

Study of temporal organization and stress in young Cuban teachers¹

Estudio de la organización temporal y el estrés en maestros jóvenes cubanos¹

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ABSTRACT

The limitations in the development of temporal organization can cause manifestations of stress that, if not attended to in a timely manner, can damage mental health. The article analyzes the characteristics of the temporal organization in three young teachers in elementary school education in the city of Holguín and they have symptoms of stress. The paradigm that guides the research is qualitative and the methodological strategy was based on the study of multiple cases. The following techniques were used to collect information: the everyday stress inventory, the pie, the composition and the semi-structured interview. The main results indicate that teachers spend their time mainly on work, family care and housework. They have never participated

RESUMEN

Las limitaciones en el desarrollo de la organización temporal pueden provocar manifestaciones de estrés que si no son atendidas oportunamente pueden dañar la salud mental. El artículo analiza las características de la habilidad “organización temporal” en tres maestros jóvenes que ejercen como docentes de la enseñanza primaria en el municipio Holguín y presentan síntomas de estrés. El paradigma que guía la pesquisa es el cualitativo y la estrategia metodológica se basó en el estudio de casos múltiples. Se utilizaron para la recogida de información las técnicas siguientes: el inventario de estrés cotidiano, el pastel, la composición y la entrevista semiestructurada. Los principales resultados indican que los maestros emplean su tiempo fundamentalmente en el trabajo, la atención a la familia y las labores domésticas. Nunca han participado en capacitaciones o entrenamientos

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in trainings that promoted the development of the skill, therefore, they learned through their experience and/or through the influence of their families. They do not show a complete development of the organization of the time that allows them: the breaking of routines, the adequate conjugation of the important and the urgent, etc., for which they present symptoms of stress that compromise their mental health.

Keywords: Temporal organization. Skill. Stress. Young teachers. Cubans.

que promovieran el desarrollo de la habilidad, por lo tanto, aprendieron por su experiencia y/o por influencia de sus familias. No muestran un desarrollo completo de la organización del tiempo que les permita: la ruptura de rutinas, la conjugación adecuada de lo importante y lo urgente, etc.; por lo que presentan síntomas de estrés que comprometen su salud mental.

Palabras-clave: Organización temporal. Habilidad. Estrés. Maestros jóvenes. Cubanos.

1 Introduction

Teachers' mental health should be a topic of interest and a fundamental issue for psychology, as should their personal development. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has been addressing this issue since the 1980s, when it began to hold discussions on the psychological symptoms that lead teachers to request long periods of leave from work, even the youngest ones (FARIÑAS, 2004).

Teachers take on different roles, functions, and responsibilities, and are subject to multiple demands that, according to Fariñas (2004), “are not easily met, even by the most prepared” (p. 11). If this situation is not managed strategically by school administrators, and teachers do not have the skills to cope with the various responsibilities, demands, and functions in the school and in everyday life, and if this is compounded by an incomplete and uncritical development of time management, then the latter may suffer from symptoms of distress.

Proper development of the temporal organization of life is important for not only performance and productivity, but for mental health and personal development. For teachers, it is essential because it allows them to effectively attend to their teaching and everyday life functions and responsibilities and not be systematically subjected to stressful situations. Promoting the mental health of teachers should be one of the goals of educational psychologists. To this end, it is important to identify the main problems faced by these actors

and characterize them to intervene. This article focuses on characterizing the time management of three young primary school teachers in the municipality of Holguín who show symptoms of stress.

2 Temporal organization as personality infrastructure and stressor event

Studies on time organization, according to (CLAESSENS, VAN EERDE, RUTTE & ROE 2007), began in 1954. According to Claessens, Van Eerde, Rutte & Roe (2007) Liu, Rijmen, Maccann & Roberts (2009), the most widely used references in research on time management are those by Bond & Feather (1988), Macan, Shahani, Dipboye & Philips (1990), and Britton & Tesser (1991). However, these and other sources do not conceive of this skill as a central aspect of personal development but rather see it as a simple technique to be learned within study techniques, etc. Incomplete learning of this skill leads to stunted development and exposure to symptoms of stress.

