.6          | 27.1              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 18      | 25.7          | 52.9              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 15      | 21.4          | 74.3              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 18      | 25.7          | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 4.    | I often find it difficult to understand what the group task is.       | 1.00      | 6       | 8.6           | 8.6               |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 24      | 34.3          | 42.9              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 22      | 31.4          | 74.3              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 10      | 14.3          | 88.6              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 8       | 11.4          | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 5.    | I like to work alone even when placed in a group.                     | 1.00      | 18      | 25.7          | 25.7              |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 31      | 44.3          | 70.0              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 15      | 21.4          | 91.4              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 4       | 5.7           | 97.1              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 2       | 2.9           | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 6.    | I prefer to work within a group rather than work alone.               | 1.00      | 5       | 7.1           | 7.1               |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 9       | 12.9          | 20.0              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 8       | 11.4          | 31.4              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 17      | 24.3          | 55.7              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 31      | 44.3          | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 7.    | I often have a strong satisfaction feeling when I become totally involved in a group achievement. | 1.00      | 1       | 1.4           | 1.4               |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 1       | 1.4           | 2.9               |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 8       | 11.4          | 14.3              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 26      | 37.1          | 51.4              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 34      | 48.6          | 100.0             |
|       | **Total**                                                            | **70**    | **100.0** | **100.0**     |                   |
| 8.    | It is important that other group members take responsibility.         | 1.00      | 5       | 7.1           | 7.1               |
|       |                                                                      | 2.00      | 5       | 7.1           | 14.3              |
|       |                                                                      | 3.00      | 5       | 7.1           | 21.4              |
|       |                                                                      | 4.00      | 18      | 25.7          | 47.1              |
|       |                                                                      | 5.00      | 37      | 52.9          | 100.0             |
|                          | Total | 70  | 100.0 | 100.0 |
|--------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| 9. I usually make a strong personal contribution to group work. |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 10    | 14.3| 14.3  | 14.3  |
| 2.00                     | 13    | 18.6| 18.6  | 32.9  |
| 3.00                     | 7     | 10.0| 10.0  | 42.9  |
| 4.00                     | 16    | 22.9| 22.9  | 65.7  |
| 5.00                     | 24    | 34.3| 34.3  | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 10. I am often afraid to ask for help within my group.   |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 4     | 5.7 | 5.7   | 5.7   |
| 2.00                     | 9     | 12.9| 12.9  | 18.6  |
| 3.00                     | 6     | 8.6 | 8.6   | 27.1  |
| 4.00                     | 22    | 31.4| 31.4  | 58.6  |
| 5.00                     | 29    | 41.4| 41.4  | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 11. I like group work more when we can make up our own groups. |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 3     | 4.3 | 4.3   | 4.3   |
| 2.00                     | 6     | 8.6 | 8.6   | 12.9  |
| 3.00                     | 10    | 14.3| 14.3  | 27.1  |
| 4.00                     | 24    | 34.3| 34.3  | 61.4  |
| 5.00                     | 27    | 38.6| 38.6  | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 12. I do not like to study within a group.                |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 29    | 41.4| 41.4  | 41.4  |
| 2.00                     | 30    | 42.9| 42.9  | 84.3  |
| 3.00                     | 5     | 7.1 | 7.1   | 91.4  |
| 4.00                     | 4     | 5.7 | 5.7   | 97.1  |
| 5.00                     | 2     | 2.9 | 2.9   | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 13. I can usually understand other group members’ ideas. |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 6     | 8.6 | 8.6   | 8.6   |
| 2.00                     | 3     | 4.3 | 4.3   | 12.9  |
| 3.00                     | 10    | 14.3| 14.3  | 27.1  |
| 4.00                     | 17    | 24.3| 24.3  | 51.4  |
| 5.00                     | 34    | 48.6| 48.6  | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 14. When groups are well-organized, I don’t believe there is a more effective way of using class time. |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 11    | 15.7| 15.7  | 15.7  |
| 2.00                     | 11    | 15.7| 15.7  | 31.4  |
| 3.00                     | 4     | 5.7 | 5.7   | 37.1  |
| 4.00                     | 22    | 31.4| 31.4  | 68.6  |
| 5.00                     | 22    | 31.4| 31.4  | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 15. It is best when each person helps each other within a group. |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 3     | 4.3 | 4.3   | 4.3   |
| 2.00                     | 6     | 8.6 | 8.6   | 12.9  |
| 3.00                     | 11    | 15.7| 15.7  | 28.6  |
| 4.00                     | 21    | 30.0| 30.0  | 58.6  |
| 5.00                     | 29    | 41.4| 41.4  | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 70    | 100.0| 100.0 |       |
| 16. I often think the work becomes too confusing when done in a group. |       |     |       |       |
| 1.00                     | 17    | 24.3| 24.3  | 24.3  |
| 2.00                     | 23    | 32.9| 32.9  | 57.1  |
| 3.00                     | 7     | 10.0| 10.0  | 67.1  |
| 4.00                     | 13    | 18.6| 18.6  | 85.7  |
rather than individually.

