

Article

# Addressing Potential Conflict among University Students during Collaborative Tasks

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**Abstract:** This study addresses potential conflicts during collaborative tasks among university undergraduate students and presents strategies to mitigate such conflicts at a university in South Africa. Drawing on the unique context of South Africa, characterised by its rich cultural diversity and historical challenges, Social Identity Theory (SIT) was used to theorise the study within a transformative paradigm, qualitative approach and participatory research design. Ten undergraduate students were sampled and interviewed. Thematic analysis was employed to make sense of the data. The study found that a lack of a culture of open dialogue and clear guidelines and expectations leads to conflict, and the study also found that promoting a culture of open dialogue and establishing clear guidelines and expectations during collaborative projects can help prevent potential conflicts among university undergraduate students during collaborative engagement. The study concludes that promoting a culture of open dialogue and fostering establishing clear guidelines and expectations provide undergraduate students with the tools to manage group conflicts.

**Keywords:** potential conflicts; collaborative tasks; undergraduate students; open dialogue; Social Identity Theory (SIT)



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## 1. Introduction

Collaborative tasks have emerged as an integral component of higher education, transforming traditional classroom dynamics and fostering valuable skills among university students. By engaging in collaborative tasks, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, enabling them to develop teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities [1,2]. These tasks often require students to work together in groups, encouraging them to share ideas, debate different viewpoints, and collectively tackle complex challenges [3]. In this way, one can argue that collaborative tasks provide a practical learning environment that mirrors real-world scenarios, preparing students for future professional endeavours where teamwork and collaboration are crucial. In line with our argument, [4] also posited that collaborative tasks promote active learning and student engagement; rather than passively absorbing information, students actively participate in the learning process by collaborating with their peers. This active engagement, in no doubt, fosters deeper understanding, as students are encouraged to articulate their thoughts, challenge assumptions, and defend their ideas [5]. Students can learn to navigate disagreements, negotiate compromises, and reach consensus through collaboration, developing important interpersonal and communication skills. However, collaborative tasks or learning processes often require students to draw upon their collective relationships toward knowledge construction and skill acquisition, which in another way enhance their problem-solving capabilities and prepare them to address complex, multifaceted challenges in their future careers [6].

However, the diverse nature of collaborative endeavours, encompassing a wide range of perspectives, cultural backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and individual preferences, can introduce potential conflicts that pose challenges to effective teamwork and jeopardise project outcomes. When students come together from different backgrounds,

they bring with them unique experiences, values, and ways of approaching tasks. While this diversity can be a source of strength, it can also lead to clashes and misunderstandings if not properly managed. The argument here is that conflicts arising from diverse perspectives can hinder effective teamwork by impeding communication and creating barriers to collaboration. Miscommunication, misunderstandings, and/or differences in problem-solving approaches may arise [7], resulting in reduced productivity and coordination difficulties within the team. Additionally, conflicts stemming from cultural backgrounds and individual preferences may give rise to biases, stereotypes, or discrimination, further exacerbating tensions and impeding team cohesion [8]. Undoubtedly, such conflicts can undermine the synergy and shared commitment necessary for successful collaborative tasks among students.

The researchers have observed that while diverse perspectives in a team setting can enrich the learning experience, they also have the potential to lead to conflicts that can hinder effective teamwork among undergraduate students. These conflicts, stemming from differences in communication styles, problem-solving approaches, cultural backgrounds, and individual preferences, often result in miscommunication, misunderstandings, and reduced productivity. Additionally, the researchers emphasise that unresolved conflicts could have detrimental effects on students' educational outcomes.

To overcome these challenges, many studies have explored various means to prevent conflict among university stakeholders, including students. This includes fostering an inclusive and respectful environment that values and appreciates diversity [9,10]. Promoting open and transparent communication channels, active listening [11], and facilitating constructive dialogue can help mitigate conflicts [12]. Additionally, providing inclusive decision-making processes at the onset of collaborative tasks can also help prevent conflicts in the university system. Despite these tendentious solutions, no study seems to have explored the causes of and solutions to conflict arising among students during group or collaborative tasks, most especially among students, hence the need for this study.

