School conflict versus academic performance

Conflicto escolar frente al desempeño académico

🆔 **Josselyn Medranda**, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador sede Santo Domingo, Ecuador
(jpmedrandac@pucesd.edu.ec) (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6121-581X)

🆔 **Melanny Contreras**, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador sede Santo Domingo, Ecuador
(mccontrerasg@pucesd.edu.ec) (https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1583-3059)

🆔 **Dr. Edgar Obaco** is a professor at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador sede Santo Domingo, Ecuador
(eeobaco@pucesd.edu.ec) (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7243-5869)

Abstract

School conflicts and low academic performance are a relevant problem within the educational context; these issues have not yet been resolved, making them a necessary topic for research. This study aims to investigate the influence of school conflict on academic performance. A quantitative approach, a deductive method and correlational-descriptive research with a non-experimental-cross-sectional design were used. A population of 1096 subjects, 38 teachers and 1058 students, and a sample of 134 subjects, 38 teachers and 96 students of the tenth year of EGB were determined. For data collection, the school conflict questionnaire CUVE 3-ESO by Álvarez et al. (2013) addressed to teachers was used, and another one addressed to students called Ser Test, developed by the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEVAL, 2016). The results reveal that there is a medium level of conflict, where a score of 3.14 points out of 10 was also determined, implying that there is a low level of academic performance; When establishing a relationship between the objects of study, it became evident that statistically there is no significant relationship between them. In conclusion, it was established that academic conflict does not affect academic performance, but, since these conflicts are at a medium level and are not dealt with in time, they tend to have repercussions on school performance.

Keywords: education, violence, school performance, quality of education, learning, interpersonal relationships.

Resumen

Los conflictos escolares y el bajo rendimiento académico son un problema relevante dentro del contexto educativo; estas problemáticas aún no han sido resueltas, tornándolas como un tema necesario de investigar. Este estudio tiene el objetivo de indagar la influencia de la conflictividad escolar en el rendimiento académico. Se utilizó un enfoque de tipo cuantitativo, un método deductivo y una investigación correlacional-descriptiva con diseño no experimental-transversal. Se determinó una población de 1096 sujetos, 38 docentes y 1058 estudiantes, y una muestra de 134 sujetos, 38 docentes y 96 estudiantes del décimo año de EGB. Para la toma de datos se utilizó el cuestionario de conflictividad escolar CUVE 3-ESO de Álvarez et al. (2013) dirigido a docentes, y otro dirigido a estudiantes denominado Prueba Ser, elaborado por el Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEVAL, 2016). Los resultados revelan que existe un nivel medio de conflictividad, donde también, se determinó una puntuación de 3,14 puntos sobre 10, dando a entender que existe un nivel bajo de rendimiento académico; al establecer una relación entre los objetos de estudio, se evidenció que estadísticamente no existe una relación significativa entre las mismas. En conclusión, se estableció que la conflictividad académica no incide sobre el rendimiento académico, pero, dichos conflictos al encontrarse en un nivel medio y al no ser atendidos a tiempo, tienden a repercutir en el desempeño escolar.

Palabras clave: educación, violencia, rendimiento escolar, calidad de la educación, aprendizaje, relaciones interpersonales.

1. Introduction and state-of-the-art

Educational institutions are a space for learning and coexisting, an aspect that is often interrupted or damaged by school conflicts, which often seriously influence student performance. Because of this, it is important to immerse in this problem to analyze the existing connection between conflict and academic performance. According to Leyton (2020), coexistence is an essential part of the educational process, since it promotes inclusion, participation, democracy, and the solution of problems, becoming a key aspect in academic daily life. Likewise, García et al. (2019) mention that "coexistence is sought to achieve elements that generate well-being, and that allows optimal development" (p. 179).

It is important to know that access to education is a human right, which must be equitable and accessible to all. The educational process intervenes in human well-being and productivity, this must be peaceful and harmonious, free of conflicts that interfere in a good coexistence. It should be noted that this coexistence has been harmed by the social inequality that the country is going through, which according to UNESCO (2020) the causes of inequality are diverse "and among its consequences are differences in access to schooling, permanence and learning".

