

# **EXPLORING FREE RIDING IN GROUP PROJECT DURING ONLINE LEARNING : A PERSPECTIVE FROM STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**FAKULTI SENI, KOMPUTERAN & INDUSTRI KREATIF  
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS**

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EXPLORING FREE-RIDING IN GROUP PROJECT DURING ONLINE LEARNING: A PERSPECTIVE FROM  
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LAPORAN PROJEK TAHUN AKHIR DIKEMUKAKAN BAGI MEMENUHI SYARAT UNTUK MEMPEROLEH  
IJAZAH SARJANA MUDA PENDIDIKAN

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A Perspective From Students In Higher Education

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## ABSTRAK

This study explored free riding in a group project during online learning: a perspective from students in higher education. This study was conducted on students from the Sultan Idris University of Education, UPSI. This is quantitative research. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and correlation with a sample of 313 respondents of Information Technology in Education, semester 1 to 7 students. collect data or information, researchers have used questionnaires as a research instrument. Google Form was used to collect the information. The data has been analyzed through a quantitative method involving the descriptive analysis and correlation analysis using SPSS software.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019

MCO Movement Control Order

M = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, a cluster of severe pneumonia cases of unknown cause was reported in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. The initial cluster was epidemiologically linked to a seafood wholesale market in Wuhan. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global public health emergency of international concern on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 as well as a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). The first two cases of COVID – 19 in Pakistan were confirmed by Federal Health Ministry in Islamabad and Karachi on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020 within 15 days (12 March) the total number of positive COVID-19 tests reached 20 (Muhammad Saqlain, Muhammad Muddasir Munir, Ali Ahmed & Azhar Hussain Tahir, 2020). As of 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020, the total number of cases of COVID-19 in the country was 165,062 with 3,229 deaths (Covid-19 Stats, 2020). In reaction to COVID -19, Pakistani authorities closed all educational institutions across the country on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020, and the Federal Government of Pakistan gave orders for Higher Education Commission (HEC) to start preparing for distance learning (DL) modes,

reschedule the ongoing exams and assist their students online regularly until the COVID 19 crisis remains unchanged (Ali,2020).

Not to be missed is also Malaysia, which is one of the countries experiencing COVID -19. COVID -19 pandemic is the greatest disease to have hit Malaysia since the 1918 Spanish Flu which killed 34, 644 people or 1% of the population in Malaysia (Hashim, Mohd Firdaus Mohd Radi & Soo Chen Kwan). There were two waves of the COVID -19 cases in Malaysia. The first wave of 22 cases occurred from January 25 to February 15 with no death and full recovery in all cases. In the second wave, the biggest cluster was the Sri Petaling Tabligh cluster with an infection rate of 6.5% and making up 47% of all cases in Malaysia. COVID – 19 pandemics have had a dramatic effect on socioeconomic, education, and others.

The effect of the pandemic on primary, secondary, and even university students. The nationwide study on the effect of the pandemic on Malaysian varsities students was conducted at the end of 2020. There are many important issues uncovered in this study ranging from the technical side, such as internet-ready programs, the socio-economic side, to the psychological perspectives. It shall provide invaluable insight to the related ministries while preparing appropriate reactions during the recovery period. The survey revealed that almost 74% of student highlighted that internet coverage and connectivity was the main issue in online teaching and learning (T&L). The effects of the pandemic are far-reaching, students belonging to the most vulnerable category find themselves in the most non-conducive place to learn, and they are disturbed by siblings.

Next, learning and teaching are conducted virtually in all universities. The lecturer opens the quota or the number of students in a class is too many to cause free riders to occur among the students. This is because the number of students in a class is too many, causing the lecturer to take the easy way out by dividing the group assignment by the number of members who are too many, for example, 10 members in a group. This will lead to free riders because only a few people will do the rest of the work.

## 1.2 Research Background

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease triggered by a new virus outbreak in Wuhan, China. COVID-19 has been rapidly spreading around the world, wreaking havoc on health services and intensifying shelter confinement (Allam et al., 2020). The first-ever documented case of a Covid-19 outbreak in Malaysia was reported on January 25, 2020, when a Chinese tourist, entering the country via Singapore, was found to be positively infected with the virus (being Malaysia's first confirmed case of Covid-19 infection in 2020). Arising from the exponential daily increase in the number of Covid-19 infected cases, Malaysian Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has announced a phase-to-phase restricted movement order for Malaysians, known as the Movement Control Order (MCO) into effect from 18th March 2020 (Yusuf & Jihan, 2020).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic across the world has profoundly altered almost all aspects of life, including education (Aliyah, Rachmadtullah, Samsudin, Syaodih, Nurtant & Tambunan, 2020). According to the most recent reports from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than 120 countries have closed their educational institutions and suspended physical classes on campus (Shawaqfeh, Bekairy, Al-Azayzih, Qandil, Obaidat & Muflih, 2020). During phase 1 of the MCO in Malaysia, all public and private institutions of higher learning were required to postpone all classes and lectures for an initial period of two weeks. Instead, beginning in April 2020, these institutions must pursue classes and learn through all appropriate online platforms (Yusuf & Jihan, 2020). The pandemic of COVID 19 has pushed every educational institute towards online learning, although nobody was ready for this transition (Baber, 2020). Therefore, according to Chung, Mohamed Noor & Mathew (2020), students and lecturers in institutions of higher education were critically hit by the unprecedented changes because of the Covid-19 pandemic (Chung, Subramaniam & Dass, 2020).