This study, therefore, addresses the identified gap by examining potential conflicts that arise during collaborative tasks among university undergraduate students and provides strategies to effectively mitigate these conflicts within a specific South African university context. By focusing on the uniqueness of the problem, the study shed light on the specific factors that contribute to conflicts in collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. Through an exploration of these conflicts and their underlying causes, the study proposed practical strategies and interventions that can be implemented within the university to foster a more inclusive and harmonious collaborative environment during collaborative tasks. Ultimately, the findings of this study contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of collaborative tasks, promoting better teamwork, and improving overall academic outcomes among university undergraduate students in South Africa.

### *Research Questions*

Based on the study's focus, the following two research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What are the main factors contributing to potential conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students in a South African university?
- What are the most effective strategies to mitigate potential conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students in a South African university?

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT), as proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, provides a framework for understanding how individuals' self-concepts are shaped by their membership in social groups [13]. This theory posits that people categorise themselves and others into groups, such as cultural, religious, or organisational affiliations. These categorisations form a social identity that influences attitudes and behaviours [14]. Individuals strive for a positive self-concept, often achieved through in-group favouritism,

where members of a group prefer and value their in-group over out-groups [15]. SIT also explains intergroup conflicts, discord and tensions that arise between different social or identity groups, suggesting that discrimination and bias can ensue when group status and access to resources are threatened [16]. The theory has been widely applied in research across disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and organisational studies, to explain phenomena such as group cohesion, prejudice, and collective action [17].

SIT is a valuable framework for theorising the study because it posits that individuals derive their self-concept and social identity from the groups they belong to, which can influence their behaviours, attitudes, and interactions [18,19]. In the context of collaborative tasks, SIT helps explain how conflicts may arise due to differences in social identities, such as cultural backgrounds or group affiliations [20,21]. By adopting SIT, the study can explore how these social identities impact intergroup dynamics, biases, and prejudices that may contribute to conflicts within collaborative teams. Applying SIT to the study is particularly relevant because the country (South Africa) is known for its diverse cultural landscape and historical challenges, which can shape social identities and affect intergroup relations. SIT offers a lens to examine how students' social identities, rooted in their cultural backgrounds and group memberships, may intersect with their collaborative experiences. By understanding the impact of social identities on conflict dynamics, the study has the potential to identify strategies to foster a sense of shared identity and minimise conflicts stemming from group differences, ultimately promoting effective collaboration and positive intergroup relations.

Moreover, SIT aligns with the goals of creating an inclusive and supportive environment within universities. By recognising the role of social identities in collaborative tasks, the study can explore ways to mitigate conflicts and promote a sense of belonging among diverse student populations. The insights derived from SIT inform our interventions aimed at reducing prejudices, and biases among group members (students), thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable collaborative environment. By incorporating SIT, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between social identities and potential conflicts during collaborative tasks, contributing to the development of strategies to enhance collaborative experiences among undergraduate students in South Africa.

### **3. Methodology and Methods**

#### *3.1. Research Paradigm*

The transformative paradigm serves as a valuable lens for this study. This paradigm focuses on understanding and addressing power dynamics, social inequalities, and promoting social change [22,23]. By adopting a transformative paradigm, the study acknowledges that conflicts during collaborative tasks are not solely individual or interpersonal issues but are deeply rooted in broader social structures and power dynamics. This perspective allows this study to explore how conflicts within collaborative teams may reflect and reinforce existing social inequalities or power imbalances. Furthermore, the transformative paradigm emphasises the importance of actively engaging participants in the research process, giving voice to marginalised groups, and working towards transformative solutions [24]. By adopting this paradigm, this study aligns with a broader goal of promoting social justice and transformation within the university context.

