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Creating an Educational Blue Ocean: Value Innovation and Sustainable Ecosystem Transformation

Ahmad Fawaiz Hakim, Alifia Putri Sunandar, Syahrul Fauzi Muharom, Muhamad Yusril, Pepen Supendi
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
2259100094@student.uinsgd.ac.id; 2259100022@student.uinsgd.ac.id

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Abstract

Competitive pressures can encourage educational institutions to imitate established practices, making it harder to offer distinctive learning experiences that respond to changing educational and societal needs. This study developed a conceptual pathway for applying Blue Ocean Strategy in education by examining value innovation, institutional differentiation, and educational ecosystem transformation. Using a qualitative integrative literature review and conceptual analysis, the study synthesized scholarship on Blue Ocean Strategy, educational competition, value creation, and institutional transformation. The synthesis identified four interconnected dimensions. Strategic repositioning directs institutional priorities toward differentiation and efficient resource use. Redefining educational value emphasizes distinctive learning experiences, stakeholder participation, and contributions to society. The Eliminate–Reduce–Raise–Create framework translates value innovation into practice by eliminating activities of limited educational value, reducing operational inefficiencies, raising educational quality and institutional accountability, and creating new learning opportunities and collaborative services. Sustaining educational value requires collaboration among students, educators, families, government agencies, industry, and communities. The proposed Educational Blue Ocean pathway connects these dimensions and offers a conceptual basis for understanding how institutions can develop distinctive, adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable educational environments.

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Keywords: Blue Ocean Strategy; Value Innovation; Institutional Differentiation; Educational Ecosystems; Educational Value Creation

INTRODUCTION

Education has increasingly become a strategic field shaped by institutional competition, changing societal expectations, technological developments, and the demand for more responsive learning experiences. Educational institutions are no longer evaluated solely on their capacity to deliver formal instruction, but also on their ability to demonstrate educational quality, respond to social transformation, and establish distinctive institutional identities (Avrahamson et al., 2026; Rachmad, 2026; Sonola & Luyombya, 2026). These pressures have encouraged schools and universities to strengthen their competitiveness through curriculum development, technological integration, infrastructure improvement, and service diversification. However, institutional competition does not necessarily lead to meaningful differentiation, as educational organizations may adopt similar structures, performance indicators, and development strategies in response to prevailing institutional expectations. Research on institutional logics in school organizations demonstrates that market pressures and institutional conditions can produce different organizational responses, including both attempts to establish distinctive institutional niches and tendencies to conform to established organizational arrangements (Davies & Quirke, 2007). Similarly, institutional pressures can encourage educational organizations to adopt structures and practices that reflect expectations imposed by influential actors within their organizational environments (Carolan, 2008). These conditions suggest that the central challenge for educational institutions is not merely to become more competitive, but to develop distinctive educational value through substantive organizational and pedagogical innovation.

The competitive orientation of educational institutions is closely related to the broader expansion of market-oriented principles, institutional autonomy, and consumer choice in educational governance. Competition is commonly expected to encourage schools to improve their educational services, respond to parental preferences, and develop more effective learning environments. Nevertheless, empirical research indicates that the relationship between competition and educational improvement is more complex than this assumption suggests. Lubienski (2003, 2005) demonstrates that competitive mechanisms may encourage schools to prioritize institutional positioning and promotional strategies

without necessarily producing substantive pedagogical innovation. This concern is reinforced by Greaves et al. (2023), whose systematic review of school marketing practices found that competitive pressures frequently stimulate institutional marketing activities, while such activities are not consistently accompanied by meaningful curricular or educational changes. Furthermore, comparative evidence from Australia and Canada indicates that greater marketization and school competition may coincide with increased social segregation, unequal distribution of educational resources, and disparities in educational outcomes (Perry et al., 2026). These findings do not imply that every form of institutional competition is detrimental; rather, they demonstrate that competition should be distinguished from the institutional capacity to improve educational quality. Consequently, educational development requires a strategic orientation that moves beyond market responsiveness and institutional promotion toward the creation of educational value that is pedagogically meaningful, socially responsive, and accessible to diverse learners.

