

Does Extending the School Day Improve Educational Outcomes? An Umbrella Review of Global Evidence

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Abstract: Extending the school day has been widely promoted as a strategy to improve educational outcomes and reduce inequalities; however, evidence regarding its effectiveness remains mixed. This study provides a comprehensive synthesis of the literature through an umbrella review of systematic reviews and meta-analyses published between 2002 and 2024.

A total of 31 reviews were analyzed using data from Scopus and Web of Science. Findings indicate that extended school time is associated with a range of intended outcomes, including improvements in academic achievement, physical well-being, and educational equity. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is highly dependent on contextual and pedagogical factors.

The results highlight that extending instructional time alone is insufficient to produce meaningful educational improvements. Instead, programme design, implementation quality, and alignment with pedagogical goals are critical determinants of success.

This study provides evidence-based insights for policymakers and educational stakeholders, emphasizing the need for structured, equitable, and context-sensitive approaches to extended learning time.

Keywords: Extended school day; learning time; educational outcomes; educational equity; educational policy; umbrella review

ES ¿Mejora la ampliación de la jornada escolar los resultados educativos? Evidencia global desde un umbrella review

Resumen: La ampliación de la jornada escolar se ha promovido ampliamente como una estrategia para mejorar los resultados educativos y reducir desigualdades; sin embargo, la evidencia sobre su efectividad es heterogénea. Este estudio presenta una síntesis integral de la literatura mediante un umbrella review de revisiones sistemáticas y metaanálisis publicados entre 2002 y 2024.

Se analizaron 31 revisiones utilizando bases de datos indexadas en Scopus y Web of Science. Los resultados muestran que la ampliación del tiempo escolar se asocia a mejoras en distintos ámbitos, como el rendimiento académico, el bienestar físico y la equidad educativa. No obstante, su efectividad depende en gran medida de factores contextuales y pedagógicos.

Los hallazgos ponen de manifiesto que el aumento del tiempo escolar por sí solo no garantiza mejoras educativas significativas. Por el contrario, el diseño de los programas, la calidad de su implementación y su alineación con objetivos pedagógicos son factores determinantes.

Este estudio aporta evidencia relevante para la toma de decisiones en política educativa, destacando la necesidad de enfoques estructurados, equitativos y adaptados al contexto en la ampliación del tiempo de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Jornada escolar extendida; tiempo de aprendizaje; resultados educativos; equidad educativa; política educativa.

Sumario: 1. Introduction 2. What Do We Mean When We Talk About the Extension of the School Day? 3. Methodology 4. Results 5. Discussion 6. Conclusions 7. References

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1. Introduction

The extension of the school day refers to the increase in the amount of time students spend engaged in educational activities at school, whether through the lengthening of regular instructional hours (Hidalgo-Chacón et al., 2022; Assis et al., 2014), the incorporation of activities offered after the end of the regular school schedule—commonly known as complementary or extracurricular activities—or the modification of the school calendar to include additional instructional days (Silva, 2007). Within this concept, multiple modalities can be included, ranging from an increase in hours dedicated to formal instruction to the implementation of comprehensive programs focusing on artistic, physical, technological, or scientific development (Baptista et al., 2020; Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2006; Xia et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Thus, the time children spend in school becomes a key factor influencing the quality of teaching and the learning opportunities available to students (Aronson & Zimmerman, 1999; Colomo et al., 2016; Martinic, 2015; Reimers, 1999; Versellino, 2016). Numerous studies argue that increased school time can expand learning opportunities, strengthen social skills, and support more equitable educational trajectories (Colomo et al., 2016). However, simply extending the schedule does not guarantee improved outcomes; its impact depends on the pedagogical quality of the activities offered and the coherence between time, curriculum, and educational objectives.

UNESCO (2022) emphasizes the urgency of forging a new social contract for education—one capable of addressing contemporary challenges related to equity, sustainability, and social justice, and responding to the needs established in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which calls for ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality learning opportunities for all by 2030 (United Nations [UN], 2023).

In this context, the extension of the school day has been adopted in numerous countries as a public policy measure aimed at improving educational quality and addressing structural inequalities. Nonetheless, Martinic (2015) warns that merely increasing the amount of time students spend at school is insufficient; it is essential to reconfigure the curriculum, strengthen the role of teachers, and recognize students as active subjects with interests, capacities, and rights at the center of the educational process (De Zubiría, 2006).

