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Value Co-Creation: A Strategy for Enhancing Inclusiveness in Special Education

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines the educational management practices of a municipality in Thailand by evaluating the current delivery of special educational services with underlying principles rooted in value co-creation (VCC)—a business concept often employed to enhance engagement and participation with the aim of creating mutual value. The study's objective is to identify gaps in real-life practices. The research methodology encompasses in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions involving school board members and parents, and content analysis to extract core concepts for policy recommendations. The study's findings reveal that the municipality is increasingly recognizing the potential of VCC in enhancing student outcomes, particularly for those with special educational needs. However, challenges stemming from schools' financial constraints and the influx of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds impede the full realization of VCC principles. Consequently, it is crucial for the government to prioritize the alignment of VCC strategies with special education. This can be achieved by considering reengineering the education budget allocation and making investments, whether direct or indirect, to support the VCC process. These measures are essential to promote the evolution of VCC and sustain special educational service operations effectively.

Keywords: special education delivery; value co-creation in education; municipality educational management; enhancing student outcomes; lower socio-economic backgrounds

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1. Introduction

Public administrators, cognizant of the pivotal role education plays in societal development and individual empowerment, have undertaken comprehensive efforts aimed at fortifying the educational system and elevating the quality of educational services [1]. This commitment extends to include efforts to achieve inclusiveness in education, necessitating a strategic and multifaceted approach [2]. In the pursuit of strengthening the educational system, administrators are confronted with the imperative of creating an environment where inclusiveness is not merely a goal but an inherent characteristic of the educational fabric. This involves a holistic approach encompassing policy development, resource allocation, and the establishment of support structures that recognize and cater to the varying abilities of students. Through collaborative efforts with educators, parents, advocacy groups, and specialized organizations, administrators strive to create a cohesive network that fosters an inclusive ethos [3].

That said, it can be argued that a critical question arises when prior ideas prove ineffective in addressing various challenges. This prompts the exploration of novel methods or concepts that can be formulated efficiently and sustainably to foster inclusiveness in Special Education. In recent times, the concept of 'value co-creation' (VCC) has gained widespread popularity as a means of fostering citizen engagement and participation. VCC, in essence, involves the collaborative generation of mutual value for both parties involved, be it businesses and customers or, in the case of education as a public service, service

providers (government agencies) and service receivers (citizens). In a business context, VCC necessitates active customer involvement in processes such as new product development and engagement in service delivery. This engagement empowers customers to shape their own product or service experiences to align with their specific needs and preferences [4–7].

When customers perceive that a business has delivered a product or service through a meaningful bond, a sense of community begins to emerge, instigating a desire to be an integral part of that business. This evolving connection is the cradle of customer loyalty [8,9]. The essence of VCC lies not just in the tangible outcomes but in the collaborative journey itself. By involving citizens in the VCC of public services, government agencies can tap into the diverse perspectives and insights of the community, ensuring that the services provided are not only effective but also reflective of the actual needs of the citizens [10]. This approach transforms citizens from passive recipients of services to active contributors, enhancing the democratic principles of governance [11,12].

Moreover, VCC extends beyond the initial transaction, creating a sustained relationship between service providers and citizens [13]. As citizens actively engage in shaping their own educational experiences, for example, they become advocates for the system, contributing to a positive cycle of continuous improvement. This transformative approach aligns with the evolving expectations of citizens who seek not just services but meaningful and participatory experiences [6,14].

This article is predicated on the premise that 'VCC', originating from the business domain, has the potential to foster active participation and positive relationships between businesses and their customers, leading to mutually beneficial, win-win solutions. Similarly, if this concept were applied to the governmental sphere, particularly in the provision of public services, such as education with a focus on establishing inclusiveness in Special Education, analogous positive outcomes could likely be anticipated. In this study, the education management of a local government in Khon Kaen Province, Thailand, was selected as the case study. The intention is to derive valuable insights and generalize findings to other contexts with similar characteristics.

2. Theoretical Dimensions of Value Co-Creation

To realize the maximum value of VCC, critical considerations must be addressed. This involves understanding the pivotal elements of VCC, recognizing the intricate relationships among these elements, and identifying the key ingredients that contribute to the optimal effectiveness of this concept. To comprehend VCC, three terms are often used interchangeably: co-creation, co-production, and VCC, and should be familiarized with.

Co-creation, co-production, and VCC are interconnected concepts within the realm of collaborative processes and value generation. Co-creation, as elucidated by Ranjan and Read [15], involves the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders working together to create value that is mutually beneficial. This process requires active participation from each stakeholder. Building on the foundation of co-creation, co-production emerges as a specific form where customers actively participate in the production process of a product or service [15,16]. This engagement of customers in the production phase is a distinctive characteristic of co-production. VCC, as a broader and encompassing concept, integrates both co-creation and co-production. According to Ranjan & Read [15] and Chatterjee et al. [17], VCC involves a collaborative process among multiple stakeholders, including customers, employees, and other partners.

In this comprehensive approach, value is generated through the combined efforts of diverse participants, resulting in outcomes that extend beyond individual contributions. To clarify, while VCC is the overarching process involving collaboration for mutual value, co-production specifically involves customers in the production phase. VCC, therefore, incorporates both these aspects, emphasizing collaboration among various stakeholders to generate value across different dimensions. Understanding these distinctions enables readers to employ these terms accurately and appreciate the nuanced relationships among co-creation, co-production, and VCC [15,18,19].

