

# Effectiveness of Student Involvement Theory Through Co-Curricular Development in College Context: Enhancement of Societal Transformation

**BK Sebake**

Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

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**Abstract:** Higher Education Institutions in South Africa and elsewhere in the world aspire to produce well rounded graduates that feed into active sectors of the society and add value. Apart from the above, students at universities and colleges are supposed to be at the cutting edge of innovation through balancing their academic life, and outdoor learning activities in order to balance amongst others, their psychological, intellectual and social beings. In light of the above, *student involvement theory* provides an opportunity to inculcate and assert both the theoretical grounds and empirical nature through utilisation of co-curricular development to contribute in a journey of societal transformation, with important pillars being: cultural awareness, social development and justice, and diversity. The fundamental enquiry of the paper is whether in the journey of this transformation, is student involvement theory effective and co-curricular activities have impact on the contribution towards societal transformation and how? The attention will be drawn from conceptual framework of student involvement theory, framework models of co-curricular, effectiveness of outdoor learning activities towards personal development, quality student engagements, and quality promotion in co-curricular activities. The above assist in affirming the importance of co-curricular activities in complementing the quality student experience, which in turn *student involvement theory* will be proven effective within universities and college context. The paper is conceptual in nature through analysis of the desk top literature and testing the empirical evidence in order to assess the effectiveness, with conclusion to be made without any recommendation.

**Keywords:** Co-curricular development, Cultural awareness, Diversity Student involvement theory, Transformation, Well-rounded graduates

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## 1. Introduction

Universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in their own nature constitute communities that should provide all the necessary support to its students to grow and develop. This assumption is always interpreted against the background that academic activities are the only methodological essence of entrenchment of student involvement theory in college or university context. However, the paper argues that the thinking that co-curricular activities provide opportunities to complete the cycle of development of a graduate, which contributes to transformation of any country. At first, it is necessary to relate the student involvement theory with the behavior of the customers in which, in this instance, students are the major customers that require that attention. Beatty, Homer & Kahle (1988) state that there are still inconsistencies and ambiguities in the conceptualisations of student involvement theory, along with a sparsity of empirical work in the area, and further, the usefulness of this body of knowledge to managers has received little attention. The

student involvement theory draws its epistemological conceptual grounds from empirical work, which in this instance, co-curricular constitutes the empirical grounds that espouse the theory of student involvement. It is also important to assert the agenda of co-curricular as designed model of entrenching student engagements that espouse graduate philosophy of the colleges and universities. Finelli, Holsapple, Ra, Bielby, Burt, Carpenter & Sutkus (2012) argue that students' co-curricular experiences (e.g. participation in student organisations, project teams, or community service) supplement their formal instruction and have also been shown to be related to ethical development. This instrument assesses student characteristics, curricular and co-curricular experiences related to ethics, and three constructs of ethical development (i.e. knowledge of ethics, ethical reasoning, and ethical behaviour). The essence of co-curricular in the college set-up creates an opportunity for social cohesion which, at the same time, deepens the ethical development on the basis that all activities in this area have rules that are applicable. It is the view of the author that the student involvement

theory aspires to deepen compliance in a form of understanding the application of rules that constitute informal education, and therefore, ethical development is used to foster transformation of human capital ready to conduct itself within a diverse society. In terms of transformation agenda, higher education is the facilitator, the bedrock, the power house and the driving force for the strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier and industrial development of a nation as higher education institutions are key mechanisms increasingly recognised as wealth and human capital producing industries (Peretomode, 2007; as cited in Asiyai, 2013), further argues that the quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to national competitiveness. The paper further notes that such quality also gets complemented by the outdoor learning activities which provide a different space of learning and nurturing of talents. The emphasis is provided on how these co-curricular are effective to both theoretical and empirical work to forge or ponder transformation in the society.

