

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE CO-INVOLVEMENT OF THE PROVIDER AND THE RECIPIENT IN THE “PRODUCTION” OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

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ABSTRACT: *The way in which the recipient of goods or services can be determined to engage in the production activity (which includes different stages such as design, production, delivery and advertising) is one of the points of interest for marketing researchers. The present study analyses the favourable conditions for this to happen, taking into account factors such as physical and emotional presence, communication or enthusiastic connection to the objectives proposed jointly by the provider and the recipient. The research consists of applying a questionnaire to the educational services sector. Constructs are analysed in terms of their reliability and validity before using linear regression to estimate how the variables are connected one to other. The results indicate that, among the indicators with which co-involvement has significant correlations, the indicator Didactic methods used in the classes influence the teacher-student communication remains significant, therefore it has an explanatory character. The involvement of the provider and the recipient in achieving the same objectives is, in the end, co-involvement, i.e. the pursuit of performance by achieving the proposed objectives. The analysis of the results shows that, by his behaviour, the provider influences the recipient's decision to get involved or not in co-production.*

KEYWORDS: Co-Involvement, Communication, Interaction

INTRODUCTION

Involvement implies physical and emotional presence, therefore participation

The concept of “customer participation” was first used by Lovelock and Young in 1979. They said that a company's productivity can grow by engaging customers in value creation and in doing some of the company's activities. Ennew and Binks (1999) show that, “participation can be thought of as having three dimensions: sharing information, responsible behaviour and interpersonal interaction”. Dabholkar (1990) states: “Consumer participation is the extent to which he is involved in the production and delivery of the service”.

To us, involvement implies participation. Co-involvement is the first stage of co-production, a term which has been much-debated in recent decades. The intensification of the concerns related to the co-production process between the provider and the recipient is due to the awareness of its importance as a phenomenon. Researchers such as Ostrom, Etgar, Lusch and Vargo, Ramirez or Grönroos are just a few names among those concerned about co-production. Their research has had diverse topics such as: establishing the essential elements that make up co-production, the identification of the differences between cooperation, co-production and co-creation of value, finding solutions for the optimal reciprocal use of assets and resources by the provider and the recipient. From the synthesis of several relevant papers in the field (the authors mentioned above), we have established several dimensions that influence the level of co-production, among which: communication, a mature (not emerging) economic environment, the perception of own work as a plus-value, the feedback, the confidence in the outcome's success.

Involvement is an essential dimension for achieving performance. It means accountability, emotional connection, enthusiasm and commitment. Co-involvement expresses these valences, be it in the goods sector, or in the service sector.

The traditional status of the producer and consumer has changed in the face of recent changes in the economic and social life. Thus, through a rapid network of communication means, a kind of computer globalisation, the producer and the consumer now share the activities they once considered as belonging to one or other of the categories. Involvement means conscious engagement in a particular process. Co-involvement means presence (physical and emotional), communication, and the sharing of moods or feelings, so it presupposes the existence of the other, of the person from the outside, of the part that is beyond an individual.

The co-involvement of the consumer in the production activity depends on the awareness of the need, interest, the importance given to that product and to the producing company. The prefix *co-* shows the union, in which case its meaning is that of “the involvement of the recipient together with the provider”. The new market conditions imposed a new philosophy, namely the reconciliation between the provider seeking profit, on the one hand, and the recipient seeking to meet a need, on the other. This new philosophy is described by the emergence of the new producer, determined and motivated to allow the recipient to be involved in his work, and the new informed consumer, eager for innovation, emotion, experience. It is a change that occurred at a thought level, a mentality level, and which, with amazing power, was able to overthrow the old ideas and concepts, replacing them with this new vision, the obsession of collaboration.

In both the public and the private sector, both in the goods and especially in the services sector, the idea of co-production was propagated with the speed specific to “the new society” (Drucker, 2010).

