



Editorial

Consider re-admitting teenage mums to school

OVER the years, thousands of girls have been dropping out of school due to early unwanted pregnancies. After giving birth, many of them can hardly return to school for fear of stigmatisation and resistance they face before they can be re-admitted.

Official statistics from the education ministry show that almost 71% of all pupils, who join Primary One never make it to Primary Seven. Of the drop-outs, the completion rate for girls is estimated to be 65%, while that of boys is 71%; meaning girls are more disadvantaged.

Most of the girls, according to studies, drop out after becoming pregnant. Peer pressure, poverty, ignorance of consequences of having premarital sex, rape, cultural practices, broken families, poverty, abuse of alcohol and drugs are some of the leading causes of pregnancies in

schools. Lack of parental guidance has also seen many young girls engaging in immoral activities. Parents nowadays have less time for their children, instead these children are left in the hands of maids.

But the best way to help girls, who have given birth, is not to marry them off, or keep them out of school. They need to be re-admitted to school. After making such mistakes, studies show that such girls are more determined to study hard and make up for their shortcomings.

Nevertheless, in most cases schools reject them. The best solution to curb this situation is to ensure that girls are offered sex education early in life. It is also important for the Government to come up with a policy to re-admit such girls to school.

Conan Businge
cbusinge@newvision.co.ug



Transferring scores will redeem higher education

Months ago, vice-chancellors from universities in the East African region, during their forum, reiterated a quick demand to start credit transfers in universities in the region. *Mwalimu* sought education expert **A.B.K. Kasozi's** view about the issue



Students of Aga Khan University. The credit system facilitates the mobility of students among institutions of the same level. They can carry their credits to another institution

A tertiary credit system that facilitates the transfer of students amongst disciplines and institution within the whole tertiary sub-sector, (the university and technical sub-sectors) could be a very positive development.

If put in place, a credit system can bridge the gap between the technical and the theoretical systems of higher education by assuring students going into technical institutions that they are not travelling a dead-end road.

By easing the rigidity of the examination system, a credit system could enhance long life learning; enable employees, people with disabilities or social problems and slow learners to take a break in their attendances at institutions of higher learning without loss of achieved academic work.

Regionally, a credit system would enhance mobility of students within the Great Lakes Region and, hopefully, increase peaceful relation in the area. Vice chancellors, principals, employers, donor agencies and other stakeholders should develop and determine the weight of the credits, the amount and quality of study credits needed to get degrees, diplomas and certificates according to levels of study and the storage and transfer of the credits.

What is a credit system?

A credit is an academic currency, which officially accepts and certifies that a student holding a given credit has completed the amount and quality of study the credit stands for. A credit system is based on credits instead of final examinations, though the latter could, and often, are part of the credit system. It

is an official acceptance and recording, by education authorities awarding the credit, of the work a student has successfully accomplished in a particular course of study, which the credit stands for.

Advantages of a credit system

While the examination system is rigid, time specific, is emotionally charged, unpredictable and does not cover much of what a student has, or needs, to learn, a credit system has many advantages including the following nine. First, it links, and therefore integrates, the university and the non-university tertiary sub-sectors. Secondly, it temporarily addresses the irrational sharp division of academia into Arts/Humanities on one hand and Science and technology on the other.

Students could opt to take courses from either science or arts as fulfilment of their study requirements. Thirdly, it eases mobility of students amongst disciplines within a given tertiary level.

It also facilitates the mobility of students amongst institutions of the same level. They can carry their credits to another institution provided all institutions in the country or region accept the credit system or systems.

It also helps learners to get in and out of the education system without loss of earned work.

It also encourages lifelong learning as students can bank their credits and later return to the education system when they are ready to do so. Pregnant women and workers need this break as the rigid examination time-table may catch them at the wrong time.

Lastly, credits can unite academic courses from different calendar years. Credits for each level, can be organised, arranged, graded, weighted and given a number representing content, time spent and level.

This grading becomes key to identifying level and quality. A student in third year can do a first year course, which was missed due to illness, poverty or pregnancy, but which is necessary for the award of a degree without physically returning to the first calendar year of the programme in a physical institutional setting. This level of flexibility will benefit all, save time and money.

Credits earned in the non-university technical sub-sector can also be recognised by every institution within that sub-sector as well as the university sub-sector, according to a formula of grading that can be worked out by higher education stakeholders.

If this happens, the non-university tertiary sub-sector cannot be a dead-end academic journey. Students wishing to continue with their studies may do so by transferring to the university sub-sector taking with them already earned credits.

They do not have to repeat already covered work. If this exercise is successful, graduates of Mbale School of Clinical Officers, for example, could be permitted into university medical schools for medical degrees without loss of earned work in medicine or clinical practice provided the host faculties agree and students pass medical schools' entrance examinations instituted centrally or by individual medical schools. Likewise agricultural diploma

students from Bukalasa or Arapai could carry earned knowledge in form of credits to university faculties of agriculture in our universities.

Admission requirements of professional faculties in universities could be adjusted to cater for students entering universities from the non-university sub-sector. For now, these admission requirements favour school leavers with Advanced level certificates. This is unfair because university places are few, parents are poor and need a break in fees payments and some students, and particularly women are often disadvantaged when they marry, get pregnant or want a rest to work.

More so, university students who cannot proceed with university work could, and hopefully, will be allowed to transfer to the non-university sub-sector using already earned credits from the university sub-sector. Their time and work at university will not be disregarded by repeating work, which they already done. Credits will increase flexibility in management.

A credit system can also enhance the popularity and enrollment in the critical tertiary non-university technical sub-sector. As a result, it can enhance the integration of both sub-sectors of higher education. These workers are, and should increasingly be, trained in the tertiary non-university sub-sector of the higher education system. It is my belief that the integration and linkage of the two sub-sectors can increase the number of students going for technical skills by demystifying the stigma people have of the technical sub-sector.

In the past, students went to the technical non-university sub-sector as a last resort: after failing to get into universities. As a result, there are very few students in our technical colleges. In the year 2010/11, out of a total higher education enrollment of 198,061 students, 139,683 were in universities and 4,781 or were in technical colleges. Of those in universities, 103,836 (or 74%) were enrolled in Arts/Humanities and 35,847 or (26%) in science and technology.

The non-university technical sub-sector needs more attention than has previously been given. It should become a major component in the production of skilled human resources needed to drive the economy. It is my hope that the credit system will help in popularising this sub-sector.

The writer is the former executive director, National Council for Higher Education