

World's highest education accolade Yidan Prize announces its 2024 laureates

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Recognizing innovative work in advancing global sustainable development through demographic research and equitable technology in emergencies

HONG KONG, Sept. 26, 2024 /CNW/ -- Global philanthropic organization Yidan Prize Foundation has awarded the 2024 Yidan Prize, the world's highest education accolade, to Professor Wolfgang Lutz for his work in understanding the long-term benefits of near-term investments in education, and to Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard for their efforts in bringing learning to life for marginalized children in conflict-affected and resource-constrained settings through War Child Alliance's 'Can't Wait to Learn' digital learning intervention. To date, the Yidan Prize Foundation has awarded a total of HK\$480 million (approximately US\$ 61.6 million) to recognize and support changemakers, half of which (HK\$240 million, approximately US\$30.8 million) is an unrestricted project fund for laureates to scale their work in over 50 countries.

"As the world evolves, so must education. The Yidan Prize champions changemakers and innovative solutions that advance education in a rapidly changing world. The exceptional achievements of our 2024 laureates are critical in preparing the next generations for an uncertain future," said Dr Charles CHEN Yidan, philanthropist and Founder of the Yidan Prize.

The award recognizes ideas that are future-oriented, innovative, transformative, and sustainable in Education Research and Education Development. Yidan Prize laureates will receive HK\$30 million (approximately US\$3.8 million), half of which is an unrestricted project fund of HK\$15 million to support them in scaling their work.

"In times of complex global challenges, it is paramount to recognize the critical need to put education at the center

of global development. By spotlighting and bridging research and practices to address education needs, we move closer to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all," said Lucy Lake, Director of Global Engagement at Yidan Prize Foundation.

Elevating education in the global dialogue for sustainable development

Professor Wolfgang Lutz, Distinguished Emeritus Scholar at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), has won the 2024 Yidan Prize for Education Research. He is also the Founding Director of Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, established in collaboration with IIASA, Austrian Academy of Sciences, and the University of Vienna. His statistical research shows the long-term benefits of investing in universal primary and secondary education. A statistician and demographer who pioneered assessments of education's impact on sustainable development goals including health, economic growth, gender equity, and climate resilience, Wolfgang's work highlights the multiplier effect of quality education for a brighter future. He plans to use the Yidan Prize project funds to establish two research centers in partnership with the University of Cape Town, South Africa and Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. The centers will support policy decision-making by training more statisticians in Africa, and expand the evidence base in building resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change in coastal areas through education, respectively.

"Wolfgang Lutz's work provides a scientific foundation that helps us connect the dots between better skills, better jobs, better life in our populations. His datasets, that are available to the world as a global public good, are crucial in informing public policy where to invest scarce public resources, to make the most difference for our collective future," Andreas Schleicher, head of the Yidan Prize for Education Research judging panel and Director for the OECD's Directorate of Education and Skills.

Improving equitable access to joyful learning through technology

The 2024 Yidan Prize for Education Development is awarded to War Child Alliance's Professor Mark Jordans, Director of Research and Development, Marwa Zahr, Implementation and Practitioner Lead, and Luke Stannard, Program Director of Can't Wait to Learn. The award recognizes the collaborative effort of War Child Alliance's Research and Development team and the Can't Wait to Learn team in widening educational access for over 205,000 marginalized children. In line with national curricula, 'Can't Wait to Learn' uses digital technology and locally-contextualized content to deliver quality education through online and offline games in conflict-affected and resource-constrained settings across eight countries including Ukraine, Lebanon, Uganda, Jordan, and South Sudan. The team and its partners co-design educational games with children and educators to ensure cultural relevance and accessibility, and continuously improves the platform based on evidence from scientific research and implementation evaluation. Through 'Can't Wait to Learn', children learn to read and count at their own pace using tablets, laptops and mobile phones. The cost-effective platform is proven to build foundational literacy and

numeracy skills. The team plans to use the Yidan Prize project funds to scale, test, and optimize the 'Can't Wait to Learn' program based on evidence from research and implementation experience in countries where Can't Wait to Learn is already in place, as well as countries not yet reached.

"Can't Wait to Learn's innovative, iterative, and collaborative approach shows that thoughtfully designed and deployed educational technology, as well as culturally and contextually relevant educational content can significantly enhance access to quality and equitable learning opportunities for the most marginalized children. This broad-based approach not only works in tandem with national curricula but also responds to the realities faced by the most vulnerable," said Dorothy K. Gordon, head of the Yidan Prize for Education Development judging panel and Board Member of the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education.

The achievements of the 2024 laureates will be celebrated at the Yidan Prize Awards Ceremony on 8 December. As leaders in education, public policy, and philanthropy gather in Hong Kong, the annual Yidan Prize Summit will also take place on 9 December to explore the importance of resilience in education.

Accelerating positive changes in global education

Since its inception, the Yidan Prize has supported 19 changemakers in education on their projects across geographies. These include the 2023 Education Development laureate Shai Reshef, who has expanded access to higher education through the University of the People, providing virtual learning to over 137,000 students facing financial, geographical, cultural, or geographical barriers worldwide. Meanwhile, the 2022 Education Research laureate Dr Linda Darling-Hammond has informed educators and policymakers in over 15 countries about equitable teaching and learning methods through her research.

"This year's nominations paint a vivid picture of progress in education globally. We're particularly encouraged by the rise in team nominations. This reinforces the power of collaboration in driving lasting change in education," said Dr Koichiro Matsuura, Chairman of the Yidan Prize Judging Committee and former Director-General of UNESCO.

Nominations for the 2025 Yidan Prize are open from 25 October 2024 until 31 March 2025.

ABOUT THE YIDAN PRIZE FOUNDATION

The Yidan Prize Foundation is a global philanthropic foundation, with a mission of creating a better world through education. Through its prize and network of innovators, the Yidan Prize Foundation supports ideas and practices in education — specifically, ones with the power to positively change lives and society.

The Yidan Prize is the world's highest education accolade that recognizes individuals or teams who have contributed significantly to the theory and practice of education. It consists of two prizes, working in harmony: the Yidan Prize for Education Research and the Yidan Prize for Education Development. They're designed for impact: laureates of each prize receive an unrestricted project fund of HK\$15 million over three years, helping them scale up their work, as well as a gold medal and a cash prize of HK\$15 million. The project fund and cash prize are shared equally for teams.

<https://yidanprize.org>

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