

4. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How long do students spend in the classroom?

- It is expected that students in OECD countries will receive an average of 6 862 hours of instruction between the ages of 7 and 14, of which 6 710 hours are compulsory.
- Reading, writing and literature, mathematics, and science account for almost 55% of compulsory instruction time for 7-8 year-olds in OECD countries, almost 47% for 9-11 year-olds and 41% for 12-14 year-olds.

Significance

This section examines the amount of time students spend in formal education between the ages of 7 and 14. The choices that countries make about how much time should be devoted to education and which subjects should be compulsory reflect national 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

In OECD countries, students are intended to receive 6 862 hours of instruction on average between the ages of 7 and 14. Formal requirements range from 5 644 hours in Estonia to 8 664 hours in Chile. In OECD countries, students between the ages of 7 and 14 receive an average of 6 710 hours of compulsory instruction.

The proportion of the compulsory curriculum that is devoted to reading, writing and literature varies widely. On average, for 7-8 year-olds in OECD countries, almost 55% of the compulsory curriculum is devoted to three basic subjects: reading, writing and literature (30.4%), mathematics (17.8%) and science (6.5%). Together with the arts (12%), physical education (9%) and social studies (6%), these six study areas form the major part of the curriculum for this age group. On average, the largest portion of the curriculum for 7-8 year-olds is devoted to reading and writing, but the differences among countries are large. For example, in Iceland, reading and writing accounts for 20% of compulsory instruction time while in Denmark, Hungary and Turkey, it accounts for 40% or more of compulsory instruction time.

For 9-11 year-olds in OECD countries, almost 47% of the compulsory curriculum is devoted to three basic subject areas: reading, writing and literature (22.5%), mathematics (16.1%) and science (8.2%). An additional 9% of the compulsory curriculum is devoted to social studies and 8% to foreign languages. However, there is great variation among countries in the percentage of class time devoted to these subjects. Reading, writing and literature, for example, accounts for 13% of instruction time in England, compared with 30% or more in France, Ireland, Mexico and the Netherlands.

For 12-14 year-olds in OECD countries, an average of 41% of the compulsory curriculum is devoted to three subjects: reading, writing and literature (16%), mathematics (13%) and science (12%). The allocation of time for the different subjects within the compulsory curriculum for 12-14 year-olds varies less among countries than it does for 9-11 year-olds. Again, one of the greatest variations is in the time spent teaching reading and writing, which ranges from 11% of compulsory instruction time in Japan and Portugal to 26% in Ireland.

Most OECD countries define a specific number of hours for compulsory instruction. Within that part of the curriculum, schools, teachers and/or students have varying degrees of freedom to choose the subjects they want to teach or study. On average among OECD countries, the flexible part of the curriculum accounts for some 6% of compulsory instruction time for 7-8 year-olds and 9-11 year-olds and 7% for 12-14 year-olds. The Czech Republic allows complete flexibility (100%) in the compulsory curriculum for 7-14 year-olds and Poland allows this for 7-8 year-olds.

Definitions

Data on teaching time distinguish between “compulsory” and “intended” teaching time. Compulsory teaching time refers to the minimum amount of teaching that schools are expected to provide. Intended instruction time is an estimate of the number of hours 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 2011 OECD-INES Survey on Teachers and the Curriculum and refer to the 2009-10 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 2012* (Indicator D1).

Areas covered include:

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

Further reading from OECD

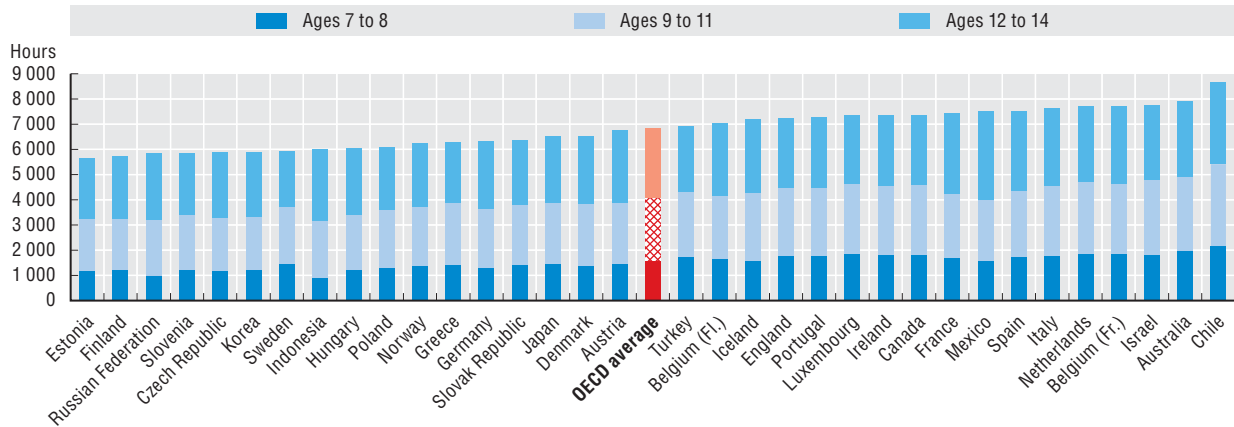
21st Century Learning Environments (2006).

