Education Vocabulary

Topic vocabulary for the IELTS exam

*Important*
- Do not try and learn this list of education vocabulary.
- Identify the vocabulary you find useful for answering practise questions about this topic.
- Record these in your vocabulary notebook and practise using them regularly.

Set 1: Key definitions

**education** – the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school, college or university, or the knowledge that you get from this
- **Education** is a low priority for the governments of some developing countries.
- Most children receive their **education** in schools but some are taught at home.

**to educate** – to give someone intellectual, moral or social instruction, typically at a school, college or university
- At the school I visited in Kenya the children are **educated** in classes of over 60 pupils.

**educational** – relating to the provision of education
- When I was at school we had an **educational** visit to the British Museum in London to see Tutankhamun’s treasures.

**educational institution** – a place where people gain an education, such as a school
- We are fortunate to have many excellent **educational institutions** in our area.

**formal education** – education normally delivered by trained teachers in a systematic way in a school, college or university.
- In Norway, **formal education** starts when children reach the age of six.

**compulsory education** – the legally-required period of time that children are expected to attend school. In the western world, these laws generally require that children attend school from the ages of 5 to 16 or 18.
- One day, a formal education will hopefully be **compulsory** for all children.

Set 2: Educational institutions

**preschool** – a school for children who are too young to begin their formal education
- Most children in the UK go to a **preschool** but it isn’t compulsory.

**nursery school** (UK)/**kindergarten** (US) – preschool education
- In the UK, most children begin **nursery school** at the age of four.

**primary school** (UK)/**elementary school** (US) – the type of school for children ages 5-11
- Bindi was so excited about starting **primary school** when the new term started in September.

**primary education** – the education of 5-11 year olds
- In an ideal world, **primary education** would be compulsory in every country.
**secondary school** (UK)/**high school** (US) – the type of school for children age 11 to 16, sometimes 18
- I want to teach in a *secondary school* when I finish my teacher training as I really enjoy working with older pupils.

**co-educational/mixed** – a school where girls and boys are taught together.
- These days, most schools in the UK are **co-educational**.

**single-sex school** – a school for either male or female students but not both
- Both my parents went to **single-sex schools** but it’s more normal these days to go to a mixed school.

**state school** – a school that is funded and controlled by the government and for which no fees are charged
- The government is facing growing criticism for the underfunding of **state schools**.

**comprehensive school** – a state school that accepts pupils regardless of their level of academic ability or achievement
- There is an ongoing debate as to whether all young people should attend **comprehensive schools** or if schools that select pupils on academic ability are still relevant.

**grammar school** (UK) – state secondary school that selects their pupils by means of an examination taken by children at age 11
- Although many people are against selective education where some school places go to the most academically able pupils, **grammar schools** are still popular.

**private school** – a school that is not supported by government money, where education must be paid for by the children’s parents
- Jonah’s parents decided to pay for him to go to a **private school** because most classes only had 20 pupils in.

**private education** – education parents have to pay for
- Only a small percentage of parents can afford to give their children a **private education**.

**public school** (UK) – an exclusive, expensive school, run independently

**public school** (US) – a school which is free and paid for by the government

**higher education** (also called tertiary education) – education beyond the age at which it is compulsory, usually in a college or university
- Most of Vijay’s friends wanted to leave school and get a job as soon as possible but he was determined to go on to **higher education** to improve his career prospects.

**boarding school** – a school where students live and study during the school term.
- Yu Yang hated **boarding school** as she missed her family and felt very homesick.

**college** – a place of higher education where people study specialized subjects or undertake vocational training for a skilled job
- Hugo applied for a place at the local **college** to train to be a chef.

**university** – a high-level educational institution where students study for degrees and academic research is done.
- Fuyuko wanted to study nursing at **university** in Australia but had to get a band 7 in her IELTS exam to be accepted.
**Set 3: Course types & levels**

**course** – a series of lessons in a particular subject

**undergraduate** – studying for a degree but having not yet achieved it

**postgraduate** – having achieved a degree and now studying for a higher qualification, possibly a professions qualification

**vocational** – education or training directed at a particular occupation and its skills, often requiring practical skills

**intensive** – fast-paced courses which give a lot of information quickly and in a short time

**Set 4: Qualifications**

**qualification** – an official record showing that you have achieved a certain level of education or skill in a particular subject or skill area

- Riya was determined to leave school with good qualifications so she could get a well-paid job to support her family.

**certificate** – an official record of achievement, generally issued for a short course

- Shona was delighted to be presented her TEFL certificate on passing her course to become an English teacher.

**diploma** – issued for a higher education course that is shorter than a degree

- Greg did so well in his two-year engineering diploma that his tutor persuaded him to study for another year to qualify for a degree.

