


Do Nobels in Education/Teaching exist? A critical look at global prizes

José Solon da Silva Júnior^a 

Marcos Alexandre Alves^a 

^a PPGECIMAT, Universidade Franciscana, Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil.

ABSTRACT

Background: The educational field has witnessed the consolidation of a global culture of recognition based on high-prestige awards, reflecting a search for objective parameters of pedagogical excellence and innovation. **Objectives:** How do the major international awards associated with the epithet "Nobel Prize of Education" reflect contemporary conceptions of quality, innovation, and social impact in the field of education, and how are they relevant to Science and Mathematics Education? **Design:** Qualitative, descriptive, and documentary research grounded in the analysis of primary and secondary sources. **Setting and Participants:** Bibliographic sources, academic and scientific studies, official institutional websites and foundations, and some journalistic articles produced by reliable media outlets regarding the WISE Prize, Yidan Prize, and Global Teacher Prize between 2011 and 2025. **Data collection and analysis:** Systematic research was conducted on qualified digital platforms and bibliographic sources that possess scientific relevance and rigor; after data collection, cross-checking and a three-step procedure were carried out: data categorization, descriptive-comparative analysis, and interpretive synthesis. **Results:** The WISE Prize has evolved from a traditional honorary model to an innovation accelerator; the Yidan Prize has become the largest global private fund for educational research, encompassing all areas of knowledge, with a strong impact on the fields of science and mathematics; and the Global Teacher Prize has redefined the concept of teachers, positioning them as agents of social transformation through teaching content relevant to real-world situations and employing innovative methodologies that make these approaches meaningful for students. **Conclusions:** The "Nobel" label acts as a legitimizing metaphor to elevate educational prestige and the importance of critical-reflective teaching, grounded in scientific principles, that makes the student the protagonist of their formative process, highlighting the growing influence of philanthropy and the reputation economy in the process of qualifying all teaching conditions for intellectual emancipation and social action. Future research should examine the concrete effects of these awards on local public policies.

Keywords: innovation; international awards; philanthropy; social impact; educational excellence.

Corresponding author: Marcos Alexandre Alves. Email: marcosalves@ufn.edu.br

Prêmios Nobel na Educação/Ensino existem? Um olhar crítico sobre prêmios globais

RESUMO

Contexto: O campo educacional testemunhou a consolidação de uma cultura global de reconhecimento baseada em prêmios de alto prestígio, refletindo uma busca por parâmetros objetivos de excelência e inovação pedagógicas. Objetivos: Como os principais prêmios internacionais associados ao epíteto “Prêmio Nobel da Educação” refletem as concepções contemporâneas de qualidade, inovação e impacto social no campo da educação, e qual a sua relevância para o Ensino de Ciências e Matemática?

Metodologia: Pesquisa qualitativa, descritiva e documental fundamentada na análise de fontes primárias e secundárias. **Local e participantes:** Fontes bibliográficas, estudos acadêmicos e científicos, sites institucionais e de fundações oficiais, e alguns artigos jornalísticos produzidos por veículos de comunicação confiáveis sobre o Prêmio WISE, o Prêmio Yidan e o Prêmio Global de Professores entre 2011 e 2025. **Coleta e análise de dados:** Foi realizada uma pesquisa sistemática em plataformas digitais qualificadas e fontes bibliográficas que possuem relevância e rigor científico; após a coleta de dados, foi realizada uma verificação cruzada e um procedimento em três etapas: categorização de dados, análise descritivo-comparativa e síntese interpretativa.

Resultados: O Prêmio WISE evoluiu de um modelo honorário tradicional para um acelerador de inovação; o Prêmio Yidan tornou-se o maior fundo privado global para pesquisa educacional, abrangendo todas as áreas do conhecimento, com forte impacto nos campos da ciência e da matemática; e o Prêmio Global de Professores redefiniu o conceito de professores, posicionando-os como agentes de transformação social por meio do ensino de conteúdo relevante para situações do mundo real e empregando metodologias inovadoras que tornam essas abordagens significativas para os alunos.

Conclusões: O selo “Nobel” atua como uma metáfora legitimadora para elevar o prestígio educacional e a importância do ensino crítico-reflexivo, fundamentado em princípios científicos, que torna o aluno o protagonista de seu processo formativo, destacando a crescente influência da filantropia e da economia da reputação no processo de qualificação de todas as condições de ensino para a emancipação intelectual e a ação social. Pesquisas futuras devem examinar os efeitos concretos desses prêmios nas políticas públicas locais.

Palavras-chave: inovação; prêmios internacionais; filantropia; impacto social; excelência educacional.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the educational field has witnessed the consolidation of a global culture of recognition based on high-prestige awards. Among the various forms of distinction, some education-focused awards have come to be compared, by both the press and academic institutions, to the Nobel Prize. This analogy, expressed in the denomination “Nobel of Education/Teaching” reflects

not only the growing appreciation of teaching as a vector for social development but also the search for objective parameters of pedagogical excellence and innovation on a global scale.

In this context, the problem that guides this study arises: how do the main international awards associated with the epithet “Nobel of Education/Teaching” translate contemporary conceptions of quality, innovation, and social impact in the educational field? Based on this question, the aim is to understand how these prizes—conceived in different sociocultural and economic contexts—articulate with global trends in philanthropy, educational policy, and teacher valorization.

The relevance of this investigation lies in the observation that international education awards not only celebrate individual or institutional trajectories but also configure themselves as strategic instruments for disseminating agendas, values, and pedagogical models. By analyzing such awards, it is possible to identify how the international community recognizes and funds educational innovation, outlining a kind of “symbolic market” of excellence in teaching and learning.