## **2. Student Involvement Theory: A Conceptual Framework**

The theory on student involvement has been observed as extensively written by Austin (1984) as an important instrument that articulates learning through actions of the students as customers themselves. This theory is emphatic on students taking ownership for their own development. In keeping track of the paper, the co-curricular conceptual framework seeks to advance a groomed graduate that is culturally aware, socially able, and embrace diversity where it emerges. After careful consideration, these co-curricular development activities build a character of a graduate that any college or university in the world wishes to produce. In observing the literature on student involvement theory Austin (1984) states that student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organisations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. The narrative above suggest that students get involved in academic activities and such alone will not complete quality engagements, but suffocate students, in which co-curricular ground students on college or

university campus and feel sense of belonging to a society full of diversity and abundant opportunities, and such students remain active in their learning activities, both academic and outdoor learning activities. The earlier assertion is in conformity with what Austin (1984) suggests, that conversely, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students. From the conceptual point of view, student involvement theory validates yet another assumption that higher failure may be apportioned to a lack of involvement, which ultimately increases a drop-out rate in any college and university. The concept of student involvement theory postulates that no amount of involvement on one side (academic or co-curricular) may solemnly succeed to transform human capital ready to transform any society than both areas of learning co-delivering quality graduate to the society.

In the literature of student involvement from the international perspective, there is an indication that students who are involved in their own development persist on their success and knowledge at all times. According to Vincent Tinto (1993, as cited in Berger & Milem, 1999), also supports the role of student involvement in promoting positive educational outcomes for college students. Moreover, he emphasizes the need to better understand the relationship between student involvement and the impact that involvement has on student persistence. Involvement has also been shown to have specific benefits for various subgroups of students on campus, particularly for students from underrepresented populations. For example, Davis (1991, as cited in Berger & Milem, 1999) found that increased interaction with peers and faculty, along with increased involvement in organised activities, leads to a lower dropout rate for African-American students. The above assertion represents the philosophical assumption of Austin's theory, which the paper argues that the more students are involved, the more time they spend on campus and get grounded for primary purpose of learning, both academic and outdoor activities. An interesting pedagogies of student involvement theory where identified by Austin, however, one interesting thematic trail is the content theory, in particular, tends to place students in a passive role as recipients of information. The theory of involvement, on the other hand, emphasizes active participation of the student in the learning process. Recent research

at the pre-collegiate level (Rosenshine, 1982 as cited in Austin, 1984) has suggested that learning will be greatest when the learning environment is structured to encourage active participation by the students. The co-curricular in this instance represents a stimulus of students' mental and physical readiness for academic activities, which complete the cycle of learning within the college and universities, which also invokes the essence of physical education as a pedagogy through its own activity arrangement asserts cultural awareness, social development and justice; and diversity. Student involvement theory from the philosophy of learning completes a well-rounded graduate that ponder transformation in the society.

### **3. Narrative Trends on Co-Curricular Development Framework**

The co-curricular in colleges and universities have been treated as activities by choice of students, which is problematic in the context of enabling each space for learning. At the very moment, the current debate particularly in African colleges and universities is to transcend our mind to move from extracurricular activities to co-curricular. This movement constitutes a framework of transformation in higher education, which is transcending very slowly in the minds of particularly senior management in higher education. King and Anderson (2004) in conformity with the assertion of the paper argue that they (as authors) made acceptance of the belief that it is the student who is primarily responsible for this development. However, it is important in this section to keep up with focus in order to interrogate the framework models for co-curricular, which King and Anderson (2004) argue that the co-curricular activities program model provides guidance for the student affairs practitioner in developing learning environments that nurture student involvement in a variety of creative ways. This approach requires the support of administrators who are experienced facilitators of cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development and who possess strong theoretical knowledge. The co-curricular in this instance, is noted as strong theoretical framework, which plays an important role to model activities towards transforming human capital that is ready to cope with diverse cultural and socio-political space in the society. The earlier assertion goes with what is the kind of the individuals that understand what the society's model of transformation is, and ensure that the theoretical conceptual frameworks changes

to attract suitable outstanding individual who are at the cutting edge of transformation of the society.