| 5.00 | 10  | 14.3 | 14.3 | 100.0 |
|------|-----|------|------|-------|
| 1.00 | 13  | 18.6 | 18.6 | 18.6  |
| 2.00 | 20  | 28.6 | 28.6 | 47.1  |
| 3.00 | 3   | 4.3  | 4.3  | 51.4  |
| 4.00 | 17  | 24.3 | 24.3 | 75.7  |
| 5.00 | 17  | 24.3 | 24.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70  | 100.0| 100.0|       |

18. I sometimes feel let down by other group members.

| 5.00 | 10  | 14.3 | 14.3 | 100.0 |
|------|-----|------|------|-------|
| 1.00 | 13  | 18.6 | 18.6 | 18.6  |
| 2.00 | 25  | 35.7 | 35.7 | 54.3  |
| 3.00 | 12  | 17.1 | 17.1 | 71.4  |
| 4.00 | 10  | 14.3 | 14.3 | 85.7  |
| 5.00 | 10  | 14.3 | 14.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 70  | 100.0| 100.0|       |

Results pointed out the learners’ positive attitudes on the whole towards group work. Both the low-intermediate and upper-intermediate participants believed that most of the comments from their group members, particularly those about the meaning and idea development of their stories, were effective in terms of their preparation for the task and its outcome. For example, a participant from the low-intermediate group added: “Our group work was successful. We talked about each other's part to see if our stories were clear and complete”. Another upper-intermediate learner commented: “This was a good activity, I think. I was able to reflect on the content of my narrative and improve its purpose and language. Other’s comments were useful although they didn’t give many comments. Some comments were related to the order of events in my part. I think the comments were good”.

In the interviews, a low-intermediate learner also mentioned other learning opportunities in group work: “It’s a good learning experience. By taking part in this activity, I can know how others prepare and tell their narratives. I can also try to avoid making mistakes that are made by my group members. Both the teacher and other members gave me some objective comments, which helped me understand and eliminate the problems with my story”. As shown in the data, high proficiency learners held positive attitudes towards participation in group work as ‘a good learning experience’ and found themselves benefiting from this activity by reviewing other peers’ language.

In addition to the advantages associated with story preparation, learners also believed that working with peers in group work could develop their cooperative spirit and help them overcome speaking problems through group cooperation. One upper-intermediate learner noted that “cooperation is very essential for successful speaking skill development. I think this activity can raise our understanding of the need to cooperate”. Similarly, an upper-intermediate participant stated that being involved in the group activities helped his own speaking skills”. He went on to emphasize that the “feedback he received from his friends triggered his reflection on his speaking and self-revisions. His modifications developed from and reflected better audience awareness”. On the contrary, one upper-intermediate participant did not think that group work was helpful for her learning and did not have a role in improving his narrative ability: “I think it's a waste of time to do group work activities in classrooms. I am not certain if the feedback can help me
improve the quality of my English speaking”. This comment reflects that Iranian learners are not very positive about peer feedback tasks.

