

BFSU Initiatives on Empowering University Teachers through AI Technology (September 17, 2021)

Higher education is undergoing profound changes with the ever accelerating advancement of information technology represented by artificial intelligence (AI). As the key enablers of education, teachers should seize opportunities to enhance their competencies in their teaching and research in this new era. Today, representatives from universities in Beijing and beyond are convening at Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) to share insights on the achievement of the “Ministry of Education’s Action Plan to Empower Teachers with AI”. Consensus has been reached and we hereby propose the following initiatives.

1. Responding to national strategies. General Secretary Xi Jinping has attached vital importance to AI development as a key driving force in spearheading a new round of scientific and technological revolution. AI is dramatically transforming the ways people live and work, ushering our society into a smart era of human-machine collaboration. The “Development Plan on the New Generation of AI” issued by the State Council calls for boosting the development of a new generation of AI to better serve mankind. We need to fully leverage new technologies such as

cloud computing, big data and AI to reform education for cultivation of top-notch innovative talents to support our national development.

2. Embracing an era of AI. AI has brought convenience and efficiency to society. It also reduces repetitive work for university faculty, challenges their intellectual authority and spurs them on to undertake new roles. Against this backdrop, a wise course of action would be to proactively embrace this era of AI and to properly utilize smart means. If we ignore or reject AI, we will miss out on good opportunities. In response to the call of the times, we should redouble our efforts to keep abreast with the rapid development of technology so as to promote educational reform and help teachers grow.

3. Supporting quality development. Facing a new era in higher education, we must lose no time in building a team of high-caliber, professional and innovative teachers and developing our pool of distinguished scholars and leading talents of international standards. We need to construct disciplinary, academic and discourse systems with Chinese characteristics while facilitating collaborative innovations among the government, industry, university, research and application sectors. We must carry forward the “Opinions of the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teaching Force in the New Era” in encouraging university

teachers to adapt to the new technological landscape shaped by AI, promoting professional development, reforming teaching modes, innovating research and supporting quality development in higher education.

4. Promoting equity in education. Equity in education is the cornerstone of social well-being. We need to harness the power of AI in developing more MOOCs to expand the coverage of high-quality teaching resources and build a “wall-less campus” that benefits all students. We should contribute to equity in education by promoting technology-enhanced education and bridging digital divides across regions and schools, and between rural and urban areas. We should build up online platforms to enable teachers to form communities across time and space for classroom observations, pedagogical discussions and sharing of teaching resources.

5. Incorporating AI into university planning. “Preparedness ensures success, while unpreparedness spells failure.” We need to prudently promote AI-powered faculty development and incorporate it into the university’s 14th Five-Year Plan and its Medium- and Long-Term Development Plan. The University Council and the President’s Office need to regularly monitor the periodical progress of the work and facilitate resource allocation so as to ensure logistics for AI-enhanced faculty

development.

6. Constructing smart environments. To support teachers with their teaching innovations, we should spare no efforts in building state-of-the-art multi-terminal intelligent classrooms and simulated VR laboratories. We will also construct AI laboratories of faculty development for classroom observations, evaluations and teaching seminars. We will further set up open, dynamic and virtual communities of teachers to cultivate first-rate faculty teams and distinguished scholars.

7. Developing intelligent solutions. We will introduce and develop smart platforms and assistants to promote human-machine collaborative teaching, effecting tailored curriculum, smart teaching, personalized learning, automated assessment, and ultimately improving both teaching qualities and learning outcomes. We will utilize the National Teachers Information Management System to develop a faculty big data system that can collect and process data for smart teaching. This system can also allow for long-term, multi-dimensional and process-oriented teacher evaluations that are more valid and reliable, which will further upgrade university governance.

8. Applying AI widely. Even the best technologies serve no good if they are shelved away. We need to deliver special training programs on AI

technology to improve the digital literacy of university faculty. We need to carry out across-the-board faculty training, fostering a team of AI-empowered forerunners. We should actively promote research on AI-enhanced teaching and encourage teachers to embrace new technologies, accept new teaching beliefs, adopt new pedagogies and assume new roles. We should motivate teachers to use AI readily and effectively.

9. Collaborating extensively. As the popular saying goes, “A single flower does not make full spring.” We need to strengthen cooperation among universities, and treat this meeting as a starting point to promote the experience of BFSU and future pilot initiatives. To this end, we must work hand-in-hand and learn from each other. We need to promote cooperation between universities and local communities to conduct joint research and develop high-quality teaching resources and platforms. We should also further university-enterprise collaboration, involving AI enterprises and contributing to technological innovations, resource and platform development as well as product design to enable win-win outcomes.

10. Bettering teacher support. We need to maintain a human-centered and problem-oriented attitude in harnessing AI technology to better support teachers in course preparation, delivery and evaluation. We should also follow ethical principles in exploiting technologies, work with a human

touch, be aware of the constraints of technology, and stay true to our original aspiration of education. It is critical that we make sensible use of AI in empowering education and aim for the humanistic integration of AI into education so that teachers can teach with both peace of mind and enthusiasm.