

**International Conference
on Education
42nd Session**

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PART III

RECOMMENDATION NO. 77 TO MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION
ON THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ILLITERACY :
OPERATIONAL POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND
PROGRAMMES FOR THE 1990s

PREAMBLE

The International Conference on Education, convened by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, meeting in Geneva at its 42nd session from 3 to 8 September 1990,

Noting the decision taken by the United Nations General Assembly to entrust the implementation of International Literacy Year to UNESCO,

Recalling UNESCO's role - in keeping with its mission - in the fight against illiteracy and for the universalization of primary education,

Welcoming the absolute priority assigned by UNESCO's General Conference at its twenty-fifth session to education for all, both in its third Medium-Term Plan and in the Plan of Action it adopted for the eradication of illiteracy, especially among girls and women,

Endorsing the World Declaration on Education for All and noting the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990) organized by the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF, and recalling the priority to be given to the developing countries, in particular to the least developed among them,

Convinced of the urgent need systematically to follow up the World Conference on Education for All and of the specific role UNESCO has to play in following it up,

Having Regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all the relevant conventions, recommendations and declarations adopted at the regional and international levels. Particularly by UNESCO

Convinced that the development of education for all is of crucial importance in the fight against poverty, malnutrition, disease, socio-economic marginalization and drugs,

Convinced that education for all is an essential condition for the all-round development of individuals and their families, for achieving gender justice and equality and for guaranteeing a better quality of life for all,

Recognizing that in most cases there has been an increase in enrolment ratios in primary schools and adult-literacy courses in the last 25 years, and noting, nevertheless, that the absolute number of illiterates in many developing countries is still rising,

Noting that access to schooling is not yet fully available to all, that drop-out rates in primary education remain high in many countries and that sizable proportions of school drop-outs and neoliterate adults relapse into illiteracy or are not sufficiently competent in reading, writing or computation,

Aware of the fact that various communities have to face major obstacles - such as a growing foreign debt, an unfavorable trade balance, deterioration of the environment or a high level of military expenditure - that have an adverse effect on the achievement of indispensable large-scale primary-education and adult-literacy programmes,

Recognizing the need for practical action at the national level to achieve education for all,

Also recognizing the importance in the 1990s of collective and concerted international action,

Adopts, on 8 September 1990, and submits for consideration by the ministries responsible for literacy and primary education and other appropriate authorities and agencies in Member States, the institutions within the United Nations system with responsibilities in this field and the inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, the following Recommendation:

A. PRINCIPLES, CONCEPTS AND OBJECTIVES

1. The right to education is a fundamental one on which depend the personal, social and economic well-being and cultural development of all children, adolescents and adults. Literacy, pre-primary and primary education constitute an indispensable stage in the larger process of life-long learning and human development.

2. With a view to making education accessible to all children, all adolescents and all adults a comprehensive approach should be adopted, consisting simultaneously and interactively in the provision of (i) literacy programmes for adolescents and adults - both women and men - and (ii) educational and training programmes designed to meet other basic needs.

3. The complete eradication of illiteracy calls for the universal provision of high-quality primary education. When promoting primary education, links should be made with learning in the family from a very early age and with pre-school education, so that all children have the possibility of attaining a satisfactory level of achievement.

4. Those children who are not integrated into the formal school system should no longer remain outside the learning system. The setting up of non-formal, non-conventional, innovative and flexible structures is a positive response to the formal system provided that such structures are not of a lower standard than those in the formal schools, which they should complement.

5. The acquisition of basic knowledge and skills, attitudes and values can be successful and lasting only if it forms an integral part of lifelong education.

6. The content of literacy and basic education is specific to geographical, social and cultural contexts and should evolve with time as societies change.

7. Competence in reading, writing and arithmetic forms the core of any process of education or training whose ethical basis is the goal of generating awareness, acumen. and the concept of cultural identity and developing the critical faculties. Literacy, programmes, understood in this perspective, include not only basic skills (reading, writing and arithmetic), but also understanding of the world and the ability to play a role in bringing it towards greater justice and equity.

