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## Applicability of Progressivism to Zimbabwe's Postcolonial Education System

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**Abstract:** Like the rest of Western pedagogies, the theory of progressivism is under the threat of extinction within Zimbabwe's contemporary education system. This is partly because the discourse on philosophy of primary and secondary education in the country resonates with and revolves around the philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu. Progressivism is also facing imminent disappearance from Zimbabwe's teacher education philosophy syllabus because the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development [MoHTEISTD], in collaboration with University of Zimbabwe [UZ], is in the process of reviewing and revamping the country's teacher education syllabi with a view to aligning them to Education 5.0. This Education 5.0 blueprint exalts the heritage-based philosophy, a predilection which warrants the scrapping of Western philosophies-theories like progressivism from Zimbabwe's teacher education syllabus. It is this looming demise of progressivism which perturbs the author since he is of the conviction that progressivism continues to inform Zimbabwe's primary and secondary education significantly. The current textual analysis, therefore, interrogates the applicability of progressivism to Zimbabwe's education system - an undertaking which positions the author to effectively assess justification for the continued study of this theory (progressivism) in the country's teacher education institutions within the postcolonial dispensation. Thus, the author juxtaposes progressivist ideas with aspects of Zimbabwe's education system as encapsulated in Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education for period 2015-2022 [also known herein as Government of Zimbabwe or GoZ (2015) or Curriculum Framework 2015-2022]. Observably, there is strong compatibility between progressivism and Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 as the latter seems to manifest ideas of the former in terms of instructional aims, curriculum, pedagogies, ideal teacher and school system, of course, notwithstanding a few points of dissonance. This discernible congruency, therefore, serves to justify the continued study of progressivism in Zimbabwe's teacher education institutions.

**Keywords:** Language Skills, Logical Thinking Skills, Literature Textbook, 6th Graders, Vietnamese.

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Like the rest of Western theories-philosophies, the theory of progressivism is under the threat of extinction within Zimbabwe's contemporary education system. This is partly because the discourse on the country's philosophical foundation of education resonates with and revolves around *Unhu/Ubuntu* which gained momentum, lately. The above is substantiated by the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education for period 2015-2022 [known herein as Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 or Government of Zimbabwe or simply GoZ (2015)], which decrees that education in Zimbabwe should be informed by *Unhu/Ubuntu* – a philosophy to which the country's values and principles are traced.

The philosophy of education component (module) within Zimbabwe's teacher education programme(s), as offered by associate teachers' colleges under the auspices of University of Zimbabwe, used to encompass both 'philosophies' and 'theories' of education, most of which were Western in origin and flavour. 'Philosophies' per-se included idealism, realism, existentialism and pragmatism whereas 'theories' incorporated progressivism, reconstructionism,

perennialism and essentialism. It is, however, regrettable that the future of these Western pedagogies within Zimbabwe's entire education system looks bleak no matter how erudite they sound. This gloomy future is attributable to the recent developments ushered and spearheaded by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development [MoHTEISTD] in collaboration with University of Zimbabwe [UZ] - developments which are embodied in what is called Education 5.0.

The Education 5.0 blueprint as steered egoistically by the heritage-based philosophy has gained momentum and traction in Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education, within which it is bound to occasion a radical review and revamp of learning experiences (content) through what are called the Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills [MBKSs]. The MBKSs, as informed by the heritage-based philosophy (which, in itself, reclines in *Unhu/Ubuntu*), seem to negate Western theories like progressivism. Thus, like the cognate Western theories and philosophies, progressivism is bound to disappear from the teachers' college philosophy of education syllabus yet it is the author's well considered view that progressivism continues to inform Zimbabwe's education system substantially even in the postcolonial era.

It is against this background that the current reflection explores the relevance of progressivism to Zimbabwe's system of education as encapsulated in Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education for period 2015-202. This positions the author to reflectively appraise the continued study of progressivism in Zimbabwe's teacher education institutions.

