

# Managing international student academic disputes in the postgraduate program of French business school<sup>1</sup>

By Quan Sheng

## ABSTRACT

With the internationalization of French business schools, there are more and more contract disputes about international students. It's a problem for both the school and the students. Then I decided to do this research in order to find a feasible solution to this problem. Eventually, I found some good practices and analyzed them by some methods such as literature review and Pareto analysis. And through this research, I got some lessons learned about the contract dispute resolution.

**KEYWORDS:** contract disputes, international student, education field, identify causes, dispute resolution, good practices

## INTRODUCTION

Since the late twentieth century, the postgraduate education in France has become more and more international with the trend of globalization.

Many famous French business schools, like some major globally ranked business school in France, started to give class by English, hire English-speaking professors and set up many campuses in various parts of the world. It is leading more and more international students to choose the postgraduate program of French business school. Statistically, forty percent students of French business school are not from France.

With the increase in the number of international students, international student academic complaints and disputes have become a prominent issue. For foreign students, academic complaints and disputes are more likely to happen and harder to resolve. There are some reasons like different laws in different countries, cultural difference, cultural conflict, and language barrier.

In France, the relationship between student and business school is different with a traditional university. There is a formal contract between student and business school about the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Editor's note: Student papers are authored by graduate or undergraduate students based on coursework at accredited universities or training programs. This paper was prepared as a deliverable for the course "International Contract Management" facilitated by Dr Paul D. Giammalvo of PT Mitratata Citragraha, Jakarta, Indonesia as an Adjunct Professor under contract to SKEMA Business School for the program Master of Science in Project and Programme Management and Business Development. <http://www.skema.edu/programmes/masters-of-science>. For more information on this global program (Lille and Paris in France; Belo Horizonte in Brazil), contact Dr Paul Gardiner, Global Programme Director [paul.gardiner@skema.edu](mailto:paul.gardiner@skema.edu).*

postgraduate program. The student is more like a client and a contract owner; business school is more like a company and a contractor. So, the conflicts between school and international student are contract disputes rather than complaints from students.

As an international postgraduate student of a French business school, I often receive complaints from my international schoolmates and I also have met some disputes with school. Comparing students who have French nationality, international students are more difficult to identify causes and resolve academic disputes. So, I think I want to help those international students who have a problem in managing academic disputes and offer some good recommendations to French business school through this research.

The disputes are presented as unfair treatment and complaint. After my preliminary investigation, I found three main types of these disputes:

1. The contract does not specify the regulations on changing majors and changing campuses.  
For example: In some school, Chinese students cannot choose China campus. And some campuses cannot be selected for some majors.
2. Regulations about Make-up examination and retake course are lack of clarity in the contract. The forms of Make-up examination and retake course is mainly decided by teachers, it could bring some problems to students to do the schedule.
3. Misunderstanding of regulations because of the language barrier.  
For example: As the sponsor of the postgraduate program, many parents cannot read English or French. It could make them misunderstand the contract.

This document aims at:

1. Identify causes of student academic disputes in French business school
2. Find out some good practices to solve these disputes.
3. Give recommendations for resolution of these disputes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For students, these disputes will seriously affect their completion of their studies or even employment. For schools, they often regard these problems as students' complaints. Most schools do not have teams and regulations that specifically address these issues. Do not reply or simply appease is a general response from the school. Eventually, these disputes have a high probability of causing the project to fail, the student's schooling has an impact, the reputation of the school has been hurt. After using fishbone diagram to analysis these disputes, I found some Feasible Alternative policies/procedures to resolve student complaints.

1. Do nothing
2. Improve the contract:

The school adds the missing details and regulations to contract or add details as a supplement to the appendix.

3. Add language types to the contract:

The bilingual contract in other languages, such as Chinese-French contract, could be prepared for non-French native speaker and non-English native speaker.

4. Dispute Resolution Board:

The school can set up a Dispute Resolution Office or appoint some employees to settle disputes. And they also need to formulate the corresponding countermeasures and regulations.

5. Student delegate:

The student union can help to elect delegates, and the delegate could communicate and negotiate with the school more effectively.