The perspective presented in this work responds to the understanding of time management as the infrastructure of personality development, from historical-culturalism references. In this sense, the skill is understood as “personality dynamics (attitudes, values, actions, feelings, etc.) that enable us to intentionally project ourselves in time, especially into the present-future, with the aim of greater self-governance of our lives” (FARIÑAS, 2004, p. 55).

Temporal organization is composed of a set of actions, operations, and indicators that make up the internal dynamic structure of the skill. In the actions listed below, proposed by Graf, Iliasov & Liaudis (1983, cited in FARIÑAS, 2004), the interfunctionality of the mental processes (thought-language, attention, etc.) that shape the skill occurs:

1. Meaningful planning “plays a guiding role through a person's motivational hierarchy, the meanings that guide their life (meaning of life).” (FARIÑAS, 2004, p. 100).

2. Control of conditions is described as “the consideration of the situations in which daily activities are carried out, from both a subjective and objective

perspective, which allows for a more adequate and realistic organization of life” (FARIÑAS, 2004, p.100).

3. The probable prognosis is “(...) the delimitation of the time in which the different activities, relationships, and tasks of life are expected to take place (dates, schedules)” (FARIÑAS, 2004, p. 101).

4. Balance control is defined as “the balance we strike between what we have done, with a certain degree of frequency and level of awareness” (FARIÑAS, 2004, p. 102).

The operations that make up the skill are defined by Iliasov (1981, cited in PÉREZ, 1989) as follows: 1. Use of special means: external support used by the subject, which is necessary due to the complexity of the current era, through agendas, notebooks, sheets of paper, etc. 2. Forecasting: Advance knowledge, for the subject, of what he or she has to do in the near or distant future (day, week, month, year). 3. Time adjustment: Approximate knowledge, for the individual, of the time needed to calculate and carry out activities. 4. Prioritization: The subject, according to the significance of the tasks to be performed, ranks them, giving greater weight to those that are more important, although they must not forget those of lesser urgency, to complete the planned activities and avoid pending tasks. 5. Consistency and persistence: Stable frequency with which the subject makes plans related to the organization of their life. Regularity of the time the subject spends on daily activities, according to their range of interests, needs, tastes, etc. This includes the specific activities that the individual carries out. 6. Projection of plans: The scope of the subject's time planning (in terms of day, week, month, year). 7. Control of plan fulfillment: Control by the subject of whether the tasks they had set out to complete have been carried out.

For his part, Fariñas (2019) defines the following indicators of the development of this skill: 1. the possibility of alternating activities with different purposes (productive, intimate-personal communication, rest, recreation); 2. The possibility of breaking life routines; 3. The possibility of

intentionally planning life routines; 4. Awareness of the organizational mechanism and its mastery; awareness of aspirations, goals, and their achievement within certain periods; 6. The reduction of pending tasks; 7. Adaptation to real possibilities (idealism versus objectivity); 8. The appropriate combination of the important with the urgent; 9. Increased work capacity, interest in and enjoyment of the things one does; 10. Reduced stress; and 11. Feelings of fulfillment and the happiness that accompanies them, among others.

Incomplete development of this skill puts people at risk of suffering from stress. Examples of this are some studies with young tourism workers (OSORIO, VELÁZQUEZ & TAPIA, 2019) or with university students (MISRA & MCKEAN, 2000; BONDAN & BARDAGI, 2008; COSTA & POLAK, 2009; PATTA & SIMON, 2011).

Manifestations of stress due to incomplete mastery of time management can emerge in teachers because, as a trend in schools, it is not common to find programs that promote their development, and when they do exist, they do not do so in the best way (FARIÑAS, 2004). This leads to empirical, unscheduled learning of time management in life, without the guidance of training programs. If individuals do not learn to organize their time in a critical, creative, flexible, and generalized manner, they may have difficulties in their adult life in carrying out different activities within the set period. They may also be exposed to different symptoms of stress that affect their mental health.