The present article aims to analyze the structure, criteria, and impacts of the three main international awards recognized as “Nobels of Education/Teaching”: the WISE Prize for Education, the Yidan Prize, and the Global Teacher Prize. Specifically, it seeks to examine how each of them originated, what principles guide their evaluations, and what trends they reveal about the role of education in the 21st century.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A prize constitutes the formal recognition granted to a person or group by virtue of notable contributions in a given field of knowledge or human practice. Awards assume different natures and express the symbolic and social value attributed to excellence and innovation. Within the scope of this article, a synthesis of the main academic awards is proposed, with an emphasis on the most internationally relevant honors. In this context, the Nobel Prize stands out, established based on the will of the Swedish scientist and inventor Alfred Nobel, drafted on November 27, 1895 (Nobel Prize, 2025a).

In the testamentary document, Nobel stipulated that the majority of his fortune should be dedicated to the creation of annual prizes awarded to “those who, during the preceding year, have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind” (Nobel Prize, 2025a). The areas covered were Physics, Chemistry, Physiology

or Medicine, Literature, and Peace. Although the principle stated by Nobel has been preserved, its application underwent adaptations over time. Evaluating contributions in “the preceding year” proved impractical, especially in the scientific and literary fields, where the impact of discoveries or works is often recognized only after decades (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025). Thus, the practice of awarding achievements whose merits have already been widely recognized by the scientific and intellectual community, even if not immediately after their production, was consolidated.

In 1968, the Swedish Central Bank instituted the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, intended to recognize significant contributions in the field of economics. Although it does not formally constitute a Nobel Prize, this honor has become widely recognized and announced in conjunction with the others (Nobel Prize, 2025c). After its creation, the Nobel Foundation Board of Directors deliberated against the introduction of new categories (Levinovitz & Ringertz, 2001), consolidating the existing set of awards. Between 1901 and 2025, the Nobel Prize and the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel were awarded 633 times, honoring 990 individuals and 28 organizations (Nobel Prize, 2025b). Each laureate receives a gold medal, a diploma, and a monetary award, with the possibility of awarding up to three people simultaneously in the same category.

As reported by Zuckerman, “the Nobel prizes still serve as the gold standard for gauging the visibility, prestige, and affluence of all other awards” (1992). This position of symbolic and institutional reference has led various other honors to be equated with the Nobel in prestige and relevance, especially in academic and scientific circles (Jiang & Liu, 2018; Meho, 2020; Zheng & Liu, 2015). According to Meho (2020), there are awards of notable recognition considered equivalent to the Nobel Prize in their respective fields — not only because of the name, but also because of the impact, scope, and credibility they represent. In the specific field of Education, two international awards stand out: the WISE Prize for Education (WP) and the Yidan Prize (YP). Another award, not included in this list but also of high relevance, is the Global Teacher Prize (GTP). All are dedicated to recognizing transformative initiatives aimed at promoting learning and educational innovation.

Thus, by understanding the Nobel Prize as a symbolic and institutional reference for the highest human distinctions, it is possible to establish the starting point for analyzing how, in the educational field, awards emerged that seek to perform an analogous function. The following sections therefore

examine the cases of the WP, the YP, and the GTP, discussing their origins, transformations, and implications for the global recognition of education.

METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as qualitative, bibliographic, descriptive, and documentary research, based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources in the public domain. The central methodological objective was to identify, systematize, and compare the main international awards that have been called the "Nobel Prize of Education/Teaching," examining their institutional bases, evaluation criteria, historical evolution, and symbolic and practical impacts in the educational field. The research adopted a qualitative approach, seeking to understand the meanings, values, and conceptions implicit in the structures and narratives of each award, prioritizing the interpretation of institutional discourses and the analysis of documentary content. The temporal scope covers the period from 2011 to 2025, corresponding to the active editions of the WP, YP, and GTP, awards that have consolidated themselves as the main global references for educational recognition.

The bibliographic and documentary sources were selected based on two main criteria: (i) institutional authenticity, prioritizing information from the official websites of the awards, reports, press releases, and records of the respective foundations; and (ii) scientific and journalistic legitimacy, considering articles published in academic journals and internationally recognized and reliable media outlets, such as BBC News, The Guardian, Forbes, The Financial Express, and USA Today, which help contextualize the public and symbolic reception of the awards. Data collection was carried out between October and November 2025, through a systematic search of each institution's official digital platforms and cross-checking of information in reliable secondary sources. Academic databases or traditional scientific literature were not used, as the focus of the study is on the empirical and discursive analysis of the awards themselves, consistent with their status as contemporary benchmarks with broad media coverage.

The analytical procedure involved three main stages:

1) Organization and data categorization, classifying information into axes: (a) origin and institutional structure; (b) selection criteria and monetary values; (c) profiles of laureates and justifications for the awards; and (d) impacts and transformations over time.

2) Descriptive and comparative analysis, identifying convergences and divergences among the three awards regarding purpose, thematic emphasis, and global reach.

3) Interpretive synthesis, articulating the results with the theoretical discussion on the symbolic function of the prizes and the consolidation of the epithet “Nobel of Education/Teaching” in the international narrative.

The methodology, therefore, follows an exploratory-descriptive paradigm, with no pretense of statistical generalization, but with interpretive rigor and documentary fidelity. The focus is on the symbolic validation of educational excellence and on the models of philanthropy, innovation, and social impact promoted by each institution analyzed.

RESULTS AND ANALISES

The WISE Prize For Education: an analysis (2011–2025)

The WP is the most prestigious distinction awarded by the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), an initiative created by the Qatar Foundation in 2009, under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Missned, the foundation’s chairperson (WISE, 2025). The main purpose of establishing the prize, inaugurated in 2011, was to grant education a status equivalent to that of areas traditionally recognized by major international awards, such as Literature, Peace, and Economics (WISE, 2025). For this reason, various media outlets have referred to the WP as the “Nobel of Education” (Coughlan, 2013; Jere, 2018; Schaffhauser, 2018), even if such equivalence is not official.