#### *3.2. Research Approach*

The study falls under a qualitative approach, which is well suited for the study. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and subjective interpretations of the situation [25]. It enables researchers to capture rich, contextual data [26] that can shed light on the underlying factors contributing to conflicts and the effectiveness of strategies for conflict mitigation. Through methods such as interviews, the study gathers detailed accounts of participants' experiences and perspectives, providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. By employing a qualitative approach, this study generated rich insights that informed the development

of contextually relevant strategies to mitigate conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students in South Africa.

### 3.3. Research Design

This study adopts a participatory research design, which underscores the importance of involving participants as active collaborators in the research process. By engaging students as partners, the study recognises their expertise and insights, allowing them to shape the research agenda and outcomes [27]. The participatory research design empowers participants to contribute to the identification of research questions, the design of interventions or strategies, and the interpretation of findings [28,29]. This collaborative approach ensures that the study's recommendations are contextually grounded, relevant, and more likely to be embraced and implemented within the South African university setting. This design, therefore, aligns with the study's aims of promoting a sense of ownership, empowerment, and social change, facilitating a more inclusive and transformative research process.

### 3.4. Research Methods

In this study, a sample of ten undergraduate (level 4) students who were involved in a compulsory group task within a selected module formed the participants. The module is one of the general modules offered by students from various disciplines within the Faculty of Education of the selected university. Among the tasks required to complete the module was a group assignment where the students were grouped, and each group consisted of a minimum of seven and a maximum of ten students. The task was meant to be performed in a group, and the students were mandated to meet either physically or virtually to plan, brainstorm, come up with ideas, harmonise their ideas, and come up with certain pages of a term paper to be submitted within a mandated time frame by the group leader. Most groups could not meet the deadlines, citing a lack of cooperation among group members and the inability to accommodate one another. The participants were chosen using the convenient sampling technique, which suggests that all students participated in the group task, which makes them qualified to be sampled using a convenient method. This method is appropriate because it enables researchers to use any member of the population that is convenient to reach since all members possess the needed characteristics [30]. To gather data, this study employed semi-structured interviews as a data collection method. Semi-structured interviews allow for a flexible yet guided approach to elicit participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights regarding conflicts during collaborative tasks [31]. This method allows the researchers to have a predefined set of questions while also allowing for follow-up questions and probing to delve deeper into participants' responses [32]. Using semi-structured interviews enabled researchers to gather rich qualitative data that provide in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of the participants regarding potential conflicts during collaborative tasks.

In analysing the collected data, the study employed thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis method that involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data [33,34]. By systematically coding and categorising the interview data, the researchers identified the recurring themes and patterns related to potential factors of conflicts during collaborative tasks and possible mitigating strategies. Thematic analysis enabled the researchers to make sense of the qualitative data, identify key issues and factors influencing conflicts, and derive meaningful findings that can inform strategies for conflict mitigation. This method ensures a rigorous and systematic analysis of the data, contributing to the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

### 3.5. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits before participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning participants pseudonyms and ensuring their

personal information remained secure and undisclosed. In the analysis below, pseudonyms such as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5 to S10 were used to represent the participants. The study also adhered to principles of voluntary participation, allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or repercussion. The research design and data collection procedures were reviewed to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines to safeguard the rights and well-being of the participants. Throughout the study, respect for the participants' autonomy, privacy, and dignity were prioritised, and every effort was made to minimise any potential harm or discomfort associated with discussing conflicts.

#### 4. Presentation of Data

These sections present the data analysis of the collected data. The data are presented thematically in response to the two research questions and their findings are also discussed along with the data presentation. Two themes were generated to respond to question 1, and two themes were generated to also respond to question 2. The table below defines the thematic representation of data.

Table 1 presents the thematic representation of the data and discussion of findings in themes to respond to each research question. Two themes were made to respond to each research question. See the analysis below.