Online education is the top choice methodology for educators after the MCO was extended in Phase 3 (Yusuf & Jihan, 2020). As a main alternative to the traditional face-to-face pedagogical approach, many universities have developed online learning teaching and learning protocols (Nasri, Husnin, Mahmud & Halim, 2020). Previously, online learning, distance education, and correspondence courses were popularly considered as part of non-formal education, but as of now, it seems that they will gradually replace the formal

education system if the circumstances enduringly persist over time (Mishra & Sree, 2020). Therefore, online learning is changing the way teaching and learning take place on every university campus in Malaysia. Changes in students' daily lives have also influenced their perceptions of teaching and learning, effectively suspending, and disabling traditional learning for them. Due to virtual learning and teaching, many students take it easy in terms of attendance, teaching and learning, and assignments whether individual assignments or group assignments. This causes students to be less familiar with their respective assignments and this creates a free rider attitude in the group.

From this phenomenon, this study was conducted under the title “Exploring free-riding in a group project during online learning: a perspective from students in higher education”. This study investigated free riding during online learning in a group project from students’ perspectives in higher education.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

According to Baber (2020), online learning refers to an electronic learning environment where, unlike traditional learning, there are no physical peer learners, and there is freedom of time and space. Online learning has attracted increasing attention from teaching staff and educational institutions as it can offer realistic and meaningful solutions to some of the existing educational issues (Abuhmaid, 2020).

Virtual learning causes students to be less interested in learning and for assignments either individual assignments or group assignments, students take an easy way to complete assignments by being a free rider in a group. Free riding occurs when one or more group members decide to refrain from participating in the group’s task or assignment; this often creates difficulties with group dynamics because it places an added responsibility upon other group members to compensate for the free rider's lack of effort (Kerr & Bruun, 2020).



As there are disadvantages of the free rider in a group project during online learning, students may have unpleasant experiences from their online learning experiences or their group project. What are the challenges students face in group projects? What is the perception of the student on the probability of free rider occurring in a group project? What adjustments did you make to deal with this person (free rider)? What impact does the free rider have upon the group? Do you feel such behaviors could transfer to the workplace? All those questions prompted this research and it's going to explore students' perceptions of the free rider using a cross-sectional survey. So, after 2 years of online learning without face-to-face learning, researchers have decided to analyze and explore free riding in a group project during online learning: a perspective from students in higher education.

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

This research will be conducted based on several objectives as follows: -

a. To identify free rider factors among students in higher education.

b. To determine the perceptions of students towards the free rider in a group project during online learning.

#### 1.5 Research Questions

This study will answer the following questions: -

1. Have you ever earned a free rider in a group project?
2. Have you ever considered the probability of a free ride occurring in your group project?
3. Have you ever dealt with this person (free rider)?
4. Do free riders affect assignment scores against groups?
5. Do you feel such behaviors could transfer to the workplace?



## 1.6 Research Scope and Limitations

This research will focus on students in higher education who are diploma and bachelor's students. This research will be based on a questionnaire only to explore free riding in a group project during online learning: a perspective from students in higher education.

Limitations: -

1. This study is only applicable to the student in higher education.
2. This research will be done based on the data provided by students in higher education.
3. The questionnaire for this research was designed based on the research objectives.

## 1.7 Significance of Research

This research is aimed to explore free riding in a group project during online learning: a perspective from students in higher education. This research presents a free ride and study about free riders and factors on how to deal with implications among students in higher education institutions. Free riding may begin to occur in cooperative learning groups used as a teaching strategy. Free ride use by individuals and the transfer of these behaviors to the workplace will present challenges to dependent organizations on cooperative learning groups. Therefore, research efforts continue to investigate many possible factors that engage in free rides.

## 1.8 Research Interest

The significance of this study is as follows:

### 1.8.1 Students

The importance of this study to students at the higher education level is when the presence of this study, students know how to control students (free riders) when doing group assignments. Next, students will also be able to increase confidence in the

group as a leader. Finally, students (free riders) will be able to commit and complete group assignments.