In its original format, in effect until 2023, the WP recognized individuals—or teams of up to six members—whose exceptional and global-reaching contribution had a lifelong impact on the educational field. The laureate receives a gold medal and a monetary prize of US\$500,000 (WISE, 2022), intended to support the continuation of their work. Furthermore, the winner served as a global education ambassador, symbolizing the transformative role of teaching in building a fairer and more sustainable future (WISE, 2022).

It is important to distinguish the WP from the WISE Awards. While the former focused on recognizing individual leadership and long-term systemic visions—through a biennial process, initially annual—the latter awards ongoing, operational projects and initiatives, granting US\$20,000 to six innovative projects per year (WISE, 2019b). This duality reveals a clear

institutional strategy: the WP values the trajectory and legacy of global leaders, while the Awards function as a mechanism for incentivizing and validating educational innovation at the implementation stage.

The WP is the most prestigious distinction awarded by the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), an initiative created by the Qatar Foundation in 2009, under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Missned, the foundation's chairperson (WISE, 2025). The main purpose of establishing the prize, inaugurated in 2011, was to grant education a status equivalent to that of areas traditionally recognized by major international awards, such as Literature, Peace, and Economics (WISE, 2025). For this reason, various media outlets have referred to the WP as the “Nobel of Education” (Coughlan, 2013; Jere, 2018; Schaffhauser, 2018), even if such equivalence is not official.

In its original format, in effect until 2023, the WP recognized individuals—or teams of up to six members—whose exceptional and global-reaching contribution had a lifelong impact on the educational field. The laureate receives a gold medal and a monetary prize of US\$500,000 (WISE, 2022), intended to support the continuation of their work. Furthermore, the winner served as a global education ambassador, symbolizing the transformative role of teaching in building a fairer and more sustainable future (WISE, 2022).

It is important to distinguish the WP from the WISE Awards. While the former focused on recognizing individual leadership and long-term systemic visions—through a biennial process, initially annual—the latter awards ongoing, operational projects and initiatives, granting US\$20,000 to six innovative projects per year (WISE, 2019b). This duality reveals a clear institutional strategy: the WP values the trajectory and legacy of global leaders, while the Awards function as a mechanism for incentivizing and validating educational innovation at the implementation stage.

The first phase of the WP highlighted innovators whose work combined community impact, scalability, and resilience, many of whom originated from bottom-up models, initially local and subsequently expanded on a global scale (Torres, 2013). To date, there have been 9 (nine) laureates. Table 1 presents a summary of the awardees and the reason for the award (WISE, 2025).

Table 1

Summary of WISE Prize of Education laureates. (Compiled by authors)

Year	Laureate	Reason for the award
2011	Sir Fazle Hasan Abed	Founder of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), was the first laureate. He was recognized for his 40-year career dedicated to alleviating poverty through education and establishing BRAC (WISE, 2011).
2012	Madhav Chavan	Co-founder of the Pratham Foundation in India, was recognized for providing quality education to millions of underserved children in India through the Pratham Foundation (WISE, 2012).
2013	Vicky Colbert	Founder of the Fundación Escuela Nueva in Colombia, was honored for developing an active, student-centered pedagogical model and expanding sustainable education throughout Colombia and other countries (WISE, 2013).
2014	Ann Cotton	Founder of the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) in the UK, was awarded for her contribution to the empowerment of girls and young women in Africa (WISE, 2014).
2015	Sakena Yacoobi	Founder of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), was recognized for promoting education and health for people in contexts of war and adversity (WISE, 2015).
2017	Patrick Awuah Jr.	Founder of Ashesi University in Ghana, was honored for reforming African higher education based on a liberal arts curriculum and ethical training (WISE, 2017).
2019	Larry Rosenstock	Founder of High Tech High (HTH) in the United States, was awarded for disseminating Project-Based Learning (PBL), integrating intellectual and manual work, and redefining the teacher's role as a curriculum designer (WISE, 2019a).

2021	Wendy Kopp	Co-founder of Teach For All, was recognized for building a global network of educational leadership for children, ensuring they have the opportunity to realize their potential (WISE, 2021).
2023	Safeena Husain	Founder of Educate Girls in India, was the last laureate of the classic era. Her work uses community mobilization and technology to ensure the enrollment and retention of girls in school (WISE, 2023).

The year 2024 marked a significant restructuring of the WP, which transitioned from being a legacy recognition award to a solution acceleration competition, focused on developing viable educational products with immediate impact. This transformation reflects WISE's intention to adopt a philanthropic venture capital approach, actively investing in frontier innovations capable of offering fast and scalable responses to contemporary educational crises (WISE, 2025). The process now involves the selection of four to six finalists who, over twelve months, develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) with technical and institutional support from WISE (WISE, 2025). The finalists receive financial support of US\$125,000, along with access to specialized mentorship and training. In addition, the first-place winner receives US\$500,000, the second-place winner US\$300,000, and the third-place winner US\$200,000 (WISE, 2025).

For the 2024–2025 cycle, WISE defined three priority challenge areas, aligned with global needs and the regional imperatives of the Qatar Foundation (WISE, 2025): (i) improving Arabic language teaching; (ii) accelerating foundational literacies; and (iii) addressing Artificial Intelligence (AI) challenges. In October 2024 WISE announced the six finalists (Qatar News Agency, 2024): AprendoLab (Chile), Bonocle (Qatar), Darsel (United States), FastTrack+ (Nigeria), Iqrالي.جو (Jordan), and TUMO Path (Armenia). The group represents geographical and institutional diversity, demonstrating that educational innovation emerges from both advanced economies and developing countries.

The podium was as follows (WISE, 2025): (i) 1st place – TUMO Path, a program from the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in Armenia, founded by the Simonian Educational Foundation, is a platform that uses AI to personalize learning pathways (WISE, 2024c); (ii) 2nd place – Iqrالي.جو, a platform developed by the Queen Rania Foundation (QRF) of Jordan, aims to

improve teaching and the acquisition of the Arabic language (WISE, 2024b); (iii) 3rd place – Darsel, a US EdTech founded by Abdulhamid Haidar, explores voice-generated learning and personalized approaches (WISE, 2024a).