**RQ4: What are Iranian EFL teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards group work?**

The majority of teachers acknowledged that their objectives for encouraging group work and providing scaffolding were to develop both cognitive and collaborative skills for their learners. Teachers’ general ideas were: “group work facilitates learners’ development of problem-solving and helping skills”. They believed that explicitly referring to the collaborative dimensions of group work in which learners should enhance social interaction and advance social and collaborative skills is an important component of every language classroom. One teacher identified a reason for establishing collaborative goals of group work. First, she considered “group work a means for achieving the course objectives. Group work is an effective teaching method that is used to help learners gain knowledge and solve tasks quickly in groups”. Almost all of teachers emphasized that they gave value to both cognitive achievement and social outcomes. An example was, “although we think that the main purpose of instruction is to enable learners use their English effectively in real-world context, this purpose can only be realized when our learners have the crucial self-esteem and social skills to use the language and interact with the speakers of that language”.

Teacher underscored the significance of social interaction from the beginning levels: “It’s necessary to enhance knowledge, but more importantly, I also have purposes of constructing effective relationships with learners to improve their social skills. Only if learners can understand and behave well with one another, can they work more successfully”. The realization of this purpose, therefore, led teachers to share these goals with their learners and underlined developing collaborative skills in the class. In sum, most teachers paid due attention to collaborative goals with respect to developing social and collaborative skills.

There were, however, a number of obstacles that were specified by teachers which their believed to hamper them from engaging in collaborative group works at times. One obstacle was the homogeneity of learners with regard to their level of proficiency. The teachers acknowledged that although the activities for the purpose of the present study was carried out with homogenous level learners, in some occasions, learners in a class might not be at similar levels which make their management of the group work challenging. Another barrier identified by the teachers was the time of the classroom: “we are usually expected to cover the identified syllabus in the classroom… this makes it difficult to use a plethora of group work in the class since they take up a lot of time”. The third issue is assessment. While the majority of the participating teachers substantially focused on assessing group productivity (e.g. outcome of tasks and the gained knowledge of learners), some teachers assessed the collaborative process, namely the ways learners enacted the activities. According to one teacher: “We don’t have detailed criteria to evaluate the way learners work in groups. Because of this, learners may be not so motivated to collaborate”. And, the teachers that assessed the collaborative process, they all were of the same opinion that they encountered challenges in assessing the group work process. First, they were unable to observe
how learners collaborated, for example: ‘I assessed group learning mainly according to the eventual outcome. Through group report or diary, I could keep record of whether a member took part actively in that group. It’s difficult to come up with precise evaluations of how learners collaborate”. Second, in spite of teachers’ use of peer-assessment, they did not always trust the validity of learners’ ratings: ‘Students particularly those at lower levels need teachers’ assistance because sometime their peers’ feedback might not be correct and so they can be misleading”. Third, these teachers asserted that their challenges in assessing and carrying out the collaborative process may also be due to large classes (normally around 40 to 60 students per class) and lack of assessment criteria: “in some classes, there are over 50 students. So I can’t manage effectively their group activities. A maximum of 20–25 students is more appropriate and feasible”.

Table 11.

