

Chapter 5:

Social Factors

The total balance sheet for policy-makers must take account of social as well as economic and educational factors. This chapter begins by noting the potential impact of multiple-shift systems on social equity. It then turns to questions of ‘restless out-of-school youth’.

1. Shift Systems and Social Equity

Multiple-shift systems can greatly contribute to social equity, for they permit governments to increase access to education at a moderate cost. Governments may be faced by a choice between:

- (a) single-shift schooling for some and no schooling for others,
or
- (b) multiple-shift schooling for everybody.

The second option is much more equitable. It may require some sacrifice of quality for pupils who would have had places in Option (a), but society’s resources are spread to cover more people.

Multiple-shift systems can also help low-income groups in other ways:

- Some families are too poor to allow members to spend the whole day in school, for they cannot afford to lose the income that children and youths could gain from working. Systems of half-day schooling reduce this problem. They allow young people to attend school *and* earn a living.
- Even when young people from poor families do not directly earn money, they are often needed to look after younger

children. Systems of shift schooling may enable young people to undertake domestic duties in turn: while one is in school, another is out of school, and vice versa.

- Poor children are also excluded from school by high fees. Multiple-shift schooling reduces costs, so can also reduce school fees.

Nevertheless, it is rare for *everybody* to attend a multiple-shift school. Unless policy-makers are careful, multiple-session schooling reinforces social inequalities. It is important to consider the equity implications of different strategies:

- * *Rural versus Urban.* Rural schools are often disadvantaged by comparison with urban schools. They have less reliable supplies of books and other materials, they are less likely to have well-qualified teachers, they may have to operate multi-grade classes, and in poor countries they may not have electricity or other amenities.

On the other hand, Chapter 1 noted that rural schools are less likely to have multiple-shift systems. A policy which only requires urban schools to have multiple shifts could help compensate for other inequities in the system.

- * *Rich versus Poor.* Inequities also exist *within* urban areas. Rich communities are usually more influential than the poor ones, and may protest against their children attending multiple-shift schools. Multiple-shift systems reinforce inequalities if they are only found in poor communities. Social justice requires multiple-shift systems to be operated in rich communities too.
- * *Academically Bright versus Academically Weak.* In Trinidad & Tobago, only junior secondary schools (Forms 1–3) operate double shifts. Full secondary schools (Forms 1–5) have single shifts. Allocation is based on examination results: pupils with good results go to full secondary schools, and the rest go to junior secondary schools.

In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that society associates double-shift schooling with low academic achievement; and in so far as double shifting imposes constraints on



single
session



double
session



triple
session

A system of single-session schooling may force authorities to exclude many children from school. A double-session system permits higher enrolments and fewer rejections. From the viewpoint of equity, a triple-session system might be the best of all.

the teachers, junior secondary schools suffer a double handicap.

Research has shown that academic performance is not just determined by children's in-born ability; it is also determined by home support and learning conditions. Thus, while at first sight the system in Trinidad & Tobago only differentiates between bright and dull children, in practice it also differentiates between rich and poor. Full secondary schools draw mainly from high socio-economic groups, while junior secondary schools draw mainly from low socio-economic groups.

If policy-makers wished to make the system more equitable, they would reverse it. The full-day schools would either operate double shifts or select only the low academic achievers; and the junior secondary schools would either operate single shifts or select only the high academic achievers. However, this policy change would be political dynamite. It would challenge the privileges of the rich, and would cause strong opposition from influential groups. It would probably be more politically realistic simply to ensure that *all* schools are either single-shift or double-shift.

- * *Desirable versus Undesirable Sessions.* Inequities may also exist within multiple-shift schools. Morning sessions are usually considered more desirable than afternoon ones. It might be unfair for some children to benefit from morning sessions for the whole of their school careers while other children suffer from afternoon sessions for the whole of their school careers.