The evolution of the WP, between 2011 and 2025, represents a structural shift in the priorities of global educational philanthropy. The transition from a \$500,000 award focused on celebrating legacies to a \$1 million competition aimed at solution acceleration signals the shift from a model of honorary recognition to a platform for investment in innovation. The legacy of the laureates between 2011 and 2023 consolidated fundamental principles for global educational success: the need for scalable and low-cost models, exemplified by BRAC and Pratham; the centrality of active pedagogy, such as that of Escuela Nueva; the integration of education, ethics, and social development from CAMFED and Ashesi University; and resilience in emergency contexts from AIL. These examples reaffirmed the role of the educational leader as a social architect.

However, the restructuring of the 2024–2025 cycle indicates that, while legacy remains relevant, the focus has shifted to immediate systemic reform and technologically oriented innovation. By demanding proposals with high feasibility, scalability, and defined deadlines for the MVP, WISE establishes a new parameter for “world-class contribution”: not just historical impact, but the proven potential for short-term transformation, especially in the areas of literacy and AI integration. The new phase of the WP is thus positioned as a strategic milestone at the intersection of philanthropy, technology, and educational policy, reflecting the most urgent trends and the most promising solutions for the challenges of contemporary global education.

The Yidan Prize: an analysis (2017–2025)

The YP was instituted in 2016 by the Chinese entrepreneur and philanthropist Charles Chen Yidan, co-founder of Tencent, with the vision of “creating a better world through education” (YP, 2025d). The foundation is supported by an endowment of US\$320 million, which ensures its stability and solidifies the prize as the largest global honor dedicated exclusively to education (YP, 2016). Its guiding principle is the conviction that education should be accessible to all and that recognizing outstanding minds in educational research and practice is the most effective way to accelerate innovation (YP, 2025e). It is also referred to as the “Nobel of Education” sometimes (Chaudhary, 2022; University of the People, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

The prize is awarded annually in two categories, reflecting the integration between academic rigor and practical application (YP, 2025g): (i) Education Research: which recognizes academic research that contributes significantly to the advancement of educational knowledge; (ii) Education Development: which recognizes innovative ideas and practices that address educational challenges with sustainable and replicable solutions, capable of transforming systems and communities.

The financial structure of the prize is a philanthropic risk capital model aimed at maximizing impact. The total annual value is HK\$60 million (approx. US\$7.8 million). Each laureate receives, in addition to a gold medal, a total of HK\$30 million (approx. US\$3.9 million), divided equally between the cash prize, for personal or team use, and the project fund, applied over three years to expand the awarded work (YP, 2025a). This structure ensures a practical and sustainable orientation, guaranteeing that recognition is converted into transformative action. The selection of laureates is conducted by an independent committee composed of global leaders, based on four main criteria (YP, 2025g): (i) transformation; (ii) innovation; (iii) sustainability; and (iv) future-oriented.

The analysis of the 2017 to 2025 editions demonstrates a consistent pattern of valuing interventions that integrate learning science and practical implementation, consolidating a cohesive global strategy. There have been 21 (twenty-one) laureates so far: 9 (nine) in the Research category and 13 (thirteen) in the Development category. Table 2 presents a summary of the laureates and their contributions. (YP, 2025c).

TABLE 2

Summary of Yidan Prize laureates. (Compiled by authors)

Year	Laureates	Reason for the award
2017	Research: Carol S. Dweck	Professor at Stanford University, recognized for the Growth Mindset Theory, which links beliefs about abilities to performance and resilience (YP, 2017a).
	Development: Vicky Colbert	From the Fundación Escuela Nueva in Colombia, awarded for her replicable, student-centered model for multi-grade rural schools (YP, 2017b). She had previously received the WP in 2013.

2018	Research: Larry Hedges	Professor at Northwestern University, awarded for his meta-analysis methods that introduced statistical rigor into evidence-based education (YP, 2018b).
	Development: Anant Agarwal	Founder of edX, for democratizing access to quality higher education on a global scale through an open-source platform (YP, 2018a).
2019	Research: Usha Goswami	Professor at Cambridge University, for her discoveries about the neurocognitive bases of reading and language (Yidan Prize, 2019a).
	Development: Sir Fazle Hasan Abed	Founder of BRAC, for integrating education, health, and empowerment into a model of sustainable community development (YP, 2019b). He had previously been awarded the WP in 2011.
2020	Research: Carl Wieman	Professor at Stanford University, for applying evidence-based methods to science teaching and promoting scientific literacy (YP, 2020b).
	Development: Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa	From CAMFED, for a scalable model of educational inclusion and female empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa (YP, 2020a).
2021	Research: Eric A. Hanushek	Professor at Stanford University, for demonstrating that the quality of education, and not just its duration, is a determining factor in economic development (YP, 2021b).
	Development: Rukmini Banerji	From the Pratham Foundation, for initiatives that improve foundational literacy and influence national public policies (YP, 2021a)
2022	Research: Linda Darling-Hammond	founder of the Learning Policy Institute, for policies and programs for equitable and effective teacher training (YP, 2022b).
	Development: Yongxin Zhu	founder of the New Education Initiative in China, for strengthening teacher quality and

		educational well-being on a national scale (YP, 2022c).
2023	Research: Micheline Chi	Professor at Arizona State University, for the ICAP model, which links levels of cognitive engagement to learning effectiveness (YP, 2023a).
	Development: Shai Reshef	Founder of the University of the People, for creating the first tuition-free online university, expanding global access to higher education (YP, 2023b).
2024	Research: Wolfgang Lutz	Researcher at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, for demonstrating that the educational level is the main indicator of resilience and social development (YP, 2024b).
	Development: Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard	From the War Child Alliance, for ensuring quality education in conflict zones through adapted technological solutions (YP, 2024a).
2025	Research: Uri Wilensky	Professor at Northwestern University, for developing agent-based modeling, NetLogo, promoting systemic and computational thinking (YP, 2025f).
	Development: Mamadou Amadou Ly	Director of Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED) in Africa, for promoting multilingual education and combating school dropout in diverse linguistic contexts (YP, 2025b).

