

The ministry seeks to give learners age-fitting sexuality education



What's the cost of choosing the wrong A-Level combination?

Limitations. Teachers, university administrators and education experts warn that choosing the wrong combination limits one's university admission opportunities, limits one from reaching their dream career and leads to emotional frustration.

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

Every year, thousands of Senior Four leavers step into Advanced Level (A-level) education with ambitious dreams of becoming doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants and entrepreneurs, among others. To do this, many choose whatever subject combinations will work to enable them achieve these goals. However, educationists are warning that a wrong subject combination at this critical stage can quietly lock learners out of their de-

sired university courses and careers. In Uganda's education system, the subjects a student selects in senior five largely determine the range of university programmes they can pursue. While many learners make these choices at the start of A-Level, a few fully understand the long-term consequences of their decisions.

Teachers, university administrators and education experts say that choosing the wrong combination not only limits one's university admission opportunities, limits one from reaching their dream career, lead to emotional frustration but also causes financial losses.

Both public and private universities programmes/courses are guided by subject requirements at A-Level which determine whether a learner qualifies to apply for a particular course.

Prof Mukadasi Buyinza, the academic registrar of Makerere University, explains that university programmes or courses classify A-Level subjects into three categories; essential, re-

levant and desirable. Essential subjects are compulsory for admission to a particular programme while relevant or desirable subjects are advantageous but not mandatory.

"If you want a particular degree programme at university, you must ensure that the combination you offer at A-Level fits within the essential or desirable subject requirements for that course," Prof Buyinza said.

He added; "For example, if a student wants to pursue bachelor of Medicine, they must offer Biology and Chemistry. If they want to pursue Engineering or Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Physics are essential."

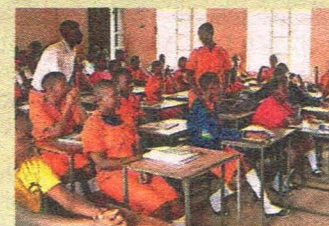
According to the Public Universities Joint Admissions Board (PUJAB) booklet for 2026-2027, at Makerere University, students aspiring for health-related courses such Surgery, Dental Surgery, Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy, all require Biology and Chemistry.

EDITOR'S PICK

Choose your A - Level subject combinations carefully

It is important for students to choose subjects that are representative of essential areas of study in the chosen degree programme of choice.

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Uganda Martyrs SS Namugongo students find solutions to local problems

Ethan Okiror used his past experience as a patient to come up with an automated bin that minimises infections in populated places like schools and hospitals. / P24



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A-LEVEL COMBINATIONS

Criteria. The performance of a child at O-Level gives us a sense of direction. The A's, the B's, and the C's help us determine where the learner's strength lies. Learners' interests or ambition and consultation from parents are also critical.

Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, Bachelor of Dental Surgery, Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, and Bachelor of Pharmacy all require Biology and Chemistry as essential subjects.

The bachelor of Nursing Science also requires Biology and Chemistry, plus one best done subject such as Agriculture, Economics, Foods and Nutrition, Mathematics or Physics.

BSc Medical Radiography requires Biology and Physics, while Biomedical Engineering requires Mathematics and either Physics or Biology. Bachelor of Optometry requires Biology and either Physics or Mathematics.

In engineering fields, including Civil, Electrical, and Mechanical Engineering, as well as Agricultural Engineering, Mathematics and Physics are essential. Software Engineering requires Mathematics and an extra better done subject like Physics, Economics, Geography, Chemistry or Biology.

Key subjects

For science and business-related programmes, BSc Statistics require Mathematics and preferably Economics, while Food Science and Technology requires Biology and Chemistry.

The bachelor of Laws requires two best done A-Level subjects while BA Economics and Bachelor of Accounting require Economics and/or Mathematics, while Bachelor of Business Administration requires Economics and/or Entrepreneurship.

Prof Buyinza noted that some subjects particularly Mathematics, Sciences and Literature are considered "facilitating subjects" as they keep the widest range of degree paths open.

"When you take Mathematics at A-Level, it can lead to many programmes at university; Engineering, Finance, Statistics, Natural Science and many others," he said.

According to Professor George Ladaah Openjuru, Vice Chancellor of Gulu University, the introduction of the abridged A-Level curriculum has not altered the way universities classify A-Level subjects. Instead, it has only changed the way of teaching to competence based.

Two best done A-Level subjects

"The three classifications essential, relevant and desirable subjects remain the same. For example, a student offering History, Economics and Entrepreneurship (HEE) can qualify for Bachelor of Business Administration, where Economics or Entrepreneurship are essential.

