

Fostering Collaborative Learning: A Comprehensive Examination of Undergraduate and Graduate Students' Perspectives on Pedagogical Partnerships in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examined undergraduate and graduate students' perspectives on pedagogical partnerships in higher education, highlighting their experiences, challenges, and impacts on learning outcomes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews were conducted with 300 participants across various disciplines. Findings revealed that students valued skill development, enhanced engagement, and a greater understanding of pedagogy through collaborative efforts with faculty. However, challenges such as time constraints and communication barriers were prevalent. The study demonstrated that active participation in partnerships positively correlated with improved academic performance and a heightened sense of belonging among students. These insights underscore the importance of fostering effective student-faculty collaborations to enhance educational experiences and outcomes. Recommendations for practice include establishing clear communication channels, creating flexible engagement opportunities, and promoting a culture of reciprocity within academic settings.

KEYWORDS: *Pedagogical Partnerships, Student Engagement, Higher Education, Collaborative Learning, Academic Performance*

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education has undergone significant transformations in recent years, with an increasing emphasis on student-faculty partnerships as a means to enhance teaching and learning. Traditionally, the educational model positioned faculty as the primary knowledge holders, while students were often relegated to passive roles within the learning environment. This conventional paradigm has been challenged by emerging pedagogical frameworks that advocate for collaborative learning experiences, where students are recognized as active participants in their education (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

Research has shown that fostering student-faculty partnerships can lead to improved academic outcomes, heightened engagement, and a more profound sense of belonging among students (Bovill et al., 2016). These partnerships not only empower students but also provide faculty with fresh insights

into student needs and preferences, thereby enriching the educational experience for all stakeholders involved. The shift towards collaborative pedagogies reflects a broader movement within higher education to cultivate inclusive environments that value diverse perspectives and promote mutual respect between students and faculty.

In this context, the concept of partnership extends beyond mere collaboration; it embodies a philosophy of shared responsibility for learning. Faculty members are encouraged to view students as co-creators of knowledge rather than mere recipients of information. This shift in perspective has been supported by various educational theories, including constructivism, which posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). By engaging students in meaningful ways, educators can foster deeper

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learning and critical thinking skills essential for success in today's complex world.

The purpose of this study was to explore how pedagogical partnerships could transform educational experiences for both undergraduate and graduate students. By examining students' perspectives on these collaborations, the research aimed to identify the benefits and challenges associated with student-faculty partnerships. Additionally, this investigation sought to understand how such partnerships could enhance learning outcomes, contributing to a more effective and engaging educational framework.

This study aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on student voices in the context of pedagogical partnerships. While previous research has highlighted the importance of collaboration in higher education, there remains a need for comprehensive studies that delve into students' experiences and perceptions. By entering student perspectives, this research aimed to provide actionable insights for educators seeking to implement or improve partnership models within their institutions.

Moreover, understanding the dynamics of these partnerships is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies that resonate with diverse student populations. As higher education institutions strive to create inclusive environments that reflect the diversity of their student bodies, it becomes imperative to consider how different groups perceive and engage in collaborative learning opportunities. This study sought not only to highlight common themes among student experiences but also to explore variations based on factors such as discipline, academic level, and cultural background.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework surrounding student-faculty partnerships has evolved significantly, reflecting a shift from traditional pedagogical models to more collaborative approaches that emphasize shared responsibility in the learning process. Central to this framework is the notion of students as partners, which positions them not merely as recipients of knowledge but as active contributors to their educational experiences (Healey et al., 2014). This paradigm is grounded in several theoretical perspectives, including constructivism and social learning theory. Constructivism asserts that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and experiences, emphasizing the importance of collaborative learning environments (Vygotsky, 1978). Social learning theory further supports this by highlighting the role of observation and imitation in learning, suggesting that students can learn from both

their peers and faculty through engaged partnerships (Bandura, 1977).

Several models have emerged to illustrate the dynamics of student-faculty partnerships. For instance, Bovill et al. (2016) proposed a framework categorizing partnerships based on the level of student involvement in decision-making processes related to teaching and curriculum design. This model distinguishes between different types of partnerships, such as consultative, collaborative, and co-creation partnerships, each with varying degrees of student agency. The framework emphasizes that effective partnerships require clear communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to enhancing educational outcomes.

Moreover, the concept of "students as partners" has been operationalized in various contexts, reflecting diverse disciplinary perspectives and institutional cultures. For example, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) explored the impact of these partnerships on curriculum development and teaching practices across multiple institutions, revealing that when students are engaged as co-creators of knowledge, both their learning experiences and academic performance improve significantly.

