

# **Organizational Silence at Jordanian Universities and its Relation to Some Variables**

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*The study aimed at identifying the degree of organizational silence and its relation to some variables at Jordanian universities from the perspectives of faculty members. The study sample consisted of (290) faculty members from Yarmouk University, The Hashemite University, and Muta University. To achieve the aim of the study, a questionnaire developed by the researcher, was used after its validity and reliability had been proven. The main results were:*

- 1- The overall degree of organizational silence at Jordanian universities was medium.*
- 2- There were statistically significant differences in the means of the answers of the study sample concerning the degree of organizational silence due to colleges, in favor of faculty members of human sciences colleges, and due to the countries of graduation, in favor of Arab countries. But, no statistically significant differences appeared in the perception of the degree of organizational silence attributed to the following variables: academic title sex, experience, and university.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Organizational silence refers to the tendency of the subordinates in the organizations to avoid providing information, talking about problems, or making suggestions to their bosses for they fear undesired results that may face (Al-Faouri & Al-Kasasbeh, 2010). It is also concealing work-related ideas, information and views, intentionally. It includes silence during meetings, low level of participating and suggesting, fading of the group in the organization, and workers' fear of talking about the difficulties and problems facing them at work. Usually, issues that workers keep silent about include disadvantages of decision-making procedures, low justice level in payment, low managers' efficiency, poor regulatory status, and decline of the organizational performance (Al-Shawabkeh, 2007). When certain organizations are characterized by ambiguity, unclear rules procedures and systems that should be followed for the work progress, as well as domineering, organizational silence prevails because such organizations refuse challenge or workers' discussion of its policies or managers. In turn, this increases the employees' hesitation to talk about the problems and difficulties they face (Al-Majali, 2007).

According to Shojaie, Matin, & Barani (2011) researchers mentioned the following possible reasons for organizational silence : Decision making procedures , pay inequity , organizational inefficiencies,poor organizational performance , contract labor and centralizing decision making , constant negative feedback from supervisors, unstated beliefs that managers often implicitly hold about

employees , supervisors' failure to address the actual problems , employees' feeling that there is no hope for resolution , lack of employees' trust in their leaders , employees' fear of speaking up about problems .

Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin (2001) mentioned some negative results of organizational silence such as reducing the quality of the organizational decision taking processes, loss of necessary ideas analysis, low organizational learning, and loss of learning in information inputs, reducing feedback which leads to the inability to discover and remedy mistakes, and high likeliness of crises occurrence. Al-Majali (2007) summarized some of the disadvantages of organizational silence as follows: Poor trust, cooperation, and relations exchange among the members of organizations which negatively affect their creativity and innovation , deterioration of work climate , poor interpersonal dialogue , low harmony among workers and management, rare opportunities for development achievement and ambitions, decline of the utilization of the potential energies of the workers, declined of freedom of thought expression , weakness of motivation and low job performance. According to Al-Khatatneh (2009), organizational silence contributes to the formation of employees' negative feelings toward their organization. This may lead to low feeling of responsibility, erosion of energies, abandonment of ideals, blaming others for failure, low motivation, decline of performance effectiveness, high absenteeism rates, and occupational instability.

Despite the fact that employees' silence is prevails at many organizations, there is a scarcity in the academic research works about it. Some researchers noted that silence was active in organizations, but it did not receive the research interest and attention it deserved (Shojaie, Matin, & Barani, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The researchers found out that some faculty members at Jordanian universities avoided to talk about the problems they faced and the obstacles that impeded their work, and preferred not to express the concerns of their profession. They only talked very briefly and privately about the low level of their job satisfaction without going into any details, and without stating the reasons for their silence. The results of some studies indicated that the laws of Jordanian universities did not guarantee academic freedom to faculty members who practiced it based on their personal judgment (Tanash, 1995; Al-Kharabsheh, 2013). As a result, the researcher adopted the idea of this study.

### **Aim and Questions**

The study aimed at identifying the degree of organizational silence and its relation to some variables at Jordanian universities through answering the following questions:

- 1 What is the degree of the organizational silence at Jordanian universities from the viewpoint of the faculty members?
- 2 Are there statistically significant differences in the degree of the organizational silence at Jordanian universities, as perceived by the faculty members, due to the difference of the following variables: academic title, sex, experience, country of graduation, faculty and university?

