

# Dialectical contradictions in postgraduate business education: A Framework for enhancing teaching and learning in UK higher education

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## Keywords

Dialectical contradiction, self-reflection, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, collaborative problem solving, problem-based learning, Socratic questioning, Higher education.

## Abstract

**Purpose of this study:** The purpose of this study is to critically examine the role of dialectical contradiction as a pedagogical construct and explore its application within Postgraduate business and management programmes in the UK Higher education sector to enhance teaching and learning experiences.

**Methodology:** This study systematically reviews the literature to explore the concept of dialectical contradictions and its application in improving the learning experience in higher education. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) framework is used to conduct systematic literature review to ensure a rigorous and replicable process. The methodology consists of several stages: defining research questions, identifying relevant literature, applying inclusion/exclusion criteria, evaluating the quality of selected studies, extracting, and synthesising data, and identifying themes.

**Key findings:** The findings of the review suggests that the concept can be applied as one of the most critical and practical pedagogical constructs for enhancing teaching and learning in business and Management education. Grounded on a rich philosophical doctrine from Hegel to modern critical pedagogy, the concept is vital for the enhancement of critical thinking and reflective capacity, promotion of resilience and entrepreneurial learning, enhance educational equality and it is a catalyst for pedagogical adaptation:

**Study originality and implications:** The study is original in its interdisciplinary approach. While most past studies use this concept in philosophical and abstract forms, this study systematically reviewed the theoretical and empirical studies to develop a practical pedagogical framework using the PRISMA framework. The findings of this study will offer valuable insights to educators, curriculum designers, and institutional leaders seeking to integrate the concept as a sound teaching strategy to promote critical thinking, reflective practice, intellectual agility ethical reasoning and responsible leadership in postgraduate business and management education.

**Background and rationale:** Dialectical contradiction plays an important role in enabling learners to understand dynamic realities and is widely viewed as an important pre-requisite to innovative and critical thinking. For postgraduate business students, it is very important as it supports individual capacity to actively engage with contradictions, ambiguity and competing perspectives. The concept centres on learning as a change over time and a developmental process, where ideas are formed, advanced, and modified through ideological conflict and resolution. This approach encourages asking questions, dialogue, debating, and reasoning together, thereby promoting inclusive learning environment where different opinions contribute to deeper understanding.

Despite extensive philosophical discussion of dialectical contradiction, its systematic application as a pedagogical framework within postgraduate business education remains underdeveloped (de Ruiter et al., 2024). In the UK business education sector, the teaching and learning environments are becoming more varied and complex because of the multicultural and multi-technological classroom and increasing demand for entrepreneurial classroom competencies. This complex setting consequently

*embeds many pedagogical tensions, such as teacher-student control, pedagogical innovation versus tradition, and the universally designed versus locally relevant curriculum.*

*Unfortunately, many pedagogical strategies designed for business and management postgraduate education seem incapable of transforming such tensions into a pedagogically constructive phenomenon that fosters the kind of critical, adaptive, and reflective learning that postgraduate business education is designed to encourage (Shore and Ahmad, 2024). Consequently, postgraduate business education in the UK suffers from a pedagogical deficit of frameworks incorporating dialectical contradiction as a pedagogical tool. In response to this deficit, this research aims to provide a comprehensive literature synthesis from across various disciplines that offers a pedagogical framework that uses dialectical contradiction to foster learning, critical reflection, and entrepreneurial thinking within UK postgraduate business and management education.*

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## Literature review

### Dialectical contradiction

Philosophically, dialectical contradiction refers to the inclusion of contradiction that exhibits two opposing but active forces that may be intense but insightful in their relationship in constructive ways (de Ruiter et al, 2024). In education, this idea is fundamental for the understanding of learning, growth and instruction on a broader perspective scope of teaching.

This derives from the dialectic that developed reasoning in ancient Chinese, Indian, and Greek philosophies where resolving a contradiction was the aim of philosophy to reasoning as a more general approach of interpreting reality relationships (Samson, 2019). In Chinese philosophy, especially Taoism, contradiction is not only accepted but treated as a natural complementary force (yin-yang) unlike the Western approach which views contradictions as logical fallacies to get rid of. Knowledge of Taoism emerges from the balancing of these polarities. With Hegel, German idealism reconceptualised contradiction as an essential pillar of the development of consciousness and body of knowledge. Not as failure of reasoning, but as an incentive of intellectual and spiritual growth through Hegel's dialectical method: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Other thinkers like Marx developed dialectical reasoning in material and religious contexts respectively to further build on his ideas. The notion of contradiction is grounded in the concept of dialectical contradiction inspired by Hegel and as elucidated by Brandom (2009) and is used as a basis to make sense of the way in which we gain knowledge through the process of contradiction. This system of education embodies dynamic learning, stimulating resolution of contradicting ideas through controlled discussion and debate. In educational theory, the shift is reflected in discursive classroom activities that encourage critical thinking and cognitive flexibility (Foster, 2004).

