A dualistic interpretation of value in higher education: Comparing students and academics' perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper: Value has a variety of meanings in the Higher Education context. In fact, different stakeholders generally hold diverging perspectives about the drivers of value generated by Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This paper investigates the value perceptions of two strictly related categories of HEIs' stakeholders: students and academics. Comparing their perspectives, the article suggests several conceptual and practical insights to realize excellence in the provision of higher education services.

Methodology: A case study approach was undertaken. A medium-sized public university located in the North of Italy was the subject of the analysis. A mixed, quali-quantitative study design was arranged to collect first-hand data about the value perceptions of 2,572 students and 232 academics affiliated with the case university. Descriptive statistics were used to compare the students and academics' value perceptions; besides, a regression analysis permitted to illuminate the drivers of higher education service quality.

Main Findings: Even though students and academics agreed on various value drivers, several diverging perspectives emerged. On the one hand, students were found to attach greater emphasis on the enrichment of the traditional learning offering delivered by the university with laboratories, apprenticeships, and empirical activities intended to improve their practical skills and attitudes, beyond their knowledge. On the other hand, academics were primarily interested in the internationalization of the institution and in the enhancement of the inter-organizational relationships between the university and its business stakeholders.

Practical implications: Students and academics participate in co-generating the value produced by HEIs. From this standpoint, the ability to establish a bridge between their diverging expectations and perceptions is crucial to increase the quality and the perceived value of higher education services.

Originality/value: The article compares the value perceptions and expectations of students and academics, triggering further conceptual and practical developments.

Type of paper: Research paper

Keywords
Higher education; Service quality; Value drivers; Students; University

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Educational services are inherently coproduced by students and academics, who perform as value co-creators during the whole service encounter (Brandsen et al., 2018). Even though they have been generally handled as two different constructs, service co-production and value co-creation have been argued to be strictly interrelated (Ordanini and Pasini, 2008). On the one hand, service co-production could be understood as the involvement of individual citizens and/or groups of citizens in co-planning, co-designing, and co-delivering services (Verschuere et al., 2012); on the other hand, value co-creation is established on the premise that "*...under certain circumstances the service provider gets opportunities to co-create value together with its customers...*" (Grönroos, 2011, p. 279). From this point of view, the implementation of service co-production can be conceived of as an opportunity for value co-creation (Ranjan and Read, 2016). In fact, it allows to engage users and providers in a joint effort which significantly increases their ability to effectively use available resources and to get better outcomes from their interaction (Ciasullo et al., 2017).

As far as educational services are concerned, co-production engenders the participation of direct and/or indirect users in the design and delivery of both primary educational services and ancillary services in an attempt to improve the value generated during the service encounter (Jakobsen and Andersen, 2013). First, users could be empowered and involved in defining the attributes of educational services and in co-delivering them in collaboration with providers, in an attempt to realize student-centred learning processes (Coates and McCormick, 2014). Second, users may cooperate in the design and co-provision of secondary services, such as meal preparation and maintenance of green areas (Palumbo et al., 2018): this permits to increase their social identification with the educational institution and to boost their commitment to the learning processes delivered by the educational institution (Boscardin and Jacobson, 1997). Whatever the focus of service co-production and the extent of value co-creation in the educational context, the establishment of a co-creating relationship between users and providers require that they adopt non-conflicting perspectives and expectations (Echeverri and Skålén, 2011): this minimizes the risk that their interaction turns into value co-destruction (Plé and Cáceres, 2010).

Service co-production and value co-creation are especially relevant in the higher education context (Hilton et al., 2012): actually, the complexity of higher educational services require a profound and continuous integration of the resources variously provided by the institution, the academic staff, and the students (Díaz-Méndez and Gummesson, 2012). Obviously, the effective integration of the resources brought in the service encounter by academics and students relies on the educational institutions' ability to create a bridge between these actors, fostering their ability to participate in value co-creation (Hau and Thuy, 2016): this requires the implementation of proper organizational models and sound institutional arrangements, which sets the condition for the establishment of a co-creating relationship between users and providers (Baron and Warnaby, 2011).

