

EDUCATION

[Education](#) in Israel is a precious legacy that dates back to biblical times.

Following the tradition of past generations, education continues to be a fundamental value in Israel's society and is recognized as the key to its future. The educational system aims to prepare children to become responsible members of a democratic, pluralistic society in which people from different ethnic, religious, cultural and political backgrounds coexist.

The educational system is based on Jewish values, love of the land and the principles of liberty and tolerance. It seeks to impart a high level of knowledge, with an emphasis on scientific and technological skills essential for the country's continued development.

History & Challenges

When the [State of Israel](#) was founded in 1948, a fully functioning education system was already in existence. Developed and maintained by the pre-state Jewish community, education was an important facet of society with Hebrew - which had been revived for daily speech at the end of the 19th century - as the [language of instruction](#). In fact, the first school whose curriculum was taught entirely in Hebrew was established in Rishon Lezion already in 1889.

However, since shortly after the establishment of the state, the education system has faced the enormous challenge of integrating large numbers of immigrant children from over 70 countries thereby fulfilling Israel's raison d'être as the historic homeland of the Jewish people.

The mass immigration of the 1950s, mainly from postwar Europe and Arab countries, was succeeded in the 1960s by a large influx of Jews from North Africa. In the 1970s, the first sizable immigration of [Jews from the Soviet Union](#) arrived, followed intermittently by smaller groups. Since the beginning of the 1990s, over one million Jews from the former Soviet Union have come to Israel, with tens of thousands more still arriving each year. Additionally, over two mass movements, in 1984 and 1991, almost the entire [Jewish community of Ethiopia](#) was brought to the country. Over the years, many Jews from the Americas and other Western countries have also settled in Israel.

In addition to meeting urgent demands for more classrooms and teachers, special tools and methods have had to be developed to help absorb youngsters from many cultural backgrounds into the school population. Programs designed specifically to meet the needs of the newcomers include preparation of appropriate curricular aids and short-term classes to introduce immigrant pupils to subjects not learned in their countries of origin, such as the Hebrew language and Jewish history. Special courses were initiated to train teachers to deal with immigrant youngsters, and retraining courses for immigrant teachers have facilitated their employment in the education system.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education is involved in an ongoing process of bringing educational standards in line with modern pedagogic practices, such as mandating gender equality, upgrading teacher status, broadening humanistic curricula, and promoting scientific and technological studies. A key aspect of its policy is to provide equal opportunities in education for all children and to increase the number of pupils passing matriculation examinations.

Primary & Secondary Education

School attendance is mandatory and free from age 6 to 18. Formal education starts in primary school (grades 1-6) and continues with intermediate school (grades 7-9) and secondary school (grades 10-12). About nine percent of the post-primary school population attend boarding schools.

The multi-cultural nature of Israel's society is accommodated within the framework of the education system. Accordingly, schools are divided into four groups: state schools, attended by the majority of pupils; state religious schools, which emphasize Jewish studies, tradition, and observance; Arab and Druze schools, with instruction in Arabic and special focus on Arab and Druze history, religion, and culture; and private schools, which operate under various religious and international auspices.

Most hours of the school day are devoted to compulsory academic studies. While the subject matter to be covered is uniform throughout the system, each school may choose from a wide range of study units and teaching materials, provided by the Ministry of Education, which best suit the needs of its faculty and pupil population. With the aim of enhancing pupils' understanding of their society, each year a special topic of national importance is studied in depth. Themes have included democratic values, the Hebrew language, immigration, Jerusalem, peace, and industry.

The majority of secondary schools offer academic curricula in science and in the humanities.

Technological schools train technicians and practical engineers on three levels, with some preparing for higher education, some studying towards a vocational diploma, and others acquiring practical skills. Agricultural schools, usually in a residential setting, supplement basic studies with subjects relating to agronomy. Military preparatory schools train future career personnel and technicians in specific fields required by the Israel Defense Forces. Yeshiva high schools, mainly boarding schools, with separate frameworks for boys and girls, complement their secular curricula with intensive religious studies and promote observance of tradition and a Jewish way of life. Comprehensive schools offer studies in a variety of vocations, ranging from bookkeeping to mechanics, electronics, hotel trades, graphic design, and more.

Higher Education

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the economic and social development of Israel.

