

INSIDE NEW PRIMARY CURRICULUM

PHOTOS BY MIRIAM NAMUTEBI

UPDATE

The inclusion of two more subjects and practical assessments will prepare learners for the lower secondary curriculum, **Martin Kitubi** writes.

After 43 years of grading learners according to aggregate scores in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE), the Government has stepped up efforts to phase out the system from Uganda's education framework.

The aggregate grading system, which critics have long described as unfair and overly restrictive, is expected to be scrapped within the next three years and replaced with a letter-grade assessment, similar to what is currently used at the lower secondary school level.

The proposed changes are anchored in a new primary school syllabus through which the Government plans to roll out a revamped competence-based curriculum, replacing the current thematic curriculum.

According to a draft curriculum framework developed by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the new approach will place greater emphasis on practical learning at the primary level, while the number of examinable subjects will increase from four to six.

In addition to integrated science, mathematics, English and social studies (SST), religious education and Kiswahili will be introduced as stand-alone examinable subjects. For decades, religious education has been taught as part of SST.

The draft further indicates that the reforms will also alter time allocation across subjects, strengthen practical skills development, and provide more room for remediation. Other expected changes include alternative curricular pathways, new pedagogical approaches, revised assessment methods and adjustments to implementation structures.

FIRST LADY EXPLAINS

While releasing the 2025 PLE results at State House Nakasero in Kampala on Friday, the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni.



The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, receives the 2025 PLE results from the executive director of UNEB, Dan Odongo (left), and UNEB chairperson Prof. Celestino Obua during the release at State House Nakasero in Kampala on Friday



UNEB chairperson Prof. Celestino Obua

assured the country that the Government is undertaking curricula reviews to improve education.

She said the ministry had embarked on reviewing the primary school curriculum to align it with the revised lower secondary curriculum, whose first cohort will write their Senior Six final exams this year.

"This will also be an opportunity for a review of the way learning in primary education is monitored and assessed," Mrs Museveni said on Friday.

She referred to the 2025 PLE, which emphasised competences, as the best approach because it tests not just knowledge, but understanding and application of facts alike.

The minister said this is the direction the country is taking primarily, to ensure that the learners at this level are equipped to adapt to the requirements of the

competency-based curriculum at Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE).

Mrs Museveni asked teachers to adjust their teaching methods to fit the new realities of competency-based teaching and assessment.

Prof. Celestino Obua, the chairperson of Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), said the change of curriculum, as well as grading, is timely. Obua said it will curb examination malpractice, which he blamed on the pressure for candidates to pass with aggregate four.

"This [aggregate 4], apparently is the gold standard by which parents rank schools. You will recall, Mama [Mrs Museveni], that in 2021, the board presented to you a proposal to change the reporting of the results of PLE to get rid of the aggregates," he said.

"You supported this proposal but observed, correctly, that with COVID-19 ravaging the country, it was not a good time to adopt and implement the proposal. I now pray that you allow the board to reintroduce this proposal for possible approval and implementation."

PRACTICALS, ASSESSMENT

As part of the practical assessment, languages such as English and Kiswahili will have both oral and written modes of assessment, while integrated science will have practicals for all its topics.

The other subjects, including

BACKGROUND

The grading of candidates doing the Primary Leaving Examinations according to aggregates was introduced to Uganda around 1983, after a reform that replaced the grading according to marks.

Before the grading according to aggregates, candidates would only sit for three subjects at the finals, each marked out of 100, and a score of 300 was the top mark.

During the early 1970s, the three subjects were English, mathematics and civic education, whereby the latter comprised history, geography and science.

The total marks a student scored also represented a grade, and there were just three of them – first, second and third, while the rest were failures.

Candidates in the first grade were those who scored 210 marks and above, while those in second grade scored between 196 and 209. The third-grade candidates scored 185 to 195, while the others were just failures.

This system, a replica of the colonial system, was intended to select the best candidates who would then progress to secondary school.

The three subjects were maintained, but later, civic education was replaced with science.

SST, will have projects for learners to undertake while in school.

New Vision has learnt that the Government is designing a curriculum where PLE will be marked out of 80%, while the 20% will be generated through continuous assessment, right from Primary One to Primary Seven.

Sources said the reviewing of the primary school curriculum will be a funded priority under the education sector budget in the next financial year (2026/2027).

NCDC has concluded the evaluation studies for

the revised curriculum. In addition, NCDC has developed a draft curriculum framework, which has since been validated by its governing council and is expected to be tabled before the education ministry's top management, headed by Mrs Museveni.

A curriculum framework serves as a guiding document for designing learning programmes, subject statements, teaching schemes and assessment strategies.

The framework is also used at the technical level by institutions such as UNEB and the Directorate of Education

REACTIONS

Emmanuel Mwima, a mathematics teacher at Mbuya Parents School in Kampala, welcomed the review of the curriculum.

"The Government should have conducted this review a long time ago. This current curriculum is outdated. With this fast-moving world, we should have a curriculum that speaks to the current challenges. This is the way to go," he said.

Didas Orikiriza, the executive director of the National Private Education Institutions Association, also welcomed the review of the primary curriculum, but called for training teachers first before it is rolled out.

"The thematic curriculum was actually a competency-based curriculum. However, along the way, the Government failed to implement it. I hope this time around, the new curriculum will be funded and implemented better," he said.

Orikiriza indicated that a new curriculum at primary is important to offer a smooth transition of learners from primary to secondary and higher education.

Standards, the inspectorate arm of the ministry, to guide their work.

After NCDC has developed the scope and sequence of the new curriculum, sources said the Government will roll out the new lower primary curriculum first, before introducing changes at the upper primary level.

According to the curriculum menu enshrined in the draft curriculum framework, each of the lower and upper primary school levels will have 10 subjects.

The lower primary school, which covers Primary One to Primary Three, will have the English language, literacy in a local language, mathematics, livelihood education, religious education, with Christian religious education and Islamic religious education for Muslims.

It will also have performing arts, art and technology, physical education and Kiswahili.

For the upper primary section (Primary Four to Primary Seven), the subjects will include English language, mathematics, integrated science, social studies, religious education, performing arts, art and technology, physical education, Kiswahili, local languages and Ugandan sign language.

However, only six subjects are expected to be examinable at PLE, while the rest will only be examined at the school level under continuous assessment.