1.2 Study rationale and research questions

Scholars have variously tried to investigate the triggers and the implications of students' involvement and engagement in the higher education context (see, *inter alia*, Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Brooman et al., 2015; Bryson, 2016; Barnacle and Dall'Alba, 2017;

Bendermacher et al., 2017). In fact, students' participation in the design and delivery of educational services has been widely identified as a fundamental ingredient of the recipe for innovative and more effective educational services, which emphasize the democratization of learning processes (Bergmark and Westman, 2018). However, whilst an increasing attention has been paid to the institutional antecedents of students' involvement in co-designing and co-delivering learning activities and to the approaches and technologies which are expected to enable the engagement of students in value co-creation (Shaw and Lowe, 2017; Martens et al., 2019), relatively less attention has been paid to the effects and implications of students and academics perspectives on service quality and value on their ability to participate in value co-creation (Jungblut et al., 2015; Nair et al., 2015; Kalfa and Taksa, 2017; Burden et al., 2018). This paper aims at contributing in filling the existing gap in the scientific literature: first, it tries to illuminate the value expectations of students and academics in the higher education context; second, it envisions the implications of such expectations on the opportunity to establish a co-creating partnership between students and academics. More specifically, three research questions inspired the development of this study:

R.Q. 1: What are the students' value expectations in the higher education context?

R.Q. 2: What are the academics' value expectations in the higher education context?

R.Q. 3: How do students and academics' value expectations affect their willingness to participate in value co-creation and service co-production?

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some details about the research strategy and design which were used to provide a tentative answer to the research questions reported above. Section 3 reports the main study findings; it is organized in three sub-sections, each of which is devoted to a research question. Section 4 critically discusses the study findings, providing some insights to trigger further conceptual and empirical developments. Lastly, section 5 summarizes the implications of this research, emphasizing its theoretical and practical contribution.

2. Methods

2.1 Research strategy and design

A mixed, quali-quantitative case study approach was taken for the purpose of this study (Yazan, 2015). In fact, the case study method was consistent with the "*what*" and "*how*" nature of the research questions which triggered this study (Hancock and Algozzine, 2017). The attention was focussed on a single case university, which was conveniently identified by the authors in light of its involvement in a research project aimed at eliciting its ability to involve students and academics in value co-creation.

As suggested by Yin (2012), we accessed multiple sources of information in order to collect evidence about the main topics dealt with in this paper. More specifically, the first step of our research design consisted of a desk study concerning the policy documents and strategic plans of the case institution. The data obtained from these sources allowed us to achieve a greater awareness of the case institutions' positioning about the process of users' engagement in value co-creation and service co-production, triggering the further phases of the research. In the second step of this study, we designed a semi-structured questionnaire, which was intended to shed light on the value expectations and perspectives of both students and academics. The questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of these two categories of agents: in sum, 1,243 students and 232 academics were involved in this

research. Section 2.3 provides some additional information about the socio-demographic characteristics of the two samples which participated in this study. In the third and concluding step of this study, we collected some in-depth insights from several key informants, who were conveniently recruited among the students who showed a greater awareness of their opportunity to participate in value co-creation and among the academics who expressed some criticism about the involvement of students in the process of value co-creation. In sum, this study design allowed us to obtain a wide array of evidence, shedding light on the students and academics' perspectives on value co-creation in the higher education context.

2.2 The case study institution

As previously anticipated, the case institution was conveniently selected by the authors. The decision to focus the attention on a single institution was consistent with the purpose of obtaining first-hand and fresh evidence about the main topics investigated in this research. The case institution was a medium-sized multi-specialty university located in North-western Italy, one of the most advanced areas of the Peninsula. By 2019, the educational institution had 346 tenured academics, with women representing about 40% of the academic workforce. Tenured scholars were distributed in 7 scientific departments, including: law, engineering, informatics, classical languages, modern languages, economics and management, and humanities and social science. With more than 1,200 scientific publications per year, 35 active patents, 11 spin-offs, and 27 start-ups, the case institution is currently ranked among the leading 100 young universities and the leading 500 universities in the world.

By the academic year 2018/2019, more than 20,500 students were enrolled at the case university. In 2017, about 2,500 people achieved a degree delivered by the educational institution. More than 2 in 3 people with a master's degree (76.1%) were able to get a job within a year of the graduation; besides, more than half of people holding a bachelors' degree (57.8%) reported that they had a job within a year of their graduation. Lastly, yet importantly, the university hosted more than 1,500 foreign students and had more than 250 operative partnerships with international institutions.

