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Identifying the Dimensions and Components of the Concept of Value Co-Creation in the Higher Education System: Metasynthesis Approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to conceptualize value co-creation and identify its constituent dimensions and components within the higher education ecosystem.

Methods and Materials: This study was applied in purpose and qualitative in nature. The research strategy was meta-synthesis, utilizing the seven-step approach of Sandelowski and Barroso. Data were collected through the systematic analysis of 15 relevant scholarly sources. The research team, consisting of experts in educational management, educational sciences, and marketing, conducted the analysis to identify core themes. To ensure trustworthiness, rigorous techniques were employed, including data validation, transferability assessment, alignment, and systematic supervision throughout the data integration process.

Findings: The analysis led to the extraction of eight key themes categorized into three main stages: antecedents of value co-creation (including stakeholders, organization, technology, and environment), the process of value co-creation, and its outcomes (impacting students, the university, and society). The findings highlight that value co-creation yields not only immediate academic results but also long-term outcomes, such as student loyalty, graduates' career success, enhancement of the university's brand image, and contributions to broader economic and social development.

Conclusion: The value co-creation model demonstrates that sustainable productivity in higher education is the result of coordinated interaction between the university and its ecosystem, and cannot be reduced to the traditional student-professor dyad. Accordingly, moving from a restricted internal view to a multi-stakeholder collaborative framework is essential. By implementing this process, educational managers and policymakers can foster improved student learning, achieve institutional academic goals, and translate research and educational outcomes into tangible societal and economic benefits.

Keywords: Co-creation, Higher Education System, Meta-synthesis, Value Co-creation

1. Introduction

Higher education is undergoing a fundamental transformation in the way value, quality, learning,

and institutional effectiveness are conceptualized. Universities are no longer regarded solely as organizations that produce knowledge and deliver educational services to relatively passive recipients; rather, they increasingly

operate as complex service ecosystems in which students, faculty members, administrators, employers, industry actors, government agencies, communities, and other stakeholders interact in the creation, exchange, and application of knowledge and experience. Within this transformation, value co-creation has emerged as an important theoretical and practical perspective for explaining how educational value is generated through interaction rather than being produced unilaterally by the university. Contemporary theorization increasingly treats value co-creation as a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon involving actors, resources, institutions, practices, and outcomes rather than as a simple producer-consumer interaction (Saha et al., 2025). At the same time, recent theoretical scrutiny has emphasized the need to refine the assumptions underlying value co-creation theory and to clarify the conditions under which collaborative processes actually generate value (Re & Magnani, 2026). These developments make the systematic conceptualization of value co-creation particularly important in higher education, where multiple actors participate in interconnected educational, research, technological, social, and institutional processes.

The growing prominence of value co-creation reflects a broader movement away from provider-dominated conceptions of value toward relational and interactive approaches. Bibliometric evidence shows that the literature has progressively expanded from conventional marketing and service settings to technological, social, organizational, and public-sector contexts (Saha et al., 2020). Reviews of technological progression similarly demonstrate that digital transformation has changed the mechanisms through which actors communicate, exchange resources, provide feedback, and participate in collaborative value creation (Zhang et al., 2020). Evidence from tourism and hospitality also illustrates that value increasingly emerges through interactions among customers, organizations, employees, technologies, and broader service networks rather than through organizational delivery alone (Carvalho & Alves, 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023). Customer participation and empowerment, including the active contribution of feedback and evaluative information, can alter the quality and direction of value-generating processes (Shin et al., 2019). At the same time, interaction does not automatically produce beneficial outcomes; service ecosystems may generate value co-destruction when resources, expectations, technologies, or institutional arrangements are poorly aligned (Schulz et al., 2021). Consequently, value co-creation should be

understood as an enabled and managed process rather than as an inevitable consequence of stakeholder participation.

These theoretical developments are particularly relevant to higher education because educational value is inherently interactive. Learning depends on engagement, dialogue, intellectual participation, emotional experience, feedback, and the integration of the learner's own knowledge and effort with the resources provided by educators and institutions. The emotional dimension of learning further reinforces the inadequacy of viewing students as passive consumers, because students' experiences, emotions, identities, and relationships influence how they engage with and derive value from educational processes (Dewaele & Li, 2023). Higher education therefore provides a particularly rich setting for value co-creation because students simultaneously receive educational services and contribute resources that affect the quality and outcomes of those services. Investigations of co-creation styles in higher education have demonstrated that value creation can involve co-production, access to information, dialogue, involvement, intellectual stimulation, relationships, and knowledge sharing (Dziewanowska, 2018). Likewise, frameworks of student co-creation behavior emphasize interaction, social identification, satisfaction, digital orientation, and connections among the university, industry, and government (Magni et al., 2020). These findings suggest that educational value emerges through combinations of interpersonal, organizational, technological, and institutional conditions.

Student participation is therefore one of the most visible manifestations of value co-creation in universities. Co-creation moves students beyond consultation toward more substantive involvement in curriculum design, teaching, assessment, governance, learning-environment development, and institutional decision-making. Whole-class approaches to co-creation demonstrate that partnership need not be restricted to small groups of selected students but can be embedded more broadly in teaching and learning practices (Bovill, 2020). Student-staff partnerships can also productively accommodate disagreement, showing that co-creation does not require complete consensus but can use pedagogical differences as resources for reflection, negotiation, and educational improvement (Abbot & Cook-Sather, 2020). Dialogue-centered approaches to course enhancement likewise illustrate how discipline-specific materials and metaphors can create spaces in which students and staff jointly examine and improve educational experiences (Chilvers et al., 2021). Moreover, students can

participate in the development of complex and evolving learning environments, demonstrating that co-creation can extend beyond isolated instructional activities to the design and continuous adaptation of the broader learning system (Luckner et al., 2019).

The potential effects of such participation extend beyond immediate classroom satisfaction. Curriculum co-creation may be transformative when students gain greater responsibility, agency, voice, and ownership of their educational experiences (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021). Contemporary work on learner empowerment similarly presents curriculum co-creation as a departure from hierarchical pedagogies toward forms of education in which learners participate meaningfully in shaping what and how they learn (Stoddard et al., 2025). Co-created educational models have also proved relevant during periods of transition, when students and educators must negotiate expectations and learning needs collaboratively rather than relying exclusively on predetermined educational structures (Suliman et al., 2022). Nevertheless, effective participation depends partly on student readiness, motivation, resources, and willingness to undertake co-creative roles; consequently, institutions cannot assume that all students will automatically participate effectively simply because opportunities are offered (Tari Kasnakoğlu & Mercan, 2020). This observation directs attention from co-creation activities themselves toward the antecedent conditions that make meaningful collaboration possible.

