



Qualitative Study on Leveraging McGregor's Theory in ... Aliyu, K. H. & Hassan, I. (2026)

Qualitative Study on Leveraging McGregor's Theory in Managing Co-Curricular Activities at Secondary School Level of Education in Nigerian

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Abstract

In today's rapidly evolving world, students are expected to excel not only in academics but also in a broad range of life skills that prepare them for real-world challenges. Therefore, this paper examines the application of McGregor's Theories X and Y in the implementation of Co-curricular activities in schools. The primary aim was to align the roles of teachers and co-curricular coordinators with contemporary management principles that enhance student engagement and participation. The study critically explored the core assumptions of both theories, highlighting their relevance to educational leadership. Theory X, which assumes that individuals inherently dislike work and require external control, is contrasted with Theory Y, which posits that individuals are self-motivated and thrive under supportive, participatory leadership. These theoretical orientations were analyzed about how co-curricular activities are planned, implemented, and supervised in school environments. The study revealed that the participatory and motivational qualities of Theory Y closely align with the objectives of co-curricular activities, which demand creativity, initiative, collaboration, and student-centered engagement. Consequently, the paper concluded that for optimal outcomes in student development and holistic education, school leaders and activity coordinators should adopt the flexible, empowering strategies of Theory Y, while selectively drawing on Theory X in situations that require structure and discipline.

Key words: Co-Curricular Activities, McGregor's theory

Introduction

Education is fundamental for manpower and national development. Thus, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, through the National Policy on Education, adopts education as a vital instrument for individual development and integration into a functional society. In addition, education fosters the worth and development of individuals, and for their sake and the general development of society. The purpose of education is to prepare students for the culture of society. UNESCO (2015) stated that education is a lifelong process aimed at man power development, intellectually, morally, socially, and emotionally developing individuals. Musakanya and Chanda (2024) affirm that the true essence of education lies in its ability to prepare students for life, not just examinations. The 21st century poses complex challenges for education, requiring a shift in focus from simply preparing students to develop adapt, creative, and critical-thinking individuals who can drive innovation and societal progress. Most tradition and nearly all contemporary educators acknowledge that education involves more than merely helping pupils memorize facts, numbers, and skills. Schools serve as institutions where specialized training is systematically delivered in subject areas that individuals may not readily acquire through everyday life experiences. In many educational systems, school activities are broadly categorized into curricular and co-curricular components. Curriculum can be defined as the document, plan, or blueprint for instructional guidance that is used for teaching and learning to bring about positive and desirable learner behaviour change (Offorma, 2014). This definition refers to the formal curriculum, which is planned ahead of time, bearing in mind the characteristics of the curriculum recipients, the philosophy and goals of education (reflecting the culture of the people), the environment, the resources, methods of teaching, and evaluation procedures. It is the road map to the attainment of the goals of education. It also focused on structured academic instruction. While the latter serves as a platform for non-academic learning. Thus, it is believed that co-curricular activities are a crucial component of the educational process. In the formal school system, co-curricular activities are carried out at the basic, post-basic, and tertiary institution levels.



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Chalageri and Yarriswami (2018) described co-curricular activities as activities designed to occur outside regular classroom settings to boost students' overall development. It plays a significant role in reinforcing and enriching the academic curriculum. Dastyar (2018) asserted that co-curricular involvement enhances creativity and interpersonal relationships. Lim eta (2018) observed that participation in these activities contributes to emotional well-being and self-expression. According to Hinds (2014), unlike the academic curriculum, co-curricular activities focus on nurturing cooperation, responsibility, and leadership in a collaborative environment.

The National Policy on Education (2016) states that co-curricular activities are sports, clubs, and societies, which are important instruments for character training and should be positively encouraged. Students must join one club, a Game, and a society. In Nigeria, despite the policy direction, co-curricular activities have not been effective in supporting the formal curriculum that takes place in the school. The planning of co-curricular activities falls under the responsibility of the school's management. They must also advocate for the effective implementation of educational tasks and act as mentors (Primasatya & Imron, 2020). Similarly, educators in schools play crucial role in implementing co-curricular activities. Berhanu (2019) highlighted that in many African countries, the implementation of co-curricular activities is fraught with logistical and administrative hurdles. According to Batool and Raiz (2019), even when programmes are available, their implementation is often ad hoc and lacks strategic alignment with students' developmental needs. Gender, teacher qualification, school location, and school type are also critical factors affecting the success of co-curricular activities in different contexts (Ibrahim, 2016; Hill, 2015; Doyin, 2012). Teachers should be aware of their responsibilities in executing these activities. The global educational landscape is rapidly evolving, with an increasing emphasis on holistic human development. This dynamic necessitates a more strategic approach to co-curricular activities. Coordinators must move beyond traditional methods and effectively leverage both human and material resources, both within and outside the school environment, to achieve optimal student outcomes and to align the roles of teachers and co-curricular coordinators with contemporary management principles that enhance student involvement. The Theory X, which assumes individuals inherently dislike work and require external control, while Theory Y, which posits that individuals are self-motivated and thrive under supportive, participative leadership. To this end, the application of relevant management theories is crucial for the successful implementation and oversight of co-curricular programs in secondary schools.

