

K12 ACADEMICS — WORLD EDUCATION SERIES

Education Systems of Asia

How school works across 33 countries — structure, exams, higher education & more, in plain English.



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2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS VOLUME

Education around the world.

This volume covers the education systems of **Asia** — a two-page profile of each country, with structure, compulsory years, curriculum, exams, higher education and more. From K12 Academics, reaching 185 countries every month.

HOW EACH PROFILE WORKS

The left page introduces the system and its structure; the right page covers schools, curriculum, exams and higher education, with the key facts at a glance. Systems evolve, so each links to its full, updated guide online.



ASIA — 01 OF 33

Afghanistan

EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

On paper, Afghanistan's education system looks similar to many others — a 6–3–3 ladder (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) overseen by the Ministry of Education , with universities under the Ministry of Higher Education , and instruction in Dari and Pashto alongside Islamic studies. In practice, decades of conflict, poverty...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

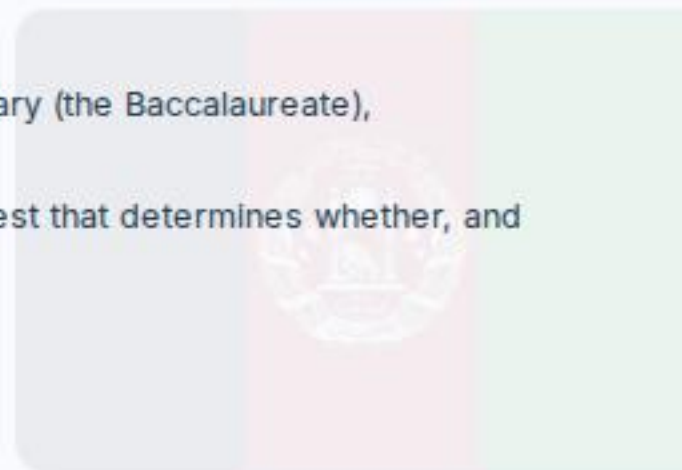
- ✓ **Primary — grades 1–6** — Ages roughly 7–12; the foundation stage, taught in Dari or Pashto
- ✓ **Lower secondary — grades 7–9** — Ages roughly 12–15; general education continues
- ✓ **Upper secondary — grades 10–12** — Ages roughly 15–18; students choose a general track (leading toward university) or a vocational/technical track
- ✓ **Graduation** — Students take exams for the 12th Grade Graduation Certificate (Baccalaureate) at the end of grade 12

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

- ✓ **School year** — Begins in late March (spring), following the Afghan solar calendar
- ✓ **Free in principle** — Public education carries no tuition, but families face indirect costs
- ✓ **Enrolment** — Handled locally through the Ministry of Education's provincial and district offices and schools
- ✓ **Out-of-school children** — Millions remain out of school; the figure rose sharply after 2021

EXAMS & THE KANKOR

- ✓ **12th Grade Graduation Certificate** — Taken at the end of upper secondary (the Baccalaureate), certifying completion of school
- ✓ **Kankor** — The national university-entrance examination — a competitive test that determines whether, and in which field, a student can enter public higher...



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Dari · Pashto
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Begins late Mar.
Literacy	~37–43%
Uni. entry	Kankor exam
Currency	Afghani (AFN)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The great majority of Afghan students attend free public (government) schools run by the Ministry of Education. The system expanded rapidly after 2001 with international support — enrollment reached nearly 10 million students by 2021, including substantial numbers of girls — but it has since contracted, and quality varies widely due to...

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

- ✓ **Private schools** — Fee-charging schools in urban centers, historically offering an alternative to public schools
- ✓ **International schools** — A limited number of foreign-curriculum schools, greatly reduced since 2021
- ✓ **Madrasas** — Religious schools, both public and private, now emphasized by the government

READ THE FULL AFGHANISTAN GUIDE
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Armenia

EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

Armenia, a post-Soviet country in the South Caucasus, runs a 12-year general-education system with Armenian as the main language of instruction and near-universal literacy (around 99.8%). Since transitioning from the Soviet model, Armenia has reformed its schools and aligned its universities with the European Bologna framework. For...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–4)** — Ages ~6–10
- ✓ **Middle / basic (grades 5–9)** — Completing the compulsory basic-education cycle
- ✓ **High school (grades 10–12)** — Upper-secondary study, including specialized and vocational options, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

- ✓ **School year** — September to June
- ✓ **Free** — Public general education is free
- ✓ **Language** — Armenian, with Russian and English widely taught

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most Armenian students attend free public schools . The system inherited strong foundations from the Soviet era — particularly in mathematics and the sciences — and has been modernizing its curriculum and standards since independence.

AT A GLANCE

Language	Armenian
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	4 – 5 – 3
School year	Sept – June
Higher ed	Yerevan State Univ.
Currency	Dram (AMD)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Armenia has a growing private-school sector in Yerevan and larger towns, including international and English/Russian-language schools serving diaspora-connected and internationally mobile families.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Armenian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages — with Russian and English commonly taught. Armenia's strong tradition in maths and sciences carries through from the Soviet-era system.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Students complete a state final attestation at the end of secondary school. Admission to universities is through unified/standardized entrance examinations in relevant subjects, which determine placement into state-funded or fee-paying places.

READ THE FULL ARMENIA GUIDE
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Azerbaijan

EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan, a post-Soviet country on the Caspian Sea, runs a general-education system with Azerbaijani as the main language of instruction (Russian is also widely used). Literacy is near-universal (around 99.8%), and the country has modernized and expanded its education system, funded in part by oil and gas revenues, while aligning...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

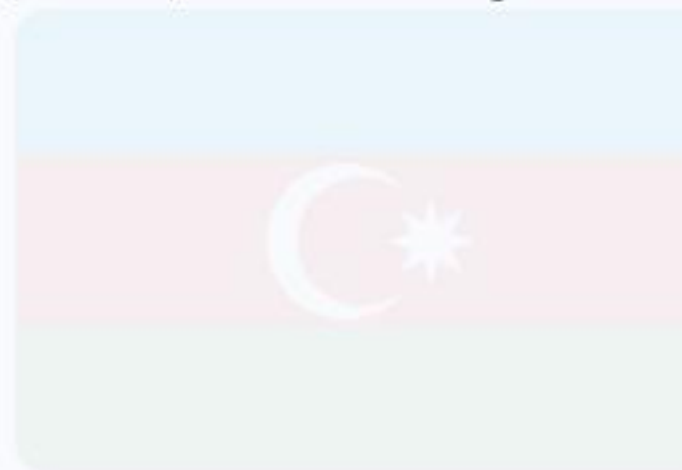
- ✓ **Primary (grades 1-4)** — Ages ~6-10
- ✓ **General secondary (grades 5-9)** — Completing the compulsory basic cycle
- ✓ **Complete secondary (grades 10-11)** — Upper-secondary study leading to university, alongside vocational options

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

- ✓ **School year** — September to June
- ✓ **Free** — Public general education is free
- ✓ **Languages** — Azerbaijani, with Russian and English also taught

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools . The system retains strong foundations from the Soviet era, especially in mathematics and the sciences, and has been modernizing curricula, facilities, and teacher training.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Azerbaijani
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	4 – 5 – 2
School year	Sept – June
Higher ed	Baku State Univ.
Currency	Manat (AZN)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Azerbaijan has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Baku, including English- and Russian-language schools serving internationally mobile and diaspora families.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Azerbaijani language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages (Russian and English are widely taught). Vocational and technical education provides an alternative route at the upper-secondary level.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Admission to universities is highly centralized: students sit standardized state entrance examinations administered by the State Examination Center, and results determine placement into state-funded or fee-paying university places.

