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Extended School Day Policies: Why, when and how?

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Inter-American Development Bank
Education Division

July 2025

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Extended School Day Policies

Why, when and how?

Series ***Más tiempo para aprender*** #2



Carla Gamberini
Gabriela Gambi
Tamara Vinacur

July 2025

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This publication is the result of a collaborative effort grounded in a shared commitment to advancing education. We hope that it will help guide school day extension policies in the region.

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Executive Summary

This document analyzes the Extended School Day (ESD) policies, evaluating their relevance in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) as well as their implementation in various international contexts. It showcases different formats of the ESD, goals and potential contributions to the education system.

The document analyzes cases of implementation of the Extended School Day (ESD) in Latin America, Europe, and Asia, with a particular focus on Croatia, which has successfully implemented the ESD thanks to the influence of international policies and its innovative educational vision. The analysis is enriched by the findings from the Study Tour to Croatia, organized by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Croatian government, where educational authorities from Latin America and Europe exchanged experiences and lessons. These contributions serve as the foundation for developing recommendations tailored to the Latin American context, aimed at maximizing the impact of ESD in the region.

The document also explores how the integration of technology into ESD policies can enhance their outcomes. It highlights ESD experiences in the region that successfully integrated technology, while offering recommendations to drive digital transformation.

Finally, the text contains a practical guide for planning, implementing and evaluating ESD policies, highlighting the importance of strategic planning, continuous monitoring and evidence-based evaluation. Compared to Europe, the region faces challenges such as shorter school days, low educational achievements and structural inequalities. In this context, the ESD is presented as a key strategy to overcome these limitations.

This document belongs to the *MAS TIEMPO PARA APRENDER* (More Time to Learn) series. It builds on topics previous addressed in earlier publications on the ESD in the Argentine context (Torre et al., 2024) and optional formats across the region (Capelletti et al. 2024); the impacts and challenges of the ESD through empirical evidence (Contreras and Lepe, 2023); the impact on adolescent fertility (Garganta et al., 2022) and female labor force participation (Garganta and Zentner, 2021) in the Dominican Republic; as well as its long-term economic benefits (Dominguez and Ruffini, 2018). Acknowledging the need for more evidence on implementation models, their impacts, and challenges, this document presents cases at both the regional and international level. With the goal of inspiring and guiding policymakers, it showcases experiences that can serve as a foundation for designing and improving similar policies in other countries.

Key Words

Education, Extended School Day, Implementation, Educational Trajectories

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Introduction

This Technical Note analyzes Extended School Day (ESD) policies, their implementation in various countries, and its particular relevance in Latin American and The Caribbean (LAC). ESD policies seek to increase the time students spend in school in order to improve the quality of education, reduce inequalities and boost comprehensive development of students, encompassing both academic and socio-emotional aspects.

The importance of the ESD policies lies in the fact that many LAC countries face serious challenges in terms of low learning outcomes and discontinuous educational trajectories. In this context, ESD presents itself as a strategy to address these issues by offering more instructional time in a safe and structured environment, which allows students to improve their performance and develop life skills.

This document is structured in several sections. First, it defines what ESD is, examines its objectives, and discusses the most common forms of implementation in different countries. Then, it explores the experiences of its application in different regions of the world, such as Latin America, Europe and Asia, with particular emphasis on cases like that of Croatia. Subsequently, it addresses the digital transformation in the context of the ESD and how this can become a powerful tool to maximize the benefits of extended hours. Finally, it analyzes the importance of an equitable approach in planning these policies, prioritizing the most vulnerable students.

Regarding the research methodology, this document is based on an analysis of international cases and a review of existing literature. It also incorporates the findings of the Study Tour to Croatia —entitled



“Extending the School Day and Lessons Learned to Reinvent the Classroom in Latin America and the Caribbean”— organized in June 2024 by the IDB and the Croatian government, with the participation of educational authorities from European and LAC countries. The research integrates these inputs and experiences from ESD in different contexts, with the aim of extracting lessons and recommendations applicable to the reality of Latin America.

This document seeks to provide a detailed view on how the Extended School Day (ESD) can be an effective policy to improve educational quality, promoting not only increased learning but also the socio-emotional and comprehensive development of students. In addition, it includes recommendations for effectively implementing these policies, ensuring that students from more vulnerable environments are the primary beneficiaries.

1 What are the Extended School Day policies (ESD)?

ESD policies aim to extend the time students spend in school, moving beyond the four to five hours that typically make up the traditional school day. These policies have been implemented in many countries with the goal of improving the educational quality, reducing inequalities in access to education and offering opportunities for students' academic, technical and socioemotional development (Contreras & Lepe, 2023; Kraft & Novicoff, 2024).

1.1. Formats of ESD Policies

ESD policies can take various forms, depending on each country's educational needs and specific contexts. In general terms, these policies aim to increase instructional time so that students spend more time in a safe environment that encourages their holistic development.

Among the various forms and specific objectives that the ESD can adopt, these are the most common models in the region:

Moderated extension of school schedule: involves adding one or two hours to the school day, usually focused on reinforcing fundamental learning such as mathematics and reading comprehension, or on extracurricular activities like sports, music and arts. An example of this model is the *Hora Más* program implemented in Argentina in 2022, which adds at least one extra hour of instruction in single-shift primary schools to strengthen abilities such as literacy and mathematics (IDB, 2024).

Full School Day: this refers to schools operating between six and eight hours per day, combining academic hours and extracurricular activities. For instance, Uruguay has implemented full-time schools since 1998, incorporating activities such as arts or physical education to provide students with learning opportunities for their comprehensive development (Contreras & Lepe, 2023). Similarly, Peru has been implementing the *Jornada Escolar Completa* (JEC) program in a select group of secondary schools since 2015, where additional hours focus on tutorial, English language and integration of technology (MINEDU, RM 2021).

