OPEN ACCESS

ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 4, Issue 11, 2026 | pp: 1-9

Abbriviate Title- ISAR J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN *(Online)*- 2583-9691

https://isarpublisher.com/journal/isarjahss

The Degree of Participative Leadership Practice among Principals of Arab Secondary Schools in the Haifa District in the Palestinian Interior and Its Relationship with Teachers' Organizational Silence

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Article History

Received: 25.08.2026

Revised: 27.09.2026

Accepted: 18.10.2026

Published: 07.11.2026

Abstract:

This study examined the degree to which principals of secondary schools in the Haifa District in the Palestinian interior practice participative leadership, the level of organizational silence among teachers, and the relationship between the two variables. It also investigated differences in participants' responses according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience. A descriptive-correlational design was adopted. The study population consisted of 3,287 teachers, from whom a random sample of 410 male and female teachers was selected. Data were collected using two questionnaires. Participative leadership was examined through administrative performance, human relations, and decision-making, whereas organizational silence was examined through protective silence, acquiescent silence, and defensive silence. The findings showed that the overall degree of participative leadership was high (M = 3.42), with human relations ranking first (M = 3.70), followed by administrative performance (M = 3.40) and decision-making (M = 3.16). Organizational silence was moderate overall (M = 3.04); protective silence ranked first (M = 3.35), followed by acquiescent silence (M = 2.90) and defensive silence (M = 2.86). No statistically significant differences were found in estimates of participative leadership or organizational silence attributable to gender, academic qualification, or years of experience. Pearson correlation results indicated statistically significant positive associations between participative leadership and the dimensions of organizational silence (all $p < .001$). The study recommends strengthening participative leadership practices, broadening teachers' involvement in decision-making, and creating psychologically safe school environments that encourage teachers to voice ideas, concerns, and suggestions.

Keywords: *participative leadership; organizational silence, school principals; secondary-school teachers; Haifa District*.

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Cite this article:

Masallha, M., Zaid, J., (2026). The Degree of Participative Leadership Practice among Principals of Arab Secondary Schools in the Haifa District in the Palestinian Interior and Its Relationship with Teachers' Organizational Silence. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, *4*(11), 1-9.

1. Introduction

Educational institutions face continuing changes and challenges that require the development of school management and leadership practices and a shift from traditional administrative approaches toward more flexible and participative models. School principals occupy a central position in this process because their leadership affects teacher guidance, work organization, human relations, decision-making, and the organizational climate of the school.

Participative leadership is a contemporary leadership approach based on involving teachers in school management and decision-making, drawing on their experience and professional knowledge, and strengthening cooperation, trust, and communication between teachers and school administration. Such practices can increase teachers' sense of responsibility and belonging and provide opportunities for them to express views, offer suggestions, and participate in addressing school-related problems.

Organizational silence, by contrast, is a behavioral phenomenon that may constrain institutional effectiveness. It refers to employees' reluctance to express opinions and ideas or to provide work-related information and suggestions. Silence may emerge because of fear of negative consequences, a belief that speaking up will not make a difference, or a desire to protect personal interests and professional relationships. In schools, persistent silence may reduce communication, participation, and the organization's ability to benefit from teachers' expertise.

Given the role of school leadership in shaping teacher behavior and establishing conditions for participation and voice, examining the relationship between participative leadership and organizational silence is particularly important. The present study therefore investigates participative leadership among secondary-school principals in the Haifa District in the Palestinian interior, the level of organizational silence among teachers, and the relationship between these variables.

2. General Framework of the Study

2.1 Problem Statement

School leadership is a key determinant of educational effectiveness. The leadership style adopted by the principal can influence professional relationships, teachers' participation in decision-making, and their willingness to express opinions and suggestions.

Participative leadership is based on involving teachers in administrative processes, drawing on their expertise, and strengthening trust, cooperation, and positive human relations. Organizational silence, in contrast, is manifested when teachers refrain from expressing views or providing information and suggestions because of fear, concern for personal or professional interests, or a perceived lack of influence.