In response to the limitations of conventional competitive approaches, Blue Ocean Strategy provides a strategic perspective for reconsidering how organizations create and communicate distinctive value. Rather than concentrating primarily on outperforming existing competitors, this approach emphasizes value innovation through the reconstruction of organizational offerings and the identification of opportunities that are insufficiently addressed by existing arrangements. (Leavy, 2018) explains that value innovation involves reconfiguring value propositions by simultaneously increasing the value delivered to users and improving the efficiency with which that value is produced. This perspective shifts strategic attention from competition within established market boundaries toward the development of new forms of value and organizational positioning. In educational settings, such a perspective should not be interpreted as an attempt to transform schools and universities into commercial enterprises. Instead, it provides an analytical lens through which educational institutions can reconsider their institutional priorities, learning models, service arrangements, and relationships with stakeholders. The relevance of strategic innovation to educational transformation is also reflected in research showing that educational innovation requires not only the introduction of new practices but also the organizational capacity to initiate, implement, and embed those practices within institutional environments (Schophuizen & Kalz, 2020). Accordingly, the application of Blue Ocean Strategy in education should be understood as an adaptation of value innovation principles to the distinctive purposes, responsibilities, and public character of educational institutions.

The relevance of value innovation becomes more evident when education is understood as a process of value creation involving multiple stakeholders rather than as a service delivered exclusively by educational institutions. Students, teachers, institutional leaders, families, communities, government agencies, and industry partners contribute different forms of knowledge, experience, expectations, and resources to educational processes. Research on value co-creation in higher education emphasizes that educational value emerges through interaction, dialogue, participation, and collaboration between students and institutional actors (Omland et al., 2025). Similarly, Zhuang & Shi (2024) identify university–industry collaboration as an important dimension of educational development, while also highlighting the organizational conditions and challenges that influence the effectiveness of such partnerships. Beyond institutional and industrial relationships, university-led community engagement can facilitate the co-creation of solutions to broader societal challenges by integrating educational activities, local knowledge, and stakeholder participation (Agusdinata, 2022). Recent research further demonstrates that stakeholder engagement can strengthen the contribution of higher education institutions to sustainable development through interdisciplinary initiatives and partnerships with communities and industry (Leal Filho et al., 2025). Although much of this literature focuses on higher education, its underlying principles provide a broader conceptual basis for understanding collaboration across educational settings. Therefore, educational value co-creation should be approached as an ecosystem process in which schools, families, communities, industries, and public institutions contribute to the development of more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable educational experiences.

Despite the growing attention given to strategic innovation and stakeholder collaboration, the literature relevant to Educational Blue Ocean remains distributed across several interconnected but insufficiently integrated research areas. Loza (2024) and Mi (2015) examines Blue Ocean Strategy and value innovation, emphasizing the reconstruction of value propositions, organizational differentiation, and the development of opportunities beyond conventional competitive boundaries (Leavy, 2018). The second group investigates educational competition, marketization, and institutional innovation, demonstrating that competitive pressures may produce organizational adaptation and promotional activities without necessarily generating substantive improvements in educational practices (Carolan, 2008; Greaves et al., 2023; Leavy, 2018). The third group focuses on value co-creation and educational ecosystem development, highlighting stakeholder participation, university–

industry collaboration, community engagement, and shared approaches to educational and societal challenges (Agusdinata, 2022; Omland et al., 2025; Zhuang & Shi, 2024). These streams provide important insights into organizational strategy, educational competition, and collaborative value creation, but they do not by themselves establish a sufficiently integrated conceptual explanation of how educational institutions can move from conventional competitive patterns toward sustainable spaces of educational value. More specifically, the relationship between institutional repositioning, the systematic reconstruction of educational value, and the development of collaborative educational ecosystems requires further conceptual clarification. This study addresses that need by integrating the three perspectives into an Educational Blue Ocean pathway that connects strategic repositioning, value innovation, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable educational value creation.

To translate this conceptual orientation into a more systematic strategic approach, the Eliminate–Reduce–Raise–Create (ERRC) framework can be adapted as an analytical instrument for examining institutional practices and reconstructing educational value. Through the elimination of activities that contribute minimally to learning outcomes, the reduction of inefficient institutional procedures, the improvement of essential educational dimensions, and the creation of new learning opportunities and collaborative services, educational institutions can reconsider how their resources are allocated and how their value propositions are developed. However, the implementation of value innovation should not be limited to operational efficiency or institutional differentiation. Research on educational innovation emphasizes that new initiatives require organizational support, contextual adaptation, and sustainable institutional integration to produce meaningful educational change (Schophuizen & Kalz, 2020). In addition, the growing emphasis on stakeholder engagement and sustainable development demonstrates that educational transformation must consider the interests of learners, communities, and other societal actors rather than focusing exclusively on institutional performance (Leal Filho et al., 2025). Accordingly, the ERRC framework in education should be interpreted in accordance with the ethical, inclusive, and developmental responsibilities of educational institutions. Its application should strengthen educational quality, equitable access, meaningful participation, and institutional accountability while encouraging the development of innovative curricula, adaptive learning environments, interdisciplinary partnerships, and community-based educational initiatives. On this basis, the present study aims to conceptualize the pathways for creating a Blue Ocean in education by examining the theoretical foundations of Blue