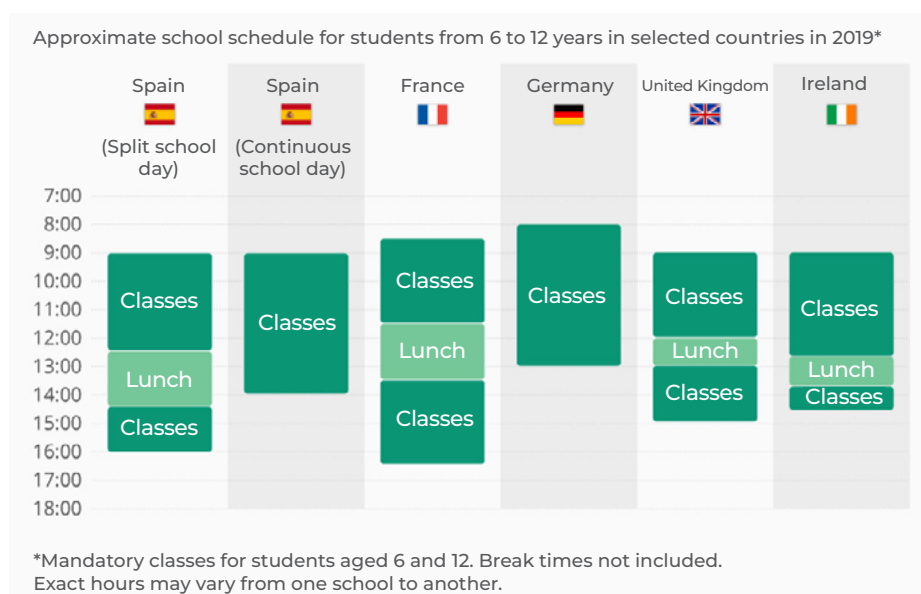
School with extended hours and diversified curriculum: this model combines extended hours with a reorganization of the school curriculum, incorporating subjects and activities adapted to 21st-century needs, such as technology and socioemotional skills development. An example is the *Escolas em Tempo Integral* (Full-Time School) program implemented in the state of Pernambuco, in Brazil, which extends school day hours to 45 hours per week and diversifies the curriculum to include science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and also socioemotional and sport activities (Contreras & Lepe, 2023).

Mandatory extracurricular activities: in some countries, ESD is designed to include extracurricular activities within the official schedule. For example, Portugal's *Curricular Enrichment Activities* program offers an extended schedule from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm, integrating activities such as sports, arts, and social development, which complement the basic curriculum (Kraft & Novicoff, 2024).

2 Relevance of ESD policies for LAC countries

Implementing ESD policies in LAC is especially relevant due to the structural challenges the region faces in terms of educational quality and socioeconomic inequality. Additionally, school days in the region are shorter compared to other parts of the world (Contreras & Lepe, 2023). On average, students in LAC attend school between four and five hours per day. According to the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (ERCE), 20% of primary school students attend classes for four hours or less, while 48% attend for five hours (Arias Ortiz et al 2024a). This limitation reduces the opportunities for students and school leaders to improve student performance. In Europe, the average school day extends from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 1. School schedule in Europe



Source: Moreno, 2019 (Statista Investigation).

Extending the school day allows for more time dedicated to learning and promotes the comprehensive development of students, especially in the most vulnerable sectors (OEI, 2023).

2.1. Main educational challenges in LAC countries

Among the most widespread challenges in education in LAC that the ESD can help overcome, are the following:

Low secondary school completion rates: more than a third (35%) of young people in the region do not finish secondary school. Even though the secondary school completion rate in LAC exceeds the global average, it is still 15 percentage points below the OECD countries' average (Arias Ortiz et al, 2024b).

Low learning outcomes or learning poverty: worldwide, countries in LAC are among the most lagging behind. According to the PISA report 2022, students in the region are, on average, five years behind compared to students in OECD countries (Arias Ortiz et al, 2023).

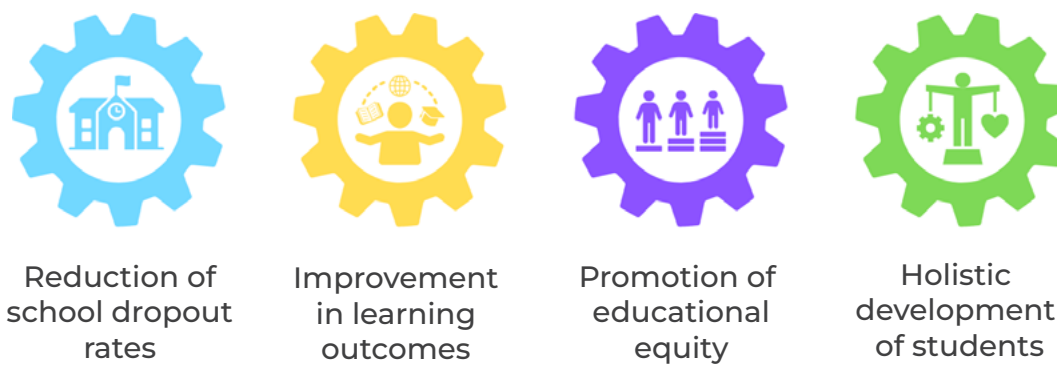
Socioeconomic inequality: the gap between students from different socioeconomic levels is deep. Public schools, which serve the most vulnerable populations, often have fewer resources and shorter school days, which perpetuates inequalities that translate into learning gaps. According to PISA 2022, 88% of students from low-income households in the region perform poorly in mathematics, 30 percentage points more than students from wealthier households (IDB and BM 2024). ESD policies that focus on the most vulnerable areas can help reduce these disparities by offering more time to support students, who would otherwise lack access to tutoring or additional educational assistance (Contreras & Lepe, 2023).

Insecurity and social risks: the willingness to learn is lower when personal safety is at risk (Caudillo & Torche, 2014; Michaelsen & Salardi, 2020). In LAC, young people face more violence and crime than in any other region of the world, whether as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses (UNODC, 2019). In this way, for many students in LAC, school is not only a place for learning but also a safe refuge from violence and crime.

2.2. Extended School Day contributions

ESD policies have been implemented in several countries with the aim of providing students with a higher quality and broader educational service. Although each country adapts these policies to its own context, they all share common goals: improving students' academic performance, promoting equity, and developing skills that prepare students for future challenges.

Figure 2. Educational challenges in LAC



Source: own elaboration

Below are some of the most relevant purposes of extended school day policies identified in the literature, along with concrete examples of their implementation:

Reduction in school dropout rates: the goal is to decrease school dropout rates, particularly in contexts of social vulnerability. The implementation of ESD policies has helped reduce dropout rates in countries such as Uruguay and Peru, as it provides a more engaging and structured school day, with extracurricular activities and pedagogical support, motivating both students and families to stay in the education system (OEI, 2023). In Brazil, the Pernambuco program has achieved a significant reduction in dropout rates while also contributing to an increase in secondary school graduation rates. In Colombia, full-day schools show a reduction in dropout and grade repetition rates. Two

main explanatory mechanisms stand out: first, compared to half-day schools, students in extended school day programs are able to take greater ownership of the learning environment, which fosters a positive connection to school. Second, having more instructional time and adult support strengthens students' sense of belonging, which improves school retention (Garcia et al., 2013).

