

Session 1.

Global models of education and China - responses to 21st-century megatrends

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October 2026



The Lecture Series

The Lecture Series examines **UK education policy in the 21st century** through an international and comparative perspective.

UK education policy is seen as part of wider global educational developments, representing a distinctive but evolving variant of the wider Anglo-Saxon educational tradition.

Main themes

Session 1. Global models of education and China - responses to 21st-century mega trends

Session 2: Understanding the UK education policy and reform through a historical lens

Session 3: The emerging educational vision of the current UK Government

Session 4: Generative AI and a new educational paradigm - policy debates in the UK and China.

Session objectives

By the end of this session, participants should be able to:

- Understand the major global challenges shaping education in the 21st century, including AI, climate change, demographic transformation and geopolitical competition.
- Identify and critically evaluate five global models of education: Anglo-Saxon, Pacific, Continental European, Nordic and Developmental.
- Analyse how different educational traditions interpret and respond to common global challenges.
- Understand the concepts of policy borrowing, policy learning, convergence, divergence and hybridisation in comparative education.
- Examine China's educational responses to technological change, industrial upgrading and national development.
- Compare Chinese and UK educational trajectories and identify their contrasting policy logics.
- Assess how advances in Generative AI, machine memory and human-machine collaboration may influence future educational systems.

Section 1.

21st-century challenges and the purposes of education

Education systems & 21st-century challenges

Legacies of the 20th century - many education systems remain organised around class-based and historical legacies :

- Selection and examination success
- Credentialing and qualification attainment
- Standardised knowledge transmission
- Preparing workers for relatively stable occupations

Contemporary societies in the 21st-century increasingly require:

- Adaptability and lifelong learning
- Collective problem-solving and innovation

Education has been changing incrementally while challenges have changed structurally. Why do education systems change so slowly?

21st-century global mega-trends and challenges

- Climate-nature crisis
- AI and technological change
- Inequality and social fragmentation
- Demographic transformation
- Geopolitical instability
- Health and resilience

Education increasingly expected to support economic adaptation, social cohesion, democratic citizenship, sustainability and collective problem-solving.

Purposes of education in the 21st century

- **Human Capital** - skills, productivity, competitiveness
- **Social Mobility** - opportunity, aspiration, life chances
- **Social Justice** - equity, inclusion, reducing inequality
- **Human Development** - personal growth, wellbeing, flourishing
- **Social Cohesion** - citizenship, trust, shared responsibility
- **Collective Problem-Solving** - knowledge, innovation, addressing societal and global challenges

The challenge for 21st-century education is not choosing between these purposes but developing a coherent relationship between them.

Section 2

***Global models of education –
a middle-range heuristic device
for comparative analysis***

Why think in terms of global models of education?

- Education systems tend to cluster around broader patterns of governance, values and institutional design.
- Countries facing similar social, economic and cultural conditions often develop comparable educational arrangements.
- These recurring patterns allow us to construct **ideal types** or **global models** of education.
- Global models simplify complexity and help us identify underlying educational logics.
- They provide a framework for understanding policy transfer, convergence and divergence across nations.
- National systems can then be analysed as particular variations or hybrids of wider educational models.

Five global models of education

1. **Anglo Saxon** (e.g. US, England, New Zealand, Eastern Europe and now Africa) – corporate management model of markets/choice/competition; standardisation of teaching and learning, focus on core subjects; test-based accountability .
2. **Pacific** (e.g. South Korea, Singapore) – conformist; didactic teaching methods; high levels of parental/social support for education; high expectations and normative behaviours.
3. **Continental European** (e.g. Germany, France, Netherlands) - structured vocational pathways; strong public education systems; less marketisation; emphasis on equity and civic education.”
4. **Nordic** (e.g. Finland, other Nordic countries; some Canadian provinces, Scotland?) – high status education profession; high trust relationships; devolved responsibilities within national frameworks; education and social services linked to school improvement
5. **Developmental/Resource-Constrained Systems** (e.g. parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, lower-income states) – expanding access under resource constraints, large regional and social inequalities, strong influence of international agencies and donors, focus on basic skills, participation and capacity-building

Using global educational models - methodological caveats

Strengths

- Simplify a complex educational landscape
- Enable comparison across national systems
- Highlight recurring policy traditions and patterns
- Provide a framework for analysing educational change

Limitations

- No country fits a single model perfectly
- Significant national variation exists within each global model
- Boundaries between models are blurred
- Educational systems evolve through adaptation and hybridisation

Global educational models are analytical tools, not precise descriptions of reality.