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Figure 4.1. Total number of instruction hours in public institutions, 2010

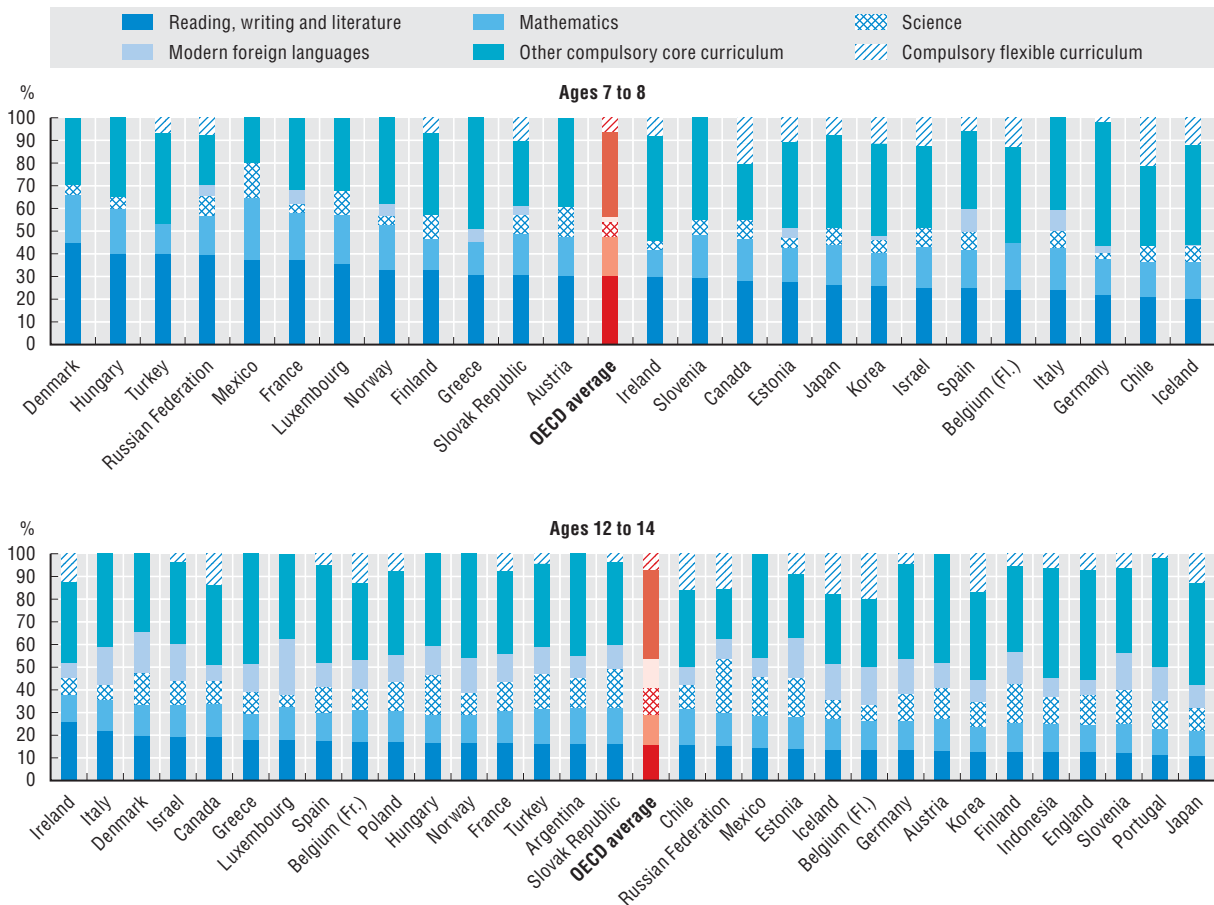
This figure shows the hours of intended instruction that students receive between ages 7 and 14 (this represents the compulsory instruction time public schools are required to deliver as well as the time devoted to non-compulsory instruction).



Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012*, Table D1.1, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932667862>.

Figure 4.2. Instruction time by subject, 2010

These figures show the percentage of compulsory instruction time devoted to each subject for 7-8 year-olds and for 12-14 year-olds.



Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012*, Table D1.2a and D1.2c, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932667881> and <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932667919>.



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