**Table 1.** Thematic representation of data and discussion of findings.

Research Questions	Themes Responding to Questions
What are the main factors contributing to potential conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students in a South African university?	Theme 1: Lack of culture of open dialogue Theme 2: Lack of clear guidelines and expectations
What are the most effective strategies to mitigate potential conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students in a South African university?	Theme 1: Promoting culture of open dialogue Theme 2: Establishing clear guidelines and expectations

##### 4.1. Question 1, Theme 1: Lack of Culture of Open Dialogue

The data collected to answer research question 1 showed that students in collaborative tasks lack a culture of open dialogue and effective communication systems to ensure peaceful and collaborative engagement among themselves. This is shown in the participants' statements below:

S10: "During the discussion, some students feel marginalised or unheard, which always contributes to conflicts."

S2: "There's a fear of conflict and confrontation among students. We need to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable speaking up and discussing their viewpoints without fear of judgment or backlash."

S3: "Yhoo, our conversations are sometimes difficult, but that only allows conflicts to simmer beneath the surface. We did not encourage effective communication, which could provide opportunities for constructive discussions. In this case, our discussion sometimes is chaotic."

S1: "I think one of the main factors is the lack of open dialogue culture. People are hesitant to express their opinions or concerns openly, which leads to misunderstandings and unresolved issues."

S9: "We do not listen to one another, which usually hinders our understanding. Not understanding each other's perspectives opens up unnecessary arguments and conflicts."

Participant S10's statement highlights that some students feel marginalised or unheard during discussions, which contributes to conflicts. This suggests that power dynamics



or communication barriers within the group may need to be addressed to create a more inclusive and equitable environment. Participant S2 mentions the fear of conflict and confrontation among students, emphasising the need to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their viewpoints without fear of judgment or backlash. This statement recognises the importance of psychological safety within the group, which can promote open dialogue and constructive discussions. Also, participant S3 acknowledges that their conversations sometimes become difficult and chaotic, leading to conflicts. This indicates a lack of effective communication within the group, where issues may remain unresolved or simmer beneath the surface. In the same vein, S1 identifies the lack of an open dialogue culture as a main factor contributing to conflicts. This aligns with other participants' statements and emphasises the importance of fostering an open environment where individuals feel encouraged and comfortable expressing their opinions and concerns. Participant S9 also points out the lack of listening to one another, which hinders understanding and leads to unnecessary arguments and conflicts. This highlights the significance of active listening in fostering better understanding, empathy, and collaboration within the group. These statements collectively show that there is a lack of inclusive and open communication culture where individuals feel empowered to speak up, actively listen to each other, and engage in constructive discussions.

**Finding:** The analysis reveals that the lack of a culture of open dialogue contributes to conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. This finding aligns with the existing empirical literature on collaborative tasks and conflict management, which emphasises the importance of open communication, psychological safety, active listening, and inclusive environments. [35] found that the lack of a culture of open dialogue contributes to conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. In the same vein, [36] also found that lack of a culture of open dialogue contributes to conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. Studies have shown that when students feel empowered to express their opinions, concerns, and perspectives openly, conflicts can be minimised [37–39]. Additionally, fostering a culture of openness by promoting effective communication practices enhances understanding, reduces misunderstandings, and prevents conflicts from escalating [40].

#### 4.2. Question 1, Theme 2: Lack of Clear Guidelines and Expectations

The data collected indicate that students lack clear guidelines and individual expectations during their collaborative engagement, which often facilitates conflicts that hinder the group outcomes. See the below statements:

S6: "There is no clear guidelines, and when there are no clear guidelines, it's harder to hold people accountable. Some may take advantage or shirk their responsibilities, which creates tension within the team."

S7: "Without clear guidelines, decision-making becomes chaotic. I can say our lecturers do not give us a clear and/or establish how decisions will be made and who has the final say."

S6: "When there are no clear guidelines or expectations, it's easy for misunderstandings and conflicts to arise. Because each of us has different assumptions about our roles, responsibilities, and deadlines."

S4: "We do not have a predetermined guideline to help us manage expectations and minimise conflicts. It sets the foundation for effective collaboration and ensures that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities."