READ THE FULL AZERBAIJAN GUIDE
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Bangladesh

EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh runs one of the world's largest education systems by enrollment, with Bangla (Bengali) as the main language of instruction and English widely taught. A defining feature is its three parallel streams : the mainstream general system, the madrasa (religious) system, and the English-medium system (following British curricula)....

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1-5)** — Free and compulsory, ages ~6-10
- ✓ **Junior secondary (grades 6-8)** —
- ✓ **Secondary (grades 9-10)** — Leading to the SSC examination
- ✓ **Higher secondary (grades 11-12)** — Leading to the HSC examination and university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Primary education (grades 1-5) is free and compulsory , beginning around age 6. The school year runs roughly January to December . Enrollment is high; the ongoing challenge is retaining students through secondary and raising learning quality.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The state runs a large network of free government primary schools and supports secondary schools — many of which are non-government but government-assisted (receiving subsidies and following the national curriculum). Instruction is in Bangla, with English as a compulsory subject throughout.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Bangla · English
Compulsory	Primary (1–5)
Structure	5 + 3 + 2 + 2
School year	Jan – Dec
Exams	SSC · HSC
Currency	Taka (BDT)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Bangladesh has extensive non-government and private provision : government-assisted secondary schools, private schools, the English-medium sector (British curricula, concentrated in Dhaka and Chittagong and popular with aspiring urban families), and a very large network of madrasas (both state-aided Aliya madrasas and independent Qawml...

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The general curriculum covers Bangla, English, mathematics, science, social studies, and religious/moral education . The English-medium stream follows British curricula and assessments, while madrasas combine Islamic studies with general subjects. English proficiency is increasingly valued for higher education and employment.

READ THE FULL BANGLADESH GUIDE
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Bhutan

EDUCATION IN BHUTAN

Bhutan, a Himalayan kingdom, has transformed a centuries-old monastic education tradition into a modern, free, state-funded system in just a few decades — with literacy rising from around 20% in the early 1980s to roughly 66–71% today. Uniquely, its schools use a bilingual model (Dzongkha taught as a subject; English as the medium of...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Pre-primary + Primary (about 6 years)** — Beginning with PP, ages ~6+
- ✓ **Lower secondary (about 3 years)** —
- ✓ **Higher secondary (about 2 years)** — Leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

The Royal Government provides 11 years of free basic education , from pre-primary (PP) through Class X. Government schools charge no tuition, and free boarding is provided in many rural schools where students travel long distances. Enrollment is near-universal at primary, with dropout challenges in remote areas. The school year runs...

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Almost all Bhutanese students attend free government schools . Beyond academics, schools emphasize GNH values, environmental awareness, and Bhutanese culture, reflecting the country's holistic approach to education.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Dzongkha · English
Compulsory	11 yrs free
Structure	6 – 3 – 2
School year	Feb – Dec
Higher ed	Royal Univ. of Bhutan
Currency	Ngultrum (BTN)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Bhutan has a small private-school sector , mostly in Thimphu and larger towns, offering an alternative to government schools; overall, education is overwhelmingly public.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Instruction blends a modern academic curriculum (in English) with Dzongkha language and strong grounding in Bhutanese culture, Buddhist values, and GNH principles. This balance of modern knowledge and traditional values is central to the system's identity.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

- ✓ **BCSE** — The Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education, taken at the end of Class X
- ✓ **BHSEC** — The Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate, taken at the end of Class XII — the basis for university entry

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Brunei

EDUCATION IN BRUNEI

Brunei, a small, oil-rich sultanate on Borneo, provides free education for its citizens under a bilingual model (the SPN21 system) that uses both Malay and English as media of instruction. Literacy is high, and the government invests heavily in education and in scholarships for study at home and abroad.

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Pre-school + Primary (about 6 years)** — The foundation stage
- ✓ **Lower secondary (about 3 years)** —
- ✓ **Upper secondary (about 2 years)** — Leading to Cambridge-based exams and further study

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory for around nine years and free for citizens, beginning around age 5–6. The school year runs roughly January to December , and Islamic religious education is also part of children's schooling.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most Bruneian students attend free government schools under the SPN21 framework, with instruction in both Malay and English. Subjects such as Malay, Islamic studies, and civics are taught in Malay, while mathematics and science are taught in English.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Malay · English
Compulsory	~9 years
Structure	6 + 3 + 2
School year	Jan – Dec
Exams	O- & A-Level
Currency	B\$ (pegged S\$)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Brunei has a private and international-school sector , offering British and other curricula, largely in and around Bandar Seri Begawan.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The SPN21 curriculum blends academic subjects taught bilingually with Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) national philosophy and Islamic education. English proficiency is emphasized alongside Malay.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

- ✓ **PSR** — The Primary School Assessment, at the end of primary
- ✓ **Brunei-Cambridge GCE O-Level** — At the end of lower/upper secondary
- ✓ **Brunei-Cambridge GCE A-Level** — For pre-university study

READ THE FULL BRUNEI GUIDE
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Cambodia

EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

Cambodia's education system has been rebuilt from near-total destruction under the Khmer Rouge (1975–79), which dismantled schooling and targeted educated people. Since then, the country has restored and expanded its system, with Khmer as the language of instruction and free public education. Literacy has risen substantially, though...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–6)** — Ages ~6–11
- ✓ **Lower secondary (grades 7–9)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary (grades 10–12)** — Ending with the national grade-12 examination and university entry

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 6 to 15 (grades 1–9) and free in public schools. The school year runs roughly November to August .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most Cambodian students attend free public schools . The system continues to develop teacher training, curriculum, and facilities after decades of rebuilding, with support from international partners.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Cambodia has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, offering English-language and international curricula popular with expatriate and aspiring families.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Khmer
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Nov – Aug
University entry	Grade 12 exam
Currency	Riel (KHR)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Instruction is in Khmer , covering language, mathematics, sciences, and social studies, with English (and some French) taught as foreign languages and increasingly valued.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Two key assessments mark the path: a grade-9 diploma examination at the end of lower secondary, and the grade-12 national examination (Baccalauréat) at the end of upper secondary — the basis for university admission.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is led by the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) , the oldest and largest, alongside other public universities (such as the Royal University of Agriculture) and a rapidly expanded private sector. Admission generally follows grade-12 results.

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China

EDUCATION IN CHINA

China runs the world's largest education system — hundreds of millions of students — overseen by the Ministry of Education , with Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) as the language of instruction. Rooted in a long tradition of merit-based examination, the system is intensely focused on academic achievement, and access to universities is...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Preschool** — Kindergarten (ages ~3–6), widespread but not compulsory
- ✓ **Primary (6 years)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Junior secondary (3 years)** — 初中 — completing the nine-year compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Senior secondary (3 years)** — Either academic high school (高中) or vocational/technical school, entered via the Zhongkao exam

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

- ✓ **Free compulsory years** — Tuition-free for the nine-year cycle
- ✓ **The hukou factor** — Access to public schooling has historically been tied to a family's hukou (household registration) , which can complicate schooling for the children...
- ✓ **Intensity** — Academic pressure and long study hours are a defining feature

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The overwhelming majority of Chinese students attend public schools . There is a strong hierarchy of quality — sought-after "key" schools versus ordinary ones — and a persistent urban-rural gap in resources and outcomes, which the government has worked to narrow.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Mandarin
Compulsory	9 yrs (6–15)
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Sept – July
University entry	Gaokao
Currency	Yuan (CNY)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

China has a private and international-school sector , including schools serving expatriate families and Chinese families seeking overseas university pathways. Regulation has tightened in recent years: rules limit foreign curricula and private operation during the compulsory years, and the 2021 "double reduction" policy sharply curtailed...