Previous studies conducted in educational settings—including Al-Jabour (2023), Thaalabi and Al-Ma'abrah (2024), Mansour and Zeidan (2024), Al-Dreibi (2024), Eid (2024), and Aslan and Çınar (2023)—underscore the importance of participative leadership and organizational silence in school environments. Collectively, this literature highlights the relevance of participation, human relations, teacher involvement in decisions, and leadership practices to teachers' organizational behavior.

Accordingly, the problem addressed in this study is to determine the degree of participative leadership practiced by secondary-school principals in the Haifa District, identify the level of organizational silence among teachers, examine differences according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience, and determine the nature of the relationship between the two variables.

2.2 Research Questions

1. What is the degree of participative leadership practiced by secondary-school principals in the Haifa District in the Palestinian interior?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq .05$ in participants' estimates of principals' participative leadership attributable to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience?
3. What is the level of organizational silence among secondary-school teachers in the Haifa District in the Palestinian interior?
4. Are there statistically significant differences at $\alpha \leq .05$ in teachers' organizational silence attributable to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience?
5. Is there a statistically significant correlation at $\alpha \leq .05$ between principals' participative leadership and teachers' organizational silence in secondary schools in the Haifa District?

2.3 Objectives of the Study

1. Determine the degree of participative leadership practiced by secondary-school principals in the Haifa District.
2. Identify the level of organizational silence among secondary-school teachers in the Haifa District.
3. Examine differences in participative leadership according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience.
4. Examine differences in organizational silence according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience.
5. Determine the nature and strength of the relationship between participative leadership and organizational silence.

2.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study derives from its focus on two organizational variables with direct relevance to school functioning: participative leadership and organizational silence. Its findings may help clarify the relationship between leadership participation and teacher silence, support principals in recognizing organizational conditions associated with withholding ideas and concerns, and inform efforts to develop a school climate grounded in dialogue, trust, participation, and constructive communication.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational design because this approach is appropriate for describing levels of participative leadership and organizational silence, examining differences across demographic groups, and identifying the relationship between the two variables.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised all secondary-school teachers in the Haifa District in the Palestinian interior during the 2025/2026 academic year (N = 3,287). A random sample of 410 teachers was selected.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	213	52.0
Gender	Female	197	48.0
Experience	Less than 5 years	54	13.1
Experience	5–10 years	107	26.0
Experience	10 years or more	249	60.9
Academic qualification	Bachelor's degree	235	57.3
Academic qualification	Master's degree or higher	175	42.7
Total		410	100.0

3.3 Research Instruments

Two questionnaires were developed to collect the study data based on a review of the relevant theoretical literature and previous studies related to the research topic.

The first questionnaire was designed to assess the degree of participative leadership practiced by secondary school principals in the Haifa District. It comprised three dimensions:

1. Administrative Performance.
2. Human Relations.
3. Decision-Making.

The organizational silence questionnaire consisted of 21items distributed equally across the three dimensions, with seven items assigned to each dimension.

The second questionnaire was designed to measure the level of organizational silence among secondary school teachers in the Haifa District. Based on the dimensions presented in the study findings, the questionnaire comprised three dimensions:

1. Preventive Silence.
2. Acquiescent Silence.
3. Defensive Silence.

The organizational silence questionnaire consisted of 18 items distributed equally across the three dimensions, with six items assigned to each dimension.

To facilitate the interpretation of the study findings, a five-point Likert scale was adopted, with the following response weights: Very High = 5, High = 4, Moderate = 3, Low = 2, and Very Low = 1.

