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Value Realization in Higher Education Service Ecosystems: A Process Model Extending Service-Dominant Logic

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Although Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) has significantly advanced understanding of value co-creation through resource integration and actor interactions, limited attention has been devoted to explaining how institutional value propositions are transformed into realized stakeholder experiences within higher education service ecosystems. Addressing this gap, this study develops a process-oriented framework of value realization that explains the mechanisms through which value is collaboratively realized and sustained. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** Adopting an interpretivist philosophy, the study employs a qualitative multiple-case design involving three higher education institutions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including faculty members, students, administrators, information technology personnel, and external collaborators. The data were analyzed using the Gioia methodology to inductively develop a theoretically grounded framework of value realization**. Findings:** The findings demonstrate that value realization is neither an automatic consequence of institutional value propositions nor an inevitable outcome of stakeholder interaction. Instead, it emerges through a recursive process comprising three interconnected mechanisms: actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. These mechanisms collectively transform institutional value propositions into meaningful stakeholder experiences, generating interconnected value outcomes at the individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels. The findings further reveal that value realization is sustained through continuous organizational learning and adaptive feedback, which shape subsequent cycles of institutional value propositions. **Originality/Value:** This study extends Service-Dominant Logic by conceptualizing value realization as a distinct theoretical construct that bridges institutional value propositions and value outcomes. It introduces value conflict resolution as a novel governance mechanism within service ecosystems and proposes a recursive, multi-level framework explaining how value is collaboratively realized, sustained, and renewed in higher education. In doing so, the study advances SDL beyond explaining value co-creation toward a more comprehensive understanding of the processes through which value is realized in complex service ecosystems.

Introduction

The increasing complexity of contemporary service environments has fundamentally transformed how organizations conceptualize value creation. Traditional goods-dominant logic viewed value as embedded in products and delivered unilaterally to customers. In contrast, Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) re-conceptualizes value as emerging through reciprocal service exchange, resource integration, and collaborative interactions among multiple actors operating within dynamic service ecosystems (Vargo, Maglio et al. 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2011, Vargo and Lusch 2014). Over the past two decades, SDL has evolved from a marketing perspective into a comprehensive meta-theoretical framework for understanding actor-to-actor (A2A) interactions, institutional arrangements, and adaptive resource configurations across increasingly complex organizational settings. Recent developments further position SDL as a systems-oriented perspective capable of explaining emergence, institutional change, and digitally enabled service ecosystems in which value continuously evolves through interactions among human and non-human actors (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024).

Within SDL, organizations do not create value independently; rather, they offer value propositions that enable beneficiaries to integrate available resources and realize value within their own contexts (Vargo and Lusch 2016). Consequently, value is phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary and emerges through use rather than being embedded in organizational outputs. This perspective has redirected scholarly attention from firm-centric production toward collaborative processes involving customers, employees, partners, regulators, communities, and digital technologies. As service ecosystems become increasingly interconnected, value is understood as an emergent and systemic phenomenon arising from continuous resource integration, institutional arrangements, and evolving actor relationships (Chandler and Lusch 2015, Mir, Kausar et al. 2022, Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026).

The rapid digital transformation of service systems has further increased the complexity of value creation. Artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, digital platforms, learning management systems, and other intelligent technologies have transformed conventional service encounters into digitally mediated ecosystems in which both human and technological actors actively participate in service provision and resource integration (Mir, Kausar et al. 2022, Vargo and Wieland 2026, Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026). Beyond supporting operational activities, these technologies shape communication, coordination, knowledge exchange, and institutional arrangements that influence how value propositions are enacted and experienced (Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026). Consequently, value increasingly emerges through iterative interactions and adaptive resource configurations rather than linear provider–customer exchanges, reinforcing the need for process-oriented explanations of how potential value becomes realized within complex service ecosystems (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024).

Despite the significant advancement of SDL, an important theoretical challenge remains unresolved. Existing research has generated substantial insights into value propositions, resource integration, actor engagement, institutional arrangements, and value co-creation within service ecosystems (Chandler and Vargo 2011, Vargo and Lusch 2016). However, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining the dynamic processes through which institutional value propositions are transformed into realized value. Resource integration is frequently presented as the principal mechanism of value co-creation, yet it does not fully explain how actors coordinate heterogeneous resources, negotiate competing objectives, adapt to institutional and technological changes, or resolve tensions that inevitably arise during collaborative service exchange. Consequently, the intermediate mechanisms connecting value propositions with realized value outcomes remain insufficiently theorized. Recent SDL scholarship has explicitly called for greater emphasis on processual explanations, systems thinking, and emergence to advance understanding of value within increasingly complex service ecosystems (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo and Wieland 2026).

This theoretical gap is particularly evident in higher education institutions (HEIs), which operate as complex multi-actor service ecosystems (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Mir, Kausar et al. 2022) rather than traditional educational providers. Educational value emerges through reciprocal interactions among students, faculty, administrators, employers, accreditation bodies, policymakers, alumni, and digital technologies that collectively contribute to teaching, learning, and institutional development (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021). The rapid integration of AI-enabled learning environments, learning management systems, and collaborative digital platforms has expanded opportunities for stakeholder engagement while simultaneously increasing the complexity of coordination and value realization (Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026). Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of value co-creation, student engagement, service quality, educational innovation, and technology adoption in higher education, the literature remains largely outcome-oriented, offering comparatively limited explanation of the processes through which institutional value propositions are translated into realized educational value (Adi, Ghinahana et al. 2024, Cruz, Alves et al. 2024, Sarturi and Aragão 2025).

Addressing this gap, the present study develops an inductive process model of value realization within higher education service ecosystems. Guided by Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2009, Vargo and Lusch 2014) and employing the Gioia methodology for inductive theory building (Gioia, Corley et al. 2013), the study investigates how diverse actors collaboratively transform institutional value propositions into realized value through ongoing resource integration, actor involvement, and value conflict resolution. Drawing on evidence from three Pakistani universities, the study demonstrates that value realization is neither an automatic consequence of value propositions nor an inevitable outcome of stakeholder interaction. Rather, it is a recursive process through which collaborative interactions, institutional arrangements, and technological mediation jointly shape meaningful stakeholder experiences and value outcomes within digitally enabled service ecosystems (Chandler and Vargo 2011, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024).

This study makes four contributions to the service literature. First, it advances Service-Dominant Logic by conceptualizing value realization as a distinct processual construct that links institutional value propositions with realized value outcomes, thereby addressing an important conceptual gap within contemporary SDL scholarship (Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024, Vargo and Wieland 2026). Second, it extends service ecosystem theory by demonstrating that actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution operate as complementary mechanisms through which value is collaboratively realized in digitally enabled multi-actor environments (Denzin 2002, Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Fehrer and Vargo 2023). Third, it enriches higher education service research by providing an empirically grounded explanation of how educational value emerges through interactions among students, faculty, administrators, institutional arrangements, and digital technologies, thereby moving beyond the predominantly outcome-oriented focus of previous studies (Adi, Ghinahana et al. 2024, Cruz, Alves et al. 2024). Finally, the findings offer practical guidance for higher education leaders by identifying organizational conditions that facilitate sustainable value realization and support the design of digitally enabled educational ecosystems characterized by effective stakeholder engagement, adaptive resource integration, and continuous organizational learning.

Literature Review

Service-Dominant Logic and Service Ecosystems

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) has fundamentally reshaped contemporary understanding of value creation by challenging the traditional Goods-Dominant Logic (GDL), which viewed value as embedded in tangible products and transferred from producers to customers through market exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2008). Instead, SDL positions service—the application of competencies for the benefit of another actor—as the fundamental basis of exchange, arguing that value is collaboratively generated through reciprocal interactions among multiple actors rather than unilaterally created by organizations (Vargo and Lusch 2009, Vargo and Lusch 2016). This paradigm shift redirected scholarly attention from products and transactions toward collaborative service exchange, emphasizing that organizations do not deliver value directly but offer value propositions that beneficiaries transform into value within their own contexts.

As SDL has evolved, its theoretical scope has expanded beyond marketing to become a meta-theoretical framework for explaining value creation across organizations, markets, and society. Its five foundational axioms establish that service constitutes the basis of exchange, value is co-created by multiple actors, all actors function as resource integrators, value is uniquely and phenomenologically determined by beneficiaries, and value co-creation is coordinated through institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo and Lusch 2016). Collectively, these principles reposition value creation as a continuous and collaborative process embedded within networks of actors whose interactions are shaped by institutional, social, and technological contexts.

A significant advancement in SDL has been the transition from provider–customer relationships to actor-to-actor (A2A) interactions within service ecosystems (Vargo and Lusch 2011, Vargo and Wieland 2026). Chandler and Vargo (2011) introduced the concept of value-in-context, emphasizing that value emerges through actors' situated experiences rather than isolated service exchanges. Building on this perspective, Vargo and Lusch (2017) conceptualized service ecosystems as dynamic configurations of resource-integrating actors connected through shared institutional arrangements and reciprocal service exchange. This ecosystem perspective recognizes that value is shaped not only by direct interactions but also by the broader institutional, technological, and environmental conditions that influence how actors access resources, coordinate activities, and interpret service experiences. Recent scholarship further extends this perspective by integrating systems thinking into SDL, portraying service ecosystems as adaptive and evolving systems characterized by emergence, feedback, and continuous reconfiguration of actor relationships (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Cruz, Alves et al. 2024).

The increasing digitalization of service environments has further reinforced the relevance of SDL. Artificial intelligence, cloud computing, digital platforms, and data-driven infrastructures have transformed service ecosystems by enabling continuous interaction, knowledge exchange, and collaborative decision-making among geographically dispersed actors. Rather than functioning merely as operational tools, digital technologies increasingly shape institutional arrangements, influence actor participation, and facilitate resource accessibility, thereby becoming integral components of service ecosystems (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo and Wieland 2026). Consequently, understanding value creation requires attention not only to human interactions but also to the ways digital technologies mediate collaboration and resource integration within increasingly complex service environments.

Despite these advances, an important theoretical limitation remains. SDL provides a robust explanation of why value is co-created through service exchange and resource integration; however, it offers comparatively limited insight into how value progresses from organizational value propositions to realized value within ongoing interactions. While concepts such as actor engagement, resource integration, and institutional arrangements explain essential elements of collaborative value creation, they do not fully account for the dynamic processes through which actors coordinate resources, negotiate institutional constraints, adapt to changing conditions, and collectively transform potential value into realized value. Recent SDL scholarship has therefore called for greater emphasis on process-oriented explanations that capture the evolving nature of value within complex service ecosystems (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024).

Accordingly, SDL provides the theoretical foundation for this study, but its explanatory power can be extended by explicitly theorizing the intermediate processes through which value propositions become realized value. Addressing this issue is particularly important in digitally enabled, multi-actor service ecosystems such as higher education, where value emerges through sustained collaboration among diverse human and technological actors. The following section therefore examines value co-creation from a multi-actor service system perspective to further develop the theoretical basis for value realization.