ATTRIBUTES I want to use to compare or assess these alternatives:

1. The cost to administer: if the cost to administer is too high the alternative will not be chosen by the school or students. Here mainly refers to the cost of money.
2. Effectiveness: the alternative should be effective to solve the problem. it should bring a speedy response or resolution to the dispute.
3. Time cost: how long does it cost to solve the problem.
4. Implementation difficulty: the solution should be easy to implemented and easy to understand.
5. Legality: the alternative should be legal.

<b>Attribute</b>	Do nothing	Improve the contract	Add language types	Dispute Resolution Board	Student delegate
Cost to administer	<u>low</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>high</u>	<u>low</u>
Effectiveness	<u>low</u>	<u>high</u>	<u>medium</u>	<u>high</u>	<u>medium</u>
Time cost	<u>long</u>	<u>long</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>medium</u>	<u>medium</u>
Implementation difficulty	<u>low</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>low</u>
Legality	<u>depends</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>depends</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>yes</u>

**Red: not good, yellow: just ok, green: good**

I am eliminating “Add language types” because there is no green.

And considering the objective of my research, do nothing is not an appropriate option. Even it is a choice with low time cost and human cost, it could lead to the worst result of disputes in large probability. So I also want to eliminate “Do nothing”.

## FINDINGS

Right now, I am going to use the Additive Weighting Technique to compare which alternative is better.

At first, I would like to specify evaluation criterion of my attributes. For each alternative, I will use 4 levels to evaluate. Each level from bottom to top equals to zero, one point, two points and three points.

1. Cost to administer: the money spent to cover the administration fees

Cost to administer	
The cost is very low or free	3
lower to the cost of the dispute	2
Equal to the cost of the dispute	1
Higher than the cost of the dispute	0

2. Effectiveness: Effectiveness can be quantified as dispute resolution success rate.

Effectiveness	
resolution success rate is 80% to 100%	3
resolution success rate is 50% to 80%	2
resolution success rate is 0% to 50%	1
resolution success rate is 0%	0

3. Time cost: how long it could solve the problem or respond to the dispute.

Time cost	
In 1 week	3
In 1 week to 1 month	2
In 1 month to 1 year	1
longer than 1 year	0

4. Implementation difficulty: the difficulty of the alternative being implemented. This is related the requirement of professional skills. In another word, is this method easy to be learned and used by employees?

Implementation difficulty	
No need of any special skill	3
easy to be trained and easy to use	2
Hard to be trained but easy to use	1
Hard to be trained and hard to use	0

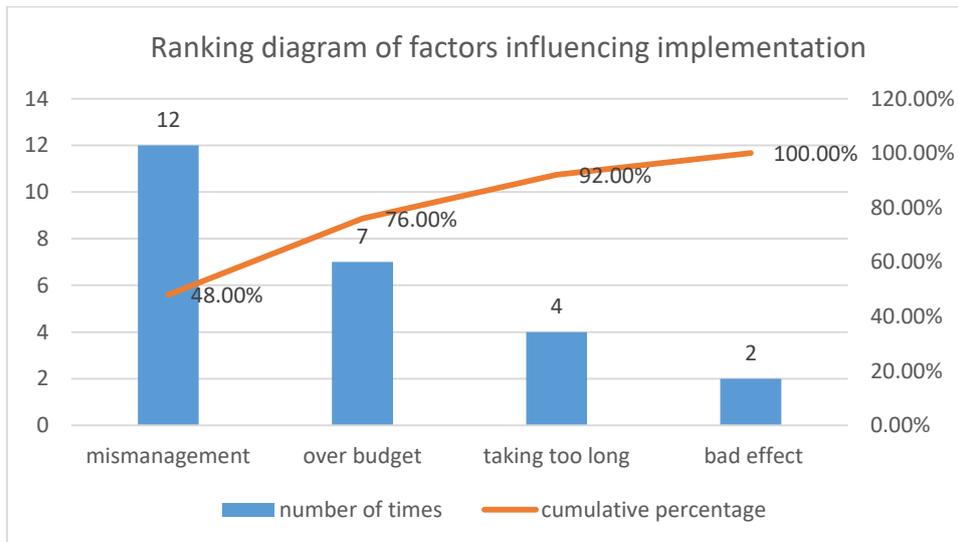
5. Legality: if the alternative is legal its score is 3 if it is illegal its score is 0 and if it depends on the situation the score is 1.