The YP awarding pattern reveals a strategic matrix that combines scientific rigor, sustainability, and global impact, especially in regions of high vulnerability. The project fund, of HK\$15 million per laureate, functions as an instrument for scaling and validation, encouraging the expansion of proven effective models. Cases such as the Hanushek's Yidan African Fellows Program and the expansion of Pratham programs by Banerji exemplify the efficient use of these resources in local policies and early childhood programs (YP, 2022a).

The foundation demonstrates a logic of structured globalization of impact: it integrates knowledge produced in centers of excellence, such as Stanford and Cambridge, and directs capital to regions in developing countries, mainly in Africa and Asia, testing and consolidating models under limited resource conditions (YP, 2022a).

Several trends can be validated in the period from 2017 to 2025:

(i) The consistent recognition of interventions focused on the educator, such as CAMFED's Learner Guide Program (Zhang, 2020) and, critically, the awards to Darling-Hammond and Yongxin Zhu, underscores that investment in teacher training, support, and well-being is the most determining factor for achieving equity in learning outcomes.

(ii) The focus is on preparing students for a technologically advanced and complex world. This includes the transformation of STEM teaching, in Wieman's case (Zhang, 2020) and, more recently, investment in open-access technology, such as Wilensky's NetLogo. The Foundation values investment in open and accessible tools for this purpose.

(iii) The awarding of Larry Hedges in meta-analysis research and Eric Hanushek in education econometrics validates the demand for statistical rigor and the capacity to prove the causal link between educational interventions and economic development. Educational policy must be informed by solid evidence to ensure the efficient allocation of resources.

(iv) Education is recognized as a critical factor for stability. Support for Colbert's rural school models, Abed's integrated community intervention, and the recognition of the War Child Alliance show the commitment to ensure that education remains accessible and of quality in contexts of crisis, war, and extreme poverty.

The trajectory of the YP offers strategic benchmarks for educational funding. By translating science into pedagogy, connecting neuroscience and cognitive psychology, as in the research cases of Dweck, Goswami, and Chi, with teaching practice, as in the cases of Wieman and Darling-Hammond, the prize values models that make research applicable in the classroom and globally replicable. Technological accessibility and sustainability, through the recognition of open and low-cost platforms such as edX, NetLogo, and the University of the People, reinforce the commitment to the democratization of knowledge. And equity in marginalized populations, by supporting models aimed at rural, multilingual, and socially vulnerable populations, as in the cases

of Escuela Nueva, ARED, and CAMFED, the foundation ensures that innovation reaches the most challenging contexts.

Thus, the YP transcends symbolic recognition, consolidating itself as a global mechanism for strategic investment in educational transformation, enhancing human capital and promoting cognitive justice in the planet's most fragile regions.

The Global Teacher Prize: an analysis (2015–2025)

The GTP, instituted by the Varkey Foundation, transcends the concept of a simple recognition award, consolidating itself as one of the world's most significant mechanisms for elevating the status of the teaching profession and highlighting the profound impact of exceptional educators on society (GTP, 2025d). Since its launch, the prize has been informally designated as the “Nobel of Teaching” (Gambino, 2015; Norwood, 2015; Shapiro, 2014; Toppo, 2015).

The award is organized in collaboration with UNESCO, a partnership that grants it institutional weight and global legitimacy (GTP, 2025c). The eligibility criteria are rigorous, requiring the teacher to dedicate a minimum of 10 hours per week to teaching children between the ages of 5 and 18 (GTP, 2025d). The evaluation focuses primarily on innovative methodologies, demonstrable learning outcomes, and the transformative impact of the teacher on students' lives and the surrounding community.

The award consists of a trophy and a monetary value of US\$1 million to the winner, which is intended not only for personal recognition but also as strategic funding to transform the laureates into true agents of systemic change (GTP, 2025d). The ability to fund the expansion of projects elevates the prize from an individual recognition to a direct investment in educational innovation at scale (GTP, 2025d). This endorsement facilitates the replication of the winning methodologies across different global contexts and the integration of these innovations into international educational development agendas.

Since its inaugural edition in 2015, the GTP has highlighted 9 (nine) educators whose stories and innovations have redefined pedagogical excellence in some of the world's most challenging contexts. Table 3 shows the winners and the reason for it. (GTP, 2025e).

Table 3

Summary of Global Teacher Prize laureates. (Compiled by authors)

Year	Laureate	Reason for the award
2015	Nancie Atwell (United States)	For her pioneering role and demonstrated excellence in reading and writing pedagogy, as the founder of the Center for Teaching and Learning, a laboratory school in Maine (GTP, 2015).
2016	Hanan Al Hroub (Palestine)	For her work with children affected by violence in conflict zones. With her “No to Violence” methodology, she used play as a therapeutic tool to overcome trauma and promote emotional security (GTP, 2016).
2017	Maggie MacDonnell (Canada)	For her work in the Inuit community of Salluit, in the Arctic, where she tackled high rates of youth suicide and school dropout. She created programs for social-emotional development that combined sports, health, and leadership, adapting teaching to the local culture (GTP, 2017).
2018	Andria Zafirakou (United Kingdom)	Was awarded for her work in a multicultural school in Brent, London, where students collectively spoke 35 languages. Using art and creativity, she broke down linguistic and cultural barriers, adapting teaching to the realities of poverty and violence experienced by students (GTP, 2018).
2019	Peter Tabichi (Kenya)	Was awarded for his work in a rural school in Pwani Village, where most students lived in extreme poverty. Known for donating 80% of his salary to support students, he created science clubs and encouraged participation in national and international competitions (GTP, 2019).
2020	Ranjitsinh Disale (India)	For using technology to increase school attendance for girls and combat child marriage in rural areas. He created interactive textbooks with QR codes that provided access to videos and digital content, translated into the local language, making learning more accessible (GTP, 2020).