### **Problem Postulation**

The author is perturbed by the unmistakable silence within local scholarship about the applicability of progressivism to the theory and practice of education in Zimbabwe and beyond. The author is agitated more by the imminent disappearance of Western philosophies and theories like progressivism from the Educational Foundations (Philosophy) syllabus for teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe as a result of the ongoing introduction of MBKSs ushered by Education 5.0. This textual analysis, therefore, seeks to examine the relevance of progressivism to education, an undertaking which positions the author to meaningfully assess justification for the continued study of this theory in Zimbabwe's teacher education institutions within the postcolonial dispensation.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This reflection is conceived within the context of Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education for period 2015-2022. The aforementioned is a principal document on Zimbabwe's system of education, a brainchild of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education [MoPSE], which encapsulates the country's education system in terms of instructional aims, curriculum content, instructional methodology, model teacher and assessment issues as from Early Childhood Development (Infant Education) to Secondary Education (Advanced Level). The current reflection is also fathomed within the purview of Education 5.0 '...which necessitates the ongoing crafting of MBKSs by the MoHTEISTD through UZ in teacher education programmes, particularly in the Educational Foundations Section which subsumes the Philosophy of Education component.

### **Locating Progressivism within the History of Philosophy**

Many a times, philosophies of education are often conflated with theories of education. This ill-conceived understanding of the two terms has since been legitimated to the extent that it is no longer in the consciousness of many that the two words cannot safely be used interchangeably. To untangle the former from the latter, differences are given hereunder. According to Philos (n.d.), philosophies of education are wide-ranging, systematic, complete and global, whereas theories of education are focused specifically on education, with no complete philosophical system offered. Thus, in core philosophies of education,

components are related to metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and logic, whilst in theories of education, components are related to specifics of education, such as curriculum, teaching and learning. Moreover, in philosophies of education, insights are derived from the general system, whereas in theories of education, insights are derived from philosophies or specific school contexts.

Core philosophies of education include mainly rationalism (modern idealism), realism (modern empiricism), pragmatism and existentialism, whereas theories of education incorporate perennialism, essentialism, Reconstructionism, progressivism and critical theory. This, therefore, highlights the fact that theories of education are not philosophies *qua* philosophies.

Zilversmit (as cited in Philos, undated) confirms that rather than being a comprehensive statement about metaphysics, epistemology, axiology or logic, progressivism is an educational theory which is specific to schooling, curriculum, and teaching and learning. According to Brown and Finn (as cited in Philos, undated), the Progressive Education Association, an American-based organisation that incorporated a number of varieties of progressivism, did not fashion a comprehensive educational philosophy because progressive educators often disagreed about both theory and practice. Thus, progressivism discards itself from being referred to as a philosophy. It, rather, becomes a particular educational theory just like social Reconstructionism, perennialism, essentialism and critical theory. The fact that sometimes theories derive from philosophies denotes that there is a thin dividing line between theories and philosophies of education. Hence, this article does not criminalise any reference to progressivism as a philosophy of education.

The roots of progressivism are traceable to an earlier pedagogy called 'romantic naturalism'. According to Teaching Academy (undated), romantics believed in the natural goodness of humans which is hindered by the urban life of civilisation. Thus, romanticism was a philosophical movement during the age of Enlightenment (roughly 18<sup>th</sup> Century) which emphasised emotional self-awareness as a necessary precondition to improving society and bettering the human condition (Teaching Academy, n.d.). It is, therefore, intimated in Teaching Academy (undated) that romantic naturalism was a student-centred philosophy that focused on meeting the students' learning readiness needs. In line with this philosophy, students had the prerogative to decide what they wanted to learn and, in some cases, the students would be expected to take full responsibility of their learning. Stalwarts of romanticism included naturalists like Jean Jacques Rousseau [1712-1778 A.D.] and Maria Montessori [1870-1952 A.D.]. Confirming the above understanding, Burnett (as cited in Chennault, 2013, p. 129) reports:

Progressive education has its roots in two philosophical camps: romantic naturalism (particularly that of Rousseau) and American pragmatism. Precursors Horace Mann and Henry Bernard demonstrate an interest in the child-centred philosophy of Rousseau and the works of Pestalozzi, a follower of Rousseau and in turn an influence on Froebel and Herbart. Later Dewey's pragmatism joins forces (somewhat uncomfortably) with the romantics, a combination that helped cultivate progressive education.