The literature identifies a range of such antecedents at the individual and institutional levels. Research on actors within higher-education learning service systems highlights management commitment, support mechanisms, training, reciprocal-benefit norms, personal motivation, and cultural conditions as factors that can facilitate or inhibit value co-creation (Mir et al., 2022). Measurement-oriented research further indicates that university co-creation is sufficiently multidimensional to require systematic operationalization rather than reliance on a single indicator of participation (Taherpour, 2022). The consequences of co-creation may similarly depend on the style and intensity with which actors participate (Dziewanowska, 2018). In e-learning environments, greater involvement in value co-creation has been linked to the quality of the online educational experience and student satisfaction, illustrating the importance of interaction, information exchange, intellectual involvement, and relationships in digitally mediated education (Dziewanowska & Kacprzak, 2023). Frameworks developed specifically for virtual academic learning

environments also identify participation motivation, competencies, organizational capabilities, collaborative learning services, technological infrastructure, and social-network acceptance as important dimensions of the co-creation system (Ranjbarfard & Heidari Sureshjani, 2018).

Technology has therefore become an essential component of contemporary academic value co-creation. Digital platforms can expand the temporal and spatial boundaries of participation, facilitate knowledge exchange, enable continuous feedback, and connect actors who would otherwise remain institutionally separated. Universities increasingly employ social media not only for communication but also for institutional branding and relationship formation, creating additional arenas in which students and other stakeholders shape the university's identity and perceived value (Maresova et al., 2020). Technology can also facilitate more sophisticated school–university–industry collaborations, in which learning technologies themselves are jointly designed through interactions among educational and industrial actors (Sillaots et al., 2024). However, technology should not be treated as an autonomous determinant of co-creation. Its contribution depends on institutional capability, usability, access, stakeholder competencies, and the organizational arrangements through which technological resources are mobilized. Accordingly, technology is better conceptualized as one component of a larger ecosystem of value co-creation rather than as a substitute for relational and organizational conditions.

The organizational capacity of universities is another central consideration. Dynamic-capabilities perspectives suggest that higher education institutions need the ability to sense changing stakeholder needs, mobilize resources, adapt routines, and reconfigure organizational practices if co-creation is to contribute to sustained institutional value (Beier et al., 2023). Quality itself can consequently be reframed as something constructed through relationships and collaborative processes instead of being determined exclusively through internally specified institutional standards (Cavallone et al., 2019). Student satisfaction, an important educational and institutional outcome, also depends on collaborative interaction and may vary according to characteristics such as study mode and fee status, underscoring the heterogeneous nature of student experiences (Maxwell-Stuart et al., 2018). Systematic evidence on student co-creation further identifies multiple strategies, benefits, and barriers, demonstrating that co-creation can occur through curriculum-related participation,

work-integrated learning, digital interaction, shared experiences, and other forms of student–university collaboration, but may also be constrained by structural and behavioral obstacles (Zarandi et al., 2022). Thus, effective co-creation requires an enabling organizational culture, supportive leadership, appropriate policies, accessible information, and mechanisms that convert participation into meaningful institutional action.

These requirements become more important as universities increasingly define their missions beyond teaching and research. The University 4.0 perspective emphasizes the transformation of higher education institutions toward sustainability and broader societal responsibility (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020). Co-creation can support social innovation when universities function as actors within ecosystems involving government, communities, and other organizations, integrating educational resources with social needs (Kumari et al., 2020). Similarly, the civic-university perspective, situated within the quadruple-helix approach, highlights universities' role in connecting academia, industry, government, and civil society in regional and sustainable development (Tozzi, 2021). Academic value co-creation is therefore increasingly relevant to fourth- and fifth-generation universities, where institutional success is tied not only to teaching effectiveness but also to innovation, entrepreneurship, societal problem-solving, and civilization-oriented development (Harandi et al., 2024). University–industry collaboration provides a concrete manifestation of this broader orientation because knowledge, technologies, competencies, and organizational resources can be integrated through collaborative digital research projects and other interorganizational initiatives (Polese et al., 2021).

The scope of co-creation also extends to governance and inclusiveness. From a value co-creation perspective, student participation in university governance creates opportunities for students to contribute to institutional decision-making rather than remaining exclusively subject to administrative decisions (Lu & Zhang, 2024). Nevertheless, participatory arrangements may conflict with established governance structures, especially where hierarchical administrative traditions remain dominant; research on public governance demonstrates that co-creation can encounter institutional resistance when collaborative logics are introduced into systems shaped by older governance paradigms (Røiseland et al., 2024). Co-creation has also been proposed as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in special education, indicating its potential to bring the experiences and needs of

diverse learners into educational planning and implementation (Narot & Kiettikunwong, 2024). Beyond education, co-created social-service initiatives such as social hackathons illustrate how collaborative arrangements can mobilize users, professionals, institutions, and communities to generate contextually responsive solutions (Toros et al., 2020). These studies reinforce the importance of treating environmental norms, policies, governance arrangements, and stakeholder diversity as integral components of the co-creation ecosystem.

Despite the rapid growth of this field, the literature remains conceptually dispersed. Reviews of value co-creation in educational institutions indicate that studies employ different definitions, actors, mechanisms, and outcome variables, limiting the coherence of the field and leaving important questions concerning its integrated structure unresolved (Chatzara & Tsiakis, 2023). The systematic literature review of co-creation and innovation in higher education similarly points to multiple research streams involving knowledge transfer, innovation, entrepreneurship, and stakeholder collaboration, while highlighting the need for greater conceptual integration and a clearer future research agenda (Oliveira et al., 2024). More recent conceptual synthesis confirms that co-creation in higher education encompasses heterogeneous forms of collaboration and that definitional ambiguity persists regarding what constitutes genuine co-creation, who participates, and at what level participation occurs (Omeland et al., 2025). This fragmentation is consequential because focusing only on specific practices—such as curriculum partnership, digital engagement, or student feedback—may obscure the broader architecture linking antecedent conditions, co-creation processes, and multilevel outcomes.

