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## Equity in Practice? Exploring the Design and Conceptualisation of the Extended School-Day Policies in Latin America

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# Equity in Practice?

## Exploring the Design and Conceptualisation of the Extended School-Day Policies in Latin America

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### ABSTRACT

The Extended School Day policy is a flagship initiative in Latin America. However, limited research has explored how this policy is conceptualised and the extent to which the values inform it of equity and equality. This study addresses this gap by examining the key features of extended school day policies, with a particular focus on the challenges and inconsistencies in their design. To this end, I employed the practical argumentation framework developed by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) to analyse policy documents from nine Latin American countries. Findings indicate two primary types of policy objectives: academic-centric and holistic. The analysis of these nine countries revealed commonalities, such as extended schooling hours, alongside notable variations in policy design. While some policies prioritise academic achievement, others adopt a holistic approach, incorporating socio-emotional skills and extracurricular activities. Some countries, such as Chile and Argentina, prioritise equality by ensuring all students receive the same foundational academic knowledge. Others, like Brazil, Uruguay, and Mexico, emphasise equity by tailoring policies to provide additional support for disadvantaged groups. The universal policies in Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, and the Dominican Republic seek a balance between academic improvement and holistic development, integrating both academic and socio-emotional competencies. Nonetheless, I found that there are contradictions and inconsistencies among the main features embedded in the policy's design. Key challenges include a lack of clarity in operationalising equity and equality, often explicitly or implicitly embedded in the policy documents without concrete implementation strategies and weak causal links between policy objectives and actions due to broad activity scopes, policy flexibility, insufficient articulation mechanisms, and inadequate teacher training. Finally, contradictions exist between the targeting approach and participation requirements. Some policies claim to be universal but include prerequisites that inadvertently exclude disadvantaged schools. Others adopt a focalised approach but fail to specify how policy activities address the needs of unprivileged students.

### KEYWORDS

Extended school day, full-time school policy, equity, equality, education policy, policy analysis, instructional time, extra-curricular activities, Latin America.

### Introduction

The question of what the length of the school day should be has a long history. For decades, scholarly research has been dedicated to exploring the length of the number of hours that students should attend school. What determines the length of the school day is related to the time needed to cover the national curriculum, and in given contexts, additional schooling time is associated with better education outcomes, particularly when speaking of instructional time. However, governments often face resource constraints, and in many countries, using double shifts for education is necessary to provide opportunities for all. In these cases, schools

are typically open for at most 4 to 5 hours per shift. Teachers and other school stakeholders also face constraints in terms of the time required to cover the national curriculum and the skills needed for activities offered after school hours. For this reason, many governments have implemented policies expecting schools to extend their hours beyond the minimum requirement to complete the national curriculum. Furthermore, in the case of Latin America (LAC), the emergence of this policy to extend the school day is associated with the need to enhance the quality of education (Alfaro & Holland, 2015) and the transition from partial school days to full-time schooling is supported by demographic shifts in many LAC countries as fewer primary school-aged children reduce the need for double-shift schools (Bruns & Luque, 2015).

The expansion of extended school-day policies across Latin America raises the question of whether increasing time spent in schools leads to improved learning outcomes. Existing literature has already addressed the effects of this type of policy on learning outcomes. At the same time, most scholarly research has focused on assessing the association of instructional time with learning outcomes. Nonetheless, little is known about the design of the policy, including how its objectives and activities are stated and what values inform them. Therefore, addressing the effects of the extended school-day policy requires an initial examination of the policy's key features. Hence, this study focused on investigating whether the stated aims of the extended school day policy are indeed focused on enhancing learning outcomes and for whom through an analysis of its stated intentions (objectives), implementation strategies (activities and targeting approaches) and values.

To this end, I employed the practical argumentation framework developed by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) to analyse policy documents from nine Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Uruguay. I adapted this framework to explore three key elements embedded in the policy design: objectives, means of implementation, targeting approaches, and values. The central research question guiding this research is:

RQ) What are the principal features of extended school-day policies in Latin America?

By analysing the key features of the extended school-day policy, this study might contribute to generating a comprehensive understanding of the design and conceptualisation of extended school-day policies across nine Latin American countries, providing a detailed account of the policies' defining characteristics. I examined the extent to which the values of equity and equality are embedded in the policy and how they informed its underlying intentions (goals). Drawing on Fairclough's analytical framework for practical argumentation (I. Fairclough et al., 2012), the analysis is guided by the following specific questions:

- Goal: What are the objectives of the extended school-day policy?
- Means: What means are embedded in the policy to achieve these goals? What type of targeting approach does the policy adopt?
- Values: To what extent are there values such as equity and equality linked to the policy objective?