Value Co-Creation in Multi-Actor Service Systems

Value co-creation represents one of the central propositions of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), fundamentally redefining value as an emergent phenomenon arising through reciprocal interactions among multiple actors rather than being created and delivered unilaterally by organizations (Vargo and Lusch 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2014, Vargo and Lusch 2016). This perspective shifts attention from organizational outputs to collaborative processes in which actors exchange services, integrate resources, and jointly shape value within specific social and institutional contexts. Consequently, value is not embedded in products or services but emerges through actors' active participation and contextual interpretation of service experiences.

The conceptualization of value co-creation has evolved considerably from its early emphasis on provider–customer interactions toward a broader ecosystem perspective. Initial research focused primarily on customer participation and relationship management within dyadic exchanges (Grönroos 2008, Payne, Storbacka et al. 2008). However, such perspectives provide only a partial explanation of value creation in contemporary service environments, where value increasingly emerges through interactions among diverse stakeholders operating within interconnected service ecosystems. Recent SDL scholarship therefore adopts a multi-actor perspective, recognizing employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, communities, technology providers, and digital platforms as active contributors to collaborative value creation (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2013, Fehrer and Vargo 2023). In these ecosystems, actors contribute heterogeneous knowledge, competencies, technologies, and institutional resources, making value an emergent property of collective rather than bilateral interactions.

The increasing digitalization of service systems has further reinforced this multi-actor perspective (Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026). Artificial intelligence, cloud computing, digital platforms, and collaborative information systems have transformed service ecosystems by enabling continuous communication, knowledge sharing, and coordinated decision-making across organizational and geographical boundaries. Digital technologies therefore function not merely as communication tools but as institutional and infrastructural components that shape actor engagement, facilitate resource accessibility, and influence collaborative interactions throughout the service process (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023). As a result, contemporary value co-creation is increasingly mediated by digital technologies that reshape both actor relationships and the broader structure of service ecosystems.

Higher education institutions exemplify these complex multi-actor service systems. Educational value emerges through sustained interactions among students, faculty, administrators, employers, accreditation bodies, policymakers, alumni, and digital technologies, each contributing distinct resources and institutional responsibilities (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Mir, Kausar et al. 2022). Rather than acting solely as providers of educational services, universities facilitate collaborative environments in which

knowledge, capabilities, technologies, and institutional resources are continuously exchanged. The integration of learning management systems, virtual learning environments, artificial intelligence, and digital collaboration platforms has further expanded these interactions, reinforcing the ecosystem nature of higher education and increasing the complexity of value creation (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021).

Despite these theoretical advances, value co-creation alone does not adequately explain how collaborative interactions produce realized value. Existing research has largely concentrated on identifying participating actors, describing resource exchanges, or examining the outcomes of collaboration, while comparatively less attention has been devoted to the dynamic processes through which actors coordinate activities, negotiate institutional constraints, adapt to changing circumstances, and collectively transform potential value into realized value. Recent reviews similarly call for greater emphasis on process-oriented explanations that account for the evolving and often non-linear nature of collaborative value creation within digitally enabled service ecosystems (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023).

This limitation is particularly evident in higher education, where educational value depends not only on stakeholder participation but also on how diverse actors mobilize complementary resources, sustain engagement, and navigate institutional and technological challenges throughout prolonged service interactions. Understanding these processes requires moving beyond the descriptive identification of actors toward examining the mechanisms through which collaborative interactions generate realized value. The following section therefore focuses on resource integration as the central collaborative mechanism underpinning this process.

Resource Integration: Beyond Resources to Dynamic Value Realization

Resource integration is widely recognized as one of the foundational mechanisms underpinning value co-creation within Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) (Vargo, Maglio et al. 2008, MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Mir, Ahmed et al. 2026). Rather than treating resources as static organizational assets, SDL conceptualizes them as dynamic and relational, acquiring value only when actors mobilize, combine, and apply them through service exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2011, Vargo and Lusch 2014, Mir, Ahmed et al. 2026). Accordingly, value does not arise from the possession of resources but from the collaborative processes through which multiple actors integrate knowledge, skills, technologies, experiences, and institutional capabilities to address contextual needs. Resource integration therefore serves as the operational mechanism through which organizational value propositions are transformed into meaningful service experiences (Vargo and Lusch 2008, MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021).

A central contribution of SDL is the distinction between operand and operant resources (Constantin and Lusch 1994, Vargo and Lusch 2004). Operand resources, including physical infrastructure, financial capital, and technological assets, are passive and require action to generate value. In contrast, operant resources—such as knowledge, competencies, organizational capabilities, relationships, and skills—act upon other resources and are therefore regarded as the primary source of innovation and competitive advantage (Vargo and Lusch 2004, Vargo and Lusch 2008). Contemporary service research increasingly recognizes that value emerges not from individual resources in isolation but from the dynamic interaction between operand and operant resources as actors collaboratively apply their capabilities within institutional and technological contexts (Lusch and Nambisan 2015, Vargo and Lusch 2016).

The understanding of resource integration has evolved alongside the broader development of SDL. Early studies largely examined resource integration within provider–customer interactions during service encounters (Payne, Storbacka et al. 2008). Subsequent research, however, expanded this perspective by conceptualizing all actors within service ecosystems as resource integrators who continuously exchange, combine, and reconfigure heterogeneous resources across interconnected networks (Akaka and Vargo 2015, Chandler and Lusch 2015, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023). This ecosystem perspective recognizes that collaborative value creation depends on distributed resource integration among diverse stakeholders rather than on isolated organizational capabilities. Consequently, resource integration is now understood as an adaptive and networked process embedded within institutional arrangements that shape actors' interactions and opportunities for collaboration.

Recent scholarship further conceptualizes resource integration as an iterative capability rather than a discrete activity (Wieland, Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016, MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Sarturi and Aragão 2025). Actors continuously evaluate available resources, negotiate access, modify resource combinations, and develop new competencies in response to changing contextual conditions. These ongoing processes of learning, coordination, and adaptation enable service ecosystems to remain resilient despite technological disruption, institutional change, and evolving stakeholder expectations. Resource integration therefore reflects not only the availability of resources but also actors' capacity to dynamically reconfigure them in pursuit of collaborative value creation (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Cruz, Alves et al. 2024).

Digital transformation has significantly expanded both the opportunities and complexity of resource integration. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, learning management systems, enterprise platforms, and collaborative digital infrastructures facilitate real-time communication, knowledge exchange, coordination, and shared decision-making across organizational and geographical boundaries (Lusch and Nambisan 2015, Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026). Within digitally enabled service ecosystems, technological platforms function not merely as operational tools but as institutional infrastructures that shape how resources are accessed, combined, and utilized by influencing communication patterns, actor participation, and organizational routines (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023, Mir, Ahmed et al. 2026). Digitalization therefore enhances the scale and speed of resource integration while simultaneously introducing challenges related to interoperability, governance, digital capability development, and institutional coordination.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide a compelling example of this complexity. Educational value depends upon the integration of diverse human, technological, organizational, and institutional resources contributed by faculty members, students, administrators, employers, accreditation bodies, and digital platforms. Faculty contribute disciplinary expertise and pedagogical capabilities; students contribute prior knowledge, motivation, engagement, and collaborative learning; administrators coordinate institutional processes; while digital technologies support communication, assessment, knowledge management, and collaborative learning (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Mir, Kausar et al. 2022, Sarturi and Aragão 2025). Educational outcomes therefore emerge through the continuous integration of complementary resources contributed by multiple actors rather than through the unilateral delivery of educational services. As universities increasingly adopt AI-enabled learning environments, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration platforms, resource integration has become increasingly central to sustaining effective educational ecosystems (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Mir, Kausar et al. 2022).

Despite its central role within SDL, resource integration does not fully explain how value becomes realized. Existing research has primarily focused on identifying relevant resources and examining how actors exchange or combine them during value co-creation (Payne, Storbacka et al. 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2016). Comparatively less attention has been devoted to explaining the dynamic processes through which actors coordinate resource contributions, negotiate institutional arrangements, overcome contextual constraints, and continually adapt resource configurations throughout service interactions. Moreover, much of the literature implicitly assumes that resource integration leads to positive outcomes, giving comparatively limited attention to the tensions, conflicts, and coordination challenges that frequently characterize complex multi-actor service ecosystems (Fehrer and Vargo 2023).

These limitations suggest that resource integration, while indispensable, represents only one component of a broader process through which potential value becomes realized. Similar configurations of resources can generate markedly different experiences and outcomes because realized value depends on actor engagement, institutional support, communication quality, trust, governance mechanisms, and the ability to resolve conflicts arising from divergent objectives and resource dependencies. Resource integration should therefore be conceptualized as a foundational mechanism embedded within a broader process of value realization that explains how actors collectively transform value propositions into experienced value within specific contexts.

Accordingly, this study positions resource integration as a dynamic, iterative, and collaborative capability operating within the broader process of value realization. By embedding resource integration within this process, the study extends SDL beyond explaining how resources are integrated to explaining how those integrated resources are translated into realized value in digitally enabled, multi-actor higher education service ecosystems. This perspective provides the theoretical foundation for the following section, which develops value realization as the missing process linking collaborative interactions with contextual value outcomes.

Value Realization: Bridging Value Propositions and Value Outcomes

While Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) has fundamentally transformed understanding of value creation by emphasizing service exchange, actor engagement, and resource integration, the process through which potential value becomes realized remains comparatively underdeveloped. SDL convincingly argues that organizations cannot deliver value directly but can only offer value propositions, with value emerging through actors' integration of resources within specific contexts (Vargo and Lusch 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2011, Wieland, Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016). However, the intermediate processes through which value propositions are translated into experienced value have received considerably less theoretical attention. Consequently, although SDL explains why value is co-created, it provides comparatively limited insight into how value is progressively realized through ongoing interactions within complex service ecosystems.

Value realization is conceptually distinct from value co-creation. Whereas value co-creation refers to the collaborative interactions through which actors exchange services and integrate resources, value realization explains how the potential generated through these interactions becomes meaningful, experienced, and contextually evaluated (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021). Rather than representing a discrete event or an automatic consequence of resource integration, value realization is a dynamic and recursive process through which actors continuously engage, adapt, negotiate, and apply heterogeneous resources in response to evolving institutional and contextual conditions. This distinction positions value realization as the operational bridge linking organizational value propositions with contextual value outcomes.

This perspective becomes increasingly important in contemporary multi-actor service ecosystems. Unlike traditional provider–customer relationships, digitally enabled service systems involve interconnected networks of students, faculty, administrators, employers, regulators, technology providers, and digital platforms, each contributing complementary resources while pursuing distinct objectives (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2013, Vargo and Lusch 2017). Realized value therefore depends not only on resource availability but also on actors' ability to coordinate activities, communicate effectively, align institutional expectations, and adapt collaboratively throughout the service process. Consequently, value emerges as a collective accomplishment sustained through ongoing interaction rather than the isolated contribution of any individual actor.

