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Book Review: *Artificial Intelligence and Education in the Global South: A Systems Perspective*

Authors: Fernando Reimers, Zainab Azim, Maria-Renée Palomo, and Callysta Thony (Springer, 2026, 198 pages). ISBNs: 978-3-032-11448-8 and 978-3-032-11449-5 (eBook). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-11449-5>

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Introduction

The 2026 book *Artificial Intelligence and Education in the Global South: A Systems Perspective* by Reimers, Azim, Palomo, and Thony addresses the urgent need for K–12 educational systems to adapt to the disruptions caused by artificial intelligence (AI) in the global workforce. The authors define AI as the simulation of human intelligence by machines capable of communication, reasoning, and learning. Published as an open-access resource, this work is designed to be highly accessible, offering vivid descriptions and practical software references, such as ChatGPT, Khanmigo, and various AI-driven data analytics tools. The authors make this complex subject matter tangible for educators and policymakers alike.

The primary focus is on the Global South, as it is home to 90% of the world’s population under the age of 18. The transformative potential of AI may have its greatest impact here, provided it is guided by intentionality. Adopting a systems perspective, the authors evaluate AI not as a collection of isolated tools, but as an integrated ecosystem encompassing students, teachers, curricula, policies, institutions, and communities. This approach prioritizes three critical dimensions: fostering AI literacy to equip stakeholders with ethical awareness and the capacity for co-intelligence; enhancing school system effectiveness by leveraging AI to optimize learning opportunities; and ensuring educational relevance through curricula that cultivate uniquely human competencies.

The book provides a rigorous analysis of the “global learning crisis,” characterized by the failure of millions of children to master foundational skills, noting that increased school enrolment has not necessarily translated into proficiency in literacy and numeracy. The authors caution that without systemic intervention, existing digital divides and socioeconomic disparities are likely to be exacerbated by the rapid deployment of AI technologies. While employing the term *Global South* as shorthand for resource-constrained regions, the authors demonstrate that this category is far from monolithic. Instead, they provide a compelling variation of initiatives from the heterogeneous regions that comprise the Global South. In doing so, they illustrate how the strategic integration of AI can serve as a catalyst for narrowing,

rather than widening, educational gaps.

Crucially, the book positions itself within the current AI discourse by advocating for purposeful engagement. Rather than viewing AI as a tool for passive consumption or as a replacement for human agency, the authors encourage stakeholders to become active, critical users who can harness AI to solve local challenges. However, integrating AI into such an ecosystem requires a clear-eyed understanding of the existing educational landscape. The success of this systems-based approach is deeply contingent upon addressing the pre-existing structural inequalities and the uneven quality of schooling that currently define many regions of the Global South. To critically evaluate its practical applications, this review highlights five essential elements for equitable systemic transformation: curriculum, personalized learning, teacher professional development, governance, and ethics.

Curriculum

The curriculum serves as the foundational blueprint of any educational system. The authors argue that AI's most immediate value lies in its ability to facilitate the creation of localized and culturally relevant materials, which is a critical step in overcoming the learning crisis in linguistically diverse regions. Key initiatives include:

- **Local content creation:** In Mali, AI was used to produce over 180 children's books in the Bambara language. Similar efforts in Benin and Cameroon involved drafting science textbooks that reflect local cultural contexts.
- **Teacher support:** In Brazil, AI-powered lesson planning tools have assisted teachers in generating tailored instructional materials.
- **National strategies:** The book contrasts various national approaches, such as China's mandatory K–12 AI curriculum and Uruguay's flexible framework centered on computational thinking, critical thinking, creativity, ethics, and societal impact.

Personalized Learning

While the curriculum defines what is learned, personalized learning addresses how it is mastered. The book emphasizes AI's capacity to democratize elite-level tutoring for the masses in the Global South. In India, the Mindspark adaptive learning platform adjusts content based on real-time performance. In Nigeria, virtual assistants have shown significant learning outcome gains for girls, potentially narrowing the gender gap. Furthermore, AI enhances inclusivity, as seen in Kenyan projects translating English into Kenyan Sign Language for deaf students. These diverse applications underscore the authors' assertion that AI-driven personalization is not merely a technical upgrade but a strategic imperative for fostering inclusive education and mitigating structural disparities in student success.

Teacher Professional Development

A central thesis of the book is that teachers remain the heart of the educational system. AI is presented as a pedagogical assistant rather than a replacement. It supports teachers through instructional coaching (immediate feedback), simulations (practicing classroom management), and administrative automation

(reducing routine burdens to prioritize student interaction). Educational technology cannot succeed without human agency; thus, professional development is the bridge between AI potential and classroom reality.

Governance

At the macro level, the success of the aforementioned three critical dimensions—AI literacy, school system effectiveness, and educational relevance—depends on robust governance. Using a systems approach for analysis, the authors demonstrate how AI can be integrated into the broader educational system. AI enhances governance through data-driven decision-making, optimizing resource allocation, and employing machine learning to predict student dropout. This allows policymakers to move beyond isolated interventions toward systemic risk management across the entire educational landscape.

Ethics

Finally, a robust ethical framework is indispensable to safeguard the integrity of the entire educational ecosystem. Without ethical vigilance, the potential benefits of AI in curriculum design or institutional governance risk being invalidated by algorithmic bias, data privacy breaches, or the erosion of transparency. Another critical challenge that the authors specifically identify is de-skilling, which is the loss of critical human cognitive capacities. They argue that meaningful transformation must arise from system-wide innovations deeply rooted in local cultural and linguistic contexts. Consequently, the book maintains that ethical integration is not merely a regulatory requirement but a strategic imperative to ensure that AI functions as a catalyst for human agency rather than a precursor to new forms of technological dependency.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the book positions AI as a tool to empower the Global South and direct it toward a more equitable and high-quality educational future, provided AI is approached not as a silver bullet but as a deliberately managed ecosystem. The book is a valuable source for educators, researchers, and administrators interested in using AI in the various contexts of the Global South.