In an effort to create an inclusive environment, a school may be required to embark on an initiative to redesign and enhance its classrooms. By embracing the principles of co-creation, co-production, and VCC, an example in Table 1 below illustrates how the principles of co-creation, co-production, and VCC can be applied to create an inclusive classroom that benefits everyone involved in the educational community.

Table 1. An example of a process in creating an inclusive classroom involving the VCC concept.

Co-Creation	Co-Production	VCC	Outcomes
Teachers, students, parents, and special education experts came together to discuss and plan how to make classrooms more inclusive. Everyone shared their ideas on what would make learning spaces better for all students, including those with special needs. This collaborative effort ensured that the perspectives of all stakeholders were considered.	With the co-creation plan in place, students actively participated in transforming their classrooms. They helped rearrange furniture to create more accessible spaces, contributed to the design of inclusive learning materials, and even assisted in implementing assistive technologies. The active involvement of students in the physical transformation of the classroom exemplified co-production.	The project extended beyond the immediate school community. Collaboration with local businesses, community members, and accessibility experts enriched the initiative. Local businesses provided resources for inclusive materials, community members volunteered to support the project, and accessibility experts ensured that the changes made were truly beneficial. This collaboration across various dimensions created value that extended beyond the individual contributions of each stakeholder.	• Inclusive Learning Spaces: Classrooms were transformed into inclusive environments, accommodating diverse learning needs. • Student Empowerment: Students gained a sense of ownership and empowerment by actively contributing to the changes in their learning spaces. • Community Involvement: Collaboration with local businesses and community members strengthened the sense of community and support for inclusive education. • Holistic Value: The inclusive classroom design project demonstrated that by co-creating and co-producing changes with diverse stakeholders, the value created went beyond physical modifications. It created a more inclusive, supportive, and empowering educational environment for all.

For better understanding, several instances where the concept has been adopted, leading to significant positive changes, are outlined below.

2.1. Partner for Possibility Program

Brand and Rolland [20] revealed a case study pertaining to a partnership program established between business leaders and school principals in under-resourced schools within South Africa, known as the Partner for Possibility program. This initiative involves collaboration between principals and business leaders to instigate transformative changes at multiple levels. Specifically, the program focuses on empowering principals to lead and manage their schools effectively, encouraging school management teams to integrate business strategies into strategic planning processes, fostering collaboration among the communities of teachers, principals, and business leaders to re-engage teachers and ensure

the generation of valuable input, and actively involving the broader community of parents and citizens surrounding the school.

Several activities are undertaken to enhance community engagement, such as organizing parent–teacher meetings, hosting sports days to encourage interaction between parents and the school community, involving parents in their children's education, and providing regular updates on the progress of students. The Partnerships for Possibility initiative has demonstrated its effectiveness in bringing about positive changes in underperforming and under-resourced schools by equipping principals and school teams with essential skills. The ongoing initiatives within this program contribute to the continuous development of leadership capabilities, the establishment of a proficient state, and the promotion of active citizenship, all aimed at fostering social cohesion [21].

2.2. Residential Care for Elderly People

The second case involves VCC, exemplified by Osborne and Strokosch [22] in a classic public service scenario related to residential care for elderly individuals. In their study, they explored VCC within the context of interactions between staff and service users in a residential care facility for the elderly. The performance and overall experience of the residential home were found to be continuously co-created through these interactions. Notably, it was emphasized that the impact of this VCC process could vary across different residential homes.

Residents actively participated in co-creating their experiences based on their individual perspectives and values. Moreover, they played a role in contributing to the VCC of experiences for fellow residents. Services such as residential care and education represent clear examples wherein co-production and VCC are heightened due to the constant and direct interaction between service users and providers [22]. Building on this, Osborne et al. [23] proposed a conceptual framework categorizing co-production as an integral part of the public service delivery process. They asserted that co-production is intricately linked to direct VCC for both service users and society at large.

Therefore, VCC can be fundamental for public services capable of addressing the needs of both individuals and society. The approach of VCC introduces a new strategy in public service provision, transforming citizens into partners with public officials. This implies that VCC can be employed as an option for dealing with policy implementation or policy change [21]. VCC necessitates a shift in the traditional roles of public services, fostering a collaborative dynamic between citizens and public officials. Furthermore, it holds the potential to yield a more comprehensive, viable, and effective contribution to both the present and future of society [23].

According to Osborne et al. [24], this approach is a key element in the development of sustainable public services in the 21st century. Given that studies on school-based partnership programs have demonstrated how the model can be used to explain the collaborative connections among educators, families, and communities in supporting students' learning success, it is intriguing to explore the potential application of VCC in inclusive schools in Thailand.

3. Challenges in Thai Special Education

A significant development in the realm of education for students with Special Educational Needs (SENs) in Thailand can be traced back to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), which established the legal framework for inclusive education through the 1997 Thai Constitution and the 1999 National Educational Reform Act [25].

The 1997 Thai Constitution emphasizes the right to a basic education for every child, considering education to be a fundamental entitlement. It specifically outlines the rights of children, youth, women, the elderly, the underprivileged, and the handicapped, including the right to receive care and education [26]. The 1999 National Education Acts categorize nine types of special needs: visual impairment, hearing impairment, physi-

cal limitation, intellectual limitation, learning disabled, speech impaired, behavioral or emotional disturbances, autistic, and multiple impairment children [27].