2021	Keishia Thorpe (United States)	Was awarded for her work with immigrant, refugee, and low-income students, helping them enter higher education through scholarships. A Jamaican immigrant herself, she created a program that guided students through the admissions and financial aid processes, resulting in millions of dollars in university scholarships (GTP, 2021).
2023	Sister Zeph (Pakistan)	For her commitment to female education and the creation of free schools for underserved communities. Her institution offers teaching, shelter, and vocational training courses every day of the week, promoting gender equity in an adverse context (GTP, 2023).
2025	Mansour Al Mansour (Saudi Arabia)	For his humanitarian vision and leadership in educational reforms. He worked on school renovation and the promotion of structural improvements that expand the impact of learning beyond the classroom (GTP, 2025a).

There were no GTP winners in 2022 and 2024, which may indicate a strategic or operational reevaluation by the Varkey Foundation.

The chronological analysis of the GTP laureates reveals a clear evolution in the award's focus, reflecting global priorities in education and social development. The history can be divided into phases that demonstrate a progression in terms of what constitutes global educational excellence:

(i) Phase 1 (2015–2017): The initial focus of the award centered on proven pedagogical methodologies, represented by Nancie Atwell, and on teacher resilience in contexts of conflict and adversity, as in the cases of Hanan Al Hroub and Maggie MacDonnell. The purpose of this phase was to recognize pedagogical excellence itself, highlighting educators capable of maintaining high teaching standards even under extreme conditions.

(ii) Phase 2 (2018–2021): In this phase, the award's focus shifted to educators who act as agents of social transformation, addressing structural challenges and promoting inclusion. This highlighted teachers who fought extreme poverty, exemplified by Peter Tabichi; who overcame technological and gender barriers, with Ranjitsinh Disale; and who mitigated migratory inequalities, in the case of Keishia Thorpe. The teacher begins to be recognized as an engine of social mobility and equity in access to education.

(iii) Phase 3 (2023–2025): In this stage, the prize began to value educators who exercise institutional leadership and the active advocacy of social and educational causes. This highlights figures such as Sister Zeph, founder of schools focused on female education, and Mansour Al Mansour, promoter of structural reforms and public policies. The focus shifts to the teacher as a leader and advocate who expands their impact beyond the classroom, influencing entire communities and educational systems.

With a value of US\$1 million, the GTP produces a significant multiplier effect. Although detailed tracking of resource use is complex, the profiles of the winners indicate strong community reinvestment. Examples like Peter Tabichi, who already donated most of his salary, and Sister Zeph, who maintains free schools, demonstrate that the capital is largely directed toward the expansion of their educational initiatives. Beyond the financial aspect, the GTP transforms its laureates into global public figures. The wide visibility and communication training offered to the finalists allow their methodologies and stories to inspire international audiences, consolidating teachers as spokespeople for education and fostering national prizes inspired by the original model (GTP, 2025b).

The award structure has created a solid platform to identify, finance, and scale up educational innovations worldwide. The nationalization of the prize, which is already happening in several countries (GTP, 2025b), decentralizes recognition and values educators in local contexts, with the support of partner foundations, such as the Galp Foundation (Galp, 2019). The GTP process prepares exceptional teachers to act as international advocates for educational policies, providing them with training to interact with the media and expand the reach of their practices. This movement strengthens the prestige of the teaching profession and promotes the dissemination of innovative methodologies.

The continuous emphasis on teachers working in contexts of vulnerability—with refugees, poor rural communities, or in conflict zones—reinforces the Varkey Foundation's mission to use education as an engine for global social and economic inclusion (Varkey Foundation, 2025). Over the years, the GTP has evolved from a celebration of individual pedagogical excellence to the recognition of systemic leadership and disruptive technological innovations conceived by educators and students. Thus, the award has become a strategic instrument to identify, support, and scale educational solutions in the face of the great humanitarian and social challenges of the 21st century.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the three main international awards associated with the epithet “Nobel of Education/Teaching”—the WISE Prize for Education, the Yidan Prize, and the Global Teacher Prize—allowed us to identify that, while they share the common purpose of elevating the status of education on the global stage, they embody distinct models of excellence, impact, and legitimacy. Each, in its structure and institutional narrative, translates a specific conception of educational innovation and its own way of articulating philanthropy, policy, and pedagogical practice.

The WP demonstrated a trajectory marked by the transition from an honorary model to a format of strategic investment in scalable educational solutions, evidencing the contemporary predominance of an entrepreneurial innovation logic in global philanthropy. The YP, in turn, consolidated itself as the award with the largest financial volume and the greatest integration between educational science and social applicability, promoting a balance between academic research and practical development in vulnerable contexts. The GTP stood out by redefining the teacher's role as a community leader and agent of systemic transformation, converting teacher valorization into a public symbol of social change.

Collectively, these awards demonstrate that the use of the expression “Nobel of Education/Teaching” does not refer only to the symbolic prestige inherited from the original prize instituted by Alfred Nobel, but to a discursive strategy for legitimizing education as a field of excellence and innovation comparable to the sciences, literature, and peace. The term functions as a cultural marker that seeks to position education at the same level of recognition as other traditionally recognized areas, responding to the historical undervaluation of teaching work and learning sciences.

However, the analysis also reveals limits and contradictions in this process of equation. While the awards promote visibility and resources, they also reproduce the concentration of prestige around large philanthropic foundations and global decision-making centers, which can reduce the epistemological and cultural diversity of recognized educational practices. Nonetheless, by becoming platforms for the dissemination of high-impact ideas and projects, these prizes expand the global repertoire of innovative policies and practices, especially in the areas of literacy, teacher training, and educational inclusion.