### The Evolution of the Concept of Dialectical Contradiction

While German philosopher Hegel is the first coined the concept of triadic dialectic known as thesis-antithesis-synthesis (Samson, 2019) but the concept has undergone significant transformation over the years across philosophical epochs. A sheer volume of research suggests that it is Heraclitus who stated that "all is flux," framing reality as a dynamic interplay of opposites (Heraclitus, c. 500 BCE). In the Book *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*. Cambridge University Press by Kirk (1954) offers translation and analysis of the fragments of Heraclitus (c 500 BCE). The concept of unity of opposite is termed by Heraclitus. He realised that the fundamental essence of the universe is the change, and he articulated the concept of "unity of opposites" where opposite forces are independent and give rise to harmony. "Unity of opposites" also suggest that contradictions are not only natural but essential for harmony. This concept is well resonated with dialectical thinkers. Barnes (1982) also explores the view of Heraclitus and its philosophical implications that flux, and the opposite is grounded. This is well aligned with the

contextualise interpretation of Heraclitus philosophy of change and unity of opposite by McKirahan (1994). Through the concept of dialectical method Plato advance Heraclitus idea of “Unity of opposites” using structured discussion to expose the limitations of competing viewpoints and advance toward truth (Plato, 427–327 BCE). In his dialogues, Plato employed dialectic as a methodological tool to engage in reasoned reasoning, highlighting inconsistencies in opposing viewpoints and pursuing truth. This approach assumes that opposing viewpoints are present. According to Articles irrelevant to UK HE or without conceptual focus excluding Plato the dialectic is the highest form of philosophical reasoning in creating knowledge. Gonzalez (1998) states that the concept of dialectic by Plato is a dynamic and interpersonal process of capturing reality and this is one of the best philosophical practices.

For philosophical enquiry while Plato used contradiction as methodological tool, his student Aristotle (384–322 BCE) had a more formal approach to philosophical investigation. By denying the existence of genuine contradictions, his Law of Non-Contradiction essentially limited dialectical thinking to the realms of consistency and logic (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*). The law of non-contradiction states that in the same sense, an attribute cannot simultaneously belong to and not belong to the same subject (Smith, 2025).

However, German philosopher Hegel revolutionised dialectics by introducing contradiction as the heart of progress and development. A sheer volume of research suggests he is the first coined the concept of triadic dialectic known as thesis-antithesis-synthesis (Samson, 2019). Hegel is one of the most influential Western thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the same time one of the most inaccessible and misunderstood. Hegel is described as “a modern savior who had come to explain the modern world to itself” (Pinkard, 2008,). The concept of dialectical contradiction according to Hegel is the dynamic and necessary opposition between two conceptual forces (thesis and antithesis), which leads to their resolution in a higher-order synthesis. Samson (2019) states that contradiction is not a logical error but a structural component of reality and thought that drives development and self-realisation. The 1960s saw a brief resurgence of interest in Hegel's writings, but only since they had an impact on Marxism. Hegel is currently experiencing somewhat of a rebirth, almost 200 years after his last published book (Beiser, 2008). Hegel has been the subject of more than 1,500 peer-reviewed research articles and more than 250 books in the past 20 years alone. Why would a philosopher whose writings were long since out of style attract such attention today? According to Fox (2005), Hegel is the endless source of inspiration and controversy who for the past many decades has constantly invited reinterpretation and appropriation.

German philosopher, economist and political theorist Karl Marx (1818-1883) worked on Hegel's idea of dialectics and shifted dialectics from the realm of ideas to material conditions. Karl Marx is best known as the founder of Marxist theory who argued that contradictions in the economic base, particularly between labor and capital drive historical change. His dialectical materialism underscores real, structural opposition within society, departing from Hegel's idealist framework. This dialectical materialism is then extended to the natural world by Engels asserting that nature itself is dialectical, full of contradictions that propel evolutionary change (Engels, 1820–1895). Chinese communist revolutionary and the founding father to the people's republic of China Mao Zedong (Known as Mao Tse-tung, 1893-1976) extend the Marx's theory further by distinguishing primary and secondary contradictions. He argues that contextual nature of the contradiction in revolutionary praxis (Mao 1973).

Marcuse (1964) critiqued the integration of oppositional thinking within advanced capitalist societies. He introduced the concept of *one-dimensionality* that explained how technological rationality neutralises contradiction, dulling the critical potential of dialectics. A few years later the concept of negative dialectics introduced by Theodor Adorno, which refused synthesis and emphasised the persistence of contradiction as a critique of total ideologies (Adorno, 1973). This negative dialectical approach disagrees with Hegel's idea that all contradictions can be solved. Instead, it sees contradictions as something that can't always be fixed and strongly convinced that they are important for deep, critical thinking. By merging dialectics with mathematical set theory, Alain Badiou (2005) argues that truth arises from *ruptures* or *events* that reveal and destabilize structured contradictions. Reconceptualisation of this abstract concept of dialectical analysis is expanded to ontological inquiry, suggesting a formal system wherein contradiction births novelty. However, Priest (2006) in a more radical vein introduced “dialetheism” doctrine which suggest that some contradictions are genuinely true, challenging classical logic and aligning more closely with the spirit of dialectical thoughts. By distinguishing ‘logical’ and “dialectical” contradictions, Du Ruji (2010)

emphasising the latter as forces that co-exist within entities, enabling transformation rather than negation. This distinction underscores the qualitative richness of dialectical reasoning in contrast to formal logic. Critical dialectical pluralism is promoted by Kumar (2021), who views epistemic and paradigmatic contradictions as generative for change. His method accepts dialectical disagreement as a necessary aesthetic and moral component of international knowledge and cross-cultural communication.