Interestingly about the framework model of learning, a closer look at the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) model was established, which was made to be compulsory for some reasons. Ferns, Campbell and Zegwaard (2014) state that students come to tertiary education to pursue an interest in a subject but aside from some vague notions hold unclear views about future careers. Work placements allow students an opportunity to work alongside an established practitioner in their field of study and to engage with an authentic workplace of practice. Ferns, Campbell and Zegwaard (2014) further argue that WIL is the term most often used within the Australasian context, and increasingly globally, to identify the myriad experiences that engage students in the workplace. The argument of the author is that the framework of WIL makes it compulsory for students in colleges and universities to undergo, however, as it relates to co-curricular development, the model used for WIL may come handy in advancing the importance of these outdoor learning activities and start enjoying the same amount of significance as the WIL program. Cooper, Orrell, and Bowden (2010) posit that the demand for work-ready graduates, who are familiar with organisational practices in the workplace is increasing, and so the need for greater work integrated learning is a growing concern for the education sector. From the above assertion, co-curricular activities demand has also grown significantly, but the challenge is the finalisation of recognition of its significance to co-deliver the well-rounded graduate. This requires fundamental and persistent research and more theoretical innovation to justify framework model for the co-curricular activities that are bound to quality promotions standards. The framework model is intended to ensure that the outcomes based results in all universities, which represent the bedrock of teaching and learning.

### **4. Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning Activities**

The effectiveness of these activities is assessed in terms of contribution towards personal development in order to create focus of the paper. While outdoor learning activities remain part of physical education. Gatzemann, Schweizer and Hummel (2008) state that, in principle, the effects of outdoor education activities emphasizing the body

can also be expected of indoor activities, especially nowadays with practical scenarios for activities of outdoor education in physical education. The author posits that any element that enriches both the mind and the body provides opportunity for effective grooming of human capital. This assumption is made precisely to empower developmental aspects of students in any college and university. In the quest to argue the effectiveness of the outdoor learning activities, the author argues that these activities are experimentally designed in nature and therefore, any learning opportunity that is experimental is effective on the basis of providing physical results in terms of its effectiveness. The argument of the author is informed by the assumption that physical activity assists in measuring extend of individual involvement in devoting both mental and physical energy into the activity at hand. The above invoke the conceptual analysis of learning, which (Calhoun, 1996) suggests that the concepts "learning", "personal development", are inextricably intertwined and inseparable. Higher Education traditionally has organised its activities into "academic affairs" (learning curriculum, classroom, and cognitive development) and "student affairs" (co-curriculum, student activities, residential life, affective or personal development).

Calhoun (1996) continues the narrative that this dichotomy has little relevance to post-college life, where the quality of one's job performance, family life, and community activities are all highly dependent on cognitive and affective skills. However, the paper argues that the academic and student affairs aspects of learning in a college or university context shapes an individual into a transformed human asset that asserts a progressive and ethical agenda in all odds of life, the earlier assertion is confirmed by (Calhoun, 1996) who further argues that experiences in various in-class and out of class setting, both on and off the campus, contribute to learning and personal development. The personal development ethos creates capacity and experience on leadership, creativity, citizenship, ethical behaviour, self-understanding, teaching and monitoring. In the author's view, co-curricular also assist in building graduate attribute in a sense of asserting civic responsibility in a graduate, this is informed by the nature of designed co-curricular activities that are presented on voluntary basis and in most cases, no assessment to build in to the academic modules thus far, but interestingly, more significant number shows interest to participate. Nicol

(2010), in affirming the earlier assertion, suggest that Higher Education institutions should focus their efforts primarily on developing in student's ability to critically evaluate the quality and impact of their own work, and for that to happen, both self-assessment and peer review must play a more prominent role in the curriculum. Developing this "core attribute" is the key purpose of a university education, it is necessary for productive engagements in employment and for engagement in civic responsibilities beyond the university. The literature reviewed confirm that co-curricular is effective in the co-deliverable of graduate with attributes that are designed by the philosophy of Higher Education globally and that of the universities and colleges in particular. What is lacking at this stage is assessment models, which will confirm the extent of outdoor learning effectiveness.