However, numerous studies have indicated slow progress in the development of educational services for students with SENs in Thailand. Contributing factors include limited resources, insufficient staff in the field, ambiguity in policy formulation and implementation, weak collaboration among involved organizations, and prevalent attitudes towards special education [25,28,29].

Research by Sharma et al. [30] conducted in the Pacific Islands, exploring challenges in inclusive education, highlighted barriers such as negative attitudes from teachers, parents, and community members. It was recommended that increased education and awareness about inclusive education among parents and teachers are essential to foster participation from all relevant stakeholders. This issue resonates similarly in the context of Thailand.

There is a significant challenge for the development of inclusive education in Thailand, particularly as the country strives for international competitiveness. Schools, in this pursuit, face the pressure of being accountable for enhancing the academic outcomes of students, which include the evaluation criteria for teachers' and school performances. Reports indicate that some schools have even refused to accept SEN students due to unprepared teachers and a lack of facilities to accommodate this student group [29].

A persisting issue is that when SEN students are present in the classroom, teachers are compelled to invest additional time in supporting them, diverting attention from regular students. The antiquated notion that SEN students contribute to lower overall academic performance in classrooms and schools still prevails. Furthermore, the attitude of parents of regular students is a notable factor, as they aspire for their children to achieve high academic levels. Family background plays a crucial role in supporting student achievement, with recent studies pointing out that factors such as Intellectual Quotient (IQ), attitude towards learning, family involvement, and learning culture significantly impact the equality and quality of education in Thailand [31].

Moreover, a report by the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) in 2020 investigated early childhood education management in Thailand and found that children from high and middle-income families have greater opportunities for age-appropriate development than those from poverty-stricken families. This research highlighted the challenges in access to resources for intellectual development, such as parental involvement in reading together with children or checking their homework [32].

In summary, despite legislative efforts, there is still sluggish progress in developing adequate educational services for SEN students, significantly influenced by various challenges in the effective implementation of inclusive education policies, such as policy refinement and attitudinal shifts to realize the envisioned inclusivity in the education system [25]. This underscores the need to find solutions to more appropriately overcome the multifaceted challenges that inclusive education in Thailand faces.

4. Study Design

While Thailand has made strides in inclusive education, challenges persist in effectively implementing education policies for students with SENs. Given the urgency and complexity of these challenges, this study operates under the presupposition that VCC emerges as yet another promising avenue to address fostering inclusiveness effectively [6]. The study utilized a qualitative research design to: (1) understand the current conditions of how education for students with SENs, as a public commodity, is being delivered at local government-run schools in Thailand; (2) assess the existing gap in view of the principles outlined in the VCC concept; and (3) make recommendations on how the process of delivering education for students with SENs can be improved to enhance inclusive classroom practices based on the framework of VCC.

To comprehensively investigate the status quo and gain insight within its real context, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including the mayor of the Municipality, a head of educational policy implementation, and six school administrators.

A structured interview format was employed for data collection, covering issues such as the actual policy implementation for inclusion, policy for VCC, activities for cultivating collaborative activities to enhance inclusion, and problems and obstacles in policy implementation. The questions were categorized similarly to the approach used by Bonamigo et al. [33]. However, for this study, the concept of VCC was considered in four categories for consistency with and appropriateness to the Thai context: acknowledging the benefits, cultivating a sense of ownership, attaining awareness of impediments, and perpetuating an iterative process. This illustrates how well the process of creating an inclusive classroom for special education aligns with the concept of VCC. It also identifies areas that require further improvement to effectively integrate students with and without diverse needs in the same classroom, enabling them to build their capacity based on individual abilities. The representative participants included a mayor, school directors, and the head of educational policy implementation, aligning with the approach advocated by Yin [34].

Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted with school board members and parents, each comprising ten parents drawn by simple random sampling, while purposive sampling was employed for ten school board members. Teachers from eleven schools under the jurisdiction of Khon Khan Municipality were also included in this group. To maintain research ethics, the research team informed all participants about the objectives of the research prior to conducting data collection. They were also assured that the names of informants would not be disclosed. The question structure employed for the focus group discussions mirrored that of the in-depth interviews. The framework for focus group discussions covered specific issues such as experiences attending or participating in VCC activities, types of benefits or knowledge gained from schools or teachers, and suggestions to overcome problems or enhance participation in VCC. The inclusion of focus group discussions aimed at triangulation, checking the consistency of findings from the in-depth interviews to ensure an accurate reflection of participants' experiences in the VCC process, aligning with Creswell's approach to triangulation checks [35].

For the random selection of samples to participate in this study, the samples were divided into four groups: municipality administrators (mayor), school board members, teachers, and parents. The purposive random sampling method was used for the first two groups due to their smaller size [36]. However, for the groups of teachers and parents, non-probability random sampling was utilized, specifically the convenience sampling method [37]. This is primarily because motivating all parents to participate fully within the limited study period presents a significant challenge. The approach involved inviting interested teachers and parents to voluntarily provide information for participation. Although this selection method has limitations in representing the entire population, it was deemed highly useful and appropriate for the given context.