There are various studies that have aimed to verifying whether school conflict really influences profoundly or superficially on the school performance of students. For Serrano & Sanz (2019), coexisting in educational institutions "requires constant adjustments to resolve the conflicts that are occurring. These adjustments help the child to grow as a person and not to stagnate" (p. 181).

Barreto & Álvarez (2017) state in "School climate and academic performance in high school students" (p. 31), that the educational environment is not considered an element that determines the extent of good grades, thus proving that it has not been possible to find any component that predicts school performance. On the other hand, Franco et al. (2016) mention in their work "School conflict in secondary schools in Guayaquil (Ecuador)" (p. 25), that the way in which students understand their environment of coexistence can be considered as a factor that develops behaviors that favor or damage the formation of their learning, influencing the relationships to the academic environment.

According to the OCDE (2016), in most Latin American countries such as Peru, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Costa Rica, 15-year-old students score low according to the desired level of learning in Reading, Science and Mathematics, as assessed by the PISA Program.

According to INEVAL (2018), the PISA-D test showed that 22.6% of students in Ecuador had high academic performance in at least one competition, but there are 44% of students who have obtained a low performance, i.e., they do not reach any competition. UNESCO (2019), emphasize that school performance is influenced by conflict, violent environments and harassment that can be evidenced in the educational context. Likewise, Cid et al. (2008) indicate that there are factors that cause such learning difficulties, these being the aggressions and conflicts experiences in schools.

In addition, it has been observed in the teaching practice the lack of authority of the teacher, lack of resources and proper management for coexistence that generates appropriate learning environments for developing the educational process. According to Castro (2009), "to speak of quality in education it is necessary to start from the quality of the teachers" (p.137).

Within the school environment, it is very important to know the interpersonal relationships, since these determine the coexistence which originates in the social relations between students; moreover, it must have an equitable, fair, empathetic and respectful approach, although sometimes it turns negative, as conflicts between students often arise in their course, which are often left aside and are not resolved. Araneda & Zuñiga (2021) state that coexistence is not seen as a socialization process between people in school, making it lose its cultural and transversal objective. In this way, coexistence becomes a determining factor to achieve a good school environment and improve academic performance.

The deterioration and difficulties that arise in academic coexistence are not new. Such problems or conflicts are considered as disagreements between educational actors regarding the defense of the own interests of those involved. Cortés (2018) defines educational conflicts as "a social process that includes the most varied forms of aggression and is characterized by having a multiplier and expansive effect that not only affects the victims, but also soci-

ety as a whole" (p. 138). Although school conflict is a phenomenon that happens occasionally, it affects not only intrinsically and extrinsically students, but also it becomes one of the main obstacles that hinder the social development of the individual and healthy coexistence of both students and teachers, and the scope of the objectives set in the educational process, i.e., school conflicts not only affect coexistence but also academic performance (Pacheco, 2018).

It is important to understand that academic performance is the assessment of learning, skills and efforts that students achieve during their education. These variables are valued at different levels as: high, medium and low; although, Erazo (2012) states that there are four levels: the high level, good, low and educational failure. It is essential to highlight that academic performance in Ecuador is measured from a scale established in the following levels: from 9 to 10 points which correspond to a high level and shows the required learning achieved, from 7 to 8.99 an average level and refer to the required learning achieved, and scores equal to or less than 4 which correspond to a low level and means that the required learning is not achieved.

This performance is normally affected by various factors, one of which is the conflicts that normally occur at schools. "Aggressive and violent behavior modify the school environment with a negative impact on learning" (Cid et al., 2008, p. 22). Likewise, Franco et al. (2019) claim that "the deterioration of relations harms the quality of classes and the academic performance of students" (p. 305). Sometimes, the educational process is damaged by various external factors such as social inequality, since poverty is one of the main factors that prevent access to one of the most important rights of children, such as education (Cárdenas & Coronado, 2017). Hence, the educational system is not fully prepared to face different situations that a student goes through, so UNESCO (2023) "has established a new social contract for education designed to reimagine and shape more peaceful, fair and sustainable societies."