Various social actors—governments, researchers, and international organizations—have debated the scope and impact of extended school time, particularly in relation to:

- the improvement of academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2006; Lester et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2024);
- the improvement of physical and nutritional health (Beets et al., 2009; Hodder et al., 2022; Komro et al., 2013; Woods et al., 2022); and
- the reduction of gaps and inequalities (Hidalgo-Chacón et al., 2022; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018; Scott-Little et al., 2002; Taheri & Welsh, 2016; Weaver et al., 2012; Yoon, 2023).

Numerous empirical studies have examined one or more of these dimensions, evidencing highly diverse results depending on the context, purpose, and approach adopted, which highlights the need for a more rigorous analysis to assess whether findings can be generalized to different educational environments (Amber-Montes et al., 2024; Hidalgo-Chacón et al., 2022; Kremer et al., 2015; Lauer et al., 2006). These studies offer broad perspectives on the effectiveness of extended school-day policies but also reveal methodological limitations and gaps, such as the scarcity of longitudinal studies, the absence of common evaluation indicators, limited attention to the perspectives of key actors (students, families, teachers, administrators), and insufficient consideration of contextual factors. These gaps justify the need for an integrative review that synthesizes accumulated knowledge, identifies emerging trends, and informs decision-making in educational policy.

For these reasons, a comprehensive mapping of the existing literature is essential. This article addresses this need through an Umbrella Review, a methodological approach proposed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Aromataris et al., 2015), which synthesizes findings from multiple systematic reviews into a single, overarching analysis, especially useful in fields characterized by broad scope or heterogeneous evidence. The search was conducted in Scopus and Web of Science, resulting in a total of 31 systematic reviews and meta-analyses published between 2002 and 2024.

Therefore, the central purpose of this study is to identify the main international trends on the extension of the school day and to analyze the educational needs these policies aim to address, guided by the following questions:

- What types of reviews have been conducted to analyze extended school-day programs?
- What trends emerge in these reviews regarding the focus of extended school-day initiatives?
- What educational needs do extended school-day programs seek to address?
- What methodological elements contribute to rigor in reviews of extended school-day programs?
- What unresolved issues are highlighted in these reviews?

2. What Do We Mean When We Talk About the Extension of the School Day?

The scientific literature associates the extension of the school day with a wide variety of interventions and programs designed to increase the amount of time students spend in their learning environments, or the time they devote to developing social and emotional skills outside the traditional school schedule—such as during vacations, school breaks, or weekends (Bastable et al., 2023; Christensen et al., 2023; Woods et al., 2022). However, these interventions differ significantly in terms of duration, organization, objectives, pedagogical

approaches, implementation processes, and the needs and interests considered during design. As a result, the concept of extended school time is diverse and multifaceted. In other words, it can be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the specific context and the focus used to address students' needs. Nonetheless, its core definition remains consistent: increasing the amount of time children and adolescents spend in educational environments.

Among the most common approaches are *after-school programs (ASPs)*, whose primary purpose is to provide a safe and structured space for students to participate in physical, recreational, or academic activities (Durlak et al., 2010; Taheri & Welsh, 2016; Weaver et al., 2012). ASPs are defined as structured and supervised programs that operate outside regular school hours but throughout the entire academic year. They may take place during weekdays or weekends (Instituto de Evaluación, 2009; Parra et al., 2013; Argüelles, 2016). Programs that operate only during the summer or within the school schedule are excluded from this category, as ASPs are intended to complement regular academic programs and provide opportunities for developing specific skills, overcoming academic difficulties, and strengthening social skills (Christensen et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2010; Kremer et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2020; Scott-Little et al., 2002; Valentine et al., 2010; Weaver et al., 2012).

A second common approach is the implementation of club-based structures, which complement formal education by offering additional learning opportunities and spaces for pursuing personal interests that cannot be fully developed during regular instructional time. Examples include reading clubs, language clubs, science clubs, mathematics clubs, arts, communication, or leadership groups (Hidalgo-Chacón et al., 2022). These clubs often hold regular sessions once or twice a week, and may include socioemotional components as well as specialized instruction aligned with the club's focus (Dinarte & Egana-delSol, 2024).

Another modality includes summer or vacation programs, which are initiatives offering educational and recreational activities outside the regular school calendar, typically during vacation periods or school breaks. Their primary objective is to provide a safe and structured environment where students can continue their academic and social development, prevent learning loss during breaks, and reduce social risks associated with the absence of adult supervision (Assis et al., 2014).