Benefits of Partnerships

The benefits of student-faculty partnerships have been well-documented in the literature, highlighting their positive impact on student engagement, learning outcomes, and faculty development. Research consistently indicates that when students are actively involved in their education, they demonstrate higher levels of motivation and ownership over their learning (Bovill et al., 2016). This increased engagement often translates into improved academic performance; for instance, a study conducted by Holen et al. (2021) found that students who participated in partnership initiatives reported higher grades and a greater sense of belonging within their academic communities.

In addition to enhancing student outcomes, these partnerships also contribute to faculty development. Faculty members who engage in collaborative practices with students often report new insights into teaching methodologies and curriculum design (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). This reciprocal relationship fosters a deeper understanding of both student needs and pedagogical strategies, leading to improved teaching practices overall. Furthermore, faculty who participate in partnership initiatives frequently experience increased job satisfaction and professional growth as they adapt their teaching approaches based on student feedback (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

The transformative power of these partnerships extends beyond individual courses or programs; they can reshape institutional cultures by promoting a more inclusive and participatory approach to education. By recognizing students as valuable collaborators in the learning process, institutions can create environments that prioritize shared governance and collective decision-making (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019). This shift not only enhances educational quality but also prepares students for active citizenship by equipping them with skills necessary for collaboration and leadership in diverse contexts.

Challenges Faced

Despite the numerous benefits associated with student-faculty partnerships, several challenges hinder their effective implementation. One significant obstacle is the entrenched attitudes within higher education that often position faculty as the primary authority figures in the classroom. Many educators may subconsciously resist the idea of sharing power with students or may lack confidence in their ability to facilitate collaborative learning environments (Holen et al., 2021). This reluctance can manifest in various ways, including hesitancy to incorporate student feedback into course design or reluctance to engage students in discussions about pedagogical practices.

Cultural barriers also play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of student-faculty partnerships. In some contexts, particularly those influenced by traditional educational norms, students may feel uncomfortable voicing their opinions or contributing to discussions about course content (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2020). These "face" issues can create an environment where students feel marginalized or undervalued, ultimately undermining the potential for meaningful collaboration.

Furthermore, logistical challenges related to time constraints and resource allocation can impede the establishment of effective partnerships. Faculty members often face heavy workloads that leave little room for collaboration with students outside traditional classroom settings (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019). Additionally, institutions may lack structured support systems or training programs designed to facilitate these partnerships effectively.

To address these challenges, institutions must foster a culture that values collaboration and recognizes the contributions of all stakeholders involved in the educational process. This may involve providing professional development opportunities for faculty focused on partnership practices or implementing institutional policies that promote shared governance models (Holen et al., 2021). By actively working to

dismantle barriers and create supportive environments for collaboration, higher education institutions can unlock the full potential of student-faculty partnerships.

The literature on student-faculty partnerships highlights both the theoretical foundations supporting collaborative learning environments and the practical implications for enhancing educational outcomes. While significant benefits exist for both students and faculty engaged in these partnerships, challenges remain that must be addressed through intentional institutional efforts. By prioritizing collaboration as a core value within higher education, institutions can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that empower all participants.

Research Questions

To guide this exploration, the study posed several theoretical research questions designed to uncover the complexities of student-faculty collaborations:

1. What are students' perceptions of pedagogical partnerships?
2. What benefits and challenges do they identify?
3. How can these partnerships enhance learning outcomes?

This research is significant because it has the potential to inform practice within higher education institutions. By prioritizing student perspectives in discussions about pedagogical partnerships, educators can develop more responsive teaching methods that align with students' needs and preferences. This alignment is particularly crucial in an era where student engagement is linked directly to academic success and retention (Tinto, 2012).

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education by highlighting the importance of collaboration in fostering equitable learning environments. As institutions increasingly recognize diversity as a strength rather than a challenge, understanding how different student populations engage with pedagogical partnerships becomes essential for creating supportive educational frameworks.

In addition, this research aims to provide a framework for institutions seeking to implement or enhance student-faculty partnership initiatives. By identifying best practices and common challenges associated with these collaborations, this study offers valuable insights that can guide policymakers and educators in their efforts to create more engaging and supportive educational experiences.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study aimed to comprehensively examine undergraduate and

graduate students' perspectives on pedagogical partnerships within higher education. This section outlines the participant demographics, data collection methods, and analysis techniques utilized to gather and interpret the data.