A comprehensive framework must therefore account simultaneously for stakeholders, organizational conditions, technological resources, environmental influences, collaborative processes, and consequences. It must also recognize that value is generated at more than one level. At the student level, co-creation may contribute to empowerment, learning, satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. At the institutional level, it may stimulate knowledge development, innovation, adaptability, financial and reputational value, and stronger stakeholder relationships. At the societal level, universities may translate co-created knowledge and capabilities into economic, social, technological, and sustainable-development outcomes. The increasing conceptual sophistication of value co-creation theory (Re & Magnani, 2026; Saha et al., 2025), together

with evidence regarding student partnership, digital environments, organizational capabilities, innovation ecosystems, civic engagement, and multi-actor governance, indicates the need to integrate these otherwise fragmented insights into a coherent higher-education framework. Such integration is particularly important because co-creation should not be reduced to student–faculty interaction alone; rather, it should capture the coordinated contribution of the broader university ecosystem and clarify the conditions, mechanisms, and outcomes through which collaborative value emerges.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to conceptualize value co-creation and systematically identify and integrate its principal dimensions and components within the higher education system through a meta-synthesis approach.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Research Design

The present study is developmental in terms of its outcome and exploratory in terms of its purpose. This research utilized “metasynthesis” as a qualitative methodology aimed at developing theory, refining concepts, and generalizing findings at a high level to enhance the accessibility of qualitative research for practical applications (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Given that the data under investigation are qualitative, an interpretive metasynthesis approach was employed to integrate existing literature and derive a comprehensive and deep model of the subject under study.

2.2. Research Procedure

In this study, Sandelowski and Barroso’s seven-step metasynthesis framework was utilized, as it is recognized as one of the most credible and widely applied methods for the qualitative synthesis of previous research. The methodological steps were as follows: 1) Formulate the review question; 2) Conduct a systematic literature search; 3) Screen and select appropriate research articles; 4) Extract findings and qualitative data; 5) Analyze and synthesize qualitative findings; 6) Maintain quality control; and 7) Present the findings. This systematic process ensured rigorous data collection and facilitated the development of an integrated model.

2.3. Research Team

To ensure the comprehensiveness of the analysis, the research team consisted of four experts with complementary specializations: two experts in educational management, one expert in educational sciences with proficiency in metasynthesis methodology, and one expert in management and marketing concepts within the field of education. This specialized composition allowed for the examination of multiple dimensions of the subject and provided a multi-perspective analysis of the literature. A total of 15 relevant research sources that met the inclusion criteria were selected as the primary body of data and subjected to rigorous analysis.

2.4. Trustworthiness of the Findings

To ensure scientific rigor and trustworthiness, multiple criteria were applied throughout the study. Validity, transferability, data harmonization, and reliability were prioritized as core evaluative pillars. Furthermore, the meticulous guidance of the data collection and integration process by the researchers, coupled with continuous monitoring of the alignment between analyses and the primary sources, significantly enhanced the reliability and accuracy of the findings. This process ensured that the results derived from diverse sources were synthesized transparently, documenting the progression from raw source data to the final consolidated findings in accordance with research ethics.

3. Findings and Results

In this section, the research results are presented according to the steps of the Sandelowski & Barroso method.

Step 1: Formulate the review question

The main question of this research is: What are the main components of the concept of value co-creation in the higher education system? In this step, four issues are examined, which are:

- What (determination of the subject parameter): Answers to the research questions
- Who (determination of the population parameter): This refers to the study population, which includes databases, journals, and various search engines.
- When (determination of the time parameter): This refers to the time period of the study, which in this research, the papers reviewed is from 2004 to 2024.

- How (determination of the methodological parameter): It indicates how the method was used to prepare the studies. In this study, the document analysis method, i.e., secondary data analysis was used. In this step, the researcher, considering some

criteria, enters suitable and relevant articles into the meta-synthesis process and identifies articles that are not suitable and then removes them from the process.

Table 1

Criteria for accepting or rejecting articles

Index	Acceptance Criteria	Non-acceptance Criteria
Geographical area	All countries	
Research language	English	Other languages
Research time	2004 to 2024	Before and after the above date
Research methods	Qualitative method and data collection and analysis, quantitative research results	Experimental methods
Research population	Papers and research presented in creditable journals and conferences	Other sources
Research conditions	Providing a model or framework or examining the components of value co-creation in higher education	Other items

Step 2: Conduct a systematic literature search

To search for sources in this study, seven major databases in English were selected, including Emerald, Science Direct (Elsevier), Springer, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, Sage, and ProQuest, and in some cases, appropriate and relevant articles were selected from other creditable databases. To search for papers in these databases, the keywords co-creation, Value co-creation, Value co-creation in learning, Value co-creation in education, and Value co-creation in higher education were used. Initially, the research keywords were searched in the above databases and all papers were collected based on the relevance of the article title to them. Accordingly, 300 articles were found.

Step 3: Screen and select appropriate research articles

In this step, relevant papers are reviewed and identified based on criteria such as geographical area, language of papers, research methods, research population, research conditions, and type of study. Then, to select appropriate papers, various parameters such as title, abstract, content,

paper details, and research method are considered, and the following procedure is followed:

- In the first step, the titles of the papers were reviewed, and papers that were not relevant to the research question and purpose were eliminated.
- In the second step, the abstracts of the papers remaining from the previous step were reviewed, and irrelevant papers were eliminated.
- In the third step, the papers were reviewed based on content and full text, and those with irrelevant topics were eliminated.
- Finally, the remaining papers enter the content review and quality assessment stage.

In the qualitative assessment stage, papers whose findings and results the researcher does not trust and whose views are invalid are eliminated. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) was used for this purpose. This checklist is a key element in a systematic review that thoroughly evaluates the research and identifies the best papers on a given topic.

Table 2

Summary of steps to use the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

Stage	Assessment content	Related CASP Tool
1. Determining the type of study	Identifying the type of paper (qualitative, quantitative, etc.)	Choosing the Right Checklist
2. Checking validity	Reviewing the purpose, design, and research question	Questions 1 to 3
3. Assessing methodology	Sampling, collection, analysis, bias	Questions 4 to 6
4. Analyzing results	Transparency, data interpretation, connection to other research	Questions 7 and 8
5. Checking applicability	Practical value and contextual relevance	Question 9
6. Final judgment	Final decision on the validity of the paper	Question 10

Using the CASP, each paper is qualitatively assessed through 10 quality criteria. Each paper is assigned a score between 1 and 5 based on each of these criteria.