The evolution of dialectical contradiction—from Heraclitus’s natural oppositions, through Hegelian synthesis, Marxist materialism, and into postmodern logic and pluralism—reflects a deepening understanding of contradiction not as a flaw, but as the *motor of change*. Whether rejected, resolved, or embraced, contradiction continues to be central to philosophical inquiry and political praxis.

Table- Dialectical contradiction: key thinkers, concepts, and definitions across history

Author	Key concept	Definition	View on contradiction	Connection to the predecessor	Application
Heraclitus (c 500 BCE)	Unity of opposites	The fundamental essence of the universe is the change, and he articulated the concept of “unity of opposites” where opposite forces are independent and give rise to harmony	Contradiction is viewed as natural and generative	Pre-Socratic origin of dialectics	Nature: change and balance
Plato (427-327 BCE)	Dialectic	Dialectic as a methodological tool to engage in reasoned reasoning, highlighting inconsistencies in opposing viewpoints and pursuing truth. This approach assumes that opposing viewpoints are present	Contradictions are the tools for investigation	Grounded in Socrates dialogue	Knowledge and ethics
Aristotle (384-322)	Law of non-Contradiction	According to his Metaphysics, "the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect. This is known as the Law of Non-Contradiction.	Logically not possible	Contrasts with Heraclitus and dialectics	Metaphysics and logic
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)	Dialectical process	Hegel's dialectical method: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Contradictions are seen as driving forces of change	Contradictions are vital and can be solved through synthesis	Aristotle is inverted, and Marx is influenced	Philosophy and history
Karl Marx (1818-1883)	Materialist dialectics	Marx converted Hegelian dialectics into a materialist dialectic, contending that historical development is fuelled by contradictions in the economic structure (basis) of society, such as labour vs. capital, which are material and actual rather than ideal.	Materialistic contradictions are vital for social changes	Developed further Hegel's idea	Labour, class struggle and economics
Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)	Dialectics of nature	Nature is full of contradictions, which serve as the foundation for evolution and change.	Contradictions are viewed as natural processes	Expands Marxist dialectics to science	Evolution and natural science
Mao Zedong (1893-1976)	Contradictions	By contrasting fundamental and secondary contradictions and highlighting their uniqueness, as well as the need to understand particular contradictions in order to direct revolutionary action, Mao promoted dialectical materialism.	Contradictions must be understood contextually and strategically.	Applied Marxist's theory to practice	Revolution and political strategy
Theodor Adorno (1903-1969)	Negative dialectics	Negative dialectics is more than just a technique. It is the dialectic's self-reflection in light of its own inability to achieve reconciliation.	To reveal truth contradictions are important	Critiques Hegelian closure	Critical theory, aesthetics
Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979)	One dimensionality	Marcuse's criticism of highly developed industrial societies, where oppositional ideas and critical thinking are either absorbed or smothered by consumer culture and technological rationality, is known as "one-dimensionality." Individuals lose their ability to recognize or respond to social contradictions when they become conformists.	Contradiction is hidden by ideology.	Critique capitalism	Technology, advancement
Alain Badiou	Dialectics	Alain Badiou redefines dialectics using	To enhance	Using	Politics,

(2005)	and set theory	mathematical set theory, arguing that truth emerges through ruptures (called events) that break with established structures. These incidents highlight inconsistencies in a circumstance, and staying true to the event allows for revolutionary transformation. According to Badiou, dialectics is the process of dealing with the many and the inconsistent, while ontology is based on set theory.	transformative moments contradictions are needed	mathematical set expanded dialectics	ontology
Graham Priest (2006)	Dialetheism	The concept is defined as the view that there are true contradictions. The notion that certain contradictions can be true is known as dialetheism. Graham Priest contends that in some circumstances, such as logical or semantic paradoxes, a proposition and its opposite may both be true. This calls into question the long-standing principle that anything cannot be both true and untrue at the same time.	Contradiction can be logically valid in certain cases.	Challenges classical logic	Logic
Du Ruji (2010)	Dialectical vs logical contradiction	A logical contradiction, according to Du Ruji, is when anything cannot be both true and false at the same time. However, a dialectical contradiction occurs when two opposed forces or concepts coexist in the same entity, such as the conflict between growth and decay or between an employer and employee. Instead of negating one another, these opposites foster growth and change.	Dialectical contradictions are developmental.	Differences between dialectical and logical	Philosophy of contradiction
Giri Ananta Kumar (2021).	Towards a Critical Dialectical Pluralism	Makes the case for accepting paradigm-shifting inconsistencies in order to foster creative change.	Fosters creative change	Combined Eastern and Western philosophy	Cultural renewal, transformation

*Source: Authors of this study*

### Thematic Review

The thematic analysis method has been used to identify and analyses the themes related to dialectical contradictions within teaching and learning practices and its influence on educational experiences of postgraduate business student in UK. It also identified how contradictions enhance pedagogical strategies.