This study comprises three components: two descriptive and one analytical. The descriptive element focuses on identifying the objectives (goals) and means of implementation (activities and targeting approaches) as stated in the policy documents. The analytical component involves the interpretation of values, since these are rarely made explicit, they must be inferred from the policy discourse. As policies generally do not articulate equity mechanisms explicitly, an analytical framework is necessary to uncover them. To this end, the practical argumentation model is employed to infer these mechanisms by examining the interrelations among values, goals, and means.

In several cases, these policy elements are explicitly articulated in the official documents, such as stated objectives, activities and targeting approaches (means of implementation). In other instances, values are either directly referenced or can be inferred from the broader narrative.

## Literature Review

Extended school-day policies are generally composed of two main components: instructional time and extracurricular activities. While additional time in school is often seen as a strategy to improve learning, research highlights that the benefits depend largely on how this time is used. Aronson, Zimmerman, and Carlos (1999) stress that the impact of extended time hinges on its alignment with appropriate instruction, while Karweit (1985) shows that more instructional time does not necessarily translate into more active student

learning, given that much of teachers' time is also spent on preparation. Thus, the extension of the school day alone does not guarantee improved academic outcomes (Connolly, 2021).

Evidence on the link between instructional time and learning outcomes remains mixed. Rivkin and Schiman (2015) and Cattaneo, Oggenfus, and Wolter (2016) suggest that while additional instructional time can raise achievement, the effects are modest and subject to diminishing returns. Crucially, the impact varies depending on teaching quality, school environment, and students' socioeconomic background. This is relevant, as existing literature indicates that the failure of the school day has been attributed to externally contracted teachers (Meyer & Van Klaveren, 2013) and a lack of quality teachers (Oliveira & Terra, 2017). These findings highlight that instructional time cannot be viewed in isolation, but rather in relation to broader determinants of learning, including teacher effectiveness and contextual factors.

A related body of research on after-school programmes underscores similar complexities. Valentine, Cooper, Patall, Tyson, and Robinson (2010), in their meta-review of 12 studies, show wide variation in reported outcomes, with methodological weaknesses limiting clear conclusions. Nonetheless, they and others identify characteristics of effective programmes, such as 1) alignment with the formal curriculum, 2) a well-structured programme, 3) remedial emphasis, 4) professional educators and counsellors delivering the programme, and 5) opportunities for one-to-one tutoring. Despite this, the overall effects of additional after-school programme time tend to be small to moderate, particularly in mathematics and reading. Taken together, the literature suggests that rather than the mere extension of schooling time, policies must focus on improving the quality and structure of both instructional and extracurricular activities to ensure meaningful learning gains (Rivkin & Schiman, 2015).

## Methods

### *Identification of Analytical Framework*

Various analytical frameworks exist for examining policy, ranging from textual to critical discourse analysis (CDA). Each offers distinct advantages for investigating extended school-day policies in Latin America. Depending on the focus, language, power relations, or ideological underpinnings, the most suitable methodological approach was selected. In particular, I reviewed textual analysis (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2015), traditional perspectives in CDA, which examine relationships between language, power, and ideology dynamics (Anderson & Holloway, 2020), and Fairclough's view of language as social practice offers a solid base for critical policy analysis (Taylor, 1997).

Overall, reviewed methodologies focus on policy drivers, decision-making, and narrative power imbalances. However, many overlook the mechanisms that clarify a policy's aims, methods, and expected outcomes, key to understanding its potential effects. Given that the central question of this study is to understand the policy's features, intentions, and beneficiaries, I focused on policy analysis. Among available frameworks and theories, the practical argumentation framework (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) was most appropriate. It views policy discourse as inherently argumentative, structured as problem-solution reasoning. The framework identifies premises and conclusions in arguments or proposals and the logic linking them (Fischer & Forester, 1993).

### *Practical Argumentation Analytical Framework*

I partially applied the framework of practical argumentation to analyse policy statements. Fairclough (I. Fairclough et al., 2012) considers policy documents a form of political discourse and provides a model for analysing policy discourse as a type of argumentative discourse. Politics fundamentally involves making choices, and the justification for the outcome of the actions could be based on practical argumentation. This is based on the assumption that discourse analysis may be inherently argumentative, focusing on the reasoning for or against specific actions and how these arguments inform decision-making. In particular, discourse analysis examines how representations within a text provide agents with reasons to act, whereas practical argumentation deals with what should be done in response to practical problems, often structured as problem-solution arguments also reflected in the design of policies.

The analysis of practical argumentation involves identifying the premises and conclusions within an

argument and the relationships between them. Evaluating these arguments necessitates a critical examination of both the validity of the premises and the strength of their connection to the claim. Practical arguments consist of premises related to circumstances, goals, values, and means-goal reasoning. The proposed action is a hypothesis that may help agents achieve their goals based on their circumstances and values. Critical questioning can challenge the rational acceptability of these premises, the relationships between them, and the likely consequences of the proposed actions.