A further approach to extending school time occurs within the regular school schedule itself. This corresponds to *full-day school models*, often referred to as *extended school day*, *full-time school*, or *single-shift school* (Battistin & Meroni, 2016; Bellei, 2009; Figlio et al., 2018; Ovalle-Ramírez et al., 2018). In this model, dual shifts (morning and afternoon) are eliminated and replaced with a continuous, longer schedule that increases students' time at school. These models often allocate additional hours to subjects such as mathematics, language, or science and are typically implemented as part of broader educational reforms intended to standardize instructional hours across public and private schools (Inter-American Development Bank [IDB], 2024).

In summary, the extension of the school day is a multifaceted educational strategy that goes beyond simply increasing classroom time. It encompasses a variety of programs and interventions that aim to foster academic, personal, and social development (Delors, 1996).

3. Methodology

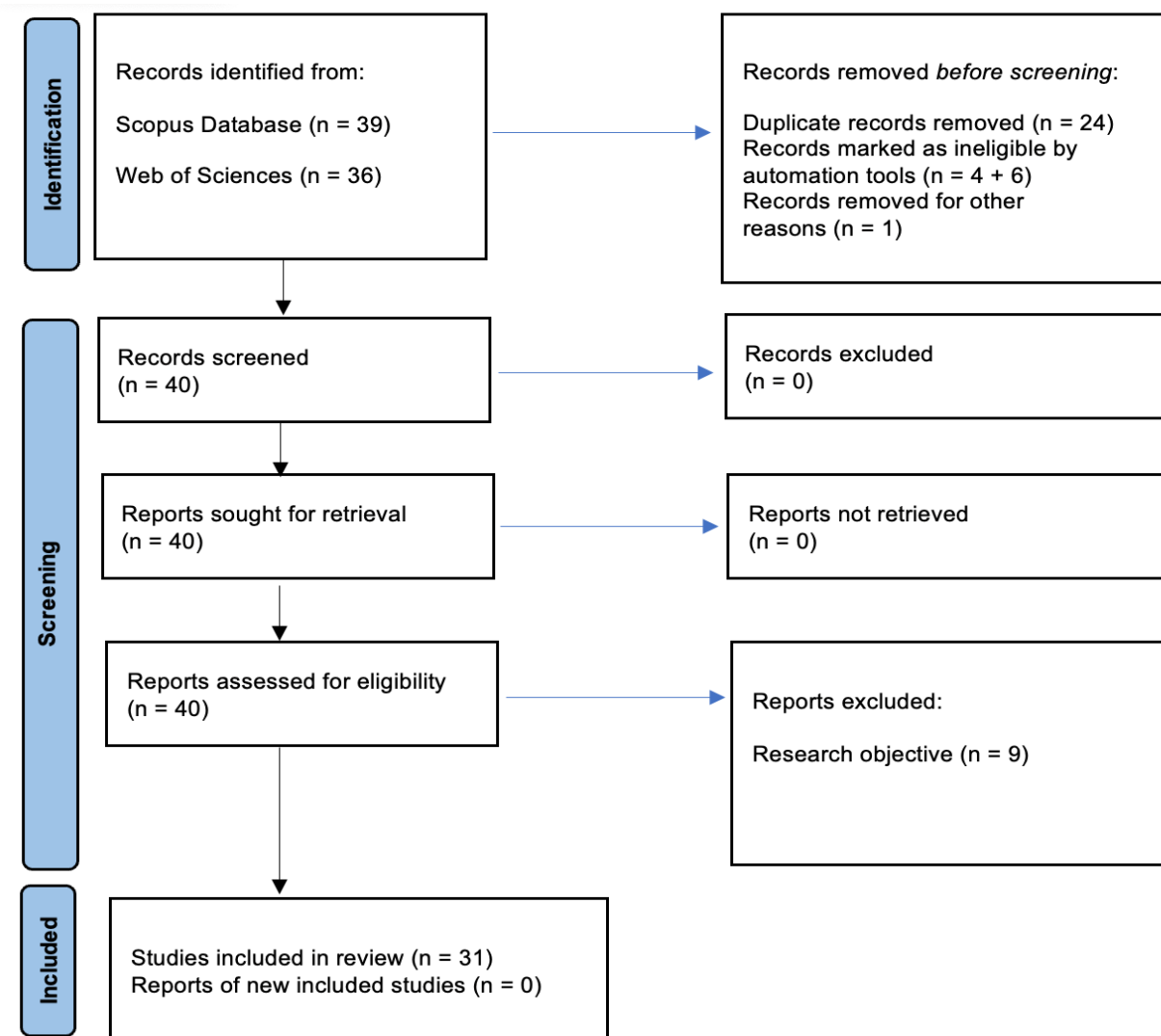
To develop this article, state-of-the-art reviews, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses addressing programs related to the extension of the school day were examined in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. These databases are widely used in academic research due to their rigorous indexing of high-quality publications and their multidisciplinary coverage. According to Pranckute (2021), Web of Science and Scopus are considered the two leading bibliographic databases in contemporary academic research, as they enable the identification of research trends, author collaborations, and impact metrics such as the impact factor and the h-index. Their use ensures that studies are grounded in verified sources, thereby avoiding the inclusion of low-quality literature or materials lacking robust academic review.