### Theme one: Dialectical contradiction in Critical reflection and deep learning

In teaching and learning situations, the edge of dialectical contradiction can be seen as a challenge to some pedagogical principles and this, in turn, leads to further insights. One important site where dialectical contradictions take place is classroom talk. Vadeboncoeur and Collie (2013) advocate for the use of structured conversation based on Socratic questioning to develop epistemological curiosity and depth of understanding. Their report demonstrates that students internalise more sophisticated ways of reasoning when they are encouraged to consider contrasting points of view. And like wise, Whitehead (2014) supports "living educational theory" as teachers describe what they learn through critical attention to contradiction. This self-reflexivity is in keeping with professional development and educational renewal. As an instance, Samson (2019) argues that Hegel's dialectics do not have to be restricted to exposition. Rather, they can function as an „educational“ process facilitating a non-passive “educate” within dialectical thinking. The same contradiction, or duality, concerns with practice and expression, or with theory and practices, is regarded as corruption. It does not need to be settled so quickly (Chang and Zhao 2025).

Engagement with competing ideas relates to the notion of complex thought. It is advanced as an 'emergent phenomenon' and synthesised in a way coined dichotomous engagement that, to use the combination of these words best explains the situation, using formal operational thinking (Kumar, 2021). Riegel and Basseches (1980) are credited for this stage, and, like the others, deem it vital when contending with clarity, obscurity, paradox, or metamorphosis - real-world challenges of education issues. The contradictions are not only pedagogical but are of an institutional nature. Naidoo (2004) challenges the

performative contradictions of the elite UK university which espouses inclusive while reproducing exclusivity. This ideological tension opens opportunities for debate among the students Kay and Dunne (2011). Williamson, Bayne, & Shay (2020) also problematise humanistic mission statements and data-driven learning analytics exposing a profound tension between institutional values and practices.

Higher education experience has not been immune to the contradictions of digital technologies. Because it fosters learner autonomy, the flipped classroom model requires high amounts of self-discipline and synchronous involvement (Sahin and Top, 2015). This points to a trade-off between flexibility and accountability. Czerniewicz and Brown (2009) have shown that these contradictions may be productive in stimulating pedagogical re-design and critical evaluations of teaching practices. Platforms that promote open access are inclined toward failing to achieve contextualization and are therefore undermining assumptions of equity and inclusion (Czerniewicz and Brown, 2009).

Divisions also originate from differing epistemological positions in multicultural classrooms. Collectivist cultures, according to Choi and Nisbett (2000), tolerate contradiction much more comfortably than individualist cultures. Such a mindset shapes students' view of learning; it is evidenced in dialogue or critical-thinking activities. For their UK HEI counterparts, this requires the implementation of inclusive pedagogical strategies that take account of and respect different cognitive styles, encouraging the growth of mutual understanding and respect. The key theme of dialectical contradiction in critical reflection and deep learning is well supported by other works including Alexander (2012); Whitehead (2012); Burbules (2000); Khalil (2020); Cronin (2015). It is clear from the above discussion that dialectical discussion and Socrates questioning promote curiosity and deeper engagement.

### **Theme two: Dialectical contradictions enhance resilience and adaptive learning**

The findings from the articles revealed several dialectical conflicts in the present teaching and learning environment, particularly in the environment of postgraduate business education. The prevailing article revealed the tension between the potential distraction of the growing engagement of students with subtitles, which potentially sinks the intellectual capacity of listening (Kamaruddin et al., 2024). This insight revealed a larger enhancement as opposed to inhibition dialectic, as present educational tools are strengthening skills like vocabulary, but inadvertently inhibit other skills such as fluency. The analysis revealed a paradox of autonomy; the study stated that the facility of self-paced learning with subtitles increased independence while learning. However, it turned students dependent on the process and lessened the deep and active participation of students. The drive for authenticity clashes with precision, while real-world materials convey valuable realism, they often bring culturally sensitive content, which increases the complexity of using the content for educational purposes (Kamaruddin et al., 2024). Accessibility dialectic also presents their easily accessible materials increasing the risk of reinforcing misinterpretation due to the limited cultural knowledge of students. A structural conflict emerged from a source, as it has been found that Eastern pedagogical norms stress hierarchical conflict with Western participatory models, which creates confusion for students to navigate both (Paletz et al., 2015; Simmons et al., 2021).