**bachelor’s degree/or just degree** *(BA/BSc)* – qualification issued by a university or college at the end of three or four years of study

- I’m studying for a bachelor’s degree in marine biology.
- I’m studying for a BA in history.

**master’s degree/or just master’s** *(MA/MSc)* – qualification issued by a university when the student has completed further study beyond a degree, often in a more specialised field than a bachelor’s degree

- Alonso wanted to stay on at university an extra year to study for his master’s but his parents couldn’t afford the fees.

**doctorate (PhD)** – the highest level of degree qualification issued by a university

- I’m so proud of my sister for achieving a PhD in biochemistry.

**fellowship** – a teaching or research post given to a person studying for an advanced degree.

- Being awarded a research fellowship at my university is a dream come true as it enables me to stay on and study for my doctorate.

**Set 5: People in education**

**headteacher/principal** – the person in charge of a school

- Our headteacher had been principal for 12 years when he retired.

**teacher** – a person who teaches, especially in a school

- My favourite teacher at school was Mr Webber because he made lessons so interesting.
tutor – a teacher who works privately with one student or a small group
- Our son struggles with maths so we've got him a private tutor to help him with his work.
lecturer – a person who teaches at a college or university.
- My cousin is a lecturer in physics at the University of London.
professor – a teacher of the highest rank in a department of a British university, or a teacher of high rank in an American university or college
- Professor Stephen Hawking was one of the most influential figures in modern science.
an academic – a person who teaches in a college or university and continues to research and increase knowledge about their specialist subject
- She was such a bookworm at school and always in the library researching some topic or other, so it's no surprise that she became an academic.
pupil – a person, usually a child at school, who is being taught
- The pupils loved Miss Lefebvre’s French lessons as she gave them fun learning games to play.
student – a person, usually a college or university, who is being taught
- The beginning of the academic year was so busy with all the new students starting their college courses.
mature student – an adult student who attends college or university some years after leaving school
- Jose was so grateful for the chance to study for a degree as a mature student having left school with very few qualifications.
a graduate – a person who has finished their college or university education
- University graduates can usually get higher paid jobs than people with vocational skills.
peer – a person who is in the same class, age group or social group as someone else
Pupils these days are under a lot of pressure to dress and behave like their peers.

Set 6: School subjects
curriculum – the subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college
- Her parents chose the school because it offered a broad curriculum including drama and dance which were her favourite subjects.
syllabus – an outline or summary of the subjects to be covered in a course
- The new syllabus included environmental science which was becoming more popular as a school subject.
maths/math/mathematics – the study of numbers, shapes and space
literature – the study of written works (such as poems, plays, and novels) that are considered to be very good and to have lasting importance
the three R's – the basic educational skills of reading, writing and arithmetic (maths)
- Most schools put a high priority on teaching the three R's.
language – a system of communication used by a particular country or community often studied as a subject by non-native speakers
- To her surprise, Jenna found that she was quite good at languages at school.
humanities – studies about human culture, such as literature, languages, philosophy, and history.
- Tuma couldn’t decide whether to study history or philosophy at university so opted for a degree in humanities.

science – the study of the structure and behaviour of the physical world, divided into subjects such as physics, biology and chemistry
- physics – the branch of science concerned with the nature and properties of matter and energy
- biology – the study of living organisms
- chemistry – the branch of science concerned with the substances of which matter is composed

geography – the study of the physical features of the earth and its atmosphere, and of human activity as it affects and is affected by these

religious studies – the study of religion and belief systems

history – the study of past events, particularly in human affairs

information technology (IT or ICT) – the study of the development, maintenance, and use of computer systems, software, and networks for the processing and distribution of data

physical education (PE) – instruction in physical exercise and games, especially in schools

art – the study of artistic techniques such as drawing, painting, sculpture, etc. or the appreciation of works of art

music – the study of how to play a musical instrument or sing, how to read music, how to compose music, etc

drama – the study of acting and theatrical performance

home economics – cooking and other aspects of household management, especially as taught at school

Set 7: School vocabulary

to play truant – to be absent without permission from parents or teachers
- Helios was always playing truant from school which he regretted when he failed his exams and struggled to find a good job.

to skip classes – to be absent from lessons you are supposed to attend
- I was never brave enough to skip classes as my parents would have been furious if they’d found out.

bookworm – a person who loves reading and/or studying
- My best friend is a real bookworm but is a great person to have on your quiz team because his general knowledge is excellent.

rote learning – a teaching style based on learning by memorisation through repetition
- My parents’ education was based on rote learning but there was more emphasis on learning by investigation by the time I went to school.

