

RECOMMENDATION No. 71
TO THE MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION
concerning

**THE PROBLEM OF INFORMATION AT THE NATIONAL
AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL WHICH IS POSED BY THE
IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS**
(1977)

Preamble

The International Conference on Education, convened by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization meeting in Geneva at its 36th session, held from 30 August to 8 September 1977,

Noting that general resolutions 9.1 and 9.2 of the General Conference of Unesco at its nineteenth session, on the establishment of a new international economic order and the Second Development Decade, drew attention to the need for a strengthening of mechanisms for the exchange of development-significant scientific and technological information as a key component in the process of transfer and adaptation of technologies appropriate to the needs of developing countries,

Noting that resolution 5.1 of the General Conference of Unesco at its nineteenth session, on the General Information Programme, committed Unesco to contribute to the development of international, regional and national information systems and services as a vital element in international co-operation and national development,

Having regard to the relevant conventions, recommendations, and declarations adopted at the international and regional level,

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which are applicable to the problem of information at the national and international level posed by the improvement of educational systems,

Interpreting educational information in the broadest sense as including the generation, recording and communication of ideas opinions, theories, facts, regulations, statistics, cultural and artistic activities, and such other information/data as may relate to education systems and educational processes and which contribute to the quality of education, in all forms of communication, with an emphasis on the essential two-way nature of communication,

Considering that the development of sound educational policies, plans and programmes requires a wide range of information, just as the reform, the improvement and even a basic knowledge of education systems depends on a constant flow of information to and from all groups taking part in the educational enterprise, such as policy makers, administrators, researchers, teacher educators, teachers, students, parents, pupils, adult learners and members of the community at large,

Considering that problems encountered in the development of national systems of education may be resolved more effectively if use is made of analogous experience from other countries, especially in the sense of technical co-operation between developing countries,

Considering that the establishment of a world-wide network based on the UNISIST conceptual framework of linkages and inter-connections with existing and projected regional and national systems, is now practicable and desirable for educational information, both as a basis for international co-operation in education, and as a means to further improvement of national systems of education,

Considering that educational information in national languages is for every country a decisive factor in development,

Recognizing at the same time the problems that occur through barriers to the flow of educational information within and between the countries, the gaps in existing services and the resulting inefficiencies when decisions are taken on the basis of inadequate, inaccurate or out-of-date information,

Recognizing also that the development of regional and international co-operation in the exchange of educational

information not only serves the improvement of education but contributes to creating better international understanding between educators of various countries and thus serves the cause of peace between all nations,

Recognizing that an adequate global information system is vital to all countries and that the cost of fully processing data and establishing and maintaining international links is often beyond the economic capacity of many developing countries,

Recognizing the constitutional provisions of each Member State,

Adopts on the seventh of September nineteen hundred and seventy-seven, and submits for consideration by the ministers responsible for education and the appropriate authorities and agencies in the various Member States and appropriate international bodies, the following Recommendation:

Underlying Principles

1) The development and improvement of educational information systems and services should be guided by the following principles:

a) Recognition of the information component in the decision-making process: in the approach to educational policy making, the planning of reforms, the establishment and implementation of educational priorities, improvement of the existing educational system, and educational practice, it is important to identify the information that is needed and the flow of information that may provide guidance in implementation, and to make suitable provision for this element. As a corollary to this principle, users at all levels should be entitled to access to this information so that they may make better use of existing systems and may participate in their further development. Impediments should not be placed in the way of the process of transmission and dissemination of publicly available information likely to benefit people in their endeavour to improve their minds or circumstances.

b) Co-operative networking: in planning and developing an information system, one aim should be to share available resources by creating a network of centres and institutions with information services relevant to education.

