

Smart Futures Youth Forum

We the Future: Imagine | Innovate | Impact

23 October 2026
Changping Campus, Beijing Normal University

CONCEPT NOTE (Draft)

Background and Rationale

Young people are essential partners and co-creators in shaping the futures of education and building more inclusive and sustainable societies.¹ Rapid advances in AI and other emerging technologies are providing new possibilities for learning and education, while raising challenges for equity, human agency and the capabilities needed for young generations. Although 80% of surveyed undergraduates reported using generative AI and people aged 25 – 34 accounted for around 45% of surveyed AI practitioners, youth participation in AI policy-making remains limited.^{2,3,4} AI is a nascent industry, and it's also an industry that belongs to young people.⁵ Young people and students should be trusted and empowered to play a leading role in education decision-making.⁶ The Forum will therefore provide a platform for this engagement, bringing young people into dialogue with leading experts to imagine educational futures, exchange innovative practices and develop capabilities for responsible action.

The inaugural Forum will focus on three interconnected themes, *Imagine, Innovate and Impact*. Through intergenerational dialogue, it will amplify youth voices and draw on the guidance of leading experts to explore how young people can shape the futures of education in the age of AI, contributing to post 2030 education agenda.

IMAGINE: Envisioning the futures of education in the age of AI

As global consultations shape education beyond 2030, young people's aspirations must inform its purposes and priorities. AI is changing how knowledge is created, where learning occurs and how people learn together. A new pact on learning and education calls for rethinking relationships and shared responsibilities across society, with learners' agency and self-development at its centre. This theme invites young people to imagine educational futures that advance human dignity, equity and collective well-being.

- What kind of education do young people envision beyond 2030?
- What should change in where, how and with whom we learn in the age of AI?
- What shared commitments should connect learners, educators, families and society to realise these futures?

¹ United Nations (2024). *Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations*.

² Chegg. (2025). *Global student survey 2025*. <https://www.chegg.org/global-student-survey-2025>

³ OECD (2024). *Bridging talent shortages in tech: Skills-first hiring, micro-credentials and inclusive outreach*. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/bridging-talent-shortages-in-tech_f35da44f-en.html

⁴ UNESCO-UNEVOC (2025). *World Youth Skills Day 2025: Youth survey report on AI and digital skills*. https://connect.unevoc.unesco.org/pub/wysd_survey_report_2025.pdf

⁵ Xinhua. (2025, April 29). *Xi inspects Shanghai large-model incubator, underscoring China's AI ambitions*. State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. https://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/2025-04/29/content_117851946.html

⁶ UNESCO (2026). *Global education monitoring report 2026: Lead with youth; youth report*. UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54676/ELTQ3060>

INNOVATE: Sharing youth-led innovations for inclusive and equitable learning

National and regional initiatives, including China's "AI + Education" Action Plan and the African Union's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, set out ambitions for applying AI to educational challenges. Translating these ambitions into practice raises questions about relevance, accessibility and educational value across diverse contexts. This theme will bring together youth-led innovations to examine how they respond to local needs, what evidence supports them and how lessons from different regions can inform more inclusive and equitable learning.

- What youth-led innovations are emerging across regions to improve learning and address educational inequalities?
- How do local needs, languages and resources shape the design and implementation of these practices?
- What evidence and lessons can guide the adaptation of promising practices across different contexts?

IMPACT: Building capabilities to turn ideas into responsible action

Turning ideas into responsible action requires the capacity to understand AI, question its outputs, exercise ethical judgement and collaborate with others. UNESCO's AI competency framework and the OECD-European Commission AI literacy framework provide foundations for developing these capabilities while safeguarding human agency. This theme will explore how learning, practical experience and intergenerational mentorship can help young people apply these capabilities, lead initiatives and contribute meaningfully to education decision-making.

- Which capabilities do young people need to work with AI purposefully, creatively and responsibly?
- How can AI competency frameworks inform learning opportunities that prepare young people to address real educational challenges?
- What mentorship, partnerships and opportunities for participation can enable young people to turn their ideas into sustained action?