2.3 The two study samples

Table 1 synthesizes the socio-demographic characteristics of students who were involved in this research. Women represented more the 2 in 3 people (75.2%), whilst men covered about a quarter of the sample (24.8%): these data mirrored the distribution per gender of students enrolled at the case university, with women (62.5%) prevailing over men (37.5%). The sample was evenly distributed in terms of age group: about 1 in 6 students (16.9%) were aged between 19 and 21 years; a third of respondents (32.3%) had an age ranging between 22 years and 25 years; the remaining part of the sample was fairly distributed among those aged between 26 years and 28 years (29.3%) and those aged 29 years and more (21.5%). About 1 in 4 students (24.7%) lived in the city centre or in the immediate suburbs of the city centre; the majority of respondents lived either in the hinterlands of the city where the case institution was established (35.5%) or in other provinces in North-western Italy (31.6%); a small portion of the sample consisted of people habitually living in other geographical areas than North-western Italy (4.3%) or outside Italy (3.9%). More than a quarter of students (22%) were attending at a degree course hosted by the department of humanities and social science; economics and management (18%), classical languages (17.4%), modern languages (15.3%), and informatics (11.7%) followed. Both the departments of law (7.3%) and engineering (8.3%) accounted for less than 1 in 10 students respectively.

Table 2 depicts the characteristics of the sample of academics who accepted to take part in this research. Men (53.4%) slightly prevailed over women (46.6%); once again, these data reflected the gender composition of the workforce employed by the case institution, with men representing about 6 in 10 members of the academic staff (59.5%). More than 1 in 6 academics were aged 35 years or less; people being aged between 36 and 45 years represented about a quarter of the sample (26.7%); the majority of academics involved in this study (31.4%) were aged between 46 years and 55 years, with the remaining part of the sample (24.6%) having 56 years or more. About half of the sample reported to live either in the near proximity of the city centre (26.7%) or in the hamlets of the city where the case institution was established (21.1%); most of academics (39.3%) lived in other provinces located in North-western Italy. More than 1 in 10 academics (11.6%) reported to live in other geographical areas of Italy, whilst only 3 respondents (1.3%) lived outside Italy. Lastly, yet importantly, academics were fairly distributed in terms of their scientific affiliation: about 1 in 10 respondents (9.9%) were part of the law department; engineering (16%), modern languages (16.3%), and humanities and social sciences (16%) accounted for about 1 in 6 academics respectively; slightly less than a fifth of academics (18.1%) belonged to the department of economics and management; the remaining part of the sample was evenly distributed among people affiliated to the departments of classical languages (12.5%) and informatics (11.3%).

Table 1. The students participating in the study (n = 1,243)

Variable	Total	
	No.	%
Gender		
Men	308	24.8
Women	935	75.2
Age group		
Between 19 and 21 years	210	16.9
Between 22 and 25 years	401	32.3
Between 26 and 28 years	364	29.3
29 years and more	268	21.5
Living area		
City centre	307	24.7
Hinterlands of the city centre	441	35.5
Other provinces in North-western Italy	393	31.6
Other geographical areas of Italy	53	4.3
Outside Italy	49	3.9
Scientific department hosting students' degree programme		
Law	91	7.3
Engineering	103	8.3
Informatics	146	11.7
Classical languages	216	17.4
Modern languages	190	15.3
Economics and management	224	18
Humanities and social sciences	273	22

Table 2. The academics participating in the study (n = 232)

Variable	Total	
	No.	%
Gender		
Men	124	53.4
Women	108	46.6
Age group		
35 years or less	40	17.3
Between 36 and 45 years	62	26.7
Between 46 and 55 years	73	31.4
56 years and more	57	24.6
Living area		
City centre	62	26.7
Hinterlands of the city centre	49	21.1
Other provinces in North-western Italy	91	39.3
Other geographical areas of Italy	27	11.6
Outside Italy	3	1.3
Scientific department hosting students' degree programme		
Law	23	9.9
Engineering	37	16
Informatics	26	11.2
Classical languages	29	12.5
Modern languages	38	16.3
Economics and management	42	18.1
Humanities and social sciences	37	16