A closed-ended questionnaire was employed, in which respondents were required to select from predetermined response options for each item. To establish the criteria for interpreting the arithmetic mean scores, the class interval width was calculated using the following formula:

Class Interval Width = (Maximum Scale Value − Minimum Scale Value) ÷ Number of Categories

Class Interval Width = (5 − 1) ÷ 5 = 0.80

Accordingly, the following criteria were adopted to interpret the arithmetic mean scores:

Table 2. Criteria for Interpreting Arithmetic Mean Scores

Category	Arithmetic Mean Range	Level of Agreement
First	4.21–5.00	Very High
Second	3.41–4.20	High
Third	2.61–3.40	Moderate
Fourth	1.81–2.60	Low
Fifth	1.00–1.80	Very Low

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Participative Leadership

Participative leadership is a prominent concept in contemporary administrative thought. It promotes interaction between leaders and subordinates, distributes responsibilities, and encourages joint participation in

achieving institutional goals (Al-Shammari, 2020). Astutik, Roesminingsih, and Sumbawati (2020) emphasize that participative educational leaders present administrative problems to staff, discuss them collectively, exchange viewpoints, and reach decisions through shared deliberation.

Participative leadership treats employees as an integral part of administrative processes and as capable of assuming responsibility, participating in decisions, confronting obstacles, and helping develop solutions rather than merely implementing decisions issued by higher administrative levels (Mansour & Zeidan, 2024). It also gives employees meaningful standing within the institution by valuing their opinions, respecting their individuality, encouraging constructive dialogue, and fostering responsibility, cooperation, creativity, innovation, and morale (Abu Madighim, 2021).

Accordingly, participative leadership may be understood as an approach in which the leader involves staff in determining institutional goals, forming teams, performing core administrative functions, solving problems, and making decisions, while developing a system of human relations grounded in trust, respect, and appreciation (Thaalabi & Al-Ma'abrah, 2024).

4.1.1 Patterns of Participative Leadership

Harb (2019) identifies three principal forms of participative leadership: consultative leadership, in which the leader solicits employees' opinions but retains final authority; consensus-based leadership, in which group discussion is used to reach a broadly supported decision; and democratic leadership, in which the group is granted substantial authority through discussion and voting.

4.1.2 Importance and Dimensions

Participative leadership provides teachers and administrators with greater flexibility and autonomy, particularly through delegation and involvement in decisions, thereby supporting goal attainment in an atmosphere of mutual respect (Atwan, 2022). It also strengthens trust, motivates staff, and encourages the use of individual and collective recommendations in planning and decision-making (Al-Jabour, 2023).

The literature in the study identifies delegation of authority, participation in decision-making, human relations, and communication/information building as central dimensions of participative leadership (Mahmoud & Mohdar, 2025). These practices can strengthen responsibility, independence, morale, belonging, communication, and effective use of employees' knowledge and abilities.

4.2 Organizational Silence

Organizational silence refers to employees' withholding of work-related opinions, ideas, information, and suggestions even when such information could contribute to problem solving or performance improvement. It may involve refraining from expressing views, avoiding organizational discussions, or withholding suggestions because employees believe speaking up will be ineffective or potentially harmful (Hakami & Al-Qarni, 2022).

Saadeh and Harahsheh (2021) similarly describe organizational silence as a position or behavior through which employees retain information, ideas, and opinions rather than sharing them with supervisors or colleagues, often because of fear of negative reactions or undesirable consequences. In schools, such silence can reduce teacher initiative, inhibit information flow, and limit organizational learning and decision quality (Al-Otaibi, 2024).

4.2.1 Causes, Forms, and Manifestations

The causes of organizational silence may be organizational, individual, or managerial. They include fear of leaders' reactions, weak acceptance of dissenting opinions, the perception that speaking up will not change existing conditions, and discouraging managerial responses (Al-Dreibi, 2024; Al-Otaibi, 2024). The study's theoretical framework discusses acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and prosocial/positive social silence as motivationally distinct forms (Hamed, 2024; Atalay, 2021).

Typical manifestations include withholding information and opinions, reluctance to state views, weak submission of proposals and initiatives, low participation in decision-making, avoidance of discussions about problems and errors, weak communication with management, withdrawal, and reduced initiative and creativity (Al-Bar, 2024; Al-Otaibi, 2024; Al-Shallash, 2022).