Ocean Strategy, identifying the limitations of conventional competitive approaches, and formulating strategic directions for educational value innovation and ecosystem transformation.

METHODS

1. Type of Research

This study employs a qualitative approach through conceptual library research to examine the pathways for creating a Blue Ocean in education. This approach is appropriate because the primary objective of the research is to critically examine, interpret, and synthesize existing theoretical perspectives concerning Blue Ocean Strategy, value innovation, educational management, and educational ecosystem transformation. Rather than collecting numerical data or measuring relationships between predetermined variables, the study focuses on developing a comprehensive conceptual understanding of how strategic innovation principles can be adapted to educational contexts. The research is therefore positioned as a conceptual inquiry that integrates theoretical arguments and relevant empirical findings to formulate an alternative framework for educational development. Snyder (2019) explains that literature-based research can provide a systematic means of synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying inconsistencies, and developing new theoretical perspectives. Similarly, Dhollande et al. (2021) emphasize that an integrative review requires a structured process of identifying, appraising, extracting, and synthesizing relevant literature to produce a comprehensive understanding of a research phenomenon. Accordingly, this study uses scholarly publications as its primary sources of evidence to formulate a conceptual pathway for creating educational value beyond conventional institutional competition.

2. Research Design

The research adopts an integrative literature review design combined with conceptual analysis to establish a systematic relationship between the principles of Blue Ocean Strategy and contemporary educational challenges. An integrative review is particularly relevant because it enables the examination and synthesis of theoretical and empirical publications with different methodological orientations, thereby supporting a broader understanding of complex research topics (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The design is structured around four interconnected analytical dimensions: the theoretical foundations of Blue Ocean Strategy, the characteristics and limitations of conventional educational competition, the application

of value innovation within educational institutions, and the development of a sustainable educational ecosystem. These dimensions provide an analytical framework for examining how educational institutions can move beyond conventional competitive practices and generate distinctive forms of educational value. The research process involves several interconnected stages, beginning with the identification of relevant concepts, followed by literature searching, source selection, critical examination, thematic synthesis, and conceptual framework development. Torraco (2005) argues that an integrative literature review can contribute to knowledge development by critically examining and synthesizing existing research into a new or expanded conceptual perspective. Furthermore, Dhollande et al. (2021) highlight the importance of maintaining a transparent and traceable review process, particularly in literature identification, critical appraisal, and synthesis. Based on these considerations, the present study is designed not merely to summarize previous publications but to construct an integrated analytical framework explaining the strategic pathways for creating a Blue Ocean in education.

3. Participants and Sampling Technique

Since this research is based on library sources and conceptual analysis, it does not involve human participants, respondents, or field informants. The research materials consist primarily of peer-reviewed journal articles and other relevant scholarly publications addressing Blue Ocean Strategy, value innovation, educational competition, institutional transformation, and educational ecosystem development. The literature selection process applies purposive sampling, whereby publications are deliberately selected according to their relevance to the research objectives, academic credibility, theoretical contribution, and substantive connection to the research themes. Priority is given to peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in recognized academic databases, particularly publications addressing strategic innovation, educational management, organizational transformation, and value co-creation. Foundational theoretical publications are also considered when they provide essential conceptual explanations that cannot be adequately replaced by more recent studies. The inclusion criteria comprise publications written in English or Indonesian, scholarly works directly related to the research themes, and studies providing theoretical, methodological, or empirical insights relevant to the development of the proposed conceptual framework. Meanwhile, duplicate publications, non-academic materials, inaccessible sources without sufficient bibliographic information, and studies with limited relevance to the research objectives are excluded. Hopia et al. (2016) emphasize that

transparent source selection and clearly established eligibility criteria are important for maintaining methodological rigor in integrative reviews. Dhollande et al. (2021) also recommend documenting the procedures used to assess the relevance and quality of selected literature. Therefore, the selection of publications in this study is guided by explicit relevance and credibility criteria rather than by the quantity of retrieved sources alone.

