

How long do students spend in the classroom?

- It is expected that students in OECD countries will receive an average of 7 751 hours of instruction during their primary and lower secondary education, and most of that instruction time is compulsory.
- Reading, writing and literature, mathematics and science account for 51% of compulsory instruction time for primary school students, on average in OECD countries, and 41% of compulsory instruction time for lower secondary school students.
- In OECD countries, an average of 6% of compulsory instruction time for primary students and 7% for lower secondary students is devoted to the flexible part of the curriculum.

Significance

This section examines the amount of time students spend in formal education during their primary and lower secondary education. The choices that countries make about how much time should be devoted to education and which subjects should be compulsory reflect national and/or regional education priorities. Since a large part of public investment in education goes to instruction time in formal classroom settings, the length of time students spend in school is an important factor in determining the amount of funding that should be devoted to education.

Findings

Compulsory instruction time is dedicated to teaching the compulsory curriculum. In OECD countries, primary students receive an average of 802 hours of instruction per year, of which 791 hours are compulsory. Lower secondary students receive an average of 122 more hours of instruction per year than primary students, of which 116 hours are compulsory.

The proportion of the compulsory curriculum that is devoted to reading, writing and literature varies widely across OECD and G20 countries. It ranges from 15% in Indonesia to 38% in Hungary for primary students; for lower secondary students, it ranges from 11% in Japan and Portugal to 24% in Ireland.

The largest portion of the curriculum for primary students, 26%, is devoted to reading and writing in all reporting OECD countries and in some G20 countries. In most OECD and G20 countries the second largest share of time, 17%, is spent studying mathematics, followed by the arts, with 11%. Together with physical education (9%), science (7%) and social studies (7%), these six study areas form the major part of the curriculum for this education level.

For lower secondary school students in around one-third of the countries with available data, the proportion of compulsory instruction time devoted to reading, writing and literature is also the largest, when compared with other fields of instruction; but in 9 countries, students spend the largest proportion of the compulsory core curriculum studying modern foreign languages. In Luxembourg and Denmark, lower secondary students spend more than 20% of compulsory instruction time studying modern foreign languages.

On average among OECD countries, the flexible part of the curriculum accounts for some 6% of compulsory instruction time for primary students and 7% for lower secondary students. While the Czech Republic and the Netherlands allow complete flexibility within the compulsory curriculum at the primary and lower secondary levels, in Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg and Mexico, the flexible part of the curriculum is negligible at both levels of education.

Definitions

Data on instruction time distinguish between “compulsory” and “intended” instruction time. Compulsory instruction time refers to the minimum amount of instruction that schools are expected to provide and students must attend. Intended instruction time is an estimate of the number of hours per year during which students are taught both compulsory and non-compulsory parts of the curriculum. It does not, however, indicate the quality of the education provided nor the level or quality of the human and material resources involved. Data on instruction time are from the 2012 OECD-INES Survey on Teachers and the Curriculum and refer to the 2010-11 school year.

Information on data for Israel:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Going further

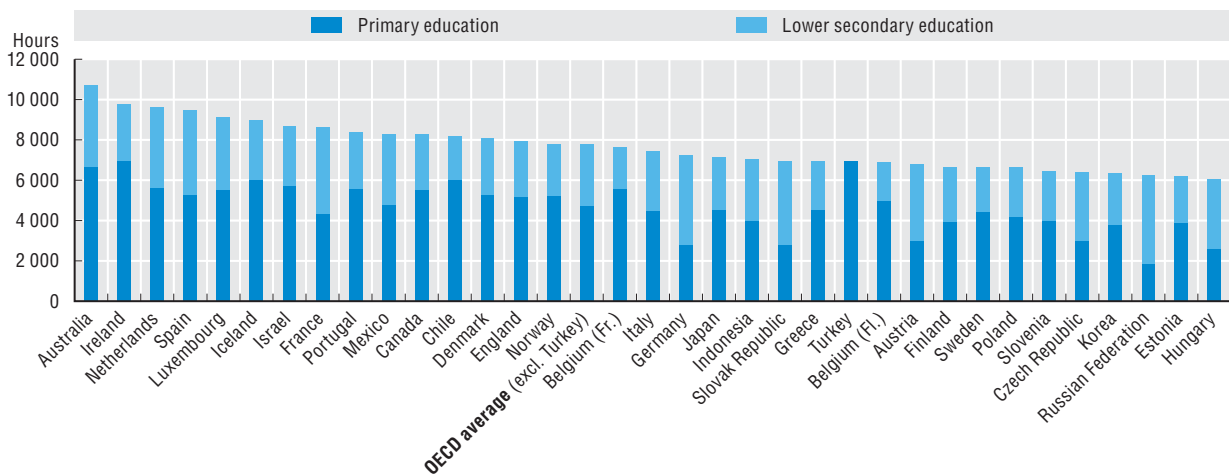
For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2013* (Indicator D1).

