

Discard S.1, S.5 entry selection and placement

For decades, the transition points into Senior One (S.1) and Senior Five (S.5) have been treated as necessary filters for academic progression.

Yet a deeper historical and policy reflection suggests that these selection mechanisms are not only outdated colonial architecture of exclusion but are also tools for reinforcing inequality which If the government of Uganda and the Ministry of Education were serious about building a modern, inclusive education system, they would have confronted this uncomfortable truth: selective transition structures are colonial inheritances that no longer serve the country's developmental ambitions given expanded government schools and privatisation of education service.

Formal education in Uganda was shaped significantly during British rule, when schooling was designed less for mass empowerment and more for producing a small administrative elite. Missionary agencies such as the Church Missionary Society established early schools (the current crop of traditional secondary schools) primarily to train clerks, interpreters, and low-level administrators who could support the colonial state. Academic progression was intentionally narrow; only a fraction of learners advanced.

Therefore, selection examinations became instruments of stratification rather than mobility. The logic was simple: Educate many at the basic level but allow only a few to proceed into academic tracks that led to leadership or professional roles, with some of those that emerged leaders deliberately educated outside their home regions, an approach that was intended to cultivate a national elite, reducing ethnic parochialism, and to promote administrative cohesion in a territorially diverse protectorate, a pattern rooted largely in late colonial and early post-colonial education policies.

Today's reliance on the Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) to determine progression after PLE and the UCE at the ex-

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pense of right-based education reflects continuity with this inherited model rather than a deliberate redesign for a post-colonial society.

Urban students typically access better-resourced schools, qualified teachers, electricity, digital tools, and private tutoring while rural learners particularly in regions historically affected by marginalisation often study in overcrowded classrooms with limited instructional materials. When both groups sit the same high-stakes examination, the playing field is far from level.

The result is predictable as the selection disproportionately channels affluent learners into prestigious secondary schools and advanced-level institutions, while disadvantaged students are pushed toward lower-tier schools or exit the academic pipeline altogether. This pattern directly contradicts the spirit of Uganda's Universal Secondary Education reform introduced under the Government of Uganda, which aimed to expand equitable access. Access without progression, however, is only partial justice.

First, it narrows the definition of intelligence as students with strengths in techni-

cal, creative, or vocational domains are often labelled "failures" simply because they do not excel in examination-oriented environments.

Secondly, schools have increasingly continued to teach for tests at the sacrifice of innovation, critical thinking, and competency development for memorisation to maximise pass rates. Thirdly, high-stakes selection fosters anxiety among adolescents at a formative stage of identity development, hardly the environment needed to nurture confident, adaptable citizens.

With Uganda signalling the reformist intent through its lower secondary curriculum redesign, which emphasises competencies over rote recall, retaining this rigid transition bottleneck undermines this progressive shift. If education is to prepare learners for a knowledge-driven economy rather than a clerical past, structural coherence is essential.

Learners should progress seamlessly from lower to upper secondary education, with targeted academic support for those who need it rather than exclusion. Technical and vocational routes must be positioned as first-choice options, not fall-back tracks for those filtered out by examinations, with schools serving disadvantaged communities requiring stronger funding formulas to counter structural disparities.

Since the Education system is supposed to mirror Uganda's societal values, persisting with a colonial outpost selection signals a system that is out of touch with the nation's needs and realities, therefore discarding S.1 and S.5 selection would be imperative not to mean lowering standards; rather but signal a shift from exclusion to development—from sorting talent to cultivating it and the Ministry of Education leadership must now decide whether to preserve it or transform it for a more equitable future for all Ugandan children.

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