Table 3

CASP Quality Checklist Scores

Evaluation criteria	Quality level	Score
The author has considered all the items	Excellent	5
The author has considered most of the items	Very good	4
The author has considered some of the items	Good	3
The author has considered a few of the items	Average	2
The author has not considered any of the items	Poor	1

After assigning the above points, the results are presented in the table below.

Table 4

Score ranges for the quality levels of the CASP

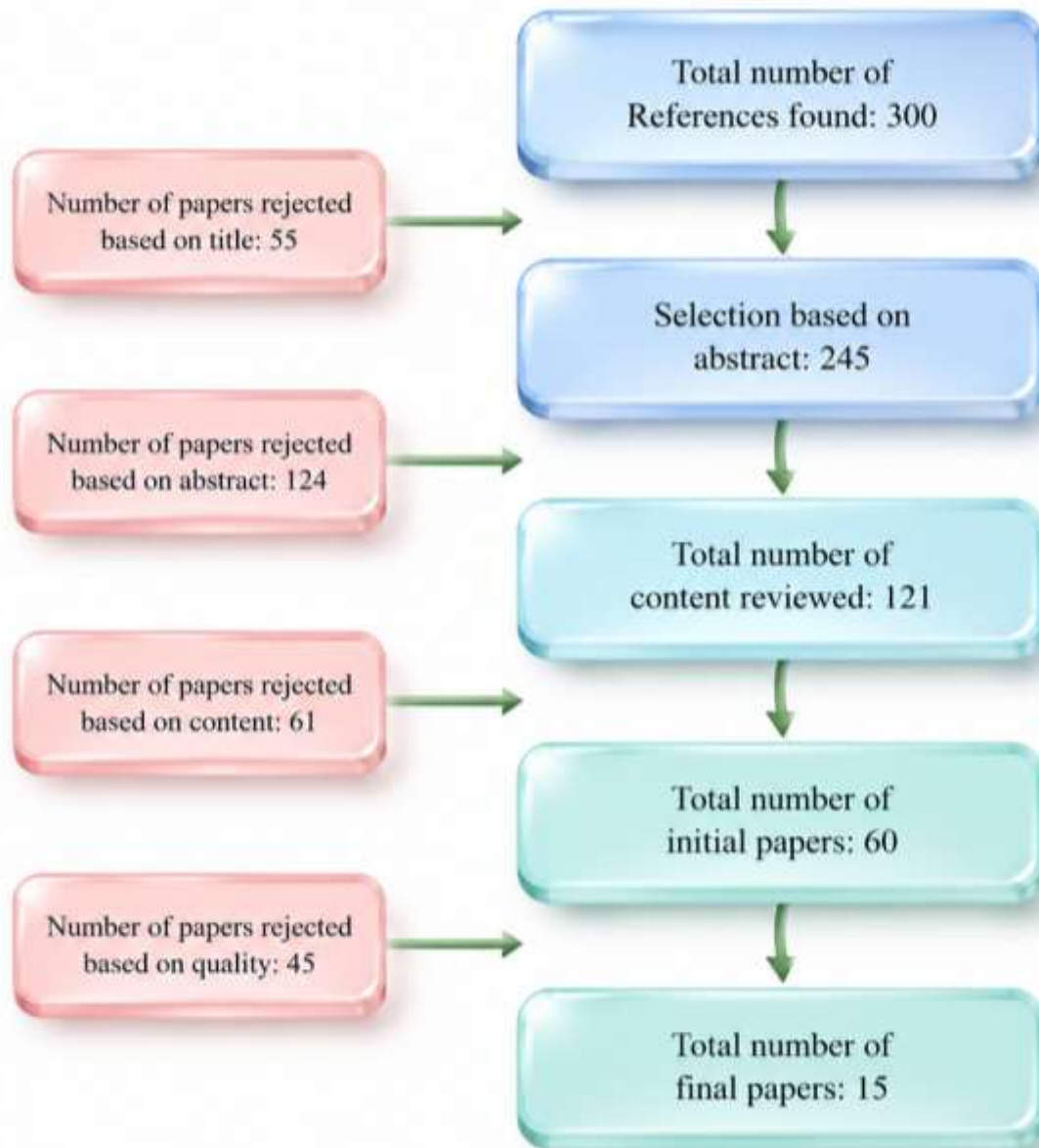
Quality level of the paper	Poor	Average	Good	Very good	Excellent
Score range	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50

After assigning points to each paper based on the 10 conditions mentioned, papers with a total score of 25 or higher will be qualitatively approved, and papers with a score of less than 25 will be eliminated. Therefore, as

mentioned, in this step, papers are selected in several stages. By performing the above steps, the selected studies from creditable scientific databases were reduced to selected studies through a meta-synthesis process.

Figure 1

Steps for selecting papers in metasyntesis



Finally, after four stages of monitoring, 15 studies were selected from 300 papers for data analysis.

Step 4: Extract the results

In this step, the desired data is extracted from each study. This data usually includes the main findings, themes, metaphors or key concepts. The focus of this step is on interpretive results, not just data description. Therefore, each study is categorized based on the name and surname of the

author(s), year of publication, research title and research findings. Finally, after reviewing the details of all studies, codes were extracted from the above texts.

Given the purpose of this study, in order to identify the components affecting value co-creation in higher education, using coding, selected studies were reviewed and the codes extracted from each study are presented in the table below.