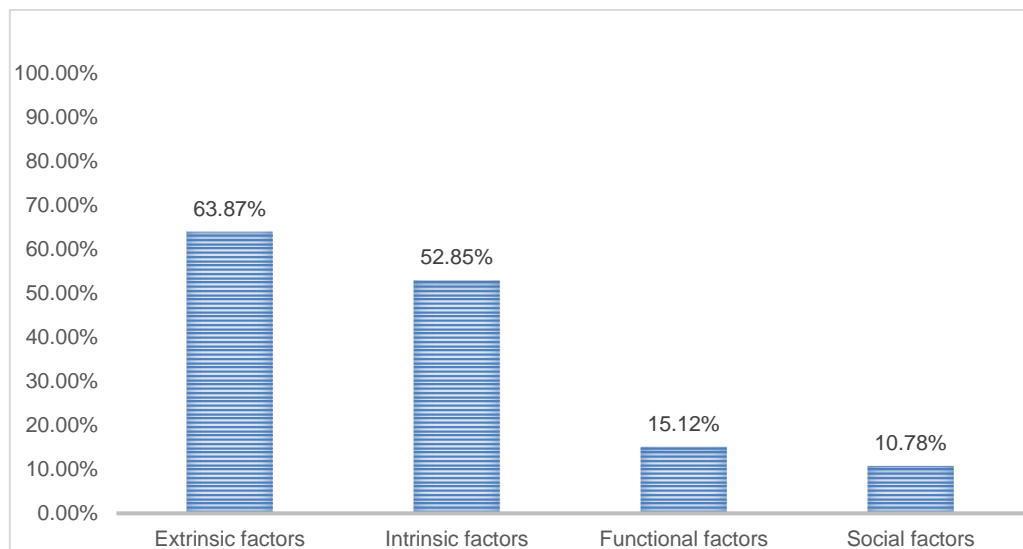*Source: Authors' elaboration*

3. Findings

3.1 The students' value expectations

The students involved in this research reported a variety of value expectations with the educational services provided by the case university. Interestingly, extrinsic factors represented the main driver of value expectations of respondents. Slightly less than 2 in 3 students (63.9%) reported that the key factor triggering their decision to attend at one of the degree courses delivered by the case institution was the opportunity to experience a learning process which was tailored to the distinguishing characteristics of the local environment, thus improving their ability to match the labour demand of firms operating in the surrounding area of the case institution. In addition to extrinsic factors, intrinsic triggers were also contemplated among the students' value expectations. In fact, more than half of the sample

(52.8%) maintained that they were strongly interested in the distinctive identity of the case institution and, consequently, in its ability to concur in the education and training of people with a strong sense of affiliation and belonging to a community.

Whilst extrinsic and intrinsic factors seemed to perform as the key driver of students' value expectations, we noticed that functional and social dimensions had a role in addressing students' prospects, too. On the one hand, about 15% of respondents emphasized that their decision to become students of the case institution was motivated by the perception of a high value for money; in other words, educational quality was considered to overwhelm the price charged for the enrolment at the case university. On the other hand, more than 1 in 10 respondents (10.8%) emphasized that they were primarily attracted by the social network gravitating towards the case institution and by the opportunity to participate in it. Figure 1 graphically summarizes the main drivers of value expectations reported by students, stressing the prevalence of extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

**Figure 1. The students' value expectations towards the case university**

Source: Authors' elaboration

However, the students' value expectations only partially matched their perceived satisfaction with the educational services provided by the case university. Figure 2 shows some details about the self-reported quality assessment of students who were involved in this study. It is worth noting that the general satisfaction of students was above the sufficiency ($\mu = 7.1$; $\sigma = 1.9$): however, about a fifth of the sample (19.8%) rated 5 or below their general satisfaction with the case institution. Whilst interviewees appreciated the quality of the learning offering delivered by the case institution ($\mu = 6.9$; $\sigma = 1.7$), the quality of learning spaces ($\mu = 7.1$; $\sigma = 2$), the availability of learning technologies ($\mu = 6.8$; $\sigma = 2$), and the value for money ratio ($\mu = 7$; $\sigma = 1.9$), they were relatively less satisfied with the degree of internationalization of the case institution ($\mu = 6.4$; $\sigma = 2.1$), the financial support to outstanding students ($\mu = 6.3$; $\sigma = 2.2$), and the students' preparation for the labour market ($\mu = 5.5$; $\sigma = 2.1$).

The factors which motivated the respondents' unsatisfaction with these attributes of the case university's learning offering are effectively reported in the hints for improvement reported by the students. Actually, more than 1 in 2 people (54.4%) maintained that the enrichment of traditional educational curricula with more frequent and practical traineeships

hosted by public and private companies operating in the surrounding territory is essential to increase the quality of educational services provided by the case institution. Moreover, about a third of the sample (32.9%) stressed the opportunity to reduce the time devoted to theoretical arguments and conceptual issues, to pay more attention to experiential learning and learning by doing. Lastly, yet importantly, many interviewees emphasized the need to partially redesign the learning offering of the case institution, delivering degree courses which are tailored to the specific labour demands of firms (34.7%) and actively engaging public and private companies both in the design and provision of empirical learning activities (15.7%).