Recent developments in service research reinforce this process-oriented understanding of value. Service ecosystems are increasingly viewed as adaptive systems in which value evolves through continuous learning, reinterpretation of experiences, and the ongoing reconfiguration of resource relationships (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Sarturi and Aragão 2025). Simultaneously, digital technologies—including artificial intelligence, cloud platforms, learning management systems, and data-driven infrastructures—reshape patterns of collaboration by influencing communication, knowledge exchange, and resource accessibility across organizational boundaries. These developments suggest that value realization should be understood as an evolving process embedded within institutional, technological, and social interactions rather than as a static service outcome.

Despite these advances, several theoretical limitations remain (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Vargo and Wieland 2026). Existing SDL research frequently assumes that successful resource integration naturally results in positive value outcomes, paying comparatively little attention to the coordination efforts, institutional constraints, and interactional tensions that shape collaborative service exchange (Wieland, Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016, Adi, Ghinahana et al. 2024). Moreover, value realization is often treated as an implicit consequence of value co-creation rather than as a theoretically distinct process requiring explicit explanation. Empirical research has likewise tended to privilege organizational or customer perspectives, providing limited understanding of how multiple actors collectively transform value propositions into realized value within increasingly digital and interconnected service ecosystems (Vargo and Lusch 2017, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024).

Addressing these limitations, this study conceptualizes value realization as the dynamic process through which institutional value propositions are transformed into contextual value outcomes through sustained collaboration among multiple actors. Specifically, value realization is facilitated through three interrelated mechanisms: actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. Actor involvement reflects stakeholders' active participation and commitment throughout service exchange (Mir, Kausar et al. 2022, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024); resource integration captures the collaborative mobilization and application of heterogeneous resources (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021); and value conflict resolution explains how competing interests, institutional constraints, and interactional challenges are negotiated to sustain collaborative relationships (Koskela-Huotari and Vargo 2016, Vargo and Lusch 2016). Collectively, these mechanisms provide a process-oriented explanation of how potential value becomes realized within digitally enabled higher education service ecosystems, thereby extending the explanatory scope of SDL beyond value co-creation toward value realization.

Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

The preceding review demonstrates that SDL has substantially advanced understanding of collaborative value creation by conceptualizing service ecosystems as networks of resource-integrating actors operating within institutional and technological contexts (Adi, Ghinahana et al. 2024, Jaakkola, Kaartemo et al. 2024, Vargo and Wieland 2026, Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026). Nevertheless, an important theoretical gap persists. Existing research has largely concentrated on the antecedents and outcomes of value co-creation—such as value propositions, actor engagement, customer participation, and resource integration—while providing comparatively limited explanation of the intermediate processes through which potential value becomes realized. Resource integration, although central to SDL, is frequently examined as an isolated mechanism rather than as one component of a broader realization process involving continuous collaboration, coordination, adaptation, and institutional alignment.

A second limitation concerns the predominantly static treatment of collaborative value creation. Much of the literature implicitly assumes that actor interaction naturally produces positive outcomes, overlooking the realities of complex service ecosystems where stakeholders possess diverse objectives, heterogeneous resources, and evolving institutional responsibilities. Recent service research therefore calls for process-oriented explanations capable of capturing how value emerges through continuous interaction, adaptation, and learning within digitally enabled ecosystems (Fehrer and Vargo 2023). Furthermore, empirical evidence concerning value realization remains limited, particularly in higher education, where educational experiences emerge through sustained collaboration among students, faculty, administrators, employers, and digital technologies rather than through the actions of any single stakeholder.

Responding to these gaps, the present study extends SDL by positioning value realization as the dynamic process linking institutional value propositions with contextual value outcomes. Drawing upon an inductive multiple-case study of higher education institutions, the study proposes that value realization is facilitated through three interrelated mechanisms: actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. Together, these mechanisms explain how multiple actors collaboratively transform potential value into realized value within digitally enabled service ecosystems.

Accordingly, the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) conceptualizes value realization as the intermediate process connecting value propositions with contextual value outcomes. Institutional value propositions initiate collaborative interactions among multiple actors who actively engage, integrate heterogeneous resources, negotiate institutional constraints, and resolve emerging conflicts throughout the service process. These dynamic interactions collectively constitute the value realization process, ultimately generating contextual value outcomes experienced by participating actors. The framework therefore extends existing SDL literature by explicitly theorizing the mechanisms through which collaborative interactions produce realized value rather than assuming that value naturally emerges from resource integration alone. This framework provides the theoretical foundation for the empirical investigation that follows and guides the inductive exploration of value realization using the Gioia methodology.

The foregoing discussion suggests that value creation within contemporary service ecosystems cannot be adequately explained through value propositions, actor interactions, or resource integration in isolation. Rather, these elements represent interdependent components of a broader process through which potential value is progressively transformed into contextual value outcomes. While SDL provides a robust foundation for understanding collaborative value creation, its explanatory power can be strengthened by explicitly theorizing the intermediate mechanisms through which actors coordinate activities, integrate heterogeneous resources, and negotiate institutional constraints over time. Building on this perspective, the present study conceptualizes value realization as a dynamic, multi-actor process facilitated through actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. These mechanisms collectively explain how institutional value propositions evolve into realized value within digitally enabled higher education service ecosystems and provide the theoretical basis for the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

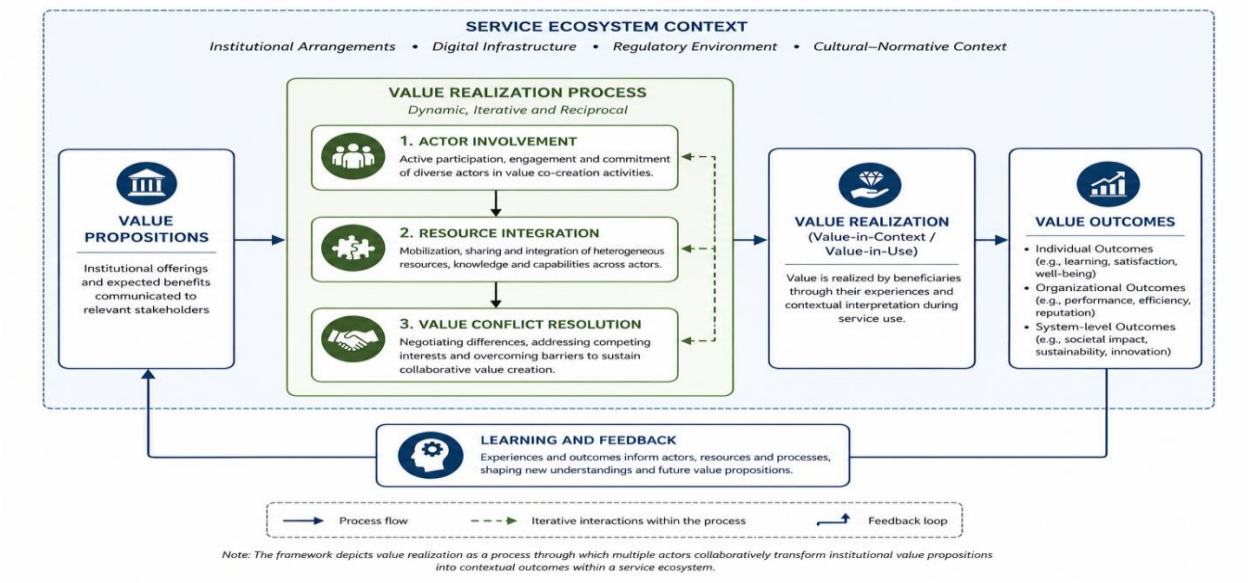


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual framework developed from Service-Dominant Logic and refined through the findings of the present study.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm to explore the process of value realization within digitally enabled higher education service systems. Interpretivism assumes that social reality is constructed through individuals' experiences, meanings, and interactions rather than existing as a single objective truth (Schwandt and Gates 2018). Since value realization is inherently contextual and emerges through interactions among multiple actors, this philosophical stance provides an appropriate foundation for examining how stakeholders collaboratively transform institutional value propositions into realized value outcomes.

Consistent with this perspective, the study employs a qualitative multiple-case study design. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for investigating complex organizational processes that require rich contextual understanding rather than hypothesis testing (Creswell and Poth 2016). A multiple-case strategy further enables the exploration of value realization across different organizational settings while strengthening theory development through replication logic and analytical comparison (Eisenhardt 1989, Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007, Yin 2018). Examining multiple higher education institutions therefore provides opportunities to identify recurring mechanisms of value realization while accounting for contextual variation across organizational environments.

The research is guided by the Gioia methodology, an inductive approach specifically developed for theory building from qualitative data (Gioia, Corley et al. 2013). Rather than testing predetermined relationships, the Gioia methodology facilitates the systematic progression from participants' first-order concepts to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions, enabling researchers to develop conceptually grounded explanations of organizational processes. This approach is particularly suited to the present study because its objective is to extend Service-Dominant Logic by theorizing value realization as the dynamic process linking institutional value propositions with contextual value outcomes. The iterative movement between empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation ensures that the proposed framework remains firmly grounded in participants' experiences while contributing to theory development.

Higher education institutions provide an appropriate empirical setting because they represent complex, digitally enabled service ecosystems involving continuous interactions among students, faculty, administrators, employers, regulators, and digital technologies. Educational value emerges through collaborative resource integration and sustained stakeholder engagement rather than through the unilateral delivery of services. Consequently, the combination of an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative multiple-case design, and the Gioia methodology provides a rigorous methodological foundation for examining how actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution collectively facilitate value realization within higher education service systems.

Research Context and Case Selection

Higher education represents a knowledge-intensive service ecosystem in which educational value emerges through continuous interactions among multiple stakeholders rather than through dyadic provider–customer exchanges. Students, faculty members, administrators, employers, regulatory bodies, alumni, and digital technology providers collaboratively integrate intellectual, technological, organizational, and institutional resources throughout the educational process. This complexity makes higher education an appropriate empirical context for examining value realization within multi-actor service systems.

The increasing digitalization of higher education has further transformed universities into digitally enabled service ecosystems (Cruz, Alves et al. 2024). Learning management systems, virtual learning environments, enterprise resource planning systems, online assessment platforms, and collaborative digital technologies have reshaped teaching, learning, administration, and stakeholder engagement. Consequently, educational value is increasingly realized through interactions among human and technological actors operating within institutional and digital environments, consistent with the ecosystem perspective of Service-Dominant Logic.

Pakistan provides an appropriate setting for investigating these processes due to the rapid expansion and digital transformation of its higher education sector. Universities have invested substantially in digital infrastructure, quality assurance, research development, and institutional modernization while responding to evolving educational and labor market demands. These developments have created diverse higher education service systems that differ in governance, institutional missions, and levels of digital integration, providing an opportunity to examine value realization across contrasting organizational contexts (MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021, Mir, Kausar et al. 2022).