### **Significance**

The importance of this study lies in the following points:

- 1 The Arab and Jordanian studies about organizational silence specially at higher education institutions are very limited.
- 2 The results of the study may benefit the officials at Jordanian universities to deal with the problem of organizational silence.
- 3 The study may encourage researchers to focus on the aspects of organizational silence which were not addressed in it.

### **Delimitations**

This study included only Mutah University, the Hashemite University and Al-Yarmouk University, and was conducted during the first semester of 2014-2015.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Among the studies in Arabic and English conducted about organizational silence are the following:

- Al-Faouri (2004) conducted a study the sample of which consisted of 156 administrators at Mutah University. She found a relationship between organizational silence and sharing in the organizational decision-making.
- Al-Shawabkeh's (2007) Study showed that academic and administrative leaders at the public Jordanian universities had a medium degree of organizational silence.
- Al-Majali's (2007) study revealed that the Jordanian public institutions workers' organizational silence was in a medium degree, and that there was a relationship between organizational silence and decision-making.
- The study of Al-Khatatneh (2009), which was applied to a sample of (682) Jordanian public institutions' employees, showed that the dimensions of organizational silence were in a medium level, and that organizational silence had effect on organizational trust.
- The study of Zheir and Erdogan (2011), whose sample consisted of (714) workers at national and multinational companies in Turkey, showed a relationship between organizational voice, silence, leadership in case of ethical leadership and the employees' performance.
- The study of Moghaddampour, Nazemipour, Aghaziarati & Bordbar (2013) aimed at shedding light on the organizational silence of the employees of 13 organizations in an Iranian city. The results did not show statistically significant differences in the level of organizational silence due to the demographic variables.
- The study of Dasci, Cemaloglu & Shain (2013) was conducted on four elementary schools in Turkey. The results of the study showed that organizational silence in those schools was attributed to administrative, organizational, and related to work and relations reasons
- Al-Whaibi (2014) conducted a study the sample of which consisted of all the workers on the middle management levels in the governmental departments of Al-Qaseem in Saudi Arabia. The results showed that the most important factors leading to organizational silence were: The managers' fear of feedback, lack of communication skills, lack of upper management support, isolation, and fear of negative reactions to any criticism provided by the employees.

The review of related literature showed the following:

First: The rarity of the Arab and Jordanian studies conducted about organizational silence.

Second: The difference of the study from the similar previous studies in the following aspects: It was concerned with the degree of organizational silence at three Jordanian public universities and its relation to some variables. As for the other similar studies, they were as follows: Al-Faouri's(2004) study focused on the organizational silence degree at Mutah University only; and its population was not the faculty members. The studies of Al-Khatatneh (2009), Al-Majali (2007) and Al-Whaibi (2014) dealt with organizational silence at Jordanian public institutions, not at higher education institutions. The study of Al-Shawabkeh (2007) handled the organizational silence among Jordanian public universities' administrative leaders, not faculty members.

## METHOD

The descriptive method was applied. The study population consisted of the faculty members at three public universities representing the three Jordanian regions: Al-Yarmouk University (North), The

Hashemite University (Centre) and Muta University (South). The total population was (1568) faculty members from which a stratified and random sample was selected. (301) copies of a questionnaire were distributed to the sample. (290) copies were suitable for analysis.

**TABLE 1  
DESCRIBES THE STUDY SAMPLE**

No.	Variable	Level/Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Academic Title	Professor	54	18.6
		Associate Professor	75	25.9
		Assistant Professor	161	55.5
		Total	290	
2	Sex	Male	244	84.1
		Female	46	15.9
		Total	290	
3	Experience	Less than 5 years	95	32.8
		From 5 to less than 10 years	75	25.9
		Ten years and more	120	41.4
		Total	290	
4	Country of Graduation	Arab	144	49.7
		Foreign	146	50.3
		Total	290	
5	Faculty	Scientific	136	46.9
		Human	154	53.1
		Total	290	
6	University	Yarmouk University	85	29.3
		The Hashemite University	92	31.7
		Muta University	113	39.0
		Total	290	

### Study Instrument

A (19)- item questionnaire was developed to identify the degree of organizational silence at Jordanian public universities benefiting from the studies of Al-Faouri & Al-Kasasbeh (2010) , Al-Shawabkeh, (2007), Al-Majali (2007) ,Shojaie, Matin, & Barani (2011) , Morrison, Milliken and Hewlin (2001) , Shojaie, Matin, & Barani( 2011) and Bagheri, Zarei and Aeen (2012) . To verify the validity of

the instrument, it was presented to fourteen faculty members specializing in educational sciences at the University of Jordan, Zarqa University, and the Hashemite University as referees. In light of their comments and notes, (3) items were deleted, some items were paraphrased and some language and typing corrections were made.

