



Artificial Intelligence, Education, and the Struggle for Global Influence

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Abstract: This editorial examines the contrasting approaches of the United States and China to AI education, focusing on curricula, funding models, and ideological underpinnings. The U.S. relies on market-driven incentives and private sector involvement, while China mandates compulsory AI education supported by substantial state investment. These divergent models illustrate how education has become a site of global rivalry, with significant implications for workforce development and value formation. The editorial also considers the cooperative frameworks advanced by UNESCO and the OECD, which emphasize equity, human rights, and global collaboration. It concludes by highlighting the tension between competitive national strategies and international calls for inclusive and human-centered AI education, indicating the risk of deepening divides rather than improving shared progress.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; education policy; geopolitics; global competition.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) today is not merely a technological innovation but a strategic and political priority for states. Education systems, beyond preparing younger generations for the future workforce through AI literacy, have become a key arena of international power competition. In this context, the divergent education policies of the United States and China constitute decisive factors shaping the trajectory of global rivalry. (*Mochizuki & Vickers, 2024*).

International organizations such as UNESCO (2025) and the OECD (2025) advocate for a human-centered, rights-based, and equitable integration of AI in education. Yet, national strategies often emphasize competitive approaches. This article examines the distinct AI education models of the United States and China—through the lenses of curricula and ideology, research funding, and workforce development—and discusses UNESCO’s and OECD’s recommendations from a global cooperation perspective. The study demonstrates how AI literacy in education has evolved into a geopolitical arena of rivalry (*Shahjahan, 2016*). The analysis compares the U.S. market-oriented, incentive-based approach with China’s centralized and compulsory curriculum model. It further highlights the tension between UNESCO’s and OECD’s equity-focused frameworks and the competitive instincts that drive national policy (*Mochizuki, Bruillard & Bryan, 2025*). The research argues that AI education cannot be reduced merely to workforce training; rather, through curriculum design, research funding allocation, and youth training, it emerges as a strategic geopolitical instrument shaping global power balances and systems of values. (*Fan, 2025*).

AI Education in the U.S.–China Rivalry

The United States' Policy-Oriented Approach

In 2025, the U.S. issued the *Executive Order on Advancing Artificial Intelligence Education for American Youth*, focusing on incentives, curriculum guidelines, and teacher training (The White House, 2025). However, no significant federal funding was allocated. Instead, private companies and universities assumed a central role in shaping curricula. This reflects the fundamentally market-driven character of the American innovation ecosystem. (Kaya-Kasikci & Glass, 2025).

China's Centralized Model

In 2025, China introduced compulsory AI education—at least eight hours annually—beginning in primary school, while simultaneously launching an \$8.2 billion national AI investment fund (R&D World, 2025; Business Insider, 2025; Recorded Future, 2025). Here, education policy functions not merely as pedagogy but also as a political instrument aligned with the state's long-term industrial strategy (Feijóo, Armuña, & Díaz, 2023).

Comparative Perspective

The U.S. relies on market dynamics and flexible incentives, whereas China employs compulsory and centralized measures to ensure broad-based AI literacy. Both models demonstrate how education policy is instrumentalized within geopolitical competition (Mochizuki & Vickers, 2024).

Curricula and Ideological Dimensions

U.S. curricula prioritize creativity, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship, reflecting liberal democratic ideals, while China's curricula emphasize technical proficiency and alignment with state objectives (Business Insider, 2025). These contrasts reveal that students are shaped not only for the labor market but also within specific socio-political value systems. (Shahjahan, 2016).

Aspen Digital (2025) underlines that the AI race is not merely a U.S.–China contest, but also a broader struggle over values: individual liberty, state control, or hybrid models that may shape the emerging global order (Elfert & Ydesen, 2024).

Research Funding and Workforce Development

China, through state-led investments, is fostering broad-based and systematic AI literacy, while the U.S. continues to cultivate elite centers of excellence through private sector and venture capital funding (Kaya-Kasikci & Glass, 2025).

This dynamic produces asymmetrical outcomes for the global workforce: Chinese students are systematically trained at scale, while in the U.S., disparities in school resources result in significantly uneven access to AI literacy (Fan, 2025).

UNESCO and OECD Frameworks

UNESCO's *Beijing Consensus on AI and Education* underscores human-centered approaches, transparency, and alignment with human rights (UNESCO, 2025). The OECD's AI Literacy Framework emphasizes equitable access, adaptability across diverse contexts, and preparing young people not only for employment but also for civic participation (Shahjahan, 2016).

Nonetheless, national strategies remain dominated by competitive reflexes. As a result, despite UNESCO's and OECD's calls for cooperation, education systems risk being transformed into arenas of a so-called global AI arms race (Mochizuki & Vickers, 2024).

Conclusion

The geopolitics of AI in education cannot be reduced to a race for technological supremacy. The design of curricula, the allocation of research funding, and the training of younger generations will determine not only future economic competitiveness but also the global order of values (Fan, 2025).

The U.S.'s market-oriented model and China's centralized strategy reflect distinct ideological visions shaping AI education. UNESCO's and OECD's cooperative and equity-driven recommendations point to the possibility of AI education serving as a genuine bridge for global collaboration (Elfert & Ydesen, 2024). Yet, under the dominance of competitive national strategies, there remains the tangible risk that AI education may function instead as a formidable wall, deepening divides rather than fostering shared progress (Mochizuki, Bruillard & Bryan, 2025).

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