Figure 2. The students' self-assessed satisfaction with educational services provided by the case institution
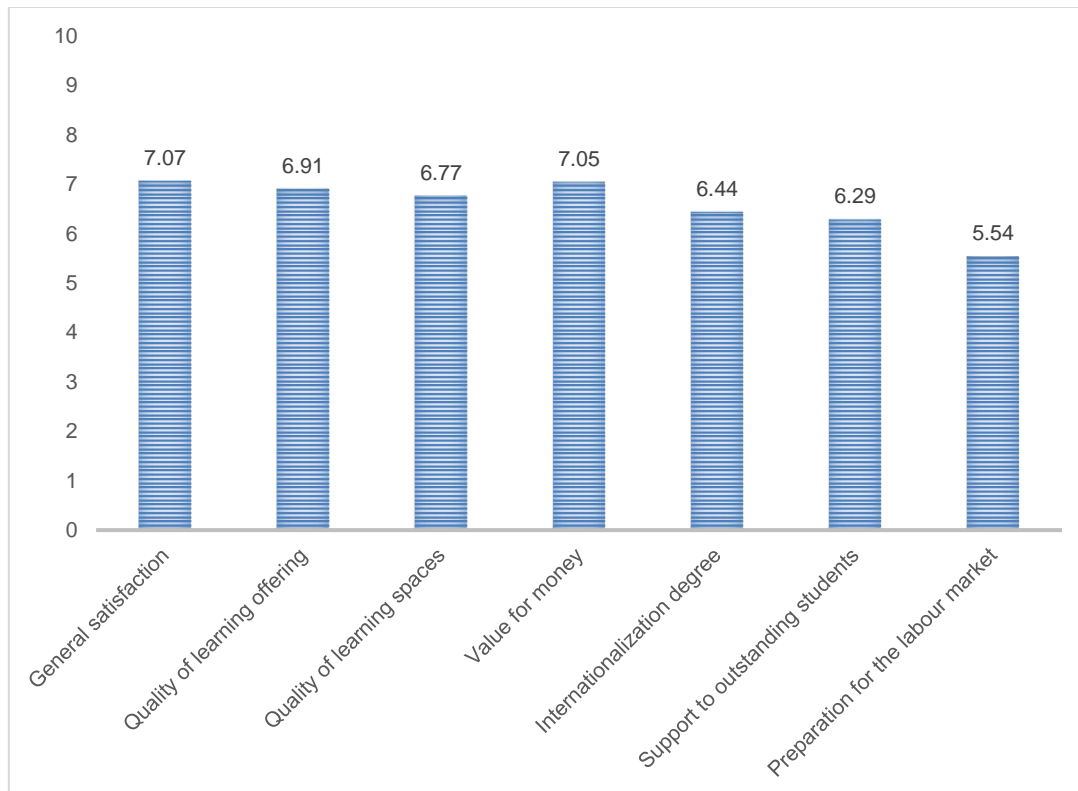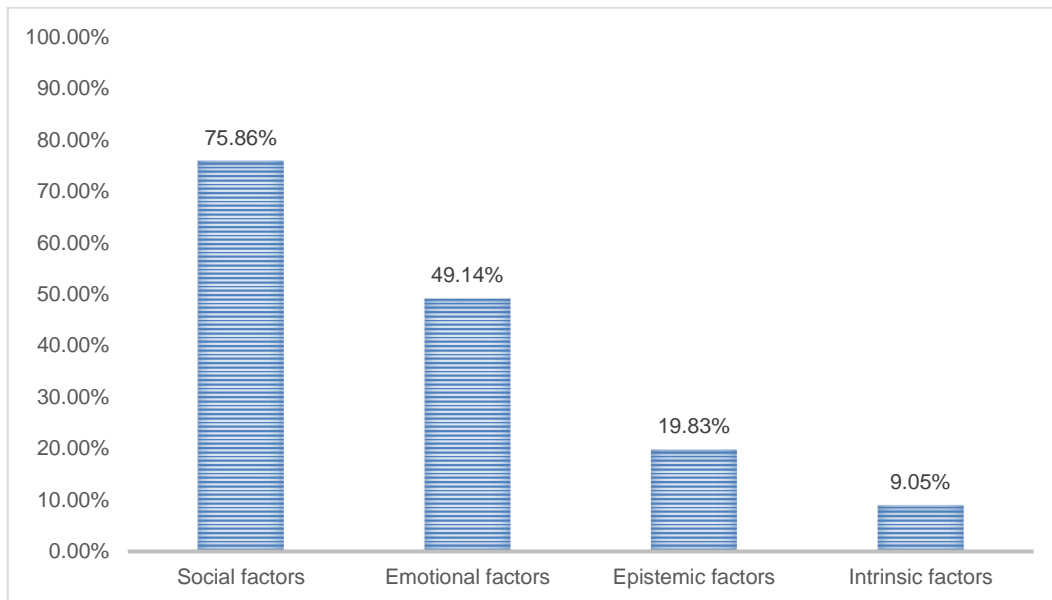