4.2.2 School Principals and Organizational Silence

Principals' practices play an important role in shaping teachers' organizational silence. Teachers may become silent when they perceive that principals do not value their ideas, exert pressure, provide insufficient support, or use authority in ways that discourage voice (Aslan & Çınar, 2023). Conversely, leaders can reduce silence by listening to teachers, encouraging expression, involving staff in decisions, and establishing a climate of trust and psychological safety (Eid, 2024). Al-Dreibi (2024) also reported a statistically significant relationship between secondary-school leaders' role in decision-making and organizational silence among female teachers. Vurkun, Katitas, and Korumaz (2025) further reported a significant negative relationship between perceived leadership-related factors and teachers' organizational silence.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Participative Leadership

Descriptive statistics were calculated to answer the first research question.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for participative leadership dimensions.

Dimension	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
Human relations	3.70	1.12	1	High
Administrative performance	3.40	1.11	2	Moderate
Decision-making	3.16	0.81	3	Moderate
Overall participative leadership	**3.42**	**1.01**		**High**

The overall degree of participative leadership was high (M = 3.42, SD = 1.01). Human relations ranked first, followed by administrative performance and decision-making. This pattern may reflect principals' increasing awareness of teamwork, respect for alternative viewpoints, positive professional relationships, and the motivational value of collaborative school environments.

5.1.1 Administrative Performance

Table 4. Administrative performance items.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	Encourages teachers to work as a team	3.87	1.02	1	High
6	Uses a flexible communication system between the principal and teachers	3.67	1.03	2	High
3	Promotes transparency by providing teachers with accurate information about school operations	3.62	1.04	3	High
2	Distributes tasks among teachers without bias	3.49	1.10	4	High
7	Discusses performance-evaluation report results with teachers	3.16	1.30	5	Moderate
4	Involves teachers in preparing the school work plan	3.05	1.21	6	Moderate
5	Delegates the management and discussion of some staff meetings to a teacher	2.72	1.31	7	Moderate
	Overall	3.37	1.14		Moderate

Administrative performance was moderate overall (M = 3.37, SD = 1.14). Teamwork received the highest mean, whereas delegating the management of staff meetings to teachers received the lowest. The results suggest relatively strong support for teamwork and communication but more limited delegation of formal leadership responsibilities.

5.1.2 Human Relations

Table 5. Human relations items.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
10	Strengthens teachers' sense of responsibility	3.95	1.03	1	High
14	Encourages teachers to exchange professional experiences within the school	3.74	1.03	2	High
13	Supports teachers' creative ideas	3.72	1.14	3	High
11	Builds trust between teachers and the administrative staff	3.68	1.20	4	High
9	Encourages teachers to submit constructive suggestions	3.66	1.12	5	High
8	Provides a healthy work environment free from conflict	3.62	1.18	6	High
12	Cooperates with teachers in solving problems they face	3.59	1.21	7	High
	Overall	**3.70**	**1.13**		**High**

Human relations were rated high overall (M = 3.70, SD = 1.13). The strongest item concerned strengthening teachers' sense of responsibility. These results indicate that interpersonal relations, trust, professional exchange, and support for creative ideas represent prominent aspects of participative leadership in the sampled schools.

5.1.3 Decision-Making

Table 6. Decision-making items.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
15	The principal makes decisions objectively	3.43	0.96	1	High
18	The principal seeks to identify teachers' problems	3.31	0.86	2	Moderate
21	The principal involves teachers in determining the importance of decisions before they are made	3.19	0.81	3	Moderate
19	The principal considers teachers' abilities when making decisions	3.11	0.78	4	Moderate
16	The principal involves teachers in gathering information before decisions are made	3.07	0.77	5	Moderate
20	The principal provides teachers with opportunities to participate in decision-making	3.02	0.83	6	Moderate
17	The principal involves teachers in developing multiple alternatives for solving problems	3.00	0.68	7	Moderate
	Overall	3.16	0.81		Moderate

Decision-making was moderate overall (M = 3.16, SD = 0.81). Objective decision-making ranked highest, whereas involving teachers in generating multiple problem-solving alternatives ranked lowest. This may indicate partial rather than extensive teacher involvement in decision processes.