For data analysis, the data obtained from both interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, validated, and organized through classification based on the key elements of VCC activities. Content analysis was employed to thoroughly examine the data and draw conclusions [38].

5. Key Findings

5.1. Acknowledging the Benefits

VCC emphasizes collaborative interaction for mutual benefit [6]. Based on the interviews with the municipality's executives, there is evidence indicating that all of them recognize the potential improvement in enhancing inclusiveness in special education—more specifically creating inclusiveness in their municipality-run classrooms—while maintaining satisfactory academic performance of students, by allowing their stakeholders to participate in managing and organizing activities/resources in the schools. In this context, "satisfactory academic performance results" means that each group of students—both with and without SENs—achieves satisfactory academic results according to their actual maximum abilities.

During an interview, when the mayor asked, 'What approach is used to balance top-down directives with community input in educational policy-making, and what mech-

anisms are in place to ensure that all stakeholders are involved?' He explained that, while adhering to the top-down educational development scheme from the national level, their policies are shaped by past issues and parental input obtained through open town hall meetings and direct feedback from social media. The mayor expressed, "...it is our clear [unofficial] policy to incorporate at least 30 percent of suggestions from all involved parties, gathered from as many channels as we possibly can find, into our yearly educational plan...".

When asked about how public values are sought out and public participation is encouraged to create an inclusive classroom, with questions like 'How does the involvement of the stakeholders contribute to the promotion of public values and participation in creating an inclusive classroom environment, and what specific strategies are employed to ensure meaningful collaboration?' the mayor emphasized the significance of the school board, which comprises elected or appointed individuals representing the community (e.g., a representative body of parents, village head, municipal secretary, and so on), as a crucial channel for supporting the process of VCC. The administrative team consistently holds meetings with the school board to exchange ideas, gather feedback, and collaboratively develop plans, spanning from classroom design and the creation of yearly activities to assessment plans and budget allocation.

The mayor explained, "...we ask what they [school board] want to do, what kind of educational or vocational program they are interested in, and what kind of support [both financially and in kind] from the government they seek..." Furthermore, when asked 'How do the initiatives rolled out by the municipality, aimed at involving stakeholders in the management of schools and fostering inclusiveness in education, contribute to the development of social and environmental opportunities? Additionally, how do these programs impact the understanding of current trends in educational development and the formulation of educational plans?' A school board member in a focus group discussion provided additional evidence supporting the supposition that his local government is keenly aware that VCC is essential to its operation. He observed that many of them and their agencies widely embrace the notion that society is actively involved in solving local issues and participating more in the development of social and environmental opportunities: "...the municipality rolls out many programs to get us involved in the management of schools, and I have attended every program..." A member of the educational implementation team in a focus group discussion added:

> "...sometimes the municipality carries out development programs, especially for school board members, just to ensure that we understand the core concept of embracing inclusiveness in education and the current trends in educational development, which is very important and helps when we develop [or adjust] our educational plans accordingly..."

This indicates that the school board is provided with knowledge as a means to empower them for effective engagement. This is a significant departure from the past, where general social projects often relied solely on government responsibility and either could not continue without further government pushing or were completely abandoned.

5.2. Cultivating a Sense of Ownership

Based on both interviews and focus group discussions, it was found that, in general, one critical challenge, apart from achieving full involvement of all stakeholders to co-creatively organize a successful inclusive classroom, is a lack of financial resources, as pointed out by the head of educational policy implementation in an interview:

> "...of all the challenges we encounter in running inclusiveness in the classroom while maintaining satisfactory academic performance for both groups of students, restrictions on how the funding provided—from the central government—should be spent are sometimes very difficult to cope with. This is because the funding provider [central government] has restrictions on the purpose of the support,

> whereby those who are supported must have a goal in line with national policy. Without the proper alignment [with the specific budgeting objective set], it is highly risky [and illegitimate] to expend the fund toward something that it is not intended for [that is solely toward creating inclusiveness in the classroom rather than for general school management]. . .”

This raises the question of whether the VCC process can help address this issue. Therefore, the question was posed to shed light on this matter. The responses received indicate that not only does everyone understand the ideology of the concept, but they are also actively leveraging it in practical ways. One interviewee said,

> “. . .it doesn’t matter if the municipality has money or not because every parent regularly participates in making Pha Pa Samakkhi to create good [inclusive] education, as the money that comes together to help the school is no different from the money parents give as pocket money to their own children.”

> “Pha Pa Samakkhi” refers to a collaborative effort or collective contribution made by a community or group of individuals towards a common goal or cause. In the context mentioned, it signifies parents coming together to contribute, either financially or through other means, to support and improve the educational environment for the benefit of the students and the school.

Furthermore, many participants in this study expressed similar sentiments, indicating that when those involved in the VCC process feel a sense of ownership, they are inclined to actively participate in every endeavor. Various strategies can be employed to make this goal achievable.

5.3. Attaining Awareness of Impediments

When asked about their primary concerns regarding barriers to the VCC process aimed at enhancing an inclusive classroom for special education, more specifically ‘What do you see as challenges that impact the VCC process aimed at enhancing an inclusive classroom for special education, and what do you see as potential strategies that could be implemented to address these constraints?’, while diverse views and opinions were expressed, most participants highlighted intriguing issues. A significant concern arises from the rising number of commuting students who live outside the municipality. These students usually rely on parental transportation or public transit to commute to and from school, typically attending municipal schools in economically growing areas based on the belief that students who attend these schools are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes compared to schools in less developed rural areas.