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c) Standardization: in the interests of economy and compatibility, standardized procedures should be introduced whenever possible into programmes of educational information keeping in view: the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), as a basis for educational statistical reporting; the information-related standards of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), internationally standardized terminology, such as the IBE and EUDISED Thesauri; and the various manuals and guidelines produced by the UNISIST programme.

d) Professionalization: because of its importance, educational information should be recognized as a professional specialty within the larger field of information/library science and the personnel working in this field should have adequate preparation and status.

e) International co-operation: national development in educational information should take account of the desirability of ensuring compatibility with regional and international networks and programmes so that Member States may participate in the transfer of educational experience.

Practical Measures at the National Level

Policy and legislative provisions

2) There is a need for explicit policy statements within each country, involving users, to show how educational information is to be related respectively to the existing information and education systems.

3) Within the various processes for educational decision making it is important to make specific provision for educational information whereby the responsibilities and roles are clearly defined, priorities emphasized, the necessary resources are foreseen and better co-ordination of efforts is achieved in order to avoid gaps in information flow and waste of resources.

4) It is advisable to embody such policies in laws, regulations, or formal institutionalized plans, which would provide for the planned development of information services in accordance with the country's needs and priorities in educational development and resource allocation. Provision should be made for regular evaluation with a view to eliminating activities for which there is no

longer a need and making necessary modifications to better serve user needs.

Services and programmes

5) In drawing up a plan and programme of action leading gradually to the development of an educational information system, education authorities should:

a) make inventories of existing educational information systems and services in relation to the user groups served;

b) establish machinery for co-ordination of activities at local provincial and national levels;

c) where national conditions favour this, identify a single national centre to serve as the focal point both for the national educational information network and for international contacts and exchanges in this area;

d) include the gathering, processing and communication of facts, statistics and theories relating to the education system and the educational process;

e) focus analysis on such areas as:

(i) the situation, trends and prospects of social and economic development in relation to educational development;

(ii) educational policy, its basis, development and implementation;

(iii) the content of education;

f) transmit to all partners in the educational system, through the use of all the media of communication, such information and explanations as will enable them to understand and appreciate approaches chosen, innovations, and changes as regards educational policy;

g) ensure provision of the necessary resources for the national programme of educational information;

h) ensure that adequate staff are available, including teachers trained to this end, and if necessary initiate training programmes for the purpose;

i) utilize educational information systems, where appropriate, to enhance the development of literacy in their respective countries;

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j) bear in mind that, in countries marked by great social and cultural variations, there may be different kinds and degrees of demand within one and the same category of users.

6) Since the aim of a national system of educational information is to support the various groups of people concerned with improving education, there is a need to give high priority to the study of user needs and preferences, including cost-benefit studies of different ways of meeting these needs, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the information services, programmes and products.

a) Policy makers and administrators should be aware of their important role in producing as well as using information.

b) Teachers and their organizations constitute a very important group in the educational community, and therefore their participation in educational information processes should be facilitated at every stage.

c) Research workers are usually viewed as producers and users of information. Special importance should therefore be attached to:

- (i) the promotion of interdisciplinary research related to educational development needs and priorities;
- (ii) adequate support for such research;
- (iii) adequate diffusion of the results of such research among all the groups concerned.

d) National bodies responsible for educational information and documentation should provide links between educational research and educational practice.

e) Students, parents, schoolchildren and adult learners should be regarded as both users and sources of information.

f) Educators should be made fully aware of the various systematic professional products and bibliographical tools, such as abstracts, indexes, current awareness lists, etc., that librarians, archivists, documentalists and information specialists generate, and that are of value and use to the educational community.

7) Information flow should not be limited to one-way vertical communication from the summit to the base but should occur in both directions through participatory planning. In addition, horizontal communication is necessary at all levels between various

agencies, institutions, groups and individuals acting in or affected by the educational process as either sources or users or both, such as educational administrators, researchers, teachers, parents, students, pupils and various other users.