The search for relevant studies incorporated Keywords: such as “school day extension,” “after-school programs,” “extended school day,” “extended learning time,” and “extracurricular programs,” combined with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to broaden search coverage. Included studies had to meet specific criteria: they must address programs implemented at the primary or secondary school level and be published as systematic reviews or meta-analyses in English or Spanish. These types of articles synthesize and critically analyze previous research to provide an overview of existing knowledge and propose future directions for investigation.

Rother (2007) highlights that systematic reviews do not present original data; instead, their purpose is to identify trends and gaps in the scientific literature. Accordingly, primary studies, opinion articles, and “grey literature”—including descriptive analyses, narrative reviews, literature reviews, or quantitative analyses lacking the rigor required for review articles—were excluded. In line with Grant and Booth (2009), the selected texts were those that synthesize prior research through systematic methods and offer interpretive analyses of accumulated evidence.

The review process followed the guidelines of the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), ensuring systematic study selection, reducing publication bias, and supporting transparency and reproducibility. This approach provides a comprehensive view of the characteristics associated with extended school-day programs and ensures the inclusion of studies with high methodological rigor.

The database search generated the following results for the period 2002–2024: 39 articles in Scopus and 36 in Web of Science.



Note. Adapted from Haddaway et al. (2022).

Figure 1. Identification of studies through databases and records. PRISMA (2020)

For this analysis, the **Umbrella Review** methodology was used. This methodological approach synthesizes and evaluates the available scientific evidence on a given topic (Hunt et al., 2018). Umbrella Reviews focus exclusively on reviewing prior reviews—such as systematic reviews and meta-analyses—rather than primary studies (Pollock et al., 2021). Thus, an Umbrella Review provides a comprehensive, hierarchical perspective of the existing knowledge base (Aromataris & Munn, 2020).

The studies identified were filtered in several stages. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to eliminate irrelevant studies. Next, full-text evaluations were conducted to ensure that studies met the inclusion criteria, using the **AMSTAR 2** tool—a methodological quality assessment instrument for systematic reviews (Shea et al., 2017). This process determined the suitability of each study for inclusion in the present analysis.