Aims and Objectives

The Forum aims to provide a youth-led platform for intergenerational dialogue, connecting young people's aspirations for education with innovative practices, capabilities for action and opportunities for collaborative research.

Its objectives are to:

- Enable young people to articulate their visions and priorities for education in the age of AI and beyond 2030.
- Exchange innovative practices across regions and examine their contributions to inclusive and equitable learning.
- Develop shared research questions and opportunities for continued collaboration among young people and leading experts.
- Identify the capabilities young people need to take an active and responsible role in shaping education in the age of AI.

Organisational Structure

Organisers: Beijing Normal University (BNU)

Global Smart Education Network (GSENet)

Host: Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University (SLI-BNU)

Advisory Committee (inaugural):

- **Prof. Asha Kanwar**, Former President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning; Chair Professor of Beijing Normal University
- **Prof. CHENG Kaiming**, Emeritus Professor and former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong
- **Prof. CHEN Guangju**, Professor and former Vice President of Beijing Normal University

Programme Committee:

- **Mr. Blessing Tunde Dada (Nigeria)**, HLSC SDG4 Youth and Student Network Leader (Sherpa) at UNESCO; Africa's Youth Representative at Education 2030 UN; Fiscal Transparency Champion Coordinator; Ekiti Central Senatorial District, Nigeria @ Inspiration Care & Dev Center Africa
- **Mr. Jacob Blasius (Denmark)**, Executive Director, Global Student Forum (GSF)
- **Dr. Rania Hamzaoui (Tunisia)**, Developer and Computer Science Instructor, Smartouch
- **Ms. Sofia De Nicolo (Argentina)**, Director of the Observatory of International Affairs and Foreign Policy (OCIPLEX)
- **Ms. XU Lin (China)**, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Global Smart Education Network (GSENet); Assistant to the Dean, Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University (SLIBNU)

Partners:

Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University

Beijing Normal University Students' Union

Academic Committee of the China Association for Educational Technology (CAET)

Harvard China Education Symposium

Oxford China Forum

Cambridge China Education Forum

Cambridge University EdTech Society

Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)

Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)

UNESCO Regional Centre for Quality and Excellence in Education (RCQE)

Observatorio de las Relaciones Unión Europea América Latina (Obreal)

Format and Participants

The Forum will be held on 23 October 2026 in a hybrid format, combining in-person participation at the Changping Campus of Beijing Normal University in Beijing, China, with online participation. The working language will be English. It will bring together young people from different countries and regions, including university students, early-career researchers, designers, innovators and education practitioners.

Expected outcomes

The Forum is expected to generate:

- **A youth perspectives working paper:** Co-developed by young participants with expert guidance, the paper will synthesis educational aspirations, insights from practice and priorities for further research.
- **Cases of youth-led innovative practices:** Selected contributions will be developed into case profiles documenting their contexts, approaches, emerging evidence and lessons, providing a foundation for subsequent comparative research.

(Selected outputs from the Forum and follow-up research may be considered for publication with Springer.)

Agenda

Morning

• Opening (09:00–9:30)

Guests

Prof. HUANG Ronghuai (China), Co-Dean, Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University (offline)

Moderator:

Ms. ZENG Yuchen (China), Master's student, The Central Academy of Drama

• Intergenerational dialogue: *Empowering youth for smart futures* (9:30–10:30)

Guests:

1. Prof. CHENG Kaiming (Hong Kong, China), Emeritus Professor and former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong (offline)
2. Prof. Asha Kanwar, Former President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning; Chair Professor of Beijing Normal University (offline)
3. Mr. Blessing Dada (Nigeria), HLSC SDG4 Youth and Student Network Leader (Sherpa) at UNESCO; Africa's Youth Representative at Education 2030 UN (offline)
4. Ms. GUO Yuxuan (China), Grade 7 student, High School Affiliated to Capital Normal University (offline)

Moderator:

Prof. ZHANG Jingjing, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University (offline)

• IMAGINE: *Envisioning the futures of education in the age of AI* (10:30–12:00)

Short Talk

Dr. Joy CHEN (China), Senior advisor at Stanford Accelerator for Learning (offline)

Speakers: (5 minutes per speaker)

