

5. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How long do students spend in the classroom?

- Students in OECD countries receive an average of 7 475 hours of compulsory instruction during their primary and lower secondary education.
- Reading, writing and literature, mathematics, and the arts account for 45% of compulsory instruction time for primary school students, on average in OECD countries, and 39% of compulsory instruction time for lower secondary school students (with instruction in first and foreign languages instead of arts).
- In OECD countries, an average of 4% of compulsory instruction time for primary and lower secondary students is devoted to compulsory subjects with a flexible timetable.

Significance

This section examines the amount of time primary and lower secondary students spend in formal education. The choices that countries make about how much time should be devoted to instruction 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, students attend an average of 4 553 hours of compulsory instruction during primary school and an average of 2 922 hours during lower secondary education. While the average total compulsory instruction time for primary and lower secondary students in OECD countries is 7 475 hours, formal instruction-time requirements range from 5 304 hours in Hungary to 10 120 hours in Australia.

The proportion of the compulsory curriculum that is devoted to reading, writing and literature varies widely among OECD and G20 countries. It ranges from 18% in Poland to 37% in France for primary students; for lower secondary students, it ranges from 12% in the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland and Japan to 33% in Italy.

On average, the largest portion of the curriculum for primary students is devoted to reading, writing and literature but the size of that portion differs widely. For example, in Chile, Germany, Iceland, Ireland and Poland, reading, writ-

ing and literature accounts for 20% or less of compulsory instruction time while in France and Mexico, it accounts for 35% or more of compulsory instruction time. In most countries, the second largest share of time is spent studying mathematics.

At the lower secondary level, an average of 39% of the compulsory curriculum is composed of three subjects: reading, writing and literature (14%), first and other foreign languages (13%) and mathematics (12%). In 11 countries, however, instruction in foreign languages accounts for the largest share of compulsory core curriculum at the lower secondary level (in some cases combined with another subject): Belgium (Flemish Community), Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Portugal.

On average in OECD countries, 4% of compulsory instruction time is allocated to subjects chosen by schools at the primary level. At the lower secondary level, 4% of compulsory instruction time is allocated to subjects chosen by schools and another 4% to subjects chosen by the students.

Definitions

Data on teaching time are from the 2013 Joint Eurydice-OECD Instruction time data collection and refer to instruction time during compulsory primary and full time (lower and upper) secondary general education for the school year 2013-14. Previous editions of *Education at a Glance* used a different survey to collect data on instruction time; thus, this year's data are not comparable with the figures in the previous additions.

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

Going further

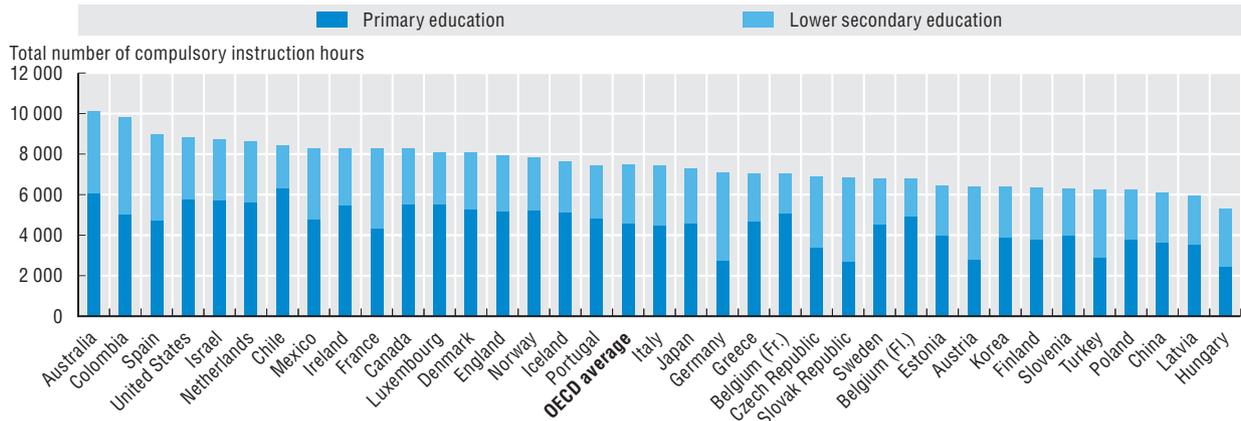
For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2014* (Indicator D1).