Additionally, addressing teenage pregnancy is key, as it is one of the main causes of dropout among adolescent girls. In Chile, a significant reduction in teenage pregnancy rates was observed in urban areas with extended school day coverage (Contreras & Lepe, 2023).

Improvement of learning outcomes: this model aims to improve student's learning, especially in key subjects such as mathematics, science, and reading comprehension. The extension of the school day has shown positive, although moderate, effects on learning gains. Countries like Chile and Colombia have implemented these policies to improve students' performance in standardized tests, although with varying results (Contreras & Lepe, 2023). Instead, in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, the ESD helped students improve their scores in mathematics and language, with increases of up to 0.22 and 0.19 standard deviations, respectively (Contreras & Lepe, 2023).

Promotion of educational equity: the extension of the school day aims to reduce socioeconomic gaps by offering more instructional time to students in vulnerable contexts and providing opportunities to broaden their cultural and social horizons through the inclusion of artistic, sports, and/or recreational activities (Torre et al., 2024). Uruguay has implemented this model to provide disadvantaged students access to a more inclusive and higher-quality educational environment (IDB, 2024). In Buenos Aires City, Argentina, the extension of the school day improved graduation rates, a result mainly driven by gains among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Llach et al., 2009).

Comprehensive development of students: ESD policies also seek to provide a safe and structured school environment that not only fosters academic learning, but also promotes the socioemotional



development and their healthy nutrition. In Portugal and Peru, the focus on extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and tutoring has been key to promoting this comprehensive development (Božić, 2024; MINEDU, 2021). In Croatia, the provision of meals to students contributes to their overall health. (European Commission, 2023). In the state of Tlaxcala, Mexico, for example, the Extended School Day Program not only had a positive impact on learning but also helped keep students away from criminal activities by keeping them in school longer and reducing their exposure to dangerous environments (Carro-Olvera et al, 2022). In Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, Dinarte-Díaz et al (2022) experimentally analyze the socioemotional learning component of an after-school program for adolescents in public schools located in violent neighborhoods. They find that including psychological activities in the program increases the likelihood of students behaving well at school by 23 percentage points. The effect is strongest among students at highest risk.

3 Some ESD experiences worldwide

Since 1980, many countries have implemented initiatives for extending the school day. The tables below summarize the best documented experiences from LAC, Europe and Asia, sorting them according to their main objectives: a) **Increasing prioritized learning and reducing dropout**, b) **Reducing educational inequalities**, and c) **Promoting students' comprehensive development**.

Experiences of the ESD in Latin America and The Caribbean

ESD objectives	Countries	Program	Characteristics	Results
Increase learning outcomes and reduce dropout rates	Argentina	<i>Hora Más</i>	Extension of an additional hour in all public primary schools to reinforce learning in Mathematics and Language.	Reduced grade repetition.
	Colombia	<i>General Education Law (1994)</i> <i>Política de Jornada Única (2016)</i>	20 weekly hours in preschool, 25 in primary school, and 30 in secondary school.	Improvements in academic performance and school attendance. Additionally, there were improvements in participation and the development of socio-emotional skills.
	Dominican Republic	<i>Jornada Escolar Extendida</i>	Extension to eight hours a day. It began with a pilot program in 2011-12 and was gradually expanded since 2013. The National School Building Program supported the JEE, with the goal of building 28,000 classrooms over four years.	Although the impact on secondary school students' scores is moderate, the JEE altered gender gaps, benefiting female students on low-stakes assessments and improving the relative scores of male students on high-stakes exams. It also reduced the incidence of teenage pregnancies.

	Honduras	<i>Jornada Extendida</i>	30 hours per week. Focus on strengthening math and language skills and building citizenship.	It was implemented in over 10,000 schools.
	Paraguay	<i>Jornada Escolar Extendida</i>	8-hour school day. Included building improvements and provision of materials, incorporation of pedagogical innovations and activities during counter-shift: sports, English, and arts, as well as training for teachers and school principals. Implemented with support from the IDB.	Implemented in 300 public primary schools (first and second cycles). The JEE improved learning among third-grade students, primarily in mathematics, and reduced regional gaps and gaps between urban and rural schools. The developed materials were extended to all public schools.
	Peru	<i>Jornada Escolar Completa</i>	45 hours per week, secondary school level.	Implemented in 2,001 public schools. It had a significant impact on all assessed academic areas, with a greater effect on the most disadvantaged students.
Increase equity in education	Brazil (Mato Grosso)	<i>Escolas em Tempo Integral</i>	School day equal to or longer than seven hours per day or 35 hours per week, across all stages and modalities of basic education. Priority is given to schools serving students in situations of greater socioeconomic vulnerability. The Federal Government provides technical and financial assistance.	Considering all educational levels, enrollment in this modality increased from 9.3% in 2022 to 10.7% in 2024.
	Brazil (Pernambuco)	<i>Programa Tempo Integral</i>	45 hours per week. Intensification of work in curricular areas and addition of new curricular spaces.	Achieved significant improvements in graduation and dropout rates, and in students' performance. According to data from the 2024 School Census, the state leads in the proportion of high school students enrolled in full-time schools, with 69.6%, well above the national average, which is 24.2%.
	Chile	<i>Jornada Escolar Completa</i>	30% increase in school time (35 hours and 25 minutes per week). More time available for institutional free use.	In the long term, it increased the income of students in early adulthood, delayed childbearing, and reduced municipal juvenile crime rates.

	Mexico	<i>Programa de Escuelas de Tiempo Completo</i>	Increase from two to four hours per day. Curriculum focused on mandatory learning, ICT, arts and culture, recreation and physical development, additional language learning, and healthy living.	Reduced school dropout rates and provided a safe environment for students, reducing their exposure to criminal surroundings.
	Uruguay	<i>Escuelas de Tiempo Completo (ETC)</i> (Primary schools) <i>Escuelas de Tiempo Extendido (ETE)</i>	ETC: focus on vulnerable urban areas. An additional 3.5 hours. Provision of lunch and a snack. Teachers have 2.5 hours per week for lesson planning. ETE: three additional hours per week. Includes activities such as art, physical education, and languages. Lunch is provided.	One-fifth of all students in public schools have benefited from the policy, which includes the provision of school meals.
Promote the holistic development of students through extra-curricular activities	Ecuador	<i>Jornada Escolar Extendida</i>	Educational institutions that choose to implement the JEE must meet infrastructure requirements. Interested students can register for extracurricular activities.	Consolidation of school clubs aligned with students' interests.

Source: own elaboration based on bibliography.

