

# Student Participation in University Governance Paths in the Value Co-creation Perspective

Jihai Lu<sup>1</sup>, Die Zhang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou College of Commerce, 311500, Hangzhou, China.

<sup>2</sup> Chengdu Railway Health School of Sichuan Provincial People's Hospital, 611741, Chengdu, China.

**Abstract.** Student participation in university governance processes exemplifies the core principles of value co-creation. Universities offer participation platforms and resource support, while students leverage their own resources. Through their interactions, both parties reach a consensus, fully realizing the functional, developmental, and societal values associated with student participation. The value co-creation process enhances university governance efficiency, emphasizes student agency, and fosters a more harmonious relationship between the institution and the students. Examining student participation in university governance from the perspective of value co-creation reveals its significant potential.

## 1 Introduction

As the modern university system with Chinese characteristics improves and develops, university governance structures have undergone continuous optimization and enhancement. Universities have recognized the necessity of increasing student democratic participation to counteract the adverse effects of excessive administrative decision-making. Therefore, in university governance, it is crucial to shift the perspective on students. They should not be seen merely as knowledge recipients or subjects to be managed but as individuals whose initiative and active participation in university governance should be fully harnessed. Scholars have explored the necessity and value of student participation in university governance from diverse perspectives, including stakeholder interests, education consumerism, democratic principles, and communitarianism [1]. Currently, scholars worldwide widely support the value of student participation in university governance. Nevertheless, given that students constitute the largest demographic within a university, the challenge lies in facilitating their organized and effective participation in university governance. This paper delves into a solution to this challenge using the framework of Value Co-creation theory.

## 2 The Essence and Applicability of Value Co-creation Theory

Traditional perspectives consider producers as the exclusive value creators, while consumers are viewed as mere value consumers. Value Co-creation theory, on the other hand, introduces a new viewpoint: it

acknowledges that producers are not the sole creators of value and that consumers are not merely consumers but also play a role in co-creating value through interactions. Fundamentally, Value Co-creation centers on improving the consumer experience. When examining the evolution of universities, two distinct stages emerge in their value development [2]. Initially, universities, primarily through their educators, were regarded as the exclusive value creators. During this phase, educational institutions served as the primary generators of academic value, utilizing resources such as teaching staff, facilities, and research equipment. Students, conversely, were perceived as recipients of knowledge and skills, which they would subsequently apply in their future careers, thereby realizing the value generated by the educators. With the progress of society and shifts in education, universities have transitioned into a phase where value is co-created by both the institution (teachers) and students. Students are no longer passive recipients; they actively engage in academic, social, and cultural activities, generating their own value [3]. Concurrently, universities have started to prioritize student feedback and requirements, offering additional opportunities and platforms for student participation while encouraging their creativity and proactivity. This collaborative value-creation model not only bolsters the university's comprehensive value creation abilities but also nurtures a stronger sense of belonging and responsibility among students.

In accordance with the Value Co-creation theory, students have evolved from passive consumers of educational value to active contributors in the value co-creation process. This transformation has turned university value creation into an open system, where students contribute their time, energy, knowledge, and cultural resources, actively engaging in value creation

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Corresponding author : [cdzdwor@163.com](mailto:cdzdwor@163.com)

alongside the institution. Through this interaction between universities and students, both parties collaboratively generate value, forming a cooperative relationship. Universities establish a value creation system by presenting their value propositions and engaging with students. In this system, students fulfill the dual roles of "consumers" and "educational products." Whether we focus on enhancing the "quality of educational products," which involves fostering student development, or on improving the "value experience for consumers," universities must actively involve students in the co-creation process [4]. This interaction not only contributes to the improvement of students' overall qualities and abilities but also elevates their satisfaction and connection with the university, subsequently fostering institutional development.

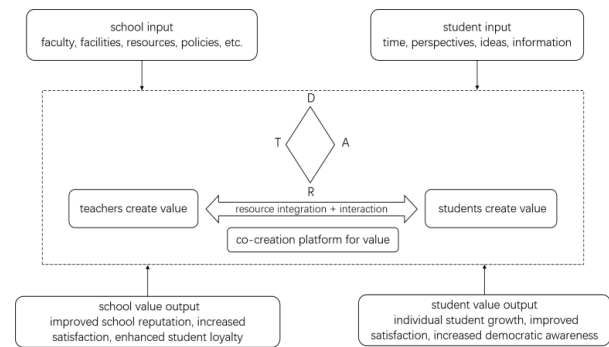
### 3 Analyzing Student Participation in University Governance from the Value Co-creation Perspective

Facilitating organized and effective student participation in internal university governance has emerged as a significant practical challenge. Failing to address this issue makes it difficult to realize significant advantages from various governance models, such as "direct democracy" or "representative democracy," in terms of student participation. The Value Co-creation theory presents a distinctive viewpoint that can offer valuable insights for tackling this challenge [5].