Thus, theoretical knowledge fails to align with applications, which reinforces the theory-practice divide. It leaves students unprepared to meet real-world demands. Similarly, students seeking flexibility come across the rigid institutional mindset, which creates a control flexibility conflict (Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2017; Chang, and Zhao, 2025). The conflict between students versus labour revealed the factor of a commoditised education system, which focuses more on the output of students than actual learning. Sources also revealed a conflict between credibility and critical teaching, as competing thoughts in education make education a way of employment rather than the process of development of intellectuality. Moreover, a methodological conflict is revealed from the present studies, as the universities are prioritising research output and compromising the teaching quality in higher education (Budd, 2015; Dlamini and Tsikata, 2025). Finally, it has been found from the sources that dialectical conflict, such as maintaining a balance between personal creativity and collaborative conflict improves resilience and adaptive learning (Shore and Ahmad, 2024). Engaging with opposing forces within a simulated entrepreneurial environment nurtures deep engagement. It promotes the development of self-efficacy and

entrepreneurial skills among postgraduate business students in UK higher education with a structured, but also dynamic educational approach.

Table 2: Dialectical contradictions enhance resilience and adaptive learning-Key sources

Key concepts	Dialectical Conflict	Supporting Source(s)
Enhancement vs. Inhibition	Educational tools improve one skill (vocabulary) but weaken another (fluency, active listening).	Kamaruddin et al., 2024
Autonomy vs. Dependence	Subtitles promote independence in learning but reduce deep engagement and critical listening.	Kamaruddin et al., 2024, Hyrkkö (2025)
Authenticity vs. Precision	Using authentic materials adds realism but risks cultural misinterpretation and limits instructional precision.	Kamaruddin et al., 2024
Accessibility vs. Misinterpretation	Easily accessible learning content might be misinterpreted due to learners limited contextual/cultural understanding.	Kamaruddin et al., 2024
Eastern vs. Western Norms	Students struggle between hierarchical Eastern norms and participatory Western models, leading to confusion in engagement expectations.	Paletz et al., 2015 ; Simmons et al., 2021
Control vs. Flexibility	Students seek flexibility in learning, but institutions maintain rigid structures and assessment protocols.	Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2017; Chang & Zhao, 2025
Research vs. Teaching	University priorities lean toward research metrics at the expense of teaching quality.	Budd, 2015; Dlamini & Tsikati, 2025
Creativity vs. Collaboration	Balancing personal expression with group collaboration builds resilience and enhances adaptive, entrepreneurial skills.	Shore & Ahmad, 2024 Wei & Yang (2025).

### Theme three: Dialectics in Business pedagogy: Effectiveness and student engagement

In exploring conflict in postgraduate business education in UK higher education, several dialectical tensions were identified that have significant impact on educational effectiveness, student engagement and application of knowledge. The sources say that students get used to new academic norms and the students feel cognitive pressure. In the initial stage, the challenge of becoming proficient at unfamiliar academic norms such as critical thinking and self-determining inquiry creates distress. But they eventually learn deeper through adaptation over time. This tension is a clear dialectic between tussle and growth which is to say, uneasiness in learning is productive for academic growth when weighed effectively (Paletz et al., 2015; Simmons et al., 2021). The source explained that digital tools act as reconciling artefacts, letting students self-navigate their learning at their own pace. However, this presented a paradox: while these tools reinforce student autonomy, but reduce the apparent need for interpersonal engagement, which hinders the experience of collaborative learning (Simmons et al., 2021). Complicating this additionally, Smit (2025) highlighted a conflict inherent in the digital literacy of faculty. Teachers with different skill sets in using digital tools build inconsistent learning environments for students. This revealed a conflict between the perspective for innovation and the ability to execute, where the academic benefits of technology are restricted due to the skills of the facilitator.

A further conflict occurred from the study of Dzelzkaleja and Kapenieks (2018), which revealed the tension between traditional pedagogical methods and developing student-centered learning methods. Faculty attachment to traditional delivery approaches often inhibits the shift towards interactive and empirical learning. It limits the pedagogical innovation in higher education. Putnam, Fairhurst and Banghart (2016) highlighted the global-local conflict; the study observed that curricula that are designed for international teams are often UK-centric. The dearth of cultural relevance pushed away different student groups; it reduced both participation and perceived relevance of curricula. The dialect here is

between universality and applicability. The article of Shore and Ahmad (2024) revealed the conflict between simulated business environments and real-world complications affects educational efficiency. Structured teamwork enhances engagement, but the diverse teacher-student assessments increase tensions in assessment. The article revealed a gap between perceived and actual skill acquisition, which challenges expectations about entrepreneurial self-efficacy and the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the context of postgraduate education. These conflicts point out that the UK postgraduate business education system aims to be progressive, but it is constrained by structural, technological and ideological contradiction. Addressing these contradicting tensions needs not only technological adjustments but also ideological moves towards more insightful, comprehensive and adaptive educational frameworks.