The article is structured as follows: an approach to co-involvement from the perspective of the provider and the recipient is presented in Section 2. Sections 3 and 4 analyse the factual data. The conclusions are presented in Section 5. Section 6 contains the references used.

The co-involvement of the provider and recipient of educational services

Educational services work on a market where knowledge is traded. Providers and recipients of educational services interact with each other to produce services together.

For the provider, the challenge is to get the recipient to get involved as much as possible, thus achieving a high level of attachment, and therefore loyalty, on his part.

The co-involvement of the recipient of educational services in the teaching-learning-evaluation activity depends highly on the importance he attaches to the educational institution in general and to the discipline in particular. Although specific in their particularity of being a socio-cultural activity rather than an economic activity, educational services operate with market relations, ultimately, still referring to demand and supply. It is a kind of educational marketing, in which the education provider promotes and sells his “product”. The co-involvement of the provider and the recipient is based on a binary relationship in which the availability of collaboration is applied at a first level as an initial investment of the attention, time and other resources of the two parties.

From the point of view of the educational service provider, the difficulty may come from several sources, which we will present in the following table:

Table 1: Difficulties encountered by the educational service provider when interacting with the recipient

The nature of the challenge	Ways to face the challenge
<p>Time factor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the ability to efficiently exploit the hours available; - the ability to optimise how to spend time.
<p>Thinking and applying the teaching-learning-evaluation process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the use of active-participatory teaching methods; - focusing on the quality of the provider-recipient interaction; - encouraging competition or cooperation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teamwork; - finding ways to transform a simple exchange of information into long-term interactions; - managing the predominant type of relationships within the classroom.
<p>Intellectual and emotional development of the recipient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - higher expectations; - focusing on the transmission of knowledge, values and conduct; - developing the recipient's exploratory behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discovering and promoting ways to get closer to the realisation of the educational ideal; - managing the complexity of the traded product (knowledge).

In the education services sector, co-involvement means:

- 1) physical and emotional presence;
- 2) communication, an element which implies the physical presence of the provider and the recipient;
- 3) mutual involvement in projects;
- 4) cooperation.

It can be seen that the “co-involvement of the provider and recipient of educational services” reflects all the elements that represent the first step in the co-production process. Physical presence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for co-involvement. As a complementary element, we have the emotional presence of the parties involved. Verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal communication is important, and as a concrete and measurable dimension we have the involvement in projects. Co-involvement indicates that both sides take things seriously and decide to cooperate to achieve the common goal.