In this study, the analysis focuses on how values inform both the objectives and the means of implementation (activities and targeting approaches), examining the nature of these objectives and activities and how they interconnect to shape the underlying mechanisms of the extended school-day policy.

Reconstructing these arguments involves examining circumstantial premises, goal premises, value premises, and a claim for action. However, given the nature of the overall research question, the inquiry is limited to an examination of policy content rather than the contextual conditions of its implementation. As a result, I have adapted the original model to focus exclusively on values, goals, and means of implementation, refining the definitions of its core elements, goals, values, and means of implementation to align with the study's specific analytical focus.

Values serve as the foundation upon which the policy is constructed, guiding its orientation and shaping its overall intent. These underlying principles provide a lens through which the policy's goals and the strategies designed to achieve them (the means of implementation) can be critically examined. Values, or concerns, are sources of normativity that influence both the formulation of the goals and the actions taken to achieve them, providing justification for actions by offering reasons to pursue specific goals and adopt particular means of achieving them.

In this study, I analysed the values of equality and equity. I refer to equality as a condition that suggests that certain educational inputs, goods, or outcomes should be universally and equally distributed, ensuring all individuals receive the same level of access and quality. In contrast, equity-based approaches allow governments to allocate educational resources unequally to compensate for existing disadvantages and promote fairer outcomes. This redistributive approach enables an assessment of whether public education expenditure compensates for socio-economic disparities, such as regional poverty rates (Omoeva, Wael Moussa, and Rachel Hatch; Alcott, 2018).

Goals represent desired future states of affairs. These goals are often considered desirable because they are normatively appropriate and align with moral values that are deemed right. Regarding the means of implementation, policymakers hypothesise that a particular action or strategy may connect the current circumstances to the desired goals, moving them from the present state to a more desirable or normatively appropriate future.

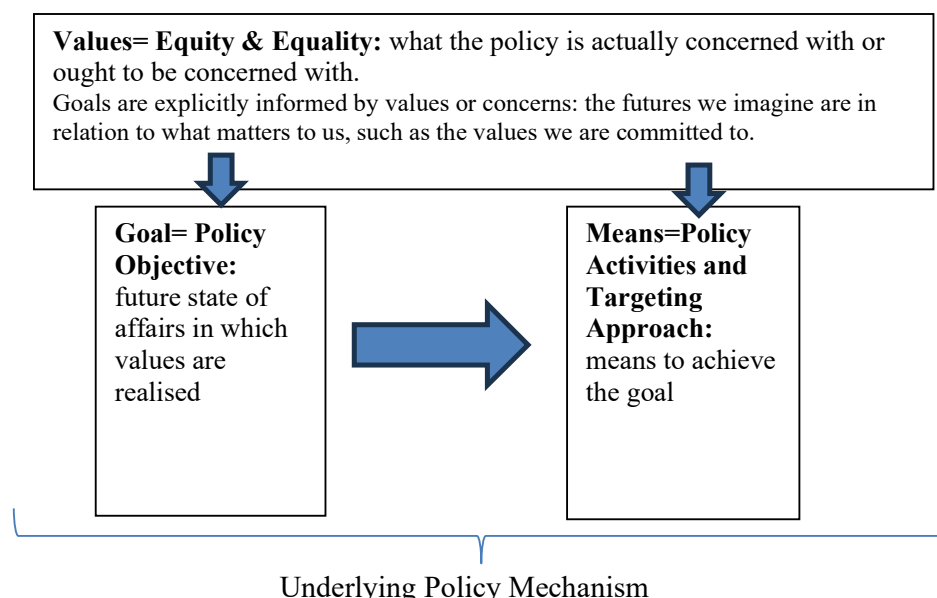
As part of the means of implementation, the policy's targeting approach determines whether it is directed at a specific population (focalised) or applies to the entire population (universal). Furthermore, the contrast between focalised and universal policies highlights different ways in which countries structure their educational objectives. Targeting refers to the mechanisms used to identify eligible individuals, households, or groups for resource transfers or preferential access to social services (Devereux et al., 2015, p. 7). The primary goal of targeting is to direct programs toward those who will benefit most (White et al., 2023). In contrast, universal schemes aim to cover all citizens who meet a basic criterion, often based on age or status (Devereux et al., 2015: 9).

For this study, when I refer to goals, I am referring to the policy objectives; means of implementation refer to the activities and targeting mechanisms; and values are equity and equality. All of these elements together form the adapted version of Fairclough's model, as outlined below:

## Figure 1

*Adaptation of Fairclough's Framework*

Claim for action: Policy



*Note.* Derived and adapted from *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students* (I. Fairclough & N. Fairclough, 2012).

Although this study does not include inferring the underlying policy mechanisms, this framework allows for such construction.

