

How students say they choose their subjects at school and its impact on the choice of science

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A scientifically literate citizenry is vital for the prosperity of modern society. However, low participation rates in science at school and university have led to fears that this need for scientifically educated individuals will not be met. A key decision point where students reject science is when they choose subjects for their final years of school and yet this decision process is poorly understood. Fifty Australian students from Years 10 and 11 participated in focus groups to explain how they choose subjects for their final years of school, what and who influenced them, and their opinions on choosing science. They described choosing subjects based initially on enjoyment, interest and need. If they needed additional subjects, students would then seek information and advice to fulfil their subject quota. Science was perceived as more difficult and useful only for stereotypical scientific careers and so appeared less attractive than other subjects. To address this problem, students who have not rejected science in the initial stage of their decision process may be presented with information from credible sources that counters this perception. This reevaluation of science at the time subject selection is made may lead to more students choosing to continue with science.