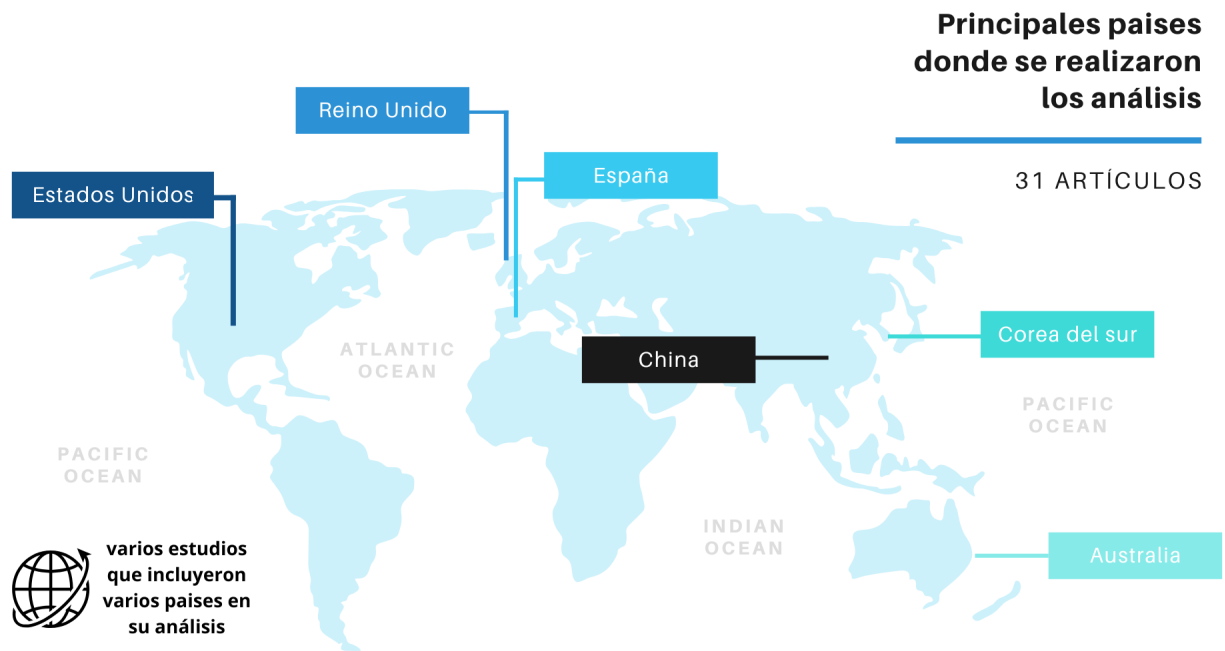
In Scopus, four studies were excluded because they were conference papers or book chapters, and one was removed due to duplication. In Web of Science, six records were excluded because they were meeting abstracts or correction notices. After comparing results from both databases, **24 duplicate articles** were identified and removed.

Additionally, two studies were excluded because they focused on higher education participants, and one was removed because its emphasis was on transparency in meta-analyses related to computer-assisted language learning (CALL), without addressing extended school-day programs or extracurricular activities.

In total, **31 articles** were included in the final analysis, comprising 17 studies conducted in the United States, seven global studies including multiple countries, and seven studies conducted in the United Kingdom, South Korea, Spain, and Australia.

4. Results

The analysis of the systematic reviews included in this study references research conducted in different regions of the world (see Figure 2), with a predominance of studies carried out in the United States and other international contexts.



Note. Author's elaboration based on database consultation.

Figure 2. Map of the location of the main countries analyzed

Table 1. Articles Included in the Review

Authors	Topic	Methodology	Country
Amber, Morales-Valero, & Prieto (2024)	Inclusion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in compulsory secondary education in Spain.	Systematic literature review following PRISMA 2020.	Spain
Bano, Atif, & Mehdi (2024)	Potential effectiveness of educational robotics for developing 21st-century skills in young learners.	Systematic review using PRISMA to analyze 20 relevant articles.	Global (multiple countries)
Christensen, Kremer, Poon, & Rhodes (2023)	Effects of extracurricular programs on youth with marginalized identities.	Multilevel meta-analysis of 615 effects from 56 studies.	United States
Bastable et al. (2023)	Empowerment of vulnerable youth through leadership programs.	Scoping review using PRISMA-ScR.	Global
Woods et al. (2022)	Correlates of physical activity and sedentary behavior in children participating in before- and after-school care.	Systematic review with correlational analysis based on an ecological-social framework.	Global
Hodder et al. (2022)	Interventions to prevent obesity in school-aged children (6-18 years).	Systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials.	Global
Farrington, Gaffney, & White (2022)	Effectiveness of 12 types of interventions to reduce juvenile offending and antisocial behavior.	Systematic review of reviews following Campbell Collaboration standards.	United Kingdom
Zhang & Liu (2022)	Effectiveness of private tutoring on academic achievement.	Three-level meta-analysis with robust variance estimation.	Global (with focus on Asia)
Neil-Sztramko, Caldwell, & Dobbins (2021)	Impact of school-based programs on children's physical activity and fitness.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials.	Global
Lester, Chow, & Melton (2020)	Effects of after-school programs on academic and social development.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of 130 effect sizes across 30 studies.	United States
Lin, Chen, & Liou (2017)	Quality and transparency in CALL meta-analyses.	Content analysis of 15 meta-analyses.	Global
Mears & Jago (2016)	Effectiveness of after-school interventions to increase moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of 15 studies.	United Kingdom / Global