Results of Exploratory Factors Analysis Cognitive Motivation Questionnaire
| Component |   1  |   2  |   3  |   4  |   5  |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|
| item1     |      | .932 |      |      |      |
| item2     |      |      | .684 |      |      |
| item3     |      |      | .982 |      |      |
| item4     |      |      | .767 |      |      |
| item5     |      |      | .943 |      |      |
| item6     |      |      |      | .892 |      |
| item7     |      |      |      | - .972 |      |
| item8     |      |      |      |      | .961 |
| item9     |      |      |      | .961 |      |
| item10    |      |      |      | .875 |      |
| item11    |      |      |      |      | .961 |
| item12    |      |      |      |      | .904 |
| item13    |      |      |      | .934 |      |
| item14    |      |      |      | .931 |      |
| item15    |      |      |      | - .939 |      |
| item16    |      |      |      | .980 |      |
| item17    |      |      | .908 |      |      |
| item18    |      |      | - .891 |      |      |
| item19    |      |      | .948 |      |      |
| item20    |      |      | - .969 |      |      |
| item21    |      |      |      |      | .954 |
| item22    |      |      |      |      | .748 |
| item23    |      |      |      | .956 |      |
| item24    |      |      |      |      | .941 |
| item25    |      |      |      | .968 |      |
| item26    |      |      |      |      | .896 |
| item27    |      |      |      |      | .886 |
| item28    |      |      |      |      | .882 |
| item29    |      |      |      | .935 |      |
| item30    |      |      |      |      | .957 |
| Item31    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Item32    |      |      |      |      | .888 |
| Item33    |      |      |      |      | .897 |
| Item34    |      |      |      | .975 |      |
| Item35    |      |      |      | .932 |      |
| Item36    |      |      |      | .678 |      |
| Item37    |      |      |      | .785 |      |
| Item38    |      |      |      |      | .849 |
| Item39    |      |      |      |      | .904 |
| Item40    |      |      |      |      | .912 |
| Item41    |      |      |      | .869 |      |
| Item42    |      |      |      |      | .783 |
| Item   | Loading |
|--------|---------|
| Item43 |         |
| Item44 | .674    |
| Item45 | .819    |
| Item46 |         |
| Item47 | .892    |
| Item48 | .766    |
| Item49 |         |
| Item50 | .799    |
| Item50 | .670    |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Table 12.

Results of Exploratory Factors Analysis of Free Riding Tendency Questionnaire
|       | Component |
|-------|----------|
|       | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   |
| item1 |      | .824| .117|
| item2 | .312 | .585| .524|
| item3 | -.214| -.169| -.468|
| item4 | -.110| .878| .220|
| item5 |      |  .944|
| item6 |      |      |  .915|
| item7 | -.155| .195 | .773|
| item8 |      |  .216|  .764|
| item9 |      |  .951|
| item10|      |  .813|  .431|
| item11|      |      |  .875|
| item12|      |      |  .945|

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

Table 13.

*Results of Exploratory Factors Analysis of Attitudes toward Group Work Questionnaire*
| Item   | Component 1 | Component 2 |
|--------|-------------|-------------|
| item 1 | .954        |             |
| item 2 | .954        |             |
| item 3 | .954        |             |
| item 4 | .929        | .813        |
| item 5 |             | .638        |
| item 6 |             | .915        |
| item 7 | .887        |             |
| item 8 | .669        | .409        |
| item 9 |             | .787        |
| item 10|             | .771        |
| item 11| .931        | .446        |
| item 12|             |             |
| item 13| .944        |             |
| item 14|             |             |
| item 15| .958        |             |
| item 16| .875        | .578        |
| item 17|             |             |
| item 18| .637        |             |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
a. Rotation converged in 2 iterations.

Table 14.