B. PRACTICAL MEASURES AND PROGRAMMES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

8. To develop literacy and basic education for all, countries should:

- (a) express a firm national political will to eradicate illiteracy by establishing priorities and objectives and by expanding the physical facilities, where necessary, so as to broaden access to education;
- (b) generate awareness among the entire population and encourage involvement by local communities and individuals themselves;
- (c) conduct a diagnostic analysis of the present position and past experience regarding literacy education and primary education, especially in the context of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of society;
- (d) determine people's basic education needs in the light of local conditions;
- (e) set specific, time-bound targets for the present decade, giving the most urgent priority to the task of ensuring access to, and improving the quality of, education for girls and women and removing every obstacle that hampers their active participation;
- (f) adopt organizational, structural, financial, social and legal measures and well-defined implementable strategies, backed by financial and human resources, that are specific and likely to provide a real opportunity to attain those objectives;
- (g) attach the highest importance to the quality and follow-up of educational services, placing emphasis on the successful outcome of the learning process;
- (h) take a broad approach in identifying potential learner groups and in encouraging recruitment efforts among members of peer groups, workplace colleagues and others within the learner's natural milieu;
- (i) link literacy with relevant community-development activities such as health and nutrition, child care and pre-school education, family welfare, in particular child welfare, the raising of productivity, income generation, environmental protection, peace, human rights, fundamental freedoms, preparation for transition to the world of work and participation in economic, civic and cultural life;
- (j) create a suitable framework and machinery for monitoring and evaluation to provide information likely to promote progress towards literacy goals;
- (k) establish new and more effective partnerships among all those concerned at the national, regional, and international levels in the planning, implementation, and management of programmes, in order to enhance integration and co-ordination of efforts for increased cost effectiveness and a more significant impact;
- (l) encourage by appropriate means research, which is one of the fundamental underpinnings for the renewal of policies, strategies, structures, content and methods.

9. For achieving time-bound targets during the 1990s, one of the essential steps to be taken is to review existing literacy strategies and incorporate the necessary modifications. When renewing these strategies, the following measures, among others, may be considered:

- (a) in order to achieve universal literacy, an interactive two-track approach should be encouraged: (i) extension of pre-primary and primary education and enhancement of their quality, inter alia through the development of or improvements in teacher training; (ii) promoting adult literacy and continuing education. This twofold approach should be firmly integrated into lifelong education;
- (b) the quality and relevance of primary education should be improved, so as to avoid any relapse into illiteracy in any form whatever. The new strategy should therefore aim to ensure, not only full school enrolment, but also satisfactory progress through primary schooling and its completion with an adequate mastery of basic knowledge and skills;
- (c) dropping-out and wastage from primary-school should be drastically reduced and eventually eliminated and regular attendance ensured by both administrative and social measures such as effective supervision and guidance, consultation with parents, active co-operation on the part of the local community, the provision of child care and support services for girls, the provision of midday meals and other incentives where feasible and the creation of a climate of awareness among the population, through the media and other means;
- (d) for out-of-school children, additional, flexible, non-formal arrangements for basic education should be made. Adequate infrastructures, possibly assisted by the school system, should be created to ensure their effectiveness. The curriculum, instructional methods and timetables should be adjusted to suit the learning needs and priorities of out-of-school children;
- (e) for adult education, a process of decentralization combined with national or other appropriate co-ordination mechanisms should be followed. Local communities should be encouraged to determine their own goals and responsibilities in precise terms;
- (f) voluntary organizations should be encouraged to co-operate closely with governmental agencies in literacy work at different levels;
- (g) co-operation with the media should be sought, with a view to producing a social will among the population, motivating potential learners to participate in literacy programmes creating and sustaining political will and mobilizing financial and human resources;
- (h) a systematic procedure for monitoring progress at different levels and in respect of different functions - administrative, financial and educational - should be instituted on reliable bases in primary education - both formal and non-formal - and in adult-literacy, post-literacy and continuing education programmes.

10. An effective policy for the elimination of disparities between men's and women's literacy rate and between boys' and girls' access to primary schooling should be formulated, with time-bound targets and in co-operation, inter alia, with women's organizations.