Areas covered include:

- Compulsory and intended instruction time in public institutions.
- Instruction time per subject.

Figure 5.1. Instruction hours in public institutions, 2011

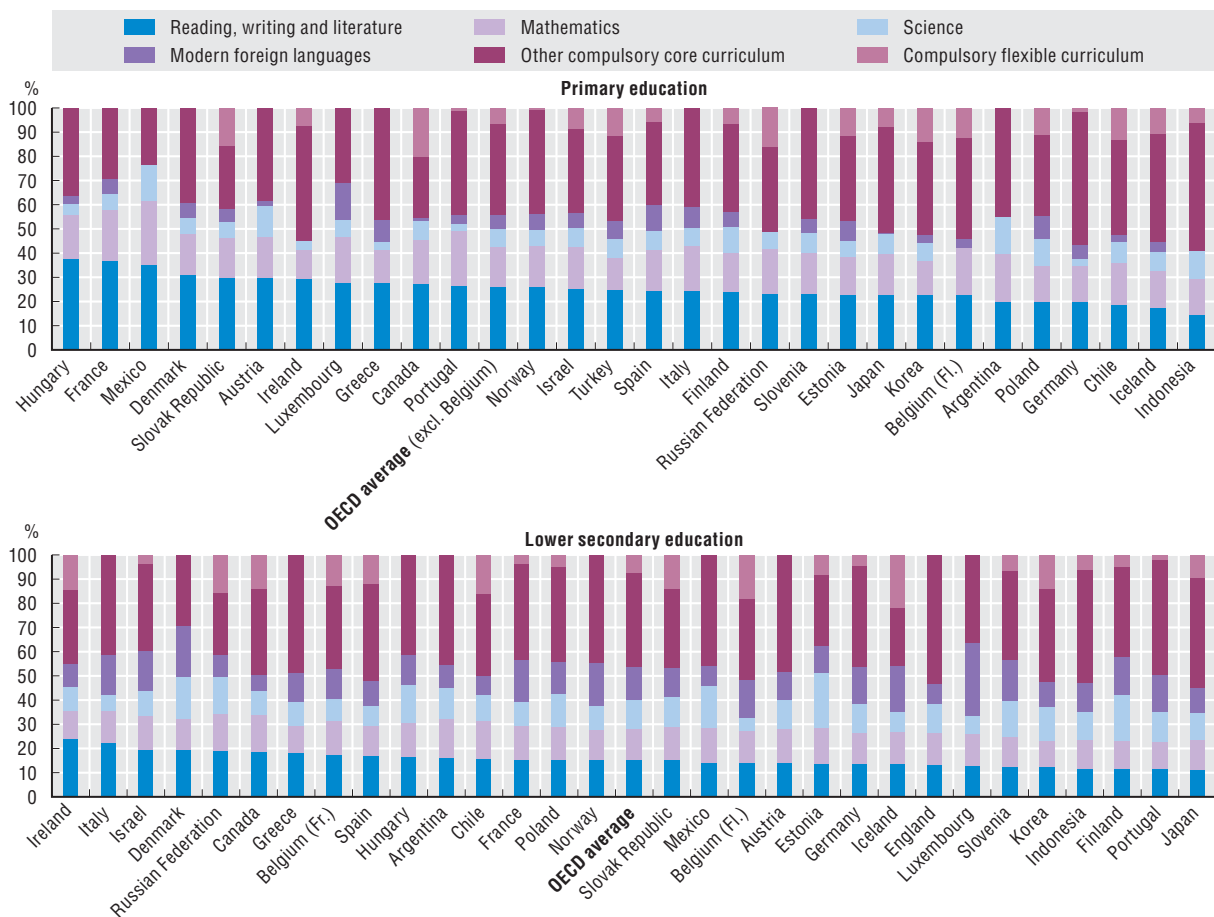
This figure shows the hours of intended instruction that students receive in primary and lower secondary education (this represents the compulsory instruction time public schools are required to deliver as well as the time devoted to non-compulsory instruction).



Source: OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013, Chart D1.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932847754>.

Figure 5.2. Instruction time by subject, 2011

These figures show the percentage of compulsory instruction time devoted to each subject in primary and lower secondary education.



Source: OECD (2013), Education at a Glance 2013, Charts D1.2a and D1.2b, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932847773> and <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932847792>.



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