

**ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT BETWEEN STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS:  
A PANACEA FOR DISRUPTION IN VOCATIONAL AND ECONOMICS  
EDUCATION.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Conflict is inevitable in all living organisms; it is a natural social and phenomenon occurring among humans wherever and when they are. There are conflicts at educational organizations/schools which can bring about disruptions in the system. The purpose of this study is to examine conflict between students and project supervisors: and put forward effective conflict prevention and management strategies. The independent variables included in the study are the task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict. The population for the study includes all final year students and project supervisors. Survey research design was adopted for the studying. The main instrument for data collection was the questionnaire based on a 4-point Likert scale. Data were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, t-test using SPSS software. The findings of the study have an R square value of 0.626 meaning that 62.6% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables while 37.4% is explained by other variables outside the model and also showed that there is a strong correlation between the dependent variable and the set of independent variables. The result showed that there is significant impact of RC, TC, PC as predictor of conflict between students and research project supervisors.*

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**KEYWORDS:** *Conflict, Management Strategies, Supervisor, students*

## **Introduction**

Research is a significant challenging task that requires in depth knowledge of the subject matter, hard work and preparation. Pedagogically speaking, research writing is a project that students must accomplish to fulfil a university policy and certainly contribute to students' development (Harris, 2020). Researchers face many challenges during a research process in all areas. Thus conflict arises. Conflict means a stage a disagreement between the parties or individual. Identifying these conflicts in organisation helps to improve the productivity in the organisation.

According to Lester and Lester (1999), there are several reasons why conducting research is significant. He claims that research is useful because it teaches methods of discovery, investigative skills, develops inquiry-based techniques, builds career skills, improves critical thinking, logic, and the basic ingredients of argument.

In tertiary education, research methodology is usually considered a compulsory subject at colleges or universities. Students of all majors must study Research Methodology subject and after the course, they are assigned to write a research paper individually or in groups.

Moreover, we recognize that most students face many challenges during the learning process as well as completing their research projects, which could disrupt the educational process. In the scope of this article, we want to explore some common difficulties encountered by the degree students when they write their research papers. Moreover, three types of intragroup conflicts identified by Jehn in Ibrahim & Kassim (2014) include task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict. Bendersky & Hays (2011) introduced the fourth type of conflict, which is status conflict. Extant literature supports the position the conflict can bring about disruption in the organization even in the educational system. Therefore, this paper seeks to added to literature in identifying the conflicts that arises between students and supervisors, as well make appropriate recommendations.

## **Statement of the problem**

Although thesis writing difficulties have been investigated by many previous studies, most of the difficulties were generalized, not mentioning the details of the detailed process from writing the introduction to the conclusion (Sitompu & Anditasari (2022);

Amuthanayaki & Prasad (2020) and Ifeoma (2019).

To the best of our knowledge, few studies explored the students' project writing difficulties presenting the three conflict areas namely task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict. It is assumed that there is a need to investigate project writing difficulties and conflict along these parameters.

### **Research Objectives**

The following research objectives guided the study:

1. To examine the impact of task conflicts on project supervision as perceived by degree students and supervisors
2. To evaluate the effect of relationship conflicts on project supervision as perceived by degree students and supervisors.
3. To assess the influence of process conflicts on project supervision as perceived by degree students and supervisors
4. To identify conflict prevention and management strategies necessary for conflict resolution between degree students and supervisors

### **Hypotheses**

In the present study following hypotheses are framed to be tested:

H1: There is a significant relationship between task conflicts and project supervision.

H2: There is a significant affiliation between relationship conflicts and project supervision.

H3: There is a significant relationship between process conflicts and project supervision.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Task Conflict**

Task conflict refers to disagreements and differences of opinion among individuals or team members regarding the content, goals, or methods of a particular task. It is a type of conflict that arises from conflicting viewpoints, ideas, or approaches related to the work at hand. Task conflict involves differences in how to approach the task, allocate resources, make decisions, or solve problems. Research findings regarding the impact

of task conflict on team performance lack consistency and show varying results. Wu, Zhao & Zuo (2017) concluded their findings and argued that task conflict contributes to stabilizing the demand for benefits within project teams and enhances communication as well as the establishment of trust mechanisms. Downes, Gonzalez-Mule & Seong (2021) demonstrated that team performance-prove goal orientation (PPGO) exhibited a positive correlation with collaboration and team performance, particularly in situations characterized by high task conflict and low relationship conflict. While De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia (2017) argued that task conflict diminishes job satisfaction; however, they noted that this effect is attenuated when individuals possess higher levels of transformational leadership, tenacity, and passion for their work.