The Emergence of Theory X and Theory Y

McGregor, a social psychologist, made significant contributions to management at the age of 58. He was the first to name concepts associated with him and sought to understand how human variables influenced organizational behavior and outcomes. His seminal thought continues to influence various management sectors today. McGregor's 'Conventional View' of management tasks, or Theory X, emphasizes the duty of management to organize, direct, control, and modify employee behavior to prevent passive resistance to work, a concept often taught in business schools.

The underpinnings of this view were, as argued by McGregor (1957), that people were averse to working, lacked ambition and a desire for responsibility, were selfish, resistant to change, and gullible. Therefore, the conventional wisdom was that people needed to be, indeed preferred to be, led by others. In response to these assumptions, management style then resulted in the 'hard' and 'soft' management approaches. The 'hard' approach was coercive, requiring close supervision and tight control, which often resulted in resistance and obstruction, and a 'soft' approach which was seen as resulting in the abdication of management and indifferent performance. The popular strategy then which was developed amongst managers, was "firm but fair (McGregor, 1957). In contrast to Theory X, or the conventional approach to management, McGregor (1957) proposed an alternative approach based on more adequate assumptions about human nature, which he called Theory Y. In this perspective, management's role is not simply direction, but in organising the resources for an enterprise to meet its objectives, whether they be human or material. People are not passive, and it is the responsibility of management to provide opportunities for the development of their employees, to release their potential by creating the conditions so that people can harness their efforts to achieve organisational objectives. The scientific movement, in an attempt to get the work done quickly and cheaply, means dehumanized the worker and encouraged mechanical behaviours. That is why the behaviour of the early co-curricular activities coordinators was autocratic and bossy. They could fire and discipline the students who engaged in the activities as they feel. The principle of theory X in human management follows these early scientific movements propounded by Fredrick Tylor.



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The human relations movement is a radical change from scientific management. Contributors like Mayo (1933, 1945), Follett (1940) are regarded as the father of the human relation movement. The movement is based on the building and maintenance of dynamic harmonious human relations. They came out with a lot of ideas about human responsibilities in the industry after the Elton Mayo famous studies at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company near Chicago, that both the psychological and sociological factors must be considered, so as to get huge productivity from the workers; such as morale, job satisfaction, team spirit and acceptance. They emphasized that organization is a complex social group and require expert handling to achieve it best desire. This principle is linked with theory Y.

The Basic Assumptions of Theory X

McGregory (1960), Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) attempted to provide a framework for proper management of organization goals, came out with the followings about man.; (i) An average individual is naturally lazy and thus has an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it, if possible; (ii) An average human being is dependent, unimaginative and shortsighted. He therefore must be controlled and directed to achieve organizational goals; (iii) An average human being is irresponsible; (iv) An average individual has fixed or set ways of doing things (v) An average individual is resistant or hostile to authority and leadership; (vi) An average human being wishes to avoid responsibilities, has little ambition but above all seeks security.

Based on these assumptions about workers; Waston (1966) suggested the following corresponding administrative policies using theory X; (i) That the people are lazy naturally and avoid work. Therefore, the administrator should drive and coerce them to work; (ii) That people are dependent, therefore the administrator should direct them (iii) That people are generally irresponsible, therefore the administrator should mount a control over them (iv) That people are short-sighted; therefore the administrator should plan for them (v) That people have fixed or set ways of doing things; therefore, the administrator should encourage routine procedures in work.

Theory X as Applied to Co-Curricular Activities

Theory X is in line with the formal propagators of co-curricular activities in Nigeria, put into practice as a relationship between the coordinators and students. This is usually referred to as the pedagogy.

In the pedagogical situation, the administrator, coordinator, or instructor is the king. He is bossy and autocratic, and he sees others as subordinates, who cannot think for themselves and are always trying to run from responsibilities, unless they are forced or coerced. The pedagogical coordinator in co-curricular activities is the one who knows what is best for the students, decides what to do, controls their relationship, directs the activities, sets standards of performance and test performance with outputs, and rewards the participants with materials.