Purposive theoretical sampling was employed to select information-rich cases capable of generating meaningful theoretical insights rather than statistical representativeness (Eisenhardt 1989, Yin 2018). Three universities were selected: the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), the Virtual University of Pakistan (VU), and Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). These institutions represent contrasting higher education models—conventional, fully online, and open and distance learning—while sharing a common objective of delivering higher education through technology-enabled service systems. Their diversity strengthens analytical comparison and supports theory development through replication logic (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007, Yin 2018).

Data were collected from academic staff, senior management, administrative personnel, information technology professionals, and students. Incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives enabled the study to capture the collaborative and ecosystem-based nature of value realization while strengthening triangulation across organizational roles and institutional contexts.

Data Collection

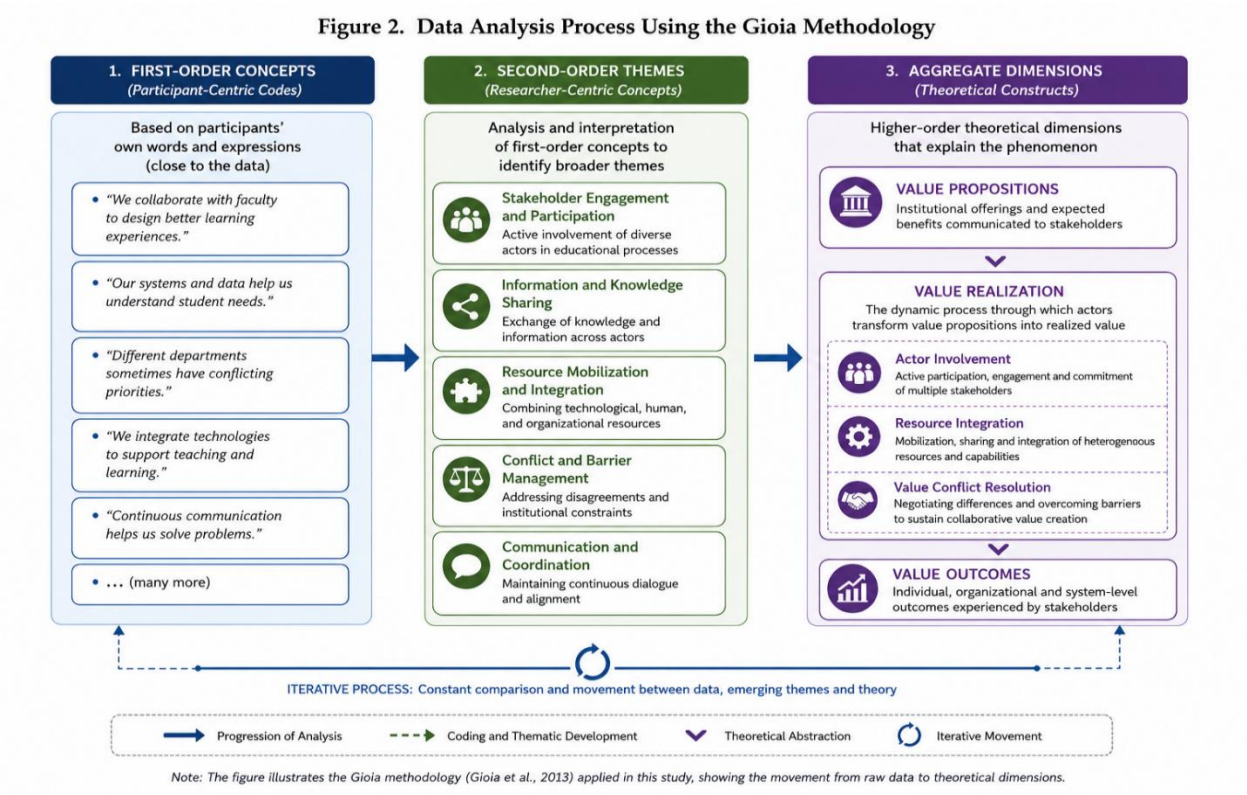
Data were collected through semi-structured interviews supported by documentary evidence to develop a comprehensive understanding of value realization within higher education service systems. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide flexibility to explore participants' experiences while maintaining consistency through a common interview protocol (Kallio, Pietilä et al. 2016). This approach is particularly appropriate for investigating organizational processes where meanings, interactions, and stakeholder experiences shape the phenomenon under investigation. The interview protocol was informed by Service-Dominant Logic and focused on institutional value propositions, actor involvement, resource integration, value conflict resolution, and value outcomes. Rather than asking participants to evaluate predefined constructs, open-ended questions encouraged them to describe their experiences of collaboration, resource utilization, stakeholder interactions, institutional support, digital technologies, and challenges encountered during educational service delivery. This approach allowed new concepts to emerge inductively, consistent with the Gioia methodology.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants possessing direct experience of educational service delivery across academic, managerial, administrative, technical, and student roles. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, whereby additional interviews no longer generated substantively new concepts or relationships (Saunders, Sim et al. 2018). Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or through secure online platforms. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed alongside field notes to preserve contextual insights. Interview data were complemented by institutional documents, including strategic plans, policy documents, annual reports, digital learning policies, quality assurance documentation, and university websites. Documentary evidence provided contextual understanding of governance structures, digital initiatives, and institutional practices while facilitating triangulation of participants' accounts (Bowen, 2009). Throughout the data collection process, iterative movement between interviews and preliminary analysis informed subsequent interviews, enabling progressively deeper exploration of the mechanisms underlying value realization.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Gioia methodology, an inductive approach designed to facilitate rigorous theory development while preserving participants' perspectives throughout the analytical process (Gioia, Corley et al. 2013). The methodology was selected because the objective of this study was to develop a process-oriented explanation of value realization rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. Through the systematic progression from first-order concepts to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions, the Gioia methodology provides a transparent framework for extending existing theory through empirically grounded conceptual development. Analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary evidence to develop familiarity with participants' experiences and identify preliminary patterns relating to value realization. Initial coding remained close to participants' own language, generating first-order concepts that reflected their interpretations of organizational practices, stakeholder interactions, and educational experiences. Similar concepts were grouped while preserving their original meanings, ensuring that participants' voices remained central during the early stages of analysis.

Figure 2. Data Analysis Process Using the Gioia Methodology



Note: The figure illustrates the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) applied in this study, showing the movement from raw data to theoretical dimensions.

The first-order concepts were subsequently compared and synthesized into second-order themes through constant comparative analysis (Gioia, Corley et al. 2013). Iterative movement between empirical evidence and emerging theoretical interpretation enabled the identification of recurring organizational processes across participants, stakeholder groups, and institutional contexts. Existing literature informed theoretical sensitivity without constraining the inductive development of themes. The final stage involved aggregating second-order themes into higher-order dimensions explaining the value realization process. The analysis identified value propositions, value realization, and value outcomes as the overarching dimensions. Within the value realization dimension, three interrelated mechanisms—actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution—emerged as the principal processes through which institutional value propositions are transformed into contextual value outcomes. NVivo software supported coding, data organization, and retrieval throughout the analysis, while analytical interpretation remained grounded in continuous engagement with the empirical data. The Gioia data structure (Figure 2) illustrates the progression from participants' expressions to the final theoretical framework.

Research Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1988). Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the participating institutions, the inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups, and the triangulation of interview data with documentary evidence. Iterative data collection and analysis further enabled the refinement and verification of emerging interpretations throughout the research process. Transferability was enhanced through the use of a multiple-case design involving three contrasting higher education institutions and by providing rich descriptions of the research context, participants, and analytical procedures. Dependability was ensured through a transparent interview protocol, systematic Gioia-based coding, analytical memos, and a documented audit trail. Confirmability was supported by maintaining close alignment between empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation through iterative comparison of interview transcripts, documentary sources, and emerging concepts. Collectively, these procedures strengthen the rigor and credibility of the proposed explanation of value realization within higher education service systems.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles governing qualitative research involving human participants. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to

withdraw at any stage without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing personal identifiers from transcripts and assigning anonymous participant codes during analysis and reporting. Interview recordings, transcripts, and supporting documents were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. The study complied with the ethical standards of the host institution and adhered to internationally accepted principles of research integrity, including informed consent, confidentiality, respect for participants, and responsible data management.

Findings: The Value Realization Process in Higher Education Service Systems

The analysis demonstrates that value realization within higher education service systems is not a discrete organizational outcome but a dynamic and recursive process through which institutional value propositions are progressively transformed into meaningful stakeholder experiences. Guided by the Gioia methodology, the findings reveal a process model comprising three overarching dimensions: Value Propositions**,** Value Realization, and Value Outcomes. Central to this process are three interrelated mechanisms—Actor Involvement, Resource Integration, and Value Conflict Resolution—through which diverse stakeholders collectively transform institutional intentions into realized educational value. Rather than operating sequentially, these mechanisms function recursively, continuously reinforcing one another as actors interact, integrate resources, negotiate competing expectations, and adapt institutional practices within digitally enabled higher education ecosystems. Figure 3 presents the empirically derived process model that emerged from the analysis.

Institutional Value Propositions: Establishing the Foundation for Value Realization

The findings indicate that value realization begins with the articulation of institutional value propositions, which establish the strategic intentions and shared expectations that guide stakeholder interactions throughout educational service delivery. Across all three universities, participants consistently described value propositions not as static institutional statements but as evolving commitments centered on educational quality, digital accessibility, knowledge development, stakeholder engagement, professional growth, and societal contribution. These propositions provide the normative direction for collaborative action, shaping how different actors understand their roles and contribute to educational value creation.

Although participants recognized a common institutional mission, they interpreted value propositions according to their respective roles within the service ecosystem. Academic staff associated institutional value with high-quality teaching, research opportunities, student-centered learning, and professional development. Administrative personnel emphasized efficient governance, transparent institutional processes, and responsive support services. Students primarily perceived institutional value through accessible learning environments, continuous academic support, employability, and opportunities for personal and professional development. These differing interpretations illustrate that value propositions are inherently multi-perspective, reflecting the heterogeneous expectations of stakeholders while remaining aligned with broader institutional objectives.

Digital transformation emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary institutional value propositions. Participants consistently described learning management systems, virtual classrooms, digital libraries, online assessment platforms, and integrated administrative systems as integral components of the educational experience rather than merely technological infrastructure. Digital platforms expanded access to learning resources, strengthened communication, facilitated collaboration, and enabled universities to maintain continuous engagement with geographically dispersed stakeholders. Consequently, digital technologies were viewed as essential enablers through which universities communicate, deliver, and sustain educational value.

One participant explained:

"Technology has changed how students experience the university. It is no longer just about attending classes; value comes from continuous access to learning resources, communication, and institutional support regardless of location."

Another participant similarly observed:

"Our responsibility is not only to deliver education but to create an environment where students, faculty, and administrators work together to achieve meaningful educational outcomes."

