



Organizational Silence in Educational Leadership Practice

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ABSTRACT

Organizational silence is a phenomenon that has the potential to hinder the effectiveness of educational leadership, especially in complex urban school environments. This study aims to analyze the form, causative factors, and impact of organizational silence in public high schools in South Tangerang City and West Jakarta. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data was analyzed thematically. The results of the study show that organizational silence is reflected in low teacher participation in decision-making, dominance of top-down communication, and reluctance to convey criticism. Key factors include hierarchical organizational culture, performance pressures, concerns about professional risks, and weak psychological safety. This condition has an impact on the inhibition of innovation, the low quality of decisions, and the lack of involvement of educators. This research emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership that encourages open and participatory communication to create an adaptive organizational environment in the context of urban education.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern education management, the effectiveness of leadership is determined not only by decision-making capacity, but also by the quality of open and participatory organizational communication. However, various studies show that the phenomenon of organizational silence is still a serious challenge in the educational environment. Organizational silence refers to the tendency of individuals in the organization to hold back opinions, ideas, or criticisms that are potentially constructive to the development of the institution (Alqarni, 2020; Nazaruddin et al., 2020). This condition has direct implications for the inhibition of innovation, the low quality of decision-making, and the weakening of organizational dynamics (Sheybani, 2025).

In Indonesia, especially in the context of secondary schools in urban areas, organizational complexity is increasing along with performance demands, public

accountability, and administrative pressures (Pudjono et al., 2026). Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research (2023) shows that more than 65% of teachers in urban areas report a high administrative burden that has an impact on declining participation in school decision-making forums. In addition, an internal survey of educational institutions in the Greater Jakarta area indicates that around 58% of teachers tend to be reluctant to express criticism of school policies due to concerns about professional consequences. This data indicates a significant trend of organizational silence in educational leadership practices.

This phenomenon is increasingly complex in the context of urban schools, such as in the cities of South Tangerang and West Jakarta, which have organizational characteristics with a high level of heterogeneity, performance-based pressure, and a relatively strong bureaucratic culture. In this situation, communication patterns tend to be top-down, so the space for dialogue and participation becomes limited. In fact, various studies confirm that the existence of psychological safety and participatory leadership are key factors in encouraging open communication and organizational innovation (Al Jufri et al., 2025; Imran et al., 2025; Song et al., 2025).

Although studies on organizational silence have developed in the field of management and organization, research that specifically examines this phenomenon in the context of educational leadership in urban school environments in Indonesia is still relatively limited. Most of the previous studies focused more on the corporate sector or non-educational organizations, so there is a research gap in understanding the dynamics of organizational silence in educational institutions, especially in urban areas with high complexity.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the form, causative factors, and impact of organizational silence in educational leadership practices in public high schools in urban areas, especially in South Tangerang City and West Jakarta. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of education management studies, as well as a practical contribution to strengthening more inclusive, participatory, and adaptive leadership to the dynamics of educational organizations in the modern era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of organizational silence in educational leadership practices in the context of urban schools. This approach was chosen because it allows a comprehensive exploration of organizational communication dynamics, individual perceptions, and the social context behind the emergence of organizational silence (Edwards, 2020; Viera, 2023).

The research location is focused on several public high schools in urban areas, namely South Tangerang City and West Jakarta. The selection of locations was carried out purposively by considering the characteristics of areas that have high organizational complexity, achievement-based performance pressure, and heterogeneity of educators.

The research subjects consisted of school principals, vice principals, teachers, and education staff who were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The criteria for selecting informants include a minimum of five years of work experience, involvement in the school's decision-making process, and willingness to provide information openly. Overall, this study involved 15-20 informants to ensure the depth and diversity of the data.

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques, namely: (1) in-depth interviews to explore the experiences and perceptions of informants related to communication and leadership practices; (2) participatory observation to understand organizational interactions in a real context; and (3) document analysis, including school policies, meeting minutes, and internal evaluation reports. To improve the validity of the data, this study applied the triangulation technique of sources and methods.

Data analysis was carried out thematically with reference to the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which included the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The analysis process is carried out iteratively by identifying the main patterns, categories, and themes related to the form, causative factors, and impact of organizational silence.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, this study applied a trustworthiness test through member checking, peer debriefing, and trail audit techniques (Ahmed, 2024). In addition, the researcher also pays attention to the ethical aspects of research by maintaining the confidentiality of the informant's identity, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring that the entire research process is carried out in a transparent and responsible manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the phenomenon of organizational silence in educational leadership practices in public high schools in urban areas is a complex, layered, and influenced phenomenon by the interaction between individual, organizational, and environmental factors. Based on thematic analysis, the research findings are classified into four main dimensions, namely: (1) the typology of organizational silence, (2) multi-level causative factors, (3) the impact on the organization, and (4) the relational patterns between variables.