4. Instruments and Data Collection

The primary research instrument is a structured literature review and data extraction matrix developed to organize and examine the selected academic publications systematically. The matrix records essential bibliographic and analytical information, including the authors and publication year, research objectives, theoretical foundations, methodological characteristics, principal findings, and relevance to the development of Blue Ocean Strategy in education. Literature collection is conducted through searches of academic databases and scholarly search platforms, particularly Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The search strategy combines relevant keywords and Boolean operators, including "Blue Ocean Strategy" AND education, "value innovation" AND educational institutions, "educational innovation" AND institutional transformation, "educational competition" AND school management, and "value co-creation" AND higher education. The selection process consists of identifying potentially relevant publications, screening titles and abstracts, examining the full texts of eligible publications, and assessing their relevance to the research objectives. To maintain the quality of the collected materials, priority is given to peer-reviewed publications, established academic publishers, and sources with identifiable bibliographic records and persistent digital identifiers. The data extraction process is conducted using the predetermined matrix, while the credibility of the sources is assessed through their publication venues, theoretical relevance, methodological clarity, and contribution to the research questions. Snyder (2019) highlights the importance of transparent literature-search procedures, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic data extraction in establishing the reliability of literature-based research. Furthermore, Gusenbauer & Gauster (2025) emphasize that literature searches should be supported by clearly defined research scopes, appropriate search terms, transparent screening procedures, and systematic reporting to improve the comprehensiveness and reproducibility of research synthesis. Whittemore & Knafl (2005) similarly stress that systematic data extraction and critical examination of primary sources are essential for developing credible integrative conclusions.

5. Data Analysis Technique

The collected literature is analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis to identify recurring patterns, theoretical relationships, and strategic implications concerning the creation of a Blue Ocean in education. The analysis begins with familiarization through repeated examination of the selected publications, followed by the identification of relevant concepts and the organization of information into preliminary analytical categories. These categories are subsequently compared and grouped into broader themes representing the theoretical foundations of Blue Ocean Strategy, the limitations of conventional educational competition, the mechanisms of value innovation, and the transformation of educational ecosystems. Braun & Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis provides a flexible methodological framework for identifying, organizing, and interpreting meaningful patterns within qualitative data. Following their analytical approach, the present study involves six interconnected activities: familiarization with the literature, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and the presentation of analytical findings. In addition, Naeem et al. (2023) demonstrate how thematic analysis can be developed beyond the identification of recurring patterns by connecting keywords, codes, and themes through conceptual interpretation and model development. Subsequently, conceptual synthesis is employed to examine the relationships among the identified themes and integrate them into a coherent strategic framework. The synthesis specifically examines the applicability of the Eliminate–Reduce–Raise–Create framework to educational institutions by identifying practices that should be eliminated or reduced, educational dimensions that require improvement, and new forms of educational value that can be created. The resulting analysis is interpreted in relation to institutional differentiation, educational accessibility, stakeholder collaboration, resource optimization, and long-term sustainability. The final stage involves constructing an integrated conceptual model illustrating the pathways through which educational institutions can move from conventional competitive orientations toward value innovation and the development of distinctive educational ecosystems. Through this analytical procedure, the research seeks to produce a theoretically grounded framework that contributes to the broader discussion of strategic innovation and educational transformation.

RESULTS

1. Theoretical Foundations and Development of Blue Ocean Strategy in Education

Blue Ocean Strategy provides a strategic framework for creating new value spaces by moving beyond competition within established institutional boundaries. Its central mechanism, value innovation, combines the pursuit of distinctive value with the more effective use of organizational resources, allowing institutions to reconsider the assumptions that traditionally shape their development strategies (Leavy, 2018). In educational settings, this perspective offers an alternative to institutional differentiation based primarily on reputation, infrastructure, accreditation, or promotional activities. Research on educational markets demonstrates that institutional responses to competitive pressures are shaped not only by organizational objectives but also by market structures, institutional positions, and the expectations of prospective students and families (Davies & Quirke, 2007; Jabbar, 2016). Accordingly, educational innovation should not be understood merely as the introduction of new programs or technologies, but as a strategic process through which institutions identify unmet learning needs and reconstruct the value they provide to students and society. This interpretation extends the application of value innovation from conventional organizational settings to educational institutions whose primary responsibilities include learning development, social inclusion, and public benefit.