This study adopted a descriptive and analytical approach based on the content of the policy documents. The focus was strictly on the policies' design to explain how their elements interact (goals, means and values) and the extent to which equity and equality are embedded into the policy. Empirically, the analysis involved reviewing policy documents to extract policy objectives and associated implementation activities, followed by identifying equity-oriented values. Grounded in an inductive approach, the data were analysed thematically to discern recurring patterns and classify the types of objectives and activities present in the policy documents.

Thus, I first extracted and categorised the policy objectives as either academic or holistic based on emerging patterns. Second, I analysed the related activities through the lens of this classification. Third, I reviewed the documents to determine whether equity or equality was explicitly referenced or implicitly embedded in the policy narrative, aiming to assess the extent to which equity informs the objectives and activities.

Specifically, I analysed the policy documents listed in **Table 1**, comprising a total of 18 texts: seven laws (Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina), six decrees (Colombia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Panama), two resolutions (Uruguay, Argentina), one rule of operation (Mexico), one regulation (Chile), and one agreement (El Salvador).

**Table 1**  
*Policy Documents of Selected Countries*

Country	Own translation of Policy documents reviewed
Uruguay	-Resolution No. 21 of Act 90 dated 24.12.98 of the CODICEN (Central Directing Council of the National Administration of Public Education)
Colombia	-Law 115 from 1994 -Law 1753 from 2015 -Decree 501 from 2016 -Decree 2105 from 2017



	-Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB)
	- Law No. 9,394, of December 20, 1996
Brazil	-Interministerial Normative Order No. 17, dated April 24, 2007: Establishing the More Education Programme
	-Decree No. 7.083, from 27th 2010 in Rio de Janeiro. Dispõe sobre o Programa Mais Educação
	-The New More Education Programme, established by The Regulation No. 1,144, dated October 10, 2016.
Chile	-Regulation of Law No. 19,532, which creates The Full-Day School Regime and dictates rules for its application
	-Law No. 19.979 that modifies the Regulation of Law No. 19.532, which creates the regime of Full Day Schooling, and establishes rules for its implementation
El Salvador	*2005 regulation is not available on Internet.
	-The Integrated System of Inclusive Full-Time Schooling in El Salvador Ministerial Agreement No. 15-0856, published in Official Gazette No. 130, Volume No. 408
Argentina	-Law No. 26.075
	-Article 28 of Law 26.206/06 of National Education
	Resolution No. 426/22 of the Federal Education Council (CFE)
	-1 Hour More. A Primary School with More Time: Policies for Extending the School Day in Primary Schools in the Argentine Republic
Mexico	-Agreement No. 475 Issuing the Operating Rules of the Full-Time Schools Program, Official Gazette (DOF): 12/31/2008
Dominican Republic	-Decree No. 01-2014
Panama	-Executive Decree No. 83

## Findings

### *Analysis of Objectives and Means of Implementation*

From the analysis of the policy documents, two types of objectives were identified: 1) Academic-centric (Focused on remedial activities to improve academic performance); 2) Holistic (Combining academic support with extracurricular activities for broader student development). Likewise, it outlines how different Latin American countries intend to implement their extended school-day policies, detailing their strategies and, in some cases, the challenges associated with their design and execution. Additionally, the targeting approach that the policy adopts is analysed (For a summary of the information for all countries, see *Appendix A. Table 2*).

Importantly, many policy documents have no clear distinction between the stated objectives and the proposed activities designed to achieve them. However, in all the countries' policy documents, the objectives and means of implementation are explicitly mentioned.

### *Academic-Centric Objectives*

Brazil, Argentina, and Chile emphasise academic improvement, focusing primarily on literacy and mathematics, with a strong commitment to standardising education and ensuring equal access to fundamental academic skills. Brazil stands out as particularly academic-centric, prioritising literacy and mathematics while promoting standardisation to ensure uniform educational outcomes (Article 1, Regulation No. 1,144, 2016, Ministry of Education, p. 1). The Brazilian policy explicitly states its objective of improving learning outcomes

through pedagogical support and supplementary activities in arts, culture, sports, and leisure, reinforcing the connection between academic achievement and structured extracurricular learning to improve the educational performance (Article 2, Regulation No. 1,144, 2016, Ministry of Education, p. 1).

Argentina similarly prioritises core subjects such as literacy and mathematics, aiming for all the students to achieve a minimum standard of academic outcomes by extending instructional hours. The primary focus is strengthening reading comprehension, written production, and mathematical and scientific literacy through workshops (1 Hour More. A Primary School with More Time: Policies for Extending the School Day in Primary Schools in the Argentine Republic, Ministry of Education, p. 8). In contrast, the fundamental objective of the Extended School Day in Chile, as stated in its guiding principles, is to restructure the use of time in schools to serve the improvement of student learning and development, without explicitly detailing subject-specific priorities or how the additional time will be utilised (Martinic et al., 2008).