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The national curriculum emphasizes Chinese, mathematics, and English alongside sciences, humanities, physical education, arts, and moral and political education . English is taught from early grades. Reforms have periodically aimed to reduce rote learning and workload and to promote "quality education," though exam pressure remains...

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Georgia

EDUCATION IN GEORGIA

Georgia, in the South Caucasus, runs a Georgian-language education system with near-universal literacy. Since a landmark 2005 reform, university admission has been governed by transparent Unified National Examinations — widely credited with reducing corruption in admissions. Georgia is Bologna-aligned and EU-aspiring, and its...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–6)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Basic (grades 7–9)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Secondary (grades 10–12)** — Leading to the school-leaving certificate and university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 6 to 15 (through grade 9). Public education is free, and the school year runs September to June .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools . The system retains strong foundations in mathematics and the sciences from the Soviet era and has been modernizing curricula and standards since independence.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Georgia has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Tbilisi, including English- and Russian-language schools.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Georgian
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Sept – June
University entry	Unified Nat'l Exams
Currency	Lari (GEL)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Georgian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages (English is increasingly emphasized, alongside Russian).

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

The pivotal assessment is the Unified National Examinations (UNE) — standardized national tests introduced in 2005 that determine university admission and the allocation of state study grants. Their transparency transformed a previously corruption-prone admissions process.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is led by Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU) (founded 1918, the oldest and largest), along with Ilia State University, the Georgian Technical University, and a growing private sector. The system is Bologna-aligned, and several universities run English-taught programs, especially in medicine .

READ THE FULL GEORGIA GUIDE
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India

EDUCATION IN INDIA

India runs one of the largest education systems on earth — hundreds of millions of students, dozens of languages, and a mix of central and state control (education is a "concurrent" responsibility, so both the national government and the states set policy). Instruction happens in Hindi, English, and many regional languages , and the...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Foundational (5 years, ages 3–8)** — Three years of pre-school plus Grades 1–2, play- and activity-based
- ✓ **Preparatory (3 years, ages 8–11)** — Grades 3–5
- ✓ **Middle (3 years, ages 11–14)** — Grades 6–8
- ✓ **Secondary (4 years, ages 14–18)** — Grades 9–12, with greater subject flexibility (softening the old Science/Commerce/Arts streams)

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Under the Right to Education (RTE) Act (2009) , education is free and compulsory for children aged 6 to 14 (elementary education), a state responsibility. NEP 2020 aims to universalize schooling from pre-primary through Grade 12. School-year calendars vary by state and board (commonly April–March or June–April).

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

India has an enormous private-school sector , from low-cost private schools to elite institutions, plus international schools offering the IB or Cambridge curricula. A defining feature of Indian education is the vast private coaching industry that prepares students for board and entrance exams.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Hindi · English + many
Compulsory	Ages 6–14
Structure	5 – 3 – 3 – 4
School year	Apr – Mar / Jun – Apr
University entry	Boards + JEE/NEET/CUET
Currency	Rupee (INR)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most Indian children attend government (public) schools , run by states and local bodies, though a very large share also attend private schools. Instruction is often in the mother tongue or regional language in early grades (NEP encourages this to at least Grade 5), shifting toward English and Hindi higher up. Quality varies enormously...

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Schools follow one of several boards : the national CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) and CISCE (ICSE/ISC), numerous state boards , and international boards (IB, Cambridge). Grades 11–12 have traditionally split into Science, Commerce, and Arts streams — though NEP 2020 promotes more flexibility. The curriculum spans languages...

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Indonesia

EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Indonesia — the world's fourth-most-populous country — runs one of the largest education systems anywhere, with Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) as the language of instruction. A defining feature is its dual structure : mainstream schools under the Ministry of Education run alongside a large network of Islamic schools (madrasah) and Islamic...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **SD (primary, 6 years)** — Ages ~7-12 — or the Islamic MI
- ✓ **SMP (junior secondary, 3 years)** — — or the Islamic MTs
- ✓ **SMA / SMK (senior secondary, 3 years)** — General (SMA) or vocational (SMK) — or the Islamic MA

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Indonesia provides 12 years of compulsory education (extended from nine), beginning around age 7. Public schooling is largely free, and the school year runs roughly July to June .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend public and government-aided schools , taught in Indonesian, with the national ideology (Pancasila) and religious education part of the curriculum. The madrasah system serves a large share of students within the Islamic track.

AT A GLANCE

Language	Indonesian
Compulsory	12 years
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Jul – Jun
University entry	SNBP / SNBT
Currency	Rupiah (IDR)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Indonesia has a large private and religious school sector , including Islamic, Christian, and international schools, concentrated in Jakarta and other cities.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Indonesian, mathematics, the sciences, social studies, religious education, and English , with vocational specialties in SMK schools. Recent reforms (the "Merdeka" / Freedom-to-Learn curriculum) emphasize flexibility and competencies.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

The old high-stakes national exam (Ujian Nasional) was abolished in 2020 and replaced by the Asesmen Nasional — a national assessment used to evaluate schools rather than to gate individual students. University admission runs through national routes: SNBP (merit/grades-based) and SNBT (a national test), plus independent university...

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Japan

EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Japan runs a rigorous, high-achieving education system, overseen by the national MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), with Japanese as the language of instruction and near-universal literacy. Japanese students consistently rank among the world's best in mathematics, science, and reading. The system...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Elementary school (小学校, 6 years)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Junior high school (中学校, 3 years)** — Ages ~12–15 — completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Senior high school (高等学校, 3 years)** — Ages ~15–18 — not compulsory, but attended by around 99% of students
- ✓ **Higher education** — Four-year universities, plus junior colleges and specialized vocational schools

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is free and compulsory for nine years (elementary plus junior high), from age 6 to 15. Public elementary and junior high schools charge no tuition (families pay for meals, materials, and trips). The school year runs April to March, in three terms, with a typical day ending around mid-afternoon followed by club activities (...)

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Japan provides special needs education through special schools and special classes/support within mainstream schools, aimed at supporting self-reliance and social participation.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Japanese
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Apr – Mar
University entry	Common Test + uni exams
Currency	Yen (JPY)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend public schools , which follow a standardized national curriculum set by MEXT (all textbooks must pass a MEXT certification process). Public schools nationwide share the same curriculum and expectations, emphasizing not just academics but moral education, group harmony, and responsibility (students often clean their...

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Japan has a significant private-school sector , especially at the senior-high and university levels (private schools charge substantial tuition). Prestigious private "escalator" schools that feed into affiliated universities are sought after, and international schools serve expatriate families.