11. Decisions of the same kind should be taken concerning other specific groups such as urban slum-dwellers, the rural poor cultural and linguistic minorities and the handicapped

12. In multilingual situations, the policy regarding the language of literacy should be carefully formulated, especially where the national or official language is different from local languages. Use of the mother tongue is desirable. However, in some situations bilingual literacy should be encouraged.

Content and methods

13. In order to identify the functional objectives and content of literacy and basic education for children and adults a procedure of needs assessment should be followed. Programmes of basic education should be conceived as a means for meeting the basic learning needs of all and strengthening learners' motivation through direct linkage with the concerns of their daily life

14. The involvement and participation of young people and adults - the potential participants in literacy programmes - in identifying and structuring basic learning needs should be promoted, so that learning becomes more meaningful to them and their motivation is enhanced.

15. In order to increase the relevance of programme content, various environmental and contextual factors should be taken into account over and above the identification of learners' needs. These factors may be of occupational, geographical, gender-related status, cultural, technological or other relevance.

16. As an integral part of continuing-literacy education programmes of post-literacy, functional literacy and lifelong education should support the continuation of learning in various areas in accordance with needs assessment, using literacy skills as learning skills and the application of learning to various situations for personal, social and economic development.

17. In devising teaching and learning methods, designing instructional material and using educational technologies and media, a distinction should be made between adult-learning and child-learning methods. The quality of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials should be continually upgraded through evaluation of the education system in its entirety.

18. Educational technologies, including new technologies, should complement the teachers work. New educational technologies, when available, - microcomputers, specially designed television programmes, video and audio cassettes, etc. - might be judiciously used for both instructional and motivational purposes in combination with analytical and interpretative discussion. Where appropriate, new computer and communications technologies might also be utilized for distance education purposes to bring literacy and educational programmes to those living in rural and remote areas.

19. Teaching and learning procedures should be made more dynamic by increasing the use of methods such as dialogue and peer-teaching, participatory learning in small groups, and self-instruction. All these should increase the motivation, autonomy and self-confidence of the learner and the competence of the teacher. The atmosphere of adult literacy classes should be made more pleasant and attractive, and local creative and cultural activities

should be introduced to provide an incentive for learners to continue attending the classes.

20. A sound infrastructure, with flexible and dynamic modes of functioning, should be set up for non-formal programmes of adult literacy, post literacy and functional literacy, and for non-formal education at the primary level for out-of-school children. The development of non-formal education, an emerging field in certain countries, should be considered part of adult-education structures, in conjunction with industries, social service agencies, agricultural extension units and the like.

Evaluation of learners' achievement and the larger social impact

21. Evaluation in relation to literacy and the continuing education of adults should be an encouraging process designed to make those concerned aware of their progress and to help them to identify gaps in their knowledge. It should be one of the important and integral elements of all literacy programmes and would serve to improve them. An appropriate scheme of cumulative evaluation should be planned and executed with this in mind. Efforts should be made to award a certificate upon successful completion of a literacy course.

22. Evaluation should typically include: (a) assessment of learner achievement; (b) curriculum evaluation; (c) monitoring of programme implementation to optimize its efficiency and effectiveness; (d) a comprehensive programme review from time to time to renew and strengthen programme objectives, organization and management, channels of communication, institutional efficiency, etc.; (e) cost evaluation; and (f) impact evaluation to understand and optimize the effects of literacy learning on the life of the learner, on his or her family, and on the local community and society

23. A plan of progress monitoring should be introduced particularly in the early stages of the programme, since it is the implementation stage that is weakest and beset with unforeseen obstacles, problems and bottlenecks that vitiate the final results of even a well-planned literacy drive. By periodically observing progress in carrying out educational, administrative and financial functions at the national, intermediary and local levels, a good monitoring system should locate shortfalls in implementation and enable timely corrective measures to be taken to optimize the results of the programme, thereby ensuring its success.

24. The impact evaluation of literacy and basic education at individual and collective levels should demonstrate how, within specific contexts and conditions, education and training contribute to better health and hygiene, longer life expectancy, lower infant mortality, greater participation in immunization programmes, better child care, improved family income, greater self-confidence and autonomy, greater social, economic and cultural participation, and full enjoyment of civic rights and responsibilities. Understanding the factors that produce these consequences is critical for achieving national development goals.