Areas covered include:

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

Figure 5.1. Compulsory instruction hours in general education in public institutions, 2014

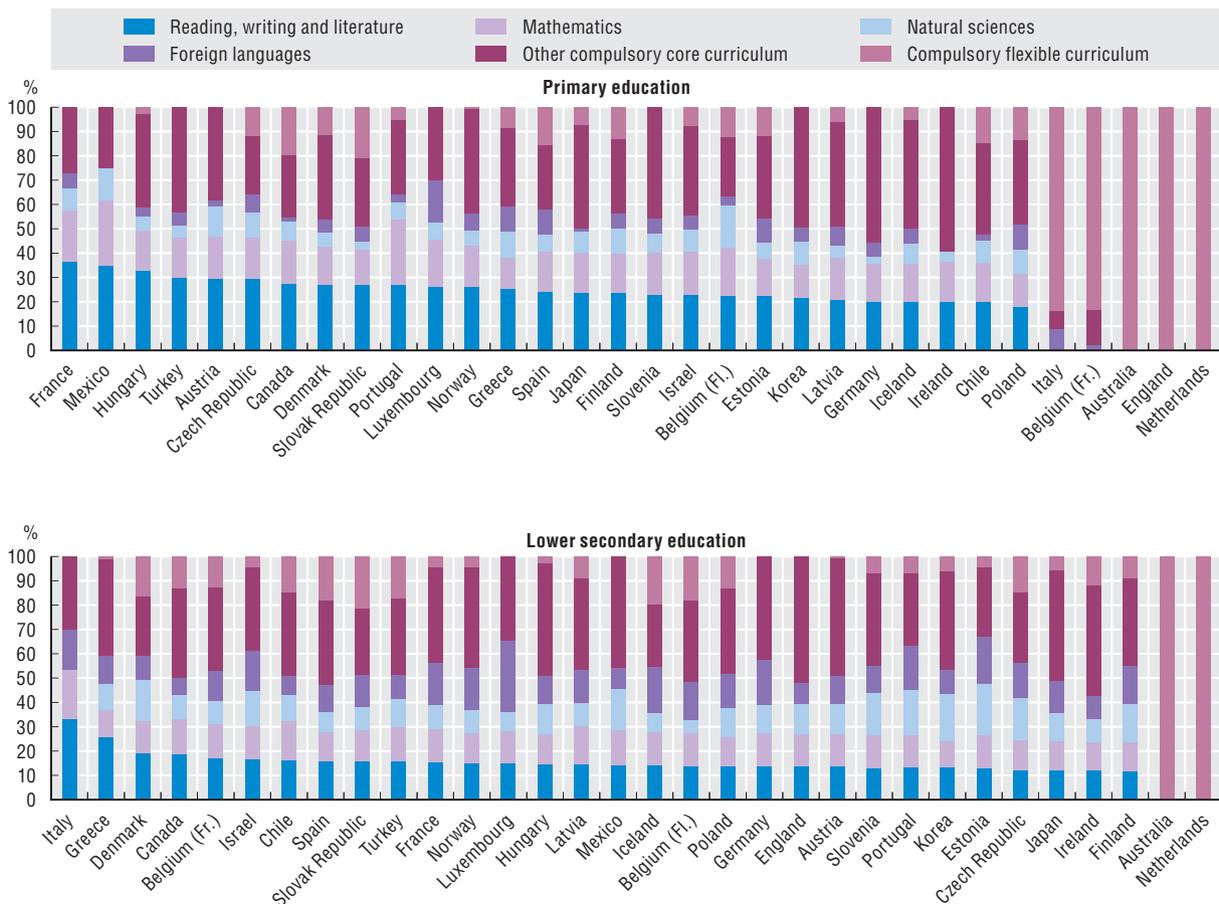
This figure shows the hours of compulsory instruction that students receive in primary and lower secondary education.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart D1.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933119625>.

Figure 5.2. Instruction time by subject, 2014

These figures show the instruction time per subject as a percentage of total compulsory instruction time in primary and lower secondary education.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Charts D1.2a and D1.2b, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933119644> and <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933119663>.



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