This demonstrates that John Dewey [1859-1952 A.D.] is not the root originator of progressivism because this theory has earlier manifestations which are traceable to as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century - the era of Jean Jacques Rousseau [1712-1778 A.D.]. Therefore, it is Rousseau "a romantic naturalist" who, as 'the father of progressivism', is known to have stated that "education should be life itself rather than a preparation for living" (Patsanza, 1987, p. 51).

Romantic naturalism, thus, sowed the seeds of progressivism, which is said to have started in the earlier decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a political reform movement spearheaded by such political progressives as Woodrow Wilson, a former US statesman (Zilversmit, as cited in Philos, n.d.). Progressivism also developed as a social reform crusade powered by such social welfare progressives as Jane Adams, again from the USA. According to Zahid *et al.* (2002), progressivism became more popular as from 1929 when the economic depression which hit the USA adversely affected the American education system. Therefrom, the principles underlying progressive education significantly influenced the modern educational theories and practices across the globe.

### **Fundamental Progressive Ideas**

Progressive education arose essentially as a rebellion against traditional schooling (Johnson, as cited in Philos, undated). This is endorsed by Zahid, Zulflqar, Fatima and Ruqayya (2002), who view progressivism as an American pedagogy which emerged as a revolt against the formal-conventional-traditional system of education.

The fundamental progressive thinking holds that there is no ultimate reality, experimental knowledge is real and values are not absolute (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). This connotes that progressivism wants to be without metaphysics, the progressive theory is empiricist in outlook and does not subscribe to the immutability of values, respectively.

According to Johnson (as cited in Philos, undated), progressive educators such as Francis Parker [1837-1902 A.D.], Stanley Hall [1844-1924 A.D.] and William Kilpatrick [1871-1965 A.D.] argued against

mindless routine, rote memorisation and authoritarian classroom management. The most prominent of them all is the American philosopher and educational reformer, Dewey, whose version of progressivism is anchored in pragmatism. According to Zahid *et al.* (2002), Dewey established the Laboratory School in 1896, wherein he introduced progressive methods of teaching. He believed that book learning was no substitute for 'actually doing things', which points to 'learning by doing'.

With particular reference to Mario Fantini (as cited in Patsanza, 1987, p. 45), a traditional classroom which progressives condemned had the following character traits:

- Emphasis on formal environment and human interaction;
- Activity time-schedules prepared and directed by teachers;
- Teacher structures curriculum;
- Teacher provides the sources of learning;
- Furniture type and arrangements follow a standard pattern;
- Whole-class oriented activity predominates;
- Children and visitors segregated;
- Teacher dominant, child subordinate;
- Curriculum planned to cover teachers' lesson plan;
- Dominance of textbooks;
- Teacher controls and is disciplinarian;
- Dichotomised work and play;
- Learning by being taught;
- Grouping for single age;
- Teacher decides who does what and when;
- Child's education the teachers' responsibility; and,
- Emphasis on intellectual development only.

The progressivist condemnation of traditional learning alluded to in the foregoing is substantiated by Brown and Finn (as cited in Philos, n.d.), whose understanding is that progressives generally condemn the traditional elements of authoritarian teachers, book-based instruction, passive memorisation of factual information, isolation of schools from society, and use of physical or psychological coercion to manage classrooms.