This problem can be reduced through systems of internal organisation discussed in Chapter 6. For example, if a double-session primary school has Grades 1, 3 and 5 in the morning and Grades 2, 4 and 6 in the afternoon, then all children alternate between morning and afternoon sessions as they progress through the system. Alternatively, schools might have Grades 1–6 in the morning and parallel Grades 1–6 in the afternoon, but could then require classes to rotate from time to time.

Teachers in multiple-session systems also tend to prefer morning sessions. Policy-makers should guard against the danger of good teachers all gravitating to the morning ses-

sion. This requires deliberate effort to secure even distribution of good staff. A schedule of teacher rotation like the schedule of pupil rotation might help to make the system more fair.

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 * *How Often should Pupils Alternate between Sessions?* *
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* *Multiple-shift systems can be made more fair if pupils alternate* *
 * *between different sessions. Pupils who begin with morning classes* *
 * *are later asked to attend afternoon classes, and vice versa.* *
 *

* *The question is then how often the students should alternate. Every* *
 * *month? Every term? Every year?* *
 *

* *The question has no fixed answer. Yearly rotation is perhaps the* *
 * *most simple and the least disruptive of family patterns. When classes* *
 * *alternate too often, parents get confused and families find it hard to* *
 * *settle into routines.* *
 *

* *However some authorities advocate more frequent rotation to pro-* *
 * *mote both equity and variety. Zambian multiple-shift schools are* *
 * *expected to rotate classes every term, many schools in Laos rotate* *
 * *classes every month, and one report in Ghana has recommended* *
 * *classes to rotate every two weeks.* *
 *

2. Problems of 'Restless Youth'

Chapter 3 pointed out that multiple-shift systems may reduce the length of a school day, which releases young people for productive work in the economy. In this case, there is an economic benefit. But in some societies school-aged children cannot find work. Either there is no work, because unemployment is too high, or labour laws prohibit employment of youths under a specified age.

In the latter cases, multiple-shift systems may contribute to problems of 'restless youth' and delinquency. When young peo-

 * ***Multiple Shifts and Youth Indiscipline: Contrasting Views*** *
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* *The double-shift system in Jamaica has been criticised for allowing* *
 * *adolescent students too much free time, "which is used in carrying* *
 * *out acts of vandalism, drug use and illicit sex". Similar comments* *
 * *may be heard in many other countries, ranging from Hong Kong to* *
 * *the USA.* *

* *However, the fact that some young people get into trouble does not* *
 * *imply that they are all delinquent. Many young people use their free* *
 * *time in highly productive ways, engaging in worthwhile hobbies,* *
 * *earning money, and helping their families.* *

* *Authorities must therefore assess these contrasting possibilities in the* *
 * *context of their specific circumstances. Planners cannot assume that* *
 * *extra free time is always good. Nor can they assume that it is* *
 * *always bad.* *

ple attend school for shorter periods each day, they have more time to hang around in the streets and get bored. Even if the school day is not shorter, pupils in multiple-session systems are free for the whole morning or the whole afternoon. In contrast to the schedule for single-session pupils, the schedule for multiple-session pupils does not occupy the central part of the day. This means that they have a longer stretch of time in which to get bored. Problems are increased when multiple-shift systems reduce contact between teachers and pupils, thereby restricting the effectiveness of school-based guidance and support.

To some extent, the accusation against the school system may be unfair: it expects schools to solve a problem which has nothing to do with education. School authorities could rightly protest against the idea that the function of schools is to keep young people off the streets.

Yet although this is not the main function of schools, it is undeniably one role that they play. Policy-makers have to weigh up the costs and benefits of:

- a) insisting on full-day schooling in order to keep young people occupied for longer periods and for the central part of each day (while also giving the schools sufficient resources to make the longer school day meaningful),
- b) retaining half-day schooling and using the resources saved for other social welfare programmes to help the young people, or
- c) simply neglecting the issue, implementing neither of these options.