S8: "Unclear expectations also lead to frustration and conflicts with me. Because we need to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding the project's objectives, deliverables, and timelines, but the reverse is the case sometimes."

The participants' statements collectively highlight the significance of clear guidelines and expectations in mitigating conflicts during collaborative tasks. Participant S6 empha-

sises that it becomes challenging to hold individuals accountable without clear guidelines, leading to tension within the team. Participant S7 echoes this sentiment, pointing out that without clear guidelines, decision making becomes chaotic, and there is ambiguity regarding decision-making authority. Participant S6 further emphasises that unclear guidelines or expectations can give rise to misunderstandings and conflicts, as team members may have different assumptions about roles, responsibilities, and deadlines. Participant S4 emphasises the need for predetermined guidelines to manage expectations and minimise conflicts, as clear guidelines establish the foundation for effective collaboration. Lastly, participant S8 highlights how unclear expectations lead to frustration and conflicts.

**Finding:** The analysis of the participants' statements reveals a key finding: the lack of clear guidelines and expectations during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. The participants emphasised that the absence of clear guidelines can lead to accountability issues, ambiguity in decision making, misunderstandings, and frustration, ultimately resulting in conflicts within the team. These findings align with the existing empirical literature on collaborative tasks, which highlights the significance of clear guidelines and expectations for effective teamwork and conflict management. Studies have shown that when roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes are clearly defined, it reduces ambiguity, promotes accountability, and enhances communication and collaboration among team members [41,42]. Clear guidelines provide a shared understanding of expectations and help manage conflicts arising from differing assumptions or interpretations [43]. The study of [44] also confirmed that the lack of clear guidelines and expectations during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students is a problem. This is also supported by the argument of [45] that the way collaborative work is usually planned is not very effective among university students. Therefore, no implementation of clear guidelines promotes conflicts and establishes a foundation for ineffective collaboration, disintegrating team members against working towards shared objectives.

#### 4.3. Question 2, Theme 1: Promoting a Culture of Open Dialogue

As indicated by the data, one of the most effective strategies to mitigate conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students in a South African university is promoting a culture of open dialogue. This is supported by the participants' statements below:

S1: "Creating a culture of open dialogue is key. We should encourage active communication, where everyone feels comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns openly."

S10: "We should prioritise active listening and empathy. By truly understanding each other's viewpoints and validating them, we can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts."

S2: "Effective communication is crucial for conflict mitigation. We need to improve our listening skills, truly understand each other's perspectives, and engage in respectful and constructive conversations."

S3: "We need safe spaces where everyone feels valued and respected. It's important to encourage active participation and make sure everyone's voice is heard."

S9: "Regular team meetings can enhance communication and build trust among team members. It provides an opportunity to share updates, address concerns, and collectively problem-solve."

The participants' statements collectively highlight the importance of creating a culture of open dialogue, active communication, active listening, empathy, and safe spaces within collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. Participant S1 emphasises the need to encourage open dialogue where everyone feels comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns openly. Participant S10 emphasises the importance of active listening and empathy to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. Participant S2 underscores the crucial role of effective communication, improved listening skills, and understanding perspectives

for conflict mitigation. Participant S3 highlights the significance of safe spaces where everyone feels valued, respected, and encouraged to actively participate and have their voices heard. On the side of participant S9, emphasis was laid on the value of regular team meetings in enhancing communication, building trust, and providing opportunities for addressing concerns and problem solving. These statements emphasise the role of open dialogue, active communication, listening skills, empathy, and creating a safe and inclusive environment in fostering effective collaboration, conflict resolution, and positive interpersonal relationships within teams.