Therefore, progressivism is concerned with 'learning by doing', as children learn best by pursuing their own interests and satisfying their own needs (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Thus, progressivism extols a child-centred classroom, which, according to Fantini (as cited in Patsanza, 1987, pp. 48-49), is endowed with the following character traits:

- Informal environment and human interaction;
- Activity duration is child-controlled;
- Teacher structures environment and process;
- Teacher provides guidance, facilitates learning;
- Furniture type and arrangement are based on the child's workshop pattern;
- Individual or small group activity predominates;
- Children and visitors integrated;

- Teacher-pupil interaction is at an individual level;
- Curriculum is planned to meet children's interests;
- Emphasis on abundance of concrete materials for children to manipulate;
- Teacher is non-authoritarian, acts as facilitator;
- No difference between work and play;
- Learning by discovery;
- Grouping for several ages;
- Teacher and children determine pattern for the day;
- Child's education the child's responsibility; and,
- Emphasis on affective, emotional as well as cognitive intellectual skills.

In congruity with this child-centred approach, members of the Progressivist Education Association (although they often disagreed about both theory and practice) generally believed that: the child should be free to develop naturally; interest stimulated by direct experience is the best stimulus for learning; the teacher should be a facilitator of learning; there should be close co-operation between the school and the home; and, the progressive school should be a laboratory for pedagogical reform and experimentation (Brown & Finn, as cited in Philos, undated). The above concurs with Dewey's six principles (cited in Patsanza, 1987, p. 54) which are the cornerstone of progressivism: (1) education should be active and related to the interests of the child; (2) learning should take place through problem-solving projects rather than the absorption of subject matter; (3) education should be life itself rather than a preparation for life; (4) the teacher should act more as a guide than as a figure of authority; (5) the school should encourage cooperation rather than competition; and, (6) only democracy permits the free interplay of ideas and personalities, that is a necessary condition of true growth.

Therefore, progressive education "was usually defined as one that followed a child-centred rather than a subject-centred curriculum" (Chennault, 2013, p. 127). Thus, for progressives, children's readiness and interest, rather than predetermined subjects, shaped curriculum and instruction (Gibboney, as cited in Philos, undated). Thus, child-centred progressives wanted schools in which children were free to experiment, play and express themselves (Gibboney, as cited in Philos, n.d.), quite consistent with the naturalist philosophy which also lays emphasis on free manipulation of the environment and play-way.

The above is endorsed by Cremin 'the historian of education' (as cited in Philos, n.d.), who also adds that child-centred progressive teachers emphasised collaborative learning rather than competition. Hence, more socially-oriented progressives sought to make schools centres of larger social reforms, which manifests Reconstructionism as a cognate educational theory.

### **Aims of Progressive Education and Goals of Zimbabwe's Education System**

Goals of progressivism are less about academia and more about learning life skills (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) embraces this progressivist aim where it declares its inclination towards "preparing learners for life and work in an agro-based economy and increasingly globalised and competitive environment" (p. 6). Moreover, progressive educators want students to become good people as well as good learners (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Progressive education, thus, seeks to churn out graduates of high moral probity. As Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 cherishes the values of discipline, integrity, honesty and *Unhu/Ubuntu*, it certainly incorporates progressivist elements of virtuousness and morality.

Progressivism sounds essentially pragmatic as it seeks to put thought into action. Therefore, as Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 seeks to ensure that learners demonstrate desirable literacy and numeracy skills, including 'practical' competencies necessary for life, it undoubtedly espouses the progressivist 'education with praxis'. In the same vein, progressive education strives to give students experiences to reflect upon (Zahid *et al.*, 2002), hence, the goal is for students to learn to solve problems, or to develop problem-solving ability (Teaching Academy, undated). Likewise, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 commits to preparing graduates of the education system to have problem-solving, among other skills.

It is also the goal of progressive education to enable students to deal with the consequences of their actions (Zahid *et al.*, 2002), which, to some degree, sounds existentialist in flavour. As Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 accentuates citizenship and *Unhu/Ubuntu*, both of which manifest the ideals of 'responsibility' and 'accountability', it indubitably portrays progressivist inclinations. Moreover, the over-arching function of progressive education is to help children grow into happy, moral and efficient human beings (Samkange & Samkange, 2013). Correspondingly, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) "seeks to produce a well-rounded learner capable of contributing meaningfully to the development of the country while leading a fulfilling and happy life" (p. 68).

However, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 seems not to harmonise readily with progressivism as this theory emphatically aims to see freedom and democracy informing education (Philos, n.d.). Thus, the said Curriculum Framework does not go far enough in giving the progressivist type of freedom to the learner in the education process because in Zimbabwe the teacher remains a disciplinarian who directs operations in class. Furthermore, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 seems not to adequately amplify the progressivist notion of

democracy because, in the said Framework, citizenship (which is expected to amplify the democratic aspect) is confined to matters of patriotism, civic virtue (volunteerism) and obedience of state laws.

### **Progressive Curriculum and Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022**

Believing that people learn best from what they consider most relevant to their lives, progressives centre their curricula on the needs, experiences, interests and abilities of students (Zahid *et al.*, 2002; & Teaching Academy, n.d.). This is reiterated by Samkange & Samkange (2013, p. 454), who understand progressives as saying “in order for children to benefit from education it should be related to their needs.” Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) adopts this progressivist ideal of ‘relevance’ which it defines as “the curriculum that addresses the developmental needs of the learner, the community and the nation” (p. 16). To Samkange & Samkange (2013), the main characteristics and principles of the progressive curriculum include the need to reflect the social life and social activities of learners. GoZ (2015) incorporates and manifests this principle of ‘functionality’ where it says “the curriculum addresses real needs and issues and is a tool for promoting competencies for life and work in a global context” (p. 16). The Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 is, therefore, progressive.

The ‘experience curriculum’ underlies progressive education, which is usually defined as one that follows a child-centred rather than a subject-centred curriculum (Chennault, 2013). Thus, the child-centred approach to instruction is at the epicentre of the progressive curriculum. Therefore, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 vividly mirrors the progressivist experience curriculum which resonates with the child-centred approach. This observation is admissible because the said Curriculum Framework principally incorporates the learner-centred approach to teaching and learning - which it calls the Inquiry-based learning - “an approach that aims at nurturing thinking, reflection and problem-solving among learners” (GoZ, 2015, p. 42).

Like romantics, progressives believe that education should focus on the whole student, rather than on the content or the teacher (Teaching Academy, undated). Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 manifests this ideal of holistic education in three ways: (a) through “seeking to produce a well-rounded learner” (GoZ, 2015, p. 68), (b) through the principle of “balance” which refers to “the comprehensive development of all aspects of a personality: intellectual; emotional; social; psychomotor” (p. 15), and (c) through decreeing *Unhu/Ubuntu* to be the underpinning philosophy – a point substantiated by Nziramasanga (1999) who explicitly and categorically defines *Unhu/Ubuntu* as “holistic education” (p. 61).

Progressivism puts primacy on the integrated curriculum (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 manifests this principle of integration which “fosters meaningful linkages among learning areas and subjects that the curriculum offers” (GoZ, p. 15). Furthermore, progressivism accentuates more curriculum diversity and seeks “to interrelate the several subjects of the curriculum in such a way as to enhance their meaning for the child” (Francis Parker, as cited in Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2012, p. 35). Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 showcases this progressivist curriculum diversity as it embodies a plethora of learning areas (and/or subjects) - which constitute the five pathways of STEM, Arts, Humanities and Languages, Design and Technology, and Commercials (GoZ, p. 38). The said curriculum document upholds the progressivist interrelation of subjects through its principle of integration (mentioned earlier) and that of coherence which “refers to the clustering of learning experiences to provide for holistic and comprehensive learning” (GoZ, p. 15).