Chile's policy also emphasises infrastructure improvements, including renovating and equipping school spaces (Article 45, Regulations of Law No. 19.532, which establishes the Full-Day School Regime and sets forth rules for its implementation, Ministry of Education, 1998).

There are also differences in the length of the extended school day. In Argentina, the extension adds only one additional hour per day, resulting in a five-hour school day. In contrast, Chile implements a full extended day of 7.5 hours. Brazil, meanwhile, establishes a more ambiguous range, adding between 5 and 15 hours per week, which translates to school days of approximately 6 to 8 hours. This heterogeneity in the length of the school day raises important questions about whether differing educational outcomes are influenced not only by variations in the means of implementation but also by the amount of additional schooling time.

### *Holistic Objectives*

In contrast, Panama, Mexico, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador adopt a broader, more holistic perspective that integrates socio-emotional development alongside academic skills. These policies emphasise not only traditional subjects but also values such as citizenship, creativity, artistic expression, and healthy lifestyles. In these countries, extracurricular activities are considered as crucial as academic instruction, reflecting a comprehensive approach that extends beyond academic learning to encompass students' overall socioemotional development.

For instance, Colombia's extended school-day policy includes a broad range of objectives, incorporating human rights education, peace and democracy promotion, environmental awareness, and sports alongside core academic subjects. Furthermore, the objective considers the reduction of the risk and vulnerability factors to which students are exposed during their free time (Article 2.3.3.6.1.5., Decree 501, Ministry of Education, 2016, p.3). Its means of implementation, include components such as teaching staff, educational infrastructure, and school meals (Article 2.3.3.6.2.3., Decree 501, Ministry of Education, 2016).

Similarly, Panama explicitly integrates social and emotional development as part of its extended school day policy, advocating for a comprehensive curriculum that addresses both academic and socioemotional growth. The policy document explicitly mentions that "Through this equity-focused policy, the aim is to maintain student retention rates within the education system, ease the burden on families, and promote a comprehensive education grounded in values, healthy lifestyles, culture, and reinforcement in the areas of language, science, English, and mathematics". (Article 15, Decree No. 83, 26, 2016, p. 5). All these should be addressed through extracurricular activities in arts, culture, citizenship, healthy lifestyle, workshops, tutoring and academic reinforcement, highlighting the promotion of a holistic curriculum (Articles 3 and 4, Executive Decree No. 83, Ministry of Education, 2016).

The Dominican Republic and El Salvador also adopt holistic approaches, placing significant emphasis on social and cultural development in conjunction with academic instruction. El Salvador, in particular, focuses on institutional innovation and expanding learning opportunities, aiming to foster both academic and socio-emotional skills (The Integrated Full-Time Inclusive School System in El Salvador, Ministry of Education, p. 3). El Salvador intends to expand the educational offering through the incorporation of pedagogical workshops that respond to local needs in alignment with the curriculum, laboratory activities, artistic and sports programmes, and research projects (Ministry of Education [MINED], 2009, Educational Social Plan "Let's Go to School", p. 41). Similarly, in the Dominican Republic, the extended school day allows



for the flexible implementation of workshops, elective courses, tutoring, and other complementary activities. Notably, it is specified that all activities must serve a pedagogical purpose and be led by a teacher who has planned them in advance (Article 7, Decree No. 01-2014, Ministry of Education).

By creating conducive educational environments Mexico aims at expanding learning opportunities and support the development of students' competencies (Numeral 2.1, Agreement No. 475 Issuing the Operating Rules of the Full-Time Schools Programme, Official Gazette (DOF), Ministry of Education, 12/31/2008), through the development of six components, including professional development for administrative, teaching, and support staff; didactic materials and computer equipment for educational use; and meal services for students and teachers (Article 3.4.2, Agreement No. 475, Operating Rules of the Full-Time Schools Programme, Official Gazette [DOF], 12/31/2008).

Uruguay presents a unique case, as its policy document does not clearly distinguish between an academic-centric or holistic approach. Instead, it describes the policy as a new model of school organisation, prioritising disadvantaged communities and emphasising equity in education. The policy integrates the goal to enhance knowledge and values without explicitly aligning with either a strictly academic or holistic framework (Pedagogical Model – Organisation, ANEP, Directorate General of Education and Primary Education, 1998). Uruguay's policy incorporates in-service teacher training, infrastructure investments, IT enhancements, and meal programmes (Pedagogical Model – Organisation, ANEP, Directorate General of Education and Primary Education, 1998).

Looking at the number of hours in the extended school day outlined in the policy documents raises important questions about the feasibility of implementing such an ambitious range of activities. For example, El Salvador, with the shortest extended school day of just five hours, faces significant constraints in achieving the aforementioned holistic objectives. This may also apply to Colombia, which extended its school day to only six hours while pursuing ambitious objectives that include fostering citizenship. While Panama, and the Dominican Republic have established an eight-hour school day, Uruguay operates on a 7.5-hour schedule, and Mexico defines a flexible range between six and eight hours per day. However, in all cases, there is limited clarity on how this time is structured and utilised. A common challenge across countries is the lack of a clear translation of broad policy objectives into specific, actionable implementation plans. The policy documents reviewed do not sufficiently explain how the various components are integrated into a coherent strategy. As a result, the wide scope of intended activities risks creating fragmentation and undermining strategic coherence.

