

CLASS SIZE AND STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO

Class size

Class size is a hotly debated topic and an important element of education policy in many OECD countries. Smaller classes are often perceived as allowing teachers to focus more on the needs of individual students and reducing the amount of class time they spend dealing with disruptions. Smaller class sizes may also influence parents when they choose schools for their children. In this respect, class size may be viewed as an indicator of the quality of the school system. Yet evidence on the effects of differences in class size upon student performance is mixed (OECD 2009, 372).

Figure 1

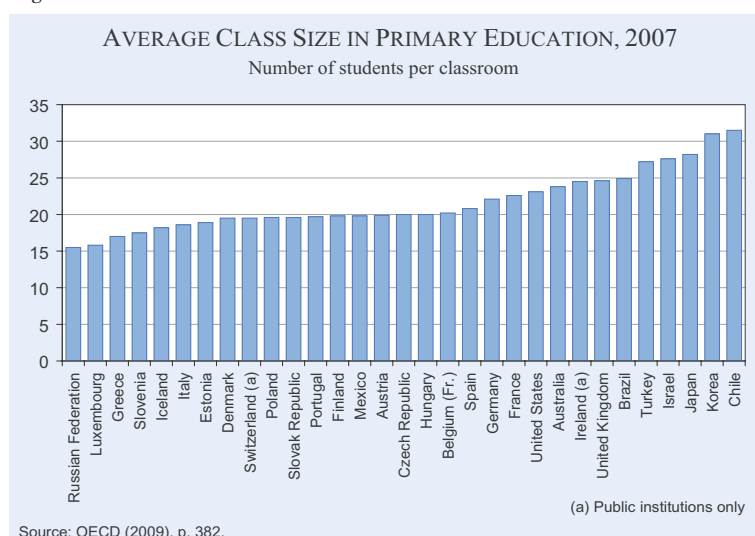
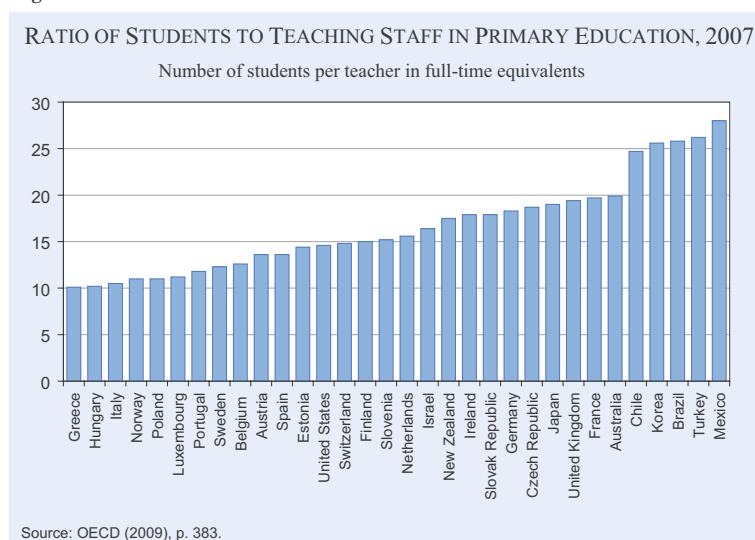


Figure 2



At the primary level, the average class size in OECD countries in 2007 is slightly more than 21 students per class, but this number varies widely between countries. It ranges from 31 or more students per primary class in Korea and the OECD partner country Chile to fewer than 20 in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, and Switzerland (public institutions) and the partner countries Estonia, the Russian Federation and Slovenia (Figure 1).

Student-teacher ratio

The ratio of students to teaching staff is also an important indicator of the resources devoted to education. A smaller ratio of students to teaching staff

may have to be weighted against higher salaries for teachers, increased teacher training, greater investment in teaching technology, or more widespread use of assistant teachers and other paraprofessionals whose salaries are often considerably lower than those of qualified teachers. Moreover, as larger numbers of children with special educational needs are integrated into normal classes, more use of specialised personnel and support services may limit the resources available for reducing the ratio of students to teaching staff.

The ratio of students to teaching staff is obtained by dividing the number of full-time equivalent students at a given level of education by the number of full-time equivalent teachers at that level and in similar types of institutions. However, this ratio does not take into account instruction time compared to the length of a teacher's working day.

In primary education, the ratio of students to teaching staff, expressed in full-time equivalents, ranges from 25 students or more per teacher in Korea, Mexico

and Turkey and in the partner country Brazil to fewer than 11 in Greece, Hungary and Italy. The OECD average in primary education is 16 students per teacher (Figure 2).

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Reference

OECD (2009), *Education at a Glance*, Paris.