#### 3.1 Model of the Value Co-creation Process in Student Participation in University Governance

According to the Value Co-creation theory, student participation in university governance is viewed as a systematic process [6]. At its core, this theory emphasizes the interaction between universities and students for the creation and sharing of value. In this process, the focus is on establishing effective interactions between universities and students to enable active student participation in internal university governance, meeting their needs, and enhancing their experiential value. Furthermore, students offer feedback on their needs and opinions while co-creating value. Universities utilize this essential information to enhance their management and teaching methods. Through this effective interaction, universities facilitate knowledge transfer, emotional connections, and collaborative relationships, culminating in the co-creation of student development value and institutional value, fostering additional value-sharing.

The model illustrating the value co-creation process of student participation in university governance is as shown in figure 1:



**Fig. 1.** the value co-creation process of student participation in university governance

During the value co-creation process between universities and students, universities invest tangible resources like faculty, facilities, and policies [7]. They also provide co-creation platforms to promote student participation. Universities integrate students' practical resources and engage in ongoing interaction and cooperation to co-create value. The ultimate goal is to enhance students' experiential value, improve the quality of education, boost institutional reputation, lower operational costs, and acquire external resources. Conversely, students contribute intangible resources like time, opinions, information, and skills. These resources become part of the value co-creation system, and students interact with the university's resources, promoting co-creation. This co-creation process involves the ongoing exchange of resources, dialogue, and cooperation. Students reap the benefits of personal development, a fulfilling university experience, and the nurturing of democratic awareness.

During the process of value co-creation between universities and students, the institutions invest significant tangible resources such as experienced faculty, cutting-edge facilities, and strategic policies. They also provide platforms for co-creation to encourage student participation and interaction. Universities integrate students' practical resources and engage in constant interaction and cooperation to co-create value. The ultimate goal is to enhance students' experiential value, improve the quality of education, boost institutional reputation, lower operational costs, and acquire external resources.

Students, on the other hand, contribute intangible resources such as time, opinions, information, and skills. These resources become an integral part of the value co-creation system, and students engage with the university's resources, promoting co-creation. This co-creation process involves the ongoing exchange of resources, constructive dialogue, and cooperation. Students reap the benefits of personal development, a fulfilling university experience, and the nurturing of democratic awareness.

The co-creation process between universities and students is a symbiotic relationship that fosters mutual growth and development [8]. Through the exchange of resources and ideas, universities and students collaborate to create value that is greater than the sum of its parts. This process not only enhances the quality of

education but also cultivates valuable life skills that prepare students for future success.

In summary, according to the Value Co-creation theory, student participation in university governance entails the collaborative integration of resources by both universities and students to achieve value co-creation. This transition shifts from a unilateral model to a bilateral interactive model. The value co-creation process centers on how universities facilitate student participation in university governance through policies, channels, platforms, and resources. As co-creators, students articulate their value expectations within the value co-creation system. They enhance interactions with the university and contribute resources, culminating in the co-creation of value.

### **3.2 Factors Analysis for Student Participation in Governance from the Value Co-creation Perspective.**

Pralhad and Ramaswamy identified four factors in Value Co-creation that influence the effectiveness of value co-creation, constituting the DART model[9]. These factors include Dialogue, Access, Risk Assessment, and Transparency, forming the DART model. These identical factors are pivotal in the value co-creation process when students engage in university governance participation.

#### *3.2.1 Dialogue (D)*

Dialogue in the Value Co-creation context implies both consumers and institutions' mutual interaction with the awareness of investing resources and ideas in each other. Dialogue is more than just listening; it requires empathetic understanding and knowledge sharing[10]. To enhance student participation in university governance, there must be an equal dialogue mechanism between the institution and students. "Students possess firsthand information about the university. If someone knows where the problems lie, it is certainly the students, who possess valuable information." Therefore, universities need to respect student opinions and facilitate substantial information exchange through a dialogue mechanism, thereby integrating students' value demands into the governance processes.

In the context of Value Co-creation, dialogue signifies the mutual interaction between both consumers and institutions, involving the conscious exchange of resources and ideas. Dialogue goes beyond mere listening; it necessitates empathetic understanding and the sharing of knowledge. To enhance student involvement in university governance, an equitable dialogue mechanism between the institution and students is essential. "Students possess firsthand information about the university, and if anyone knows where the issues exist, it's undoubtedly the students who possess valuable insights. "Hence, universities should honor student opinions and facilitate substantial information exchange through a dialogue mechanism, thereby incorporating students' value expectations into the governance processes.