8) Improvement in the various kinds of educational information services requires the solution of the many technical problems involved in information processing. Assuming the establishment of an adequate institutionalized framework, with staff and budgets, there is a need for:

a) the adoption of standardized procedures in so far as possible and practicable over the entire range of information processing;

b) the application of modern technologies—wherever national conditions allow for it or where the use of educational technologies has already been established which include, for example telecommunications, the use of computers for information storage and retrieval, and the use of audio-visual means for information dissemination;

c) notwithstanding the value of these technologies, considerable improvements should also be possible by better use of simpler means for information processing; in particular, bibliographic control, the issuing of reference tools, the promotion of educational periodicals, awareness lists, etc., should be aimed at;

d) the processing and presentation of information and data at one or more levels of sophistication so as to widen their user clientele, with the objective also of greater consumer usability, based on brevity, attractive presentation, graphic illustration and other means.

Status and training of educational information personnel

9) A corollary to the improvement of educational information services and their efficiency is the establishment of a cadre of appropriately educated and trained personnel with the administrative, social and economic status consistent with their roles and functions and comparable to those enjoyed by information personnel in other specialized sectors.

10) In some cases it may be desirable that a set of legislative and regulatory texts governing the professional status and training of

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librarians, documentalists, archivists and other information personnel, should be promulgated.

11) To combat the dearth of educational information personnel from which the developing and many developed countries presently suffer, programmes of pre-service training should be initiated or further developed aiming, whenever possible and in conformity with the new conception of educational information, at the education and training of a new type of personnel which would have a preparation both in the field of education and in the field of information.

12) When personnel working in educational information are qualified in either education or documentation but not both, they should be given the opportunity to receive training in order to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that will qualify them in both fields.

13) Personnel already working in the field with appropriate knowledge and skills should be provided with the possibility of improving their professional qualifications. This can be achieved either:

a) through developing training and refresher courses with the training methods suited to each country's needs and patterns; or

b) through arranging regional training and refresher courses which would be organized by the joint efforts of the competent authorities of the Member States in the region with the assistance of international organizations;

c) through fellowships either within or outside the country.

14) In order to give further recognition to the work of educational information personnel, and to make better use of their skills and knowledge of quantitative and qualitative sources of information, they should be given the opportunity to participate actively in the educational development process through extended periods of training and through involvement in meetings, symposia, seminars and conferences whether at national, regional or international levels.

15) More generally there is a need for greater attention to education and training of various categories of people involved in education in how to produce and use information at every stage of

the educational process. To achieve this, the following actions should be considered:

a) curricula at all levels of instruction, including teachers' colleges, should include short courses on information resources and documentation utilization;

b) pre-service and in-service training of educational administrators and in-service programmes and courses of professional improvement of teachers should provide for their initiation to the utilization of educational information;

c) school inspectors and the teaching staff of teachers' colleges should play an important role in promoting the exchange of information between teachers and educational institutions and research centres and at the same time in providing further training in the use of educational information;

d) teachers' organizations and other professional associations can also play a role in this respect by organizing meetings, seminars and workshops and by stimulating the exchange of information through their publications.

Regional and International Co-operation

16) Regional and international exchange of information provides a new dimension and form of international co-operation directed to assisting endogenous development. In order to overcome shortcomings in the regional and international flow of relevant educational information and to improve exchanges of educational experiences, coherent action is needed at the national, bilateral, regional and international levels. Therefore the Conference calls upon all relevant national, regional and international authorities, organizations and agencies to co-operate in improving regional and international exchanges of information so as to establish during the next decade a world information network in education which could contribute to improved decision making towards the establishment of a new international economic order.

17) Since international networks succeed only when they are based upon national programmes or systems, the Member States and their appropriate authorities should endeavour to:

a) encourage recognition at the national level of the importance of regional and international exchanges of educational information;

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b) ensure that national policies of educational information contain adequate provisions for the gathering and dissemination within the country of up-to-date information on educational developments in other countries;

c) develop adequate national infrastructures which would include mechanisms for regional and international linkage and information exchange to facilitate the country's participation in regional and international networks in the field of education;

d) make further efforts to develop and strengthen national bibliographic, abstracting and translation services;

e) encourage countries to use the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) for national and international educational statistical reporting purposes;

f) encourage any new legislation or regulation governing the exchange of information to reflect the changes occurring in this field so that the flow of educational materials between countries may be encouraged and the processes of translation and adaptation be facilitated;

g) see that the content of information intended for international exchange is arranged in accordance with the priorities of the nation or region involved, with particular attention to basic legislative instruments and reforms concerning education, the planning of the development of education, curricula and syllabuses, information about innovation for the improvement of education, and the results of educational research;

h) give due importance to the building up and development of national and local information infrastructures when formulating requests for international technical assistance in the field of education.

