

# Call for Abstracts

International Workshop, University of Bern, January 2026

## Education, Power and Possibility: Rethinking “Quality Education” in the Middle East

The United Nations’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identified quality education as one of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Experts have lauded the UN’s emphasis on quality over mere access. However, the new formulation prompts further questions about how to define quality education. This is a particularly critical task to pursue under ongoing conditions of economic restructuring, educational privatization and market-driven reforms that prioritize the cultivation of marketable skills over broader educational objectives. In the Middle East, education systems have been subject to profound transformations in response to budgetary constraints, political instability and socioeconomic inequalities. Additionally, ongoing warfare and protracted political conflicts have exacerbated barriers to education, significantly undermining educational equity and posing long-term challenges for human development across the region.

This workshop seeks to critically interrogate the notion of “quality education” as international policy directive and universal ideal by examining how the concept of quality education is constructed, negotiated and/or challenged in the Middle East. Our focus will be on how local actors—including educators, students, civil society organizations, policymakers and communities—define and deliberate on what constitutes quality education, and how conceptions and aspirations for quality education are informed by context and historically specific contestations over development, democracy and pluralism in the region. We are also interested in exploring the extent to which technological transformations, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digitization, shape the realm of possibility for quality education, and how might alternative educational practices—often situated outside formal institutions—offer new possibilities for reimagining quality education in the region.

The Education, Power and Possibility workshop will examine original papers that critically engage the notion of quality education as policy framework and educational ideal, and which address one or more of the following thematic axes:

### **Axis 1: Rethinking Quality Education in Formal Education**

focusing on how conceptions/expectations of “quality education” are shaped, negotiated or challenged in/around formal educational institutions, covering issues such as curriculum development, inequality, authoritarianism and democracy.

### **Axis 2: Quality Education in Conflict Zones**

examining the limitations and possibilities of quality education for children and youth in war-torn communities, including scholasticide and the destruction of educational infrastructures, community-based initiatives, the role of NGOs and online learning.

### **Axis 3: Quality Education beyond the State**

exploring alternative conceptions of quality education that emerge out of bottom-up practices of learning and teaching beyond formal educational institutions, including youth-driven initiatives, online learning platforms and reading circles.

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### **Submission**

Please submit a brief biography and an abstract (350 words) engaging the workshop’s theme by May 31st, 2025, to: [nijmi.edres@unibe.ch](mailto:nijmi.edres@unibe.ch).

Authors of selected abstracts will be notified at the end of June and asked to submit their full paper (around 6000 words) by November 30th, 2025. We will cover travel and accommodation costs for all invited participants without institutional funding of their own. Please state in your application whether you require funding. The workshop is organized by Prof. Dr. Nijmi Edres and Dr. Noha Roushdy in the Middle East and Muslim Societies Unit of the Department for Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies at the University of Bern.

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**Unit for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Societies (MOMuG)**

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