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In defense of tailoring and textile design

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The sudden announcement of a new curriculum by National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) on April 10, has tickled the minds of many Ugandans because the process of the changes is questionable since most stakeholders were not consulted. Also, the subjects retained and those

dropped as well as those combined left a lot to be desired. One of the vital subjects which was dropped is tailoring and textile design. I would like to make a case for reinstating tailoring and textile design on our curriculum.

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First, wearing clothes is a basic need and its importance and demand as an economic product has never been more important than it is today. Textile and garment manufacturing is one of the oldest economic activity and it is intertwined in our African culture. In Buganda, the Arabs and Europeans who brought external civilization found the people putting on bark cloth.

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Bazungu did not find us naked. Neither did they find us putting on *mitumba* as we are doing today. The bark cloth which our grandfathers were putting on was one aspect of life that impressed the *bazungu* and one of them, Churchill, described Uganda as the Pearl of Africa.

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Tailoring and textile design skills need to be reinvigorated and transformed by Ugandans who have the unique bark clothes component to integrate it with other fabrics and bring out an attractive garment which will compete in the modern market.

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Secondly, the textile industry was one of the core sectors in the first industrial revolution in Britain and other countries in the 18th century. It is one of the sectors underpinning the industrialisation process of rapidly emerging economies.

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Thirdly, the NCDC decision to drop tailoring and textile design runs counter to the direction the East African Community (EAC) is taking. The EAC selected textile as one of the sectors where the industrialisation process should start. Over the past two years, EAC member states have been mulling over a joint restriction on second-hand clothes and shoes in a move meant to protect local textile manufacturers. In 2017, a number of East African states imposed varying controls against the importation of used clothing from America and Europe, some arguing in favour of promoting and protecting our local textile industries, others saying it is undignified for our people to be wearing clothes that have been worn by unknown people elsewhere.

Instead of complementing the EAC move by popularising the teaching of tailoring and textile design in our schools, NCDC has scrapped this vital subject off the Ugandan curriculum.

Considering the way NCDC is trying to hurriedly smuggle the new curriculum in our schools, it is not inconceivable that there is some ulterior motive behind this move.

The writer is an economist and educational planner and the chairperson of the Board of Governors of Kasule High School