

Editorial

Choose A-Level subject combinations carefully

About 10 years ago, a student offered Literature in Luganda, Arabic, Islamic Religious Education and History and scored all A's at Senior 6, attaining the basic grade for admission to the bachelor of Laws degree programme at Makerere University. While the student had clearly qualified for admission with 25 points, the university did not deem the student to have attained the essential grade for admission, save for History.

It was on the basis of this that the Makerere University School of Laws proposed that all students seeking to study on this programme, be subjected to the pre-entry test. The university also proposed that students who fail this test, should be barred from admission. Consequently, the measure was adopted by the Law Council and several other universities also now place stringent standards on admission, including essential A-level subject combinations. It was on this basis that many students were turned away from what they saw as their preferred career.

So it has become important for students to choose the right subject combination when they join A-level, so that they are able to gain admission to university programmes of their choice. This would then enable them to qualify for the careers of their choices. It is important to choose subjects that represent essential areas of study in the chosen degree programme of choice.

However, there have been questions about how this fits in with contemporary changes in learning outcomes. For instance, if one is to pursue university programmes that will also lend themselves to new subject areas, not catered for under established professions, such as social media influencing, what A-level subject combination is ideal?

There are also concerns that what constitutes essential subjects for particular areas have considered changes in learning outcomes, over time. For instance, it used to be that Biology, Chemistry and Geography as a subject combination was ideal for admission to a bachelor's degree in Agriculture. But what about one with a subject combination consisting, Agriculture, Geography and Economics? How about one considering Fine Art, Technical Drawing and Mathematics, while considering a career as an architect?

While the regulations set up in the Public Universities Joint Admissions Board (PUJAB) booklet for 2026-2027 provide some guidance, it is important for the actual standards of essential subjects for the given degree programmes, should be made clear. University administrators and their secondary school counterparts also need to provide support to innovative approaches by students, so that learners can take up the best subject combinations for given degree programmes.

Setting up a uniform subject combinations, for particular bachelor degree programmes, only sets students up for uniformity, instead of looking at everyone's unique attributes, based on the divergent subject formations that led them to the university in the first place. The new competence based curriculum, now being adopted by universities will require original thinking on the part of the learners. But the university administrators should not excuse themselves from it. However, in turn students should also look carefully at how they choose these subject combinations, before they leave Senior four - so they are not left stranded after Senior Six.

The NIE welcomes comments and suggestions from readers, especially secondary school students. If you would like your suggestions, compliments published, send them to our regular email address - niecontent@ug.nationmedia.com

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