**Finding:** The analysis of the participants' statements reveals a significant finding regarding the importance of creating a culture of open dialogue, active communication, active listening, empathy, and safe spaces within collaborative tasks among undergraduate students. The participants emphasised that fostering an open environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their thoughts and concerns, actively listening to each other, understanding different viewpoints, and creating safe spaces where all voices are valued and respected are essential for conflict mitigation and effective collaboration. These findings align with the existing empirical literature on collaborative tasks and communication in team settings. Studies have shown that promoting open dialogue and active communication contributes to better team understanding, trust building, and conflict resolution [46,47]. Active listening and empathy play crucial roles in preventing misunderstandings and conflicts while creating safe spaces, allowing for inclusive participation and valuing diverse perspectives [48]. Therefore, incorporating these strategies informed by empirical data can create an environment that fosters effective communication, enhances collaboration, and reduces conflicts, ultimately leading to better outcomes in collaborative tasks among undergraduate students.

#### 4.4. Question 2, Theme 2: Establishing Clear Guidelines and Expectations

Based on the data, one of the most effective strategies to mitigate conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students is establishing clear guidelines and expectations. This is supported by the participants' statements below:

S6: "Establishing a clear framework for conflict resolution will assist us to work well with one another. That when we have rules and guidelines on how conflicts will be addressed and resolved, will probably ensure fairness and avoids prolonged disputes."

S7: "In every meeting, we need to set clear expectations to help manage everyone's assumptions and minimise misunderstandings. This will allow for a shared understanding of project objectives and fosters accountability."

S6: "Establishing clear guidelines and expectations is vital. It helps ensure that everyone understands their roles, responsibilities, and deadlines, reducing the chances of conflicts arising."

S4: "Regular check-ins and progress updates by the group leaders can help keep everyone aligned and accountable. That is, reporting progress and addressing any challenges can prevent conflicts from escalating because everyone will be made to participate."

S8: "I think there is nothing bad if we have a well-defined decision-making process and a guideline on how decisions will be made and who holds decision-making. This I believe, can prevent conflicts related to decision-making disagreements."

The participants' statements collectively argue the significance of establishing a clear framework for conflict resolution, setting clear expectations, establishing guidelines and expectations, regular check-ins, and a well-defined decision-making process in mitigating conflicts during collaborative tasks. The statement of Participant S6 emphasises the need for a clear framework for conflict resolution to ensure fairness and avoid prolonged disputes. Also, participant S7 supports the need to set clear expectations to manage assumptions



and minimise misunderstandings, fostering accountability. Participant S6 reiterates the importance of clear guidelines and expectations in understanding roles, responsibilities, and deadlines, reducing conflicts. Participant S4 highlights the value of regular check-ins and progress updates to keep everyone aligned and accountable, preventing conflicts from escalating. Participant S8 suggests that a well-defined decision-making process and guidelines can prevent conflicts related to decision-making disagreements. These findings argue that incorporating these strategies, informed by empirical data, can contribute to a more harmonious and productive collaborative environment among university undergraduate students during collaborative engagement.

**Finding:** The analysis of the participants' statements revealed the importance of establishing clear frameworks, guidelines, expectations, regular check-ins, and a well-defined decision-making process in mitigating conflicts during collaborative tasks. The participants emphasised that establishing clear guidelines and expectations promotes fairness and prevents prolonged disputes, while setting clear expectations fosters accountability and minimises misunderstandings. Additionally, clear guidelines and expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and deadlines reduce the chances of conflicts arising. Regular check-ins and progress updates help keep everyone aligned and accountable, while a well-defined decision-making process and guidelines prevent conflicts related to decision-making disagreements. These findings align with the existing empirical literature on conflict management and effective teamwork. Research suggests that clear frameworks, guidelines, and expectations promote clarity, understanding, and accountability within teams, reducing conflicts and improving collaboration [49,50]. Moreover, regular communication and well-defined decision-making processes establish a shared understanding and facilitate smoother team interactions [51]. By incorporating these strategies informed by empirical data, universities can create an environment conducive to effective collaboration, conflict resolution, and positive team dynamics during collaborative tasks among university undergraduate students.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study explored potential conflicts during collaborative tasks among university undergraduate students within a specific South African university context and presented strategies to effectively mitigate these conflicts. The findings of the study indicate that the absence of a culture of open dialogue and the lack of clear guidelines and expectations are significant contributing factors to conflicts during collaborative tasks. Conversely, the study also found that promoting a culture of open dialogue and establishing clear guidelines and expectations are effective strategies for conflict mitigation. These conclusions were derived from a participatory research design that aimed to transform collaborative group tasks among undergraduate students.