Conflicts are sometimes perceived as constructive or destructive. All of this is reflected in how these conflicts are addressed and how large or small they may become. Carmona et al. (2020) comment that although conflicts generate annoyance, tension or anger, they do not always harm people; in education this can be very true, since sometimes the conflict becomes the initia-

tive to create a solution that benefits the whole group of students, without causing consequences or much more serious aspects. However, sometimes violent behaviors or school conflicts that arise among students are not perceived by other educational actors, making the problem as something common (Rodríguez et al., 2006). Soriano (2009) states that it is necessary that the educational system works on the construction of a harmonious and peaceful coexistence for a good development and training of students, not only in the behavioral aspect but also in academic performance. In addition to this, Arenas (2018) states that promoting the transformation of society is based on "promoting comprehensive training, both in the home and in schools, implementing actions that guarantee change and the reduction of aggressions and further increasing peaceful coexistence to achieve the social transformation desired" (p. 54).

It is necessary to understand conflict as one of the factors that tends to condition the level of academic performance. School conflicts should be perceived as a possibility of learning or as a wake-up call to the fact that something does not work among educational actors, and thus promote a good coexistence between them and, therefore, that school performance is not impaired (Ceballos et al., 2012). In addition, Fierro & Carbajal (2019) say that in "the analysis of the conflict different elements becomes especially relevant, such as origin of the conflict, actors involved, processes followed and proposed alternatives for solution" (p. 4). In other words, the good management of school conflicts allows highlighting possible solutions that may benefit the actors involved, generating harmonious coexistence at the educational, social and, therefore, personal level.

2. Methodology

The approach used for conducting this study was quantitative, since it is based on the statistical analysis and the necessary objective evaluations of the study problem; It is also deductive, since it facilitates the verification of the hypotheses and the representation of the variables. For Rodríguez & Pérez (2017) "through deduction, one moves from a general knowledge to a less general one" (p. 11).

The population consisted of 1096 subjects (38 professors and 1058 students), which according to Ventura (2017), share characteristics that are sought
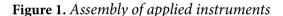
to be analyzed. Also, to study this topic, it was necessary to determine a segment of the population, thus, a sample of 134 subjects was established, divided into 38 professors and 96 students of the tenth year of General Basic Education. It should be noted that in order to select this sample, a non-probabilistic sampling was considered, which allows an arbitrary selection of the number of subjects who will be part of the research (Hernández, 2021). Therefore, this was determined respecting the following criteria: students who are part of the last year of EGB, students who legally belong to the institution, subjects who are willing to provide the necessary information and who are aware of the reality of the investigated context.
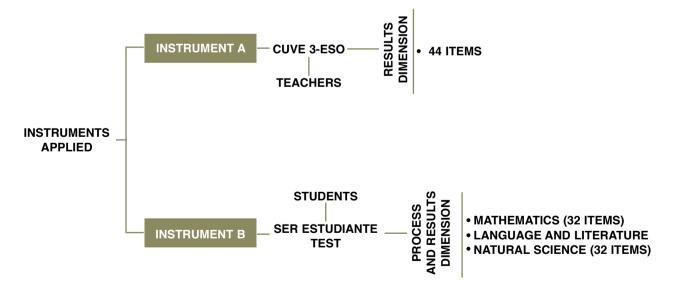
To obtain data, the questionnaire was used as an instrument, which according to Blanch et al. (2010) allows examining opinions held by the subjects investigated. In this way, the questionnaire of school conflict CUVE 3-ESO, developed by Álvarez et al. (2013) was used, which is aimed at teachers to measure school conflict. At the same time, the Ser Estudiante tests, conducted by INEVAL (2016) in Ecuador, were used, allowing the evaluation of student performance in the areas of Language and Literature, Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

All the data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, referring to the organization and tabulation of the data obtained, whose results were expressed by measuring central tendency, in frequencies and percentages represented in the form of tables and graphs. Vargas et al. (2018) mention both tables and graphs allow to represent data and information from sources in a clear and organized way. Similarly, inferential statistics were used to determine the correlation between the two variables investigated through the Pearson parametric test. To improve the organization of the information, the SPSS program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 25 was used.