Stress is one of the most important risk factors for most common diseases that have been on the rise in recent times. Several authors have offered a definition of stress. For Chacón, Grau & Reyes (2012), it is:

[...] a process of interaction between the individual and their environment (social, family, work, school), when someone assesses certain situations that are personally significant as threatening or overwhelming their resources" (p.19).

This definition highlights the meaning that any situation, real or imagined, can have for the subject when it jeopardizes their emotional stability and psychological health and they do not have the resources to resolve it.

The literature describes two types of stress: eustress and distress. According to Chacón, Grau & Reyes (2012), eustress often helps to mobilize behavior to achieve goals, while harmful stress, or distress, manifests itself

[...] negative emotions (fear, depression, anxiety, hostility) can hinder our personal, family, work, and/or social functioning and impact the neuroendocrine and immune systems, modulating the onset of disorders and diseases under certain conditions (p. 20).

We agree with these authors that distress is what must be learned to prevent and control due to the consequences it causes at the levels of the body, the organism, social relationships, enjoyment, and mental, academic, and work performance. The line between eustress and distress can be fine, so it is necessary to be attentive to its different manifestations so that it does not transcend from mobilizing behavior to resolve situations or problems to the appearance of diseases.

In short, incomplete development of temporal organization from the perspective discussed in this paper can lead to eustress or distress and negative consequences for mental health. To be better prepared and not be constantly exposed to stressful situations that affect mental health, it is necessary to address the issue in schools in a deliberate manner. A first step would be to characterize the actual, current development of time management in teachers who show symptoms of stress, which is what this study does. The methodology used to do so is described below.

3 Methodology

The research was conducted between January and June 2017. It employed qualitative methodology and multiple case studies as its methodological strategy.

3. 1 Participants: case selection

The cases were selected intentionally and purposefully because the aim is not to generalize, but rather to obtain in-depth, rich, and high-quality information, according to Creswell (2009, cited in Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2010). The following criteria were considered for the investigation: easy access to the field; a high probability of a mixture of processes, programs, people, interactions, and/or structures related to the research questions; a good relationship with the informants; the researcher being able to perform their role for as long as necessary; and ensuring the quality and credibility of the study. Other criteria used were inclusion, i.e., young teachers who agreed to participate in the research; exclusion: 1. middle-aged or older teachers and 2. Those who did not wish to participate in the research; and exit, which refers to the possibility of teachers not continuing in the study.

Three cases were selected, based on the selection criteria and willingness to participate in the research. The age range was between 25 and 28 years old. Of these, two were female and one was male.

3. 2 Procedure

Before entering the field, consent was requested from the principal of the school where the work was to be carried out, and teachers under the age of 35 were identified. Subsequently, informed consent was requested from the teachers who were to participate in the study. For the final selection of cases, the “Daily Stress Inventory” by Brantley, Waggoner, Jones & Rappaport (1987) was applied. This technique consists of a questionnaire that gathers interpersonal, family, and work-related setbacks, the intensity of which is to be assessed by the subject themselves, according to a conventional score. It has 58 items that are rated from 1 to 7, with 7 expressing the highest level of stress. The questionnaire has a quantitative and a qualitative assessment, which are described below. Questionnaire results from 0 to 120 points: you are relaxed. Your stress is occasional and controlled if you score between 121 and 200 points. You show signs of stress, but you usually manage it if you score

between 200 and 300 points. Your stress level is significant, and you should pay attention to it if you score 361 points or more. This last range indicates that your stress level is pathological, so you should consult a doctor.

The qualitative assessment was based on the subject's evaluation of events that express a relationship with time management. Events that cause tension or discomfort related to time management correspond to the following items: 3. concern about pending work; 4. rushing to finish work on time; 8. inability to finish a job; 9. being disorganized; 24. forgetting something; 30. Worrying about the future; 39. Being unable to fulfill daily plans; and 58. Being late for work or an appointment.