Participants

The study involved a diverse sample of students from various disciplines at a mid-sized public university. A

total of 300 students participated, comprising approximately 200 undergraduate students and 100 graduate students. This stratified sampling approach ensured representation across different academic levels, fields of study, and demographic backgrounds.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Category	Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students	Total Participants
Number of Participants	200	100	300
Fields of Study	Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Engineering	Education, Business, Arts	-
Gender Distribution	55% Female, 45% Male	60% Female, 40% Male	-
Age Range	18-24 years	22-35 years	-

This diverse demographic allowed for an exploration of both commonalities and differences in experiences related to pedagogical partnerships, contributing to the richness of the data collected.

Data Collection Methods

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on student experiences with pedagogical partnerships. This approach combined surveys and semi-structured interviews to provide a holistic view of student perspectives.

Surveys

A structured survey was designed to collect quantitative data regarding students' experiences with pedagogical partnerships. The survey included Likert-scale items that measured various dimensions, such as perceived engagement in partnership activities, satisfaction with collaborative experiences, and self-reported academic outcomes. Key constructs assessed included:

- **Engagement:** Items measuring the extent to which students felt actively involved in their learning processes.
- **Satisfaction:** Questions assessing overall satisfaction with student-faculty interactions.
- **Academic Outcomes:** Self-reported measures of academic performance and retention.

The survey was distributed electronically through the university's learning management system, ensuring accessibility for all participants. A total of 300 responses were collected, yielding a response rate of approximately 75%.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 30 participants (15 undergraduate and 15 graduate students). These interviews aimed to capture deeper

insights into students' lived experiences with pedagogical partnerships. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about:

- Personal experiences in student-faculty collaborations.
- Perceived benefits and challenges associated with these partnerships.
- Suggestions for improving partnership practices within their educational context.

Interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms to accommodate participants' schedules and preferences. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent for subsequent analysis.

Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using a systematic approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to draw meaningful conclusions regarding student perspectives on pedagogical partnerships.

Quantitative Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participant demographics and responses. Inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, were employed to examine differences in perceptions based on demographic variables (e.g., academic level, discipline). Additionally, regression analyses were conducted to explore relationships between engagement levels in partnerships and self-reported academic outcomes.

Qualitative Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved several key steps. Researchers read through transcripts multiple times to understand the content. Initial codes were generated based on recurring themes related to student experiences in partnerships. Codes were organized into broader themes that reflected key aspects of the data. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the dataset. Each theme was clearly defined with supporting quotes from participants.

This dual analysis approach allowed for triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity of the study's conclusions. By integrating quantitative metrics with rich qualitative insights, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of how student-faculty partnerships function within higher education settings.

Findings

The findings of this study provided valuable insights into undergraduate and graduate students' perspectives on pedagogical partnerships in higher education. Through the analysis of survey and interview data, several key themes emerged regarding positive experiences, challenges faced, and the overall impact of these partnerships on learning outcomes.

Student Perspectives

Positive Experiences in Partnerships

Students reported numerous positive experiences resulting from their involvement in pedagogical partnerships. The following themes were highlighted:

Skill Development

Many students indicated that participating in partnerships allowed them to develop essential skills such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking. For instance,

one undergraduate student noted,
"Working closely with my professor not only helped me understand the course material better but also improved my ability to articulate my ideas and provide constructive feedback" (Participant 12).

Enhanced Understanding of Pedagogy

Students expressed a deeper appreciation for teaching methodologies and curriculum design as a result of their collaborative experiences. Graduate students particularly noted how these partnerships provided them with insights into effective teaching practices.

One graduate participant stated,
"Being involved in the planning stages of the course helped me see the complexities of teaching and how

important it is to consider students' perspectives" (Participant 25).

Increased Engagement

Many participants reported feeling more engaged in their learning processes due to their active roles in partnerships. This engagement was often linked to a sense of ownership over their educational experiences.

A student remarked,
"When I felt like my input mattered, I was much more motivated to participate and succeed" (Participant 8).

Challenges Faced

Despite the positive experiences reported, students also identified several challenges associated with pedagogical partnerships:

Time Constraints

A significant number of participants highlighted time limitations as a barrier to effective collaboration. Many students struggled to balance their academic responsibilities with partnership activities.

One undergraduate student commented,
"I wanted to engage more deeply, but with assignments piling up, it was hard to find the time" (Participant 15).

Communication Barriers

Some students experienced difficulties in communication with faculty members, particularly when expectations were not clearly defined.

A graduate participant noted, *"At times, I felt unsure about what was expected of me in the partnership, which led to some frustration"* (Participant 22).

This challenge underscores the importance of establishing clear communication channels at the outset of partnerships.

