

# Teaching about the League of Nations: An attempt to cultivate international consensus during the interwar period

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During the interwar period, the view was widely shared by international scholars and officials of the League of Nations that it was essential to cultivate faith in international cooperation as the standard method for conducting world affairs among subsequent generations. They also believed that the League of Nations' existence was largely reliant on sympathetic responses from different peoples. In this context, from 1926 the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) of the League of Nations constituted a Sub-Committee of Experts for the Instruction of Children and Youth in the Existence and Aims of the League of Nations (the Sub-Committee of Experts) and undertook the work of making the League of Nations known to the younger generation, which was one of the lasting educational achievements of the League. Although some scholars have analyzed how the program was carried out in some countries (Osborne 2016; Li 2021; Julie McLeod 2019; McCarthy 2010), the role of the ICIC in globalizing the program and how the program was carried out globally have not yet been fully explored. It is not only an important vehicle for understanding the role of international organizations in the process of globalizing particular educational concepts but also because it enables a historical reflection on the diverse voices expressed by differently positioned countries on peace education. The article aims to fill in the research gap by analyzing the networks of the Sub-Committee of Experts and reports written by scholars or governmental representatives in each country, published in *Educational Survey* and *The Bulletin of League of Nations Teaching*. This article argues that the Sub-Committee of Experts functioned as the centre of international communication although it did not directly undertake any activities within national territories. Furthermore, the necessity of the League of Nations' existence was not viewed as common sense in most countries.

The article includes three parts. In the first part, it argues that the cautious attitudes towards education upheld by the ICIC were also reflected in this program, and such conservative attitudes constrained the working scope and the role of the Sub-Committee of Experts in internationalizing the program. The article finds that when discussing how the Sub-Committee of Experts should function, the members of the ICIC shared the agreement of not interfering in national education systems and expected the description of the League of Nations in each country to diverge. The activities of the ICIC and the Sub-Committee of Experts mainly consisted of four tasks: a) organizing summer schools, b) issuing recommendations on the methods of teaching about the League, c) providing reference materials for those who showed an interest in the program and d) issuing educational journals that contained information on how the program was being carried out in each individual country. The ICIC kept its distance from governments while trying to establish a close relationship with teachers and other international organizations. In analyzing how those activities were conducted, the article reveals how the internal organs of the League of Nations were coordinated to try to ensure the successful operation of the program. The Assembly and the sub-organs of the Permanent Secretariat, such as the Information Section, the Library and the Intellectual Cooperation and International Bureaux Section, were all involved in supporting the works of the Sub-Committee of Experts.

In the second part, the article provides a descriptive analysis of how the program was carried out in different countries. Adding content about the League of Nations to textbooks, organizing special lectures on the League of Nations, and providing reading materials for teachers and students as references were the three main methods taken in most countries. Beyond these methods, the article finds that some countries also organized article competitions and arranged scholarships for individuals travelling to Geneva. The article reveals the degree to which these methods were employed, while showing that access to information about the League of Nations to teachers and students substantially varied. The article further shows that private

organizations played a significant role in carrying out the program in most countries. The League of Nations Unions in different countries were most active in the program, while the national Sub-Committee of the ICIC was seldom mentioned.

In the final part, the article analyzes what challenges the program faced in each individual country. The ICIC from the very beginning held the line that in each country, the image of the League of Nations was expected to be viewed differently, and that the League itself had no right to decide what students should know about the League in an any given national instance. As a result, the description of the League of Nations varied from one nation to another. The expectations placed on the League of Nations and how its image was viewed in the different parts of the international order it maintained played a decisive role in the popularity of the program in any given country. Accordingly, the article divides those countries participating in the program into four groups: the first group consisted of countries occupying dominating positions in the post-WWI international system that actively carried out the program. The second group consisted of those countries in Eastern Europe established after WWI which expected that the League could provide them with national security. The third group was comprised of those countries who felt themselves to be non-participants in the League of Nations system. The fourth group was made up of those that considered their national interests beyond the League's protection.

In the conclusion, the article summarizes the contradiction between the attempts of the ICIC to avoiding political influencing the program and the reality that the international educational program was inherently political, leading to a discussion of the role that an international organization such as the ICIC could and should take in globalizing educational concepts, especially relating to constructing a *sensus communis* among the next generation.

## References

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