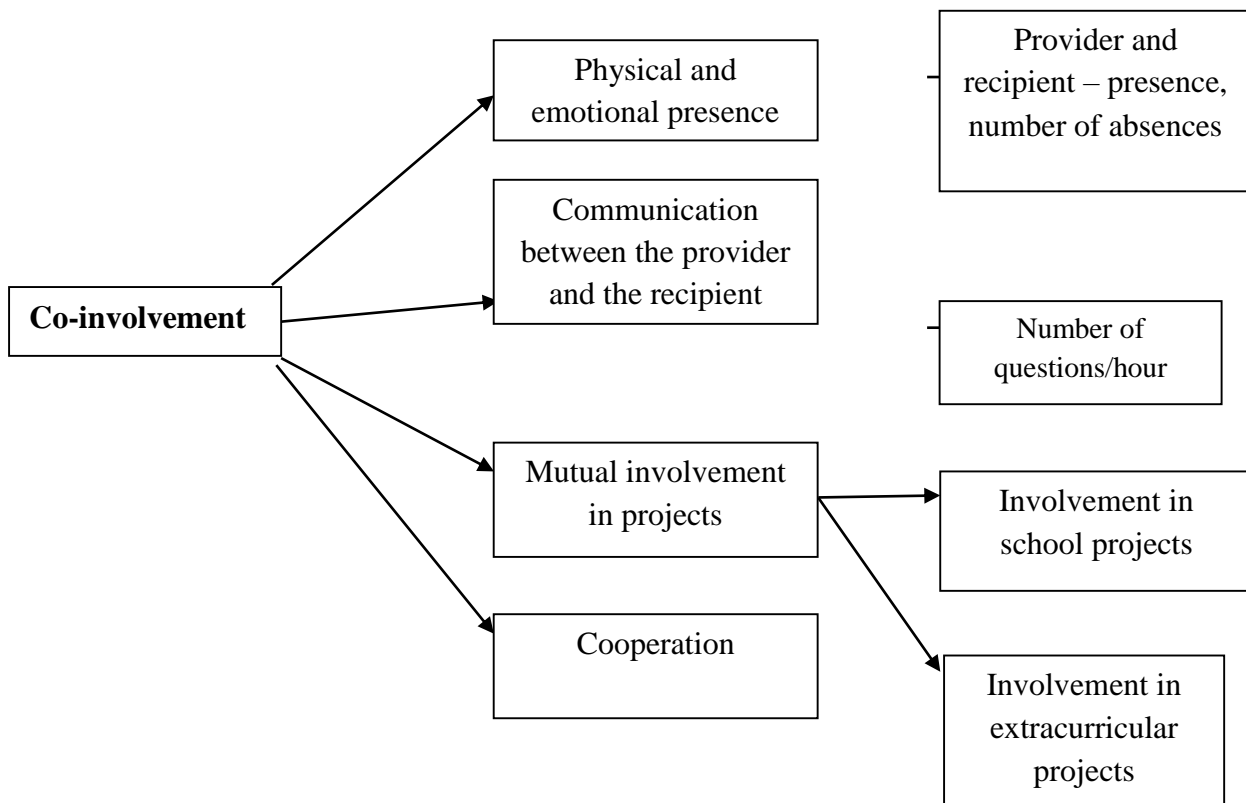


Figure 1. The dimensions of co-involvement and the activities it represents

The things that should be taken into account are that the attitude of the provider is passed on to the recipient (a positive attitude transmits positive emotions, and the same can be applied in case of a negative one), and that the success of any co-production activity is, as shown by Etgar (2008), the creation of outcomes in the form of benefits that the recipient receives and evaluates. For example, in the case of educational services, the final value of the assimilated knowledge may reside in the various activities carried out during teaching, in the texts read individually, in the effort made during the solving of problems. The value of the various stages necessary to achieve the goal is then integrated into the final outcome's assessment. Co-involvement represents, as the first stage of co-production, a measure of the value of the outcome.

Data sources and evaluation method

Each research issue, in order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the approach, but also to obtain valid data, must comply with a certain approach that is adapted to the objectives envisaged. To investigate certain aspects of co-production, we used a questionnaire-based survey. For the present study, we only considered the side of co-involvement. The questionnaire is addressed to 501 respondents and, although it essentially seeks to “count” the results, the questionnaire also contains open questions asking for expressions of views in free answers, opinions and comments.

In the study we wanted to check what was the most important factor that can determine the recipient's involvement in the teaching-learning-evaluation activity.

The structure of the sample of students is shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Sample structure by gender and specialisation

Structure of the sample of students/gender/specialisation															
															Total
		Bilingual – English	Commerce	Electronics and Automation	Philology bilingual – Spanish – Romanian	Philology – Intensive courses	Mathematics – Computer Science	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	Technician in economic activities	Technician in administration	Technician in agrotourism	Technician in tourism	Tourism and Food Service	Humanities	
Gender	Male	11	18	13	5	2	73	21	35	6	12	14	16	3	229
	Female	13	21	7	27	10	50	35	42	7	14	8	18	7	272
	Total	24	20	20	32	12	123	56	77	13	26	22	34	10	501

It can be seen that the number of females differs significantly from that of the males. In terms of specialisation, there are big differences for the Electronics and Automation and Philology profiles.