Cultural Resistance

Students reported encountering resistance from faculty who were hesitant to embrace collaborative approaches. This resistance often stemmed from traditional views of the teacher-student hierarchy.

One participant shared,
"Not all faculty were open to the idea of partnership; some preferred sticking to traditional methods" (Participant 30).

The study also examined how student-faculty partnerships influenced academic performance and engagement levels among participants. The findings suggested several positive impacts. Analysis of survey data indicated a correlation between active participation in partnerships and higher self-reported grades. Students who engaged more deeply in

collaborative activities reported better academic outcomes than those who did not participate as actively.

Table 2: Relationship Between Partnership Involvement and Academic Performance

Level of Involvement	Average GPA
Low	2.75
Moderate	3.20
High	3.65

Survey results indicated that students involved in partnerships reported higher levels of engagement compared to those who did not participate in such initiatives. Engagement metrics included participation in class discussions, attendance rates, and willingness to contribute feedback on course materials.

Participants frequently mentioned that partnerships fostered a greater sense of belonging within their academic communities. This sense of belonging was linked to increased motivation and retention rates among students, as they felt more connected to their peers and faculty members.

The findings revealed that while student-faculty partnerships offered significant benefits such as skill development and enhanced engagement, they also presented challenges related to time management and communication barriers. Moreover, these partnerships positively impacted academic performance and fostered a sense of belonging among participants.

Discussion

The findings from this study revealed a nuanced understanding of student-faculty partnerships in higher education, aligning with and, in some cases, challenging existing literature on the subject. The positive experiences reported by students, such as skill development, enhanced understanding of pedagogy, and increased engagement, corroborate previous research that emphasizes the benefits of collaborative learning environments. For instance, Cook-Sather et al. (2014) highlighted that student-faculty partnerships can foster a sense of agency and ownership among students, which aligns with our findings that students felt more motivated and engaged when their input was valued.

Students in this study articulated how these partnerships not only facilitated their learning but also contributed to the development of essential skills that are critical in both academic and professional contexts. The ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers and faculty, and engage in critical thinking emerged as significant outcomes of their involvement in partnership activities. This finding resonates with the work of Healey et al.

(2014), who argued that partnerships can enhance students' employability by equipping them with transferable skills.

Moreover, the challenges identified, such as time constraints, communication barriers, and cultural resistance, are similar concerns raised in the literature. Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) noted that while pedagogical partnerships have the potential to transform educational practices, they often face obstacles stemming from traditional power dynamics and institutional inertia. Our findings reinforced this notion, as many students expressed frustration with faculty members who were reluctant to embrace collaborative approaches. This resistance can hinder the effectiveness of partnerships and limit their potential benefits.

Interestingly, the impact of partnerships on learning outcomes was particularly pronounced in our study. The correlation between high levels of involvement in partnerships and improved academic performance supports the assertion made by Bovill et al. (2016) that active engagement in collaborative activities can lead to better academic results. Students who reported higher engagement levels also described a greater sense of belonging within their academic communities, which has been shown to correlate positively with retention rates (Tinto, 2012). This finding underscores the importance of fostering environments where students are encouraged to participate actively in their learning processes.

Implications for Practice

The insights gained from this study offer several recommendations for faculty and institutions aiming to foster effective student-faculty collaborations. To mitigate communication barriers, institutions should prioritize establishing clear channels for dialogue between students and faculty. This could involve regular check-ins or feedback sessions where expectations are discussed openly. Faculty training programs should also emphasize the importance of transparency in partnership roles. Creating a structured framework for communication can help bridge gaps between students and faculty, ensuring that both parties have a shared understanding of goals and responsibilities.

Given the time constraints reported by students, institutions should design flexible engagement opportunities that allow for meaningful participation without overwhelming academic workloads. This might include integrating partnership activities into existing course structures or offering extracurricular programs that promote collaboration. For example, faculty could incorporate project-based learning

assignments where students collaborate on real-world problems while receiving guidance from instructors.

Institutions should work towards cultivating a culture that values reciprocity in student-faculty relationships. This involves recognizing and rewarding faculty who actively engage with students as partners in the learning process. Professional development programs could highlight successful partnership models and encourage faculty to adopt similar practices. By fostering an environment where both students and faculty learn from each other, institutions can create a more dynamic educational experience.

To address cultural resistance among faculty, institutions must support change initiatives that promote pedagogical partnerships. This could involve institutional policies that encourage collaborative teaching practices or funding opportunities for projects that integrate student input into curriculum design. Leadership at all levels should advocate for these changes to ensure that collaborative practices are embedded within institutional culture rather than viewed as optional or supplementary.