18) Highly appreciative of the role of international co-operation in improving the content of education, and attributing great importance to the part played by educational materials of all types (e.g. syllabuses, textbooks, teaching aids) in spreading the concepts of peace, mutual respect and friendship among peoples, the Conference recommends that Member States and their appropriate authorities engage more widely in the exchange of information concerning the content of education and common efforts to bring

about the improvement of educational materials in order to develop students' interest in, and appreciation of, the history and culture of all countries and peoples

19) Although national action in both governmental and non-governmental domains for successful transfer of educational experiences and methods forms the basis of regional and international co-operation in this field, these national efforts should assist in achieving Unesco's aims in the sphere of education and should converge in programmes of the international and regional organizations, in particular those of Unesco.

20) The Conference recommends that Unesco should play a leadership role and should undertake the specific task of developing a plan for a world information network in education in co-operation with the other Specialized Agencies, and that the principles of action for such development should comprise:

a) the networking approach, by which existing or new regional information programmes are interconnected and linked into a world-wide network;

b) adoption by national centres and regional programmes of common standards and procedures so that modern techniques can be applied to educational information exchange;

c) promoting a co-operative approach, both for the free sharing of educational experience between countries and for supporting the growth of information services in countries where they are still weak.

21) At the regional level, the programmes of Unesco and of regional and subregional organizations concerned with education, should help and stimulate the exchange of educational information and strengthen national information capacities by their services for the gathering, processing, analysing and disseminating of information. The goal should be to achieve within each region an effective system, into which national systems would feed and which would correspond to the educational priorities and conditions of the countries concerned. Whenever such systems are already in place, or substantially in being, appropriate measures should be looked for to link them into the world-wide network.

22) In developing regional network, Unesco and the pertinent

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regional and international organizations should seek to harmonize their programmes with national activities in educational information while at the same time ensuring compatibility with the systems developed in other regions.

23) Unesco should strengthen its contribution to the development of national services for educational research and information and make provision for:

a) reinforcement of the information component in the regional programmes of educational innovation for development such as APEID, NEIDA, EIPDAS, which are based on technical co-operation among developing countries;

b) support to developing countries wishing to strengthen their national and local infrastructures in this field, with particular emphasis on national training programmes, refresher courses and seminars for educational information personnel and on feasibility studies on different information-processing technologies and systems, appropriate to national resources and needs;

c) organization of regional and subregional training programmes, refresher courses and seminars for information specialists as an effective means of strengthening networking capacity and efficiency of national services;

d) opportunities for training abroad of specialists who might contribute to the more rapid development of information services in their own countries.

24) Unesco, particularly through IBE and in close collaboration with other international agencies and organizations, should undertake:

a) the systematic planning, costing and development of a world-wide information network in education based on the active participation of regional and national institutions and programmes and including an assessment of the resources available and a time scale showing intermediate objectives;

b) the expansion of the International Educational Reporting Service (IERS) so that it may form an important information basis for educational reform and innovation in all countries;

c) the establishment of systems interconnections between existing systems, whenever possible and feasible, such as between

Unesco and IBE education-related data bases, and between national and regional education-related documentation systems, with the production of the necessary technical instruments;

d) the encouragement of specialized information services by voluntary professional bodies, including teachers' organizations at the international level, so that these groups will also participate in the network;

e) the resumed publication of the International Yearbook of Education, in a new form;

f) the rationalization of educational data requested of countries by regional and international bodies, in order to avoid duplication and overlap among gathering efforts, and to ensure the availability of the data in usable form.