**weightings added:** Based on the importance of each criteria, I weighted them and use the Additive Weighting Technique to compare which alternative is better in the following table.

weightings added	Attribute	Improve the contract	Dispute Resolution Board	Student delegate
0.3	Cost to administer	2	1	3
0.25	Effectiveness	2	3	1
0.2	Time cost	1	3	1
0.15	Implementation difficulty	1	2	3
0.1	Legality	3	3	3
<b>1</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>2.1</b>

By calculation and comparison, “Dispute Resolution Board” got the highest score, “Student delegate” second, “Improve the contract” third. Considering all attributes, “Dispute Resolution Board” is the best alternative to choose. So, I think the establishment of a “Dispute Resolution Board” is necessary for a French business school if they only want to choose one alternative to resolve international student disputes. But considering other factors such as cost and time, the other two alternatives can also be carried out.

To make the “Dispute Resolution Board” effective, we need to analyze and determine the possible main causes or factors that could affect the result and monitor these factors if we implement this alternative. According to the literature review and other analysis before, I found out four main factors to focus on. Establishing and running a Dispute Resolution Board most likely to lead to involving too many administrative staffs and over budget to pay for them. And then it might take too long to solve the problem and lead a bad result. So, I summarize these four factors as mismanagement, over budget, taking too long, and bad effect. There are about 35 business school in France, if all of them have taken my advice, let's assume the number of occurrences of each problem and use Pareto analysis to analyze them.



Due to the case of other colleges and universities, I think that mismanagement is the most frequent factor to affect establishing and running a Dispute Resolution Board and other factors rank in the following. Then we can use this diagram to help to monitor the implementation of “Dispute Resolution Board”

In general, if a French business school accepted my suggestion and successfully executed, it would help them to improve student satisfaction, reduce the loss of disputes and improve the reputation of the school.

## CONCLUSIONS

By doing this research I found three main causes of international student academic disputes in French business school.

1. Language barrier, cultural differences and bad notification to students.
2. The contract regulations are not specific enough.
3. There is no special coordinator to resolve disputes.

Then I found some good practices to resolve these disputes. We can solve the problem by Improving the contract, establishing a dispute resolution board and selecting a student delegate.

And through this research, I believe that the key to dispute resolution is to have detailed contract regulations and effective communication mechanisms or negotiation methods.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- DVC Academic. ( 2012). *Resolution of Student Academic Complaints and Disputes Statute*.
- Booen, P. L. (2000). The FIDIC contracts guide. *Federation Internationale Des Ingenieurs Conseile, Geneva*.
- Wade, C. (2005). An Overview of FIDIC Contracts. *International Construction Contracts and Dispute Resolution-ICC-FIDIC*.
- AAHE BULLETIN, “Crossing Cultures: From College President to CEO”, March 1997, pp. 10-12.
- TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT, edition 14 June 1991.
- Academic Dispute Resolution | Rackham Graduate School. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic-dispute-resolution>
- Academic Dispute Resolutions | Student Guide| University of Alaska Southeast. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.uas.alaska.edu/students/guide/academics/dispute-resolutions.html>
- Conflict Resolution Process for Student Academic Complaints: Twin Cities | UMN Policy. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://policy.umn.edu/education/studentcomplaints-proc01>
- Resolution of Student Academic Complaints and Disputes Statute - The University of Auckland. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/the-university/how-university-works/policy-and-administration/teaching-and-learning/students/resolution-disputes-statute.html>
- Resolving Disputes | Student Rights and Responsibilities - McGill University. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/disputes>

## About the Author



### **Quan SHENG**

Paris, France



**Quan Sheng** is a MSc student in SKEMA Business School, majoring in Project and Programme Management & Business Development (PPMBD). He graduated from Dalian University of Technology, China and holds a Bachelor's degree in Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering. He lives in Paris, France now, and can be contacted at [quan.sheng@skema.edu](mailto:quan.sheng@skema.edu).