

Arts-sciences mix will transform Uganda's education sector

The proposal by the Government to introduce an arts-sciences mix at A'level has generated both excitement and anxiety across the education sector. For decades, Uganda's A'level system has been characterised by a rigid separation: students either follow a science track or an arts track, with little room for crossover. While this structure has produced specialists, it has also contributed to narrow academic pathways that may no longer serve the needs of a rapidly changing society. If implemented thoughtfully, combining arts and sciences at A'level could be one of the most progressive education reforms Uganda has undertaken in recent years.

At the heart of this debate is the reality that modern challenges do not respect academic boundaries. Climate change, public health, technological innovation, governance, and economic development all require interdisciplinary thinking.

A doctor today must understand ethics and communication just as much as biology. An engineer



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needs knowledge of economics, environmental studies, and social impact. Likewise, a journalist or lawyer increasingly requires data literacy and scientific reasoning. By forcing learners to choose between arts and sciences too early, the current system restricts curiosity and limits holistic intellectual development.

Introducing combined subject options at A'level would help students develop broader perspectives. A learner doing mathematics,

economics and history, or biology, geography, and literature, would be better equipped to see connections between human behaviour, policy and scientific realities. Education should not merely prepare students to pass exams, but to understand the world they inhabit.

Interdisciplinary learning encourages critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability – skills that employers and societies value highly.

Another advantage of this reform lies in addressing the persistent skills mismatch in Uganda's labour market. Employers often lament that graduates are either technically competent, but poor communicators, or eloquent, but lacking analytical and quantitative skills. This gap begins long before university. By allowing A'level students to blend arts and sciences, Uganda would be laying the foundation for more versatile graduates – future professionals who can analyse data, communicate ideas clearly, and make informed decisions grounded in both evidence and context.

However, this reform must be approached with caution.

Uganda's education system already struggles with infrastructure gaps, teacher shortages and uneven learning outcomes between urban and rural schools.

Introducing combined subject options without adequate preparation risks widening inequalities.

Well-resourced schools may implement the reform smoothly, while underfunded schools could be left behind. For this initiative to succeed, the Government investment in teacher training, laboratories, libraries and guidance counselling is non-negotiable.

Teacher preparedness is particularly critical. Effective interdisciplinary education requires educators who are comfortable teaching beyond traditional silos or collaborating across departments. Continuous professional development will be necessary to help teachers adapt to new curricula and assessment methods. Without this support, the reform could become cosmetic changing subject combinations on paper without transforming classroom practice.

Assessment is another area that demands careful attention. Uganda's

examination culture is deeply entrenched and often prioritises memorisation over understanding. If arts and sciences are blended, assessment systems must evolve to test analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and the ability to integrate knowledge from different fields. Otherwise, students may be overburdened with content without gaining the intended benefits of interdisciplinary learning.

Critics of the proposal argue that Uganda needs more scientists and technologists, not diluted science education. This concern is valid, especially in a country striving for industrialisation and technological growth. However, combining arts and sciences does not mean weakening scientific rigor. On the contrary, it can strengthen it by producing scientists who understand social realities, ethics, and communication—qualities essential for innovation and public trust in science.

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