*Results of Exploratory Factors Analysis of Big Five Factor Questionnaire*
|    | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| item1 | 0.964 |     |     |     |     |
| item2 | 0.964 |     |     |     |     |
| item3 | 0.932 |     |     |     |     |
| item4 |     |     |     | -0.819 |     |
| item5 | 0.932 |     |     |     |     |
| item6 | 0.911 |     |     |     |     |
| item7 |     |     | -0.516 | 0.699 |     |
| item8 | 0.842 |     |     | 0.401 |     |
| item9 | 0.869 |     |     |     |     |
| item10 | 0.875 |     |     |     |     |
| item11 |     |     |     | 0.550 |     |
| item12 | 0.633 |     | -0.476 |     |     |
| item13 | 0.908 |     |     |     |     |
| item14 |     |     | -0.757 |     |     |
| item15 | 0.847 |     |     |     |     |
| item16 | 0.965 |     |     |     |     |
| item17 |     | 0.633 |     | -0.422 |     |
| item18 |     |     | 0.944 |     |     |
| item19 | 0.463 |     |     | 0.761 |     |
| item20 | 0.825 |     |     |     |     |
| item21 | 0.859 |     |     |     |     |
| item22 |     | 0.585 |     | 0.602 |     |
| item23 |     |     |     | 0.857 |     |
| item24 |     |     |     | 0.794 |     |
| item25 |     |     |     | 0.823 |     |
| item26 |     | -0.461 |     | -0.541 | 0.423 |
| item27 |     |     |     |     | 0.678 |
| item28 |     |     |     |     | 0.789 |
| item29 |     |     |     |     | 0.666 |
| item30 |     |     |     |     | 0.578 |
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Discussion

This study attempted to figure out the degree to which the motivation and personality traits of L2 learners were related to their free riding tendencies. With regard to the former, it was found that learners’ motivation was significantly correlated with their group work tendencies. This finding lends credence to Gardner’s socioeducational model of second language acquisition which considers motivation to comprise motivational intensity, desire to learn and attitudes towards learning the L2. More particularly, the findings of the present study revealed that learners’ motivation in terms of their attempts to take part in collaborative work and their positive attitudes towards groups work (see the discussion of the third
research question below) were related to their free-riding inclinations. This result is also in line with the study by Clement et al. (1994) which revealed a relationship at the more macro-level between learners’ understanding of group cohesiveness and their L2 motivation. The connection between effective group work and motivation also mirrors Ushioda’s (2007) concept of motivation as a socially mediated process in which a strong intrapersonal motivation should be advocated by appropriate interpersonal interactions and/or scaffolding within a positive social context (Curseu, Ilies, Virga, Maricutoiu & Sava, 2018). Similarly, in the classroom, to encourage motivated group work, there is a need for the development of positive interpersonal group dynamic behaviors between and among group members (Khezrlou, 2020a, 2020b).

Another important finding of the study was the essential role of personality traits. Since group activities are social in nature, agreeableness, and extraversion, as interpersonal traits and conscientiousness as task-related trait are expected to affect teamwork success via interpersonal negotiations, cooperative group criteria and task engagement (Carter et al., 2014; Gonzalez-Mulé, DeGeest, McCormick, Seong, & Brown, 2014). Extraverts are likely to be active during group activities and are more involved in group interactions. Therefore, as the findings of Curseu, Ilies, Virga, Maricutoiu and Sava (2018) have indicated extraversion is positively related with effective group work skills. Agreeableness is another personality dimension that was closely related to the participants’ low free riding tendencies. Agreeableness is especially pertinent to group work since it is a fundamental aspect of individual-environment fit particularly in contexts including interpersonal conflict (Ilies, Johnson, Judge, & Keeney, 2011). As another dimension of the Big Five Model, agreeableness was correlated with low free riding tendency in the present study, consistent with other studies (Curseu et al., 2018; Graziano & Tobin, 2002). The possible explanation for this is that agreeableness is related with the willingness to communicate and appropriate conflict management skills, making it positively related to effective group work. Conscientiousness has also been shown to be related to less free riding in line with other studies (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991). It is a strong determiner of individual-based performance due to the high accomplishment motivation of conscientious individuals (e.g., Richardson & Abraham, 2009). Lastly, even though it is known that openness to experience could also be non-linearly associated with learning outcomes (Bozionelos et al., 2014; Vasilopoulos, Cucina, & Hunter, 2007) and such non-linearity could be theoretically grounded (McCord et al., 2014), it is presumed that empirical evidence is not adequate to conceptualize that openness to experience has a non-linear relation with group work. Neuroticism, in contrast, is a global determiner of maladaptive functioning (Claridge & Davis, 2001), and was investigated as a predictor of counterproductive group behaviors (Duffy, Shaw, Scott, & Tepper, 2006; Le et al., 2011; Ohana, 2016). This is because neurotic individuals, as was the case in the present study as well, are less central in the advice and friendship relations in groups (Fang et al., 2015; Klein, Lim, Saltz, & Mayer, 2004) and often produce negative interpersonal dynamics and negative affectivity in groups (LePine et al., 2011). Hence, neuroticism has an association with ineffective contributions to group work.

