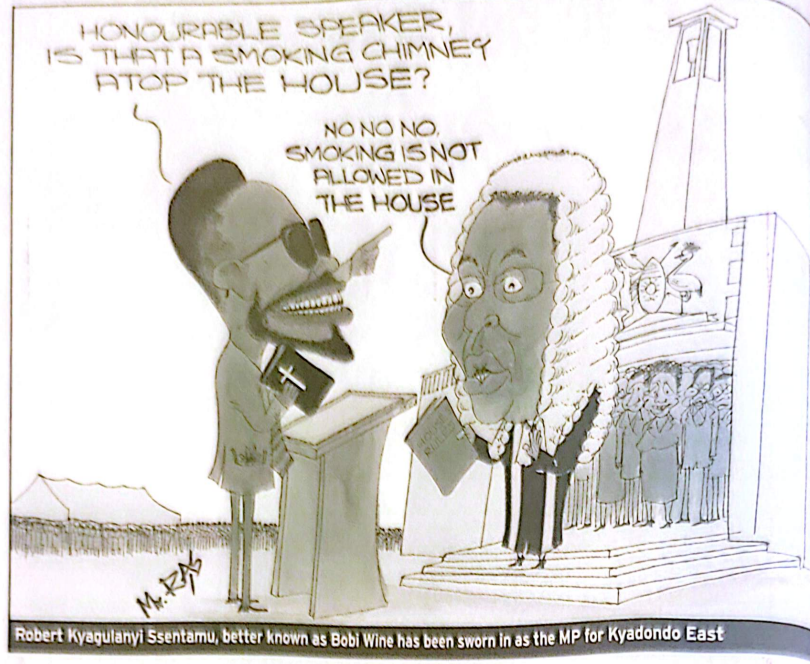




Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known as Bobi Wine has been sworn in as the MP for Kyadondo East

Prof. Abdu Kasozi, Academic

Dropping sciences at O'level a big mistake

I have read with surprise and wonder that some examination and other education officials would like to abolish the compulsory science at O'level, which in most of the successful countries must be taken by all students up to the end of the first degree in the US, Canada and a number of Asian countries.

The reason given for abolishing this requirement is that many students fail science subjects in UNEB examinations.

To eliminate disciplines because students fail them is to say the aim of education is to pass examinations not to educate for life. The emphasis on examinations has had many adverse effects on the quality and general education of Ugandans.

First, this belief has narrowed the amount of knowledge students learn to only those areas where passing of examinations is thought to be guaranteed. Those wishing to drop science are not considering how useful it is to expose all our children to basic science knowledge which they will need whether they pass examinations or not.

They are interested only in their children getting paper certificates. Knowledge is useful in life whether one uses it in examinations or not. Secondly, and as a result of the emphasis and belief in examinations, we are turning out semi educated graduates whose aim in going to school and universities is to pass examinations, however little in terms of knowledge they have. Very many employers in Uganda find our graduates not as versatile and broad minded as the grades written on their certificates are.

Thirdly, while education should aim at refining the mind, which comes with broad education covering both Arts and Sciences, those calling for the dropping of the "difficult" science subjects are in fact supporting narrow education which constricts the mind into narrow and ignorant enclaves of thought. Such minds are very fertile for unscientific beliefs in witchcrafts, ignorant crude beliefs such thinking that doctored water can protect one from bullets, religious extremism, human sacrifice and inflammatory behaviour.

Students should study both Arts/Humanities and Sciences up to the end of the first degree for the following reasons. At Senior Two or Four, children are too young to know the implications of dropping a given discipline. While science teaches children to appreciate the nature of things in the animal kingdom, Arts/Humanities introduce them to the

fundamentals of their sociological nature.

A person is both a physiological and sociological animal. Human beings must know the scientific laws of society and nature of the community they live, for as Plato puts, "man is by nature a political animal".

A person must know his animal physiology to attend to his physical fitness.

Secondly, as noted above, if a person is not well versed in the impact of the physical on the psychological/philosophical components of humanity, he turns to simple explanations of phenomenon such as magic, extreme religious dependence and insanity.

The reasons I think the policy of compulsory science up to Senior Four should stay are: The policy needs time, probably 20 years, to be reviewed and its impact properly assessed. Currently, many schools are just beginning to get both the material and personnel facilities to teach both Arts and Science in order to produce balanced students.

The way science is taught makes a difference of whether students will understand it or not. In most schools, teachers and examination boards

have not developed methods that use the local environment to teach students to understand the nature of things.

The other reason is that whether Uganda needs it or not, science is essential for development. For a country to develop, both the tertiary gross enrollment and the tertiary science enrollment ratios must be high.

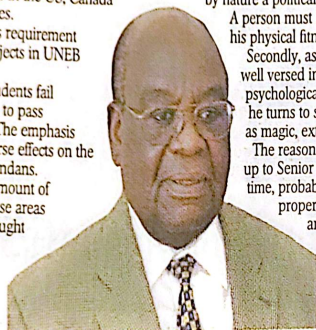
Without raising these ratios, Uganda will never be a modern economy by 2040 as we wish. Never. Indeed, Africa's science deficit is probably our major development problem.

In the East African region, Uganda is not the leader in the number of scientists though there are many education institutions. Uganda fares badly in all categories such as science, doctors,

engineers, surveyors, architects, basic scientists, to population ratio. It is no wonder that extreme religious beliefs and belief in magic are rampant in Uganda. People are ignorant of the physical causes of phenomena which science helps to explain.

I believe the more students we expose to science at an early age, the more scientists we are likely to turn out at the tertiary and, therefore, at the national level. We should maintain the status-quo for science at O'level.

The writer is a Research Associate, Makerere Institute of Social Research



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