For age-appropriateness, Rousseau the father of progressivism (as cited in Samkange & Samkange, 2013, p. 455), argues that formal teaching “has to be delayed until the child is ready.” This is endorsed by Patsanza (1987, p. 51) who quotes Rousseau stating that “it is useless to expect a child to indulge in abstract intellectual pursuits until he had reached the age of reason (12-16 years).” This is, however, seen to be contradicted by Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 which provides for abstract intellectual pursuits (though in a diluted fashion) from approximately the age of 4 years, *id est*, from the ECD level.

## **PROGRESSIVE METHODOLOGY AND PEDAGOGICS IN ZIMBABWE**

“The use of group work is a progressive teaching approach based on the interests and needs of the child” (Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2012, p. 40). This is endorsed in Teaching Academy (undated) where it is argued that progressives emphasise on group activity and group problem-solving so that the students learn through cooperative learning strategies. Thus, group work is instrumental in the development of social skills. Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 affirms this progressivist notion of group work where it provides for learners to work collaboratively with classmates and others beyond the school.

Progressives (most prominently Dewey) strongly emphasise the project approach to instruction (Chennault, 2013), wherein learners are allocated into groups each with a task and the teacher serves as a resource facilitator. Working with each group individually, the teacher would suggest sources and help students discover ways of pursuing the project and

solving targeted problems. Thus, the “inquiry-based learning” (GoZ, 2015, p. 42), on which Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 sets a premium, manifests this Deweyan progressive project method. As the curriculum document in question says “teacher is facilitator and coach” (GoZ, 2015, p. 42), it correspondingly views the teacher as a resource facilitator.

Progressives stress learner-centred instruction *id est* “to move the child to the centre of the educative process” (Francis Parker, as cited in Siyakwazi & Siyakwazi, 2012, p. 35). This is endorsed by Samkange & Samkange (2013), who hold that “the child should be the centre of educational planning” (p. 454). In line with the foregoing, Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) argues that “the focus of learning revolves around learners as they engage in the search and discovery of new knowledge” (p. 41). Thus, the said curriculum document, which commits to placing the learner at the centre of learning and teaching, manifests strong progressivist tendencies.

Progressives place emphasis on learning by doing, hands-on projects, experiential learning (Zahid *et al.*, 2002), and field trips (Akinpelu, 1981). Experience represents the core concept of Dewey’s theory of progressivism (Teaching Academy, undated). Correspondingly, Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 accentuates discovery learning which involves problem-solving situations where learners tap from their past experiences or existing knowledge to discover facts and new knowledge. This includes “active hands-on learning opportunities for learners” (Castronova, as cited in GoZ, 2015, p. 42). Thus, the said curriculum’s inclination towards heuristic learning is of a Deweyan progressivist making.

Progressivism recognises favourably the ‘experimentalist’ approach to education – “placing more explicit emphasis on learning through solving real-life problems central to the Tuskegee curriculum – what could be called a project approach” (Chennault, 2013, p. 127). Hence, progressivism identifies strongly with the four stages of experimentalism that include identification of a problem, coming up with a hypothesis, experimental testing and inductive argumentation (Samkange & Samkange, 2013). Progressivism, thus, “stresses that students should test ideas by active experimentation. Learning is rooted in the questions of learners that arise through experiencing the world” (Teaching Academy, undated). This experimentalist outlook is reiterated by Samkange & Samkange (2013, p. 454), who say “according to the philosophy of John Dewey, experimentation by children as they learn allows them to try new ideas.” This connotes that the Deweyan experimentalist approach to instruction is abundantly positioned to harness the learners’ inherently inquisitive minds.

Samkange & Samkange (2013) also submit:

Children should be allowed to discover answers to problems through their interaction with the physical and social environment. Such an approach is seen as developing thinking and problem-solving skills in children. Progressivism in education is seen as promoting creativity and freedom among children. Children should be able to use different tools that support their education. It is not the books that determine what children learn, but rather children have the power to decide (p. 454).

Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 manifests the above-stated progressive experimentalist outlook of education as it places emphasis on discovery, problem-solving, reflective thought (critical thinking) and creativity. However, the said Framework deviates from progressivism as it seems to constrict the learner autonomy implicated in the above quote.