ESD experiences in Europe

ESD objectives	Countries	Results
Improve academic performance and equity in education	Croatia	Implemented in 62 primary schools with high satisfaction from the educational community.
	Portugal	Students with special needs were integrated into regular schools.
Support students' comprehensive development through recreational and creative activities	Sweden	Huge impact on social and emotional development.
	Finland	Increase in academic performance and greater balance between academic activities, extracurricular activities, and family interaction.

Source: own elaboration based on bibliography.

ESD experiences in Asia

ESD objectives	Countries	Results
Focus on high performance and integration of technology	South Korea	High rates in standardized tests.
Improve learning, reduce gaps, and move towards a curriculum focused on creativity.	Shanghai	High rate of assistance and excellent results in international tests.
Strengthen foundational learning in primary education and to specialize in enhancing specific talents in secondary education.	Singapore	A combination of academic excellence and comprehensive development.

Source: own elaboration based on bibliography.

3.1. Challenges in the implementation of ESD policies

Among the pioneer countries in the implementation of ESD policies, certain challenges have been identified:

Teachers and students burnout: In Chile, Croatia and South Korea the extended school day has overburdened teachers with more work and caused students to experience fatigue or stress due to long hours spent in school (Zeballos, 2012; Božić, 2024).

Lack of proper infrastructure: In Peru, Colombia and Mexico, the implementation of the full-time school day has been hindered by the lack of adequate facilities, especially in rural areas. This challenge also includes limitations in the implementation of technological equipment and connectivity (Contreras & Lepe, 2023; OEI, 2023; LEE 2022).

Sustainable financing: In countries such as Peru, Brazil and Croatia, the cost of implementing ESD policies is high, raising the challenge of securing financing that can sustain and scale them. ESD policies require significant investments in teacher salaries, infrastructure, equipment and additional staff (IBD 2024; Minedu 2021).

3.2. Successful examples in LAC

- Argentina: through the *Hora Más* program, primary schools have extended the school day to improve literacy and mathematics. Launched in 2022, this program aims for the nationwide expansion of the extended school day and has already led to a 23% reduction in grade repetition in participating schools (IBD 2024; Minedu 2021).
- Brazil: the state of Pernambuco is a successful example of how ESD can positively impact the academic performance and reduce school dropout rates. The *Escolas em Tempo Integral* program has significantly increased graduation rates and reduced school dropout (Contreras & Lepe, 2023).
- Uruguay: full time school policies have provided greater access to quality education, especially in vulnerable areas. Full-time schools offer a safe learning environment that includes meals, extracurricular activities and additional hours to reinforce critical areas such as mathematics and language. In addition, a special focus has been placed on the development of digital skills (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

4 The experience of Croatia

In 2023, Croatia began implementing its policy of extending the school day in 62 primary schools, adopting the model of Whole Day School (WDS). This case is particularly interesting to observe because, being a recent initiative, the country draws on the experiences of other nations and existing evidence to design its own model.

The focus of this model is not only on the integral development of students but also on improving the well-being of the educational community through the extension of the school day. The objectives of the whole day school in Croatia are:

- To improve the learning outcomes of all primary education students across all curricular areas through an increase in teaching hours.
- To reduce learning gaps between groups of students with different socio-economic, social, territorial, familiar and personal conditions—factors over which students have no control.
- To significantly improve the financial, professional, and social status of teachers, expert advisors, and school principals.
- To enhance the quality of life for students, their parents and/or caregivers, and local communities.

The implementation of this policy has been designed gradually. In the first phase, the whole day school is introduced as a four-year experimental program in 62 schools selected through a public call. This phase, currently underway, aims to verify the value of the conceptual framework, the model, and the organization of work in schools. During this period, detailed monitoring of various aspects will be carried out, and the results will be evaluated (Ministry of Science and Education of Croatia, 2023).

The ESD model consists of the following four educational programs:

- i. National Primary School Curriculum Program, which is primarily implemented through regular classes (mandatory and elective) (A1)
- ii. Supported, Assisted, and Enriched Learning Program (A2)
- iii. Extracurricular Activities Program (B1)
- iv. Extra-Academic Activities Program (B2).

Figure 3. Key stakeholders in Croatia's ESD

Key stakeholders for the ESD in Croatia	
• Teachers:	responsible for A hours (academic). They can also participate in B hours (extracurricular). Teachers receive professional training to adapt to the new format.
• External specialists:	for B hours, external specialists are being hired for special activities such as sports and arts.
• Ministry of Education:	provides guidelines and funding for infrastructure improvements and program developments.
• Parents and the community:	they are encouraged to participate in the designing of extracurricular activities and the decision making through the school board and consulting meetings.

Source: own elaboration.

These four programs are implemented in two time groups. On the one hand, there are the A hours (A1 and A2), which include the regular teaching hours (A1) and the support or tutoring hours to assist students in enriching their learning (A2). On the other hand, there are the B hours (B1 and B2), focused on extracurricular activities such as sports, science, art, and social development (B1), as well as other activities scheduled after school hours (B2). These activities can be taught by regular teachers or external specialists.

The implementation of this policy has required significant investments in infrastructure in several schools, such as the modernization of kitchens and dining areas. Each school has received an average of 300,000 euros in improvements.

But in addition to the curricular and infrastructure improvements, the component of nutritional support for families has been key in Croatia. Although schools already provided meals before the implementation of the whole day school, the extended schedule has strengthened this program, ensuring that students receive healthy meals throughout the extended school day.

In the implementation of its JEC policy, Croatia has also faced some challenges, particularly regarding human and financial resources. Firstly, there was resistance to change from teachers and families, who did not fully understand the benefits of the new model and perceived it as an additional burden. Overcoming this obstacle required careful management of communications and the change process.

Another challenge was the work overload for teachers and principals, resulting from the extended hours and new responsibilities. To mitigate this issue, better organization and salary incentives for staff were implemented.

Finally, one of the greatest challenges has been sustainable financing for its potential expansion. Although there is initial funding securing the implementation of the experimental program in 62 schools, it is necessary to develop strategies to ensure the long-term continuity of the program, which includes continuing to improve infrastructure and guaranteeing the payment for the additional hours worked by staff (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

4.1. Countries that influenced the Extension of the School Day in Croatia

Croatia has adapted elements from various international education systems—particularly from European and Asian countries—to design its Extended School Day (ESD) model focused on holistic development.

Portugal: pioneer in integrating mandatory extracurricular activities within the extended school day, Portugal was one of the main countries that influenced Croatia's model. This approach aims to enhance both academic achievements and students' personal development. Additionally, the Portuguese model emphasizes communication with families to ensure student attendance during the extended schedule.