Thus, it can be concluded that the set of analyzed awards constitutes a symbolic system for the consecration of educational excellence, in which merit, innovation, and social justice combine under diverse yet complementary perspectives. The “Nobel of Education/Teaching” is, therefore, less a single title and more a plural paradigm, represented by initiatives that seek, each in their own way, to transform education into one of the central axes of human and sustainable development in the 21st century.

The research showed that the WISE Prize evolved from a traditional honorary model into an accelerator of innovation; the Yidan Prize became the largest global private fund for educational research, encompassing all areas of knowledge, with a strong impact on the fields of science and mathematics; and the Global Teacher Prize redefined the concept of teachers, positioning them as agents of social transformation through teaching content relevant to real-world situations and employing innovative methodologies that make these approaches meaningful for students.

The “Nobel” seal acts as a legitimizing metaphor to elevate educational prestige and the importance of critical-reflective teaching, grounded in scientific principles, which makes the student the protagonist of their formative process, highlighting the growing influence of philanthropy and the reputation economy in the process of qualifying all teaching conditions for intellectual emancipation and social action. Future research should examine the concrete effects of these awards on local public policies.

As a follow-up, it is recommended that future research expand the comparative analysis, incorporating studies on the concrete effects of these prizes on public policies and local pedagogical practices, as well as the relationship between global recognition and regional inequalities in the diffusion of educational innovation. Such investigations can contribute to understanding how the awarding of excellence is, in fact, converted into lasting social and educational transformation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENTS

The two authors, JSSJ and MAA, proposed and designed the research project that led to this research article. JSSJ collected the data and developed the first draft of the article. MAA reviewed the document several times and made the necessary corrections. The conclusions and the remaining aspects of the article were the work of the two authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The evidence supporting the observations made in this work is kept by MAA and can be accessed upon reasonable request.

REFERENCES

- Chaudhary, V. (2002). *Nobel of education: What is the Yidan Prize?*. The Financial Express. <https://www.financialexpress.com/jobs-career/education-nobel-of-education-what-is-the-yidan-prize-2779362>
- Coughlan, S. (2012). *Madhav Chavan wins education 'Nobel prize'*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-20272305>
- Encyclopædia Britannica (2025). *Nobel Prize | Definition, History, Winners, & Facts*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nobel-Prize>
- Galp (2019). *Global Teacher Prize Portugal: Fundação Galp apoia 2ª edição do 'Nobel do Ensino'*. Galp. <https://www.galp.com/corp/pt/media/comunicados-de-imprensa/comunicado/id/893/global-teacher-prize-portugal-fundacao-galp-apoia-2-edicao-do-nobel-do-ensino>
- Gambino, L. (2015). *The world's best teacher lives in rural Maine and doesn't care about test scores*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/23/worlds-best-teacher-nancie-atwell-maine-center-for-teaching-and-learning>
- GTP (2015). *Nancie Atwell 2015*. Global Teacher Prize. <https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/nancie-atwell-2015>
- GTP (2016). *Hanan Al Hroub 2016*. Global Teacher Prize. <https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/hanan-al-hroub-2016>
- GTP (2017). *Maggie MacDonnell 2017*. Global Teacher Prize. <https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/maggie-macdonnell-2017>

- GTP (2018). *Andria Zafirakou 2018*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/andria-zafirakou-2018>
- GTP (2019). *Peter Tabichi 2019*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/peter-tabichi-2019>
- GTP (2020). *Ranjitsinh Disale 2020*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/ranjitsinh-disale-2020>
- GTP (2021). *Keishia Thorpe 2021*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/keishia-thorpe-2021>
- GTP (2023). *Sister Zeph 2023*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/sister-zeph-2023>
- GTP (2025a). *Mansour Al Mansour*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/Mansour-Al-Mansour>
- GTP (2025b). *National Teacher Prizes*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/nationalteacherprizes>
- GTP (2025c). *Our Partners*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/our-partners>
- GTP (2025d). *Terms and Conditions*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/terms-conditions>
- GTP (2025e). *Winners*. Global Teacher Prize.
<https://globalteacherprize.org/pages/winners-globalteacherprize>
- Jere, R. J. (2018). *WISE: Rethinking learning*. New African Magazine.
<https://newafricanmagazine.com/news-analysis/politics/rethinking-and-debating-education-in-africa>
- Jiang, F.; Liu, N. (2018). The hierarchical status of international academic awards in social sciences. *Scientometrics*, v. 117, n. 3, p. 2091-2115.

- Levinovitz, A. W.; Ringertz, N. (2001). *The Nobel Prize: The First 100 Years*. London: Imperial College Press.
- Meho, L. I. (2020). Highly prestigious international academic awards and their impact on university rankings. *Quantitative Science Studies*, v. 1, n. 2, p. 824-848.
- Nobel Prize (2025a). *Alfred Nobel's will*. Nobel Prize.
<https://www.nobelprize.org/alfred-nobel/alfred-nobels-will>
- Nobel Prize (2025b). *All Nobel Prizes*. Nobel Prize.
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-prizes>
- Nobel Prize (2025c). *FAQ – Frequently asked questions*. Nobel Prize.
<https://www.nobelprize.org/frequently-asked-questions>
- Norwood, C. (2015). *Nancie Atwell Of Maine Wins \$1 Million Global Teaching Prize*. NPR.
<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/03/16/393324420/nancie-atwell-of-maine-wins-1-million-global-teaching-prize>
- Qatar News Agency (2024). *WISE Announces Six Finalists for its 24-25 Prize for Education*. QNA. <https://qna.org.qa/en/news/news-details?id=0074-wise-announces-six-finalists-for-its-24-25-prize-for-education&date=29/10/2024>
- Schaffhauser, D. (2018). *'Nobel Prize for Education' Seeks 2019 Nominees*. THE Journal. <https://thejournal.com/articles/2018/12/13/nobel-prize-for-education-seeks-2019-nominees.aspx>
- Shapiro, J. (2014). *Now There's A Davos Of Education And A \$1 Million "Nobel Prize" For Teachers*. Forbes.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jordanshapiro/2014/03/22/now-theres-a-davos-of-education-and-a-1-million-nobel-prize-for-teachers>
- Toppo, G. (2015). *U.S. writing teacher wins \$1M "Nobel Prize of Teaching"*. USA Today.
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/03/15/nobel-prize-teaching-winner/24807879>