The daily stress inventory made it possible to diagnose the everyday stress suffered by a group of young teachers working in primary school. Once the cases that showed symptoms of stress in everyday life due to limitations in time management had been identified, the following techniques were applied: pastel, semi-structured interview, and composition. These instruments made it possible to characterize the time management of the teachers who participated in the study⁵.

3.3 Instruments

Each of the instruments is briefly described below.

Pie chart: Subjects were asked to divide a circle into sections. The sizes of the sections did not have to be equal but should reflect the amount of time they spent on their daily activities. The aim was to observe how time was used, because the distribution of activities reveals which ones are carried out routinely, but this does not mean that time is not devoted to other activities that do not occur frequently and are left aside (SUÁREZ, 2007).

Interview guide: a guide was drawn up based on general and specific topics related to time management, which, following Ratner's ideas (2013), were discussed in a more or less specific order. The topics were based on the actions, operations, and indicators that make up the skill.

⁵ The procedure followed was used to conduct a similar study with young workers in the tourism sector.

Composition: It was titled “How I Organize My Time,” and its objective was to understand and explore how the subject organized their time.

3.4 Analysis strategy

The procedure followed for data analysis was that formulated by Rodríguez, Gil & García (2004). These researchers propose that, for the analysis of qualitative data, the first step is to collect the data, followed by the following tasks: data reduction, data arrangement and transformation, and finally, conclusions are obtained and verified. Pseudonyms were used in the data analysis to preserve the identity of the subjects.

4 Results

Katia

She was 25 years old, had a high school diploma, and had studied for a technical degree in Library Science. She was working as a teacher (librarian) at the elementary school selected for the study. She learned to organize her time in an unscheduled manner; that is, she did not participate in training or education aimed at developing this skill.

The stress inventory indicated that she was under specific and controlled stress, as she scored 195 points. However, several items related to time management indicated that she experienced symptoms of stress due to difficulties in organizing her time. For example, item 4, which refers to the rush to finish work on time, was rated 6 points, the maximum score. Items 3, 8, 9, and 39, referring to concern about pending work, inability to finish a job, being disorganized, and being unable to fulfill daily plans, respectively, were rated 5 points, the second highest. Items 24 and 58, “forgetting something” and “being late for work or an appointment,” were rated 4, and finally, item 30, which refers to worrying about the future, was rated 3. She added that the lack of time for her duties is extremely stressful and rated it 5 points.

She divided the pie into 8 parts, the largest representing work, 50% of the pie, the other activities to which she devoted most time were caring for her son and husband, household chores, and recreational and leisure activities such as going to the gym, playing on her phone, watching television, and sleeping.

The **prioritization** between what was important and urgent depended on her work as a librarian: “My work and my obligations as a librarian weigh more heavily in the balance than any other activity.” She also said, “I find it difficult to disconnect from my work schedule.” Difficulties were observed in adequately balancing social demands and personal needs because she devoted a lot of time to work and did not know how to disconnect to devote more time to her family, etc.

She was not aware of the **conditions** she considered necessary to carry out her activities. In this regard, she said, “I don't exercise any control; I just do the tasks, and that's it.” She also said that sometimes she lacked the conditions to carry out the activities with quality.

In terms of **probable planning**, Katia said she was not forward thinking, stating, “I'm not used to planning.” Her lack of foresight was also evident when she said, “I don't calculate the amount of time my activities require before I do them,” “I don't know in advance what I'm going to do during the day or week,” and “I don't set myself tasks or issues to deal with that cannot be solved quickly.” The above statements showed her attachment to well-established routines in her life. Although she said she wanted to study for a degree in Library Science and travel to Italy, these were not goals or plans because she was not doing anything in the short or medium term to achieve them, which indicated a mismatch with her actual possibilities. She said she used a diary, but this was to record her days and was not a useful tool for planning.