The development of Blue Ocean Strategy in education therefore requires a shift from competition-oriented institutional positioning toward the systematic creation of meaningful educational value. Previous studies on innovation and collaboration in higher education indicate that institutional development increasingly depends on the integration of academic activities, stakeholder participation, and organizational resources rather than on isolated institutional initiatives (Dollinger et al., 2018; Oliveira et al., 2024). This orientation can be translated into curriculum innovation, personalized learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, digital integration, and community-based educational programs. Research on personalized learning emphasizes that educational experiences can be designed around learners' different characteristics, needs, and learning objectives, although implementation requires clear pedagogical principles and appropriate institutional support (Tetzlaff et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). Thus, educational differentiation should be evaluated through the relevance, inclusiveness, and quality of learning experiences rather than through institutional visibility alone. The conceptual development of an educational Blue Ocean consequently positions

innovation as a means of creating sustainable educational value while maintaining institutional accountability and responsiveness to societal needs.

2. Characteristics and Limitations of Conventional Educational Competition

Conventional educational competition is commonly expressed through institutional efforts to improve reputation, attract prospective students, strengthen academic performance, and demonstrate organizational quality through measurable indicators. Such efforts may encourage institutions to improve their services, develop academic programs, and respond to changing expectations among students and families. Research on school markets shows that competitive environments can influence organizational behavior, including the ways schools interpret their institutional positions and formulate strategies in response to other providers (Davies & Quirke, 2007; Jabbar, 2016). Competition may therefore have constructive effects when it encourages institutions to evaluate existing practices, improve educational services, and become more responsive to stakeholder expectations. However, these potential benefits should not be assumed to occur automatically, because institutional responses are also influenced by differences in resources, organizational capacity, and the social conditions surrounding educational provision. The relationship between competition and institutional improvement is consequently conditional rather than universal, requiring attention to the context in which competitive mechanisms operate.

Despite its potential contribution to institutional improvement, conventional educational competition also presents limitations when organizational success becomes excessively associated with rankings, enrollment growth, institutional branding, and selective admission practices. Lubienski (2005) explains that competition-based educational reforms may redirect organizational attention toward promotional and market-oriented responses rather than substantive improvements in educational processes. Similarly, comparative research on educational marketization in Australia and Canada indicates that greater market competition may coincide with increased school segregation, unequal resource distribution, and disparities in educational outcomes (Perry et al., 2026). These findings suggest that competitive mechanisms can reinforce existing institutional advantages when access to educational opportunities is strongly influenced by socioeconomic conditions and organizational prestige. Nevertheless, the limitations of competition should not be interpreted as evidence that all forms of institutional rivalry are inherently detrimental; rather,

the problem emerges when competition becomes the dominant organizing principle and marginalizes collaboration, inclusion, and educational quality. A more sustainable strategic orientation therefore requires institutions to move beyond imitation and comparative positioning toward the creation of distinctive educational value that expands learning opportunities and addresses diverse societal needs.

3. Value Innovation and Strategic Reconstruction in Educational Institutions

Value innovation constitutes the central mechanism through which educational institutions can reconstruct their organizational priorities and develop learning experiences that respond to changing educational needs. Rather than treating innovation as the accumulation of new facilities, programs, or technological applications, this approach emphasizes the alignment of educational objectives, pedagogical practices, institutional capabilities, and stakeholder expectations. Research on personalized learning demonstrates that instructional design can be adapted to accommodate differences in learners' characteristics, learning needs, and educational goals (Tetzlaff et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, research on professional learning indicates that sustained teacher development, collaborative learning, and instructional support can contribute to improvements in teaching practices and student learning outcomes (Ventista & Brown, 2023; Visscher et al., 2025). These findings provide a basis for understanding educational value as a multidimensional outcome involving academic achievement, learner development, pedagogical quality, and institutional responsiveness. Consequently, strategic reconstruction should integrate curriculum relevance, personalized instruction, digital learning opportunities, teacher professionalism, and interdisciplinary engagement within a coherent institutional development agenda.