1. Prof. Sofia De Nicolo (Argentina), Director of the Observatory of International Affairs and Foreign Policy (OCIPLEX); Professor at the National University of Quilmes
2. Mr. Charlie Haywood (United States), Undergraduate student, Stanford University; Founder, Dream Catchers Education; Co-founder, Rumbo; Founder, Albatrust (online)
3. Ms. SHENG Yihao (China), Ph.D. Candidates, Boston University; Director of Public Relations at the China Education Symposium at Harvard Graduate School of Education. (online)
4. Mr. Najib Mattar (Lebanon), UNICEF's Generation Unlimited (online)
5. Mr. TU Shangqing (China), Doctoral student, Department of Computer Science and Technology, Tsinghua University; member of the fully AI-supported classroom research team (offline)
6. Ms. Maja Kocbek (Slovenia), Master's student, University of Maribor; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (offline)

Panel Discussion

All Speakers

Moderator:

Dr. Joy CHEN (China), Senior advisor at Stanford Accelerator for Learning (offline)

Coordinator:

Dr. ZHANG Yifan (China), Postdoctoral Fellow at Beijing Normal University (offline)

• Lunch Break (12:00–13:30)

Afternoon

• **INNOVATE:** *Sharing youth-led innovations for inclusive and equitable learning* **(13:30–15:00)**

Short Talk

Prof. Atsa Etoundi Roger (Cameroon), Expert representative, Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon (offline)

Speakers (5 minutes per speaker)

1. **Dr. Rania Hamzaoui (Tunisia)**, Developer and Instructor, Smarttouch (online)
2. **Mr. Youssef Ashraf El-Shihy (Egypt)**, Regional Presales Consulting Manager, iFLYTEK Co., LTD. (offline)
3. **Ms. YU Bo (China)**, Doctoral student, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge (offline)
4. **Mr. ZHOU Hai (China)**, Master's student in Integrated Machine Learning Systems, University College London; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (online)
5. **Mr. Almouthana Taha Khalfallah (Tunisia)**, Undergraduate student, University of Tunis; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (offline)
6. **Ms. Ksenia Shishkina (Russia)**, Undergraduate student, Saratov State University; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (offline) (TBC)

Panel Discussion

All Speakers

Moderator:

Prof. Atsa Etoundi Roger (Cameroon), Expert representative, Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon (offline)

Coordinator:

Dr. Boulus Shehata (Egypt), Assistant Professor, Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University

• **IMPACT:** *Building capabilities to turn ideas into responsible action* **(15:00–16:30)**

Short Talk

Dr. ZHANG Zhongyao (China), Education Specialist, UNESCO Global Alliance on the Science of Learning (online)

Speakers (5 minutes per speaker)

1. **Mr. Jacob Blasius (Denmark)**, Executive Director at Global Student Forum (online)
2. **Ms. GU Jiawei (China)**, Master's student in Public Health, Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (offline)
3. **Mr. Syed Nazmus Zawad (Bangladesh)**, Bachelor's graduate in E-commerce Management, Wuhan University; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (offline)
4. **Mr. Ashyrgeldi Atayev (Turkmenistan)**, AI Education Expert, Ministry of Education, Turkmenistan (online)
5. **Ms. Tran Thi My Duyen (Vietnam)**, Undergraduate student, Hanoi University of Science and Technology; Global Competition on Design for Futures Team (offline)
6. **Ms. WU Xiaobei (China)**, Master's degree in Educational Technology, Peking University (offline)
7. **Ms. WONG Chong Kei (Macao, China)**, Grade 8 student from Pui Ching Middle School (Coloane Campus), Macao (offline)

Panel Discussion

All Speakers

Moderator:

Dr. ZHANG Zhongyao (China), Education Specialist, UNESCO Global Alliance on the Science of Learning (online)

Coordinator:

Dr. Cinnie LIU (Indonesia), Postdoctoral Fellow at Beijing Normal University (offline)

• **Closing** **(16:30–17:00)**

Guests

Prof. Asha Kanwar (India), Former President and CEO of Commonwealth of Learning, Chair Professor of Beijing Normal University

Moderator:

Ms. ZENG Yuchen (China), Master's student, The Central Academy of Drama