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Kazakhstan

EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest economy, runs a post-Soviet education system that it has been modernizing and internationalizing. A defining policy is trilingualism — promoting Kazakh, Russian, and English across schooling — and the country has invested in flagship institutions and scholarships to raise standards. Literacy is...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–4)** — Ages ~6–10
- ✓ **Basic secondary (grades 5–9)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary (grades 10–11/12)** — General or technical/vocational, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 6 to 15 (through grade 9). Public education is free, and the school year runs roughly September to May . Kazakhstan has been transitioning toward a 12-year system in line with international norms.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools , taught in Kazakh or Russian, with English increasingly emphasized under the trilingual policy. Specialized schools (such as the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools network) serve high-achieving students and pilot reforms.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Kazakh · Russian · English
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	4 – 5 – 2
School year	Sept – May
University entry	UNT
Currency	Tenge (KZT)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Kazakhstan has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Astana and Almaty.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Kazakh and Russian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and English . The trilingual policy aims for students to learn in and across all three languages, and Kazakh is transitioning toward a Latin-based script.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission is governed by the Unified National Testing (UNT) — a standardized national exam whose results determine admission and the allocation of state education grants.

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling is uncommon in Kazakhstan; education is overwhelmingly school-based within the state system.

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Kyrgyzstan

EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan, a mountainous Central Asian country, runs a post-Soviet education system in which both Kyrgyz and Russian are official and used in schooling, with near-universal literacy. University admission is governed by a national test, and Kyrgyzstan has become a notable destination for international students — especially for...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–4)** — Ages ~7–10
- ✓ **Basic secondary (grades 5–9)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary (grades 10–11)** — Leading to university, alongside vocational options

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 7 to 15 (through grade 9). Public education is free, and the school year runs roughly September to May .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools , taught in Kyrgyz or Russian. The system retains strong Soviet-era foundations in mathematics and the sciences and has been modernizing since independence.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Kyrgyzstan has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Bishkek, including Turkish, Russian, and English-language schools.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Kyrgyz · Russian
Compulsory	Ages 7–15
Structure	4 – 5 – 2
School year	Sept – May
University entry	ORT
Currency	Som (KGS)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Kyrgyz and Russian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages , with English increasingly emphasized.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission is governed by the National Testing (ORT) — a standardized exam whose results determine admission and the allocation of state scholarships.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education includes the Kyrgyz National University and the English-medium, liberal-arts American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, along with numerous medical universities that have become a major draw for international students.

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling is uncommon in Kyrgyzstan; education is overwhelmingly school-based.

READ THE FULL KYRGYZSTAN GUIDE
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Laos

EDUCATION IN LAOS

Laos, a landlocked Southeast Asian nation, runs a Lao-language education system overseen by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The government has expanded access and raised literacy substantially, though the system remains under-resourced, with challenges around rural access, teacher supply, and quality.

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (5 years)** — Ages ~6–11
- ✓ **Lower secondary (4 years)** — Completing the basic cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary (3 years)** — Leading to university, alongside vocational options

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Primary education is compulsory and intended to be free , beginning around age 6. Access has expanded significantly, though completion — especially in remote areas and among ethnic-minority communities — remains a challenge. The school year runs roughly September to June .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most children attend public schools , with instruction in Lao. The system relies partly on international and development support, and the government has prioritized expanding primary access and literacy.

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling is not an established route ; education is school-based.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Lao
Compulsory	Primary (5 yrs)
Structure	5 – 4 – 3
School year	Sept – June
Higher ed	National Univ. of Laos
Currency	Kip (LAK)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Laos has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Vientiane, including bilingual and foreign-curriculum schools.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Instruction is in Lao , covering language, mathematics, sciences, and social studies, with French and English taught as foreign languages (a legacy of French colonial ties and growing regional integration).

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Students progress through lower- and upper-secondary examinations, culminating in the qualifications required for university admission.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education centers on the National University of Laos in Vientiane (the main institution), along with regional universities and colleges. Many students also study abroad, especially within ASEAN, Vietnam, and China, often on scholarships.

READ THE FULL LAOS GUIDE
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Malaysia

EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia runs a distinctive, multi-stream education system that reflects its multi-ethnic society. Instruction is mainly in Malay (Bahasa Malaysia), with English compulsory nationwide, and — uniquely — parallel Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium "vernacular" schools operate alongside national schools at the primary level. Malaysia has also...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (6 years)** — National schools (Sekolah Kebangsaan, Malay-medium) or vernacular schools (SJKC Chinese-medium, SJKT Tamil-medium) — all following the national...
- ✓ **Lower secondary (Forms 1–3)** —
- ✓ **Upper secondary (Forms 4–5)** — Academic, technical, or vocational streams, ending with the SPM
- ✓ **Pre-university** — Form 6 (STPM), matriculation, foundation, or diploma programs

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Primary education (six years) is free and compulsory, and government secondary schooling is also free. Both Malay and English are compulsory subjects for all students. School calendars vary, and the medium of instruction depends on the school type.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free government schools — national or vernacular. The system also includes specialized streams such as fully residential science schools (Sekolah Berasrama Penuh), MARA junior science colleges (MRSM), religious schools (SMKA), and technical/vocational institutions. Entry to elite science and boarding schools is...



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Malay · English + Chinese/Tamil
Compulsory	Primary (6 yrs)
Structure	6 – 3 – 2
School year	varies
University entry	SPM → STPM / matriculation
Currency	Ringgit (MYR)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Malaysia has a large private and international-school sector — including British, American, and IB international schools, private academic schools, and religious schools — concentrated in Kuala Lumpur and other cities, offering alternatives to the national and vernacular systems.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Malay, English, mathematics, science, and social/moral or Islamic education , with Chinese or Tamil in vernacular schools. Upper secondary offers science, arts, technical, and vocational streams.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Malaysia provides special education through special schools and integrated programs in mainstream schools, backed by national policy.

READ THE FULL MALAYSIA GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com





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Maldives

EDUCATION IN MALDIVES

The Maldives, an Indian Ocean nation of nearly 1,200 coral islands, runs an education system that uses Dhivehi (the national language) in early grades and English as the medium of instruction higher up. Literacy is very high (around 98%), and the country relies on Cambridge (British-based) examinations for secondary certification....

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1-7)** — Ages ~6-12
- ✓ **Lower secondary (grades 8-10)** — Ending with IGCSE / O-Level examinations
- ✓ **Higher secondary (grades 11-12)** — Ending with A-Level examinations, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Primary education is compulsory and free , beginning around age 6. The government has worked to expand access across the atolls, including through island schools. School calendars have shifted in recent years.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most children attend government schools , with Dhivehi and Islamic studies alongside an English-medium academic curriculum. Providing full secondary schooling on smaller islands is a persistent challenge, so some students relocate to larger islands or Malé.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Maldives has a private and international-school sector , concentrated in Malé, offering alternatives including international curricula.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Dhivehi · English
Compulsory	Primary
Structure	7 + 3 + 2
School year	varies
Exams	IGCSE · A-Level
Currency	Rufiyaa (MVR)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Dhivehi, English, mathematics, the sciences, Islamic studies, and social studies , taught in Dhivehi early on and English later, geared toward Cambridge examinations.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Secondary certification uses Cambridge examinations — the IGCSE / GCE O-Level at the end of lower secondary and GCE A-Level at the end of higher secondary — alongside local Dhivehi and Islamic-studies assessments.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education centers on the Maldives National University (MNU) and the Islamic University of Maldives , along with colleges. Many Maldivian students also pursue higher education abroad, in Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, the UK, and elsewhere.