literacy – the ability to read and write, sometimes use as a subject title for reading and writing
- Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world with just 28% of people able to read and write.
literate – to be able to read and write
- In the past 20 years, the proportion of adults in the world who are literate has increased from 75% to 84% which is a great improvement.
iliterate – to be unable to read and write
- There are many children in the poorest countries of the world who have little or no access to education and are illiterate.
remedial – involving pupils who need extra help with a particular area of study or subject
- Pupils who got poor grades used to be put in a remedial class but now they are given extra support from a learning assistant.
additional needs/special needs – related to students who need special help due to a learning or physical difficulty
- Shona spent the later part of her teaching career working in a school for students with additional needs.
extra-curricular activities – activities or subjects offered in addition to the normal curriculum usually offered outside normal class hours, such as art, cooking or computer clubs and extra sporting activities
- The most popular extra-curricular activities at Westcroft School were pottery, badminton, and computer programming.
school uniform – a particular set of clothes that has to be worn by pupils
- Do Hyun looked so smarting setting off for school on his first day wearing his new school uniform.
discipline – a set of rules governing conduct or behaviour
- Schools where a high level of discipline is maintained, generally have above average exam results
  - impose discipline
  - maintain discipline
  - lack of discipline
timetable – a chart showing times of particular events, such as lesson times in the school day
- Ruby wasn’t very happy with her new timetable as she had double maths followed by double science on a Monday, both subjects she found hard.

Set 8: Facilities
classroom – where lessons take place in a school
- The noisy classroom fell silent when the headteacher walked through the door.
lecture theatre/hall – a room or hall for lectures with seats in tiers
- There was excitement in the lecture theatre as the famous actor stood up to give the drama students a lecture on method acting.
studio – a room where students studying art, photography, media studies, etc. create work
- The studio was set up with recording equipment for the students to practice editing techniques.
**library** – a building or room containing collections of books, professional journals and other academic literature and material relevant to student’s studies
- Sabiha spent all day in the university library doing research for her essay on globalisation.

**laboratory** – a room or building with scientific equipment for doing scientific tests or for teaching science
- Kate’s favourite part of her degree course in molecular biology was the laboratory work.

**campus** – the buildings and grounds of a university or college
- It took me a long time to find my way around the campus when I first started at university.

**halls of residence** – a college or university building where students live
- In his first year at college, Somchai lived in a hall of residence, but in his second year, he rented a house with some other students.

**student accommodation** – living accommodation for college or university students
- The university offered a range of student accommodation including studio apartments, flats, halls of residence and shared houses.

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**Set 9: Academic work**

**assignment** – a piece of work given to someone as part of their studies
- I have three more written assignments to complete this term.

**coursework** – written or practical work done by a student during a course of study, often assessed in order to count towards a final mark or grade
- Helga was really bad at exams so she chose a course where 50 per cent of the overall marks came from assessed coursework.

**dissertation** – is a long formal piece of writing on a particular subject, especially for a university degree.
- It was hard getting my dissertation finished by the deadline and I handed it in on the very last day.

**thesis** – a long piece of writing on a particular subject, especially one that is done for a higher degree
- Adao wrote his PhD thesis on the effect of organic fertilizers on soil fertility in tropical climates.

**presentation** – a speech or talk given in front of an audience
- As part of their end of year assessment, the students had to give a presentation on the theories of learning for children under 3 years of age.

**lecture** – a formal talk on a subject given to a large group of students who would normally take notes
- She was so pleased that the lecture was cancelled as it gave her time to catch up on some coursework.

**tuition** – teaching or instruction, especially of individual pupils or small groups
- Dana was unable to get to lectures after breaking her leg but the college provided individual tuition for her until she recovered.

**tutorial** – a small group study session with a tutor often following a lecture
- He always found tutorials helpful as it was a chance to ask questions about what they’d heard in the lecture.
**seminar** – a class at university in which a specific topic is discussed by a teacher and a small group of students
- At university, I found seminars far more useful than lectures as I learn best in a small group.

**lesson** – a period of learning or teaching, usually in a school
- Walter was late for the history lesson and got into trouble with the teacher.

**homework** – additional coursework work given to pupils to complete in their own time outside school hours
- Most pupils hate homework as they’d rather be out with their friends or playing computer games than studying.

**correspondence course** – a course of study in which student and tutors communicate by post
- Juan’s local college didn’t offer a course in accountancy but he found a good correspondence course to give him the qualification he needed.

**distance learning** – a way of studying in which lectures are broadcast or lessons are conducted by post or via the internet without the student needing to attend a school or college or have in-person teacher interaction
- I prefer to study by distance learning as I can work when I want and at the pace I want.

**online learning** – Similar to distance learning but done 100% via the internet and often involving in-person interaction with a teacher online
- I find online learning ideal for preparing for my IELTS exam and enjoy connecting with my teacher via Skype.

**to sit an exam** – to take an exam.
- I want to carry on learning for the rest of my life but after I finish my training I hope I never have to sit an exam again.