Table 5
Result extracted from selected studies

Article Number	Researchers	Year	Field of study	Extracted results
1	Oliveira et al	2024	Co-creation and innovation in higher education organizations	Presenting a conceptual model including 3 clusters: Cluster 1. Management and transfer of knowledge from higher education institutions to companies Cluster 2. Co-creation and innovation in higher education institutions Cluster 3. The role of universities in the development of entrepreneurship education
2	Chatzara & TTsiakis	2023	A review of the literature on value co-creation in educational institutions: current status and future prospects	The VCC model includes the following components: knowledge sharing, experience, dialogue, intellectual stimulation, involvement, equity, interaction, relations among students, personalization.
3	Dziewanowska & Kacprzak	2023	The effect of participation in value creation on e-learning experience and student satisfaction: an empirical study	Dimensions of the conceptual model: 1- VCC (dialogue, information, involvement, intellect, relations) 2- Online experience (good teaching, clear goals, appropriate workload, generic skills) 3- Satisfaction
4	Mir et al	2022	Active action for shared value creation in educational service systems in higher education institutions	A model consisting of two parts: enablers of VCC and inhibitors of VCC. Enablers (compliance mechanisms, management commitment for VCC, support mechanisms, training and orientation, norms for mutual benefits, motivation and personal interest) Inhibitors (initial difficulty for users, cultural limitation, personal hesitance)
5	Zarandi et al	2022	A systematic literature review of student co-creation in higher education (strategies, advantages and obstacles)	Co-creation strategies: electives provision, games, work-integrated learning (WIL), crowdsourcing, educational program design, experience sharing/interaction through university website and social media platforms, student-university identification
6	Pathak et al	2022	Conceptual framework for value co-creation in a business-to-business context	Prerequisites (customer context, organizational context, technological context, environmental context) Co-creation (co-conception of ideas, co-design, co-research, co-marketing, feedback loop, co-conception for competition)
7	Polese et al	2020	Value co-creation in university-industry collaboration	The process of VCC between university and industry has building blocks and Contextual layers: Building blocks (1.Resources 2.Interactions 3.Outcomes) Contextual layers (1.Individual layer, 2.Organizational layer, 3.Institutional layer)
8	Tarı Kasnakoğlu & Mercan	2020	Positive consequences of co-creation in higher education	Dimensions of co-creation in higher education institutions: 1- Contextual factors 2- Environmental factors 3- Individual factors Operant resources are necessary prerequisites, and co-creation behavior as a mediating variable between operant resources and student outcomes.
9	Magni et al	2020	A framework for student co-creation behavior in higher education institutions.	The conceptual model of co-creation is presented as consisting of three dimensions: 1-Government 2-Industry 3-University The components of students' co-creation behavior are: Community involvement (1.Interaction 2.Satisfaction 3.Student social identity) Interactive technology (1.Web communication 2.Lean structure organisation 3.Digital mindset)
10	Kumari et al	2019	Co-creation for social innovation in the ecosystem: The role of higher education institutions	Co-creation for social innovation: 1-Society 2-State and policymakers 3-Higher education institutions (Tools: learning theories, systems approach, new role of higher education institutions)

11	Dollinger et al	2018	Conceptual model of co-creation in higher education	The model of this research includes: antecedents, co-creation and outcomes. Antecedents: Co-Production (knowledge sharing, equity and interaction) and Value-in-Use (experience, personalization and relationship) Outcomes: innovation, knowledge and relational
12	Dziewanowska	2018	Value co-creation styles in higher education and their consequences	The VCC model includes the following dimensions and components: 1- Co-production (information access, dialogue, control) 2- Experience (involvement, intellectual stimulation) 3- Relations (relationships among students, interactions/knowledge sharing)
13	Ranjbarfard & Heidari Sureshjani	2018	Value co-creation framework in virtual learning environments	The dimensions and components of VCC are: Participation requirements (participation motivation, resource, personal competencies, structural requirement, organizational capabilities) Collaborative learning Services (infrastructure, educational services, common services) Social network (social networks acceptance)
14	Hasan & Abdul Rahman	2016	Factors affecting customer participation in value co-creation in higher education institutions	The co-creation model presented in this research includes the following 3 dimensions: 1-Customer aspects 2-Organizational aspects 3-Technological aspects
15	Hasan et al	2015	Motivations for value co-creation in higher education institutions using online platforms	The co-creation model presented in this study includes the following 3 dimensions: 1.Technology interaction platforms 2.Provider-related factors 3. Customer-related factors Outcome: Sustaining participation in VCC

Step 5: Analyze and synthesize qualitative findings

At this stage, the extracted findings are classified into semantic categories or different levels of interpretation. In this study, all the data extracted from previous studies that were coded were classified into a similar concept according to the meaning of each of these codes, and thus the concepts

or themes of the research were identified. In this process, some themes were modified, changed, merged or deleted, and new themes were generated, the results of which are shown in the table below. The above table has been prepared using the categorization and meta-abstracting technique.

Table 6

Main and sub themes

Dimensions	Main themes	Sub themes	Ref
Antecedents	Stakeholders	1.Customer/Stakeholder Culture	[4], [6], [13]
		2.stakeholders competency and skills	[2], [3], [6], [7], [13], [14], [15]
		3.Stakeholder motivation and commitment	[6], [13], [14]
		4.Stakeholder participation	[1], [3], [5], [6], [8], [13]
		5.Trust and relationship with stakeholders	[1], [2], [3], [5], [6], [9], [11]
		6.Knowledge and experience of stakeholders	[1], [2], [3], [6], [7], [8], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15]
		7.Psychological behavioral factors	[11], [13], [14]
		8.Value perceived by stakeholders	[6], [11]
	Organization	9.Organizational Culture	[6], [14], [15]
		10.Organizational leadership style	[9], [14], [15]
		11.Clear and supportive administrative policies and procedures	[3], [4], [6], [7], [13], [14], [15]
		12.Management motivation and commitment	[1], [4], [6], [8], [14]
		13.Regular training and manuals	[4], [14]
		14.Access to information	[12], [13], [14]
	Technology	15.Information and communication infrastructure	[4], [6], [9], [13], [14]
		16.Equipment and physical facilities	[6], [13]
		17.Design and use of interactive platforms	[9], [13], [14]

	Environment	18.New technology	[6], [7]
		19.Culture and norms of value co-creation	[4], [8]
		20.Government policies and laws	[6], [8], [10]
		21.Market structure and competitive environment	[6], [8]
		22. University administrators' attitudes towards value co-creation	[4], [10]
Value Co-creation	VCC Process	23.Economic drivers	[8]
		24.Co-research	[6], [13]
		25.Co-marketing	[6], [13]
		26.Co-ideation	[1], [2], [6], [12]
		27.Co-design	[5], [6]
		28.Co-production	[5], [6], [11], [12]
		29.Feedback loop	[6], [11], [13]
Outcomes	Student	30.Empowerment and active learning	[5], [9], [14], [15]
		31.Improving communication and interaction with the university	[9], [12], [15]
		32.Student satisfaction	[3], [9], [14], [15]
		33.Student loyalty	[14]
	University	34.Value creation and financial performance	[7], [10]
		35.University image	[5]
		36. Knowledge creation and development	[1], [7], [12]
		37.Innovation	[7], [10], [14], [15]
	Society	38.Developing culture of co-creation	[1], [5], [7], [10]
		39.Economic development	[1], [7]
		40.Social development	[7], [9], [10], [13], [14], [15]