READ THE FULL MALDIVES GUIDE
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Mongolia

EDUCATION IN MONGOLIA

Mongolia, a vast, sparsely populated country between Russia and China, runs an education system with Mongolian as the language of instruction and high literacy — a strong legacy of the socialist era. A distinctive challenge and feature is educating the children of the country's nomadic herder families , for whom boarding schools and...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

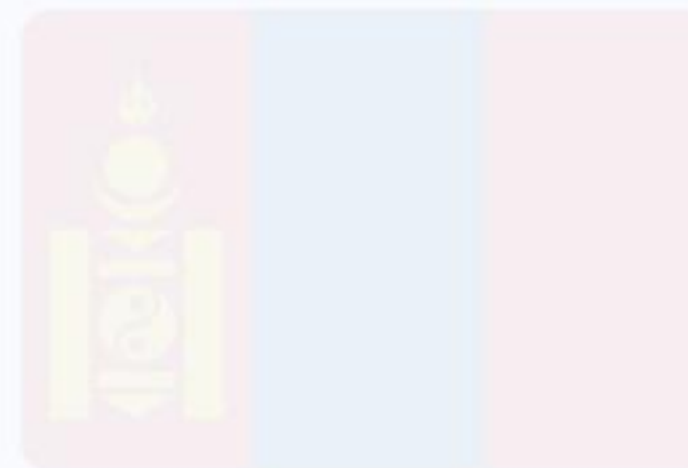
- ✓ **Primary (5 years)** — Ages ~6-11
- ✓ **Lower secondary (4 years)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary (3 years)** — Leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 6 to 15 (through lower secondary). Public education is free, and the school year runs roughly September to June . Dormitories allow herder children to attend school while their families move with the seasons.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools . The system inherited strong foundations from the socialist period, and providing schooling to a dispersed, partly nomadic population — including through boarding provision — is a defining feature.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Mongolian
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	5 – 4 – 3
School year	Sept – June
University entry	Entrance exam
Currency	Tögrög (MNT)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Mongolia has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Ulaanbaatar.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Mongolian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages (English and Russian are commonly taught). Mongolia has been reviving traditional Mongolian script alongside the Cyrillic script in use.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission is governed by a national entrance examination taken at the end of secondary school, whose results determine admission and scholarships.

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling is uncommon ; education is school-based, with boarding provision reaching herder families.

READ THE FULL MONGOLIA GUIDE
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Myanmar

EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

Myanmar (Burma) runs a Burmese-language education system alongside a long tradition of Buddhist monastic schools that have historically educated many children, especially the poor. The country had been reforming and expanding its schooling — but the 2021 military coup and the conflict that followed have severely disrupted education...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (5 years)** — Ages ~6–10
- ✓ **Lower secondary (4 years)** —
- ✓ **Upper secondary (3 years)** — Ending with the matriculation examination

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Primary education is the focus of compulsory schooling and intended to be free , beginning around age 6. The school year traditionally runs roughly June to March . Access has been heavily disrupted since 2021.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most children attend public (government) schools , taught in Burmese, alongside a significant network of monastic schools run by Buddhist monasteries that provide free education, particularly for disadvantaged children. Ethnic-minority areas also have community and mother-tongue schooling.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Burmese
Compulsory	Primary
Structure	5 – 4 – 3
School year	June – Mar
University entry	Matriculation exam
Currency	Kyat (MMK)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Myanmar has a private and international-school sector , concentrated in Yangon and Mandalay; many operate independently of the disrupted state system.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Instruction is in Burmese , covering the standard academic subjects, with English taught as a foreign language. Monastic schools combine general and Buddhist education.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

The pivotal assessment is the matriculation examination at the end of high school — a high-stakes exam whose results determine university admission and field of study.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Special-education provision is very limited , delivered mainly through NGO and faith-based programs, and further strained by the crisis.

READ THE FULL MYANMAR GUIDE
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Nepal

EDUCATION IN NEPAL

Nepal, a Himalayan nation between India and China, runs a Nepali-language education system (with many mother tongues used locally and English common in private schools). The country has restructured its system under its federal constitution, expanding free basic education, though literacy and rural access remain challenges. Nepal is also...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Basic education (grades 1–8)** — Free and compulsory, ages ~5–13
- ✓ **Secondary (grades 9–12)** — Leading to the SEE (grade 10) and grade-12 examinations

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Basic education (grades 1–8) is free and compulsory , beginning around age 5. The school year runs roughly April to March . Completion and quality vary widely between urban and rural, and public and private, schools.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most children attend public (community) schools , taught in Nepali, though a large and growing share attend English-medium private schools , which are often seen as higher-quality — a major divide in Nepali education.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Nepali, English, mathematics, science, and social studies , with English-medium instruction common in private schools.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Nepali
Compulsory	Basic (1–8)
Structure	8 + 4
School year	Apr – Mar
University entry	SEE + grade 12
Currency	Rupee (NPR)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Nepal has an extensive private-school sector (English-medium "boarding" schools), concentrated in Kathmandu and other cities, plus medical and technical colleges.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Two key assessments mark the path: the SEE (Secondary Education Examination) at the end of grade 10 — historically called the "iron gate" for its high stakes — and the grade-12 examination (National Examinations Board), the basis for university admission.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is dominated by the vast Tribhuvan University (one of the largest universities in the world by enrollment), alongside Kathmandu University, Pokhara University, and many affiliated and medical colleges. Medical education, in particular, draws some regional students.

READ THE FULL NEPAL GUIDE
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North Korea

EDUCATION IN NORTH KOREA

North Korea (the DPRK) runs a fully state-controlled, Korean-language education system that provides universal, free, compulsory schooling and reports very high literacy. A defining feature — set apart from most other countries — is the heavy integration of political and ideological education centered on the ruling Kim family and the...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

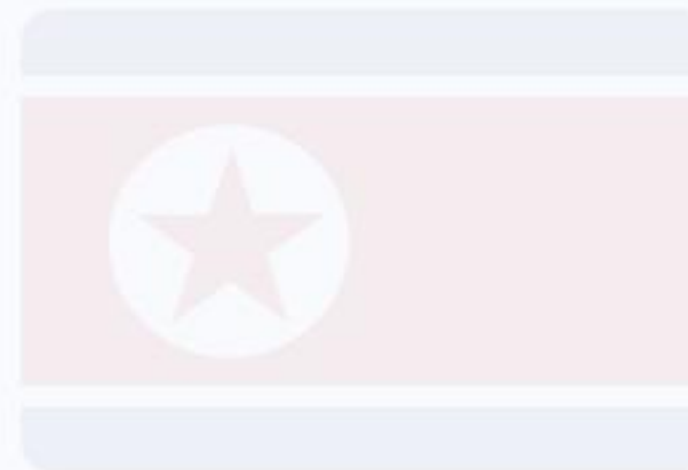
- ✓ **One year of kindergarten** — The final pre-school year, compulsory
- ✓ **Primary school (5 years)** —
- ✓ **Junior middle school (3 years)** —
- ✓ **Senior middle school (3 years)** — Leading to work, military service, or higher education

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is free and compulsory for 12 years , and the state reports near-universal enrollment and literacy. The academic year runs roughly April to March . All schooling is provided and tightly controlled by the state.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

All schools are state-run ; there is no private sector. Alongside academic subjects, the curriculum places strong emphasis on the revolutionary history of the Kim family and Juche ideology , and access to elite schools and higher education is influenced by songbun — a person's state-assigned social and political background.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Korean
Compulsory	12 years
Structure	5 – 3 – 3
School year	Apr – Mar
Higher ed	Kim Il-sung Univ.
Currency	Won (KPW)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

There is no private schooling in North Korea; education is entirely state-provided and controlled.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Korean, mathematics, the sciences, and history , alongside substantial ideological and political education . There has been reported emphasis on science, technology, and computing in recent years, within the bounds of state control.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Admission to higher education is state-controlled , combining academic performance with political and songbun considerations; places at elite universities are highly selective.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Information on special-education provision is limited; the state reports services within its centralized system.