Finland: this model has been a key source of inspiration for Croatia due to its focus on education quality and student well-being. In Finland, the school day is structured with regular breaks that allow students to engage in outdoor and recreational activities, promoting a balance between academic work and personal wellness. This approach has proven highly effective to reduce stress and improve students' concentration (Božić, 2024). Croatia has adopted a similar practice by incorporating scheduled breaks into its ESD model, allowing students to participate in recreational activities during the school day.

Singapore: known for being highly competitive and results-oriented, Singapore's educational model places a strong emphasis on academic excellence. Its ESD model combines academic instruction with extracurricular activities at both primary and secondary levels. This comprehensive approach not only enhances academic performance but also fosters the development of leadership, teamwork and resilience, with a strong emphasis on values education and social competencies (Ministry of Education of Singapore, 2023). Croatia has drawn from this model by incorporating extracurricular activities and focusing on strengthening teacher capacity.

South Korea: with one of the longest school days in the world, South Korea places strong emphasis on academic excellence and discipline. However, the system also aims to provide a balanced experience through the inclusion of extracurricular activities, though to a lesser extent than in many European countries. Croatia has adopted the idea of extending school hours and offering optional extracurricular activities, allowing students to engage in areas of personal interest (Radinger & Boeskens, 2022; Božić, 2023; Zeballos, 2012).

4.2. What do school stakeholders in Croatia say?

During the Study Tour organized by the IBD and the administration of Croatia in June 2024, education authorities from Ministries across the region had the opportunity to directly observe the experience of two primary schools implementing the WDS: one in Zagreb (urban area) and other in Kaprina (rural area). Through dialogue with teachers,

administrators, students, and parents, participants gathered valuable insights into the perceived benefits and areas for improvement in the implementation of the WDS.

In general, the implementation of the model was positively evaluated in both schools:

Perceived aspects	School	
	IVAN CANKAR – ZAGREB (primary school)	AUGUST CESAREC – KRAPINA (primary school)
Focus Highlighted by the School Regarding the ESD	Diverse activities that complement the curriculum, such as sports, arts and music.	Integration of extracurricular activities focused on technology, sports and arts including robotics and drama.
Main benefits	Individual opportunities for learning, improvement in academic outcomes, creative and socioemotional development.	Improvement in academic outcomes, a more holistic environment for learning, integration of technology, sports and arts.
Areas to improve	Infrastructure (recreational and technological spaces), management of student fatigue in the afternoon.	Regular training for teachers, balance between workload and expectations, improvement in infrastructure and support for technological activities.

Source: own elaboration based on Gamberini & Božić, 2024.

Detail of perception by education stakeholders	School	
	IVAN CANKAR – ZAGREB (primary school)	AUGUST CESAREC – KRAPINA (primary school)
What do students say?	They value the opportunity to participate in activities that promote their socioemotional and creative development.	They enjoy non-academic activities, such as robotics and drama. Both of them offer the opportunity to relax and have fun after theoretical classes.
What do teachers say?	They appreciate the flexibility and the additional time to support individualized learning, although they mention the challenge of student fatigue in the afternoon.	They value the responsibility of experimenting with new ways of teaching, but they emphasize the workload and the lack of proportional compensation.
What do parents say?	Were not present in the meeting.	They value that the extended school day allows them to meet their work responsibilities while their children are in a safe and productive environment.
What do directors say?	They emphasize the positive impact on academic outcomes and student motivation, identifying the extended school day as a key tool for improving school life.	They value the strengthening of the relationship between the school and the community, and highlight the careful planning as key to ensure that students do not feel overwhelmed.

Source: own elaboration based on Gamberini & Božić, 2024.



Each school stakeholder has a more positive than negative assessment of the new WDS model, although they emphasize the need for some improvements to promote greater well-being.

In conclusion, the WDS model in Croatia aims to reduce educational gaps in primary education through a comprehensive approach that combines improved learning outcomes, personal development, and community support. Although it faces several challenges, it offers significant opportunities to transform the Croatian education system and improve both academic performance and student well-being. Its design has been strongly influenced by the educational experiences of countries such as Portugal, Finland, Singapore and South Korea, which Croatia has adapted to its own needs. Regarding the stakeholders' perceptions, the overall evaluation of the WDS is positive, although some areas of improvement have been identified to further promote student well-being. However, the success of the WDS will largely depend on Croatia's capacity to overcome financial challenges and issues related to human resources.

5 Digital transformation in ESD policies

The digital transformation of schools involves the integration and use of digital technologies in both educational and management processes to improve the quality of education. This goes beyond the use of electronic devices or the access to connectivity: it includes the design of new pedagogical methodologies, teacher training in digital competencies, and the creation of interactive and flexible learning environments. Tools such as online learning platforms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and multimedia resources aim to personalize learning and provide more equitable and efficient access to education (IBD, 2024; Božić 2024).

Integrating technology into ESD policies is key to optimizing the quality of students' extra time at school. The ESD offers an ideal setting to incorporate technological activities, allowing students to learn essential 21st-century skills, such as programming, digital literacy, and critical thinking. Moreover, technology helps teachers manage tasks more efficiently, enabling them to spend more time supporting students. It also enables personalized learning by adapting the content to the individual needs of each student, which enhances the use and impact of additional time (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

The use of technology can also play a significant role in reducing educational gaps, especially if its implementation is prioritized in the most vulnerable areas. In contexts with limited infrastructure and teachers' shortage, technology can provide high-quality, personalized educational resources. With connectivity, students could strengthen their learning by using additional hours in online tutoring or blended learning activities, contributing to close learning gaps.

5.1. Experiences of integration of technology in the Extended School Day (ESD)

Uruguay has established itself as the leading country in digital transformation in education in the region. Through its *Ceibal* digital education initiative, it has successfully provided connectivity and equipment to all schools nationwide, ensuring that each student has access to a personal laptop and universal access to digital platforms in public schools. Additionally, *Ceibal* has enabled teachers to access online training and educational resources. Uruguay is one of the few countries in LAC that incorporates skills related to programming, computational thinking, robotics and even introduction to the use of AI in its ESD activity offerings.

In Peru, the implementation of the ESD prioritized the expansion of instructional hours dedicated to English, among other subjects, and reinforced learning through a digital platform that allows students to progress in the language at their own pace. This platform also offers teachers the opportunity to strengthen their language skills. To support this strategy, laptops were distributed, the learning platform was developed, and connectivity was enhanced in more than 2000 selected schools.

In Croatia, the work of the Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNET) is a prime example of how technology can become an essential pillar of the ESD. The CARNET program has digitalized educational processes, enabling the personalization of teaching, the integration of new hybrid methodologies, and the improvement of school management. Through digital integration, Croatia has improved both students' academic performance and their socioemotional well-being (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

5.2. Recommendations to promote digital transformation in ESD policies

Based on these experiences, the following recommendations can be offered to countries seeking to meaningfully integrate technology into ESD policies.