Data analysis and interpretation of results

At this stage, the dimensions of the constructs presented in the study were analysed using the Cronbach's alpha test to determine the reliability of the scale. The scale used to measure co-involvement shows, as seen in the following table, a Cronbach's alpha-level of 0.744, meaning that the scale used in the measurement is reliable (Kline, 2005).

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.744	.730	10

The descriptive analysis of the data is shown in Table 4. It is noted that *Professional interaction with teachers improves the learning environment* is the most important aspect with an average of 3.89 followed by the existence of an optimal communication environment between the provider and the recipient. Communication is related to motivation and the feeling of satisfaction, to the satisfaction of the recipient.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
It motivates me when I work in a group and achieve better results than when I work alone	501	1	5	3.37	1.191
Teaching methods used during classes influence teacher-student communication	501	1	4	3.00	.744
Are you familiar with the notion of cooperation within the class	501	1	4	3.09	.789
A high degree of cooperation between teacher and student increases performance	501	0	1	.91	.292
Professional interaction with teachers improves my attitude towards learning	501	1	5	3.78	1.005
Professional interaction with teachers increases student self-esteem	501	1	5	3.76	.951
Professional interaction with teachers improves the learning environment	501	1	5	3.89	.966
Professional interaction with teachers determines the participation of all parties in the learning process	501	1	5	3.59	1.029
It motivates me to have an optimal communication environment with the teachers	501	1	5	3.87	.882
Valid N (listwise)	501				

The regression analysis highlighted the fact that among the indicators with which the co-production presents significant correlations, the indicator *Didactic methods used in the classes influence the teacher-student communication* remains significant, therefore it has an explanatory character for co-involvement. As we can see in table 3, sig. = 0,024 and the related confidence interval does not contain the value of 0. Consequently, co-involvement occurs when there is communication and interaction, primarily from the teachers, and then, necessarily, from

the students as well, being determined by how the educational service provider manages to think and guide the teaching-learning-evaluation process.

Table 3: Results of the regression analysis for the co-involvement construct

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.605	.194		13.450	.000	2.225	2.986
	Students' performance is influenced by optimal communication between them and the teachers	.035	.034	.048	1.006	.315	-.033	.102
	Didactic methods used during classes influence teacher-student communication	.080	.035	.107	2.258	.024	.010	.150
	Are you familiar with the notion of cooperation within the class	.025	.032	.035	.771	.441	-.038	.088
	A high degree of cooperation between teacher and student increases performance	.019	.092	.010	.212	.832	-.161	.200
	Professional interaction with teachers improves my attitude towards learning	.049	.034	.088	1.448	.148	-.017	.115
	Professional interaction with teachers increases student self-esteem	.028	.035	.047	.798	.425	-.040	.095
	Professional interaction with teachers improves	-.062	.036	-.107	-1.729	.085	-.133	.008

the learning environment								
Professional interaction with teachers determines the participation of all parties in the learning process	-.004	.030	-.007	-.120	.904	-.062	.055	
It motivates me to have an optimal communication environment with the teachers	.052	.033	.082	1.584	.114	-.013	.117	
To enhance school performance, student-teacher cooperation is relevant	-.038	.104	-.017	-.367	.714	-.244	.167	

Although changes in the context of the new economy allow for greater independence for the recipient of goods and services, the role of the provider is an essential one. Recipients can learn from various sources about the products they are interested in, but the relationship with the producer-provider remains irreplaceable.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the empirical study indicate three aspects relevant to the co-involvement of the provider and the recipient of educational services: the way the provider succeeds in capturing the recipient's interest, communication and interaction. It seems that the challenges posed by the thinking and application by the provider of the process of teaching-learning-evaluation are the most important aspect. Educational management must take this into account when setting goals and outlining the methods by which they can be achieved. There are many roads that can lead to the same result, but these data are meant to impart the rationality and efficiency of educational action. Educational services, as we have said, belong to a market and their trading follows the efficiency and effectiveness indicators specific to an economic activity.

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