### *Targeting approach: Focalised and Universal* **Countries with Academic Centric Objectives**

While Argentina's policy is officially described as universal, its implementation details reveal a more conditional approach that risks undermining its universalist claims, as it depends on the availability of infrastructure at individual schools (Ministry of Education, p. 18). To support the universalisation of the initiative, the government introduced a medium- and long-term infrastructure plan prioritising schools located in areas with high levels of vulnerability (ibid., p. 17).

Chile's legislation mandates that all schools be included in the extended school day system (Article 2 of the Regulations of Law No. 19.532, Ministry of Education, 1998). Nevertheless, exemptions are granted to schools that demonstrate high quality based on national educational outcome measures (Article 4), as well as to those providing special education to children with disabilities. This could potentially exclude children who are themselves in vulnerable situations. Furthermore, Article 13 specifies that schools serving vulnerable student populations may participate. While the law insists on universal participation, it is clear from Articles 16 and 23 that access to the policy is dependent on sufficient school infrastructure. To address this, a special financial support fund is introduced for schools requiring upgrades (Article 45). Yet, the fact that the law allows both exemptions and imposes certain conditions for participation undermines its claim to universal coverage.

Brazil, in contrast, has implemented a clearly focalised approach. Its policy documentation explicitly identifies the groups and institutions that should be prioritised for participation. These include students and schools located in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, those with the greatest learning underperformance, and those with the lowest educational performance indicators (Chapter III of the

Programme Guidelines under Regulation No. 1,144, 2016, issued by the Ministry of Education).

### **Countries with Holistic Objectives**

Colombia has adopted a universal model for its extended school day policy. The policy stipulates that, by 2025, the Single School Day must be fully implemented in all public and private educational institutions in urban areas across the country. By 2030, it should be universally implemented in rural areas as well (Article 2.3.3.6.2.13, Decree 501, Ministry of Education, 2016). Similar to Chile, schools wishing to participate must meet specific infrastructure standards and be in good condition (Article 2.3.3.6.1.4, Decree 501, 2016).

Panama, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador have also adopted universal approaches. In Panama, student enrolment in the extended school day is mandatory (Article 15, Decree No. 83, 2016, p. 5), although participation is conditional upon schools having suitable infrastructure and meeting a defined institutional profile (Article 9, p. 9). In the Dominican Republic, the policy is designed to be universal, yet its implementation is described as progressive. It is intended to align with the National Classroom Construction Plan and other educational enhancement initiatives such as teacher training. According to Decree No. 01-2014 (Ministry of Education), this gradual rollout may delay universal access, thereby undermining its universal character. El Salvador mandates the policy's implementation in all municipalities but offers no detailed roadmap for how this is to be achieved (*Educational Social Plan "Let's Go to School"*, Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 19).

Uruguay, on the other hand, takes a focalised approach. The Full-Time School policy prioritises the most disadvantaged sectors of society, though it is not strictly limited to them. The intention is to contribute to social equity by first providing a richer and more comprehensive education to children living in the most vulnerable conditions, as established in Resolution No. 21 of Act 90 (1998) of the Ministry of Education. Mexico follows a similar model. The Full-Time Schools Programme (PETC) is primarily aimed at public basic education schools that serve disadvantaged students, particularly those in urban-marginalised, Indigenous, or migrant communities. It also targets schools that already operate with extended hours or perform poorly in educational outcomes (Agreement No. 475, Official Gazette [DOF], 31 December 2008).

Brazil, Uruguay, and Mexico entail a focalised approach, independently of their type of goals, either strictly academic (as in Brazil) or holistic (as in Uruguay, and Mexico), and adapt their interventions to the unique needs of their student populations. These policies are more tailored, addressing particular social contexts and educational challenges. In contrast, universal policies in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and El Salvador aim to improve education for all students, aligning more closely with an equality-based approach. While these policies emphasise academic achievement, they also integrate social, cultural, and recreational activities into the extended school-day model, fostering a more inclusive educational experience.

### **Values**

#### *Equality and Equity Values within the Policy Design*

### **Countries with Academic-Centric Objectives**

Equity and equality are explicitly or implicitly incorporated through varied narratives within extended school day policies across the region. While some countries conceptualise equity as the prioritisation of marginalised populations or the provision of focalised support for underperforming students, others associate it with broader notions of vulnerability, including exposure to risk factors, limited family support, insufficient schooling infrastructure, and adverse educational indicators such as school dropout rates or the failure to meet minimum learning standards. For instance, in Argentina, equity is not explicitly mentioned in the policy, though the overall aim of ensuring that all students meet minimum curricular standards implies a concern for equality. The concept of vulnerability only appears in the context of the infrastructure plan, not directly within the extended school day policy itself.