Initial and continuing training of teachers and other educational personnel

25. The training of men and women teachers is one of the main components of high quality primary education. In some Member States it would be useful if that training also covered adult education so as to enable primary school teachers, if necessary, to carry out certain teaching tasks in that area. Innovative steps should be taken in recruitment and specific training, leading to professional mobility for well-motivated teachers and utilization of the skills acquired in the field by literacy workers.

26. The variety of tasks given to literacy workers requires them to possess special skills. They should therefore be provided with a sound specific training, including an introduction to educational theory, reflection and practical experience in the teaching of adults. The same considerations should apply to those in charge of management, inspection, curriculum preparation and other tasks of an educational nature.

27. In order to maintain the quality and efficiency of the entire programme, all staff should be given in-service training. In addition distance-learning programmes, journals, newsletters and other such means should be made available to promote the self-instruction and continuing education of literacy teachers, trainers and other educational personnel. Higher-education establishments, faculties of education and regional training centres that collaborate with UNESCO, such as CREFAL and ASFEC, and national training centres should take part in the initial and recurrent training of teachers and functionaries working in the area of literacy.

28. In recognition of the key role of teachers in any educational activity, their social status, living conditions and remuneration should receive the active support of the authorities in line with Article 7 of the World Declaration on Education for All, paragraph 33 of the Framework for Action and the joint UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, so that they can devote their full attention to education and thereby avoid wastage of their potential through the need to look for alternative means of subsistence.

Functional literacy and continuing education

29. Awareness-raising campaigns and existing facilities in all industrialized and developing countries should be substantially expanded to meet the basic learning needs of all adults. A systematic, research-based investigation of the question should seek to identify groups and individuals with inadequate schooling, including migrant workers and their families, whose linguistic and cultural identity should be respected, to determine the numbers involved and establish reliable statistical data. The nature and scope of the basic learning needs of these different groups and individuals should also be identified in relation to cumulative factors such as unemployment, poverty, social marginalization, etc. Changing employment patterns demographic trends and evolving technology make these needs recurrent, generating a continuing demand for basic learning skills in the form of flexible and abiding educational services that call for a long-term commitment on the part of the authorities, in both industrialized and developing countries.

30. Adult-literacy work in industrialized and developing countries should receive sustained core funding by the public sector and should continue to be diversified to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups. Teaching partnerships should be developed with the formal education system, including post-secondary institutions, training programmes at work and community-based programmes. In addition, partnerships at the institutional level should be developed with the various ministries (education, labour, agriculture, etc.), firms, local authorities, communities, the voluntary sector and other non-governmental agencies. Where it does not already exist, machinery should be established at the national, regional and local levels to guide research, improve the quantity and quality of services and ensure that appropriate systems for practical local action receive adequate support.

31. In all countries, a greater investment should be made in research so as to determine how best to raise the level of the fundamental skills of the population. Universities and other agencies should contribute in this area.

32. Industrialized and developing countries should share their experience concerning common concerns with respect to the development of appropriate programmes to meet the needs of their populations concerns relating to language of instruction, highly dispersed populations, regions of extreme poverty, the diversity of groups with literacy needs, etc.

C. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

33. Envisaging a decade of worldwide literacy action the General-Conference of UNESCO, at its twenty-fourth session (1987), appealed to Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to take immediate measures to prepare programmes and activities for International Literacy Year in the context of the Plan of Action for the Eradication of Illiteracy by the Year 2000. Taking this and other international and national developments into account, it is recommended that UNESCO, together with its Member States, should take further concerted action towards the eradication of illiteracy and the provision of education for all in this decade. UNESCO, in close co-operation with its Member States and the other organizations of the-United Nations system, should take action throughout the decade to achieve basic education for all with a view to eradicating illiteracy and universalizing education.

34. While strengthening co-ordination and co-operation among the partners within countries themselves and making-maximum use of their international resources, Member States should also take into account the possibility of financial support created as a consequence of the World Conference on Education for All held in Thailand in March 1990. Taking this development into consideration, Member States should strengthen and further develop bilateral, regional and international co-operation with a view to adopting and implementing renewed policies and strategies for education for all and participate actively in UNESCO's regional programmes and projects established to achieve this goal by collective effort. They should also provide necessary support for the regional networks for educational research, innovation and development that have been working towards improving the quality of basic education.