Institutions should implement mechanisms for regularly evaluating the effectiveness of student-faculty partnerships. Collecting feedback from both students and faculty can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that partnerships remain dynamic and responsive to the needs of all participants. Surveys or focus groups could be utilized to gather insights on what aspects of partnerships are working well and what challenges persist.

Faculty should actively seek out student feedback during curriculum development processes to ensure that course content aligns with student interests and needs. By involving students early in these discussions, educators can create courses that are more relevant and engaging for learners. Institutions might consider developing mentorship programs where experienced faculty mentor newer instructors on best practices for engaging students as partners in learning. These mentorship relationships can facilitate knowledge transfer regarding effective collaboration strategies. By implementing these recommendations, higher education institutions can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that empower both students and faculty to collaborate meaningfully.

This study has contributed valuable insights into the dynamics of student-faculty partnerships in higher education. The alignment of our findings with existing literature reinforces the importance of

fostering collaborative learning environments while also highlighting the challenges that must be addressed to realize their full potential. By prioritizing effective communication, flexibility, reciprocity, institutional support, ongoing evaluation, incorporating student feedback into curriculum design, and developing mentorship programs, educators can enhance pedagogical partnerships and ultimately improve educational outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

The implications drawn from this research extend beyond individual experiences; they suggest a transformative potential for higher education as a whole when institutions embrace collaborative pedagogical models. By recognizing students as active partners rather than passive recipients of knowledge, educators can cultivate a more engaging and enriching educational experience that prepares all participants for success in an increasingly complex world.

Future Research Directions

While this study has contributed valuable insights into the dynamics of student-faculty partnerships, further research is necessary to continue enhancing these collaborations in higher education. Future investigations could explore several areas: Conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of student-faculty partnerships on academic performance and career outcomes would provide deeper insights into the sustainability and effectiveness of these collaborations over time.

Future research could examine how disciplinary contexts influence the nature and effectiveness of pedagogical partnerships. Understanding how different fields approach collaboration may reveal best practices tailored to specific academic environments.

Investigating how engaging in partnerships affects faculty development and teaching practices would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the reciprocal benefits of these collaborations. This could include examining changes in faculty attitudes toward teaching and learning as a result of student engagement. Further studies should consider the perspectives of diverse student populations, including those from underrepresented backgrounds. Exploring how different identities and experiences shape students' engagement in partnerships can inform more inclusive practices.

With the increasing integration of technology in education, future research could explore how digital tools facilitate or hinder student-faculty partnerships. Understanding these dynamics will be crucial as

institutions continue to adapt to evolving educational landscapes. Examining the role of institutional policies in supporting or obstructing pedagogical partnerships would provide insights into how higher education institutions can create environments conducive to collaboration.

By pursuing these avenues for future research, scholars can continue to build on the foundation established by this study, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of pedagogical partnerships in higher education.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively examined undergraduate and graduate students' perspectives on pedagogical partnerships in higher education. The findings highlighted several key insights that underscore the significance of these collaborations in enhancing educational experiences.

Firstly, students reported numerous positive experiences stemming from their involvement in partnerships, including skill development, enhanced understanding of teaching methodologies, and increased engagement in their learning processes. These findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the transformative potential of student-faculty collaborations (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Bovill et al., 2016). Students expressed that their active participation fostered a sense of agency and ownership over their educational journeys, which is crucial for their academic success and personal growth.

However, the study also identified several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of these partnerships. Time constraints, communication barriers, and cultural resistance from faculty were significant obstacles reported by participants. These challenges echo concerns raised in prior research regarding traditional power dynamics and institutional inertia that can impede collaborative efforts (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

Moreover, the impact of partnerships on learning outcomes was noteworthy. The correlation between high levels of engagement in partnerships and improved academic performance supports the assertion that active participation in collaborative activities can lead to better educational results (Bovill et al., 2016). Additionally, students reported a heightened sense of belonging within their academic communities as a direct result of their involvement in these partnerships, which is essential for fostering retention and motivation (Tinto, 2012).

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Zhejiang Normal University: College of Education (Protocol code: 20210069). The research adhered to ethical standards concerning the treatment of human subjects, ensuring that all participants were aware of their rights and the purpose of the study.

Consent for Publication

All authors have consented to the publication of this manuscript. Additionally, participants provided consent for their anonymized data to be included in the study findings.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets generated and analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. All materials used in the research, including questionnaires and measurement tools, can also be made available for replication.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this research and no financial or personal relationships that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

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