These accounts demonstrate that institutional value propositions increasingly extend beyond the provision of educational services to encompass collaborative experiences that require active stakeholder participation. Participants repeatedly emphasized that educational value emerges through sustained interaction, shared responsibility, and continuous engagement among multiple actors

rather than through unilateral service delivery. In this sense, institutional value propositions establish the conditions under which collaboration becomes possible but do not themselves constitute realized value.

A consistent finding across the three cases was that institutional aspirations alone are insufficient to guarantee value realization. While universities articulate commitments relating to educational excellence, innovation, digital transformation, and stakeholder satisfaction, participants acknowledged that these commitments acquire practical meaning only when stakeholders actively participate in implementing them. Institutional value propositions therefore function as initiating conditions that shape stakeholder expectations and provide strategic direction, whereas realized value depends upon the collaborative processes through which these intentions are enacted within everyday educational practice.

Collectively, the findings position institutional value propositions as the foundation of the value realization process. They establish a shared vision for educational service delivery, align stakeholder expectations, and create the institutional context within which collaboration unfolds. However, the empirical evidence also demonstrates that value propositions remain potential sources of value until they are activated through stakeholder participation. Their transformation into meaningful educational experiences depends upon the dynamic interaction of multiple actors who collectively mobilize knowledge, capabilities, technologies, and relationships throughout the service ecosystem. This observation provides the foundation for the next stage of the analysis, which examines the mechanisms through which stakeholders collaboratively transform institutional value propositions into realized value.

Value Realization Mechanisms: Transforming Value Propositions into Realized Value

The empirical findings demonstrate that institutional value propositions do not automatically generate educational value. Instead, value realization emerges through a dynamic process in which multiple stakeholders continuously interact, integrate resources, and negotiate competing expectations within digitally enabled service ecosystems. Across all three universities, participants consistently described value realization as an evolving process rather than a discrete organizational outcome. Rather than following a linear sequence, stakeholders engaged in repeated cycles of collaboration, adaptation, and learning through which institutional intentions were progressively translated into meaningful educational experiences.

The Gioia analysis identified three interdependent mechanisms that collectively constitute the value realization process: Actor Involvement, Resource Integration, and Value Conflict Resolution. Although each mechanism performs a distinct function, the findings indicate that they operate recursively, with continuous feedback among them sustaining value realization over time. Actor involvement establishes collaborative relationships, resource integration mobilizes complementary capabilities, and value conflict resolution maintains alignment among stakeholders with diverse expectations. Together, these mechanisms explain how institutional value propositions are transformed into realized value within complex higher education service systems.

Actor Involvement: Establishing Collaborative Relationships

The findings identify actor involvement as the initiating mechanism of value realization. Participants consistently emphasized that educational value does not emerge solely from institutional policies or service provision but from the active engagement of multiple stakeholders who collectively contribute knowledge, expertise, experience, and capabilities throughout the educational process. Value realization therefore begins when institutional actors move beyond their formal organizational roles and participate collaboratively in achieving shared educational objectives.

Across the three institutions, participants described a broad network of actors involved in educational service delivery, including students, faculty members, administrators, university leadership, information technology specialists, employers, alumni, parents, and regulatory agencies. Each stakeholder contributed distinct resources and perspectives that influenced learning experiences, institutional performance, and service quality. Rather than viewing education as an interaction between universities and students alone, participants portrayed higher education as a collaborative ecosystem in which value depends upon the coordinated efforts of diverse actors operating across organizational boundaries.

One senior academic explained:

"Students are no longer passive recipients of education. Their feedback, participation, and engagement directly shape how teaching and learning evolve within the university."

Similarly, an administrator observed:

"Every department contributes differently, but meaningful educational outcomes depend upon continuous coordination among all institutional actors rather than isolated efforts."

Digital technologies significantly expanded opportunities for stakeholder participation. Learning management systems, virtual collaboration platforms, institutional communication systems, and online assessment tools enabled geographically dispersed actors to engage in continuous dialogue, exchange information, and participate in collaborative decision-making. Participants consistently indicated that these technologies strengthened institutional responsiveness by enabling interaction beyond the physical campus and supporting sustained stakeholder engagement across digital environments.

Importantly, actor involvement was characterized by reciprocity rather than one-way participation. Participants described continuous cycles of feedback, knowledge exchange, collaborative planning, and joint problem-solving through which stakeholders influenced one another's decisions and actions. Such reciprocal engagement strengthened trust, reinforced shared responsibility, and established the collaborative relationships necessary for subsequent resource integration. The findings therefore suggest that actor involvement is not simply stakeholder participation but the relational mechanism through which collaborative value realization is initiated within higher education service ecosystems.

Resource Integration: Mobilizing Collaborative Capabilities

While actor involvement establishes collaborative relationships, the findings indicate that value realization progresses only when stakeholders effectively integrate their complementary resources. Participants consistently emphasized that educational value is created not through the possession of individual resources but through their continuous mobilization, combination, and application in pursuit of shared educational objectives. Resource integration therefore represents the operational mechanism that transforms stakeholder participation into collaborative capability.

Participants described resource integration as an adaptive process involving both operant resources—including knowledge, professional expertise, leadership, and technological competencies—and operand resources such as digital infrastructure, learning management systems, libraries, laboratories, financial support, and institutional facilities. Rather than functioning independently, these resources acquired value through coordinated interaction among stakeholders who continually reconfigured available capabilities in response to changing educational needs.

Academic participants highlighted collaborative curriculum development, interdisciplinary research, faculty mentoring, and shared teaching practices as important mechanisms for integrating institutional knowledge. These activities enabled expertise to circulate across departments and strengthened collective capability for teaching, research, and innovation. Educational delivery was therefore described as an interconnected organizational process requiring continuous communication and mutual support rather than isolated academic activity.

One participant explained:

"No single department possesses all the resources required to achieve educational excellence. Effective learning depends upon how knowledge, technology, and people work together across the institution."

An information technology specialist similarly noted:

"Digital platforms have become the backbone of collaboration. They connect students, faculty, and administrators, allowing resources to be shared instantly and making educational processes more responsive and efficient.

The findings further demonstrate that digital technologies substantially expanded the capacity for resource integration by enabling real-time communication, coordinated decision-making, and knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries. Learning management systems, cloud-based collaboration platforms, enterprise resource planning systems, and digital communication tools enabled stakeholders to exchange information rapidly and coordinate educational activities irrespective of geographical constraints. Participants also emphasized the importance of external resource integration through partnerships with industry, regulatory agencies, alumni, and community organizations, which enriched institutional capabilities and strengthened the alignment between educational provision and societal needs.

Across all three cases, participants consistently portrayed resource integration as a dynamic organizational capability rather than a static asset. Resources generated value only when they were continuously adapted, recombined, and applied through collaborative action. Continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and institutional flexibility enabled universities to respond effectively to emerging

challenges while sustaining value realization across changing educational environments. These findings position resource integration as the mechanism through which collaborative relationships are translated into coordinated organizational capability, thereby advancing the value realization process.

Value Conflict Resolution: Sustaining Collaborative Value Realization

Although actor involvement and resource integration enable collaborative value creation, participants consistently acknowledged that interactions among multiple stakeholders inevitably generate competing priorities, institutional constraints, and differing expectations. The findings identify value conflict resolution as the mechanism that sustains value realization by enabling stakeholders to negotiate these differences while maintaining collaborative relationships. Rather than viewing conflict as a disruption, participants described it as an inherent feature of complex service ecosystems that, when managed constructively, promotes organizational learning, adaptation, and continuous improvement.

Across the three universities, participants described value conflicts arising from diverse stakeholder expectations regarding educational quality, flexibility, operational efficiency, technological adoption, curriculum development, and resource allocation. Students prioritized accessibility and personalized learning, faculty emphasized academic standards, administrators focused on institutional governance, information technology personnel highlighted system reliability, while external stakeholders expected graduates to possess relevant professional competencies. These differing priorities required continuous negotiation rather than unilateral decision-making.

A faculty member explained:

"Students often expect immediate flexibility, while academic quality requires structured processes. The challenge is finding solutions that preserve educational standards while responding to students' evolving needs."

An administrator similarly observed:

"Every stakeholder has legitimate expectations, but institutional decisions require balancing competing priorities rather than satisfying one group at the expense of another."

Participants consistently identified communication, collaborative decision-making, stakeholder consultation, and cross-functional coordination as the principal mechanisms through which these tensions were addressed. Digital communication platforms, learning management systems, virtual meetings, and integrated information systems further strengthened transparency, accelerated information exchange, and enabled geographically dispersed stakeholders to participate in collaborative problem-solving. Participants emphasized that organizational flexibility and adaptive governance were equally important, as institutional policies, technological systems, and administrative procedures were frequently revised in response to stakeholder feedback and changing educational needs.

One participant summarized this process by stating:

"Differences are unavoidable because every stakeholder views value differently. What matters is how effectively we communicate, adapt, and learn together rather than trying to eliminate disagreement."

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that value conflict resolution extends beyond conventional conflict management. It represents a dynamic governance mechanism through which stakeholders reconcile competing priorities, strengthen mutual trust, and sustain collaborative relationships despite institutional complexity. By transforming disagreement into opportunities for organizational learning and adaptation, value conflict resolution preserves alignment between institutional value propositions and evolving stakeholder expectations. Together with actor involvement and resource integration, this mechanism completes the value realization process by ensuring that collaborative efforts remain responsive, adaptive, and sustainable within digitally enabled higher education service ecosystems

Value Outcomes: Multi-Level Impacts of Value Realization

The findings indicate that the successful realization of institutional value propositions generates outcomes that extend well beyond immediate educational experiences. Participants consistently emphasized that value realization produces interconnected benefits at the individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels, reinforcing the proposition that higher education functions as a collaborative service ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated educational activities. These outcomes emerged as the cumulative consequence of sustained actor involvement, effective resource integration, and the constructive resolution of stakeholder conflicts. Importantly,

participants viewed these outcomes not as static end states but as dynamic capabilities that continuously inform future institutional decisions, stakeholder relationships, and service innovation.

The analysis further demonstrates that realized value is inherently contextual. Different stakeholder groups recognized value according to their respective roles, expectations, and experiences. Students associated realized value with meaningful learning, employability, confidence, and continuous institutional support. Faculty members emphasized enhanced student engagement, collaborative knowledge creation, professional satisfaction, and academic innovation. Administrative participants highlighted improved service quality, organizational responsiveness, operational efficiency, and stronger institutional relationships. Despite these different perspectives, participants consistently described realized value as the outcome of collaborative interactions rather than the direct consequence of institutional service provision.

One participant reflected:

"Real value is achieved when students not only complete their courses but also feel prepared, confident, and capable of applying what they have learned beyond the university."

Another participant explained:

"Our objective is not simply to provide educational services but to ensure that every stakeholder experiences genuine benefits from the collaborative efforts of the institution."