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**Set 10: The cost of education**

**tuition fees** – the money paid for a course of study, especially at a private school or a college or university
- High tuition fees mean that many young people can’t afford to go to university.

**a grant** – money given by the government to support a student while studying
- Bernice was successful in her application for a grant which meant that she could attend her local university.

**a student loan** – money which a student can borrow while they are studying, but which has to be repaid
- Geraint took out student loans of £9000 a year to pay for his tuition of fees and left university heavily in debt.

**a scholarship** – money given to someone, often by the institution they are studying at, to help pay for their tuition
- He was overjoyed to receive a scholarship to Oxford University as his parents couldn’t afford to pay the fees.
**internship** – a period of work experience (often unpaid) offered by an employer to give students and graduates experience of working in an industry related to their field of study.
- All students on the course were expected to secure an **internship** during the long vacation between the second and third years of their degree course.

**Set 11: Common terms related to college or university**

**unconditional offer** – the offer of a place at an educational institution for which you already meet the entry requirements.
- Mustafa was delighted to receive an **unconditional offer** from his first choice university and accepted immediately.

**conditional offer** – the offer of a place at an educational institution which requires you to meet certain entry requirements, usually specific exam grades.
- She was fairly confident that she would get the exam grades she needed to take up the **conditional offer** at Bristol University.

**to major in** – to choose as your main subject.
- I want **to major in** primary education with a specialism in science.

**to read** (a subject) – to study a specific subject.
- Hans **read** geology at university and is now working for an oil company in the States.

**faculty** – department in a university that specialises in a specific subject.
- It was a proud day for the university when the **faculty** of science move into the new, state-of-the-art building.

**research** – a detailed study of a particular subject.
- I’m really enjoying this **research** project on the migratory behaviour of the golden eagle.
  - **conduct research**
  - **carry out research**

**Set 12: More common words, phrases & expressions**

**to work your way through university** – to have a paid job while studying to support yourself financially.
- With the steep increase in tuition fees, many students are forced to **work their way through university**.

**to keep up with your studies** – to not fall behind with your work.
- Giang would have to limit his time socializing with his friends if he was going to **keep up with his studies**.

**to fall behind with your studies** – to not get your coursework and assignments done in the time allowed.
- She was a hard-working student but **fell behind with her studies** after catching pneumonia and having to spend time in hospital.

**to learn something by heart** – to memorise it.
- By the end of his first week learning English, Elisha **had learnt** all the days of the weeks and months of the year **by heart**.
**gap year** – a period, typically an academic year, taken by a student as a break between school and university or college education
- Many students spend their **gap year** travelling to get more experience of life before they settle down to studying for a degree.

**to take a year out** – to take a gap year
- Before going to the university, I **took a year out** to travel and also earn some money.

**to enrol** – to officially register on a course at a college or university
- She didn’t know an old friend had **enrolled** on the same course until they met up on the first day.

**sign up for** – to commit to something for a specific period such as the duration of a course
- Having **signed up for** the photography course, she now had to ask her brother if she could borrow his camera.

**to drop out** – to leave a course before completing it
- Hiran was forced to **drop out** of university when his father became ill and he had to take over the family business to support his family.

**a dropout** – a student who fails to complete a course of study and leaves the educational institution with no qualifications
- Many famous and very wealthy entrepreneurs are college **dropouts**, which proves that you don’t need a degree to succeed in life.

**well-educated** – someone who has received a high level or good standard of education
- You could tell that he was **well-educated** by the way he spoke.

**to meet a deadline** – to complete a piece of work by the required date
- I didn’t think I’d get my essay written in time but I just **met the deadline**.

**note-taking** – to take notes in a lesson or lecture when the teacher is talking
- I find **note-taking** in a lecture really difficult as I miss much of what is being said while I’m writing.

**to revise** – study or read something again in order to remember it better, often before exams
- No matter how hard I **revise**, my mind goes blank as soon as I get into the exam room.

**to review** – to read over something again. Similar to revise, but generally done just after a lesson or lecture rather than in preparation for an exam
- Bella found that **reviewing** her notes just before going to sleep helped her to remember the key points.

**workload** – the amount of work that has to be done
- The course **workload** felt overwhelming at first but became more manageable once the students had covered the theory and moved on to the more practical part of the course.

**to pass with flying colours** – to pass an exam or test easily and with excellent result
- He was sure he was going to fail his maths exam but **passed with flying colours**.

**scrape through** – to just pass an exam
- She ran out of time in the exam and left many questions unanswered but just **scraped through** with a pass mark.

**to resit/retake an exam** – to take an exam again in order to get a better result
- Madee needed band 7 in her IELTS Speaking test but only got 6.5, so she had to **retake the exam**.
For IELTS-style practise questions

For IELTS-style education-related practise questions and sample answers visit:

www.ieltsjacky.com/education-vocabulary.html