Step 6: Maintain quality control

This stage is the heart of the metasynthesis process. By comparing, contrasting, and integrating different findings, the researcher arrives at new concepts, theoretical models, or deeper understandings. The goal is to generate new knowledge through the systematic integration of findings, not simply to summarize themes (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

The validity of the meta-synthesis data was determined using Credibility and transferability techniques through researchers' self-review and data triangulation, and dependability was determined by guiding the data collection process and investigator triangulation. Also, for greater certainty, the intercoder reliability method and the kappa coefficient were used. In this way, the team of researchers categorized the themes and concepts separately and independently of each other, and finally, considering the number of similar and different concepts created, the kappa coefficient was calculated to be 0.838, which indicates that the research results have high reliability.

According to Sandelowski and Barroso, when a researcher begins their study and throughout the study, they should consider ways to improve the validity of their research. They have proposed four types of validity for mixed research: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, and pragmatic validity.

In this research, due to the identification of all relevant research and the precise explanation of the information included in the research, as well as the validation of the process of searching and retrieving studies, holding meetings of the research team members to discuss, review, and evaluate the results of selected qualitative studies and providing a complete and appropriate explanation and description of the researcher's understanding and opinion, as well as the validation of the methods used by the researcher to produce the findings, the research findings; and the researcher's interpretation of the findings of other researchers through continuous meetings of the research team with experts, and finally examining the applicability of the results and their transferability and generalizability, it has descriptive, interpretative, theoretical, and pragmatic validity.

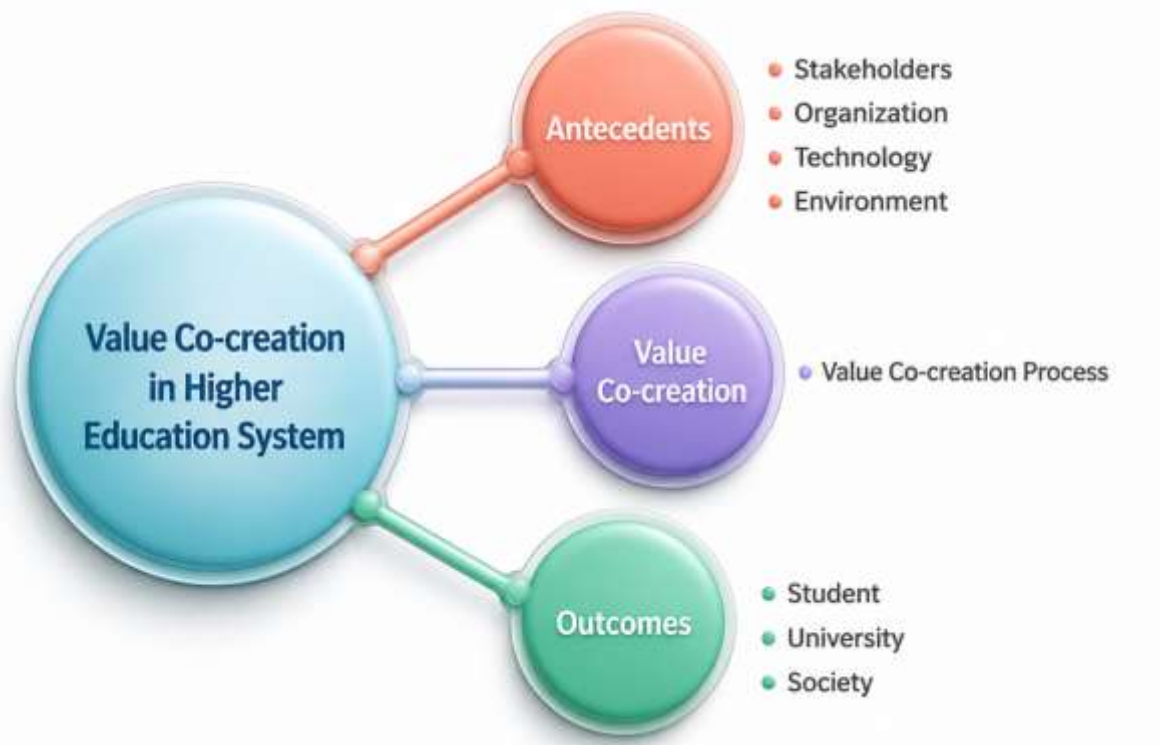
Step 7: Present findings

At this stage, the final results are presented in the form of a scientific narrative or conceptual model. This model should represent the depth and richness of the combined data and have a conceptual or theoretical impact (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

In this research, by summarizing the main and sub-themes extracted from the meta-synthesis plan, the value co-creation model in the higher education system was finally formulated as follows:

Figure 2

Proposed research model



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to conceptualize value co-creation in the higher education system and identify its principal dimensions and components through a meta-synthesis of previous research. The findings resulted in an integrated framework comprising three overarching dimensions—antecedents, the value co-creation process, and outcomes—and eight main themes. The antecedent dimension included stakeholders, organization, technology, and environment; the central process dimension encompassed co-research, co-marketing, co-ideation, co-design, co-production, and feedback; and the outcome dimension comprised consequences for students, universities, and society. Taken together, these findings indicate that value co-creation in higher education is not a discrete activity or a simple bilateral interaction between students and faculty members. Rather, it is a systemic and dynamic process in which multiple actors combine knowledge, competencies, experiences, technological resources, organizational capabilities, and institutional opportunities to generate value at different levels. This interpretation is consistent with recent theoretical developments that conceptualize value co-creation as a

multi-actor and relational phenomenon embedded within broader service ecosystems (Saha et al., 2025). It also corresponds with recent efforts to refine value co-creation theory by emphasizing that value does not arise automatically from interaction but depends on the assumptions, contextual conditions, and mechanisms through which resources are integrated (Re & Magnani, 2026).

