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European Context

The following information are provided as a common overview of the European situation in schools of 42 European Countries and the source of these information is the Eurydice document:

Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-time Compulsory Education in Europe 2015/16

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The following information are based on regulations or standards of the central (or top-level) education authorities or as established as a set of recommendations at regional level. The reference year is 2015/16

Definitions of subject categories

The subjects taught during full-time compulsory education in Europe (primary and secondary schools) vary depending on the countries however it is necessary to group them according to more general subject categories, in order to be able to compare the information or produce trends. Most subject categories cover several subjects (e.g. natural sciences: physics, chemistry or biology).

The category 'reading, writing and literature' is also considered as 'language 1'. Additional languages learnt by students – known as foreign languages in nearly all countries, are categorised as 'language 2', 'language 3', 'language 4' and 'language 5'.

The following subject categories are those ones included in the national data sheets.

Subject categories Definitions

Reading, writing and literature (L1) Covers skills such as spelling, reading, and writing in the language of instruction and includes subjects such as grammar, language of instruction and literature. It can be considered as the first language taught to students. If there are two languages of instruction in almost every public school, then hours allocated to reading, writing and literature in both languages of instruction should be reported.

Mathematics Covers all numeracy skills and subjects such as arithmetic, algebra, geometry, statistics, etc.

Natural sciences Includes subjects such as science, physics, chemistry, biology, environmental sciences and ecology.

Social studies Includes subjects such as history, geography and all related studies. May also include community studies, social and political instruction, philosophy or civics education.

Languages (L 2-5) Includes subjects that develop students' knowledge of a language viewed in the curriculum as 'foreign' (or modern) languages, other national languages and/or regional and minority languages.

This definition of languages in the curriculum is educationally based and unrelated to the political status of languages.

Physical education and health Includes subjects such as education in sports and health enhancing physical activities, as well as time devoted to instruction in competitive and traditional games, gymnastics, swimming, athletics, dance or other activities that develop pupils' physical and social competences (including knowledge, skills, psychomotor coordination, cooperation and leadership) and an active healthy lifestyle.

Arts education Includes subjects such as arts, history of arts, music, visual arts, drama, music and dance performance, photography, and creative handicraft.

Religion/ethics/ moral education Includes subjects whose aim is to teach the principles and history of one or more religions, and subjects such as ethics whose aim is to determine how to live and behave in accordance with human and social principles.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) Includes subjects such as informatics, information and communication technologies or computer science. These subjects include a wide range of topics concerned with the new technologies used for the processing and transmission of digital information, including computers, computerised networks (including the Internet), microelectronics, multimedia, software and programming, etc.

Technology Includes subjects that provide knowledge on the practical use of scientific or technological discoveries that use specific instruments and processes. For example, construction, electricity, electronics, graphics and design, etc.

Practical and vocational skills Includes vocational skills (preparation for a specific occupation), accountancy, business studies, career education, clothing and textiles, driving and road security, home economics, nursing, secretarial studies, tourism and hospitality, woodwork, metalwork and sewing.

Other subjects This category includes different subjects that cannot be classified within the other groups or which specifically reflect national concerns.

In this category, the following types of subjects may be included: classical languages and minority

languages which the curriculum does not consider to be other languages, personal development/well-being

Definitions of curriculum categories The intended instruction time might be composed of a compulsory curriculum and a non-compulsory curriculum. The compulsory curriculum refers to the amount and allocation of instruction time that has to be provided in almost every public school and must be attended by almost all public sector students.

The compulsory curriculum contains compulsory subjects defined as such by central education authorities and taught to all pupils. It may also be flexible in various ways as local authorities, schools, teachers and/or students may have varying degrees of freedom to choose the subjects and/or the allocation of compulsory instruction time.

Curriculum categories

Definitions

Compulsory subject

Subject that must be studied by all students.

Compulsory options chosen by the students

Includes the total amount of instruction time for subjects that are chosen by students, where there is a list of subjects that school must offer and each student must choose one or more from the list.

Compulsory flexible subjects chosen by schools

Includes the total amount of compulsory instruction time indicated by the central authorities, which regional authorities, local authorities, schools or teachers allocate to subjects of their choice (or subjects they chose from a list defined by central education authorities). For example, schools may be able to choose between offering religious education or more science, or art, etc., but to offer one of these subjects is compulsory for the school and students must study it.

Compulsory subjects with flexible timetable (total time devoted to ...)

Includes the total amount of instruction time indicated by the central authorities for a given group of subjects, which regional authorities, local authorities, schools or teachers allocate to individual subjects. There is flexibility in the time spent on a subject, but not in the subjects to be taught. For example, central authorities may define the total number of hours that students should be studying reading, writing and literature, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages per year and schools may choose how to distribute this time between these individual subjects.

Non-compulsory curriculum

Includes the total amount of instruction time to which students are entitled beyond the compulsory hours of instruction and that almost every public school is expected to provide. Subjects can vary from school to school or from region to region and take the form of elective subjects. For example, students may have the possibility to take a mathematics enrichment course or to study an additional language, above the compulsory hours of instruction. Students are not required to choose one of these elective subjects, but all public schools are expected to offer this possibility.

Main findings comparing 42 European countries:

1. The annual minimum instruction time tends to increase with the education level

2. Differences between countries become less significant
3. Little change in the recommended minimum annual instruction time over the last five years
4. More flexibility is allowed for allocating the recommended minimum instruction time than for choosing curriculum subjects
5. Reading, writing and literature takes up the largest share of the curriculum especially in primary education
6. Maths is also allocated a large share of the minimum instruction time at primary level, and nearly equals that of reading, writing and literature at secondary level
7. The focus on natural sciences increases considerably in secondary education
8. The time allocated to the teaching of additional languages at secondary level is similar to that for reading, writing and literature
9. The trend in the last five years is for instruction time in the core subject areas to increase

Instruction time

The intended instruction time includes the time a public school is expected to provide instruction to students on all the subjects integrated in the compulsory and non-compulsory curriculum in the school premises or in out-of school activities which are formal parts of the compulsory programmes.