The potential reason this issue may become quite problematic is that the success or failure of adopting the VCC concept may be constrained by these students (and their parents), for two main reasons: (1) they perceive the sub-standardized education services of highly urbanized municipal schools as more satisfying than the conceivably ‘high-standard education services’ provided by local schools in their area; and (2) their parents’ participation and engagement in school activities is quite low, with one stating, “. . .out-of-town parents rarely partake in town halls or meetings, which is understandable, as their children are only here for schooling. . .” Another participant remarked, “. . .it makes sense that commuting parents only put in a bare minimum effort into school projects. I would have done the same thing if I were them. . .” while another mentioned, “. . .It is difficult to find out-of-town parents who are interested in investing their time. . .”.

During the focus group discussion, another participant raised a different but somewhat similar pertinent concern about children (regardless of whether they have SENs or not), especially those with parents in a very low economic status, such as day-labor workers or those with a history of substance abuse, who may eventually drop out of school. He commented that these children lack a formal channel to express their needs, as their parents are less likely to get involved in school management or activities, let alone monitor their children’s learning progress at home. To address this issue, the mayor and his education

team organize regular meetings to conduct need assessments for such children. The mayor noted, "...interestingly, when we approach these groups of dropout children to ask about their interests or needs, they fully engage...".

Another impediment is related to a specific cultural issue. In Thailand, cultural perceptions about the inequality of life, such as disabilities, being in a lower economic hierarchy, and being marginalized, can be considered to be 'Karma'-related [39] This plays a key influence in Thai attitudes, and it is one aspect that affects the practice of VCC, where participation is at the heart of success [7]. Some parents accept their children's conditions, believing that they deserve their disability as a result of past-life Karma. They may also view it as their fate and feel they do not have to take any further action [39]. This kind of attitude hinders participation in the VCC process.

5.4. Perpetuating an Iterative Process

In the context of enhancing inclusiveness in a classroom run by a municipality, perpetuating an iterative process involves an ongoing and adaptive cycle of improvement in strategies, policies, and practices related to inclusive education. This implies that efforts to create a more inclusive learning environment are not viewed as a one-time initiative but rather as a continuous commitment to refining and evolving approaches based on feedback, experiences, and changing circumstances.

Based on the interviews, with questions like 'How does the municipality ensure the continual enhancement of inclusiveness in education, and what strategies are employed to facilitate collaborative assessments, gather feedback, and make continuous adjustments to ensure that inclusiveness is consistently improved over time?', it was found that the municipality's implementation of inclusive education programs, policies, and support mechanisms to create an environment that accommodates students with diverse needs is adjusted regularly. This is achieved through collaborative assessments involving all parties concerned, evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives. Stakeholders gather feedback, become aware of the situation and challenges, and make continuous adjustments to ensure that inclusiveness is not achieved just once or twice but continually enhanced. One interviewee suggested that "...Our focus on enhancing inclusiveness in education isn't just about putting plans into action. We're in constant collaboration, regularly assessing our programs and support systems..." Another added, "...inclusiveness isn't just achieved momentarily but is consistently improved...".

This commitment involves a dynamic and responsive approach. All involved parties must see that using VCC to create an inclusive classroom requires an evolving process and is never a static goal. With this mindset, they actively seek out and embrace the benefits of all students, acknowledging that their needs to overcome challenges may change over time. By staying adaptable, they can address challenges head-on. This could involve reassessing teaching methods, ensuring physical accessibility, or providing additional support services. "...We're committed to adapting and responding to the diverse needs of our students, making sure we overcome any challenges we encounter in creating an inclusive learning environment," said a member of the school board, echoing the mayor's statement that "...the landscape of education, the needs of students, and societal expectations can evolve over time...".

Therefore, municipal authorities and educational stakeholders need to engage in an ongoing dialogue, learning from their experiences, and making iterative improvements to promote sustained inclusivity in the classroom. This involves a commitment to flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness to the ever-changing dynamics of the educational landscape and the diverse needs of students.

6. Discussion

At this juncture, everything appears to be progressing smoothly. The question arises: if this is indeed the case, should we expect inclusive classrooms to operate at an excellent

level, with satisfactory academic performance from both groups of children? Surprisingly (or not), the answer is no, and this could be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, the development of an inclusive culture in educational institutions is crucial for creating an environment where all students feel valued and supported in their learning journey, thereby enhancing inclusivity in the classroom [40]. An inclusive culture surpasses mere policy implementation, incorporating attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that promote diversity, equity, and belonging [41]. By cultivating such a culture, schools foster a sense of community where differences are celebrated and individual needs are addressed through personalized support and accommodations, aligning with the concept of VCC. This benefits not only students with disabilities but also enhances the educational experience for all learners, promoting social cohesion and academic success [42]. Inclusive culture fosters collaboration among teachers, administrators, students, and families, fostering a shared commitment to diversity and inclusion across all aspects of school life. Therefore, investing in the development of an inclusive culture is essential for creating an educational environment where every student can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally [43].