- **Investment in technology infrastructure:** it is essential for schools to have adequate connectivity, devices and digital resources to support the teaching and learning processes.
- **Ongoing teacher training:** to maximize the potential of technology in classrooms, it is crucial for teachers to receive continuous training in its pedagogical use. This training should include not only how to operate devices, but also how to integrate technology into teaching practices to enhance learning, along with strategies for engaging with technology in a critical and ethical manner.
- **Promote equitable access:** it is essential to prioritize and boost digital transformation in schools located in rural areas and vulnerable communities. This ensures that all students, regardless of their place of residence or socioeconomic status, have the same access to quality education. In order for technology to help close learning gaps, the digital gap between urban and rural areas must be reduced.
- **Curriculum adaptation:** ESD programs should include digital competencies, computational thinking, and problem-solving skills as part of both the formal curriculum and extracurricular activities.

Integrating technology into ESD policies presents significant opportunities to improve educational quality and reduce learning and digital gaps. The successful implementation of these programs requires strong investment in infrastructure, constant teacher training and especial attention to equity and inclusion.

6 Focus on equity in ESD policies

The equity approach in educational policy ensures that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic condition, gender, race or geographic location, have access to quality educational opportunities. This focus does not only promote equity in access to school, but also the availability of resources, learning opportunities, and achievement of satisfactory academic outcomes. Equity does not mean treating all students the same, but rather providing additional support and resources for those who face greater barriers to learning effectively and achieving their full development.

Equity in education policy is essential because education is a key driver of social mobility and economic development. Education systems that promote equity not only improve individual well-being, but also reduce inequity and poverty, fostering greater social cohesion.

In LAC, educational equity is particularly relevant due to the region's high levels of inequality. The region has the highest income distribution inequality in the world, which is strongly reflected in access to quality education. In many countries, students from rural areas, as well as those from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, face additional obstacles that prevent them from accessing equal educational opportunities. According to UNESCO, 40% of children living in extreme poverty do not complete primary education, perpetuating the cycle of poverty in the region (UNESCO, 2015).

Students from most vulnerable areas often attend schools with fewer resources, less instruction time, and lower educational quality. Moreover,

by the time they reach secondary school, they often do not have access to a school in their localities. In fact, among youth of secondary school age, there is a 14-percentage-point gap in school attendance between students from high and low-income backgrounds (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024b).

The region also shows one of the widest gaps in educational quality between different socioeconomic groups. According to PISA 2022, 88% of the poorest students did not achieve satisfactory learning outcomes, compared to 55% among the wealthiest students (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

For this reason, it is critical that education policies, such as ESD, focus on promoting equity, providing all students with the tools they need to succeed, and prioritizing investment in the most vulnerable.

6.1. Strategies to foster equity through ESD

LAC countries that adopted ESD policies have identified diverse strategies to guarantee an implementation that benefits all students equitably, especially those in situations of vulnerability.

School feeding programs: one of the main obstacles that students face in impoverished areas is malnutrition, which has a direct impact on their academic performance. In the region, more than 80 million kids receive school meals daily, supported by a regional investment estimated at US\$7.6 billion (World Food Programme, 2023). Countries like Honduras and Ecuador are good examples of this program. In Honduras, a daily nutritionally balanced and fresh ration is ensured for students, while also strengthening the local economy by purchasing from small producers. In Ecuador, school meals in rural areas with high poverty rates are linked to family farming, benefiting thousands of students nationwide (WFP, 2023). Another example is Paraguay, where the *Cocinando en la Escuela* (Cooking at School) pilot program was implemented in 90 rural schools, which received kitchen improvements and equipment to ensure school meals were provided throughout the school year. Previous studies had identified the lack of consistent lunch provision as the main

obstacle to extending the school day in some schools (Vacotti, 2021). This pilot program proved to be an effective alternative for overcoming this limitation.

Support teachers in rural schools: the quality of teacher training is key for equity in education. In Peru, through its JEC program, efforts have been prioritized to train teachers in rural and remote areas in curriculum planning, assessment, and learning recovery strategies in mathematics and reading comprehension. The most vulnerable schools are supported by pedagogical advisors who guide and strengthen them.

Prioritizing investment in socioeconomic vulnerable areas: some countries prioritize implementing ESD policies in densely populated urban areas with greater access to services. However, other countries choose to invest in areas with high levels of poverty and social exclusion rates, with the objective of reaching equity in education, even if this benefits fewer students and entails higher implementation costs.

Curricula adapted to local needs: some countries have adapted their school curricula to better align with the needs of students and teachers. For instance, in Argentina, several provinces, such as Mendoza, have made afternoon activities in the ESD more flexible, tailoring them to local preferences (IDB, 2024).

Socioemotional support: another key component to achieve educational equity is providing socioemotional support to students in vulnerable situations, as they are often more exposed to high-risk environments. In Chile, the ESD program has incorporated activities that promote socio-emotional development, an essential element for students coming from challenging family or social backgrounds. These activities have played a crucial role in reducing risk behaviors, such as violence and teenage pregnancy, and in improving school climate (OEI, 2023).

In summary, in regions like LAC, characterized by high levels of educational inequality, it is crucial to break the circle of poverty and promote a more inclusive development. ESD policies serve as a key vehicle for advancing equity by providing additional time and learning opportunities to the most vulnerable students. Strategies implemented,

such as focusing on impoverished areas, implementing school feeding programs, and offering socio-emotional support, help ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstances, have access to quality education.

Table 1. Strategies for Reducing Inequality in LAC

Strategy to reduce inequality	Country
School feeding program	Honduras and Ecuador
Provide support to teachers in rural schools	Peru
Curricula adapted to local needs	Argentina
Socio-emotional support for at-risk students	Chile
Prioritization of investment in socioeconomically vulnerable areas	Honduras, Ecuador, Peru