Table 3: Dialectics in Business pedagogy: Effectiveness and student engagement-key sources

Key concepts	Dialectical Conflict	Supporting Source(s)
Tussle vs. Growth	Initial struggle with critical thinking and independent inquiry causes stress but ultimately fosters deeper learning and adaptation.	Paletz et al., 2015 ; Simmons et al., 2021
Autonomy vs. Collaboration	Digital tools enhance autonomy but hinder collaborative and interpersonal learning experiences.	Simmons et al., 2021
Innovation vs. Execution	Faculty's uneven digital proficiency limits the effective use of technology, despite its promise for innovation.	Smit, 2025
Tradition vs. Transformation	Resistance to change by faculty prevents the adoption of innovative, interactive teaching models aligned with modern learner needs.	Dzelzkaleja & Kapenieks, 2018
Universality vs. Applicability	Internationalised curricula often remain UK-centric, reducing engagement and relevance for culturally diverse student groups.	Putnam, Fairhurst & Banghart, 2016
Simulation vs. Reality	Simulated entrepreneurial environments promote structured learning but fall short of preparing students for nuanced real-world business challenges.	Shore & Ahmad, 2024
Expectation vs. Outcome	Students expect entrepreneurial competence but experience a disconnect between simulated training and real skill acquisition.	Shore & Ahmad, 2024

#### Theme four: Dialectical contradictions to enhance teaching methods and learning practices

The investigation of Farjoun (2017) highlighted that to improve teaching and learning, teachers need to harness dialectical conflict by boosting critical reflection, embracing conflict as a dynamic teaching tool, and incorporating opposing perspectives. It will encourage deeper understanding and adaptive thinking among students. Strategies include encouraging dialogue, using case-based learning to explore tension, and designing assignments that identify evolving perspectives. These practices will improve creativity and will align teaching methods with real-world complexities. The dialectic of mental health in higher education such as making a balance between educational stress and emotional well-being is a key to improving teaching practices (Li, 2023). Institutions need to incorporate mental health support into teaching by including strategies such as emotion regulation workshops, academic mentoring, and cross-functional support systems, transforming tension into prospects for deeper engagement, and complete student development (Eshtehardi, 2025).

Dialectical contradiction such as the tension between traditional methods and modern demands in the education sector accelerates academic development (Sunikan, Wardoyo and Roesminingsih, 2025). Inspiring better teaching, enhancing collaboration, and offering academic supervision build conflicts that inspire reflection and modernisation. Adopting adaptive strategies such as new technology and making an environment for teacher-student interaction can transform these conflicts into promoters. These strategies will improve teaching practices, consequently, student engagement will increase, and it will

create a more inclusive as well as approachable learning environment. However, the study of Asa, Du Plessis and Atiku, (2024) revealed that the dialectical contradiction between traditional teaching approaches and technological advancements brings a strategic opportunity to incorporate novelty in teaching. The virtual learning process increases student engagement compared to rigid methods. Addressing conflicts related to access, interactivity and student expectations would encourage the implementation of a student-centric approach.

Table 4: Dialectical contradictions to enhance teaching methods and learning practices-Key sources

Key concepts	Proposed Strategy / Impact	Source(s)
Conflict as a Learning Tool	Promote dialogue, use case-based learning, and evolving-perspective assignments.	Farjoun, 2017
Educational Stress vs. Well-being	Emotion regulation workshops, mentoring, and support systems.	Li, 2023
Tradition vs. Modernisation	Introduce collaboration, adaptive teaching, and teacher-student interaction to drive pedagogical evolution.	Sunikan, Wardoyo & Roesminingsih, 2025
Rigidity vs. Flexibility	Use virtual platforms, increase student interactivity, align with learner expectations.	Asa, Du Plessis & Atiku, 2024
Static vs. Dynamic Learning	Employ dynamic teaching tools like case studies and evolving assignments.	Farjoun, 2017
Stress vs. Growth	Embed emotional well-being in pedagogy through integrated support mechanisms.	

### Theme 5: Contradictions Cultivate Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy and Resilience

Resilience, entrepreneurial mindset, and self-efficacy are widely recognised as the key competency's students in Business Educations as the current world is shaped by uncertainty, ambiguity, volatility, and dynamic environment (Hartmann et al, 2022). The number of theories such as Cognitive conflict theory and entrepreneurial self-efficacy model positions the philosophical concept, dialectical contradiction as a deliberate educational strategy instead of a pedagogical flaw to promote inclusive education, learners' engagement, transformation, and adaptability (Shore and Ahmad, 2024, Bhattarai, 2025). The authors further states that structured entrepreneurial simulations, where students grapple with competing priorities, resource constraints, and conflicting feedback, create cognitive dissonance that catalyses reflective practice and deeper engagement. These contradictions serve as pedagogical inflection points where learners begin to internalise complex critical thinking skills and develop a stronger entrepreneurial identity.

This finding is further reinforced by Woods (2022), who conceptualises cognitive conflict as a driver of strategic decision-making in business education, especially when learners are exposed to group-based debates that reflect real-world business dilemmas. Similarly, Lee (2012) shows that decision-making under conflicting conditions stimulates higher-order thinking and reinforces resilience. These studies collectively affirm that the tension between ideal outcomes and real-world constraints offers not only an emotional and cognitive challenge but also a transformative learning opportunity. Yet, despite its proven pedagogical value, the integration of dialectical contradiction into entrepreneurship education remains underutilised. There is still limited empirical research that systematically explores how such contradictions, when embedded intentionally, shape long-term entrepreneurial mindsets or influence students' post-educational trajectories.