Almost a quarter of a century before the state came into being, the [Technion Israel Institute of Technology](#) in [Haifa](#) was opened (1924) to train engineers and architects and the [Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#) was founded (1925) as a center of higher learning for youth in the Land of Israel and to attract Jewish students and scholars from abroad.

Accorded full academic and administrative freedom, Israel's institutions of higher education are open to all those who meet their academic standards. New immigrants and students lacking the necessary qualifications may attend a special preparatory program, which upon successful completion enables them to apply for admission.

Most Israeli students are over age 21 when they begin their studies, after three years' compulsory military service for men and two years for women. Until the early 1960s, students pursued higher education mainly to acquire knowledge, while in recent years they have been more career-oriented, with larger numbers enrolled in the wide range of professional studies now offered. At present, well over half of Israelis in the 20-24 age group are enrolled in one of the country's institutions of postsecondary or higher education.

Today, there are eight universities in Israel:

School	Established	Location	World Ranking
Technion-Israel Institute of Technology	1924	Haifa	131
Hebrew University	1925	Jerusalem	101-150
Weizmann Institute of Science	1934	Rehovot	346
Bar Ilan University	1955	Ramat Gan	570
Tel Aviv University	1956	Tel Aviv	266
University of Haifa	1963	Haifa	510
Ben Gurion University	1967	Beersheba	448
The Open University	1974	n/a	n/a

Students can also choose from a selection of a few dozen academic colleges or colleges of education. Many of these smaller colleges operate under the auspices of one of the major universities, making it possible for students to begin studying for a degree near their home and complete it at the university's main campus.

Some specialized institutes provide various disciplines in art, music, dance, fashion, nursing, rehabilitation therapies, teaching, and sports. Several private degree-granting colleges offer subjects in great demand such as business administration, law, computers, economics, and related topics. At some, additional tracks are available, leading to certificates or vocational diplomas in a variety of subjects ranging from technology and agriculture to marketing and hotel trades.

Education Statistics

Israeli [expenditure on education](#), in billions of shekels per year, has more than doubled since 1990, from below \$30 billion to more than \$66.5 billion in FY2010. The spending on education in 2010 represented 8.2% of the Israeli GDP.

In 2011, a private research firm identified the top ten countries worldwide according to the percentage of population with postsecondary, or tertiary, education. [Israel ranked second highest](#) with 45% of its population having attained such a level of education, trailing only Canada which hit 50%. Despite its small size and compulsory service in the military, Israel outpaced Western nations such as Japan (44%), the United States (41%), the United Kingdom (37%) and Finland (37%).

Israel ranks among the world average, measured by the average of OECD nations, in [enrollment rates](#) for students of all ages. Its 83% enrollment rate (2008) for children between the ages of 3 and 4 is more than 10 percentage points higher than the OECD average. The enrollment rates for student ages 15 to 19 and 20 to 29, however, fall off the pace slightly, however officials disregard this statistic mostly because of conscription into military service for all 18 year olds.

Since independence in 1948, the number of [primary schools](#) - both Arab and Jewish - has more than quadrupled from only 512 in 1948 to more than 2,600 in 2011. Likewise, the number of students in these schools have risen by more than eight times, from 101,000 in 1948 to nearly 900,000 today. [Secondary education](#) has also seen a similar rise. There are now just under 2,300 secondary schools in Israel (99 in 1948) with more than 630,000 students (10,200 in 1948).

When Israel attained independence enrollment at its two universities totaled only about 1,600. In the 2010-11 academic year, some [250,000 students attended](#) the country's institutions of higher learning. Of these, 49% attend universities, 38% are enrolled in academic colleges, and 12% attend colleges of education. Thousands of additional students also take courses through the Open University.

Innovations in Education

Israel has a lot to offer in the field of education, particularly as it relates to at-risk youth. This has been a focus since the founding of the state because of the unique demands of educating children who survived the Holocaust, many of whom were orphans, and meeting the needs of the large immigrant population, which includes youth from under-developed nations like Ethiopia.

Despite the sometimes vast cultural differences in the different immigrant groups within Israel, many common problems and common needs have been found and programs to support them developed. These include: early childhood intervention, family support, day care, school dropouts, academic underachievement, alienated youth, employment of new technologies and absorption of immigrants.

Many programs dealing with these problems developed in Israel offer better solutions that are around educational facilities in the rest of the world. Israel's smaller size may be an advantage in making it possible to conceptualize the problems more clearly and to design programs to deal with them more effectively.