Similarly, Chile's policy documents do not directly refer to equity or equality. However, the rationale behind the policy suggests that increased schooling time will enhance learning outcomes, especially for students in disadvantaged schools, which are also to benefit from improved infrastructure and teaching staff

(Ministry of Education, 2002). This objective appears at odds with the policy's universal application, particularly when exceptions are granted to some schools. In Chile's case, equality seems to be embedded through support mechanisms such as better infrastructure, rather than through differential treatment based on need. Brazil's policy objective includes reducing dropout rates and grade repetition through focalised pedagogical interventions that aim to improve student performance (Chapter I, Regulation No. 1,144, 2016). While equity and equality are not explicitly discussed, the prioritisation of vulnerable populations through its targeting approach strongly indicates an equity-based orientation in its implementation.

### **Countries with Holistic Objectives**

In addition to the ways in which equity is conceptualised by countries with academic-centric objectives, those adopting holistic aims often frame equity in broader and more inclusive terms. In these contexts, equity is understood as the promotion of inclusive education, the implementation of a holistic curriculum, and the strengthening of schools as systems of social protection. Similarly, in several cases, equity informs policy through the lens of reducing students' exposure to risk factors and social vulnerabilities and supporting underperforming students. For instance, Colombia's policy frames equity as the reduction of risk factors and vulnerabilities that students face during their free time (Article 2.3.3.6.1.5, Decree 501, 2016).

Mexico, despite following a focalised approach, does not refer to equity explicitly within the policy objectives. However, the introductory section of the policy notes that one of Mexico's key concerns is the improvement of public education quality, particularly for children and youth from vulnerable social backgrounds. This is presented as a way to close the equity gap in terms of access to knowledge and skills development (Agreement No. 475, DOF, 31 December 2008). In contrast, Uruguay is one of the few countries to explicitly mention equity as a core policy goal, firmly embedding it within its legal and educational framework (Resolution No. 21 of Act 90, 1998).

Panama's extended school day policy incorporates equity as part of its mission by prioritising the attention of underperforming students. Although universal in targeting, it seeks to support students in areas where they underperform academically and aims to maintain retention, reduce the burden on families, and provide a well-rounded education based on values, health, and arts (Article 15, Decree No. 83, 2016, p. 9).

The Dominican Republic and El Salvador are examples of countries that adopt holistic aims and frame equity in broader and more inclusive terms. Interestingly, the Dominican Republic is particularly clear in articulating equity as a guiding principle. The policy is framed as a State initiative to support holistic student development through time optimisation and diverse learning opportunities, all delivered with a strong emphasis on quality and equity. The school is also positioned as a protective social space for children and youth students (Article 1, Decree No. 01-2014, Ministry of Education).

In El Salvador, equity is addressed in two ways. First, it is envisioned as part of an inclusive approach, in which schools operating under the extended school day model are expected to promote a holistic curriculum that removes barriers to participation. Second, the policy mandates that student characteristics be taken into account during implementation (The Integrated Full-Time Inclusive School System in El Salvador, Ministry of Education, pp. 14 and 16).

### **Conclusion: Policy implications<sup>1</sup>**

There is a clash between the intentions of the policy and its means of implementation, targeting approaches and values. Whether it is to enhance learning outcomes, to close inequality gaps, or to promote a more holistic education process, I argue that a new revision of the policy conceptualisation is needed to enhance its effects. Interestingly, equity is framed in some countries as vulnerability and risk reduction, with a broader perspective including inclusion and holistic education. Equity informs the policy either explicitly or implicitly through a universal or focalised targeting approach. As a result, the extended school-day policies in Latin America reflect diverse approaches to addressing educational disparities. Some countries, such as Chile and Argentina, prioritise equality by ensuring all students receive the same foundational academic

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the details presented in the previous sections, please refer to the table in Annex 1.

knowledge. Others, like Brazil, Uruguay, and Mexico, emphasise equity by tailoring policies to provide additional support for disadvantaged groups. The universal policies in Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, and the Dominican Republic seek a balance between academic improvement and holistic development, integrating both academic and socio-emotional competencies.

Nonetheless, the concept of equity needs to be better integrated into policy design. There is a notable lack of clarity regarding how equity and equality goals are operationalised. While these concepts are explicitly or implicitly embedded in the policy documents, they are often not accompanied by concrete implementation strategies. In some cases, there are contradictions between the stated equity and equality goals and the mechanisms for achieving them. Additionally, whether a policy is focalised or universal does not necessarily determine its focus on equity or equality.