Progressivism recognises understanding and action as the goals of learning as opposed to rote learning, this theory also condemns exclusive reliance on bookish methods of teaching and passive memorisation of factual data (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework 2015-2022, therefore, harmonises with this progressivist exaltation of ‘education with praxis’, which concurs with Lipman’s reflective paradigm of education. Hence, the said Framework (GoZ, 2015) says “the focus will thus be on knowledge generation not just information delivery and treating learners as empty vessels ready to be filled with information” (p. 41). In other words, both progressivism and Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework are wary of the lecture method and indoctrination tendencies.

Use of realia is central in the progressivist class (Samkange & Samkange, 2013). This finds testimony in Montessori [1870-1952 A.D.] (as cited in Patsanza, 1987, p. 52) who “used sensori-motor materials and reality-oriented experiences to accelerate early cognitive development.” Moreover, the playway methods were advocated by Montessori and popularised significantly by Friedrich Froebel [1782-1852 A.D.] (as cited in Patsanza, 1987, p. 53) “Whose major aim of education was the social and individual development of the youngster through directed self-activity that emphasised cooperation, spontaneity, creativity, and joy – the free unfolding of the child’s nature?” Correspondingly, Zimbabwe’s Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) incorporates the progressivist use of realia as it urges the use of “multiple forms of media” (p. 42), and manifests progressivist play way methods in the infant education cycle where the Curriculum Framework in question says “learners achieve outcomes through play and exploration” (p. 30).

### **Progressive Teacher and Teacher in Zimbabwe**

According to Zahid *et al.* (2002), progressives hold that the teacher is a facilitator, guide and counsellor. Thus, the teacher does not present anything himself but motivates learners to discover knowledge on their own. Progressives, therefore, accentuate participatory learning. Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) advocates this progressive model of a teacher where it says "the teacher acts as a co-explorer and facilitator in knowledge discovery in order to arrive at an objective understanding of content and demonstration of skills so acquired" (p. 41). Therefore, like progressivism, the Curriculum Framework in question implores teachers to 'stop teaching and let children learn'.

The progressive teacher should be democratic (Samkange & Samkange, 2013). Thus, progressivism detests the authoritarian teacher (Zahid *et al.*, 2002; Teaching Academy, undated). Hence, progressivism implores the teacher to be non-authoritarian (Patsanza, 1987). In the same vein, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 values "the problem-solving method" which "empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory with practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem" (GoZ, 2015, p. 43). Thus, the empowerment proclivity of the said Curriculum Framework manifests the democratic acumen of Zimbabwe's system of education which calls for a non-authoritarian teacher.

Progressivism says the teacher should not be a disciplinarian because discipline would be derived from the activities the children engage in (Samkange & Samkange, 2013). This is embedded in 'negative learning' - a brainchild of Rousseau the chief romantic naturalist. However, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 does not seem to embrace this romantic view of discipline since it (Curriculum Framework) obliges the teacher to enforce discipline. Moreover, the *Unhu/Ubuntu* philosophy (declared by the said curriculum document to underpin Zimbabwe's education system) incorporates discipline as one of its cardinal values or beliefs, hence the teacher in Zimbabwe cannot afford to be non-disciplinarian.

### **Progressive School and Zimbabwe's School System**

Progressives believe that all children have the right to attend school (Gibboney, as cited in Philos, n.d.), which accentuates the principle of inclusivity. Correspondingly, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) manifests this progressivist notion of inclusivity which it defines as "an education system that takes into account and addresses the different learners' needs and abilities without disadvantaging any group or individual" (p. 15).

Deweyan progressivism views the school as a miniature democratic society in which students can learn and practice the skills and tools necessary for democratic living (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Hence, progressive schools

often seek to free children from conventional restraints and repression. Thus, schools should be seen as agents of democracy. Likewise, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework's shift from didactic teaching to participatory and learner-centred and interactive methodologies implies giving learners a say in the educative process, which constitutes a major enhancement of democratic principles.