#### *3.2.2 Access (A)*

In the evolving landscape, consumers prioritize experiences over mere ownership of products or services. Similarly, in student participation within university governance, it's crucial for universities to establish an environment that ensures a positive experience for students. This entails offering accessible channels and platforms for student engagement and demonstrating genuine respect throughout the participation process. By framing student involvement as a democratic experience promoting social and civic engagement, the emphasis should be on enhancing students' experiential value during their participation.

#### *3.2.3 Risk Assessment (R)*

Co-creation, risk pertains to the possibility of harm to either consumers or institutions. In student participation in university governance, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the risks associated with student engagement. This assessment encompasses potential harm to the university as well as the adverse effects of participation on the students themselves. While students are pivotal stakeholders in universities, it is imperative to acknowledge their capabilities and limitations. Universities must guide student participation within defined boundaries and constraints to mitigate the risks associated with excessive involvement. Encouraging active student participation is essential, but universities must also remain vigilant regarding the potential risks linked to excessive engagement.

Co-creation, risk is not limited to consumer or institutional harm, but also encompasses the potential for negative impact on the overall governance process. In the context of student participation in university governance, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the risks associated with student engagement. This assessment must consider potential harm to the institution and the adverse effects of student participation on the governance process itself. Students are essential stakeholders in universities, playing a critical role in the overall governance and decision-making process. However, it is crucial to recognize their capabilities and limitations. Universities must provide clear guidelines and boundaries for student participation to mitigate the risks associated with unchecked involvement. While encouraging active student participation is essential, universities must also remain vigilant regarding the potential risks linked to excessive engagement.

To ensure effective co-creation and minimize potential risks, universities should establish formal mechanisms to engage students in decision-making processes. These mechanisms should provide opportunities for students to voice their opinions and contribute ideas while ensuring that their contributions are integrated into the broader governance framework. By doing so, universities can leverage student participation to enhance decision-making effectiveness while mitigating potential risks associated with excessive involvement.

Furthermore, universities should establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact of student participation on governance outcomes. This evaluation should take into account the broader context of institutional goals, strategic development, and potential long-term impacts of student engagement. By conducting regular assessments, universities can identify any potential risks or negative consequences of student participation and take appropriate measures to address them.

Ultimately, co-creation in university governance requires a balance between student participation and institutional oversight. Universities must recognize the importance of student voices in decision-making processes while also acknowledging the need to establish boundaries and constraints to mitigate potential risks. By doing so, universities can foster meaningful student participation that enhances governance effectiveness while minimizing potential harm to consumers, institutions, and the broader governance process.

### 3.2.4 Transparency (T)

Within the DART model, transparency plays a pivotal role in fostering trust and nurturing cooperative relationships. It serves as the fundamental cornerstone for mutually beneficial collaboration and forms the bedrock of trust. Likewise, in the process of student participation in university governance, it is imperative for universities to promptly disclose non-confidential information to students. This transparency is essential for fostering student engagement. Furthermore, universities should promptly address student feedback and provide outcomes to students. For instance, in the context of teacher evaluations, students often find that these evaluations may not accurately reflect the teachers' instructional abilities. A significant reason for this discrepancy is the delayed release of evaluation results by universities. This delay not only hampers teachers' opportunities for improvement but also fails to guide students in their course selection. Universities can draw lessons from teaching evaluation platforms like *ratemyprofessor.com*, widely utilized in the United States and the United Kingdom. Through this platform, students can openly assess teachers' performance, influencing their course choices based on available information. By awarding "chili peppers" online to teachers, students can signify their approval of a teacher's instruction, with more "chili peppers" indicating greater recognition. Thus, transparency in university governance is indispensable for fostering meaningful student participation.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, employing the perspective of the Value Co-creation theory to analyze student participation in university governance offers a unique and innovative outlook. Firstly, the Value Co-creation theory underscores interactive cooperation within the student participation process, highlighting mutual investment

and co-creation. This perspective aids in comprehending the dynamic mechanisms of participation. Secondly, the Value Co-creation theory doesn't solely concentrate on the outcomes but also accentuates the significance of the participation process, thereby transforming student involvement into an ongoing ideology. Lastly, the Value Co-creation theory offers a comprehensive analysis of the myriad factors influencing student participation, resulting in more systematic and thorough research. Consequently, the Value Co-creation perspective offers a fresh and wider outlook for conducting in-depth research on student involvement in university governance, broadens the scope of research, and furnishes a theoretical basis and practical guidelines for advancing student participation in university governance.

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