5.1.4 Differences by Demographic Variables

The analyses reported in the study showed no statistically significant differences in participative leadership attributable to gender, years of experience, or academic qualification ($\alpha \leq .05$). The similarity of respondents' perceptions may reflect their exposure to comparable school policies, administrative regulations, and leadership practices.

5.2 Organizational Silence

Table 7. Means and standard deviations for organizational silence dimensions.

Dimension	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
Protective silence	3.35	0.96	1	Moderate
Acquiescent silence	2.90	0.89	2	Moderate
Defensive silence	2.86	0.81	3	Moderate
Overall organizational silence	3.04	0.88		Moderate

Organizational silence was moderate overall (M = 3.04, SD = 0.88). Protective silence ranked first, followed by acquiescent silence and defensive silence. This suggests that teachers sometimes withhold views in order to avoid perceived risks, preserve relationships, or protect personal interests, while silence does not appear to constitute a uniformly high-level phenomenon across the sample.

5.2.1 Protective Silence

Table 8. Protective silence items.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	I avoid discussing work problems in order to preserve my relationships with colleagues	3.83	0.98	1	High
2	I remain silent in meetings about sensitive work issues to avoid exposing myself to risk	3.65	0.86	2	High
3	Disclosing unlawful practices at work makes me feel unsafe	3.58	0.83	3	High
6	I lack the courage to present new ideas for fear that the school may fail to implement them	3.23	0.88	4	Moderate
4	I avoid offering suggestions for fear of increasing the workload for myself and my colleagues	3.06	0.79	5	Moderate
5	I limit myself to receiving and implementing instructions in order to protect my own interests	2.76	0.81	6	Moderate
	Overall	3.35	0.86		Moderate

Protective silence was moderate overall (M = 3.35, SD = 0.86). Avoiding discussion of work problems to preserve collegial relationships ranked first. This may reflect teachers' desire to avoid interpersonal tension and maintain stable professional relationships. The lowest-rated item concerned merely receiving and implementing instructions to protect personal interests, suggesting that teachers do not generally prefer complete passivity.

5.2.2 Acquiescent Silence

Table 9. Acquiescent silence items.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
8	I refrain from making suggestions for the benefit of the school because of bureaucratic systems	3.14	0.88	1	Moderate
10	I limit myself to receiving and implementing instructions because my authority is limited	3.02	0.86	2	Moderate
9	I avoid participating in solving problems that do not directly concern me	3.00	0.87	3	Moderate
7	I work in a school climate characterized by isolation and individual work	2.80	0.89	4	Moderate
12	I avoid expressing my opinions because I do not feel safe	2.78	0.78	5	Moderate
11	I accept additional tasks without complaint in order to gain the administration's trust	2.70	0.84	6	Moderate
	Overall	2.91	0.85		Moderate

Acquiescent silence was moderate (M = 2.91, SD = 0.85). The highest-rated item concerned refraining from suggestions because of bureaucratic procedures. This pattern may indicate that perceived constraints and limited influence can sometimes reduce teachers' willingness to voice suggestions, although this form of silence did not reach a high level.

5.2.3 Defensive Silence

Table 10. Defensive silence items.