The Eliminate–Reduce–Raise–Create framework provides an analytical instrument for translating value innovation into concrete institutional priorities. The eliminate dimension involves identifying administrative procedures, duplicated activities, and learning practices that no longer contribute meaningfully to educational objectives; this requires institutional evaluation rather than the indiscriminate removal of existing programs. The reduce dimension focuses on minimizing unnecessary operational burdens, inefficient resource allocation, and activities whose costs are disproportionate to their educational contributions, thereby allowing institutions to redirect resources toward more consequential learning processes. The raise dimension prioritizes the improvement of essential educational

components, including teacher professionalism, curriculum relevance, instructional quality, academic support, and institutional accountability; evidence from teacher professional development research reinforces the importance of sustained and appropriately designed professional learning for improving educational outcomes (Ventista & Brown, 2023; Visscher et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the create dimension encourages institutions to develop new forms of educational value through personalized learning environments, interdisciplinary programs, community-based initiatives, collaborative learning, and inclusive digital services. Research on higher education co-creation indicates that institutional value can be strengthened through active student participation and the integration of stakeholder knowledge and resources (Adi et al., 2024; Dhollande et al., 2021). Taken together, these four dimensions establish a strategic sequence for evaluating existing practices, optimizing institutional resources, strengthening educational quality, and generating new learning opportunities without reducing educational innovation to technological adoption or institutional promotion.

4. Pathways for Creating a Blue Ocean through Educational Ecosystem Transformation

Creating a Blue Ocean in education requires institutional innovation to be connected with a broader educational ecosystem involving students, teachers, families, government agencies, industries, universities, and local communities. This ecosystem perspective recognizes that educational value is not produced exclusively by individual institutions but emerges through interactions among actors who contribute different forms of knowledge, expertise, technology, and resources. Research on higher education co-creation demonstrates that students and other stakeholders can participate in the development of educational value through collaborative relationships and shared institutional activities (Dollinger et al., 2018; Omland et al., 2025). Similarly, studies of university–community sustainability initiatives emphasize the importance of reciprocal relationships between universities and society in addressing complex social and environmental challenges (Trencher et al., 2017). These findings suggest that educational institutions should develop partnerships not merely as supplementary activities but as integral components of institutional strategy and learning development. Through such arrangements, educational organizations can expand access to expertise, strengthen the relevance of learning experiences, and connect academic knowledge with practical challenges in their surrounding communities.

The transformation of an educational ecosystem can be organized through four interconnected strategic orientations: institutional repositioning, collaborative resource integration, innovative learning development, and sustainable value creation. Institutional repositioning enables educational organizations to identify their distinctive contributions in relation to their institutional capacities and the needs of their communities, while collaborative resource integration facilitates the exchange of knowledge, expertise, technology, and organizational capabilities among relevant stakeholders. Research on value co-creation in higher education emphasizes that institutional value is strengthened when organizational resources and stakeholder participation are integrated into educational processes (Adi et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2024). At the interorganizational level, university–industry collaboration can connect academic knowledge with professional practices and technological development, while university–community engagement can orient educational activities toward locally identified needs and shared social challenges (Trencher et al., 2017). Innovative learning development subsequently translates these partnerships into interdisciplinary, inclusive, and adaptive learning experiences that cultivate intellectual capabilities, practical competencies, creativity, and social responsibility. Ultimately, sustainable value creation requires institutions to evaluate the long-term educational, social, and organizational consequences of their innovations, ensuring that ecosystem transformation contributes to educational quality, equitable access, and institutional accountability rather than merely expanding institutional networks.

DISCUSSION

1. Analysis and Interpretation of the Educational Blue Ocean Pathway

The proposed Educational Blue Ocean pathway contributes to educational management by explaining how institutional differentiation can be connected with value creation, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainability within a single strategic orientation. Unlike conventional interpretations of competitive advantage that emphasize an organization's position relative to other providers, this framework conceptualizes differentiation through the distinctive educational contributions an institution makes to learners and society. This distinction is important because educational institutions operate within multiple institutional logics, including academic quality, public responsibility, professional values, and market expectations, which cannot always be reconciled through

competitive positioning alone. Dolbec et al. (2022) for example, demonstrate that religious schools responding to marketization must negotiate the tension between market demands and their established institutional values by reconfiguring organizational resources. Their findings support the argument that educational differentiation should emerge from the strategic integration of institutional identity and changing societal expectations rather than from the uncritical adoption of competitors' practices.