Authors	Topic	Methodology	Country
Melendez-Torres et al. (2016)	Impact of positive youth development programs on substance use reduction.	Systematic review with quality appraisal and narrative synthesis.	Anglophone countries
Taheri & Welsh (2016)	Effectiveness of after-school programs for delinquency prevention.	Systematic review and meta-analysis of 17 studies.	United States / Global
Arundell et al. (2016)	Correlates of after-school sedentary behavior in children and adolescents.	Systematic review.	Australia / English-speaking countries
Ajja et al. (2015)	Evaluation of environmental audit tools to promote physical activity and healthy eating.	Systematic review of literature and policy documents.	United States
Kremer et al. (2015)	Effects of after-school programs on attendance and externalizing behaviors among at-risk youth.	Systematic review and meta-analysis with robust variance methods.	United States
Evans, Owens, & Bunford (2014)	Evidence-based psychosocial treatments for ADHD.	Systematic review of interventions.	Predominantly United States
Maynard et al. (2013)	Fidelity of implementation in after-school interventions.	Systematic review with fidelity assessment.	United States
Beets et al. (2011)	Review of nutritional policies for snacks served in after-school programs.	Systematic review.	United States
Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan (2010)	Meta-analysis of after-school programs promoting personal and social skills.	Meta-analysis with SAFE framework.	United States
Valentine et al. (2010)	Methodological quality of syntheses on after-school program effects.	Critical methodological analysis of 12 systematic reviews.	United States
Beets et al. (2009)	Meta-analysis of after-school program effects on physical activity and fitness.	Meta-analysis of 11 interventions.	United States
Lauer et al. (2006)	Meta-analysis of after-school and out-of-school programs for at-risk students in reading and mathematics.	Meta-analysis of 35 studies.	United States
Scott-Little et al. (2002)	Meta-evaluation of methodologies assessing after-school programs.	Meta-evaluation and narrative synthesis.	United States
Xia, Bentley, Fan, & Tai (2024)	Effects of informal STEM education on attitudes and interest.	Quantitative meta-analysis.	United States
Zhang, Xu, & Zhang (2024)	Impact of after-school programs on K-12 students' creativity.	Experimental meta-analysis.	China / Global
Muzaffar et al. (2024)	Systematic review of interventions to improve children's diets.	Systematic review.	United States
Yoon (2023)	Educational outcomes of after-school programs in Korea.	Meta-analysis.	South Korea
Baptista et al. (2020)	Teaching personal and social responsibility in extracurricular contexts.	Systematic review.	United States
Komro et al. (2013)	Community-based strategies to improve child health.	Systematic review and narrative analysis.	United States

Note. Author's elaboration based on database consultation.

Narrative Synthesis of Results

The reviewed articles reveal a clear trend: most research has been conducted in Anglophone contexts, particularly in the United States. These studies highlight the academic, social, and emotional effects of after-school programs (ASPs), especially for vulnerable youth. Findings suggest that ASPs can yield positive—though generally modest—effects on academic achievement, prosocial behavior, socioemotional well-being, and physical health (Christensen et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer et al., 2006).

However, the methodological quality of the reviews varies considerably. Studies such as Valentine et al. (2010) and Scott-Little et al. (2002) identify significant limitations, including weak implementation fidelity, insufficient rigor in evaluation designs, and inconsistent measurement practices. Maynard et al. (2013) also note limited attention to implementation fidelity, a critical factor for interpreting program outcomes.

Studies from Asia and Australia reveal a growing focus on STEM development and socioemotional learning through extended school-day initiatives (Lin et al., 2017; Zhang & Liu, 2022). These interventions range from educational robotics and private tutoring (Bano et al., 2024; Zhang & Liu, 2022) to physical activity promotion and youth leadership programs (Woods et al., 2022; Bastable et al., 2023). Despite thematic diversity, these programs share a common emphasis on students' holistic development—cognitive, physical, and social. Findings consistently show small but positive effects across interventions.

European studies (Spain, the UK, Portugal) highlight the link between extended school time, educational equity, and students' comprehensive development (Hidalgo-Chacón et al., 2022; Amber-Montes et al., 2024).

