

# Prof. Kasozi got it wrong on scrapping A'level

I read through Prof. Abdu B.K. Kasozi's article which was published on March 20 in the *New Vision*.

In my opinion, Prof. Kasozi attempted to justify, unsuccessfully, his proposal that the 'A' level ladder of the Ugandan education system should be abolished in order to increase overall enrolment, particularly science student enrolment at universities and other tertiary institutions.

The professor bases his proposal on the fact that the tertiary gross enrolment ratio (GER) in Uganda is so low due to "transition bottlenecks that block the movement of students in the system..."

Kasozi claims that the "preferred GER for unlocking human capital and general development is 40% in relevant discipline". He believes that the 'A' level section is one of the major bottlenecks, which, if abolished, would lead to a significant increase in the GER.

I disagree with his proposal due to the fact that he just concentrates on the number of students and not the actual underlying factors that lead to the low number as well as the low academic standards in the country. As the table (right) shows, in 2009, pupil enrolment in Primary one was 1,943,552, and in 2013, the enrolment was 1,883,803. The enrolment in the same years in Primary Seven were 544,531 and 579,431, respectively. Assuming that these are typical years, this gives drop-out rates of 72.0% and 69.2% for the two years, respectively.

## Cause of attrition rates

Since there is automatic promotion of pupils from one class to another at the primary school level, the attrition cannot be due to Prof. Kasozi's type of bottlenecks. Instead, research has shown that factors that lead to this significant attrition include inter alia, the following:

The last two columns of the table (right) show total enrolment in the primary school section (8,264,317 in 2015 and 8,655,924 in 2016) as well as the secondary school section (1,284,008 in 2015 and 1,457,277 in 2016) showing attrition rates of 84.5% and 83.2% in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The huge drop in enrolment cannot definitely be due to bottlenecks, such as the Primary Leaving Examinations 'block'!

Explanatory factors here include the exorbitant fees charged by both government-aided and private schools, in addition to poverty, the high cost of living and some of the factors enumerated above. For example, school fees and other dues are so high that even if a rural primary school pupil scored aggregate four in PLE and was admitted to good schools such as Kisubi, Budo, Namugongo or Kintende, they would not be able to join the institution.



opinion  
**Mukwanason  
A. Hyuha**

things. Many researchers and writers on the education system in Uganda have argued and shown that academic standards across education levels in the country are very low. Available evidence shows that out of the 12,205 government-aided primary schools, 4,882 are in a dire state.

The 8-4-4 system in Kenya also means that a learner will stay at school for a minimum of 16 years before completing a three-year course at a university, just like Uganda's 7-4-2-3 adds to the same 16 years. Kenya just shifted the second year of the 'A' levels to university, the first year of the 'A' levels to the secondary school section and the first year of secondary school to the primary section. This might have resulted into higher numbers in universities, but not necessarily in higher academic standards. That is, the GER did increase, but not necessarily the academic standards. Note that Prof. Kasozi's proposal, without effecting adjustment at other levels, is tantamount to a 7-4-0-3 (or 7-4-3) system—summing to only 14 years of education.

One should not just compare



Makerere University medical school students going for classes. Many researchers and writers on the education system in Uganda have argued that academic standards across education levels are very low

student numbers at secondary school and tertiary institution levels without taking into account population numbers, in addition to underlying academic standards. Hence, Prof. Kasozi's statement that higher education numbers in Kenya are twice those in Uganda leaves a lot to be desired, since Kenya's population is much higher than that of Uganda. Besides, are Kenya's academic standards as low as Uganda's?

Let us now focus specifically on Prof. Kasozi's reasons. To begin with, the GER is just an average. Without taking into account the countries' population and academic standards, comparing Uganda with other countries is tantamount to comparing lemons and mangoes.

The GER will imply "unlocking human capital and general development" given high academic standards across the board. Hence, a mere rise of the GER by removing the 'A' level bottleneck, as suggested, given our very low standards, will have

no value-addition. It will be an exercise in futility.

The alarming wastage of students as detailed earlier is due to various factors as discussed above and hardly due to what Prof. Kasozi refers to as bottlenecks.

These wastages are higher during the primary school level, ranging from 69.2% to 72.0% between 2009 and 2013, as the table (below) shows. To remove these wastages, the concerned authorities should focus on the factors discussed above rather than abolishing A'level. After all, if the objective is just naively to increase student numbers at the tertiary education institutions or the GER, automatic promotion of students from Primary One to university, similar to what is done at the primary school level would be the easier solution. Automatic promotion would, obviously, have a bigger impact on enrolment numbers.