These accounts reinforce the central proposition emerging from the study: value is realized only when institutional intentions are translated into meaningful stakeholder experiences through collaborative interaction. Participants consistently emphasized that educational value extends beyond academic achievement to include trust, long-term relationships, digital empowerment, professional capability, organizational learning, and sustained stakeholder engagement. Consequently, value realization should be understood as a multidimensional experience encompassing both tangible outcomes and intangible relational benefits that collectively shape perceptions of educational success.

Individual-Level Outcomes

At the individual level, participants described value outcomes primarily in terms of enhanced learning, professional competence, confidence, satisfaction, and personal development. Students consistently reported that meaningful educational experiences extended beyond obtaining academic qualifications to developing critical thinking, communication skills, digital literacy, and career readiness. Faculty members similarly identified value through professional growth, collaborative teaching practices, interdisciplinary engagement, and continuous learning opportunities. These findings suggest that value realization contributes simultaneously to cognitive, behavioral, and affective development among stakeholders.

One student remarked:

"The greatest benefit was not simply obtaining a degree but developing the confidence and practical skills needed to succeed beyond university."

Participants further noted that stronger stakeholder engagement, collaborative learning environments, and continuous institutional support enhanced motivation, commitment, and satisfaction. Individual value outcomes therefore reflected not only academic achievement but also the development of capabilities that enabled stakeholders to contribute more effectively within and beyond the university.

Organizational-Level Outcomes

Beyond individual benefits, participants consistently associated value realization with significant organizational improvements. Universities experienced enhanced service quality, stronger stakeholder relationships, improved communication, greater operational flexibility, and increased organizational learning. Collaborative governance, evidence-based decision-making, and digital transformation strengthened institutional responsiveness, enabling universities to adapt more effectively to evolving educational demands while maintaining academic standards.

An administrator explained:

"When collaboration becomes part of the institutional culture, improvements occur across teaching, administration, student services, and strategic planning simultaneously."

Participants also highlighted the role of continuous stakeholder feedback in supporting curriculum enhancement, technological innovation, quality assurance, and institutional learning. These improvements strengthened organizational resilience by enabling universities to refine services continuously while maintaining alignment with stakeholder expectations. Consequently, value realization emerged not only as a mechanism for improving educational experiences but also as a driver of long-term institutional capability and organizational adaptation.

Ecosystem-Level Outcomes

The findings further demonstrate that the outcomes of value realization extend beyond individual institutions to influence the broader higher education service ecosystem. Participants described sustained collaboration among universities, industry partners, regulatory agencies, alumni, and community organizations as generating wider societal benefits through knowledge exchange, research collaboration, workforce development, and enhanced graduate employability. These collaborative relationships strengthened universities' contributions to regional and national development while reinforcing the reciprocal nature of value creation across institutional boundaries.

One participant observed:

"Universities create greater value when they work with industry and society rather than operating independently."

Participants emphasized that ecosystem collaboration generated long-term benefits extending beyond educational provision, including innovation, community engagement, public trust, and stronger alignment between higher education and societal needs. These findings reinforce the ecosystem perspective by demonstrating that realized value diffuses across multiple stakeholders and institutions, producing cumulative benefits that cannot be attributed to any single organizational actor.

Synthesis of Multi-Level Value Outcomes

Across the three cases, value outcomes were found to be highly interdependent. Improvements in individual learning and capability enhanced organizational effectiveness, while stronger institutional performance fostered deeper collaboration with external stakeholders. In turn, ecosystem partnerships generated new knowledge, resources, and opportunities that informed subsequent cycles of educational innovation and institutional development. Rather than representing the endpoint of service delivery, value outcomes became important inputs into future organizational decision-making and stakeholder collaboration.

A particularly significant finding concerns the recursive nature of value realization. Participants consistently described stakeholder feedback, organizational learning, curriculum enhancement, technological innovation, and policy refinement as mechanisms through which realized value continuously shaped subsequent institutional value propositions. This recursive relationship demonstrates that value realization is not a linear sequence culminating in predetermined outcomes but a continuous cycle of interaction, adaptation, and learning that sustains the evolution of higher education service ecosystems.

Collectively, the findings support a process-oriented understanding of value realization in which institutional value propositions are progressively transformed into meaningful stakeholder experiences through actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. These mechanisms generate interconnected outcomes at the individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels while simultaneously creating the knowledge, relationships, and capabilities that inform future cycles of value realization. The resulting process model positions value realization as a recursive and dynamic phenomenon through which higher education institutions continuously adapt, innovate, and co-create value within digitally enabled multi-actor service ecosystems.

Discussion

Extending Service-Dominant Logic through the Concept of Value Realization

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing value realization as a distinct process that links institutional value propositions with contextual value outcomes. Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) has established that value is phenomenologically determined by beneficiaries and emerges through resource integration rather than being embedded within services (Vargo and Lusch 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2014, Vargo and Lusch 2017). However, comparatively

limited attention has been devoted to explaining how institutional value propositions are transformed into realized stakeholder experiences within complex service ecosystems. Recent scholarship has similarly called for greater attention to the processual and systemic dynamics through which value emerges and evolves across interacting actors and institutions.

The findings address this gap by demonstrating that value realization is neither synonymous with value co-creation nor equivalent to value outcomes. Rather, it represents the collaborative and recursive process through which institutional intentions are translated into meaningful stakeholder experiences via sustained actor interaction, adaptive resource integration, and continuous organizational learning. In doing so, the study positions value realization as the missing process connecting value propositions with value outcomes, thereby extending SDL from explaining *how value is co-created* to explaining *how value becomes realized* within digitally enabled multi-actor service ecosystems. This interpretation advances the conceptual boundaries of SDL by making explicit a process that has often remained implicit within existing theorization.

The findings demonstrate that value realization is inherently recursive, with realized stakeholder experiences continuously informing subsequent value propositions through organizational learning and adaptive governance. This observation is consistent with SDL's view of service ecosystems as dynamic configurations of actors and institutions (Vargo and Lusch 2016, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023). However, whereas previous studies primarily conceptualize recursion through ongoing resource integration and institutional arrangements (Chandler and Vargo 2011, Akaka and Vargo 2015), the present findings extend this perspective by identifying value realization itself as the recursive mechanism through which institutional intentions are continually refined into contextual value outcomes. Recent service ecosystem research has similarly argued for greater attention to processual value formation and adaptive value practices (Chandler and Lusch 2015, Wieland, Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016, Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023), yet it has not explicitly theorized the mechanisms linking value propositions with realized value. The present study addresses this gap by positioning value realization as the feedback process that sustains collaboration, organizational learning, and continuous service innovation.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the conceptualization of value realization as a distinct process linking institutional value propositions with contextual value outcomes. While Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) has established that value is phenomenologically determined by beneficiaries and emerges through resource integration rather than being embedded in services (Wieland, Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016, MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021), comparatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining how institutional value propositions are translated into realized stakeholder experiences. The findings demonstrate that value realization is neither synonymous with value co-creation nor equivalent to value outcomes. Instead, it represents the collaborative and dynamic process through which institutional intentions are transformed into meaningful stakeholder experiences through sustained interaction, adaptive resource mobilization, and continuous organizational learning. By positioning value realization as the missing process between value propositions and value outcomes, this study extends SDL and responds to recent calls for greater conceptual precision regarding value formation within complex service ecosystems (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023).

Mechanisms of Value Realization in Multi-Actor Service Ecosystems

The findings demonstrate that value realization is enabled through the recursive interaction of actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. Rather than operating as discrete or sequential activities, these mechanisms function interdependently to translate institutional value propositions into contextual value outcomes. This finding reinforces the central premise of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) that value emerges through interactions among multiple actors (Vargo and Lusch 2016, Vargo and Wieland 2026), while extending this perspective by identifying the organizational mechanisms through which collaborative interactions become realized value. In contrast to studies that primarily emphasize resource integration as the principal driver of value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2014, Akaka and Vargo 2015), the present findings suggest that value realization depends equally on sustained stakeholder engagement and the continuous reconciliation of competing interests within complex service ecosystems. Recent research has similarly argued that value emerges through dynamic configurations of actors, institutions, and practices rather than isolated exchanges (Storbacka, Brodie et al. 2016, MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021), yet the specific mechanisms linking value propositions with realized value remain insufficiently theorized.

The findings particularly refine the role of actor involvement within SDL. Previous research has conceptualized actors as resource integrators who co-create value through reciprocal service exchange (Chandler and Vargo 2011, Akaka, Vargo et al. 2013). While the present study supports this perspective, it further demonstrates that actor involvement establishes the relational conditions necessary for value realization by fostering trust, shared responsibility, and collaborative learning across institutional boundaries. Within the higher education ecosystem, value realization depended not only on interactions between faculty and students but also

on the coordinated participation of administrators, digital support personnel, industry partners, regulators, and community stakeholders. This broader configuration supports recent ecosystem research advocating a shift from dyadic interactions to networked collaboration but extends it by demonstrating how stakeholder participation initiates and sustains the realization of value rather than merely facilitating value co-creation.

The study also extends existing understanding of resource integration. Consistent with SDL, participants viewed resources as sources of value only when mobilized collaboratively rather than possessed individually (Vargo and Lusch 2014, Lusch and Nambisan 2015). However, the findings indicate that resource integration functions as a dynamic organizational capability that continuously adapts to changing stakeholder needs through knowledge sharing, digital technologies, and institutional learning. This interpretation complements recent studies highlighting the strategic role of digital infrastructures in enabling service ecosystems (Vargo, Peters et al. 2023) while advancing the argument that resource integration alone is insufficient for value realization unless accompanied by collaborative governance and adaptive organizational practices.

Perhaps the most significant extension to SDL is the identification of value conflict resolution as an integral mechanism of value realization. Although the ecosystem perspective acknowledges institutional complexity and the coexistence of diverse actors, previous studies have devoted comparatively limited attention to how conflicting expectations are negotiated to sustain collaborative value creation (Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023). The present findings demonstrate that disagreement is not an impediment to value realization but a catalyst for organizational learning when managed through stakeholder dialogue, adaptive governance, and continuous communication. By conceptualizing value conflict resolution as a governance mechanism that preserves collaboration while accommodating diverse stakeholder priorities, this study broadens SDL beyond resource integration to incorporate the processes through which complex service ecosystems maintain stability, adaptability, and long-term value realization.

Value Realization as a Recursive Multi-Level Process

A further contribution of this study is the conceptualization of value realization as a recursive and multi-level process rather than a discrete service outcome. While SDL acknowledges that value is phenomenologically determined and continuously shaped through service exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2016, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023), it offers comparatively limited explanation of how realized value influences subsequent cycles of value creation. The findings indicate that value realization extends beyond individual stakeholder experiences to generate interconnected outcomes at the individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels. More importantly, these outcomes continuously reshape institutional value propositions through stakeholder feedback, organizational learning, and adaptive governance, demonstrating that value realization is an ongoing rather than terminal process.

