

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 double-shift systems on social equity. It then turns to questions of 'restless out-of-school youth'.

1. Shift Systems and Social Equity

Double-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:

- single-shift schooling for some and no schooling for others, or
- double-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 the first option, but society's resources are spread to cover more people.

Double-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 still earn a living.
- Even when young people from poor families do not directly earn money, they are often needed to look after younger children. Double-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. Double-shift schooling reduces costs, so can also reduce school fees.

Nevertheless, it is rare for everybody to attend a double-shift school.



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.

Unless policy-makers are careful, double-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 multigrade 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 double-shift systems. A policy which only requires urban schools to have double 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 poor ones, and may protest against their children attending double-shift schools. Double-shift systems reinforce inequalities if they are only found in poor communities. Social justice requires double-shift systems to be operated in rich communities too.
- *Different Racial Groups.* Under apartheid in colonial Zimbabwe (then called Southern Rhodesia), different education systems served the European, Asian, Coloured and Black populations. Shortly before Independence in 1980, the schools for European, Asian and Coloured populations were renamed Group A schools, and those for Blacks were renamed Group B schools. The categories were unified after Independence, but real racial integration was slow and major funding disparities persisted. Reflecting these disparities, two decades after Independence double-shift schooling was much more common in former Group B than in former Group A schools. Namibia faced a similar problem. Double-shift schooling in these two countries was perceived to perpetuate racial as well as class inequalities. It would have been preferable to have had the same system for schools serving all communities.
- *Academically Bright versus Academically Weak.* During the 1980s and 1990s, in Trinidad & Tobago only junior secondary schools (Forms 1-3) operated double shifts. Full secondary schools (Forms 1-5) had single shifts. Allocation was based on examination results: pupils with good results went to full secondary schools, and the rest went to junior secondary schools.

In such circumstances, it was hardly surprising that society associated double-shift schooling with low academic achievement; and in so far as double shifting imposed constraints on the teachers, junior secondary schools suffered a double handicap.

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

If policy-makers had wished to make the system more equitable, they would have reversed it. The full-day schools would have either operated double shifts or selected only the low academic achievers; and the junior secondary schools would have either operated single shifts or selected only the high academic achievers. However, this policy change would have been political dynamite. It would have challenged the privileges of the rich, and would have caused strong opposition from influential groups. It would probably have been more politically realistic simply to ensure that all schools were either single-shift or double-shift.

- *Desirable versus Undesirable Sessions.* Inequities may also exist within double-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 double-session systems also tend to prefer morning sessions. Policy-makers should guard against the danger of good

teachers all gravitating to the morning session. 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.

Box 11: How Often should Pupils Alternate between Sessions?

Double-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 promote both equity and variety. Zambian double-shift schools are expected to rotate classes every term, many schools in Laos rotate classes every month, one report in Ghana has recommended classes to rotate every two weeks, and some classes in The Gambia and Zimbabwe rotate every week.

2. Problems of 'Restless Youth'

Chapter 3 pointed out that double-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, double-shift systems may contribute to problems of 'restless youth' and delinquency. When young people 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 double-session systems are free for the whole morning or the whole afternoon. In contrast to the schedule for single-session pupils, the schedule for double-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 double-shift systems reduce contact between teachers and pupils, thereby restricting the effectiveness of school-based guidance and support.

Box 12: Double Shifts and Youth Indiscipline – Contrasting Views

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 societies, ranging from Nigeria to the India.

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. But nor can they assume that it is always bad.

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:

- 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),
- retaining half-day schooling and using the resources saved for other social welfare programmes to help the young people, or
- simply neglecting the issue, implementing neither of these options.