### **Relationship Conflict**

This conflict refers to disputes, disagreements, or tension among team members. In particular, relationship conflict occurs when there is a personal incompatibility between members (Caputo et al., 2018). Past research studies have indicated that relationship conflicts among team members can lead to anger and dissatisfaction, ultimately impeding their ability to effectively accomplish tasks (Khosravi, Rezvani & Ashkanasey, 2020). Failure to address task conflict or process conflict adequately can result in their escalation and subsequent development into relationship conflict (Wu et al., 2017). Therefore, relationship conflicts can distract team members from their tasks and reduce their focus on achieving common goals. This distraction can lead to decreased productivity and hinder the team's overall performance. Continuous relationship conflicts create a negative work environment, which can lead to decreased morale and job satisfaction. Team members may experience stress, anxiety, or frustration, affecting their motivation and commitment to the team's objectives.

### **Process Conflict**

Process conflict involves incompatible views about how the work should be accomplished (Alhyari, Alhyari & Sweis, 2020). It often involves debates and disagreements about the procedures, timelines, allocation of resources, or division of responsibilities within the group. Process conflict is an exceptional form of intragroup conflict due to its intricate interpersonal dynamics, encompassing concerns related to tasks, relationships, and power dynamics. Study on the impacts of conflicts on team trust and Performance, Yuni,Tham & Azam (2020) revealed that process conflict exhibits a positive correlation with team trust while displaying a negative association

with team performance. The authors argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between task and relationship conflict and process conflict. While process conflict can initially create challenges and hinder group effectiveness, it also offers potential benefits. It can stimulate critical thinking, encourage creativity, and promote a more thorough evaluation of different options. If managed constructively, process conflict can lead to better decision-making, innovative solutions, and improved overall group performance.

Some empirical review will suffice at this point.

Ajike, Babatunde, Magaji & Sonubi (2016) in their research article “Effect of Conflict Management on the Performance of Financial Service Organization in Nigeria: An Empirical Study of Access Bank PLC” examined the impact of conflict management upon the performance of Access Bank in Nigeria. Researchers noted that the term conflict has often been viewed negatively, but the successful management of conflict increases organizational creativity and productivity. Finally, the study concluded with different recommendations, like developing suitable strategies, dealing with issues properly, and managing flexible approaches to conflict management, to resolve disputes before escalating to the unmanaged level.

Awan, and Saeed (2015), in their research paper entitled “Conflict Management and Organizational Performance: A Case Study of Askari Bank Ltd”, analyzed the major reasons for conflict and conflict management strategies prevalent in the bank under study. Conclusions showed that the approaches for conflict resolution vary greatly with the age and education of the studied respondents. The views of respondents of men and women on various conflict resolution approach implemented by the management of the bank were not substantially distinguished. Lack of warm relationships between management and employees, differences of perception, behavioral problems, and a lack of effective communication have continued to emerge as key conflict sources among banking personnel. The multiple unstable effects were subsequently investigated using high mean ratings like Low morality, low productivity, lack of direction, and lack of innovation. Communications divide. The study concluded with a range of recommendations for banking management on free contact, the continuous dialog between management and staff to share ideas, and explain various issues whenever appropriate.

Sitompu & Anditasari (2022) this study attempted to investigate the students' difficulties in research writing involving 39 master's students majoring in English Language Education at one of the universities in Malang. The data on the thesis writing difficulties were gathered through a close-ended questionnaire designed based on the theory proposed by Harris (2020), consisting of three aspects: research skills in the introduction, research method, and finding and discussion parts. The data was analyzed quantitatively by measuring the mean, mode, and percentage from each scale. The results revealed that many master's students encountered difficulties in most three aspects.

Amuthanayaki & Prasad (2020) explored different and general challenges during writing the research projects such as: lack of understanding of the subject, complicatedness in deciding the topic, lack of good quality knowledge of the methodology, inability of finding modern, specialized and interrelated references, , lack of moment in time, and research guiding.