Progressivism also condemns the 'four walls' philosophy of education for attempting to isolate instruction from social reality (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). This is confirmed by Dewey (as cited in Patsanza, 1987, p. 54) who takes the relationship between school and larger society a step further with his idea of education as an 'embryonic community'. Thus, Deweyan progressivism envisions the school beyond the 'classroom walls' as a dynamic centre of the community. Compatibly, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) engenders this close relationship between the school and the community where it commits to having "learners work collaboratively with classmates and others beyond the school" (p. 42). Thus, collaborating with others 'beyond the school' depicts the straddling of school and community, which is a progressivist inclination.

The progressive school system has no place for the use of fear or physical punishment as a form of discipline (Zahid *et al.*, 2002). Likewise, Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 (GoZ, 2015) adopts a clause contained in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act 2013, which "emphasises freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (p. 14). The said curriculum document, thus, de-legitimises corporal punishment. Hence, it has a progressivist predilection.

Dewey himself on the whole argues that the school should encourage cooperation rather than competition (Patsanza, 1987). In principle, Zimbabwe's school system as portrayed in Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 encourages this Deweyan cooperative worldview as it puts primacy on group work. In practice, however, the Zimbabwean school is yet to achieve this Deweyan goal of cooperative learning because the country's education as it currently stands is suffused with cut-throat competition whereby learners seek to pass terminal examinations in their individual capacities by whatever means at their disposal – even if it means cheating.

### **A Critique of Progressivism**

Critics of progressivism argue that educational aims are not determined 'by starting from the child', but by establishing what educators and the community consider to be valuable. Besides, to restrict education to what children-learners are interested in is to come up with a very limited conception of education, in-deed limited to trivialities. Thus, children lack life experience

to determine their own interests. Furthermore, the progressivist theory de-emphasises the role of discipline yet children need to learn in a disciplined environment. In the same vein, allowing children to engage in activities at their own pace and at will may create disorder. Moreover, focusing on the approaches as advocated by progressivism may be time-consuming. Additionally, the project method of teaching may require more resources than ordinary approaches. Above all, in most public schools, the number of learners exceeds the ideal thereby making it difficult for the teacher to plan for individual learners as expected in a progressive class (Samkange & Samkange, 2013). Nevertheless, progressivism retains its importance because the foregoing critique does not suffice to dismiss the utmost influence that the progressivist theory has on education in Zimbabwe and beyond.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As emerged from the foregoing, there is strong compatibility between progressivism and Zimbabwe's Curriculum Framework 2015-2022 as the latter seems to manifest ideas of the former in terms of instructional aims, curriculum, pedagogics, ideal teacher and school system. Of course, this is notwithstanding a few points of dissonance between the two (progressivism and Curriculum Framework 2015-2022) and the indication that progressivism propagates *laissez faire* tendencies in class. In fact, progressive ideas are found to be on the whole applicable to Zimbabwe's education system. Hence, the continued study of progressivism in the country's teacher education institutions finds justification. This reflection, thus, exhorts the MoHTEISTD and UZ to rethink their position (that of wanting to excise Western theories) with due sobriety so that they consider restoring progressivism to its rightful place in Zimbabwe's teacher education, especially in the Educational Foundations (Philosophy) syllabus. It should also be noted that the author has no misgivings with *Unhu/Ubuntu* and heritage-based philosophies. What the author recommends is the hybridisation of Western theories of education (like progressivism) with the African worldviews in the mould of *Unhu/Ubuntu* and heritage-based philosophies. Thus, the author recommends the continued study of 'progressivism in context' within Zimbabwe's teacher education institutions, a predisposition which he feels is in the best interests of the country's primary and secondary education sector. This harmonises with eclecticism and the thesis of complementarity, ideals which have the vast potential to deliver a viable and vibrant system of education in a postcolonial and globalising Zimbabwe.

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