## Research gap

While there are number of interdisciplinary studies acknowledging the historical, philosophical, and pedagogical importance of dialectical contradiction, significant research gap remains in its practical integration within higher education especially within postgraduate business and management education in the UK. There are number of areas where gap is identified:

**Lack of empirical application in Business & Management education:** Despite dialectical contradiction is widely discussed throughout the history in philosophical context (Hegel, Brandom) and pedagogical (Whitehead, 2014) and organizational (Putnam et al, 2016) context, there is a very few or limited empirical investigation into how this concept directly influences teaching practices and learning outcomes in business schools. Most studies are theoretical or conceptual, and there is a paucity of practical frameworks or intervention models that educators can adopt within business and management curricula.

**Underexplored Role of Contradiction in Digital and Hybrid Learning Environments:** When we discuss about autonomy vs collaboration, flexibility vs rigid institutional structure in the context of digital pedagogy numerous studies highlight increasing tensions among participants in the learning process (Simmons et al., 2021; Smit, 2025). But interestingly the concept of dialectical contradiction is rarely analysed in these evolving learning environments, especially in relation to student engagement, self-efficacy, and collaborative learning.

**Insufficient focus on cross-cultural and epistemological contradictions:** While there are some cross-cultural studies investigated the concept (Nisbett ,2021; Kumaravadivelu, 2017) but these insights are not sufficiently incorporated into the pedagogical strategies of UK higher education. There is a gap in addressing how students from diverse contexts and traditions engage with contradiction as a learning tool, especially in multicultural postgraduate classrooms.

**Neglect of contradiction as a catalyst for entrepreneurial and adaptive learning:** The TCCM tables and other reviewed literature reveals a conceptual acknowledgment of the role of contradiction in developing entrepreneurial skills and adaptive learning (Shore & Ahmad, 2024), **yet** few empirical studies link dialectical tension to the enhancement of entrepreneurial self-efficacy or innovation-based pedagogy in business education.

## Methodology

This study systematically reviews literature to explore the concept of dialectical contradiction and its application in improving the learning experience in higher education. Due to the non-empirical nature of this research, it is found to be the most appropriate method to synthesize existing concepts, theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, those are drawn from political science, philosophy, social sciences and business education. A systematic literature review enables a rigorous synthesis of existing knowledge, particularly when empirical primary data collection is not feasible (Gough et al., 2017).

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) framework is used to conduct the systematic literature review to ensure a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process. The number of steps is involved in this process including key research questions, identifying relevant studies, applying eligibility criteria (inclusion and exclusion), evaluating the selected studies and identifying the key themes to conduct reviews.

The methodology consists of several stages: defining research questions, identifying relevant literature, applying inclusion/exclusion criteria, evaluating the quality of selected studies, extracting and synthesizing data, and identifying themes.

**Step-1- Defining research questions:** The systematic literature review is guided by the following key questions:

- How the concept of dialectical contradiction is conceptualised and applied in the context of education
- What are the key pedagogical benefits of using such old philosophical concept in enhancing teaching and learning experience in postgraduate business education.
- What strategies have been reported for integrating dialectical contradiction in higher education settings?

**Step-2: Identifying relevant literature:** To identify the relevant literature the authors have used the following research parameters:

- Search criteria: To identify the relevant studies on the theme a comprehensive search was carried out across multiple academic databases.
- Databases: Scopus, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), CORE, Semantic scholar, Google Scholar, ProQuest and EBSCO database
- Date Range: 2020–2025 (However, due to the nature of the concepts some of the sources are very old. We have used ancient Greek philosophies, Confucian philosophies and Hegelian philosophies to understand the concept better)
- Language: English only
- Secondary **data source:** Books and peer reviewed scholarly indexed Journal articles published in most of the advanced countries

### Step-3: Criteria for inclusion and exclusion

Inclusions criteria	Exclusion criteria
Highly indexed peer reviewed Journal articles	Non-indexed, non-peer reviewed articles
Studies published in the most developed countries	Studies published in non-developed countries
Studies published in English only	Non-English studies not considered
Studies that examine dialectical contradictions or related concepts from various disciplines.	Articles that mention dialectics without a pedagogical or educational focus
Theoretical, conceptual and empirical studies	Abstract and articles not available in full text

### 4. Final screening and selection process

- Title and Abstract Screening:** All results retrieval was conducted with an aim to filter out irrelevant works.
- Full Text Review:** The shortlisted articles were examined to verify compliance with the research questions and inclusion criteria.
- PRISMA Flow Diagram:** A PRISMA flowchart is presented to illustrate the study selection process that includes the number of records captured, screened, included, and excluded at each stage.

Each study was carefully appraised based on the clarity, methodological rigor, relevance to the research questions, ethical consideration for all empirical studies and robustness of the findings.