The first major finding concerned the role of stakeholders as an antecedent of value co-creation. The extracted components included stakeholder culture, competencies and skills, motivation and commitment, participation, trust and relationships, knowledge and experience, psychological and behavioral factors, and perceived value. This finding demonstrates that higher education institutions cannot establish meaningful co-creation merely by formally inviting individuals to participate. Stakeholders must possess the willingness, competencies, knowledge, trust, and relational capacity necessary for collaborative engagement. This result is consistent with Mir et al., who identified management commitment, support mechanisms, motivation, training, reciprocal-benefit norms, and individual readiness as important facilitators of co-creation within higher education learning service systems (Mir et al., 2022).

Likewise, research on students' readiness for co-creation has shown that participation is affected by students' willingness and capacity to assume active roles in educational processes (Tari Kasnakoglu & Mercan, 2020). The importance of participation and relational interaction is also supported by research indicating that dialogue, knowledge sharing, intellectual involvement, experience, and relationships represent essential components of educational value co-creation (Chatzara & Tsiakis, 2023; Dziewanowska, 2018). Thus, the present results suggest that effective value co-creation begins with capable and motivated actors who recognize mutual value in collaboration.

The second antecedent theme was organization, incorporating organizational culture, leadership style, clear and supportive administrative policies, managerial motivation and commitment, training, and access to information. This finding indicates that co-creation must be institutionally enabled rather than depending exclusively on voluntary interpersonal relationships. Even highly motivated students or faculty members may be unable to participate effectively if organizational structures remain rigid, information is inaccessible, decision-making is centralized, or management does not support collaborative initiatives. The result aligns with Beier et al., who emphasize the role of organizational dynamic capabilities in enabling higher education institutions to respond to changing conditions and mobilize resources for value co-creation (Beier et al., 2023). It also corresponds with Cavallone et al., who argue that value co-creation requires appropriate institutional conditions through which higher education quality can be jointly developed rather than delivered unilaterally (Cavallone et al., 2019). Studies of student co-creation further identify organizational support, institutional mechanisms, and structured opportunities as important determinants of whether student participation becomes substantive rather than symbolic (Zarandi et al., 2022). Consequently, the findings position organizational readiness as a fundamental infrastructure for sustained co-creation.

The third antecedent theme, technology, included information and communication infrastructure, equipment and physical facilities, interactive platforms, and emerging technologies. This dimension has become increasingly important because contemporary co-creation is frequently mediated through learning management systems, institutional portals, social networks, online learning environments, and collaborative digital platforms. The present finding is strongly supported by Ranjbarfard and Heidari Sureshjani, whose framework for virtual academic

learning environments emphasized technological infrastructure, organizational capabilities, collaborative learning services, social networks, and participation requirements (Ranjbarfard & Heidari Sureshjani, 2018). Similarly, Zhang et al. demonstrated that technological progression has substantially changed the mechanisms through which actors participate in value co-creation, making digital interaction increasingly central to the integration of resources and experiences (Zhang et al., 2020). Sillaots et al. further showed that educational technologies can themselves be co-created through school–university–industry partnerships, illustrating how technology may function simultaneously as an enabling infrastructure and an object of collaborative development (Sillaots et al., 2024). The influence of digital interaction is also evident in e-learning, where participation in value co-creation has been associated with the quality of students' online learning experiences and satisfaction (Dziewanowska & Kacprzak, 2023). Accordingly, technological readiness should be regarded as a structural component of contemporary academic co-creation rather than merely as a supplementary communication tool.

The fourth antecedent identified in the study was the environment, represented by co-creation culture and norms, government policies and laws, market structure and competition, administrators' attitudes, and economic drivers. The significance of this finding is that co-creation is embedded within institutional and societal contexts that can either facilitate or constrain collaborative activity. University practices are influenced by national regulations, governance traditions, competitive pressures, labor-market needs, economic conditions, and broader cultural expectations regarding authority and participation. Røiseland et al. similarly demonstrated that co-creation may conflict with established governance paradigms when traditional hierarchical structures are inconsistent with collaborative modes of decision-making (Røiseland et al., 2024). The relevance of the wider ecosystem is also supported by Kumari et al., who conceptualized higher education institutions as important actors in co-creation for social innovation involving government, society, and other stakeholders (Kumari et al., 2020). From the perspective of fourth- and fifth-generation universities, academic value co-creation likewise requires alignment between institutional strategies and broader economic, social, technological, and developmental expectations (Harandi et al., 2024). Therefore, co-creation should not be examined independently from the policy, economic, cultural, and

governance environment in which higher education institutions operate.

The fifth principal theme was the value co-creation process itself, consisting of co-research, co-marketing, co-ideation, co-design, co-production, and continuous feedback. This finding clarifies that value co-creation is not equivalent to participation in a single phase of educational provision. Instead, stakeholders can contribute across an interconnected cycle beginning with the identification and generation of ideas, continuing through collaborative design and production, and extending to research, communication, marketing, evaluation, and feedback. Oliveira et al. similarly identify co-creation in higher education as extending across knowledge transfer, innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaborative institutional activities (Oliveira et al., 2024). Student partnership studies also demonstrate that learners can contribute directly to curriculum development, teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessment processes (Bovill, 2020; Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021). In addition, dialogue between students and staff can function as a mechanism for continuous course enhancement (Chilvers et al., 2021), while the involvement of students in the development of complex learning environments confirms that co-creation can continue through repeated cycles of participation, reflection, and adaptation (Luckner et al., 2019). These convergent findings support the interpretation of co-creation as a continuous process rather than a one-time consultation exercise.

The first category of outcomes concerned students, including empowerment and active learning, improved communication and interaction with the university, satisfaction, and loyalty. These findings indicate that students derive value not only from educational content but also from the opportunity to exercise agency and participate meaningfully in shaping educational experiences. Curriculum co-creation has been shown to provide potentially transformative experiences by strengthening students' ownership, agency, responsibility, and engagement in learning (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021). Similarly, Stoddard et al. emphasize the empowerment potential of learner participation in curriculum co-creation and its capacity to challenge conventional hierarchical educational relationships (Stoddard et al., 2025). Evidence from e-learning also supports the association between engagement in co-creation and student satisfaction (Dziewanowska & Kacprzak, 2023), while research on student satisfaction indicates that collaborative experiences can strengthen positive evaluations of the institution (Maxwell-Stuart et al.,

2018). The emotional character of learning experiences further helps explain these outcomes because relationships, engagement, and emotional experiences shape how students perceive and respond to their learning environments (Dewaele & Li, 2023). Thus, student-level outcomes reflect both educational development and strengthened relational attachment to the institution.