### 1.8.2 Lecturers

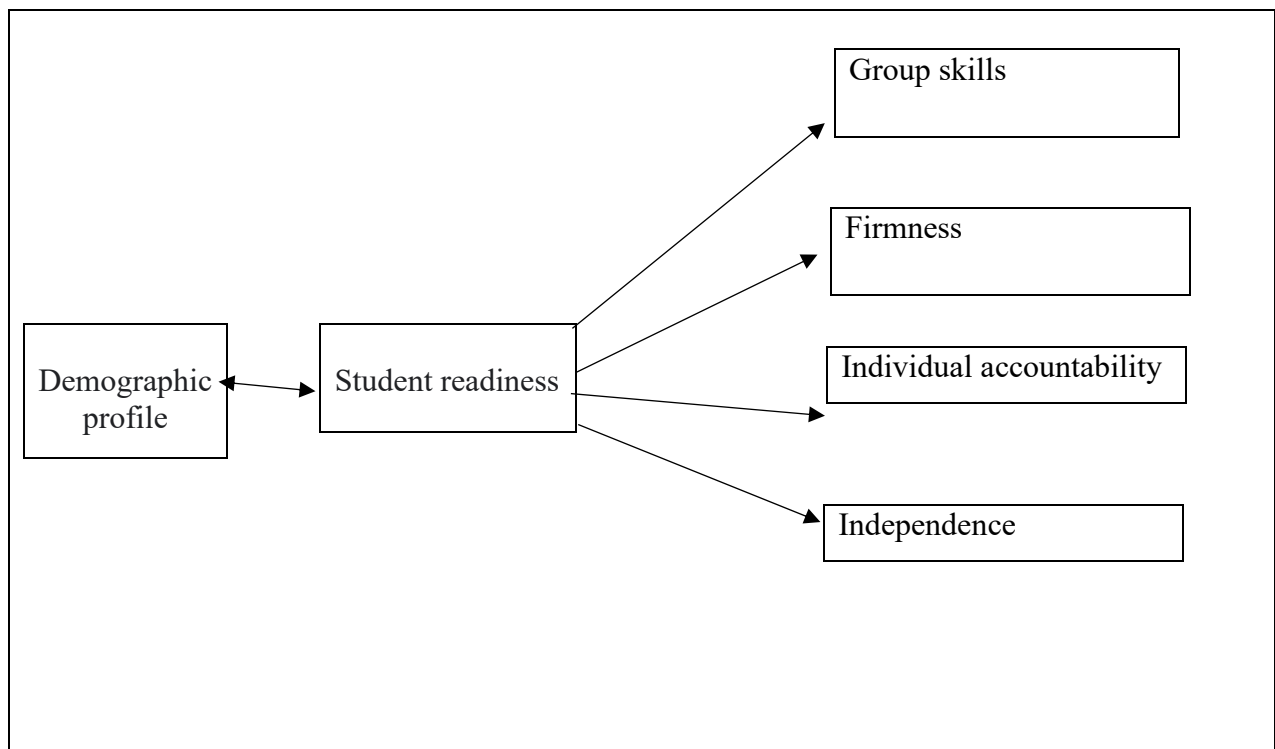
This study can also provide information to lecturers about students who free ride in groups. Thus, lecturers can distribute group members for assignments with few members. Next, lecturers can create monitors among students in each class, monitors are not made up of lecturers, but they are made up of students who are group leaders, or someone trusted by the lecturer, and this can detect free riders. It is unfair for some to benefit from the efforts of others without contributing, from which all would benefit (Julia Maskiuker, 2022).

### 1.8.3 University

The importance of this study to the university is university able to find more information and feedback from students about free riding in a group project in higher education. So that the university knows about the situation that is happening. But sometimes, the university knows about this problem but does not know the factors that occur; therefore, the university cannot control this problem.

## 1.9 Research Framework

A research framework is a form of framework that serves as a guide in researching research elements. For the research framework, this study shows that there are two namely demographic profile and student readiness. In a demographic profile, five elements have been studied namely gender, level of education, the flexibility to choose members, the number of members in the group, and how to deal with free riders. Figure 1.1 below shows the research framework in this study.



**Figure 1.1: A research framework**

The following definition is provided to ensure understanding of these terms consistently throughout the study.

- ❖ **COVID -19:** COVID-19 (coronavirus disease of 2019), the disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Galbraith, Kinning, Sullivan, Baxter, Araya, Jordan & Espinosa, 2021).
- ❖ **Online Learning:** Online learning, as defined by Carliner (2002), is educational information delivered on a computer. Khan (1997) further delineated that the phrase referred to “an innovative approach for delivering instruction to a remote audience using the Web as a medium”. Ally (2008) defined online learning as being more than just “presentations and delivery of materials using the Web”.



## 1.11 Summary

This chapter has briefly explained the reason why and how the research study was conducted. This chapter begins with a general overview of the COVID- 19 pandemic and Malaysia's current educational situation. Then, the discussion included the background of this research. Next, the problem statement discusses the problem faced by students about the free riders. Following the problem statement, 2 research objectives and 5 research questions are clearly stated. The scope, limitations, and significance of the research are then discussed. The explanation of the conceptual framework is also stated. The chapter ends with a definition of the terms.