<div align="right">Source: Authors' elaboration</div>

3.2 The academics value expectations

Academics disclosed distinguishing value expectations as compared with students. In fact, while students emphasized the extrinsic and intrinsic features of value, academics were found to put greater emphasis on both social and emotional value. On the one hand, more than 7 in 10 respondents (75.9%) maintained that they were especially interested in the ability of the case university to allow them to establish vivid and continuous interactions with other academics and students; in turn, such relationships were considered to be crucial to enhance their social connections and, therefore, to enrich their intellectual capital. On the other hand, slightly less than half of respondents (49.1%) argued that they conceived the case university as a fruitful space to express their own potential and to comfortably fulfil research activities aimed at pushing forward scientific knowledge. In addition, epistemic factors and intrinsic factors were identified as important triggers of academics' value expectations towards the case university. In fact, about a fourth of the sample (19.8%) stated that, ideally, the

university should be understood as a place fostering knowledge development and opening new horizons through debate and critical reasoning. Besides, slightly less than 1 in 10 academics (9.1%) revealed that they understood the university as a context aimed at promoting self-development. Figure 3 summarizes the value expectations expressed by academics in a bar diagram.
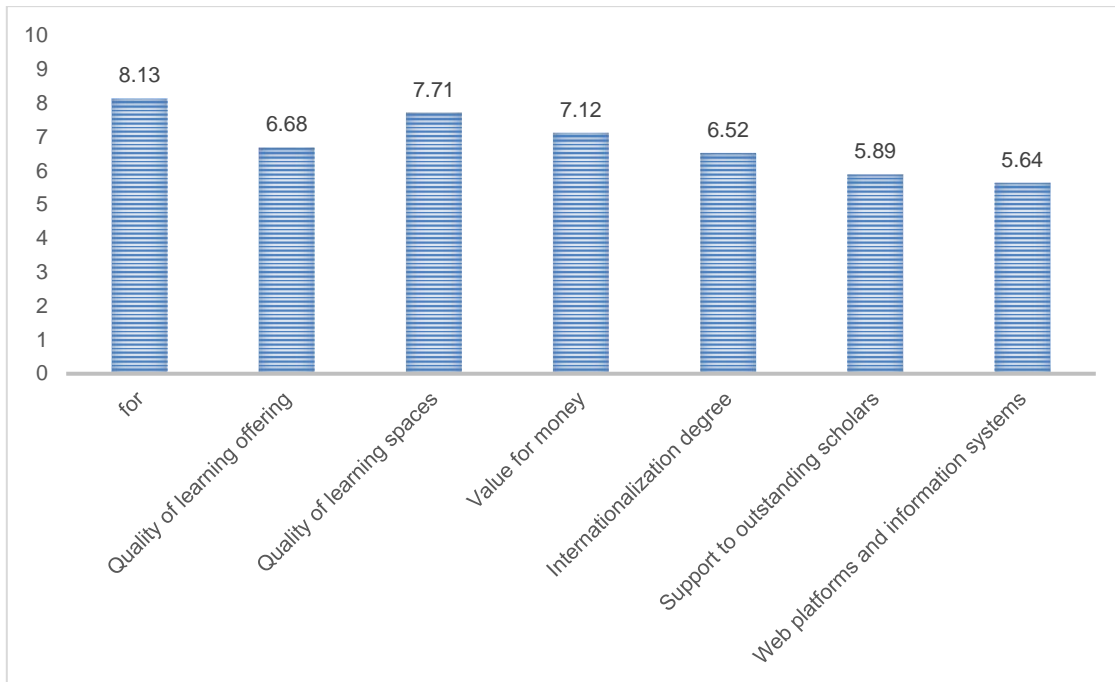
Figure 3. The academics' value expectations towards the case university

Once again, only a partial match between the academics' value expectations and their perceived quality of educational services provided by the case university was retrieved. Figure 4 graphically shows the respondents' self-assessed satisfaction with different attributes of the case institution service offering. The general quality was rated above 8 ($\mu = 8.1$; $\sigma = 1.6$): in fact, only 5% of the sample reported a score of 5 or below to gauge their overall satisfaction with the university's service offering.