When the conflict variable scores were added, a global average was obtained that contrasted the results of the academic performance variable. This allowed to obtain the existing correlation between the, yielding in the statistical significance of the phenomenon studied.

Figure 1. *Assembly of applied instruments*

3. Results

This section shows the variables analyzed individually and, in turn, the existing correlation.

According to Table 1, the level of conflict perceived by teachers corresponded to an average of 62.68, reflecting an average level of conflict. In this way, it can be deduced that there is not a good coexistence and a good school environment in the institution; although, it should be emphasized that when the conflict is at an average level and if it is discussed in time there is a tendency to find a solution, thus avoiding major problems.

Table 1. *Conflict Level*

	Average	%	Conflict Level
Teacher perceived conflict	62.67	67.40	Average

Therefore, to analyze the correlation of the variables studied, it is important to know not only the level of conflict but to establish the level of school performance that the students have as shown in Table 2, since this allows to establish the incidence that one variable has on the other.

According to Table 2, there is an overall academic achievement level of 3.14 out of 10, which is equivalent to a low level, implying that students do not achieve the required learning. At the same time, there is a significant deficit in achieving the minimum learning that students have to obtain to study at the next educational level. It is necessary to emphasize that the greatest problems are recorded in the subjects of Mathematics and Natural Sciences with a score of less than 3 points.

Table 2. *Level of academic achievement*

Variable	M
Academic Performance for Natural Sciences	2,83
Academic Performance for Language and Literature	3,90
Academic Performance for Mathematics	2,70
Overall average academic performance	3,14

According to Table 3, both conflict and school performance have a ratio of 0.123, which explains that there is a low positive correlational force, also it can be observed that there is no statistical significance, since the p-value is equal to 0.240, greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be mentioned that there is no significant relationship between the objects of study, i.e., school conflict does not necessarily influence the school performance of the students.

Likewise, Table 4 was elaborated with the intention of predicting the relationship between the variables, where the transcendental data of the predictive simulation of the conflict on the academic performance are shown.

Table 3. *Bivariate correlations of academic performance according to teacher conflict*

		1	2	3	4	5
Global Performance of High School Students	Pearson correlation	1	,553**	,715**	,590**	,123
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000	,000	,000	,240
Academic Performance for Natural Sciences	Pearson correlation	,553**	1	,031	,046	- ,060
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000		,771	,663	,568
Academic Performance for Language and Literature	Pearson correlation	,715**	,031	1	,168	,143
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	,771		,107	,173
Academic Performance for Mathematics	Pearson correlation	,590**	,046	,168	1	,141
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	,663	,107		,176
Teacher perceived conflict	Pearson correlation	,123	- ,060	,143	,141	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,240	,568	,173	,176	

**. Correlation is significant at level .01 (bilateral).

According to Table 4, the projected relationship between the variables studied is statistically significant, as the p-value of the areas studied is lower than the significant value (0.05). It should be noted that the correlation force is moderate for the Natural Sciences and the correlation force is low for Language and Literature and Mathematics. Thus, although there is a low positive correlation force, as school conflicts become more severe it tends to influence the academic performance of the student.

Table 4. *Predictive simulation of conflict over academic performance*

Dependent Variable	R²	ΔR²	Typical Error	Constant	β	T	Q	Independent variable
Academic performance of Natural Sciences	,004	- ,007	1,035	3,055		7,48	,000	Constant
					- ,060	- ,573	,568	Conflict
Academic performance of Language and Literature	,020	,010	1,244	3,248		6,622	0	Constant
					,143	1,375	,173	Conflict
Academic performance in Mathematics	,020	,009	,924	2,223		6,101	0	Constant
					,141	1,363	,176	Conflict
Overall Academic Performance	,015	,004	2,007	8,525		1 ,774	0	Constant
					,123	1,184	,240	Conflict

4. Discussion and conclusions

According to the results obtained, it can be said that there is an average level of school conflict. Román and Murillo (2011) stated in one of their investigations that 51% of the students in the Ecuadorian State have been victims of attacks and insults, reflecting a high level of conflict in their school environment. Similarly, UNICEF (2017) finds that more than half of students throughout Ecuador (60%) between the ages of 11 and 18 are victims of violence or school conflicts, showing that every 3 out of 5 students are affected by this problem. Conversely, Jordán et al. (2021) show that 37.4% of students have witnessed violence between peers and, according to the investigated institutions, there are countless situations of conflict and aggression, however, depending on the low level determined, these could be resolved without applying complex measures.

