

# New Publication Calls for a Bold Redefinition of Education in the Age of AI: From Meritocracy to Human Interdependence

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*Researchers challenge fundamental assumptions of modern education systems and call for a paradigm shift away from meritocracy to human interdependence*

CHINA, July 14, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Challenging traditional meritocratic models, this research calls for redefining the purpose of education in the age of AI. It argues that systems based on ranking and standardized testing ignore deep social inequalities and are misaligned with a world shaped by artificial intelligence and complexity. Instead, the authors propose an education model rooted in human interdependence—emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and creativity as essential skills for thriving in an interconnected, uncertain, and rapidly evolving global landscape.

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, growing global interdependence, and rising mental health concerns among youth, traditional education systems are under increasing scrutiny. Rooted in industrial-age ideals, most systems continue to operate on meritocratic principles—ranking, sorting, and rewarding students based on standardized academic performance. However, critics argue that this approach fails to reflect the complexities of today's world, especially as artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes what it means to learn, work, and succeed.

In this view, a new article by educational scholars Yong Zhao from the University of Kansas and Ruo Jun Zhong of YEE Education calls for a bold redefinition of the purpose of education for the era of AI. [Their article, published in the journal ECNU Review of Education on June 19, 2025](#), challenges the foundational assumptions of modern education. Their research argues that educational systems grounded in meritocracy are no longer suited to a world increasingly shaped by AI, complexity, and global challenges. Instead, they propose a paradigm shift toward an educational model built on human interdependence, urging a re-examination of how success and purpose are defined in schools.

The authors begin by interrogating the widespread belief in meritocracy—the idea that individuals succeed through ability and effort. This belief, they explain, underpins competitive education systems worldwide. Students are routinely ranked and filtered based on standardized metrics such as test scores, grade-point averages, and selective admissions. While meritocracy claims to reward fairness and objectivity, authors argue that it fails to account for deep

inequalities in students' starting points. Factors such as family background, access to resources, community support, and socioeconomic status profoundly influence student outcomes but are often overlooked in supposedly objective evaluations.

"Meritocracy turns education into a race," Zhao and Zhong state. "It treats students as competitors rather than collaborators, and in doing so, it narrows the purpose of education to sorting winners from losers." This competitive framing, they argue, not only exacerbates inequality but also misaligns with the skills and mindsets needed for a future shaped by AI.

The article highlights how traditional education, which emphasizes memorization, rule-following, and ranking, fails to prepare students for a world where machines can outperform humans in many technical and academic domains. Instead of reinforcing human-machine competition, the authors introduce the concept of 'co-agency'—the idea that students should be taught to work with AI rather than against it. This shift requires emphasizing uniquely human capacities such as creativity, ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and the ability to work collaboratively across differences.

In response to these challenges, the scholars propose a reimagined model of education rooted in human interdependence. This approach calls for systems that prepare individuals to thrive not in isolation, but through relationships, community engagement, and global awareness. Zhao and Zhong mention, "Human interdependence is not merely a moral argument; it is a survival imperative in a world where global challenges cannot be solved alone." The authors argue that education should develop learners who are not only knowledgeable but also empathetic, adaptable, and capable of navigating uncertainty with others.

To support this vision, the paper outlines a series of transformative changes. These include moving from standardized, one-size-fits-all curricula to personalized learning pathways; replacing age-based cohorts and hierarchical assessments with interest-based, collaborative learning environments; and designing assessments that measure personal growth, social contribution, and well-being rather than relative performance.

Ultimately, the authors advocate for redefining educational excellence. They assert, "Excellence in the age of interdependence is not about being better than others. It is about becoming better with others." Their findings serve as both a critique of outdated systems and a forward-looking roadmap for educators, policymakers, and communities seeking to create more inclusive, humane, and future-ready education models.

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## Reference

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