To achieve the aforementioned success, it is crucial to understand that developing an inclusive culture within educational institutions presents significant challenges and complexities. Shifting ingrained attitudes and beliefs towards inclusivity demands substantial time and effort, requiring comprehensive strategies for unlearning and re-education, particularly concerning biases towards students with disabilities or marginalized backgrounds [41]. A solution to this problem is stimulating collaboration among stakeholders using various techniques, such as encouraging open dialogue and reflection, so that educators, administrators, students, families, and the wider community are involved in the process. Schools can foster a shared commitment to inclusivity incorporated into decision-making processes, which is key. This approach aligns with the principles of VCC, suggesting it is implementable in this context as well.

Secondly, when study participants were asked why, despite seemingly favorable conditions, outcomes did not align with expectations, a common response emerged. The consensus was that creating VCC is not always easily realized in practice, particularly within the constraints of the public sector [7]. While the municipality endeavors to organize numerous activities involving all stakeholders throughout the process, not all of these activities result in tangible changes in the inclusive teaching and learning process. The efforts to create an inclusive classroom and related activities are perceived as minimal compared to other obligations that schools managed by municipalities must fulfill to comply with the policy directives of the central government. The central government holds significant influence in setting the direction for education, and aside from this, there is another influential segment—parents—whose size surpasses that of those advocating for an inclusive classroom. These parents, with differing perspectives, play a substantial role in determining various school activities.

It is important to recognize that education is unlike a business unit [44] and cannot be equated or treated as such, especially when subject to numerous regulations. Public schools cannot function like business units that select customers with similar needs or objectives, excluding those with different ideas. Unlike businesses, which can shape their customer community, public schools and education are bound by regulations and cannot exclude parents with dissenting views [45]. Some parents believe that participating in school-related activities is unnecessary as they view teaching and learning as the sole responsibility of the school and municipality. They question why they should pay tuition fees or taxes if it requires their time to contribute. Additionally, there are those who argue that students with SENs should be segregated into specific schools to avoid burdening teachers and prevent their children's academic performance from being disadvantaged in the highly competitive labor market.

Based on these findings, it can be asserted that the primary challenges concerning the effective implementation of VCC as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in special education warrant serious consideration in at least three dimensions: the burden of participating

in the VCC process, cohesion among groups engaged in VCC, and equilibrium between intervention and support.

Regarding the first issue, the burden of participating in the VCC process within the general context of the VCC process in business involves two parties: the business side and the customer side. VCC implies the business, as the owner of the product, transferring the burden of production to its customers. Consequently, as customers become more involved in production, the ownership of the product is also increasingly shifted to them. Thus, when customers are more engaged in VCC, the sense of ownership is also heightened. Despite the transferred responsibility of production imposing burdens on customers, their acceptance can be attributed to perceiving benefits that outweigh the burdens they bear. In essence, the benefits gained from the VCC process surpass the burden of participating in co-production [46].

However, unlike the VCC process in business, in this case study, the parties involved can be segmented into three main groups: (1) the service provider, represented by the municipality delivering the service; (2) a group comprising parents, school board members, municipality education personnel, etc., who perceive benefits in education improvement extending beyond the burdens they bear; and (3) a group that does not perceive benefits from the process, viewing it more as the duty of the service provider (group 1).

This implies that during VCC, while groups 2 and 3 may receive equal benefits, the burden of creating value, shifted from service providers, falls solely on Group 2 rather than being equally distributed between groups 2 and 3. For instance, in the context of resource mobilization for activities like the preparation of Pha Pa Samakkhi, when there is a need for supplemental funds, if only the parents in group 2 are willing to participate in creating value without cooperation from parents in group 3, it means that the parents in group 2 will inevitably have to contribute more to ensure that all children, including those of parents in group 3, receive better inclusiveness in education.

Therefore, from an economic standpoint, the primary caution against utilizing VCC as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in special education within similar circumstances lies in the obstacle arising from the transferred burden of VCC (economic cost, i.e., opportunity costs), which may become so burdensome that it outweighs the benefits, potentially leading to unsuccessful outcomes. Figure 1 below depicts the dilemma structure that VCC participants must bear in the context of utilizing VCC as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in special education, based on the case study.

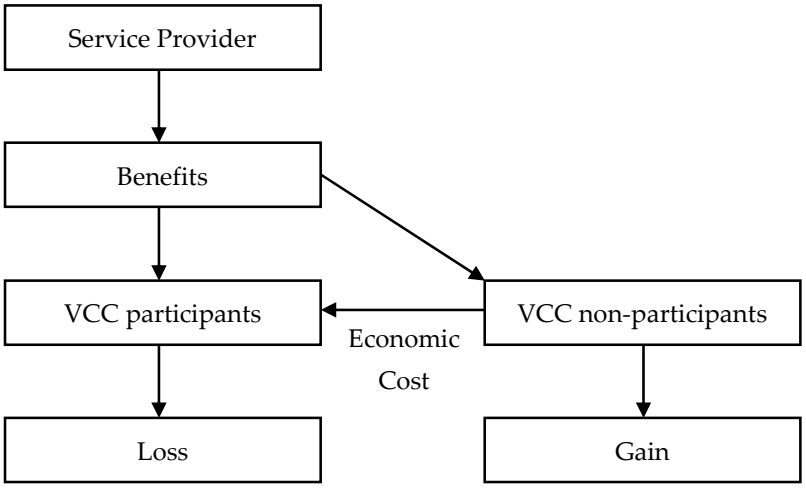


Figure 1. Dilemma structure in utilizing VCC for enhancing inclusiveness in special education.