READ THE FULL NORTH KOREA GUIDE
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Pakistan

EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan — the world's fifth-most-populous country — runs a large, multi-stream education system. Urdu is the national language and English the official one (and the medium in many schools), with regional languages (Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and others) widely spoken. Education runs across three main streams : government...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–5)** — Ages ~5–10
- ✓ **Middle (grades 6–8)** —
- ✓ **Secondary / Matriculation (grades 9–10)** — Ending with the SSC (Matric)
- ✓ **Higher secondary / Intermediate (grades 11–12)** — Ending with the HSSC (FSc/FA), leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Under Article 25-A of the constitution, the state is to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 5 to 16 . In practice, delivery is uneven, and a large share of children — especially girls and those in rural areas — remain out of school. Education is largely a provincial responsibility.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most children attend government schools , taught in Urdu or a regional language. Public schooling is free but often under-resourced; quality concerns drive many families toward private schools where they can afford them.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Urdu · English + regional
Compulsory	Ages 5–16
Structure	5 – 3 – 2 – 2
School year	Apr – Mar / Aug – May
University entry	Matric + Intermediate
Currency	Rupee (PKR)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Pakistan has an enormous private-school sector — from low-cost private schools to elite English-medium institutions offering O/A-Levels — plus a large network of madrasas providing free religious (and some general) education, especially for poorer families.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Urdu, English, mathematics, the sciences, social studies, and Islamic studies . A Single National Curriculum has been introduced to standardize content across the streams, though implementation varies. English-medium and O/A-Level schools follow their own frameworks.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

- ✓ **SSC (Matriculation / "Matric")** — Taken at the end of grade 10
- ✓ **HSSC (Intermediate / FSc / FA)** — Taken at the end of grade 12 — the basis for university admission

READ THE FULL PAKISTAN GUIDE
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Philippines

EDUCATION IN PHILIPPINES

The Philippines runs a large education system in which Filipino and English are both official and English is the medium for many subjects — a key reason for the country's strong English proficiency. Its defining recent change is the K-12 program (Enhanced Basic Education Act, 2013), which added Kindergarten and two years of Senior High...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

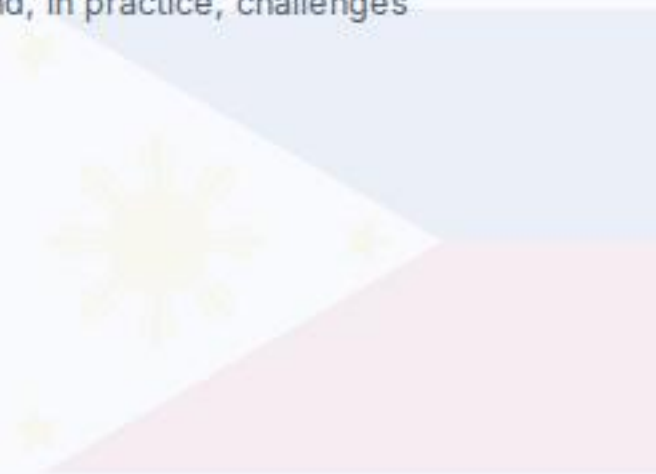
- ✓ **Kindergarten** — Age 5, compulsory
- ✓ **Elementary (Grades 1–6)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Junior High School (Grades 7–10)** — Ages ~13–16
- ✓ **Senior High School (Grades 11–12)** — Ages ~17–18 — with academic (STEM, ABM, HUMSS), technical-vocational (TVL), sports, and arts tracks

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

The full K-12 cycle (13 years) is compulsory . The country has been refining the program — the "MATATAG" curriculum reforms (for K-10) and a revised, decongested Senior High curriculum are being phased in. Language policy has also shifted, with Filipino and English serving as the main media of instruction.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools under DepEd, which enroll tens of millions of learners. The K-12 reform brought major changes — new senior-high tracks, curriculum updates, and, in practice, challenges around classrooms, funding, and resources.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Filipino · English
Compulsory	K–12
Structure	K + 6 + 4 + 2
School year	varies
University entry	University exams
Currency	Peso (PHP)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Philippines has a large private and religious (largely Catholic) school sector — including prestigious universities that run their own basic-education units — concentrated in Metro Manila and other cities.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Filipino, English, mathematics, science, social studies (Araling Panlipunan), and values education, with Senior High tracks allowing specialization. K-12 features multiple exit points — students in technical-vocational tracks can earn TESDA national certificates for immediate employment.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

The Philippines has no single national exit exam; students earn a Senior High School Diploma. University admission is by each institution's own entrance examination — for example, the highly competitive UPCAT for the University of the Philippines.

READ THE FULL PHILIPPINES GUIDE
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Singapore

EDUCATION IN SINGAPORE

Singapore's education system is among the most admired in the world — its students consistently rank at or near the top of international assessments (PISA, TIMSS) . Built on meritocracy, strong teaching, and a distinctive bilingual policy (English as the main medium plus a "Mother Tongue" — Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil), the system is...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (6 years)** — Compulsory; ending with the PSLE
- ✓ **Secondary (4–5 years)** — Under Full Subject-Based Banding, ending with national examinations
- ✓ **Post-secondary** — Junior colleges / Millennia Institute (pre-university, 2–3 years), polytechnics (3 years), or the Institute of Technical Education (ITE)
- ✓ **University** —

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Primary education (six years) is compulsory under the Compulsory Education Act. Public education is heavily subsidized for citizens, and the school year runs roughly January to November . Co-curricular activities (CCAs) are a valued, graded part of secondary school.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Almost all students attend government or government-aided schools , which are strong and closely benchmarked. Specialized schools serve particular talents (for example, the School of the Arts and the NUS High School of Math and Science), and the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools emphasize bilingual Chinese-English education.

AT A GLANCE

Languages	English · Mother Tongue
Compulsory	Primary (6 yrs)
Structure	6 + 4/5 + 2/3
School year	Jan – Nov
University entry	A-Level / diploma
Currency	Dollar (SGD)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Singapore has a private and international-school sector (offering the IB, Cambridge, and other curricula) serving expatriate and internationally mobile families, concentrated across the city-state.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers English, Mother Tongue, mathematics, science (from upper primary), the humanities, the arts, and Character and Citizenship Education . Bilingualism — mastering English plus one's Mother Tongue — is a cornerstone of national policy.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

- ✓ **PSLE** — The Primary School Leaving Examination at the end of Primary 6 — scored by Achievement Levels (AL) since 2021 — used for posting to secondary school
- ✓ **Full Subject-Based Banding (SBB)** — From 2024, this replaced the old Express / Normal (Academic) / Normal (Technical) streams — students now take each subject at level G1, G2, or G3...
- ✓ **National certificate** — Currently the GCE O- and N-Levels (and A-Levels at junior college); from 2027 these secondary certificates converge into a single Singapore-Cambridge...