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
18	I avoid discussing job-performance problems to prevent harm to my colleagues	3.08	0.88	1	Moderate
13	I refrain from discussing work problems so that I do not create new problems	2.98	0.86	2	Moderate
14	I fear expressing an opinion about a decision or proposal concerning a problem so as not to anger the principal	2.95	0.87	3	Moderate
15	I prefer not to disclose my own mistakes for fear of harm	2.80	0.89	4	Moderate
16	I avoid discussing work issues to protect myself and maintain the administration's trust in me	2.72	0.78	5	Moderate
17	I do not take the initiative to share experience with colleagues for fear of criticism from colleagues or school administration	2.63	0.84	6	Moderate
	Overall	2.86	0.85		Moderate

Defensive silence was moderate overall (M = 2.86, SD = 0.85). Avoiding discussion of job-performance problems to prevent harm to colleagues ranked first. The results point to a moderate degree of caution in discussing issues that could create conflict, harm others, or provoke negative reactions from school administration.

5.2.4 Differences by Demographic Variables

No statistically significant differences were found in any organizational silence dimension or in the overall score according to gender, years of experience, or academic qualification ($\alpha \leq .05$). These findings suggest that organizational silence may be more strongly associated with

shared organizational and managerial conditions than with teachers' demographic characteristics.

5.3 Relationship between Participative Leadership and Organizational Silence

Table 11. Pearson correlations between participative leadership and organizational silence.

Participative leadership variable	Organizational silence dimension	Pearson r	p
Administrative performance	Protective silence	.277	< .001
Administrative performance	Acquiescent silence	.446	< .001
Administrative performance	Defensive silence	.423	< .001
Human relations	Protective silence	.300	< .001
Human relations	Acquiescent silence	.480	< .001
Human relations	Defensive silence	.421	< .001
Decision-making	Protective silence	.321	< .001
Decision-making	Acquiescent silence	.541	< .001
Decision-making	Defensive silence	.519	< .001
Overall participative leadership	Protective silence	.820	< .001
Overall participative leadership	Acquiescent silence	.561	< .001
Overall participative leadership	Defensive silence	.758	< .001

Pearson correlations indicated statistically significant positive relationships between all participative leadership dimensions and all organizational silence dimensions (all $p < .001$). Administrative performance correlated with protective, acquiescent, and defensive silence at $r = .277$, .446, and .423, respectively. Human relations correlated with the same dimensions at $r = .300$, .480, and .421, while decision-making correlated at $r = .321$, .541, and .519.

The overall participative leadership score correlated positively with protective silence ($r = .820$), acquiescent silence ($r = .561$), and defensive silence ($r = .758$), all $p < .001$. On the basis of the reported coding and coefficients, the null hypothesis of no relationship is rejected. Because the reported correlations are positive, interpretation should remain consistent with the direction of the scale coding; the correlations themselves do not establish causation.

6. Conclusions

- Participative leadership was practiced at a high overall level in the sampled secondary schools, with human relations emerging as the strongest dimension.
- Decision-making received a moderate rating and ranked last among participative leadership dimensions, indicating scope for expanding teachers' substantive involvement in school decisions.
- Organizational silence was moderate overall. Protective silence was the most prominent form, followed by acquiescent and defensive silence.
- Teachers' perceptions of both participative leadership and organizational silence did not differ significantly according to gender, years of experience, or academic qualification.
- The reported Pearson coefficients showed statistically significant positive associations between participative leadership and the dimensions of organizational silence under the scoring used in the study.

7. Recommendations

1. Strengthen participative leadership among secondary-school principals by broadening teachers' involvement in school management and drawing more systematically on their professional expertise and suggestions.
2. Increase teachers' participation in decision-making, particularly because decision-making ranked last among the participative leadership dimensions. Schools should use committees, professional teams, and structured consultation to ensure meaningful participation in work-related decisions.
3. Reduce organizational silence by creating a psychologically safe school environment that encourages dialogue and the expression of opinions and suggestions without fear of negative consequences.
4. Strengthen communication channels and mutual trust between school administration and teachers, with particular attention to reducing protective silence, which ranked first among the organizational silence dimensions.
5. Provide professional-development programs for school principals on participative leadership practices and on identifying and addressing manifestations of organizational silence in ways that enhance teacher participation and school performance.

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