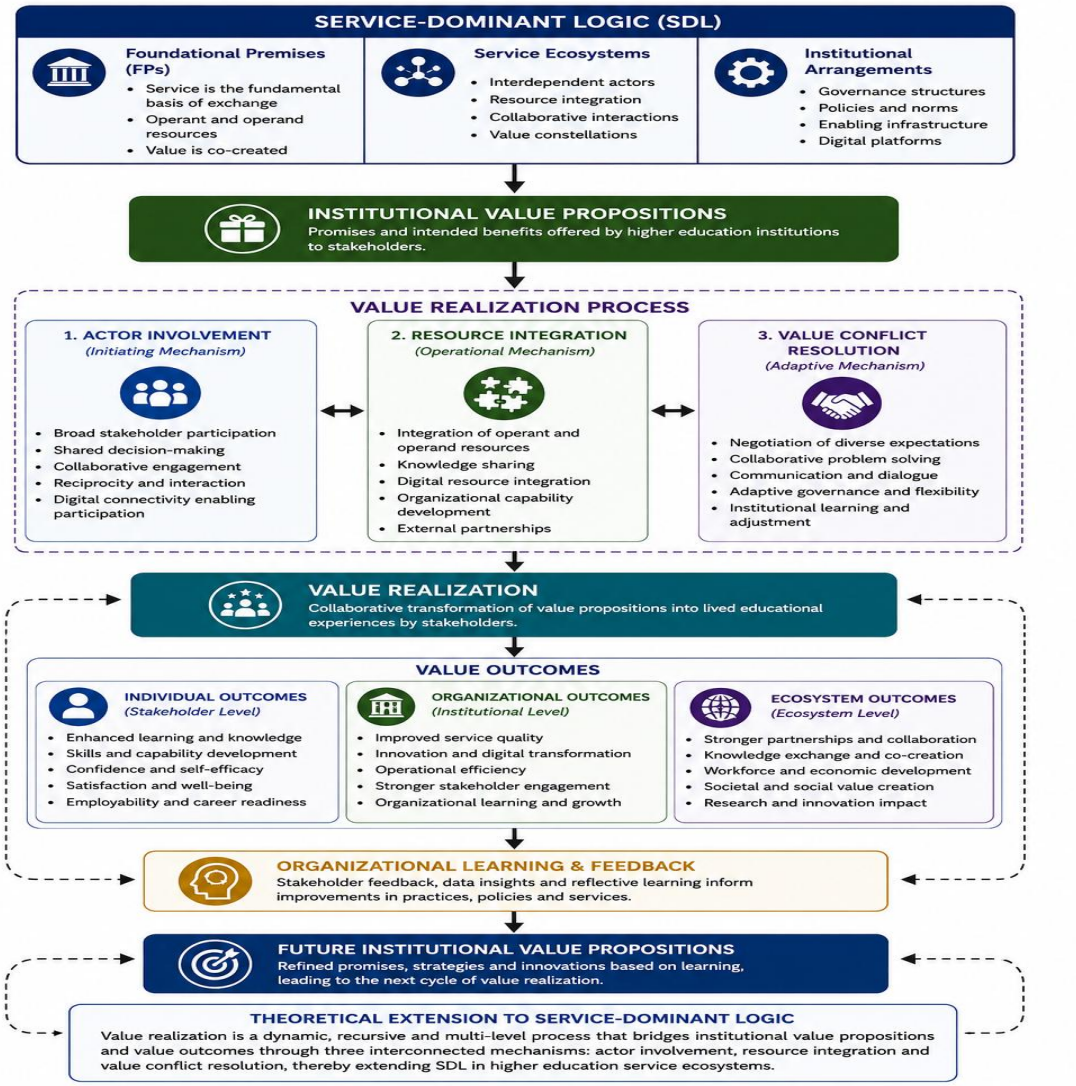
This recursive perspective complements recent service ecosystem research that conceptualizes value as emerging within adaptive configurations of actors, institutions, and shared practices (Vargo, Peters et al. 2023, Sarturi and Aragão 2025). However, whereas existing studies primarily emphasize the evolution of resource configurations and institutional arrangements, the present findings extend this literature by positioning value realization itself as the mechanism through which stakeholder experiences inform future institutional actions. In doing so, the study introduces an explicit feedback loop that connects realized value with the continuous refinement of value propositions, thereby providing a clearer explanation of how service ecosystems evolve over time.

The findings also contribute to the growing body of multi-level service research by demonstrating that value realization cannot be adequately understood from the perspective of a single actor or organizational level. Individual learning and satisfaction strengthened organizational capabilities, while organizational improvements enhanced collaboration with external stakeholders, generating broader ecosystem benefits through knowledge exchange, innovation, and societal engagement. This observation supports recent calls for adopting a systems perspective in service research, where value emerges through interconnected interactions across multiple levels of analysis rather than isolated organizational activities (Storbacka, Brodie et al. 2016, Sarturi and Aragão 2025). Unlike earlier studies that primarily describe these interactions, the present study explains the process through which value is sustained and renewed across levels, thereby enriching the theoretical understanding of value formation within complex service ecosystems.

Collectively, these findings suggest that value realization should be viewed as a dynamic organizational capability that continuously links institutional intentions, stakeholder experiences, and future service development. This recursive and multi-level perspective moves beyond the traditional linear view of value creation by demonstrating that realized value simultaneously represents an outcome of collaborative interaction and an antecedent of subsequent value realization. In this respect, the study extends SDL by

integrating feedback-driven organizational learning into the theoretical explanation of how value is realized, sustained, and renewed within digitally enabled multi-actor service ecosystems.

Figure 8. Theoretical Extension of Service-Dominant Logic through Value Realization



Theoretical Implications

The findings make four important theoretical contributions to Service-Dominant Logic and the broader literature on value realization within service ecosystems. First, the study conceptually distinguishes value realization from related constructs, including value propositions, value co-creation, value-in-use, and value outcomes. While previous SDL research has primarily focused on explaining how value is proposed and co-created through resource integration, the present findings demonstrate that value realization constitutes a distinct process through which institutional intentions are translated into contextual stakeholder experiences. This conceptual clarification addresses an important gap in SDL and responds to recent calls for greater theoretical precision regarding value formation within complex service ecosystems (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2023, Vargo, Peters et al. 2023).

Second, the study advances a process perspective of value realization by demonstrating that collaborative outcomes emerge through the recursive interaction of actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution. Although actor participation and resource integration have long been recognized as central elements of SDL (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2013, MIR, KAUSAR et al. 2021), the findings extend this perspective by showing that collaborative value realization also depends on governance mechanisms capable of reconciling competing stakeholder expectations. The identification of value conflict resolution as a core mechanism therefore expands existing service ecosystem theory beyond resource integration to include the adaptive processes that sustain collaboration

under conditions of institutional complexity. This contribution complements emerging discussions on institutional adaptability and collaborative governance within service ecosystems (Akaka, Vargo et al. 2013, Fehrer and Vargo 2023, Adi, Ghinahana et al. 2024).

Third, the study contributes to the growing ecosystem literature by conceptualizing value realization as a recursive and multi-level phenomenon. Existing research increasingly recognizes that value emerges across interconnected actors and institutional arrangements (Vargo, Peters et al. 2023), yet comparatively little attention has been given to how realized value informs subsequent cycles of value creation. The findings demonstrate that stakeholder experiences generate continuous feedback that shapes organizational learning, institutional adaptation, and the refinement of future value propositions. By incorporating this feedback mechanism, the proposed framework extends SDL from a predominantly co-creation perspective towards a dynamic explanation of how value is realized, sustained, and renewed over time.

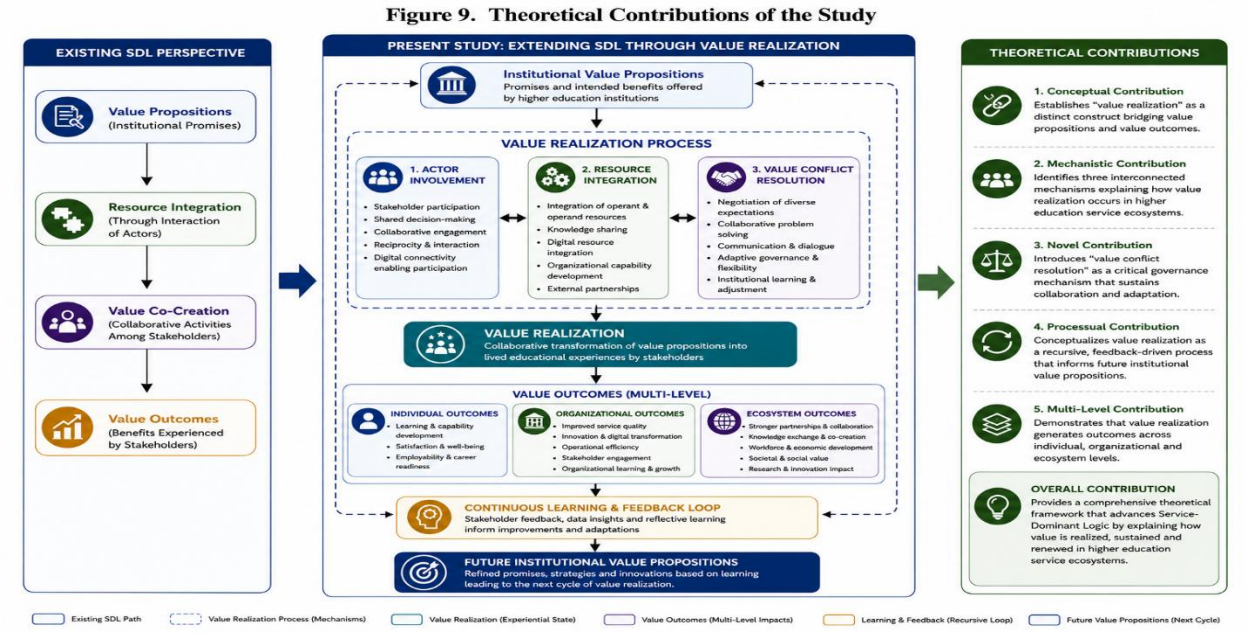
Collectively, these contributions culminate in a refined theoretical framework in which value realization represents the missing process connecting institutional value propositions with value outcomes. Rather than viewing value as the direct consequence of service provision or resource integration alone, the study demonstrates that realized value emerges through continuous collaboration, adaptive governance, and organizational learning among multiple actors. This process-oriented perspective not only extends Service-Dominant Logic but also provides a foundation for future research examining value realization across diverse digitally enabled service ecosystems.

The findings suggest that universities should move beyond provider-centric approaches and adopt participatory governance structures that actively involve students, faculty, administrators, industry partners, and regulators in institutional decision-making. Such collaborative governance strengthens stakeholder engagement and enhances institutional responsiveness, which recent service ecosystem research identifies as central to sustaining value in complex service environments (Vargo, Peters et al. 2023, Sarturi and Aragão 2025, Vargo and Wieland 2026). Universities should also invest in digital platforms that facilitate continuous knowledge sharing and cross-functional collaboration. Rather than serving merely as instructional technologies, digital infrastructures should be viewed as strategic enablers of resource integration and organizational learning, consistent with recent work on digitally enabled service ecosystems (Adi, Ghinahana et al. 2024, Vargo, Wieland et al. 2026).