Continuing from the previous point, it can be observed that when only a small group of people is willing to co-create value, they will have to exert more effort to manage the tasks and ensure that various goals are achieved. This implies that they must work closely

together to be successful, emphasizing the importance of ensuring sustained cohesion among groups engaged in VCC throughout the process [6].

As such, it becomes evident that adopting VCC as a strategy may not be universally appropriate for every environment. In the context of this case study, where the service provider is a municipality characterized as highly urbanized with a rapidly expanding economy and significant diversity among its population in terms of family backgrounds, social statuses, beliefs, and economic classes, maintaining a level of cohesion among groups engaged in VCC may pose challenges in comparison to rural societies, which are smaller in size and exhibit relatively higher interconnectedness between communities. The adoption of this strategy may be perceived as more suitable in settings where fewer people live in proximity and have stronger ties, such as rural communities, as opposed to urban communities.

Moreover, for a sustainable VCC process, both the government and citizens must not rely solely on financial support from the central government. An illustrative case from the literature review by Wang et al. [47] highlights the valuable experience of a non-governmental organization in China, Green Xioxiang. The study revealed that constructing a social relationship network was the foundation of the Green Xioxiang project, and the municipality data indicated the potential for networking, albeit requiring additional support. Wang et al. [47] demonstrated that the Green Xioxiang project equipped the public with essential skills, fostering continued participation. Notably, providing training to the public can have a positive impact on short-term participation and mobilize enthusiasm. Therefore, establishing trust and building a cooperative relationship with the public is crucial.

In the case of the Green Xioxiang project, a strategic bottom-up approach to awareness amplification was adopted, utilizing new media as a platform. This strategy aimed to shape public opinion, maintain relationships, and sustain engagement over time. The findings underscore the significance of proactive efforts in skill-building, trust establishment, and ongoing engagement to foster a robust and sustainable VCC process, as summarized in Figure 2 below.

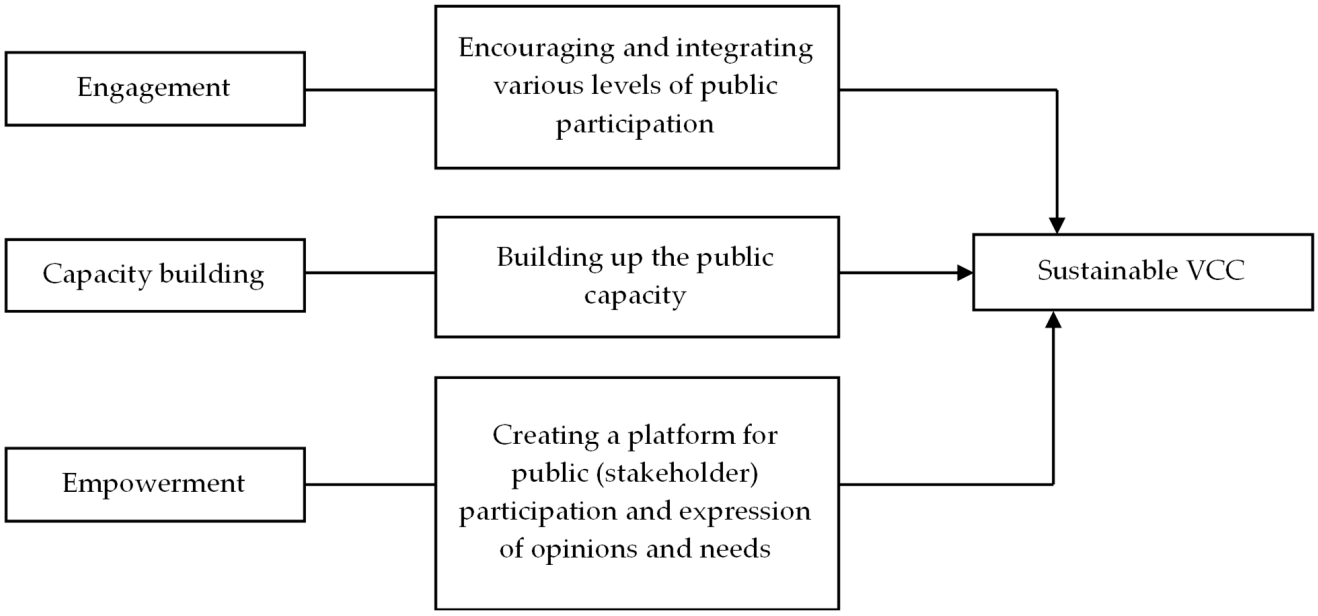


Figure 2. Green Xioxiang Project bottom-up awareness amplification VCC strategy.

To successfully introduce a VCC strategy into public service delivery and enhance inclusiveness in special education, local government as an original service owner/provider must take into account several key initiatives, as follows:

Professionals and officers need to reposition their roles, adopting positions such as calibrators, catalysts, facilitators, or even partners in policy during the service delivery

process. Recognizing that aspects like fairness, participation, equity, respect, and honesty are significant to stakeholders, service providers need to adjust their approaches and clearly identify strategic priorities when planning and implementing VCC. Trust-building situations, considering the motivation and capabilities of users to co-produce, should be integral to this process [48,49].