Ngoc & Ngoc (2021) the purpose of the study is to figure out some common challenges English majors encounter when writing their research papers. The participants are 53 English majors at Tra Vinh University. The questionnaire is the only instrument focusing on students' obstacles: preparing for conducting a research paper, writing the introduction, writing the literature review, identifying the research methodology, analyzing the data, and giving recommendations. The findings reveal that the participants face some difficulties including identifying a research topic, searching materials, recognizing the significance of the paper, selecting appropriate theoretical background, choosing and summarizing related studies, using correct style of citation, deciding the appropriate statistical tool for data analysis, using appropriate formulas for calculating the collected data, interpreting data clearly and concisely, and comparing the findings of the present study to those of related studies.

Ifeoma (2019) identified three major categories of challenged affecting the success of a research paper, including: Mentor-student challenges comprised the lack of scientific training, supervision challenges and pacing of content; Student-related challenges identified students' issues such as research problem definition, time management, confidence issue, quantity of literature, working of deadlines, data collection and interpreting literature and data and Institution-related challenges stemmed from poorly

equipped library and lack of access to resources.

Qasem and Zayid (2019) carried out a study on “The challenges and problems faced by students in the early stage of writing research projects In L2, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia”. The study aimed to investigate some common challenges students encountered during writing their research proposals and projects. The results revealed that students had some difficulties regarding deciding the research topic, lacking knowledge of methodology, being unable to find specialized and related reference, lacking interest in research, lacking understanding of the subject matter, lacking time and guidance for conducting the research. From the findings presented above, the authors gave some recommendations as follows. Students should participate in more training workshops concerning writing research. Besides, supervisors should give students good guidance about choosing the topics and appropriate materials. Moreover, teachers teaching research methodology should create some useful tasks or activities in class to help students be familiar with the research procedures.

In view of the reviews above, this study therefore seeks to fill the gap in literature in that to the best of our knowledge, no study in Nigeria has investigated conflict between degree students and Supervisors as a panacea towards disruption of vocational and economic education using the process identified in the literature.

### **Methodology**

**Design:** This study utilized a descriptive survey design where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in data collection and analysis, concurrently. According to Olannye (2017), survey research method is a “systematic gathering of information from respondents for the purpose of understanding and/or predicting some aspect of the behaviour of the population of interest”.

**Sampling:** A descriptive research design was used in executing the study using 50 purposively selected sample respondents consisting of ten (10) degree supervisors and forty (40) degree students in Federal College of Education (Tech), Asaba and Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba.

### **Data collection:**

The questionnaire was the main data collection tool that was distributed to both

supervisors and degree students. The questionnaire is designed as per the variables featured in the research questions.

In order to ensure reliability of the research instrument, a pre-test was done using same category of students and supervisors in Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Anambra State. The results from reliability indicated that all the variables had Cronbach alpha coefficient values greater than 0.7. Thus, the study instruments met the required reliability threshold and thus were considered reliable for data collection.

The questionnaire is on the 4 point Likert Scale. Secondary data included published and unpublished articles, conference papers, books, and bulletins, etc.

A total of fifty (50) copies of the questionnaire were administered and forty (46) copies were returned and used for the analysis. The return rate of the questionnaires was 92%.

#### Data analysis tools and presentation

To analyze the problem of the research, statistical techniques of Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation and Regression, are used to examine the variables characteristics through statistical software SPSS Version 21.

**Table 1: Correlation Result**

	Mean	SD	Correlation			
			TC	RC	PC	EP
TC	2.4643		0.6841			
RC	2.9158	0.6688		.619**		
PC	3.3482	0.4962		.140**	.488**	
EP	3.7277	0.5976		-199**	-0.06	.372**

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

From the above table the mean value of all variables is average representing that there is average amount of task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict present between degree students and supervisors.

The highest mean value is for process conflict i.e. **3.3482**, showing that participants in the study are more affected by process conflict in project supervision.

The results from the table show that correlation between task conflict and project supervision is positive and significant. Hence, it is inferred that task conflict has positive effect on project supervision and supervision of students.

The variables relationship conflict and project supervision are moderately related and do not have a strong correlation, therefore relationship conflict is marginally related with conflict between degree students and supervisor.