To test the extent of the internal consistency of the scale items, Chronbach's Alfa was used, as shown in Table (2).

**TABLE 2**  
**RELIABILITY COEFFICIENT OF THE INTERNAL CONSISTENCY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE DEGREE**

No.	Variable	No. of Items	(α) Alfa Value
	<b>Organizational Silence Degree</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0.895</b>

The reliability coefficient indicates that the instrument has a high reliability coefficient, suitable for achieving the purposes of the study (e.g. 0.895).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **First: Discussion of the results of the first question: What is the degree of organizational silence at Jordanian universities from the viewpoint of the faculty members?**

To answer the question, the means (M'S) and standard deviations (SD's) were calculated for every item of the questionnaire. The means were presented in a descending order, as shown in table (3).

**TABLE 3**  
**M'S OF ALL THE ITEMS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE QUESTIONNAIRE, ARRANGED IN A DESCENDING ORDER**

Item Order	Item No.	Items	M	SD	Agreement Degree
1	12	The university management sees that it is more knowledgeable about the university issues and affairs than the faculty members.	3.77	1.11	High
2	11	Whoever criticizes the leadership of the university is accused of working for personal interests.	3.71	0.98	High
3	10	The officials of the university consider those who are dissatisfied with their leadership as troublesome.	3.61	0.96	Medium
4	9	The university management considers criticism as a type of raising doubt about it.	3.59	1.03	Medium
5	8	The university officials consider talking about its problems as a form of defamation.	3.53	1.08	Medium
6	3	The university leadership limits the opportunities to talk about its defects.	3.49	1.08	Medium
7	7	The university leadership restricts freedom of expression	3.32	1.08	Medium
8	14	The university leadership considers criticism as a source of division	3.25	0.97	Medium

9	2	The officials of the university see that its affairs are not the task or responsibility of faculty members	3.25	1.15	Medium
10	1	The university management considers criticism as a violation to the instructions.	3.16	1.13	Medium
11	13	The university management encourages employees' silence	3.03	1.21	Medium
12	16	The university management questions the faculty members who criticize the conditions of the university.	3.00	0.99	Medium
13	17	I prefer not to talk about the university problems to keep my job.	3.00	1.25	Medium
14	18	I avoid talking about university weaknesses to preserve my rights and privileges.	2.81	1.11	Medium
15	5	The university management pays attention to the complaints of faculty members.	2.80	1.01	Medium
16	19	I avoid talking explicitly about my university for the fear of postponing my promotion.	2.80	1.24	Medium
17	6	I talk freely about the university affairs.	2.44	0.96	Medium
18	15	I avoid talking about the pitfalls of the university for the fear of being subject to punishment.	2.44	1.09	Medium
19	4	I can freely express my points of view about the university.	2.40	1.00	Medium
Total			3.13	0.434	Medium

Table (3) indicated that the overall degree of organizational silence at Jordanian universities was medium. The result showed that some managements of Jordanian universities prevent their faculty members from revealing the disadvantages and points of weakness of their universities' policies and procedures or talking about their concerns and problems. It indicated the existence of faculty members' fear that forced them to keep silent, and the lack of supportive organizational climate which led to high degree of their organizational silence. That may be attributed to the low level of job security and the narrow margin of academic freedom at Jordanian universities. Also, it may be due to the possibility that Some faculty members:

- were persuaded that it was useless to present opinions, suggestions or ideas because they would not be seriously taken into consideration.
- felt isolated from their universities. Such isolation may have weakened their organizational commitment, and pushed them towards withdrawal.
- tended to passiveness, indifference, non-participation and lack of interest in the worries, problems and challenges their universities faced which led them to be convinced that it was safer to keep silent.

The result was in agreement with the results of some other studies. For instance, the studies of Al-Khataiba & Al-Soud (2007), and Al-Tarawneh (2007) found a medium level of academic freedom at Jordanian universities, and the study of Al-Shawabkeh (2007) revealed a medium degree of organizational silence at a Jordanian university.

**Second: Discussion of the results concerning the second question: "Are there statistically significant differences in the degree of the organizational silence at Jordanian universities, as perceived by faculty members, due to differences in the following variables: academic title, gender, experience, country of graduation, faculty and university?"**

To answer this question concerning gender, faculty and country of graduation variables, means (M'S), standard deviations (SD's) were calculated and T-test was used, as illustrated in Table No. (4).