The bachelor of Commerce degree requires Economics or Mathematics, while in the bachelor of Economics where Economics is the essential subject," Prof Openjuru said.

He noted that while some programmes require specific subjects, oth-



Students during a lesson at Entebbe Comprehensive Secondary School in Wakiso, Uganda, on April 5, 2022. PHOTO | FILE

Cost of choosing wrong combination at A-Level

ers remain open programmes and simply require two best done A-Level subjects, especially in humanities. However, he emphasises that the choice of a combination should depend largely on a learner's academic performance and career ambitions.

"Choosing a combination should depend on how a learner performed and what they intend to do at university. If they performed well in science subjects, they may pursue science combinations that lead to medicine or other scientific science programmes. If they did well in arts subjects, they may pursue social sciences," he said.

What school consider

In many schools, the process of selecting subject combinations involves careful consultations between teachers, parents and learners. Ms Sandra Mlay, the deputy head teacher of Kitante Hill School, stated that several factors are considered before guiding students into a specific combination.

"First criteria is the performance of the child at O-Level. Where the B's, the A's, the C's are helps us determine where the learner's strength lies.

She highlighted that the learners' interest or ambition is also critical, noting that some parents want their children to take a science combination, as they believe these careers are more prestigious and well paying; yet sometimes the child knows they are not good at sciences.

Ms Mlay further noted that schools also consider the global employment trends and future work when advising learners.

"We work with the national development plans that normally appoint us, and we also depend on research on the

ADVICE

Combinations

Education experts advise schools and learners to carefully evaluate several factors before selecting an A-Level combination such as career goals, noting that students should first identify the career they want to pursue and research the university requirements for that path.

global plans so that when we are guiding a learner, you're like, I've read somewhere in the next five years projections, this might be what the world looks like," she said.

She added, "At the same time, we consider professions that are stable and always needed; such careers require human interaction regardless of evolving technology like AI."

Ms Mlay emphasised the need for schools to also rely on official guidance materials such as the PUJAB booklets released annually by the Ministry of Education which show university admission trends and subject requirements.

"We follow the PUJAB booklets very closely. We analyse the document to understand the trends in university admissions so that we guide learners properly," Ms Mlay said.

Resource limitations in schools

Experts acknowledge that not all subject combinations are available in every school. Mr Edson Baluku, the head-teacher at Birere Secondary School in Isingiro District, says schools often make decisions based on available re-

sources. These resources include teachers, textbooks, laboratories and classroom space.

He explains that a school with limited laboratory facilities may not be able to accommodate all students who want to pursue science combinations.

"Everyone may want Physics, Chemistry and Biology (PCB) but the science laboratory might not be in position to accommodate all learners. In such cases, we guide some students to try another school or offer arts combination," Mr Baluku said, emphasising that schools must ensure they can provide quality instruction before offering a subject.

"It is not advisable to force a subject where the environment cannot support it. If a school does not have a well-equipped laboratory, forcing science combinations would compromise the quality of education," he said.

What to consider

Education experts advise schools and learners to carefully evaluate several factors before selecting an A-Level combination such as career goals, noting that students should first identify the career they want to pursue and research the university requirements for that path.

"If you want to do engineering, you must choose Mathematics and Physics. If you want medicine, then Biology and Chemistry must be part of your combination," Prof Mukadasi said.

Academic strength is another critical thing to consider as educationists note that a selecting combination should be based on learners academic strengths based on O-Level results. Although parents also play a crucial role in guiding subject choices, experts caution them against imposing personal ambitions on their

children.

Mr Baluku said that schools often experience situations where parents insist on science combinations even when learners are uncomfortable.

"In many cases, the parent may want the child to become a doctor, but the learner has different interests. In such situations we counsel both the parent and the learner because the learner is the one who will face the reality of studying those subjects," Mr Baluku said.

While Ms Mlay adds that disagreements between parents and learners sometimes require extensive counseling.

Harsh realities

He notes that choosing the wrong A-Level combination can have serious consequences as students often discover the problem during university application when they can get their desired programmes/ courses.

"When students choose combinations based on peer influence or school convenience rather than career goals; they may later face harsh realities during university applications as they don't qualify for their aspiring course," Mr Baluku said.

Ms Mlay said the emotional impact can also be significant as some learners live with regret because they realise too late that they chose the wrong path emphasising the need for robust career guidance. Prof Buyinza encouraged schools to always organise structured counselling sessions before learners finalise their subject choices.

"We run career guidance programmes where we visit schools and explain the different A-Level combinations and how they relate to university programmes," he says.