The implications of the study's conclusion on Social Identity Theory suggest that by creating a culture of open dialogue and establishing clear guidelines, university undergraduate students can effectively manage conflicts during collaborative tasks while promoting positive social identities within the student population. This, in turn, can lead to enhanced teamwork, improved collaboration, and a more inclusive and supportive group environment that aligns with the principles of Social Identity Theory.

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- In order to foster a culture of open dialogue, instructors and facilitators should take proactive measures. They can achieve this by implementing structured group activities that ensure active participation from all members, providing comprehensive training in effective communication and active listening skills. Furthermore, they should establish clear guidelines that promote respectful and inclusive interactions within the collaborative setting. Creating a safe space for expression is essential, and the inclusion of facilitators or mediators can guide discussions and facilitate conflict resolution. To enhance communication, implementing anonymous feedback mechanisms and reflective practices is recommended.

- To minimize misunderstandings and conflicts in collaborative tasks, instructors, facilitators, and team leaders play a pivotal role. They should define specific roles and responsibilities for each team member, clearly state and agree upon deadlines, and outline the decision-making process. Regular check-ins and progress updates should be scheduled to reinforce guidelines and maintain alignment, providing a platform for accountability. These sessions allow team members to report on their progress, discuss challenges faced, and receive constructive feedback.
- In terms of decision making, team leaders and decision-making authorities should implement a well-defined process to prevent conflicts arising from disagreements and ambiguity. Ensuring transparency and inclusivity in the decision-making process is crucial. Clear guidelines should be provided on decisions, specifying consensus, majority vote, or delegation to individuals or sub-groups. The authority for making final decisions should also be clearly established, designating a specific individual or group responsible for decisions when consensus cannot be reached. These structured guidelines ensure fairness and efficiency in the decision-making process, reducing the likelihood of conflicts and ensuring timely and informed decisions.

## 6. Implications of the Theory

This study concludes that conflicts during collaborative tasks among undergraduate students can be mitigated by promoting a culture of open dialogue and establishing clear guidelines and expectations. Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that individuals categorise themselves and others into various social groups, leading to the development of a social identity. This social identity influences an individual's behaviour and attitudes towards others, affecting group dynamics and potentially leading to intergroup conflicts. The implications of the study's conclusion on SIT suggest that fostering open communication and clear guidelines can lead to a more supportive and inclusive group environment, promoting positive social identities and reducing conflicts. By encouraging active communication, creating safe spaces for expression, establishing clear roles and responsibilities, and implementing well-defined decision-making processes, universities can create a framework that promotes positive social identities, reduces misunderstandings, and ultimately leads to enhanced collaboration and a harmonious environment. This aligns with the principles of SIT as it encourages the formation of positive social identities, promoting a sense of belonging and cooperation among group members, leading to improved teamwork and collaboration. Therefore, the recommendations made in this study are crucial for enhancing collaboration and minimising conflicts, as they directly address the underlying social dynamics that influence group interactions and contribute to the development of a supportive and inclusive group environment.

## 7. Contribution to Knowledge

The significance of the findings in this study, despite addressing well-known reasons for group conflicts, lies in its contextual specificity and practical applicability. Focusing on a South African university setting, the research provides tailored insights and strategies directly relevant to the unique cultural, social, and educational dynamics in this context. This ensures that the proposed interventions are not just generic recommendations but are grounded in the specific experiences and needs of the students involved. Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by validating and reinforcing the importance of addressing group conflicts in collaborative tasks while offering a fresh perspective and localised solutions. In doing so, the research upholds the value of context-specific studies. It demonstrates that even well-established concepts can benefit from re-examination and adaptation to settings, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of collaborative learning and improving academic outcomes for undergraduate students in South Africa.

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