She had difficulty breaking her routines: “From Monday to Friday and up to two Saturdays a month, school becomes my other home. I get up at 6:30 a.m. to wake up my son, have breakfast... In the afternoon, I ask him how he

did in kindergarten and spend time with him... Nighttime becomes a challenge because we don't know what will happen the next day..." A stereotypical and uncritical organization of time could be observed based on her daily routines.

Regarding **control of balance**, it was observed that he only occasionally checked whether he had completed certain tasks, relying on his memory to do so. The diary was not a useful tool for this action. It was concluded that he was not aware of the occasional checks he carried out.

Difficulties in his time management led to stress, especially when urgent activities arose. The main symptoms of stress manifested during the investigation were memory problems, fatigue, and a desire not to go to work, headaches, and tension.

Mario

He was 27 years old and had a college education. He learned to organize himself in an unplanned manner; he had not participated in any training or education during his school years to learn and/or develop this skill.

The stress inventory indicated that he had signs of stress, but he usually managed them well, as he scored 201 points. However, several items related to time management indicated that the subject was experiencing symptoms of stress due to difficulties in organizing his time; for example, items 3, 4, and 58, referring to "concern about pending work," "rushing to finish work on time," and "being late for work or appointments," were rated by the subject with 4 points, that is, he rated them as very stressful. Items 9, 24, 30, and 39, referring to being disorganized, forgetting something, worrying about the future, and being unable to fulfill daily plans, respectively, were rated 5 points, meaning they were extremely stressful. Item 8, referring to the inability to finish a job, was rated 3, meaning it was not very stressful.

He divided his time into three parts, with the largest portion devoted to work and the smaller portions to spending time with his family and

watching television. In addition, he spent time on two other activities that he mentioned in his essay, such as preparing for his business and guarding a house he was looking after.

The **prioritization** of his activities depended on his work as a teacher and self-employed person. It was clear that he did not devote any time to preparing his classes. His daily routine led to the conclusion that he did not adequately balance social demands and personal needs and that he had difficulty alternating between different types of activities. For example, he stated, "I have almost no time for recreation."

A **stereotypical and routine control of conditions** was observed. He was able to secure the raw materials for his work as a self-employed person, but he had to take his lesson plans home to prepare them. This indicated that, as a tendency, he did not control the minimum and necessary conditions in his work as a teacher and the prioritization of his activity as a self-employed person.

His planning for the day and week showed him to be **short-term forward thinking**, and he set aside time to do non-urgent tasks. He used the work plan for his work as a teacher, but this tool was a formal requirement that hindered his life. He had thought about his goals, including finding a prosperous job, finding a partner or getting back together with his ex, and having a child, but he did not mention the time frame for achieving them, which suggests difficulties in medium- and long-term planning.

Their daily routines were well established and stereotypical. "...I get up at 5:00 a.m. to work the night shift at a house... At around 5:30 a.m., I take a shower and start preparing the dough for the cheese balls... I take a short nap; get up at 7:00 a.m. to go to school, where I start teaching until 12:40 p.m.... I return to school at 2:00 p.m. to continue working until 4:15 p.m.... I get home and start frying the cheese balls and go out to sell them... I take a shower, eat, rest for a while, and then leave again at 10:00 p.m. for my shift. In another sense, he found it difficult to break out of these routines.

It was clear that, in some way, he was making a **final assessment** of his performance as a street vendor, but he was not doing so consciously; the process of assessing his performance was mental, automatic, and uncritical, and did not allow him to be effective. There was no evidence of him assessing his performance in other areas of his daily life.

Difficulties in time management caused stress, mainly due to having to deal with urgent activities. The main symptoms of stress manifested during the investigation were sweaty palms, frequent smoking, worry, and tension, among others.

Rebecca

She was 28 years old and had a high school education. She learned to organize herself in an unplanned manner and had not participated in any training or education to develop this skill.

The stress inventory indicated that she was under specific and controlled stress, as she scored 198 points. However, several items related to time management indicated the presence of stress symptoms due to difficulties in organizing time; for example, items 3, 4, 9, 24, 30, 39, and 58, which refer to concern about pending work, rushing to finish work on time, being disorganized, forgetting something, worrying about the future, being unable to fulfill daily plans, and being late for work or an appointment, respectively, were rated 5 points, meaning they are extremely stressful. Item 8, referring to the inability to finish a job, was rated 4, indicating that it is very stressful.

