

Position Paper of the People's Republic of China

Bridging the Digital Divide and Strengthening Student Data Sovereignty

Delegation of the People's Republic of China

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The digital era has created a profound divergence in global development, where 2.6 billion people—including 1.3 billion school-age children—remain disconnected from the Internet.¹ While developed nations in the Global North utilize digital infrastructure to enhance education, many developing countries in the Global South lack the necessary resources and infrastructure to bridge this digital divide, and the current global architecture implicitly imposes dependency on foreign platforms.

The unregulated expansion of EdTech platforms has facilitated the mass commodification of student data and transformed classrooms into environments of large-scale data monitoring. For many developing nations, the current choice is a false dichotomy: either remain digitally isolated or compromise control over national data to private-sector entities that prioritize profit over national security. 40% of countries worldwide have no national regulatory framework requiring EdTech companies to report on data collection.² This highlights the need for models of digital education that prioritize the sovereignty and security of all Member States. These challenges are particularly significant for developing countries facing similar constraints.

Over the last seven decades, China has made important strides for South-South cooperation in development, upholding its goals of promoting common development and advancing world multipolarity. China has implemented the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) to support partner countries in the development of digital infrastructure. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and its Digital Silk Road component, promotes high-quality international cooperation. The 2019 Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education advocated for a mindful and cognizant approach to AI integration in education, which only became more relevant in the years since. This reflects China's commitment to establishing global norms that prioritize the development and security of all Member States.

The People's Republic of China advocates for an expansion of access to digital resources built upon sovereign, state-led infrastructure, since connectivity is a prerequisite for the right to education. China maintains that respecting the right of all Member States to choose their own path of digital development is essential. The digital divide should be narrowed

¹ITU (2024); UNICEF (2020)

²UNICEF/GPA DEWG (2024)

through mutual and win-win cooperation. Student data generated within a Member State's border should be recognized as being under the jurisdiction of that Member State, and a core component of national security. Any international framework for digital education must be built on the principles of mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs. Digital development should be achieved through infrastructure investment, technology transfer, and state-regulated digital platforms.

Furthermore, while the People's Republic of China supports global cooperation in digital literacy and teacher training, such initiatives must respect the principle of non-interference. Capacity building should focus on providing Member States with the technical autonomy to manage their own digital pedagogical frameworks, reflecting their unique socio-political realities and national contexts. The international community's role is to facilitate technology transfer and infrastructure funding (such as through the GIGA initiative) without imposing ideological conditions on how states educate their youth.

Artificial intelligence integration in educational contexts should be approached with caution. AI must be human-centered and state-governed to prevent bias and ensure that it serves the educational needs of all students. China maintains that AI development, which requires significant amounts of data and computational resources, must be balanced with robust, state-led cybersecurity protocols. Additionally, as schools increasingly become targets for external cyber-interference, protecting student data must be recognized as a fundamental pillar of national defense.

This position is aligned with United Nations General Assembly resolutions on the right to privacy in the digital age,³ which particularly emphasizes the role of Member States in ensuring that data governance frameworks reflect national legal systems and development priorities.

The People's Republic of China calls upon the General Assembly to foster a peaceful, secure, open and cooperative cyberspace. We advocate for the rejection of digital hegemony and the use of the Internet for peaceful purposes. We invite all Member States to prioritize the establishment of a multilateral, democratic, and transparent global internet governance system to bridge the digital divide and ensure that the right to digital education is universally accessible without surrendering national data sovereignty.

³The right to privacy in the digital age, UNGA (2020)