Section 3

***Global model interpretation of
mega trends & the realities of national hybridization***

Model interpretation & dominant responses

Aggregated model	How it interprets 21st-century challenges	Dominant educational response
Anglo-Saxon	Globalisation as a competitive race between nations, firms and individuals	Skills, competition, performance, accountability, innovation
Pacific	National development depends on educational effort, discipline and excellence	Attainment, high expectations, STEM excellence, effort, social discipline
Continental European	Challenges require social coordination and balanced economic adaptation	Social partnership, vocational adaptation, social cohesion, citizenship
Nordic	Long-term sustainability depends on equity, trust and collective wellbeing	Wellbeing, equity, sustainability, democratic citizenship
Developmental	Primary challenge is educational expansion and nation-building	Access, literacy, capacity-building, system development

Convergence and divergence

Converging global pressures

- PISA and international benchmarking
- AI and digitalisation
- Labour market change
- Climate and sustainability agendas

Diverging model responses

- Markets and competition
- State coordination
- Equity and wellbeing
- Social partnership
- Developmental nation-building

How do global challenges drive the convergence/divergence balance?

Hybridisation through policy borrowing & learning

Global models are analytical constructs

- Educational models are ‘ideal types’, not precise descriptions of reality
- Most national systems combine features from several traditions according to their historical/political lens
- Globalisation has increased ‘policy borrowing’ and ‘policy learning’

Examples of hybridisation

- **England:** Anglo-Saxon markets + Pacific-style performance culture
- **Singapore:** Pacific traditions + Anglo-Saxon innovation agenda
- **Finland:** Nordic foundations + growing focus on skills and innovation

Section 4
***China's education responses
to 21st-century trends***

China's strategic state-led response

Megatrend	Educational response
AI & Digitalisation	Smart education, STEM, innovation capacity
Climate Change	Green skills and sustainability education
Economic Res	Skills for industrial upgrading and innovation
Demographic	Lifelong learning and workforce reskilling
Global Competition	Internationalisation and technological sovereignty

Key characteristics

- Strong state coordination and long-term planning
- Close alignment between education and national development
- Rapid investment in technological and research capacity
- Education viewed as a strategic driver of modernisation

China's hybrid learning strategy

Model	What China learns from	What China adapts
Anglo-Saxon	University research excellence, world-class universities, entrepreneurship	Incorporated into Double First-Class Universities, AI and innovation strategies
Pacific	High expectations, educational effort, STEM excellence, strong family support for learning	Reinforces existing Confucian traditions of attainment and examination success
Continental European	Vocational education, applied science, industry partnerships, skills formation	Expansion of vocational pathways and industry-education integration
Nordic	Creativity, student wellbeing, inquiry learning, sustainability education	Selective curriculum reforms and growing emphasis on holistic development
Developmental systems	Expansion of participation and capacity-building	Large-scale educational expansion in poorer western provinces

UK and China - contrasting responses

Dimension	UK	China
Policy orientation	Reform and adaptation within an Anglo-Saxon framework	Strategic long-term educational modernisation
Governance	Decentralised, market-oriented, policy turnover	Strong state coordination and planning
Economic focus	Skills, employability, competitiveness	Innovation, industrial upgrading, technological leadership
Response to AI	Growing adoption and experimentation	National strategy and system-wide investment
Policy learning	Selective borrowing from high-performing systems	Systematic adaptation from multiple global models

Both countries respond through different institutional traditions, policy mechanisms and political conceptions of educational change.

Section 5

***Dynamic globalised comparative
conceptual approach***

Comparative political-economy-ecology of education

- Education systems analysed as part of wider social, economic, ecological and political systems
- Global challenges provide a common reference point
- National traditions and political economy shape policy responses
- Policy learning and hybridisation infrom change
- Comparison focuses on trajectories as well as institutions

Globalised comparative methodology

- Uses global educational models as **middle-range heuristic devices** for analysis.
- Examines processes of **policy borrowing, learning, adaptation and hybridisation**.
- Analyses both **convergence and divergence** among national systems.
- Explores how global challenges are interpreted through different educational traditions.
- Locates specific national developments within wider international debates and trajectories.
- Recognises that educational systems are dynamic hybrids rather than fixed models.

How do we apply this comparative methodology to the UK systems?