## 5. Quality Student Engagements

The concept of quality student engagements requires a deeper analysis to the degree, which an engagement is valued as that of quality. This is against the bedrock of lack of assessment and standards in the performance of co-curricular activities. However, the stages of interest in co-curricular activities are those of mass participation, and elite levels of participation. These key concepts are identified to guide the dialectical disclosure of quality student engagements. Coates (2005) states that as the principles and practices of quality assurance are further implanted in higher education, methodological questions about how to understand and manage quality become increasingly important. The author argues that that assessment standards present predicament in co-curricular activities or development, which question the standards in this area. The empirical evidence notes that, at this stage, each university or college attempts to use its own standards to define quality, which is problematic in formalising the essence of quality in this area of learning.

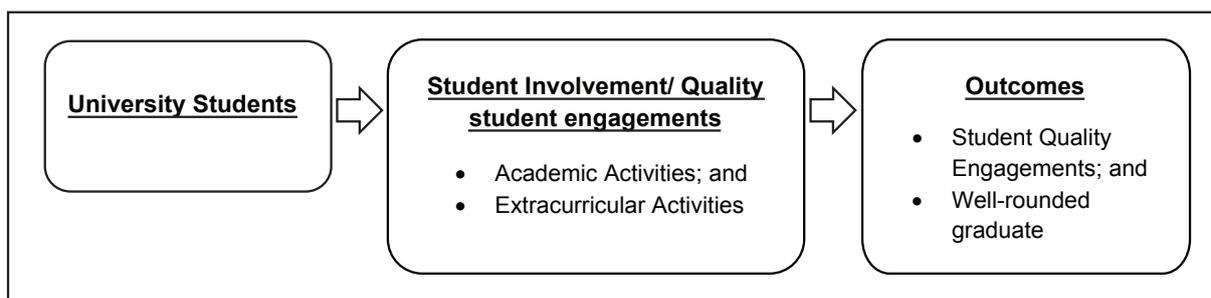
The evolution of the theoretical construct, in the 1970's, drawing on thirty years of his own research, Pace (1990) developed the College Student Experiences Questionnaire, which was based on what he termed "quality of effort". Pace (1990) showed that students gained more from their studies and other aspects of the college experience when they invested more time and energy in educationally purposeful tasks: studying, interacting

with their peers and teachers about substantive matters, applying what they are learning to concrete situations and tasks, and so forth (Pace, 1990; as cited in Kuh, 2009). It is arguable that Austin student involvement theory, creates a platform for the empirical outcomes which quality has to be determined out of it. Therefore, theory in the analysis of the author represents a cornerstone for quality engagements within the context of co-curricular development.

In the analysis of the quality student engagement, it is necessary to rethink holistic development of students as part of a strategic approach to navigate quality student engagement. It is also necessary to note that holistic development assists in the enhancement of social construct. Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) state that social construction of identity occurs in different contexts on campus such as on how student organisations are created and which students are drawn to them, or in the social identities among those in leadership positions and those not, as well as on issues of institutional fit within access retention. In the pursued of the argument, it is important to note that enhancing the development of students has long been a primary role of student affairs practitioners. Identity development theories help practitioners to understand how students go about discovering their "abilities, aptitude and objectives" while assisting them to achieve their "maximum effectiveness" (American Council on Education, as cited in Torres, *et al*, 2009). From the earlier assertion, one could immediately pick up and interesting thematic trail being at the cutting edge of addressing the element of quality in student engagements. It is therefore, that the epistemological existence of quality in student engagement is that which provide a theoretical context, which ultimately informs a practitioner of the expected outcomes of the quality engagement. It is also interesting that the