The following are some of the assumptions of coordinators about co-curricular activities.

1. They cannot direct themselves unless they depend upon the coordinators.
2. That student has little experience and that the activities of co-curricular cannot be based on the experience of the students.
3. The needs of the co-curricular activities in schools should be established by the coordinator and the Ministry of Education because the students cannot diagnose their immediate needs.
4. The orientation of students in co-curricular activities have be geared for future purposes, that the students should master the activities, which needs to be put into used later.
5. That instructor or coordinator has to evaluate the students and award a reward at the end.

The application of theory X alone has not solved any co-curricular activities problems. It has, instead, led to the failure of the various co-curricular activities geared towards making the student all-round development. Unfortunately, co-curricular activities are out of reach for the vast majority of pupils. There are times when people are uninterested, when they are too busy, when they cannot afford to participate, when they live in a remote village, when they are denied a chance, and when they do not see any value in taking part (Castano & Kelly, 2012). Even those who engaged in co-curricular activities are often disengaged, because their immediate needs and interest are not considered. These have been the reason for the various philosophical principles which sought for radical change to the theory Y of McGregor.

Basic Assumptions of the Theory Y

McGregor (1960) basic assumptions in theory Y include the following:



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1. That man will exercise self-direction and self-control toward an organizational goal, if he is committed to them.
2. That the average person can learn to accept and seek responsibility.
3. That creativity, ingenuity, and imagination are wide spread among people and do not occur only in a selected few.
4. That commitment is a function of rewards. The best rewards are the satisfaction of ego and self-actualization.
5. That people are not lazy, but the environment makes them so; if the environments are conducive, that physical work and mental work are as natural as play.

Again Watson (1966) suggested the corresponding administrative policies about human behavior in organization, using theory Y:

1. That people are independent, therefore the administrator should allow them to direct themselves.
2. That people are naturally active and enterprising, therefore the administrator should provide good leadership and motivation.
3. That people can identify with you and have loyalty, therefore the manager gives the co-operation and support.
4. That people like to take up responsibility, therefore the manager should trust them.
5. Those workers are capable of broad vision and long view; therefore, the administrator should plan and take decision with them.

Theory Y as Applicable to Co-Curricular Activities

Based upon the theory Y, the following assumption was made

1. That student becomes more experienced over time. This accumulated experience made them qualitatively different from the others who are not engaged. The basic knowledge should be used in the implementation of Co-curricular activities.
2. That student, as learners, is self-directing; their orientation is towards self-direction. Therefore, the activities given to them are not to give new direction but to help them discover which way to go.
3. That the students have tasted freedom. They are relatively free from the infant. Therefore, students cannot be forced to do things.
4. That student are very much aware of the importance of time and therefore not interested in things that are either general or things of the future, but in a kind of co-curricular activities that will solve present problems.

It can then be asserted that theory Y recognize the students as human being and not as a tool or machine, that can be manipulated to achieve the co-curricular activities objectives.

Based on the forgoing theory X and theory Y in co-curricular activities to achieve its objectives.

1. That student who engaged in co-curricular activities are self-directive, that is, they are independent, people can take initiative on their own without being forced or coerced.
2. Students who participate in co-curricular activities are always ready to function; the degree of their readiness depends upon the task to be performed and the roles to play.
3. That the experiences of the students who are involved in co-curricular activities are a rich source of skill, knowledge, moral beliefs, and confidence.
4. That decision about the selection of co-curricular activities is based on collaborative efforts of both the coordinators and students.
5. The type of co-curricular activities and the objectives are clearly stated. This has led to an increase in students' involvement in co-curricular activities.

Conclusion

School administrators play a vital participatory role in the successful implementation of co-curricular activities. Their engagement goes beyond mere supervision; they actively consult with students, involve them in decision-making processes, and jointly determine the nature and direction of the activities to be undertaken. This inclusive approach not only fosters a sense of ownership among students but also promotes the development of self-direction and autonomy, which are essential attributes for lifelong learning and personal growth. Moreover, effective school administrators clearly define the objectives of co-curricular programs, establish measurable goals, monitor the performance of participants, and provide timely and constructive feedback. Such practices help in aligning the activities with educational outcomes and ensuring continuous improvement. Importantly, the most effective coordinators of co-curricular activities are those who adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach to leadership. They skillfully integrate elements from both directive and participatory theories,



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adapting their strategies to the specific challenges and needs that arise. By employing whichever approach is best suited to address immediate concerns whether it requires firm guidance or collaborative problem-solving these coordinators are able to maintain a balanced and responsive leadership style that enhances both student engagement and programmes success.

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