35. UNESCO's existing action to promote literacy and universal primary education in the least-developed countries, in particular through the regional programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States, should be strengthened.

36. In the context of the undertaking of a study on the possibility of a European co-operation programme, recommended by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-fifth session, it would be desirable to submit a report on illiteracy problems in the Europe region. The report should be written in co-operation with' other international institutions, networks and non-governmental organizations and should take their activities into account.

37. At a time when International Literacy Year (ILY) has generated a psychological moment for action with renewed commitment many developing countries are not in a position to make sufficient progress, on account of financial shortages; the burden of foreign debt, rising interest payments on that debt and various other economic factors have hampered their educational growth. Their need for support in the way of instructional material, the training of personnel, exchanges of innovative experience and a supply

of funds should therefore be seriously considered by bilateral donor agencies and other multilateral and international financing agencies. In this context, donor agencies and beneficiary countries could together consider redefining their priorities, simplifying where possible their procedure for technical co-operation and redirecting some of the funds now used for debt-servicing by developing countries to the financing of basic education.

38. UNESCO, as the agency responsible for implementing ILY and an international organization dedicated to education should endeavour to:

- (a) help Member States, on request, to draw up their plan of action for education for all;
- (b) strengthen its operational capacity and the implementation of concerted action with other organizations (UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, bilateral agencies, NGOs, etc.) in the field, in line with the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs;
- (c) promote the training of personnel on a larger scale in the areas of planning and management, curriculum preparation and instruction, research and evaluation and other related areas, in order to raise the quality of work in literacy and basic education in Member States through formal and non-formal approaches;
- (d) In each country where massive illiteracy persists, initiate, at the request of the government, appropriate programmes and projects;
- (e) organize information dissemination, exchanges of experts and exchanges of ideas and materials through seminars and workshops for different functionaries in Member States and through the establishment and strengthening of regional and international networks for exchanging information;
- (f) strengthen the capacity of its Regional Offices and international institutes, namely IBE, IIEP and UIE, so as to be able to stimulate research, innovation and evaluation programmes in Member States;
- (g) foster closer co-operation among Member States themselves through its regional innovation networks, Regional Offices and international institutes such as the Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), the Regional Centre for Adult Education and Functional Literacy for Latin America (CRE-FAL) and the Arab Literacy and Adult Education Organization (ARLO);
- (h) promote co-operation among non-governmental organizations operating at different levels and seek their partnership and involvement in the Organization's activities in this field;
- (i) create mechanisms during the 1990s, in co-operation with Member States and the demographic services of the United Nations, for improving the reliability of statistics on literacy and for monitoring progress in different regions and internationally, in order to inform Member States and others periodically about the progress being made concerning education for all, any obstacles or bottlenecks being experienced in any region or sub-region and the modifications in plans and programmes needed to achieve the targets set for the decade;

- (j) carry out an evaluation on a global scale of the impact of International Literacy Year, with a view to stimulating further action during the remainder of the decade;
- (k) provide Member States and appropriate non-governmental organizations, at their request, with information and assistance in order to find external sources of financing for their major programmes and projects aimed at the reduction of illiteracy and the promotion of basic education.

39. The International Bureau of Education, in co-operation and co-ordination with other units of UNESCO, should:

- (a) carry out follow-up activities to this Conference and advise Member States, on request, on ways and means of implementing this Recommendation in the light of experience gathered from other countries - both developing and industrialized;
- (b) further step up its documentation work and the worldwide dissemination of publications on literacy and education for all
- (c) conduct comparative surveys and monitor the progress made by different Member States and regions towards "education for all" by the year 2000, making use for this purpose of, inter alia, the documents of the World Conference on Education for All, for which it is the repository, and the information-gleaned from national reports;
- (d) assist developing countries through the organization of training programmes for the setting up of regional and national documentation-exchange networks;
- (e) produce more 'Literacy Lessons' in different languages and disseminate them widely throughout the 1990s.

40. The Conference recommends that a preliminary report on the implementation of this Recommendation be submitted to the International Conference on Education at its 43rd session.