The four dimensions of the proposed pathway are therefore best understood as interdependent strategic processes rather than isolated institutional activities. Strategic repositioning establishes the institutional direction by identifying the educational needs and distinctive contributions that should guide organizational development, while value innovation translates this direction into changes in curriculum, learning processes, and resource allocation. Stakeholder collaboration expands the institution's capacity to implement these changes by integrating knowledge and resources beyond its organizational boundaries, whereas sustainability provides the evaluative orientation for determining whether the resulting innovations generate lasting educational and social benefits. This interpretation extends previous research on educational collaboration, which has shown that cooperation among institutions can support mutual learning and system improvement even when education policies continue to emphasize competition (Hadfield & Ainscow, 2018). Accordingly, the central contribution of the Educational Blue Ocean pathway lies in integrating strategic direction, pedagogical reconstruction, collaborative capacity, and long-term responsibility into a coherent model of institutional transformation.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives on Blue Ocean Strategy in Education

The application of Blue Ocean Strategy to education requires a distinction between the value innovation principles developed in business and the broader responsibilities of educational institutions. In business contexts, value innovation is generally associated with creating distinctive offerings and developing new sources of demand, whereas educational value must also be assessed through learning quality, equitable access, human development, and social contribution. Research on marketization illustrates why this distinction matters: schools may respond to competitive pressures by adjusting their organizational identities and resource configurations, but such responses do not necessarily correspond to improvements in educational quality (Dolbec et al., 2022; Greaves et al., 2023). This suggests that educational institutions cannot define value solely through student recruitment, institutional

reputation, or service differentiation, because these indicators do not adequately capture the public and developmental purposes of education. The Educational Blue Ocean perspective consequently adapts the principle of value innovation by making educational outcomes and social responsibility central criteria for institutional differentiation.

The empirical literature also indicates that competition and collaboration operate through different, although potentially complementary, organizational mechanisms. Competition can encourage institutions to respond to external pressures and reconsider their organizational positions, but it may also stimulate imitation, conformity, and market-oriented activities that do not directly improve learning processes. In contrast, research on school-system transformation shows that collaboration can create opportunities for mutual support, shared learning, and organizational improvement, although its implementation requires changes in institutional relationships and policy arrangements (Hadfield & Ainscow, 2018). At the higher education level, research on university–industry collaboration identifies trust, mutual benefit, shared values, and sustained commitment as important conditions for developing productive partnerships (Littleton et al., 2023). These findings indicate that the Educational Blue Ocean pathway should not simply replace competition with collaboration; rather, it should redirect institutional competition toward constructive differentiation while using collaboration to expand the knowledge, resources, and opportunities available to learners.

3. Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Educational Blue Ocean Pathway

Theoretically, the proposed pathway extends strategic management in education by integrating value innovation, institutional positioning, stakeholder theory, and sustainability-oriented organizational development. Its contribution is not the creation of an entirely new theory of institutional competition, but the formulation of an integrative framework that explains how these perspectives can operate together in educational settings. Stakeholder theory helps explain why educational value depends on relationships among students, educators, families, government, industry, and communities, while value co-creation clarifies how these actors can contribute knowledge, capabilities, and resources to educational processes. Empirical research on higher education sustainability has demonstrated that stakeholder involvement is associated with institutional sustainability initiatives and organizational practices (Srivastava et al., 2019), while research on stakeholder networks shows how relationships among university actors can influence organizational change toward

sustainable development (Vargas et al., 2019). The Educational Blue Ocean pathway therefore contributes an integrative perspective in which institutional differentiation is evaluated not only through organizational performance but also through the capacity to create shared and sustainable educational value.

Practically, the framework can guide institutional decision-making at school, university, and educational-policy levels, provided that its application is adapted to the responsibilities and resources of each setting. At the school level, institutional leaders can use the ERRC framework to review administrative routines, strengthen teacher development, improve curriculum relevance, and create partnerships with families and local communities. At the university level, the framework can inform interdisciplinary curriculum development, collaborative research, work-integrated learning, and partnerships with industry and public institutions, with attention to mutual benefits and the continuity of stakeholder relationships (Littleton et al., 2023). At the policy level, educational authorities can encourage collaboration across institutions, support locally responsive innovation, and incorporate sustainability considerations into institutional evaluation rather than relying exclusively on competitive indicators. Research on university engagement with sustainability in Malaysia further demonstrates that institutional commitment is shaped by stakeholder perspectives and organizational conditions, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive implementation (Teh, 2024).