However, emphasizing the level of school performance reflected between the students and the students of the studied institution, a low level was determined regarding the performance, showing that they do not achieve the required learning. According to a study conducted by Shapiro (2011) "poor school performance is a frequent problem and has multiple causes; the alterations that characterize it are mainly expressed in the areas of cognitive, academic and behavioral functioning" (p. 218). Likewise, Estrada (2018) states that the presence of a low academic performance originated by psychoeducational factors such as family or social climate and study routines, in addition, the author states that teacher intervention is necessary to address this problem and find early solutions to it.

Finally, and according to the results, a non-significant statistical relationship between the variables is projected, and with it, it is shown that the conflict does not necessarily affect the school performance of the students. This result agrees with Soriano (2009), who indicated that conflicts are not a problem that necessarily affect academic performance, and the author also says that it is important to interpret and prevent them in a harmonious and enriching way.

In contrast to this, UNESCO (2019) mentions that harassment and violence among educational members do have an impact on the academic performance of several schools in the world. Likewise, Araneda & Zuñiga (2021) accept that school conflict does intervene in learning and that it must be solved in a timely way, since it harms good interpersonal coexistence, losing its transversal educational sense and, therefore, education. Likewise, Cid et al. (2008), consider school conflicts as a growing problem that causes harmful effects on students such as school dropout and difficulties in the educational process.

It is essential to recognize negative emotions in students, since they play a primary role in academic performance (Pulido & Herrera, 2017).

However, focusing on the data investigated, it can be indicated that when there is a violent and conflictive climate in educational institutions, these tend to affect students, causing a low self-esteem, emotional imbalance and lack of communication, which according to Barrios and Frías (2016) are factors that affect school performance, since they do not allow students to develop their skills immediately and effectively. In addition, Bonifaz et al. (2017) mention that the level of school performance is affected by various aspects such as social, personal and their interrelation. In spite of this, Carmona et al. (2020), state that school conflicts generate tensions between the people involved, but sometimes this becomes the initiative of creating solutions that favor and strengthen interpersonal relationships, in this way their effects can be reduced. For this reason, Márquez & Gaeta (2017) argue that schools can prevent aggression and violent behaviors, strengthening conflict resolution management, thus favoring good interpersonal relationships among educational actors.

As mentioned, school conflicts tend to affect academic performance, since there are some types of conflicts, either minor or major, with a number of emotions on both sides which can generate an emotional deterioration in the student, thus lowering their grades. It is important to emphasize that these educational conflicts, if they are attended in time and properly, do not tend to harm students deeply, but rather is a way to solve and learn to generate good school coexistence (Ceballos et al., 2012).

As a conclusion it can be mentioned that there was a low-moderate level presented against the incidence between conflict and academic performance. This, in turn, reveals that despite the fact that conflictive acts are observed in the institution, there is a certain number of students who are not harmed in their school performance. The key point of the research is based on determinants of school conflict in the face of coexistence, the working environment, interpersonal relationships and organization, components that affect academic performance.

It also states that there is not a statistical significance between the conflicts and academic performance, which shows that the conflicts are not always linked to the students' academic performance. However, this relationship could become positive in the future due to certain emotional gaps in the students, i.e., a hostile environment in the school will be projected, in which academic actors are limited only to explain their class, seriously affecting dropout, depression and low academic performance.

Searches should focus on the limitations of the study, highlighting the characteristics of the population and the sample to be selected. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the magnitude of the data, i.e., since this is a broad problem, it is necessary to consider not only a small part of a set, but also a broader sample that allows to guarantee a more specific representation of the problem. Likewise, future researchers are encouraged to replicate the study, considering determinant criteria to the context of life of both the student and the teacher.

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