empirical nature of co-curricular activities provides yet a scientific space to develop the body of knowledge that narrates quality engagements. Shek (2010) notes that many researchers suggest that building cognitive, academic, social, and emotional competence is a fundamental task, with reference to the specific assets to be developed, in which (Shek, 2010) proposes five core social-emotional competencies to be targeted in positive youth development programs: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible actions. The author, after careful rethinking informed by the review of the literature, asserts that the quality of student engagements is defined by impact. This impact is measured on how it has transformed students socially and imparted skills that are tools to transform diverse odds of lives. From the research perspective on the enhancement of first year experience, Krause and Coates (2008) argue that engagement is a broad phenomenon that encompasses academic as well as selected non-academic and social aspects of the student experience. At a certain level of analysis, engagement is taken to provide a singularly sufficient means of determining if students are engaging with their study and university learning community in ways likely to promote high quality learning. While student engagement tends to be viewed as a quintessential reflection of learning processes, there is an important sense in which such involvement is one of the more significant outcomes of first year study (Krause & Coates, 2008). The fundamental argument of the author in this regard is that, the more engagements are viewed as meaningful, the more the horizon of the students will grow. It is then necessary to rethink student quality engagements within the context of the student quality experience as the fundamental outcomes of student involvement. In the conclusive argument, Figure 1 illustrates how the quality outcomes are derived:

**Figure 1: Connectivity of Involvement Activities and Outcomes**



Source: Author

The narrative of the connectivity between the academic and extracurricular activities provide basis for enhancement of student experience and contribute effectively to transformation of human capital for the diverse societal challenges, and the essence of their existence translate into the scientific learning within the higher education framework. The interesting theoretical framework that enjoys the narrative of the connectivity of Figure 1 is the social exchange theory. Homans (1961:13 as cited in Cook, Cheshire, Rice & Nakagawa, 2013) defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons. Cost was viewed primarily in terms of alternative activities or opportunities foregone by the actors involved. The author argues that involvement theory has aspects of physical activities with none-physical outcomes that are the indicators of social behavior of students in higher education generally. The influence which the activities and outcomes in terms of the student experience marks the enhancement of quality student experience. In illustrating this thematic trail further as Cook, *et al.* (2013) explain social behaviour and the forms of social organisation produced by social interaction by showing how A's behaviour reinforced B's behaviour (in a two party relation between actors A and B), and how B's behaviour reinforced A's behaviour in return. In a scholarly conclusive reflection note that the outcomes reflect the quality student engagements that is remarkable to influence social behaviour of students at universities and colleges and beyond tertiary live, and therefore is the backdrop of transformation of the society.

## 6. Quality Promotion in Co-Curricular Activities

It is imperative to first provide a theoretical basis of what constitutes quality promotion for co-curricular activities in particular. Green (1994) states that the concern about quality and standards is not new. However, until the mid-1980s, any debate was mainly internal to the higher education system. Green (1994) further states that while education will never, strictly speaking, be a 'free' market, nevertheless an injection of market forces should engender the kind of behaviour, essentially competition for students and resources, which is conducive to greater efficiency. The assumption of the author on quality promotion requires a set of framework and standard of outcomes for co-curricular activities in

higher education sector to ensure return on investments. While quality promotion from the academic point of view marks a conceptual framework of fitness for purpose, which is controlled by Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), and which also claims the status of quality assessment for the overall university offering, but for a long experience, it has concentrated much on quality of fitness for academic programs. The essential component of fitness of the academic programs in this case is defined by addressing learning objectives that should yield specific outcomes.