Regarding the teachers’ and learners’ attitudes to group work, it was found that, generally speaking, learners held positive attitudes towards collaborative interaction through group work. Nevertheless, the learners who expressed particular disadvantages of group work should also not be ignored. It can be
noted that the most noteworthy drawback is unequal participation of all members of the group in activities, which was also found in previous research (Basta, 2011). This inequality, however, can be explicited with respect to the differences in learners’ learning styles. In order to overcome this issue, teachers need to specify what learners belong to which learning style type and to motivate these learners so that they also contribute to group work.

**Conclusion**

Through a positive group work environment with low free riding tendency, L2 learners can foster each other’s motivation and enhance opportunities for linguistic development. Throughout this process, a positive socio-emotional pattern (Hatfield et al., 1994) appears in which group members encourage each other and regularize and harmonize their cognitive, motivational, and emotional reactions. As a preliminary stage to accomplishing positive group work environments, teachers need to attend to creating a positive whole class dynamic. This can be attained by modeling a natural eagerness and satisfaction; integrating humor; setting up group norms; carrying out icebreaker activities and playing games; consistently modifying seating arrangements so that learners get opportunities to interact and be acquainted with different classmates; and organizing the physical features of the classroom which cultivates an optimal environment for interactive communication. Furthermore, it is suggested that learners be informed about the several benefits of group work and cooperation and to also receive instruction and practice in the development of different collaborative group work skills.

The findings of this study bear significant implications for English language teaching in Iran. Language teaching has been mainly based on the structural view of language learning with little attention to the sociocultural element of communicative competence and the evaluation process is mostly based on the transmission view of learning. Approaches of language learning must be shifted from the traditional view of the learner as a passive absorber of information and knowledge provided by the teacher. Teachers, students, officials, and administrative should change their mentality to encourage those forms of language teaching in which students and teachers jointly engage in knowledge making and in which teachers progressively turn over metacognitive functions to the students, so that students can be instructed how to learn. In so doing, understanding learners’ individual characteristics, their preferences for group/pair work, the barriers that stop them from effectively contributing to group work, ways to motivate them need be taken into consideration. Since in the Iranian or other EFL contexts, learners have limited opportunities to use the language outside the classroom, the development of virtual learning and E-education approaches that foster collaborative learning seem promising. Nevertheless, since there has been limited research on free-riding in virtual environments, it would be worthwhile to explore learners’ free-riding tendencies in those contexts as well.

Although the present study has offered empirical support to theoretical perspectives on L2 motivation and personality traits and effective group work that underscore the significant role of the social context and of group impacts, it is vital to bear in mind that the study was conducted in a specific cultural context with a small number of participants. In addition, the limitations imposed by the correlation research
design should also be acknowledged. Lastly, this study did not explore the role that other individual difference variables such as working memory, learning age, proficiency and gender might play in reducing or increasing the learners’ free riding. As this line of inquiry is still in its infancy, it is hoped that the results of the present study motivate further research to delve into the existent ambiguities.

Declarations

Availability of data and materials:

The dataset for this study can be provided upon request.

Competing interests:

The authors have no competing interests.

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**Figures**
Figure 1

Socio-educational model of second language acquisition (Gardner 2001)
Figure 2

Constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)