After-school programs emerge as a recurrent tool for optimizing extended learning opportunities, although results vary according to objectives, pedagogical approaches, and student characteristics (Mears & Jago, 2016; Yoon, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Evidence also warns that excessive academic workload without a balanced mix of recreational or socioemotional activities may lead to fatigue and reduced school well-being (Komro et al., 2013). Several reviews call for an approach based on “extended well-being”, where additional time is used to foster socioemotional learning and meaningful experiences rather than merely reinforcing traditional academics (Amber-Montes et al., 2024).

Studies from Spain, Australia, and South Korea demonstrate that the impact of extended school-day programs depends heavily on program structure, clarity of goals, and contextual alignment.

Overall, findings confirm that extending school time alone does not guarantee improved academic performance or holistic development. Effectiveness depends on rigorous pedagogical planning, contextualized implementation, and systematic evaluation (Mears & Jago, 2016; Yoon, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Moreover, thematic fragmentation and the lack of curricular integration limit the transformative potential of these interventions.

5. Discussion

Despite the breadth and variety of systematic reviews examined in this Umbrella Review, several recurring limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings. The most significant of these is the high heterogeneity of research designs. The reviewed studies differ considerably in their inclusion criteria, definitions of what constitutes extended school time, and the indicators used to evaluate implementation and outcomes. The lack of standardized instruments for measuring comparable results makes it difficult to conduct robust meta-analyses and limits the comparability of findings across contexts (Maynard et al., 2013; Valentine et al., 2010).

Moreover, most reviews focus on short-term interventions, which complicates the assessment of long-term sustainability and the durability of observed effects. A notable geographical bias also emerges: the majority of studies are concentrated in North America and Western Europe, while regions such as Latin America, Africa, and South Asia remain underrepresented in the evidence base.

This review highlights that the extension of the school day—particularly through extracurricular or after-school programs—does not constitute a uniform pedagogical strategy. It is not a universally structured or automatic intervention; rather, its impact largely depends on the quality of pedagogical design, clarity of objectives, educational level of participants, and, importantly, the sociocultural and institutional context in which it is implemented. While numerous studies report consistent benefits in areas such as academic performance, socioemotional development, and school engagement (Christensen et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2024), these effects tend to be moderate and highly dependent on contextual factors (Bastable et al., 2023; Maynard et al., 2013).

This underscores the importance of developing structured, sustained, and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches (Durlak et al., 2010; Kremer et al., 2015). A persistent disconnection is often observed between the theoretical design of interventions and their contextualized application in schools. In many cases, the moderate and heterogeneous effects reported are associated with limited integration of multicomponent approaches, low levels of student participation, and weak intersectoral coordination (Bastable et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2017).

Additionally, the review reveals the absence of Latin American programs in most meta-analyses, despite the existence of nationally significant policies such as *Jornada Escolar Completa* in Chile, *Tempo Integral* programs in Brazil, and *Jornada Única* in Colombia. These initiatives have been widely studied within their respective countries and present important challenges related to implementation, equity, coverage, and institutional sustainability (Bellei, 2009; Martinic, 2015; Versellino, 2016; Franco, 2018).

Evidence from these regional programs shows that schools with greater resources achieve more effective outcomes, whereas schools in rural or high-vulnerability settings tend to extend hours without the necessary materials, infrastructure, or qualified personnel (Bellei, 2009; Martinic, 2015). This reinforces the notion that equity is not determined solely by the distribution of time, but by the pedagogical, material, and social conditions that frame its use.

If inconsistencies persist in the way “success” in extended school-day programs is conceptualized and operationalized, educational systems will continue to face challenges in constructing a consolidated theoretical base and in scaling and institutionalizing best practices.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this analysis indicate that merely extending the school day is insufficient. A meaningful transformation requires rethinking the purpose, content, and conditions under which additional time is implemented. Therefore, public policies must prioritize equitable access, the establishment of quality standards, and the development of rigorous and participatory evaluation mechanisms.

At the institutional level, schools could use extended time to strengthen community engagement, foster meaningful learning experiences, and promote students’ holistic development, ensuring that additional time is not used to replicate routine daily practices but rather to generate differentiated and enriching opportunities.

Finally, this review identifies several pressing challenges for future research. There is a need to advance toward more robust and comparable methodological designs, strengthen the theoretical and ethical

frameworks guiding interventions, and incorporate the voices of students, families, and communities in all stages of program design and evaluation. Only through such approaches will it be possible to fully harness the potential of extended school time and transform it into a tool for a more equitable, inclusive, and transformative education.

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