- Torres, R. M. (2013). *WISE Prize for Education Laureates: Bottom-up Innovators*. Otra Educacion. <https://otra-educacion.blogspot.com/2013/11/wise-prize-for-education-laureates.html>
- University of The People (2023). *UoPeople President Shai Reshef Awarded 2023 Yidan Prize: The World's Highest Education Accolade*. UoPeople. <https://www.uopeople.edu/about/worldwide-recognition/press-releases/uopeople-president-shai-reshef-awarded-2023-yidan-prize-the-worlds-highest-education-accolade>
- Varkey Foundation (2025). *Global Teacher Prize*. Varkey Foundation. <https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/global-teacher-prize>
- WISE (2011). *Sir Fazle Hasan Abed*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/fazle-hasan-abed>
- WISE (2012). *Madhav Chavan*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/madhav-chavan>
- WISE (2013). *Vicky Colbert*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/vicky-colbert-2>
- WISE (2014). *Ann Cotton*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/ann-cotton>
- WISE (2015). *Sakena Yacoobi*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/sakena-yacoobi>
- WISE (2017). *Patrick Gyimah Awuah Jr.* WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/dr-patrick-gyimah-awuah-jr>
- WISE (2019a). *Larry Rosenstock*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/larry-rosenstock>
- WISE (2019b). *WISE 2011 - Program*. WISE. https://www.wise-qatar.org/app/uploads/2019/07/wise_2011_-_program.pdf

- WISE (2021). *Wendy Kopp*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/wendy-kopp>
- WISE (2022). *2021 WISE Prize for Education is presented to Wendy Kopp, CEO of Teach For All*. WISE. https://www.wise-qatar.org/app/uploads/2022/02/pr_2021-wise-prize-for-education_english.pdf
- WISE (2023). *Safeena Husain*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/biography/safeena-husain-2>
- WISE (2024a). *Darsel*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/project/darsel>
- WISE (2024b). *IqrAli.jo*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/project/iqrAli-jo>
- WISE (2024c). *TUMO Path*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/project/tumo-generative-learning-a-proactive-approach-to-ai-education>
- WISE (2025). *WISE Prize for Education*. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/wise-works/wise-prize-for-education>
- YP (2016). *Nomination for the world's largest education prize is now open*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/newsroom/press-releases/nomination-for-the-worlds-largest-education-prize-is-now-open>
- YP (2017a). *Professor Carol S. Dweck*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/carol-s-dweck>
- YP (2017b). *Vicky Colbert*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/vicky-colbert>
- YP (2018a). *Professor Anant Agarwal*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/anant-agarwal>
- YP (2018b). *Professor Larry Hedges*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/larry-hedges>

- YP (2019a). *Professor Usha Goswami*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/usha-goswami>
- YP (2019b). *Sir Fazle Hasan Abed*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/fazle-hasan-abed>
- YP (2020a). *Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/lucy-lake-and-angeline-murimirwa>
- YP (2020b). *Professor Carl Wieman*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/carl-wieman>
- YP (2021a). *Dr Rukmini Banerji*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/rukmini-banerji>
- YP (2021b). *Professor Eric A. Hanushek*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/eric-a-hanushek>
- YP (2022a). *2022 Yidan Prize—world’s highest accolade in education—awarded to Dr Linda Darling-Hammond and Professor Yongxin Zhu*. Yidan Prize. <https://www.yidanprize.org/newsroom/press-releases/2022-yidan-prize-announcement>
- YP (2022b). *Dr Linda Darling-Hammond*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/linda-darling-hammond>
- YP (2022c). *Professor Yongxin Zhu*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/yongxin-zhu>
- YP (2023a). *Professor Micheline Chi*. Yidan Prize.
<https://yidanprize.org/laureates/micheline-chi>
- YP (2023b). *Shai Reshef*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/shai-reshef>
- YP (2024a). *Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr and Luke Stannard*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/shai-reshef>

- YP (2024b). *Professor Wolfgang Lutz*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/wolfgang-lutz>
- YP (2025a). *Frequently asked questions*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/the-prize-and-nominations/nominations/faq>
- YP (2025b). *Mamadou Amadou Ly*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/mamadou-amadou-ly>
- YP (2025c). *Our laureates*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates>
- YP (2025d). *Our mission*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/about-us/our-mission>
- YP (2025e). *Our story*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/about-us/our-story>
- YP (2025f). *Professor Uri Wilensky*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/laureates/uri-wilensky>
- YP (2025g). *The Yidan Prize*. Yidan Prize. <https://yidanprize.org/the-prize-and-nominations/the-prize>
- Zhang, M. (2023). *Interview with Michelle Zhang (Yidan Prize Foundation)*. What's Working Solutions. <https://whatsworkingsolutions.org/resource/interview-with-michelle-zhang-yidan-prize-foundation>
- Zhang, S. (2020). *The Yidan Prize Foundation Announces the 2020 Yidan Prize Laureates*. JMDedu. <https://en.jmdedu.com/Article/512>
- Zheng, J.; Liu, N. (2015). Mapping of important international academic awards. *Scientometrics*, v. 104, n. 3, p. 763-791.
- Zuckerman, H. (1992). The proliferation of prizes: Nobel complements and Nobel surrogates in the reward system of science. *Theoretical Medicine*, v. 13, n. 2, p. 217-231.