Also, the relationship between process conflict and project supervision is high and positively significant. Therefore, process conflict has positive relationship with conflict during project supervision.

**TABLE II:  
Hypothesis Results**

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	B	T	p-value	Result
H1	RC→PS	-.193	-2.961	.003	Negatively significant
H2	TC→PS	-.113	-2.005	.046	Negatively significant
H3	PC→PS	-.170	-2.216	.037	Negatively significant
R <sup>2</sup>	.626				
F (3, 332)	30.470				

Note: “p<0.05. RC: Relationship Conflict, TC=Task Conflict, PC=Process Conflict, PS=Project Supervision

The dependent variable (Project Supervision) was regressed on predicting variables of Task conflict, Relationship conflict, and Process conflict. The independent variables significantly predict Project Supervision, F(3,332)=30.470, p<0.001, which indicates that the three factors under study have a significant impact on project supervision.

Moreover, the R<sup>2</sup>=.626 depicts that model explains 62.6% of the variance in conflict between degree students and supervisors during project supervision.

Additionally, coefficients were further assessed to ascertain the influence of each factor on the criterion variables (project supervision).

**Hypothesis one (H1):** There is a significant relationship between task conflicts and project supervision.). The result revealed that there is a statistically significant negative

relationship between role conflict and project supervision. ( $B = -.193$ ,  $t = -2.961$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, H1 is accepted.

H2: evaluates whether there is relationship between relationship conflict and project supervision. The result shows that there is statistically significant negative relationship between relationship conflict and project supervision. ( $B = -.113$ ,  $t = -2.961$ ,  $p > .001$ ), consequently, H2 is accepted.

H3 There is a significant relationship between process conflicts and project supervision. The result show that there is significant negative relationship between process conflict and project supervision ( $B = -.170$ ,  $t = -2.216$ ,  $P < .0001$ ). Hence H3 is accepted.

### **Discussion of findings**

Firstly, task conflicts, which arise due to disagreements about work goals, procedures, or resources, were found to have a negative impact on interaction between the Degree students and supervisors. Such conflicts can lead to decreased collaboration, coordination difficulties, and reduced zeal of both parties, especially the Degree students. This is supported by Ibrahim & Kassim (2014) who found that task conflict has negative effect on bank employees.

Secondly, relationship conflicts, which involve personal disagreements, tension, or animosity between individuals, were found to have a detrimental impact on the project supervision process. These conflicts can lead to decreased motivation, increased stress levels, and a breakdown in teamwork. This is in agreement with Qasem and Zayid (2019), who investigated research writing problems encountered by first degree students.

Thirdly, process conflicts, which arise from differences in opinions regarding task-related decision-making, were also found to have a negative influence on project supervision process. These conflicts can lead to delays, inefficiencies, poor finishing and confusion within the work processes, ultimately hindering students' ability to perform at their best and as at when due.

Lastly, conflict management strategies adopted to resolve conflicts between Degree students and supervisors showed readiness of the participants to pursue conflict resolution via two or three strategies. Overall, the study highlights the significance of

managing and resolving conflicts within the school system to enhance student and supervisor relationship, thereby facilitating smooth running of the school.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of the study suggest that task conflicts, relationship conflicts, and process conflicts have a negative impact on project supervision as perceived by degree students and supervisors.

The research highlights the importance of adopting more than one conflict management strategy to handle any conflict that may arise. Since the academic exercise is ultimately to the benefit of the Degree students he has to be alert to conflict as they arise and adopt strategies to manage it.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendation are made

1. It is crucial for the institution to foster a culture that promotes effective communication, problem-solving, and mutual understanding to minimize the adverse effects of task conflicts during project writing and thus mitigate the effect of disruptions in vocational and economics education.
2. To mitigate relationship conflicts, institution should focus on fostering positive work relationships, promoting open and respectful communication, and providing conflict resolution training to staff and students.
3. The institution should emphasize clear communication channels, well-defined decision-making processes, and encourage students and supervisors quickly address conflict to minimize the impact of process conflicts.
4. Additionally, organization of training programs and workshops to equip the students with the necessary skills to identify and seek support during conflicts constructively, leading to improved performance during project writing and supervision by supervisors.

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