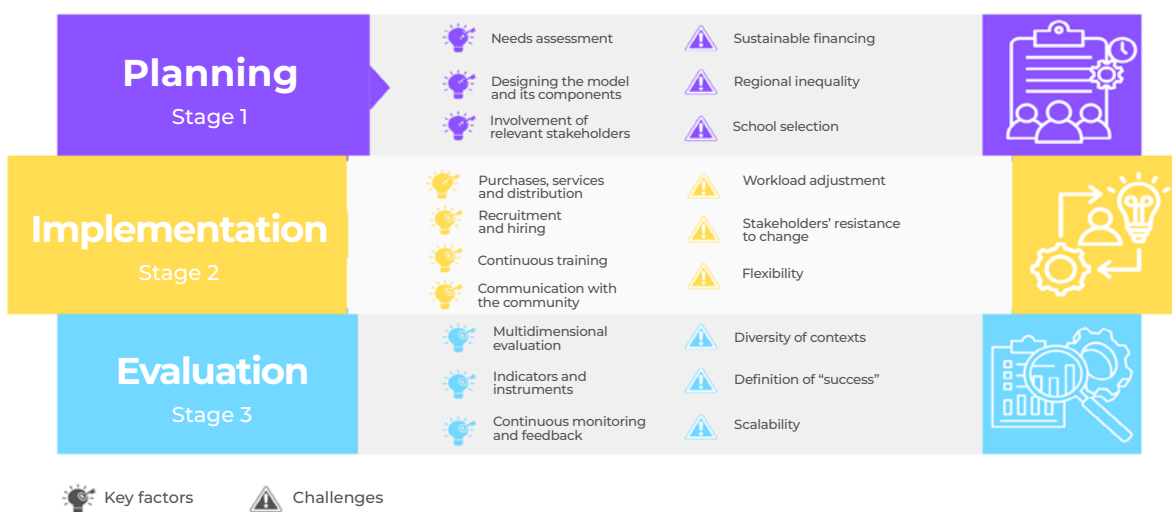
Source: own elaboration.

7 How to plan, implement and evaluate ESD policies?

Based on the ESD policies analyzed in this document, we will conclude by presenting practical recommendations for implementing an ESD policy. These recommendations aim to guide educational authorities in adopting best practices in three key stages: planning, implementation and evaluation.

Extended school day policies require careful planning, effective execution, and continuous evaluation to ensure that the intended educational goals are achieved. Below, we describe the three stages, highlighting key success factors and common challenges in each.

Figure 4. Rollout of the Extended School Day



Source: own elaboration

Stage 1: Planning

This stage aims to make accurate assessments of schools' needs, analyze models relevant to each context, set the goals of the ESD policy, and design the educational service model that the ESD will offer, including cost estimation and resources. Likewise, it is also essential to establish the necessary partnerships with key stakeholders to ensure the successful rollout of the policy.



In this stage, it is highly important to take **key factors** into account. On the one hand, **it is necessary to understand and evaluate the local, regional and national needs** in terms of infrastructure, availability of teachers, socioeconomic conditions, school staff's competencies, students' achievements, inequality in education, etc. A thorough analysis will allow the design of a program adapted to the reality of each region. For example, in Peru, when the JEC was launched in 2015, information about the 8,000 secondary schools was collected through regional authorities. Then, a detailed information gathering process was organized in a sample of these schools, for approximately six months. This process allowed the selection of 1,000 schools in which the JEC was implemented (Minedu, 2021).

Once the assessment has been made, it is important to learn about other countries' experiences to understand the opportunities and challenges of each model. When formulating their own model, **each country should consider which approach to prioritize** (according to the identified needs), while bearing into account that boosting equity is fundamental in a region like LAC.

Main components of an ESD model:

- **Pedagogical component:** it explains the purpose of the extended time, and defines the activities that will be carried out during the additional hours. It is highly important to establish approaches and principles, the profile of students, curricular proposals and study plans, among others. It should specify how many hours will be added and which types of skills will be emphasized. For example, in Croatia, the pedagogical model emphasized the importance of including activities

such as sports, arts and technology, as well as foundational skills, to foster a comprehensive development of students (Božić, 2024).

- **Management component:** defines the mode of student support, the school's organizational structure and staff roles, the profiles of teachers for prioritized activities, and the monitoring strategies, among others.
- **Infrastructure component and resources of education:** for extended school days, schools need proper classrooms, recreational areas, cafeterias, technological equipment and connectivity, learning platforms and other materials. This is the most expensive component in ESD models: for example, Croatia invested 1.5 billion euros to adjust the facilities in its 62 pilot schools (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

The model may also include other components, such as teacher training, coexistence, participation, and school feeding. During the planning process, it is crucial to involve the various stakeholders of the education system: teachers, directors, students, families, local administrations, and others. This guarantees a collaborative design that takes into account all the relevant perspectives. Likewise, it is important to have clear and effective communication channels in order to deal with any problem that may arise (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

Main challenges in the planning stage:

- **Funding:** the greatest challenge is ensuring adequate and sustainable funding to implement the ESD. Extending school hours involves high costs related to infrastructure, teachers' and directors' salaries, school meal services, equipment, and more. Countries should establish financing strategies (such as loans or international cooperation) that guarantee not only the launch of a pilot program but also the sustainability and scalability of the policy.
- **Regional inequalities:** differences in infrastructure, availability of staff, and educational resources between urban and rural areas can create inequities. It is advisable to prioritize vulnerable areas in order to prevent these disparities from widening. Brazil and Croatia are good examples of such prioritization (Gamberini and Božić, 2024).



- **School selection:** it is important to define clear criteria for selecting the schools that will participate in the implementation of the ESD (if not all are included) and to communicate these criteria to relevant stakeholders. In this way, conflicts could be prevented between selected and non-selected schools.



Stage 2: Implementation

Unlike the planning stage, this stage involves the implementation of key elements both at the level of education authorities and within the schools themselves. It includes the execution of infrastructure and equipment improvements, recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff, training with relevant stakeholders, and curriculum adjustments, among other actions. It is important to ensure that administrative and logistic processes function effectively so that the necessary resources reach schools on time and the policy can be implemented. In addition, it is crucial to maintain close coordination and clear communication with all stakeholders in the educational community involved in the ESD policy.

Principal **key factors** for the implementation of the ESD:



- **Purchasing of goods and contracting services:** to ensure the proper implementation of extended school hours, administrative and logistical processes at national and regional levels must be carried out in timely manner so that schools are properly equipped. For example, in order to build cafeterias in schools or equip classrooms with new technology, it is necessary to develop and approve technical specifications, calls for suppliers, follow the procurement steps, and sign contracts. In the case of a cafeteria, the construction must be carried out, supervised, and local operating permits obtained. For the purchase of technological equipment, once the contract is signed, the equipment must be received and distributed to schools. Distribution complexity varies depending on

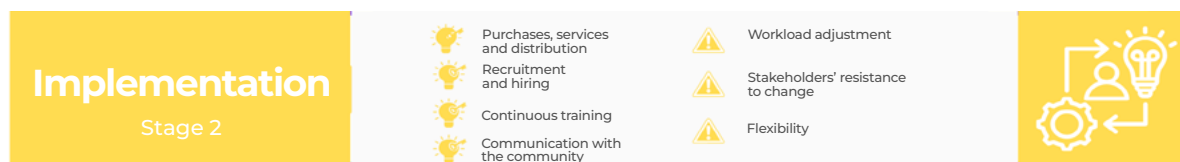
the location and the quantity of equipment involved. These processes could take months or even years, so it is advisable to plan these operations in advance and closely monitor them to ensure timely completion.