READ THE FULL SINGAPORE GUIDE
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South Korea

EDUCATION IN SOUTH KOREA

South Korea has one of the world's highest-achieving education systems — consistently near the top of international assessments — and one of the most intense. Instruction is in Korean , literacy is near-universal, and the entire system builds toward a single, decisive event: the Suneung (the College Scholastic Ability Test, or CSAT), the...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Elementary school (6 years)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Middle school (3 years)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **High school (3 years)** — General or vocational, leading to the Suneung and university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory and free for nine years (elementary plus middle school), from age 6 to 15. The school year runs roughly March to February . In practice, schooling extends far beyond the classroom — many students study late into the evening at cram schools.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend public schools , which follow a national curriculum. The public system is strong, but a defining feature is that it is supplemented — and, for exam preparation, sometimes effectively replaced — by private tutoring.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Korean
Compulsory	Ages 6–15
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Mar – Feb
University entry	Suneung (CSAT)
Currency	Won (KRW)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Beyond hagwon, South Korea has private and international schools , including foreign-language high schools and international schools serving expatriate and internationally-minded families.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Korean, mathematics, English, Korean history, the sciences and social studies, and the arts , with a strong academic emphasis. English is heavily prioritized, reflecting its weight in the Suneung and in careers.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

The Suneung (CSAT) is the pivotal exam — held once a year in November, an eight-hour marathon covering Korean, mathematics, English, Korean history, and elective subjects, scored on a percentile (stanine) system. Its societal impact is remarkable: on test day, offices and markets open late to ease traffic, and flights are grounded during...

READ THE FULL SOUTH KOREA GUIDE
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Sri Lanka

EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is famous for providing free education from primary school all the way through university — a policy dating to the 1940s that gave the country one of the highest literacy rates in South Asia. Instruction is in Sinhala or Tamil (both official), with English as a link language, and the system uses British-style O- and A-Level...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–5)** — Ending with the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination
- ✓ **Junior secondary (grades 6–9)** —
- ✓ **Senior secondary (grades 10–11)** — Ending with the GCE Ordinary Level (O-Level)
- ✓ **Collegiate (grades 12–13)** — Ending with the GCE Advanced Level (A-Level), leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory and free from age 5 to 16 . The school year runs January to December . Free education — including free textbooks and uniforms — is a cornerstone of national policy.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free government schools , in Sinhala or Tamil. The system is strong on access and literacy; the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination is a high-stakes early milestone that can secure a place at a prestigious school.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Sinhala · Tamil
Compulsory	Ages 5–16
Structure	5 + 4 + 2 + 2
School year	Jan – Dec
University entry	GCE A-Level
Currency	Rupee (LKR)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Sri Lanka has a private and international-school sector (including English-medium and Cambridge/Edexcel schools), concentrated in Colombo and larger towns.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Sinhala/Tamil, English, mathematics, science, and social studies , geared toward the O- and A-Level examinations, with religion taught according to community.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Three high-stakes assessments mark the path: the Grade 5 Scholarship , the GCE O-Level (grade 11), and the GCE A-Level (grade 13) — the latter the decisive basis for admission to Sri Lanka's free but limited public universities.

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Taiwan

EDUCATION IN TAIWAN

Taiwan runs a rigorous, high-achieving education system — its students rank among the world's best in mathematics and science on international assessments. Instruction is in Mandarin Chinese (with Taiwanese Hokkien, Hakka, and indigenous languages also taught), literacy is near-universal, and the system is known for its strong academic...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

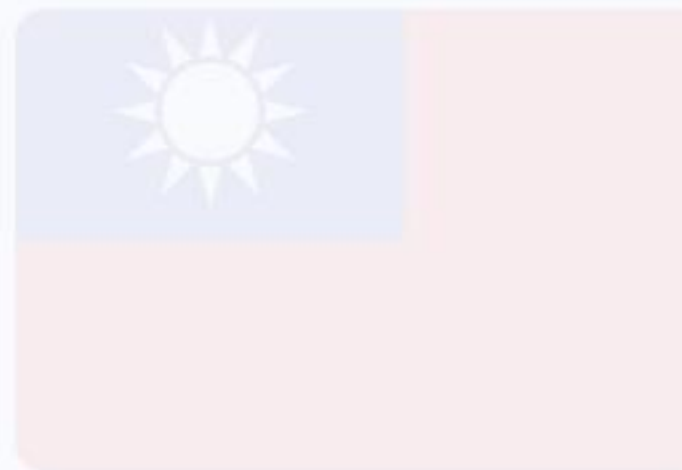
- ✓ **Primary (6 years)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Junior high school (3 years)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Senior high school (3 years)** — Academic or vocational, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory and free for nine years (primary plus junior high), and Taiwan introduced twelve-year basic education in 2014, extending largely free (and largely non-selective) schooling through senior high. The school year runs roughly September to June .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend public schools , which follow a national curriculum. Academic pressure is high, and a defining feature is the widespread use of buxiban (cram schools) — private after-school academies where students study to prepare for entrance examinations.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Mandarin
Compulsory	9 years
Structure	6 – 3 – 3
School year	Sept – June
University entry	GSAT / exams
Currency	Dollar (TWD)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Taiwan has a private and international-school sector , concentrated in Taipei and other cities.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Chinese, mathematics, English, the sciences, and social studies , with strong emphasis on the sciences and mathematics. Reforms have aimed to broaden the curriculum and ease exam pressure, with mixed results.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission runs through national examinations and a multi-track admissions system — centered on the General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT) and subject tests — combined with application and recommendation pathways. Entrance exams have long been high-stakes, driving the buxiban culture.

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Tajikistan

EDUCATION IN TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan, a mountainous Central Asian country, runs a post-Soviet education system with Tajik as the main language of instruction (Russian is also widely used). Literacy is near-universal, a legacy of the Soviet era, though the system — in one of the region's poorest countries — faces challenges of funding, teacher supply, and rural...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–4)** — Ages ~7–10
- ✓ **Basic secondary (grades 5–9)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Secondary (grades 10–11)** — Leading to university, alongside vocational options

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 7 to 16 (through grade 9). Public education is free, and the school year runs roughly September to May .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools , taught in Tajik (with Russian and some other languages). The system retains Soviet-era foundations and has been modernizing since independence.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Tajikistan has a small private and international-school sector , concentrated in Dushanbe.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Tajik · Russian
Compulsory	Ages 7–16
Structure	4 – 5 – 2
School year	Sept – May
University entry	Entrance test
Currency	Somoni (TJS)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Tajik and Russian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages .

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission is governed by a centralized national entrance examination , introduced to make admissions more transparent, whose results determine placement.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is led by Tajik National University in Dushanbe, along with specialized and regional universities. Many students also study abroad, especially in Russia.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Special-education provision is limited , delivered through specialized schools and some integration; resources are scarce.