The emergence of Student Affairs Associations provided platform from conceptual understanding of higher education systems to provide hope to prioritise, what constitutes quality from national framework on co-curricular activities, which Deardorff (2011) argues that one of the first steps in assessment is knowing exactly what is to be assessed. The fundamental methodological challenge in co-curricular activities is that existing professional bodies in pursuance of professionalising student affairs have not acceded to lead in the formalisation of the framework of standards that can be quantified, and therefore, universities and colleges still set their own standards. This dilemma creates a gap into methodological assessment in co-curricular activities. The author notes that quality promotion is a complex, and constantly appealing to many professional associations or bodies with less understanding of what it entails. Altbach & Knight (2007) attest the author's argument by asking an important question on quality assurance in education that the first issue is, are the institutions, companies, and networks that deliver cross-border courses or programs registered, licensed, or recognised by the sending and the receiving countries?

Many countries – lacking capacity or political will – do not have the regulatory systems to register or evaluate out-of-country providers. It is in the context of arriving at assessment of the work done by existing associations of student affairs on how quality assurance has been only important to share platforms in conferences without finalisation of national framework for quality promotion that is quantified in co-curricular activities. In comparison in the world, the existence of National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) brought hope to assessment in student affairs activities in the context of internationalisation. NASPA has been established in 1918, and founded in 1919, with

affiliates around world colleges and universities. In the assessment of one of its major contribution in student affairs practices assessment of impact, and in the same narrative, it is noted that over the past two decades, there have been three multi-institutional studies examining the benefits of Collegiate Recreational Sports (CRS) participation that warrant further review. In a study designed to assess "student involvement and satisfaction with campus recreational programs and facilities, and their relationship to recruitment, retention, outcomes, and satisfaction with the institution" (Bryant, Banta & Bradley, 1995:155, as cited in Forrester, 2015), further posits that students reported the greatest benefits from participating in recreational sports CRS to be: feeling of physical well-being, stress reduction, respect for others, friendships, and self-confidence. Forrester (2014) posits that this specific study, reporting the results from the Recreation and Wellness Benchmark/Survey used as part of the 2013 NASPA Assessment and Knowledge Consortium, represents the most comprehensive effort to date substantiating the impact of participation in campus recreational sports, activities, facilities, programs and services on student recruitment and retention, and various health and wellness as well as student learning outcomes. The NASPA Assessment and Knowledge Consortium is a collection of assessment instruments focused on key areas within Student Affairs. This remarkable project by NASPA provide in-depth analysis that an impact survey becomes one of the most important aspect that assess the quality in co-curricular activities with a framework of variables that provide feedback on the benefits of student involvement, particularly on co-curricular activities.

## 7. Conclusion

Student involvement theory is presented as a leading theory in Higher Education in the world, which the essence of its existence presents an opportunity to justify the impact of co-curricular activities to co-deliver a quality graduate. Interesting element remains transcending administrators in Higher Education from extracurricular to co-curricular development as the first step to transform this section of learning. The question of impact has been presented through how co-curricular activities transform human capital for the society outside the college and university set-up, which aspects of cultural awareness, social development and justice; and diversity, on the basis of its empirical nature.

From the theoretical context, it is conclusive that student involvement theory provides platform for quality student experience, which in the context of student affairs, this would have been impossible without the existence of co-curricular activities. The connectivity was used through Figure 1 in the paper to illustrate the connectivity and its imperatives on transformation of human-beings. The fundamental challenge at the stage is the application of standards as aspect of institutional (colleges and universities) prerogative compromises the aspect of national and international benchmark on quality student engagements in Higher Education system, and this goes against the bedrock that Education is a national social capital, due to its nature decided by institutions of Higher Learning individually. The emergence of a professional association in student affairs is challenged to step up their research and innovative strategies to reaffirm the nobility of co-curricular activities in contributing to the architect of societal transformation. However, one could conclude that at the stage, human capital constitutes one important aspect that the author's view is groomed individual who understand what to transform post-university life, and this has been demonstrated by skills transfers through innovative capacity buildings etc. it is only that more research need to be done in formalising co-curricular development in transforming human minds.

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