Furthermore, this study found that there are contradictions and inconsistencies among the main features embedded in the policy's design. First, there are discrepancies between the targeting approach and participation requirements. Some countries' policies claim to be universal but include prerequisites that inadvertently exclude disadvantaged schools. Others adopt a focalised approach but fail to specify how policy activities will address the needs of unprivileged students.

Second, I claim that there are weak causal links between stated objectives and proposed means of implementation. This disconnect may stem from the broad range of activities included in these policies, the flexibility granted to schools, and the absence of mechanisms to ensure coherence between different policy components. Furthermore, the underlying policy mechanisms in the selected countries lack a solid theoretical basis regarding the causal relationship between its objectives and means of implementation. Most existing evidence is about the effects of instructional time on learning outcomes. Nonetheless, less is known about how extracurricular activities impact educational results.

Third, the heterogeneity in the number of hours added to the school day raises the question of how a vast catalogue of activities will be conducted with one additional schooling hour (eg, Argentina or El Salvador). Furthermore, the question of quality emerges. Research emphasises that the impact of extended instructional time significantly hinges on how effectively this time is used for quality instruction. Academic gains depend on converting time into effective learning opportunities. However, there is not always a direct relationship between the amount of instructional time, and the time students actively engage in learning, which means extending the school day does not automatically lead to improved academic outcomes (Gavriloiu, 2024).

Fourth, despite these insights, the policies in the countries under review lack detailed guidance on utilising the additional hours effectively or adapting pedagogy to improve classroom management. Although some policy documents reference teacher training, they do not specify the skills teachers should develop to maximise the benefits of extended hours, nor do they outline strategies to motivate teachers and students for this increased instructional time. This absence of a clear pedagogical framework may limit the potential efficacy of the extended school-day policies. Additionally, insufficient teacher training strategies tailored to extended hours further weaken the policy's effectiveness.

In summary, the challenge lies in balancing these perspectives: equality ensures equal access to educational opportunities, while equity ensures that these opportunities translate into meaningful outcomes for all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A comprehensive education system should incorporate both, ensuring that students not only have access to education but are also supported in achieving their full potential.

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**Appendix A. Table 2**

**Extended School Day Policies: Schooling Hours, Objectives, Activities, and Targeting Mechanisms by Country**

<b>Total number of hours, including the hours added</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Type of Objective</b>	<b>Activities as stated in the policy documents</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>	<b>Type of Targeting mechanism</b>
5 hours per day	Argentina	Academic centric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extending regular class activities</li> <li>Workshops (strengthen written production, reading comprehension, and mathematical and scientific literacy)</li> </ul>	Remedial activities	Universal
	El Salvador	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curricular activities</li> <li>Extracurricular activities</li> <li>Workshops, laboratories, artistic and sports activities and research projects</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ Extra-curricular activities	Universal
6 hours per day	Colombia	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend basic areas' hourly intensity</li> <li>Formulate pedagogical projects to develop basic and citizen competencies</li> <li>Technological resources</li> <li>Human resources</li> <li>Food services</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ Extra-curricular activities +Feeding	Universal
7.5 hours per day	Chile	Academic centric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops on science and mathematics, language, communications, social sciences,</li> <li>Arts, and sports</li> <li>Infrastructure support</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ Extra-curricular activities + Infrastructure	Universal
	Uruguay	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing a specific pedagogical approach within the common primary education programme (playtime, workshops, community)</li> <li>In-service teacher training</li> <li>Infrastructure investment</li> <li>Technologies</li> <li>Feeding component</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ In-service teacher training + Infrastructure +IT + Feeding	Focalised (Categorical and geographic) * Urban schools in disadvantaged areas
8 hours per day	Dominican Republic	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops to expand, reinforce, and apply knowledge and competencies</li> <li>Food provision</li> <li>Infrastructure</li> </ul>	Remedial activities	Universal
	Panama	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complement core subjects with extracurricular activities promoting art, culture, citizenship, healthy lifestyles, and</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ Extra-curricular activities	Universal

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic reinforcement</li> </ul>		
Ranging from 4.5 to 8 hours per day	Mexico	Holistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curricular content: using information and communication technologies,</li> <li>• Arts and culture, recreation,</li> <li>• Physical development,</li> <li>• Additional languages, and healthy living</li> <li>• School management autonomy,</li> <li>• Infrastructure,</li> <li>• Educational materials,</li> <li>• food services</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ Extra-curricular activities+ Infrastructure + Feeding + Educational materials	Focalised (Categorical and geographic) *Disadvantaged populations in marginalised urban, indigenous, or migrant contexts
Ranging from 5 to 15 hours per week	Brazil	Academic centric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogical support in Portuguese and Mathematics</li> <li>• Other activities like arts, culture, sports, and leisure</li> </ul>	Remedial activities+ Extra-curricular activities	Focalised (Categorical and geographic) *Socioeconomic vulnerability and educational performance indicators