The second outcome category involved the university, encompassing value creation and financial performance, institutional image, knowledge creation and development, and innovation. These results show that student and stakeholder co-creation should not be interpreted solely as a pedagogical strategy; it can also contribute to broader organizational performance. Higher education institutions that systematically integrate stakeholder knowledge can become more responsive to emerging needs, generate new ideas, improve services, and strengthen institutional reputation. This result is consistent with Beier et al., who link dynamic capabilities and value co-creation within higher education organizations (Beier et al., 2023). Co-creation is also closely associated with innovation in higher education, particularly through knowledge transfer, entrepreneurship, and collaborative relationships with external partners (Oliveira et al., 2024). University–industry collaboration demonstrates how resources and expertise from different institutional actors can be integrated to produce value through digital research and innovation projects (Polese et al., 2021). Furthermore, university branding increasingly occurs through interactive digital environments in which stakeholders contribute to institutional visibility and reputation (Maresova et al., 2020). Therefore, co-creation can strengthen both the academic mission and the strategic competitiveness of higher education institutions.

The final outcome theme was society, including the development of a culture of co-creation, economic development, and social development. This result extends the conceptual boundaries of value co-creation beyond individual learners and universities and emphasizes the public and societal mission of higher education. Universities increasingly function as nodes within innovation and development ecosystems where knowledge is created and mobilized through interactions with industry, government, and civil society. Kumari et al. identify higher education institutions as important facilitators of social innovation within broader ecosystems (Kumari et al., 2020). Similarly, the civic university model highlights the role of academic institutions in quadruple-helix structures connecting

universities, government, industry, and society to advance sustainable development (Tozzi, 2021). Co-creation has also been applied to social-service innovation, demonstrating the ability of collaborative processes to mobilize diverse actors around societal problems (Toros et al., 2020). Moreover, the potential contribution of co-creation to inclusiveness indicates that collaborative approaches can generate social value by incorporating groups whose needs may otherwise be marginalized in conventional institutional processes (Narot & Kiettikunwong, 2024). Accordingly, the present study suggests that the ultimate value of higher education co-creation lies not only in improved educational services but also in universities' capacity to translate collaborative knowledge into wider social and economic benefits.

Overall, the findings provide an integrated interpretation of value co-creation in higher education as an ecosystem-level phenomenon. Earlier research has often examined isolated elements such as student participation, online engagement, curriculum partnership, institutional innovation, or university-industry relationships. Recent systematic reviews confirm both the rapid growth of the field and its continuing conceptual fragmentation (Chatzara & Tsiakis, 2023; Omland et al., 2025). The present synthesis contributes by organizing these dispersed elements into a coherent sequence in which stakeholder, organizational, technological, and environmental conditions establish the foundation for co-research, co-ideation, co-design, co-production, co-marketing, and feedback, which subsequently generate student-, university-, and society-level outcomes. This multi-level structure is compatible with contemporary metatheoretical approaches emphasizing resource integration, interaction, and interdependence among actors (Saha et al., 2025). At the same time, the framework acknowledges that participation by itself does not guarantee successful outcomes, as value co-creation may be weakened or even converted into value co-destruction when resources, expectations, or institutional arrangements are misaligned (Schulz et al., 2021). Hence, sustainable academic value co-creation requires coordinated management of both enabling conditions and collaborative processes.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, because the research employed a meta-synthesis design, its conclusions are dependent on the scope, quality, conceptual orientations, and methodological characteristics of the studies included in the synthesis. Relevant unpublished research, dissertations, institutional reports, policy documents, or studies

unavailable through the selected databases may therefore have been excluded. Second, differences among national higher education systems, governance structures, cultures, technological capacities, and socioeconomic environments may restrict the direct transferability of the identified framework to every institutional context. Third, although the synthesis produced an integrated conceptual model, the relationships among the identified antecedents, process components, and outcomes were not empirically tested through primary quantitative or longitudinal data. The relative importance of each component and possible mediating or moderating relationships therefore remain undetermined. Finally, rapidly evolving technologies and institutional practices may introduce new forms of co-creation that were not sufficiently represented in the studies available during the review period.

Future studies should empirically test and validate the proposed framework across different higher education systems, institutional types, academic disciplines, and cultural settings. Quantitative research could develop and validate multidimensional measurement instruments for the antecedent, process, and outcome dimensions and subsequently examine the structural relationships among them using longitudinal and multilevel designs. Comparative studies between public and private universities, traditional and digital universities, and institutions at different stages of development could clarify how organizational and environmental conditions influence co-creation. Further research should also investigate the perspectives of less frequently studied actors, including employers, parents, policymakers, alumni, community organizations, and industry partners. Longitudinal studies are particularly needed to determine whether student participation produces durable effects on loyalty, employability, institutional reputation, innovation, and societal development. Future investigations should additionally examine co-creation in artificial intelligence-supported learning environments, blended education, virtual universities, collaborative research networks, and fourth- and fifth-generation universities, while paying particular attention to potential risks such as unequal participation, tokenism, stakeholder conflict, digital exclusion, and value co-destruction.

Higher education administrators should approach value co-creation as an institutional strategy rather than as a collection of isolated student-engagement activities. Universities should establish clear structures through which students, faculty members, administrators, alumni,

employers, industry representatives, and community stakeholders can participate in identifying needs, generating ideas, designing curricula and services, conducting collaborative research, evaluating outcomes, and providing continuous feedback. Leadership should promote a culture of trust, openness, shared responsibility, and mutual benefit while providing stakeholders with appropriate training and access to relevant information. Institutions should also invest in accessible digital platforms and communication infrastructures that facilitate sustained interaction and transparent feedback. Formal policies should specify how stakeholder contributions are considered in institutional decision-making so that participation does not become merely symbolic. Universities can further develop co-creation roadmaps, interdisciplinary partnership programs, joint university–industry projects, student–staff curriculum committees, innovation laboratories, and community-engagement initiatives. Finally, evaluation systems should assess outcomes not only in terms of student satisfaction but also in terms of empowerment, learning, loyalty, knowledge development, innovation, institutional reputation, economic contribution, and wider social value.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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