She divided her time into six parts, with the largest portion, representing 50%, devoted to work. The other activities to which she devoted time were household chores, her daughter, and leisure and recreation, including watching television, entertainment, and going for walks.

The **prioritization** of her activities depended on her responsibilities as a teacher and mother, as she had no other help with household chores. She

said that after leaving work, “When I get home, I continue working because my mother does nothing.” She also explained that “as the day goes by, I deal with the priorities first and then the less urgent tasks.” She had difficulty balancing social demands and personal needs.

Nor did she **consciously monitor the conditions necessary** to perform her activities with quality. Her control was stereotypical and automated, as she stated, “I don't do any kind of monitoring.” However, it was observed that she considered different conditions, mainly material ones, for her work as a teacher and her activities at home.

In relation to **probable planning**, she seemed to plan using her memory, but she tended to be a short-sighted person, as she said on several occasions: “I do the same thing every day,” “I don't calculate the time required for activities before doing them,” “I don't know in advance what I will do during the day or week,” “Sometimes I didn't have enough time to finish my classes,” and “During my workday, I don't have enough time to do everything I want to do.” The work plan required of her as a teacher was a formal instrument, so she did not use it. During class time, she was unable to stick to the established schedule and needed additional time to finish the activities she had prepared, which demonstrated her limitations in planning and control. In another sense, she did not break with her daily routines, despite her need for recreation and rest, which she expressed as follows: “I feel tired,” and “My life is complex and frustrating.” Although she mentioned having goals in life that she had thought about, such as traveling abroad one day, continuing to enjoy life, and seeing her two daughters study and become someone in life, there was no evidence of planning to achieve them within specific time frames.

She did not systematically **monitor the completion** of her tasks. This was observed when she stated that once she realized that she was sometimes unable to finish her activities, she perceived manifestations of stress: “Not finishing things on time causes me tension and stress. I think I'm not going to finish because this makes me feel uncomfortable and unable to do what I'm asked to do.”

Difficulties in his time management caused stress, especially when urgent activities arose. The main symptoms of stress manifested during the investigation were sweating, headaches, and stomachaches, among others.

5 Conclusions

The research made it possible to characterize the temporal organization of three young primary school teachers in the municipality of Holguín who presented symptoms of stress. A tendency was observed for time organization to be stereotypical and uncritical, characteristics that gave rise to symptoms of stress.

The theoretical and methodological criteria adopted in this study allow us to examine everyday stress and the various ways in which the dynamics of teachers' time organization are expressed.

Teachers learned to organize their time based on their personal experience and that of their families. They did not participate in training or education programs to develop this skill throughout their student careers. This finding coincides with those of Osorio, Velázquez & Tapia (2019) and with the statements of Fariñas (2004): "Skills related to time management are often not intentionally developed in educational institutions and, with some frequency, do not reach their full potential in individuals." (p. 102)

As a trend, they spent their time in the workplace, and they devoted most of their time to their families and, to a lesser extent, to recreation. In this sense, they had difficulty in adequately balancing social demands and personal needs, so that on occasions when they had to carry out urgent activities, for example, they showed signs of stress.

Their control of conditions tended to be stereotypical and uncritical. They failed to consider the minimum conditions necessary to carry out their activities effectively.

Two of the teachers were found to be unplanned, and the other was found to be short-term planned. The means they used were formal, to comply with a requirement demanded by the school administration. There was no conscious or

critical planning that would allow for regulating behavior in terms of effectiveness and stress reduction.

In terms of probable control, they were characterized by checking results only occasionally; they were not systematic. They did this mentally, without using any means of support.

The symptoms of stress they presented due to limitations in the organization of their time included sweaty palms, tension, smoking more frequently, headaches, and stomachaches, among others.

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