Session 1, Track 7 | Workshop: Paulo Freire decolonial. Potentials and contradictions of the emerging decolonial paradigm for SDG 4

Time: Friday, 25th Sept. 2026
11:00am - 1:00pm

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Abstract

As the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches, the gap between ambition and reality in global education is becoming increasingly visible. SDG 4 calls for "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all," yet current projections suggest that none of its targets will be fully achieved. Persistent inequalities—within and between countries, particularly along the North–South divide—continue to shape access, participation, and learning outcomes. These inequities not only affect individual life chances but also undermine broader societal development and social cohesion.

This workshop invites participants to critically revisit both the conceptual foundations of SDG 4 and the broader question of educational inequity through the lens of Paulo Freire and contemporary decolonial theories.

Conceptual orientation:

- Introduction to key ideas in Freirean pedagogy (e.g. critical consciousness, dialogue, emancipation)
- Overview of central strands in decolonial thought (e.g. coloniality of knowledge (Aníbal Quijano), epistemic violence (Gayatri Spivak), pluriversality (Walter Mignolo))
- Exploration of common ground and key differences between these approaches

Critical perspectives on inequity in education:

- Why do educational inequities persist despite decades of expansion in access?
- How are inequities reproduced through global power relations, knowledge hierarchies, and policy frameworks?
- To what extent do dominant education models privilege certain forms of knowledge while marginalising others?
- How can Freirean and decolonial perspectives help to better understand the structural roots of inequity beyond short-term crisis explanations (e.g. Covid-19)?

Revisiting SDG 4 through a decolonial and Freirean lens:

- Is SDG 4 rooted in a universalist—and potentially colonial—model of education and development?
- Or does it offer openings for transformative, decolonial approaches (e.g. through its focus on equity and inclusion)?
- Where do current implementation strategies risk reproducing global inequalities (e.g. through standardisation, measurement, and policy transfer)?
- What would it mean to reinterpret or re-implement SDG 4 from a decolonial perspective?

The workshop directly engages with current debates surrounding the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2026, which highlights stagnation and persistent disparities in access and equity. Moving beyond surface-level explanations, the session foregrounds structural and historical dimensions of inequity and opens space for alternative framings and responses.

Methodology and objectives:

- Short conceptual inputs combined with moderated discussion
- Exchange between researchers, practitioners, and policy-oriented participants
- Joint reflection on implications for global and local contexts (including Austria)
- Contribution to a more differentiated and critical dialogue on the future of education

By bringing Freirean and decolonial perspectives into dialogue with SDG 4, the workshop aims to deepen the understanding of educational inequities and to explore pathways towards more just, context-sensitive, and transformative educational futures.