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ASIA — 29 OF 33

Thailand

EDUCATION IN THAILAND

Thailand runs a large education system with Thai as the language of instruction (English is widely taught and used in international programs). The government provides fifteen years of free basic education , from pre-school through upper secondary, and university admission runs through a centralized system. Thailand has also become a...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Prathom (primary, 6 years)** — Ages ~6–12
- ✓ **Lower Matthayom (junior secondary, 3 years, M1–M3)** — Completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Upper Matthayom (senior secondary, 3 years, M4–M6)** — Academic or vocational, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory for nine years (primary plus lower secondary), and the government funds fifteen years of free basic education overall. The school year runs roughly May to March .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend public schools , which follow a national curriculum emphasizing Thai language, mathematics, science, and the pillars of "Nation, Religion (Buddhism), and Monarchy." Quality gaps persist between urban and rural schools.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Thailand supports inclusive education , integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools with support, alongside special schools.

AT A GLANCE

Language	Thai
Compulsory	9 years
Structure	6 + 3 + 3
School year	May – Mar
University entry	TCAS
Currency	Baht (THB)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Thailand has a substantial private and international-school sector (offering British, American, IB, and other curricula), concentrated in Bangkok and other cities, along with temple-based and vocational schools.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Thai, mathematics, science, social studies (including Buddhism and civics), and English , with vocational streams at the upper-secondary level.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission runs through the centralized TCAS (Thai University Central Admission System) , which draws on the national O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) and various aptitude and subject tests, alongside portfolio and direct-admission rounds.

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Timor-Leste

EDUCATION IN TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste (East Timor), one of Asia's youngest countries (independent in 2002), has two official languages — Portuguese and Tetum — and has been rebuilding its education system after Indonesian occupation and the struggle for independence. Language of instruction (Portuguese, Tetum, and the role of Indonesian and English) has been a...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Basic education (9 years)** — Compulsory, combining primary and lower secondary
- ✓ **Secondary (3 years)** — General or technical, leading to higher education or work

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Basic education is compulsory and intended to be free , beginning around age 6. The school year runs roughly January to December . Access has expanded since independence, though completion and quality remain challenges.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most children attend public schools . The government has promoted Portuguese and Tetum as languages of instruction (part of nation-building after independence), while many people also speak Indonesian and, increasingly, English — a genuine language-of-instruction challenge.

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling is not an established route ; education is school-based.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Portuguese · Tetum
Compulsory	Basic (9 yrs)
Structure	9 + 3
School year	Jan – Dec
Higher ed	National Univ. (UNTL)
Currency	US Dollar (USD)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Timor-Leste has a private and religious (largely Catholic) school sector , which plays a significant role, concentrated in Dili.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Instruction is in Portuguese and Tetum , covering the standard academic subjects, with the balance of languages a continuing area of reform.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

Students sit national examinations at key stages, culminating in the qualifications needed for higher education.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education centers on the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL) in Dili, along with private institutions. Many students also study abroad, especially in Indonesia and Portugal.

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Turkmenistan

EDUCATION IN TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan, a gas-rich but closed Central Asian state, runs a centralized, state-controlled education system with Turkmen as the main language of instruction (Russian is also used). Literacy is near-universal, a Soviet-era legacy, but the system is tightly controlled, university places are limited, and information is restricted —...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

The system provides twelve years of general education (extended from the shorter Soviet-era model), covering primary and secondary stages, followed by higher or vocational education.

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

General education is compulsory and free , beginning around age 6/7. The school year runs roughly September to May . The state controls curricula and access closely.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Almost all students attend state schools , following a curriculum set by the government. Schooling has historically included substantial state ideology, and the system is highly centralized.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

The private-school sector is very limited ; education is overwhelmingly state-run.



AT A GLANCE

Languages	Turkmen · Russian
Compulsory	Basic education
Structure	12-year
School year	Sept – May
Higher ed	Turkmen State Univ.
Currency	Manat (TMT)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Turkmen and Russian language, mathematics, the sciences, and history , within a state-controlled framework.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission is by state-controlled entrance examination ; places at Turkmenistan's universities are limited relative to demand.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is led by Magtymguly Turkmen State University in Ashgabat and other state institutions. Because domestic capacity is limited, large numbers of Turkmen students study abroad — in Turkey, Russia, Belarus, and elsewhere.

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Information on special-education provision is limited within the centralized state system.

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Uzbekistan

EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan, the most populous Central Asian country, runs a post-Soviet education system with Uzbek as the main language of instruction (Russian and other languages are also used) and near-universal literacy. Since 2016, sweeping reforms have opened up the country and its education system — expanding access, emphasizing English, and...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (grades 1–4)** — Ages ~7–10
- ✓ **General secondary (grades 5–9)** — Completing the core cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary** — Continued schooling, academic lyceums, or vocational colleges, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory and free , and reforms have extended schooling (toward 11–12 years). Public education is free, and the school year runs roughly September to May .

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend free public schools , taught in Uzbek (with Russian and other languages). Post-2016 reforms have modernized curricula, expanded pre-school and higher-education access, and prioritized English and digital skills.

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Uzbekistan has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Tashkent and other cities.

AT A GLANCE

Languages	Uzbek · Russian
Compulsory	Ages 7–18
Structure	4 – 5 – 2/3
School year	Sept – May
University entry	Entrance test
Currency	Som (UZS)

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Uzbek and Russian language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, history, and foreign languages — with English increasingly emphasized under the reforms.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

University admission is governed by a centralized national entrance examination (administered by the State Test Center), whose results determine placement; competition for university places is significant.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is led by the National University of Uzbekistan in Tashkent and specialized universities, plus a rapidly growing set of international branch campuses (of British, Italian, Russian, Korean, and other universities) — a hallmark of the reform era. Access has expanded markedly.

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Vietnam

EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Vietnam runs a Vietnamese-language education system that has drawn international attention for a striking reason: its students outperform those of much wealthier countries on international assessments (PISA). Rooted in a strong, Confucian-influenced cultural respect for education, the system is rigorous and exam-focused, with families...

STRUCTURE & STAGES

- ✓ **Primary (5 years)** — Grades 1–5, ages ~6–11
- ✓ **Lower secondary (4 years)** — Grades 6–9, completing the compulsory cycle
- ✓ **Upper secondary (3 years)** — Grades 10–12, leading to university

COMPULSORY EDUCATION & ENROLMENT

Education is compulsory from age 6 to 14 (primary plus lower secondary). Public schooling is largely free (with some fees), and the school year runs roughly September to May. Academic pressure is high, and private tutoring is widespread.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most students attend public schools, which follow a national curriculum with a strong emphasis on mathematics, the sciences, and literacy. Vietnam's strong results despite its developing-economy status are often attributed to focused teaching, high expectations, and deep family investment in education.



AT A GLANCE

Language	Vietnamese
Compulsory	Ages 6–14
Structure	5 – 4 – 3
School year	Sept – May
University entry	National exam
Currency	Dong (VND)

PRIVATE & INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Vietnam has a growing private and international-school sector , concentrated in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, along with a vast network of private tutoring centers.

CURRICULUM & LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The curriculum covers Vietnamese, mathematics, the sciences, social studies, and foreign languages (English is heavily emphasized). A major curriculum reform has been modernizing content and shifting toward competency-based learning.

EXAMS & QUALIFICATIONS

The pivotal assessment is the National High School Graduation Examination (taken at the end of grade 12), which serves as both the graduation exam and the main basis for university admission — a high-stakes event that shapes the upper-secondary years.

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