4. Research Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of two distinct categories of limitations: limitations arising from the research design and limitations inherent in the proposed conceptual framework. Methodologically, the study relies on an integrative literature review and conceptual synthesis rather than primary data collected directly from educational institutions, meaning that its conclusions reflect the scope and perspectives of the literature examined. As a result, the analysis cannot establish whether the proposed pathway produces measurable improvements in institutional performance, learning quality, or educational equity when implemented in practice. This limitation is particularly relevant because educational innovation is influenced by institutional culture, leadership, resource availability, policy environments, and stakeholder relationships, which may vary substantially across educational contexts. Previous research on educational innovation projects has shown

that institutional initiatives are shaped by organizational conditions and the ways educational actors respond to implementation challenges (Schophuizen & Kalz, 2020).

The conceptual framework also requires further examination to determine whether its four strategic dimensions are sufficiently clear, applicable, and adaptable across different types of educational institutions. Future research could begin with expert assessment and stakeholder consultation to examine the conceptual clarity, relevance, and practical feasibility of each dimension before proceeding to empirical testing. Comparative case studies involving schools and universities with different organizational characteristics would help identify how strategic repositioning, ERRC implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainability priorities interact under different institutional conditions. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for examining whether changes in institutional practices and stakeholder networks are maintained over time, rather than being limited to short-term innovation projects or temporary partnerships. Research on sustainability-oriented organizational networks and university–industry collaboration provides relevant empirical foundations for developing such investigations, particularly by emphasizing stakeholder relationships, organizational adaptation, and the continuity of collaborative initiatives (Leal Filho et al., 2025; Littleton et al., 2023; Vargas et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

Blue Ocean Strategy provides an alternative strategic perspective for transforming educational institutions from competition-oriented organizations into value-oriented institutions that prioritize innovation and sustainable development. Its fundamental principle of value innovation encourages educational institutions to move beyond conventional competitive practices by simultaneously pursuing institutional differentiation and efficient resource utilization. However, its application in education requires adaptation to the distinctive characteristics and social responsibilities of educational institutions, particularly their commitment to human development, educational accessibility, and broader societal benefits. Therefore, Blue Ocean Strategy should not be understood merely as an instrument for achieving institutional superiority but as a strategic paradigm for reconstructing educational priorities, institutional identities, and approaches to value creation.

The analysis demonstrates that conventional educational competition, which frequently emphasizes reputation, accreditation, enrollment, rankings, and institutional

status, may encourage organizations to imitate established practices rather than develop distinctive educational contributions. Moving beyond this orientation requires redefining educational value through meaningful learning experiences, stakeholder participation, and institutional contributions that respond to individual and societal needs. Educational differentiation should consequently be developed through distinctive institutional identities, adaptive learning systems, collaborative innovation, and opportunities that generate mutual benefits for students, educators, institutions, and society. This perspective positions educational value creation, rather than competitive superiority, as a central consideration in institutional development.

The implementation of value innovation can be operationalized through the Eliminate–Reduce–Raise–Create framework, which provides a strategic basis for reconsidering institutional practices and educational priorities. Educational institutions need to eliminate activities and procedures that do not contribute meaningfully to educational value, reduce unnecessary operational burdens and resource inefficiencies, raise the quality of learning, teacher professionalism, curriculum relevance, and institutional accountability, and create new forms of educational value through collaboration, inclusive learning environments, interdisciplinary partnerships, and innovative educational services. This framework demonstrates that educational innovation involves more than adopting new technologies or introducing different programs, as it requires a fundamental reconstruction of how institutions allocate resources, organize learning, and engage with stakeholders. Through this process, institutions can develop more adaptive, innovative, and value-oriented approaches to educational development.

Ultimately, creating a Blue Ocean in education requires an integrated pathway that connects strategic repositioning, value innovation, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable educational value creation. The transformation of educational institutions must therefore extend beyond individual organizational initiatives toward the development of an educational ecosystem involving students, educators, families, government agencies, industries, and local communities. Collaboration among these stakeholders enables the integration of knowledge, expertise, technology, and resources to establish inclusive learning opportunities and respond to changing societal needs. The proposed Educational Blue Ocean pathway consequently emphasizes that sustainable institutional differentiation should be achieved through adaptability, collaboration, inclusiveness, and meaningful contributions to society,

positioning educational ecosystem transformation as the broader direction of strategic innovation in education.

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