Table 1. Summary of Theoretical Contributions

Existing SDL Perspective	Contribution of the Present Study	Theoretical Advancement
Value emerges through resource integration.	Value realization is conceptualized as a distinct collaborative process linking value propositions and value outcomes.	Clarifies the conceptual position of value realization within SDL.
Actors co-create value through interaction.	Actor involvement initiates the value realization process by establishing collaborative relationships.	Explains the initiating mechanism of value realization.
Resource integration enables value creation.	Resource integration is reframed as a dynamic organizational capability within value realization.	Extends SDL by emphasizing adaptive capability rather than resource possession.
Service ecosystems coordinate multiple actors.	Value conflict resolution is identified as an essential governance mechanism that sustains collaboration.	Introduces a novel mechanism into service ecosystem theory.
Value is contextually determined by beneficiaries.	Value realization operates recursively across individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels through continuous feedback.	Integrates multi-level learning and recursive adaptation into SDL.

Figure 9. Theoretical Contributions of the Study



Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for university leaders, academic administrators, policymakers, faculty members, and other stakeholders involved in higher education service systems. By conceptualizing value realization as a collaborative and recursive process, the study offers a practical framework for improving educational service delivery through sustained stakeholder engagement, adaptive resource integration, and continuous organizational learning.

First, the findings suggest that universities should move beyond viewing students as passive recipients of educational services and instead recognize them as active partners in value realization. Institutional leaders should therefore establish formal mechanisms that encourage meaningful student participation in curriculum design, quality assurance, digital innovation initiatives, and institutional decision-making. Strengthening stakeholder participation can improve responsiveness, increase student engagement, and enhance the overall educational experience.

Second, the study highlights the importance of resource integration as an organizational capability rather than simply the availability of institutional resources. University administrators should encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the effective use of digital technologies to integrate academic expertise, administrative capabilities, and external partnerships. Investments in learning management systems, collaborative digital platforms, faculty development programs, and institutional knowledge-sharing mechanisms can significantly strengthen universities' capacity to realize educational value.

Third, the identification of value conflict resolution as a central mechanism underscores the importance of collaborative governance within higher education institutions. Universities should develop transparent communication channels, participatory decision-making structures, and structured conflict-resolution mechanisms that enable stakeholders to negotiate differing expectations constructively. Regular stakeholder consultations, cross-functional committees, and collaborative planning sessions can help institutions respond more effectively to competing priorities while maintaining organizational cohesion.

The findings also emphasize the growing importance of digital transformation in supporting collaborative value realization. Higher education institutions should continue investing in integrated digital infrastructures that facilitate communication, knowledge exchange, online learning, and real-time stakeholder feedback. Digital technologies should not be viewed merely as instructional tools but as strategic enablers of stakeholder collaboration, institutional responsiveness, and continuous service innovation.

For policymakers and higher education regulators, the study suggests that institutional performance should be evaluated using broader indicators than traditional academic outputs alone. Evaluation frameworks should also consider stakeholder engagement, collaborative governance, organizational learning, digital capability, and ecosystem partnerships as important dimensions of institutional effectiveness. Such an approach would better reflect the collaborative nature of contemporary higher education service systems.

The findings further indicate that universities should strengthen collaboration with external stakeholders, including industry partners, alumni, government agencies, and community organizations. These partnerships enhance curriculum relevance, research collaboration, graduate employability, and knowledge exchange while simultaneously strengthening universities' contributions to regional and national development. Finally, the recursive framework proposed in this study provides universities with a practical roadmap for continuous improvement. Rather than treating quality assurance as a periodic assessment exercise, institutions should establish ongoing feedback systems that capture stakeholder experiences, evaluate realized value, and translate these insights into future institutional strategies. Continuous learning and adaptive governance can therefore become central components of sustainable value realization within higher education.

Collectively, these implications demonstrate that successful value realization depends upon coordinated stakeholder participation, integrated organizational capabilities, adaptive governance, and continuous institutional learning. Universities that adopt these principles are likely to strengthen educational quality, stakeholder satisfaction, organizational resilience, and long-term societal impact.

Table 2. Practical Implications for Higher Education Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Key Recommendation	Expected Benefit
University Leadership	Promote participatory governance and stakeholder collaboration	Improved institutional responsiveness and strategic alignment
Academic Staff	Encourage interdisciplinary teaching, collaborative learning, and knowledge sharing	Enhanced educational quality and student engagement
Administrative Managers	Develop integrated digital systems and collaborative service processes	Greater operational efficiency and service quality
Students	Participate actively in curriculum development, institutional feedback, and quality assurance	Increased satisfaction, ownership, and learning outcomes
Policy Makers and Regulators	Adopt ecosystem-oriented performance indicators emphasizing collaboration and innovation	More comprehensive institutional evaluation and policy effectiveness
Industry and Community Partners	Expand partnerships for internships, research, curriculum development, and community engagement	Stronger employability, innovation, and societal impact

Limitations and Future Research

While this study contributes to the understanding of value realization within higher education service ecosystems, several limitations should be acknowledged. Recognizing these limitations provides opportunities for future research to refine, extend, and validate the proposed framework across different service contexts.

First, this study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design involving three higher education institutions. Although this approach enabled an in-depth exploration of stakeholders' experiences and facilitated inductive theory development, the findings are context-specific and should not be interpreted as statistically generalizable. Instead, the proposed framework offers analytical generalization (Yin, 2018), providing theoretical insights that may inform research across comparable service ecosystems. Future studies may employ quantitative research designs to test the relationships among institutional value propositions, actor involvement, resource integration, value conflict resolution, value realization, and value outcomes using larger and more diverse samples.

Second, the empirical investigation was conducted within the context of higher education institutions in Pakistan**.** Institutional structures, governance arrangements, cultural norms, technological maturity, and stakeholder expectations vary considerably across countries and educational systems. Future research should therefore examine the applicability of the proposed framework within different national, cultural, and institutional settings to determine its contextual robustness and identify potential contextual variations in value realization processes.

Third, although the study incorporated perspectives from multiple stakeholder groups—including students, faculty members, administrators, information technology personnel, and external collaborators—the representation of stakeholder categories remained constrained by the selected cases. Future investigations could broaden stakeholder representation by including policymakers, accreditation bodies, employers, parents, international students, alumni, and community organizations to develop a more comprehensive understanding of collaborative value realization across higher education ecosystems.

Fourth, the present study examined value realization at a particular point in time. However, value realization is inherently dynamic and recursive, evolving as institutional relationships, digital technologies, and stakeholder expectations change. Longitudinal studies would provide valuable insights into how value realization develops, adapts, and transforms across different stages of institutional development, organizational change, and digital transformation initiatives.

Finally, the proposed framework was developed within the higher education service context. Although many of the identified mechanisms—particularly actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution—may be applicable across other service ecosystems, further empirical research is required to examine their relevance in sectors such as healthcare, public administration, tourism, financial services, professional services, and digital platform ecosystems. Comparative cross-sector studies could determine whether value realization represents a generalizable service process or whether sector-specific adaptations are required.

Beyond validating the framework, future research should also investigate additional antecedents and moderators of value realization. Variables such as institutional trust, digital capability, organizational culture, leadership, stakeholder engagement intensity, service innovation capability, and artificial intelligence-enabled service platforms may further enrich understanding of how collaborative value realization occurs within increasingly complex service ecosystems.

Collectively, these future research directions provide opportunities to refine the proposed framework, strengthen its empirical validation, and extend its applicability across diverse organizational and societal contexts. Such investigations will further advance the growing body of knowledge surrounding Service-Dominant Logic, service ecosystems, and collaborative value realization.

Table 3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Limitation	Future Research Opportunity
Qualitative multiple-case design	Test the proposed framework using quantitative methods, mixed methods, or structural equation modeling across larger samples.
Pakistani higher education context	Conduct cross-cultural and cross-national comparative studies to examine contextual differences in value realization.
Limited stakeholder representation	Include additional actors such as policymakers, accreditation bodies, alumni, employers, parents, and community organizations.
Cross-sectional research design	Undertake longitudinal studies examining the evolution of value realization and organizational learning over time.
Single service context	Apply the framework within healthcare, tourism, public services, financial services, and digital platform ecosystems to assess its broader applicability.
Limited examination of contextual influences	Investigate the moderating roles of digital capability, organizational culture, leadership, institutional trust, AI adoption, and governance mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how value is realized within higher education service ecosystems by examining the collaborative interactions among multiple stakeholders through the lens of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL). While SDL has substantially advanced understanding of value co-creation and resource integration, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining how institutional value propositions are transformed into meaningful stakeholder experiences. Addressing this gap, the present study

developed and empirically grounded a process-oriented framework of value realization based on qualitative evidence from multiple higher education institutions.

The findings demonstrate that value realization is neither an automatic consequence of institutional value propositions nor an inevitable outcome of stakeholder interaction. Instead, it emerges through a recursive process comprising actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution, which collectively enable stakeholders to transform institutional intentions into meaningful educational experiences. These collaborative mechanisms subsequently generate interconnected value outcomes at the individual, organizational, and ecosystem levels while simultaneously informing future institutional value propositions through continuous learning and adaptive feedback.

The study makes an important contribution to Service-Dominant Logic by distinguishing value realization from the related concepts of value propositions, value co-creation, value-in-use, and value outcomes. In doing so, it addresses a conceptual gap within the literature by positioning value realization as the dynamic process that connects institutional intentions with experienced value. The introduction of value conflict resolution as a core mechanism further enriches the service ecosystem perspective by demonstrating that sustainable collaboration depends not only on resource integration but also on stakeholders' ability to negotiate competing expectations, reconcile institutional tensions, and adapt collaboratively to changing conditions.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the study offers a practical framework for universities seeking to strengthen stakeholder engagement, collaborative governance, digital transformation, and organizational learning. By emphasizing continuous feedback and adaptive institutional practices, the proposed framework provides higher education leaders with a roadmap for enhancing educational quality, institutional responsiveness, and long-term ecosystem resilience.

More broadly, the findings suggest that higher education should be understood not as a traditional service delivery system but as a dynamic service ecosystem in which value is collaboratively realized through ongoing interaction, shared responsibility, and organizational adaptation. This perspective aligns with the evolving nature of contemporary higher education while extending the application of Service-Dominant Logic to increasingly complex educational environments.

In conclusion, this study advances service research by proposing that value realization constitutes the missing theoretical process linking institutional value propositions with value outcomes. Through the integration of actor involvement, resource integration, and value conflict resolution, the study offers a recursive and multi-level framework that explains how value is collaboratively realized, sustained, and continuously renewed within higher education service ecosystems. It is anticipated that this framework will stimulate further theoretical refinement and empirical investigation into value realization across diverse service contexts, thereby contributing to the continued evolution of Service-Dominant Logic and service ecosystem research.

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