Also, did Kenya effectively abolish A'level? Is Prof. Kasozi suggesting that Uganda adopts

## TOP TIP ✓

**It is also not true that A'level contributes to inequity of access to higher education, as Prof. Kasozi claims. The inequity arises out of the huge gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots".**

the Kenyan 8-4-4 system (when many Kenyans still fervently yearn for the abolished 7-4-2-3 system)? To convince one that A'level should be abolished, Prof. Kasozi should give better reasons and apply a superior, objective and rigorous level of analysis backed by available evidence on academic standards and not merely using the GER for it is grossly inadequate and inappropriate.

## Admissions at Makerere

It is also not true that A'level contributes to inequity of access to higher education, as Prof. Kasozi claims.

The inequity arises out of the huge gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" ('the wretched of the earth').

In the mid-1990s, I wrote a paper showing that admission of students to first-year courses at Makerere University is accounted for by around 20 schools in and around Kampala.

These schools have, among other good attributes, sound physical and academic infrastructures, well-qualified and experienced teachers, conducive teaching and learning environments.

However, tuition and other fees in these schools are, so high that the majority of Ugandans ('the wretched of the earth') cannot afford them, so, only the rich take their sons and daughters to these schools.

Thus, many of the students

admitted to Makerere and other public universities on government sponsorship are essentially children of the well-to-do Ugandans; the system is skewed against the poor, who are the majority of Ugandans.

This is the cause of the inequity, not the existence of A'level. Note that I presented this paper to the relevant government ministries, urging, inter alia, for abolition of government sponsorship of students in favour of student loans for all. Nobody then paid attention to this paper.

No university in the country admits O'level students to their academic study courses.

As Prof. Kasozi observes, the equivalent of O'level graduates from Kenya and other countries go through well-designed one-year remedial course programmes; it is only those who successfully complete these remedial programmes that may be admitted to diploma and degree programmes. A remedial programme aims at raising the participant to Senior Six level. So, once a student has successfully completed such a programme, he/she is equivalent to an A'level graduate.

Thus, I find it extremely hard, if not impossible, to accept Prof. Kasozi's proposal of doing away with the A'level section in Uganda. His reasons for justifying the proposal are disturbingly wanting and devoid of serious analysis. Just like he accuses [Daily Monitor's Daniel] Kalinaki of providing no evidence in asserting that his (Kasozi's) proposal to abolish the A'level borders on insanity. Kasozi's justification also lacks evidence, since he just looks at mere numbers and appears to misinterpret and misuse the statistics in the table included in the article.

**The writer is a professor of economics and former academic registrar of Makerere University**

## Attrition (Drop-out) Statistics in Primary to Secondary Schools in Uganda, 2009-2016

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015*	2016*
P.1	1,943,552	1,838,714	...	1,667,803	1,883,803		
P.7	544,531	532,631	...	504,217	579,431	8,264,317	8,655,924
Attrition: P.1-P.7	1,399,021	1,306,083	...	1,163,586	1,304,372		
Attrition: P.1-P.7	72.0%	71.0%	...	69.8%	69.2%		
Senior 1	296,400	324,487	320,273	317,286	345,537		
Attrition: P.7-S.1	248,131	208,144	...	186,931	233,894		
Attrition: P.7-S.1	45.6%	39.1%	...	37.1%	40.4%		
Senior 4	193,168	220,340	222,226	216,754	250,274		
Attrition: S.1-S.4	103,232	104,147	98,047	100,532	95,263		
Attrition: S.1-S.4	34.8%	32.1%	30.6%	31.7%	27.6%		
Senior Six	79,726	68,446	74,079	74,618	89,748	1,284,008	1,457,277
Attrition: S.4-S.6	113,422	151,894	148,147	142,136	160,526		
Attrition: S.4-S.6	58.7%	68.9%	66.7%	65.6%	64.1%		
Attrition: Primary-Secondary			...	...	...	6,980,309	7,198,647
Attrition: Primary-Secondary (%)						84.5	83.2

\* Total enrolment in Primary Schools and in Secondary Schools in 2015 and 2016

Source: Table in Prof. Kasozi's article and Background to the Budget, 2017 for 2015 and 2016.

## Prof. Kasozi's justification

Before examining Prof. Kasozi's justification, let me clarify a few