**TABLE 4  
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND T-TEST RESULTS OF THE DIFFERENCES SIGNIFICANCE IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE DEGREE AT JORDANIAN UNIVERSITIES, DUE TO GENDER, COUNTRY OF GRADUATION, AND FACULTY VARIABLES**

Variable	Levels	No.	M	SD	F	T Value	Significance
Gender	Male	244	59.48	14.802	288	- 0.038	0.969
	Female	46	59.57	13.288			
Faculty	Scientific	136	57.54	14.899	288	-2.153	*0.032
	Humanities	154	61.21	14.061			
Country of Graduation	Arab	144	61.44	13.589	288	2.280	* 0.023
	Foreign	146	57.57	15.244			

The results of the T-test, shown in table (4) revealed statistically significant differences among the means of the responses of the sample concerning organizational silence degree at Jordanian universities due to faculty, in favor of humanities specialists, country of graduation variable, in favor of Arab countries' graduates, but showed no statistically significant differences due to the gender. The reason for that may have been that the job chances for humanities specialists were limited. So, they were less courageous to express their criticism and more inclined to silence to keep their jobs. Foreign countries' graduates were more accustomed to academic freedom than Arab countries graduates' because Arab countries in general had low level of freedom.

Concerning the study of the effect of academic title, experience and university variables on organizational silence at Jordanian universities, as viewed by the faculty members; their M's and SD's of the variables were obtained, as indicated in table (5).

**TABLE 5  
M'S AND SD'S OF ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE DEGREE AT JORDANIAN UNIVERSITIES ACCORDING TO ACADEMIC TITLE, EXPERIENCE AND UNIVERSITY VARIABLES**

Variables	Variable Level	No.	M	SD
Academic Title	Professor	54	58.00	15.400
	Associate Professor	75	59.19	14.290
	Assistant Professor	161	60.13	14.429
Experience	Less than 5 years	95	59.41	14.245
	5-less than 10 years	75	60.25	13.750
	10 years and more	120	59.08	15.355
University	Yarmouk	85	62.22	14.801
	Hashemite	92	57.55	16.252
	Muta	113	59.01	12.587

Table (5) showed apparent differences among the means. To verify the substantiality and significance of the above mentioned apparent differences, the researcher applied the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to the responses of the faculty members at Jordanian universities according to academic title, experience, and university variables, as shown in Table (6).

**TABLE 6**  
**MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (MANOVA) OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE IN THE JORDANIAN UNIVERSITIES, AS VIEWED BY THE FACULTY MEMBERS ACCORDING TO ACADEMIC TITLE, EXPERIENCE, AND UNIVERSITY VARIABLES**

Source of variance	Total Squares	Freedom Degrees	Square Average	F Value	Significance Level
Academic Title	1040.882	2	52.441	2.460	0.087
Experience	72.141	2	36.071	0.170	0.843
University	218.973	2	109.486	0.518	0.597
Error	59872.837	283	211.565		
Total	61186.469	289			

Table No. (6) did not show statistically significant differences in the organizational silence degree at Jordanian universities attributed to the academic title, experience, and university variables

There were absence in statistically significant differences in organizational silence at Jordanian universities due to academic title, gender, experience and university. This may be attributed to that faculty members are very similar in the challenges and difficulties they face, the university managements with which they deal, the rules and systems they apply. the incentives and salaries they receive, the organizational culture in which they live, the promotion criteria to which they are subject, the health insurance and social security they enjoy, the tasks and responsibilities they perform and the margin of academic freedom they are given. Such similarities may have made them similar in their judgment regarding organizational silence at their universities irrespective of their academic titles, genders, experience and universities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the study findings, the researcher recommended the following:

1. Reducing the organizational silence degree at Jordanian universities through the following procedures:
  - Guaranteeing faculty members' sharing in their universities' decisions making process.
  - Enacting laws that emphasize upgrading academic freedom level and widening its margin, and enhance job security and stability
  - Avoiding applying centralization, bureaucracy and authoritarianism in higher education administration.
  - Creating objective and fair bases for faculty members' employment, promotion, and service termination procedures.
  - Enacting laws that ensure academic freedom for faculty members.
2. Conducting studies about organizational silence at kindergartens, schools, and private universities, and relating it to variables not covered in the study such as organizational climate, health, culture, alienation, fear, commitment, and loyalty.



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