### 5. Data Extraction

To capture the following key details a data table form is developed

- Name of the authors, year of publication, name of the Journal/book and country
- Study type (empirical/theoretical/conceptual)
- Study context
- Key concepts related to dialectical contradiction
- Reported outcomes for teaching/learning
- Relevance to business or management education

### 6. Identifying themes

Themes were interpreted in light of the research questions and theoretical framework (i.e., dialectical theory and critical pedagogy).

**Table 1: PRISMA flow diagram**

(Source: Author, 2025)

Step	Number of search results	Number removed and reason why
Identification	Total articles identified (n=251)	Initial CORE search results; Research Gates, Google Scholar, and EBSCO Host
Screening	Records screened (n = 158)	Records were not directly related to the topic/Duplicates and non-peer reviewed articles removed (n =93)
Articles assessed for eligibility	n=77	Articles irrelevant to UK HE or without conceptual focus excluded (n = 81)
Final inclusion	Final articles selected for synthesis (n = 53)	Articles irrelevant to UK HE or without conceptual focus excluded (n = 24)

In an effort to be more methodologically transparent, the review adopted the four step PRISMA method of framework applied to systematic reviews: identification, screening, assessment of eligibility and inclusion. After the removal of duplicates and non-peer-reviewed articles 158 records were screened based on titles and abstracts. Total seventy-seven (77) articles were retained for full text assessment against the inclusion criteria. For final thematic analysis 55 articles were chosen. An inductive approach was applied in the thematic analysis. The pedagogical tension studies were analysed to determine the

instances of the pedagogical tension, over and under, as a form of dialectical contradiction. Five main thematic groups were established through the process of multiple coding and comparison. These groups were: critical reflection and deep learning, resilience and adaptive learning, tensions of business pedagogy, pedagogical innovation and entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

### Key Findings and discussion

While the concept is rooted in classical philosophy, it is still valid and has profound impact on teaching and learning in Higher Education sector. The systematic literature review indicates that the concept is very influential and serves as one of the most transformative pedagogical tools within postgraduate business education in the UK higher education. The dialectical contradiction concept extended through critical pedagogy, cognitive theory, and socio-cultural analysis – reveals **four key**

#### Findings:

**Enhancement of critical thinking and reflective capacity:** The dialectical contradiction fosters an inclusive environment where learners actively engaged in epistemological enquiry, assumptions are challenged and develop deeper understanding through contradictions and tension. The process is thesis-antithesis -synthesis. By applying Socrates dialogue, the concept was widely supported by many studies such as (Alexander, 2012), reflective teaching (Whitehead, 2012), and contradiction-driven learning (Khalil, 2020).

**Contradictions as catalysts for pedagogical adaptation:** Within the digital pedagogy (i.e autonomy vs collaboration) and institutional practices (i.e tradition vs innovation) the concept expose both barriers and opportunities for growth. These contradictions and tensions are important for critically reflect on students' engagement, curriculum development and design and inclusive education (Simmons et al., 2021; Dzelzkaleja & Kapenieks, 2018; Smit, 2024).

**Promotion of resilience and entrepreneurial learning:** Conflicting ideas and ambiguous situations are vital for students learning as these supports development of cognitive behaviours, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial mindset, and adaptability. Shore & Ahmad (2024) stated how contradictions within entrepreneurial education environments enhance not only skill development but also personal transformation.

**Contradictions to enhance educational equity:** Modern education system is overly complex due to the nature of educational dynamics. Many institutions take inclusive education very seriously to promote best educational model. Scholars such as Lynch (2010); Learmonth (2010); reveal how ideological contradictions—particularly around privilege, inclusion, and compliance—can be transformed through critical pedagogy into strategies for greater equity and cultural responsiveness. Addressing cognitive dissonance in multicultural classrooms and integrating mental health support are key areas of intervention.

Together, these findings reaffirm that contradictions, when strategically surfaced and engaged, stimulate profound learning, shifting teaching from information transmission to transformation.

### Theoretical and Pedagogical Contribution

Based on the systematic literature review the study contributes to the literature in two important ways.

The study applies philosophical concept of dialectical contradiction into practical teaching and learning strategies within the context of postgraduate business education. The concepts such as case-based exploration, dialogic learning, and structured entrepreneurial simulations are found to be important as these expose learners to conflicting decision environments.

The study also identifies autonomy verses collaboration; tradition verses innovation and global curricula verse local capability as key typology of dialectical contradiction affecting postgraduate business education.

### Conclusion

This research shows that through the use of dialectical contradiction in postgraduate business education, teaching and learning can be enhanced. Instead of seeing issues as barriers, they can be used as facilitators. For example, issues that arise can be used to promote critical reflection, learning, and the development of entrepreneurial skills. From the systematic review, it became clear that tensions such as autonomy versus collaboration, tradition versus innovation, and global versus local curricula and relevance, are not only challenges but also learning opportunities. When the pedagogical design is aimed at resolving these tensions, it results in more substantive engagement and equips students for the challenging and ambiguous situations that are typical of contemporary business practice.

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