
Synthesis

Extending school timeⁱ

Low impact for moderate cost, based on moderate evidence



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This summary focuses on extending core teaching and learning time in schools and the use of targeted before and after school programmes. Other approaches to increasing learning time are included in other sections of the Toolkit, such as Homework, Early years intervention and Summer schools.

The research focuses on three main approaches to extending teaching and learning time in schools:

- extending the length of the school year;
- extending the length of the school day; and
- providing additional time for targeted groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged or low-attaining pupils, either before or after school.

How effective is it?

The evidence indicates that, on average, pupils make two additional months' progress per year from extended school time and in particular through the targeted use of before and after school programmes. There is some evidence that disadvantaged pupils benefit more, making closer to three months' additional progress. There are also often wider benefits for low-income students, such as increased attendance at school, improved behaviour, and better relationships with peers.



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In addition to providing academic support, some school programmes aim to provide stimulating environments and activities or develop additional personal and social skills. These programmes are more likely to have an impact on attainment than those that are solely academic in focus. However, it is not clear whether this is due to the additional activities or to improved attendance and better engagement.

The research also indicates that attracting and retaining pupils in before and after school programmes is harder at secondary level than at primary level. To be successful, any increases in school time should be supported by both parents and staff, and extreme increases (for example more than nine hours of schooling per day in total) do not appear to be additionally beneficial.

Latin American Evidenceⁱⁱ

Qualitative and quantitative research has been done in Latin America to investigate the effect that extending school time has on student learning and also on the organization of school time, teaching practices, student activities and relationships in and outside the school. Most of the research comes from case studies and their findings are not consistent.

Using a qualitative and a quantitative design, one study shows that the relationship between time spent in the school and the student level of achievement is not linear. This effect depends on the quality of the interactions and the educational experiences children develop during the school day. In this sense, the challenge is to maximize opportunities for meaningful pedagogical interactions between teachers and pupils at school, to increase children's learning opportunities.

Another study argues that in terms of the average number of class hours during the school year, as reported by teachers, there is an inverse relationship between the number of class hours and student achievement, holding that those countries that have more school time obtain lower scores in the TIMSS test. However, it is not possible to determine causality only based on a correlation between the number of class hours and academic results. Decisions to lengthen the school day are often a component among a wider set of actions of school reform. Other studies in Chile argue that the extension of the school day has a positive impact on the academic achievement of the students, as measured by the national test (SIMCE). In the same direction, another study conducted in Argentina holds that with the implementation of this policy there were some improvements in indicators of schooling.

The results are not completely consistent across studies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The differences will depend in part on how effectively extra school time is used. More research in the region is required to analyze the specific effect that this type of strategies has on students' learning outcomes.

How secure is the evidence?

The evidence is moderately secure. Decisions to lengthen the school year or school day are often one component of wider approaches to school reform. This makes attributing any learning gains to the additional time itself difficult. Gains are not consistent across studies, indicating that additional time alone is not enough — it must be used effectively. Discrete or targeted programmes are more likely to have been evaluated robustly than other ways of extending learning time, and even here there is substantial variation in impact.

Most of the evaluations of extending school time come from the USA. The reviews all note the need for more rigorous evaluations with outcome measures that demonstrate direct impact on learning.

What are the costs?

The costs are estimated as moderate. This involves economic efforts that vary by country and by educational level due to the differentiated costs between primary and secondary education. Another cost to consider is the training of educators to work extra-programmatic activities in addition to school hours.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Planning to get the most from the extra time is important. It should meet pupils' needs and build on their capabilities.
2. After school programmes with a clear structure, a strong link to the curriculum, and well-qualified and well-trained staff are more clearly linked to academic benefits than other types of extended hours provision.
3. After school programmes could give the opportunity to carry out some more intensive tuition (see entries for One to one or Small Group Tuition)
4. Enrichment activities without a specific focus on learning can have an impact on attainment, but the link is not well-established and the impact of different interventions can vary a great deal (see entries for Sports or Arts participation)
5. Have you explored how the quality of teaching and learning during school time can be improved? It might be cheaper and more efficient to try introducing more evidence-based programmes or practices into the existing school day first.

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