

GOVT ISSUES NEW RULES ON STUDENTS' DATA

PHOTO BY NANCY NANYONGA

By John Masaba

The Government has issued new guidelines governing the use of the Education Management Information System (EMIS), introducing stricter compliance measures and sanctions for education officials and institutions that fail to adhere to data requirements.

Launched yesterday, by the Ministry of Education and Sports at the National ICT Innovation Hub in Nakawa, Kampala, the guidelines aim to strengthen data privacy, improve accuracy, and ensure reliable information for planning and resource allocation across the education sector.

EMIS is a centralised digital platform developed by the Government to collect, store and process data from all schools nationwide. Under the system, each learner is assigned a unique learner identification number (LIN), while institutions are required to submit detailed information, including school location, ownership status and governance structure.

The education ministry relies on EMIS data to determine capitation grants and guide resource allocation to both government and government-aided schools. Registration on the system is mandatory for all public and private institutions.

The Government redeveloped and rolled out the digital EMIS in July 2022 to replace the annual school census. The system enables online tracking of learners and teachers, licensing and student verification across all education levels.

However, despite its intended benefits, the system has faced challenges, including mistrust among some stakeholders and misdeclaration of information submitted to the Government.

Analysts say the latest guidelines are intended to address these concerns by strengthening compliance, improving data integrity, and enhancing transparency to boost uptake of the system.

CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The guidelines outline procedures for updating institutional identification details, registering refugees and cross-border learners, as well as managing data on learners from child-headed households.

In cases where a learner's guardianship is unclear, the document requires a recommendation letter from



Ssozi (seated, third-left), Barugahare (right) and other officials pose for a group photo during the dissemination of Education Management Information System guidelines at Nakawa ICT Hub in Kampala, yesterday

EMIS guidelines at a glance

LEARNER TRANSFERS

Schools must update learner records using the Learner Information Number when a learner changes schools at the same academic level

For promotion to a higher level, use Learner Information Number (primary) or Index Number (secondary and above)

UPDATE PROMOTION STATUS

Schools must update learner promotion records within one month after the academic year ends

ENSURE ACCURATE RECORDS

Secondary and post-secondary learners' details must match records used for national examinations before any EMIS edits

MANDATORY REGISTRATION

All learners and teachers must be registered on EMIS

SPECIAL REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Foreign teachers: Passport, work permit, academic qualifications

Refugee learners: Refugee ID, parent/guardian identification, and certified academic qualifications

Cross-border learners: Passport/NIN of learner and parent/guardian

Child-headed families: LC1 recommendation letter and LC1 Chairperson's NIN

Learners without parents/guardians: Community Development Officer or Local Council recommendation letter and CDO NIN

PROHIBITED PRACTICES

Falsifying education data

Refusing to submit required information

Unauthorised access or sharing of data

Fraudulent handling of EMIS records

PENALTIES FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

User access to EMIS may be suspended or permanently withdrawn

Schools risk withholding of government funding and support until compliance is achieved

the LCI chairperson of the area where the child resides.

For learners without known parents or guardians, school heads are required to obtain a recommendation letter from the community development officer, accompanied by the officer's national identification number.

The guidelines further provide for the registration of teaching and non-teaching

staff, as well as rules governing data storage, access and security, in a bid to address concerns over data privacy and misuse.

The education ministry will remain the primary custodian of all data entered into EMIS and will be responsible for secure storage, archiving and retrieval.

"All data stored on EMIS shall be submitted to the

MOVEMENT OF LEARNERS

Under the new guidelines, heads of institutions are required to update learners' promotion status within one month after the end of each academic year.

For learners transferring between schools within the same academic level, the receiving institution must update records using the learner's identification number.

Where a school changes ownership status, the guidelines state that a private institution can only be converted into a government or government-aided school after formal grant-aiding by the ministry and allocation of an official school code.

BETWEEN THE LINES

The rules will fortify data privacy, improve accuracy, and ensure reliable information for planning and resource allocation across the education sector.

national data centre (data depository) managed by the National Information Technology Authority or any other authorised entity," the document states.

Access to the system will be strictly controlled and granted only when necessary, including for legal purposes.

"Data access shall be granted only for as long as it is needed [for example, by a court]. Access to the system shall be routinely reviewed to ensure that those who have it still need it. Access shall be revoked promptly when it is no longer necessary," the guidelines add.

The document introduces sanctions for misuse of education data, stating that any managerial or technical officer who misuses data or statistics will face disciplinary action under public service standing orders, the Teachers Act, and

other applicable laws.

Other penalties include suspension or permanent withdrawal of EMIS access rights. The guidelines also indicate that government support, including funding, may be withheld until compliance is achieved.

Falsification of data, failure to submit required information, or unauthorised manipulation of EMIS records for personal gain is strictly prohibited.

RELUCTANCE FROM PARENTS

While launching the guidelines, the ministry noted concerns over resistance from some stakeholders who have been reluctant to provide complete and accurate data to the system.

"We have been underreporting and now we want to have accurate data. When we do the census, we say we have 10 million learners in the system, but when we do head count, we find that we have less. So, schools and many other people have been giving us false data, which causes poor planning and mischief that the Government should come out and cure," said Brighton Barugahare, the commissioner for education

policy and research at the education ministry.

Barugahare said the guidelines are expected to enhance transparency and strengthen data governance in the education sector.

He added that although the guidelines were developed earlier, implementation has faced challenges due to mistrust among some stakeholders, including parents and school administrators.

"When you ask for information, people think you want it for bad motives, but this is your Government and we are your ministry. If you are withholding information, you are disabling the Government as far as planning is concerned," Barugahare added.

NEED FOR CO-OPERATION

Vicent Sozi, the assistant commissioner for statistics at the ministry, said the guidelines will help stakeholders better understand their responsibilities and improve compliance.

"The next level is to come up with clear regulations to ensure that the issue of compliance is dealt with," he said, adding that accurate data remains critical for planning and resource allocation.

Sozi added that the system, introduced in 2022, has improved efficiency in data collection and management by replacing manual processes.

Mukono district inspector of schools Anifa Namayanja welcomed the guidelines, but called for clearer sanctions for non-compliance.

She also raised concerns over data utilisation, saying schools are sometimes required to resubmit information already available in EMIS.

"There is also some contradiction between registration by the Ministry of Education and Sports and the registration done by the Uganda Registration Services Bureau. Many private institutions claim their names are gazetted, but sometimes this is not accepted," she said.

Francis Mukasa, a headteacher in Mukono district, called for increased digital literacy training to improve the effective use of EMIS.

"When EMIS was brought, it found most of us limited in skills. That is why most of the problems have come," he said.

Mukasa added that gaps such as duplicate LINs arose due to tight implementation timelines and limited guidance during rollout.