

## India: Education

Education, in theory, is free, universal, and compulsory (in most states) for eight years, from the age of six. In fact, the right for every child to demand free and elementary education between the ages of six and 14 years is legally enforceable since 2010. Although a much higher percentage of children are enrolled in elementary school today than were in the early 1990s, an estimated 11.9 million children between the ages of six and 14 still do not attend school.

Schooling consists of five years of primary school, three years of upper primary school, and two years each of lower and upper secondary school, for a total of 12 years. The pattern, however, varies from state to state. Most states ascribe to 12 years of schooling followed by three years of college. Graduation hinges on passing the secondary-school leaving certificate examination, which is both a diploma in itself and a passport to the university.

The academic year runs from April to March. English is the medium of instruction in most private schools; Hindi or the dominant state language is the medium of instruction in primary grades in public schools, but the medium shifts to English either in the upper secondary schools or early in college. Many universities, however, offer examinations in Hindi or regional languages. All students are required to be bilingual, some trilingual (in Hindi, English, and their mother tongue).

A few private schools (called public schools, on the British model) cater to the wealthy. These schools receive no subsidies, but the quality of the teaching staffs is generally high, and the medium of instruction is English. Schools run by religious denominations, both Christian and non-Christian, also operate within the school system.

About 10 percent of the secondary school enrollment is in the vocational stream. Vocational and technical education is provided in junior technical schools and industrial institutes. In the early 21st century the government has begun to focus on expanding the vocational training sector to fill a growing need for skilled workers in the country.

Education is funded mainly by state governments and administered by the state ministries of education and the municipal and district school boards. The union government provides and funds support services and educational development schemes, particularly in the areas of vocational education, basic education, adult education, propagation of Hindi, textbook research, and audiovisual education.

Higher education is provided in more than 700 universities, making it the third largest higher education system in the world. The most prestigious are the universities of Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi.

Nationwide, a large gap exists in literacy between males and females. In 2011, about 81 percent of males could read and write, while only 65 percent of females could. However, the gap is smaller among the 15-24 year olds: 88 percent of young men and 74 percent of young women could read and write in 2006. That same year India dedicated 3.1 percent of its GDP to education expenditures.

### Citation Information

MLA  Chicago Manual of Style

Kurian, George Thomas, ed. "India: Education." *World Geography and Culture Online*. Facts On File, Inc. Web. fofweb.infobase.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE39&Details.aspx&iPin=EWNC2989&SingleRecord=True. 31 Jan. 2021.

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