Figure 4. The academics' self-assessed satisfaction with educational services provided by the case institution

It is interesting to note that the academics involved in this study especially appreciated the quality of learning spaces ($\mu = 7.7$; $\sigma = 1.4$) and the value for money ratio attached to the university' service offering ($\mu = 7.1$; $\sigma = 1.7$). Moreover, they expressed positive evaluations about the quality of learning offering delivered by the educational institution ($\mu = 6.7$; $\sigma = 1.6$) and the degree of internationalization of the university ($\mu = 6.5$; $\sigma = 1.7$). Conversely, we found that academics were not fully satisfied with two relevant triggers of perceived value: first, they did not acknowledge an adequate support of the case institution for outstanding scholar ($\mu = 5.9$; $\sigma = 2.1$); second, they complained inadequate investments and interventions targeted to the enhancement of the web platforms and information systems used by academics to perform their everyday research activities ($\mu = 5.6$; $\sigma = 2.2$).

The suggestions of academics to improve the quality of educational services provided by the case institution partly echoed the hints proposed by students. In fact, about half of the sample (47.4%) pointed out the need to reframe the learning offering of the university, paying more attention to laboratories and experiential learning sessions; similarly, about 1 in 2 respondents (44.4%) claimed that the design of tailored degree courses focused on the specific labour demand of public and private companies represent key factors contributing to the improvement of educational services' quality. In line with these points, about a third of respondents (32.7%) stressed that the increase of traineeships is a critical ingredient of the recipe for excellence in providing timely educational services to students. Last, but not least, a further effort to enhance the internationalization of the case institution (16.4%) and targeted investments to support the development of human resources employed by the university (10.3%) were assumed to pave the way for more effective learning processes.

3.3 Finding spaces for value co-creation and service co-production

Some excerpts which were collected from the unstructured interviews help in identifying some potential spaces for value co-creation and service co-production in the higher education context. Many students reported that their interactions with teachers was negatively affected by the "*…focus of learning processes and activities… on conceptual topics, rather than on*

practical issues" (St. #26). In addition, as argued by several interviewees, "*… the academic staff… is usually disinterested in the specific learning needs of students*" (St. #127); this circumstance was considered to be primarily produced by the "*…propensity of academics… to pay greater attention on applied research, rather than on designing engaging and effective teaching courses*" (St. #461). Students emphasized that they felt to be "*…disempowered in participating with the academic staff in designing their own learning curriculum*" (St. #933) and in "*…defining the traineeship or other practical activities to improve their skills, alongside their conceptual knowledge*" (St. #48). Finally, yet importantly, the students complained that "*…the academic staff is used to treat students as… mere users, who have not voice over the attributes of the service delivery*" (St. # 1194); in turn, the students' lack of voice paves the way for their disengagement and, consequently, for their "*…unwillingness to be involved as active co-creators of value*" (St. # 566) in partnership with the academics.

Some intriguing insights were also drawn from the unstructured interviews which were issued by academics. First, the interviewees were consistent in reporting that the "*…academic staff felt to be disempowered in the effort of encouraging… the students to perform as co-producers during the service encounter*" (Ac. #38). Such feeling of disempowerment was primarily triggered by the predisposition of the institution to promote "*…excellence in scientific research…, but not in teaching activities*" (Ac. #214). Moreover, the academics agreed that "*…in spite of the efforts performed to increase the connections of the university with international institutional partners*" (Ac. #167), the case institution was still "*…suffering from provincialism*" (Ac. #98) and "*…limited interest in the contribution of relevant stakeholders – including students – in… co-creating value in collaboration with the academic staff*" (Ac. #13). Lastly, the respondents argued that the academics were "*…not properly trained in engaging students as potential service co-producers and value co-creators*" (Ac. #114); on the opposite, it seemed that "…the main role of the academic staff is to transfer theoretical knowledge to students" (Ac. #69), "*…providing only limited attention to the real needs of the external environment*" (Ac. #143).

4. Discussion

Several limitations affected the consistency of this study and the reliability of the research findings. The case study approach was compatible with our purpose of collecting first-hand evidence from the observation of the real-life experience of an institution which is daily concerned by the challenge of involving students and academics in co-producing educational services and co-creating value. However, this method produced several shortcomings in terms of biased interpretation of the study results; moreover, it prevented the generalization of the research findings. Similarly, it is possible that the specificity of the Italian context which was contemplated in this research affected the evidence reported above. Lastly, the exclusive focus on two categories of stakeholders – namely students and academics – limited the breadth of this research; nevertheless, it allowed us to pay attention to the specific issues affecting the interactions between the two main co-creators of value in the higher education context.