- **Recruitment and hiring of personnel:** the expansion of school hours requires more teachers, support staff, and even expanded leadership teams to ensure the model positively impacts students. Therefore, it is essential to recruit and hire staff in advance, as well as extend the working hours of current staff if necessary. For example, in Peru, socioemotional support was prioritized as part of the extended school day, which led to the hiring of at least one psychologist per school. However, there were not enough psychologists in all regions, and many positions remained vacant during the initial months of implementation, especially in remote areas. This example highlights the importance of ensuring the availability and retention of all necessary personnel to operate the ESD model effectively.
- **Ongoing staff training:** training of teachers, directors and support staff should be continuous, and school teams need to be trained in the innovations of the ESD policy. It is highly recommended to provide this training prior to implementation and to design ongoing support strategies. In Brazil and Portugal, teacher training was an essential component for the successful implementation of the policy (IBD & Božić, 2024).
- **Communication with the community:** involving the local community and families in the process is key. This can facilitate the acceptance of extended school hours and foster a collaborative environment that supports the policy's success. Implementation should be accompanied by a clear communication strategy targeting all stakeholders, especially families and teachers. This ensures a shared understanding of the policy's objectives and benefits, reducing the resistance to change. For example, in Croatia, the message that schools were the “heart” of the community, helped gain family support for the policy (Gamberini & Božić, 2024).

Challenges of the implementation stage:



- **Workload adjustment:** the extended school day can increase the workload of school leaders and, mainly, teachers, potentially leading to burnout if not managed properly. It is essential to provide additional support, ensure adequate rest periods, and implement ongoing support strategies to safeguard staff well-being and sustain their engagement.
- **Resistance to change:** as the ESD involves changes in schedules, pedagogical approaches, and use of school spaces, it may face resistance from teachers, families, school leaders, and/or students. This resistance often arises when stakeholders are not involved in the design of the model and perceive it as imposed. Clear communication of the model's objectives and benefits, along with meaningful stakeholder engagement in key decisions, is critical. In Brazil, Croatia and Peru, the resistance from certain stakeholders posed a significant challenge during the implementation of the ESD (Gamberini & Božić.2024).
- **Flexibility:** the original plan for implementing the ESD model may not always be followed strictly due to budgetary limitations, shortage of resources, or difficulties that may arise during the implementation. While the planning stage should anticipate as many risks as possible, not everything can be predicted. Consequently, those leading the ESD implementation should be flexible to adapt plans and find proper solutions to every circumstance and context.



Stage 3: Evaluation

At this stage, the goal is to analyze the design, the implementation process, and the outcomes of the ESD policy, in order to gather evidence to improve the management of the intervention, strengthen institutional decision-making capacity, and support the planning of its expansion.

Diverse tools must be developed to measure the processes and goals achieved, identifying challenges, successes, good practices, and external factors that may have influenced the achievement of the expected results.

Key factors for the implementation of the ESD:



- **Multidimensional evaluation:** the evaluation must be comprehensive, taking into account not only the learning outcomes, but also the impact on students' well-being, community participation and soft skills development. For example, Croatia identified challenges to evaluate students in different socioeconomic and geographical contexts, which required the adaptation of assessments tools.
- **Indicators and instruments:** it is essential to clearly define the indicators to measure the success of the ESD. First, it is necessary to establish a definition of success and identify the specific components to be measured. Based on the evaluation experiences of education policies in LAC, examples of indicators have been identified, such as students learning achievements (evaluated through census or sample tests), the improvement in socioemotional competences (measured through surveys and/or focus groups), reduction of school dropout (evaluated with enrollment and attendance records) and satisfaction levels of teachers, students and families (evaluated through census or sample tests). It should be noted that when the system has robust information systems and student demographic data, the process of measuring indicators is easier. This is why counting with a solid SIGED (Integrated School and Teacher Management System) is highly important.
- **Continuous feedback and monitoring:** evaluation should be an ongoing process, allowing for timely adjustments rather than showing a static snapshot of the outcomes. It is important to maintain constant communication channels with the stakeholders involved (teachers, families, students), so they can offer feedback on the implementation based on their experiences, facilitating improvements. In Brazil, continuous evaluation helped adapting strategies to ensure that additional hours were utilized effectively (Contreras & Lepe, 2023).

Main challenges of the evaluation stage:



- **Diversity of contexts:** evaluating the ESD policies in schools across diverse contexts (rural, urban, high and low income, etc.) may complicate the development of indicators and comparative evaluation tools. Therefore, evaluation instruments should be adapted to these differences in order to provide a complete and accurate perspective, and results should be interpreted in light of the specific contexts.
- **Definition of success:** the definition of success in ESD policies can vary according to the socioeconomic context and the goals established in each model. While for Argentina, success was linked to improving learning outcomes in the prioritized areas; for Chile, it was defined by a reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancy, and for Peru, changing families' perceptions of schools, shifting them towards viewing schools as a safe place. Each ESD model has its own definition of success and consequently, which in turn influences the design of indicators and evaluation instruments.
- **Scalability:** the results obtained from monitoring and evaluation contain plenty of information regarding the potential and feasibility of expanding the ESD to more schools. These results provide information about the perceptions of the various stakeholders, the achievements and the challenges, among others. It is important to make the necessary adaptations for the ESD expansion, while taking into account the costs involved, the sources of funding, the priorities, and the elements that could be eliminated. In this regard, literature still has ground to cover in order to better understand the cost-effectiveness of extended school day policies. Few studies rigorously estimate the associated costs and compare them with the outcomes achieved. Moreover, it is crucial that these evaluations go beyond learning outcomes in language and math and also consider other important results, such as continuity in educational trajectories, school retention, and students' overall well-being. Including these dimensions would offer a more comprehensive view of the value these types of policies can bring.

Evaluation

Stage 3



Multidimensional evaluation



Indicators and instruments



Continuous monitoring and feedback



Diversity of contexts



Definition of "success"



Scalability



In conclusion, implementing ESD policies requires a strong commitment to planning, execution and continuous evaluation. It is a complex process that demands resources, coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders. Moreover, it is an ongoing cycle, where the outcomes of the evaluation inform the subsequent phases of planning, improvement, and scaling of the policy. When these three processes are carried out effectively, they can ensure the success of the educational policy and lead to meaningful transformation in a country's education system.

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