The final crucial factor influencing success or failure in the VCC process is maintaining an equilibrium of intervention and support by the service provider (municipality in this context) throughout the process. In discussions about the VCC process, much literature emphasizes the role of customers in co-creating value for the products they enjoy [14,18,23]. Nevertheless, it is essential not to overlook the fact that the products or services with which customers co-create are inherently owned by the service provider as true owners, and the responsibility for producing those products or services rests with the service provider. Therefore, even though responsibility in VCC is transferred to the group of people participating in the process, the service provider, as a product owner, must still fulfill their duty to assist in creating that value. Given that the name of the strategy, 'VCC', itself signifies collaborative efforts between the service provider and the service receiver to create value for the product or service, the service provider must provide support in every way that aligns with their original duty to enable customers to successfully complete the process of VCC [50–52].

From the case study, it can be observed that in some instances, even when a group dedicated to co-creating value for inclusiveness in special education puts in great effort and determination, participants in the VCC process may not always be able to find solutions to encounter challenges by themselves independently. When this occurs, it is the duty of the service provider to intervene and offer support. This is because the obligation to deliver inclusiveness in special education is also a legal duty that the municipality must fulfill. Success in this process not only depends on the active involvement of the service recipients but also on the readiness of the municipality to intervene and provide necessary support when challenges arise for the group engaged in creating shared value. These efforts are critically necessary and a prerequisite for success. It is important to remember that, in addition to the burdensome challenges that the group of value co-creators must bear, reducing burdens can help ease the situation [53]. Therefore, the decision to maintain the right balance of invention and support for those willing to participate is crucial.

7. Conclusions

In essence, this study provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of employing VCC as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in special education. The key findings from this study shed light on several critical aspects acknowledging benefits of employing VCC as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in special education within a municipality. However, the intricate challenges surrounding VCC in this context require careful consideration of the burden of participation, cohesive efforts, and the dynamic equilibrium of intervention and support [54,55]. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in implementing VCC as a strategy for enhancing inclusiveness in education in the public sector.

Moreover, within the context of Thailand, where the central government continues to play a crucial role in controlling budget allocations, VCC may serve as a potential solution to address the financial challenges faced by local governments, especially those of smaller sizes. The VCC process inherently involves a group of stakeholders collaboratively seeking solutions to various problems using the available resources. This approach aligns with the 'Bricolage' concept introduced by Lévi-Strauss in 1967 [56], which characterizes a mode of thought and cultural expression centered around the utilization of existing materials and ideas to create novel solutions (see [57] p. 333).

However, the influence of the central government in determining budgetary support for local governments presents a potential obstacle to the successful implementation of VCC. While VCC allows for flexibility and innovation, the centralized control of budget

allocations by the central government may impose regulatory restrictions on the process. If the burden on the groups participating in the VCC process becomes too onerous, and the state fails to mobilize sufficient resources to alleviate these challenges, comprehensive implementation of VCC may face hindrances. It is crucial to strike a balance between local autonomy and central oversight to ensure that the benefits of VCC can be realized without undue constraints [6,7].

Another noteworthy aspect is the challenging nature of VCC, particularly in large urban cities where the service provider must navigate a diverse array of stakeholder needs while managing limited funds, making sustainable VCC for society a formidable task. Prioritizing among the multitude of voices can pose a significant challenge for the service provider, as they grapple with determining which needs should be given precedence.

Establish empowerment by enhancing competency and involving individuals in public service delivery through regular training, information sharing, or meetings. Platforms or social media should be employed to keep parents informed and engaged in empowerment programs. For parents of SEN students, research for an appropriate design to enhance collaboration effectiveness is essential for devising better strategies for both teachers and parents [58,59].

Given the financial constraints as a significant obstacle for sustaining empowerment functions in the municipality, employ public relations strategies to garner attention from stakeholders in business enterprises and higher educational institutions. Encouraging their participation in the VCC process can lead to knowledge sharing and constructive channels for enhancing empowerment [60].

Build trust among a wider group of stakeholders in the service delivery process, as it is a key condition for successful collaboration. Utilize participatory approaches in the evaluation process [61]. Individuals with low levels of trust in local government (service providers) are likely to be less convinced by the benefits of VCC. The experience of service delivery also influences trust attitudes [62].

Create a bottom-up approach platform for parents of both SEN and regular students to share their opinions through various communication channels. Additionally, to contribute the VCC framework to other municipalities, establish networks for sharing successes and obstacles in the VCC process for educational development with other local administrative organizations.

For further research, there are several limitations that researchers must take into account. In this study, the researcher diligently employed triangulation, drawing data from multiple groups and various perspectives, to bolster the credibility of the obtained information and ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the phenomenon [35]. However, given the inherent perception of qualitative research as potentially lacking scientific generalizability or predictability [63], future research endeavors could benefit from integrating these qualitative findings into a quantitative research framework. For instance, incorporating data from a longitudinal study would offer a more nuanced and in-depth exploration of the subject matter.

Lastly, as a case study, it is crucial to note that the findings from this specific municipality, being one of the fast-growing cities, may not be readily generalizable to every municipality. However, given the current trends in development observed in many municipalities, the knowledge acquired may find application in similar urban contexts. Specifically, the concept of VCC could be considered by other local administrations for educational development. Nonetheless, future research endeavors should explore diverse types of municipalities, comparing VCC dynamics in various contexts to enhance understanding of inclusive school management.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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