Acknowledging the main study limitations permits us to shed light on several avenues for further developments. First, a natural evolution of this study consists in the adoption of a longitudinal perspective, which will pave the way for the collection of more dependable data during a prolonged span of time. Beyond increasing the consistency of this research, the longitudinal approach will allow us to understand what kinds of factors are more likely to affect the propensity of students and academics to perform as value co-creators and service

co-producers, thus contributing to the achievement of excellence in the provision of educational services in higher education. Second, a comparative approach is needed to confirm the reliability of the research findings and to suggest sound strategic, organizational, and management indications aimed at fostering value co-creation during the service encounter between students and academics. Finally, yet importantly, further empirical research is required to disentangle the antecedents of the students and academics' willingness to be involved in service co-production. In fact, to be best of the authors' knowledge, there is a dearth of studies intended to unravel the determinants of the establishment of co-creating relationships between users and providers in the higher education context.

In spite of these considerations, the research findings provide some intriguing insights to tentatively answer the research questions at the basis of this research. Students were found to have particular value expectations towards the educational institution. In fact, they were primarily interested in the intrinsic and extrinsic drivers of educational services' value, *i.e.* in the contribution of the learning processes to contribute in their intellectual, social, and personal development (Byrne and Flood, 2005); moreover, they appreciated the relational attributes of educational services, stressing that the effectiveness and quality of teaching experiences strongly relies on the ability of the academic staff to create a comfortable and vivid learning environment where students are encouraged to actively participate in knowledge creation and assimilation (Voss et al., 2007).

The academic staff reported diverging value expectations as confronted with students. In fact, they emphasized the importance of relational and emotional factors in realizing conditions for quality excellence in the higher education system (Anushree et al., 2018). On the one hand, the poor attention paid by the institution to the affiliation needs of academics was argued to produce disempowerment and limited organizational commitment (Kok and McDonald, 2017); on the other hand, they maintained that the formal and informal support of the institutions in their effort to continuously cope with the evolving challenges raised by the external environment was a crucial driver of success (Díaz et al., 2010).

The limited ability of the case institution to deal with the specific value expectations of students and academics generated two main effects. First, it triggered a sort of dissatisfaction of both the typologies of agents with the educational services provided by the university; second, it produced feelings of frustration and disempowerment among both students and academics, which constrained their willingness to participate in service co-production and value co-creation. Indeed, the accounts recorded during the unstructured interviews pointed out that students and academics perceived the existence of inadequate opportunities for collaboration to achieving excellence in the provision of educational services (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Students complained the inadequate interests of academics in conceiving them as service co-producers during the different steps of the service encounter; at the same time, academics reported to do not have proper institutional and organizational support by the case university to involve students in a co-creating relationship. From this point of view, the reconfiguration of the university's policies, structures, and learning processes in a perspective of student centredness turn out to be essential in an attempt to create better opportunities of value co-creation between students and academics (Meijer, 2016; Klemenčič, 2017).

5. Conclusions

The research implications are twofold. From a conceptual standpoint, it emphasizes the importance of students and academics value expectations and perceptions in triggering

opportunities for value co-creation. Whilst the congruence of the outlooks of these two categories of agents are expected to engender value co-creation, inconsistent perspectives might pave the way for value co-destruction. The limited ability of higher education institutions to elicit and to steer the value perceptions of students and academics is thought to imply both low quality of educational services and unwillingness of users and providers to establish a co-creating partnership aimed at achieving excellence in the higher education context.

From a practical point of view, the article suggests that a multifaceted set of interventions is requires in order to engage students and academics in service co-production and value co-creation. Adopting a strategic outlook, educational institutions should revise their human resources management policies and practices, including the ability to establish a co-creating partnership with students among the criteria used to assess the performance of the academic staff. Embracing an organizational perspective, two interventions are needed to boost a student-centred approach in the delivery of educational services. Firstly, learning environments should be redesigned, removing the formal and informal barriers that prevent a friendly and comfortable interactions between students and academics. Secondly, educational programmes should be reframed, involving public and private companies in co-designing and co-delivering tailored learning activities to students; in fact, the involvement of firms in the reconfiguration of the teaching offerings of educational institutions might represent a stimulus to student-centredness and to the active engagement of students in the process of value co-creation. Lastly, from a management standpoint, greater efforts should be realized to identify the evolving value expectations of students and academics and to match them, in an attempt to avoid their disengagement and increase their commitment to excellence in higher education.

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