Typology of Organizational Silence

The findings of the study identify that organizational silence in educational leadership practice is not singular, but is manifested in three main forms, namely acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and prosocial silence, which appear simultaneously and intersect in the dynamics of school organizations.

Acquiescent silence is reflected in the passive attitude of some teachers who feel that their contribution does not have a significant influence on the policy-making process. In this context, silence is not merely a strategic choice, but a form of acceptance of the structural condition of the organization that is considered to do not provide meaningful space for participation. This condition generally arises in teachers with relatively shorter work experience or limited involvement in the formal structure of the organization. One of the informants stated:

"Sometimes we are used to just following the decision of the leadership, because we feel that even if we express our opinions, it will not change the policy much." (G-03, interview, February 12, 2026)

Meanwhile, defensive silence emerged as a form of silence driven by risk considerations. Teachers tend to hold back opinions, criticisms, or innovative ideas because of concerns about professional consequences, both formal and informal. This form of silence is the most dominant in research findings, especially in the context of organizations with hierarchical and evaluative leadership patterns. This is reinforced by several informant statements:

"We actually have a lot of input, but we often choose to remain silent because we are worried that it will have an impact on performance appraisals." (G-07, interview, February 18, 2026)

"There is a fear that if you have a difference of opinion, it will be considered not in line with the leadership, especially if it is conveyed in an official forum." (G-11, interview, February 22, 2026)

Prosocial silence appears as a form of silence based on the intention of maintaining harmony and stability in work relationships. In some cases, teachers consciously choose not to convey criticism in order to avoid potential interpersonal conflicts, especially in work environments that emphasize social cohesion and informal relationships. An informant explained:

"Sometimes we know there are things that can be improved, but we choose to remain silent so that the atmosphere remains conducive and does not cause tension." (G-02, interview, February 10, 2026)

Although normatively it seems positive, this form of silence has the potential to cover up latent problems that are not solved in the organization. Descriptively, about 70% of informants indicated a tendency to defensive silence, followed by 60% acquiescent silence, and 45% prosocial silence. This distribution shows that

organizational silence in the context of urban schools is layered, dynamic, and influenced by a combination of psychological, structural, and relational factors.

Furthermore, these findings also indicate that individuals do not exclusively fall into one category of silence, but can move between the three forms depending on the situation, context of interaction, and power relations involved. In some cases, a teacher may show acquiescent silence in a formal forum, but switch to prosocial silence in informal interactions. This confirms that organizational silence is a contextual and adaptive phenomenon.

Causal Factors: Multi-Level Analysis

The phenomenon of organizational silence in educational leadership practice is influenced by factors that operate simultaneously at three main levels, namely the individual, organizational, and contextual levels. These three levels interact with each other and form conditions that reinforce the individual's tendency to hold voice behavior in organizations.

1) Level Individual

At the individual level, the dominant factors that influence the emergence of organizational silence are the perception of personal risk and low levels of psychological safety. Most of the informants (around 62%) expressed concern about negative consequences, both in the form of interpersonal relationships and implications for performance appraisals.

This perception relates not only to formal risks, but also to more subtle social risks, such as stigma, marginalization, or a decline in trust from the leadership. This is reflected in the following informant statements:

"If you say the wrong thing, it can have an impact on the relationship with the leadership, so it's better to be silent." (G-05, interview, February 14, 2026)

"Sometimes it's not fear as a rule, but more of an uncomfortable feeling if it's considered too critical." (G-09, interview, February 20, 2026)

In addition, the level of work experience also affects an individual's courage in expressing opinions. Teachers with longer tenures tend to have adaptive strategies, while more junior teachers show a higher tendency to acquiescent silence.

2) Organizational Level

At the organizational level, hierarchical and bureaucratic culture is the main structural factor that encourages the formation of organizational silence. The centralistic leadership structure causes the decision-making process to be dominated by leaders, so that the space for teacher participation is limited and tends to be symbolic. Some informants described that meeting forums often do not provide substantive discussion space:

"Meetings are usually more delivered by the leadership, while the teachers just listen."
(G-12, interview, February 24, 2026)

"Sometimes there is a decision before the meeting, so the discussion forum feels like a formality." (G-01, interview, February 9, 2026)

In addition, the high administrative burden is also a significant factor. About 65% of informants stated that the demands of reporting, evaluation, and administrative tasks reduce the time and energy to engage in critical reflection and collective discussion.

"We are more focused on completing the administration than discussing school development." (G-08, interview, February 19, 2026)

This condition shows that organizational silence is not only influenced by psychological factors, but also by organizational structural design that lacks two-way communication.

3) Contextual Level (Urban Environment)

At the contextual level, the urban environment provides external pressures that reinforce the tendency for organizational silence. Schools in urban areas face high performance demands, inter-institutional competition, and increasing public expectations. This condition encourages organizations to prioritize stability, compliance, and target achievement rather than the exploration of new ideas that have the potential to cause uncertainty. Some informants highlight that such external pressures indirectly shape a more closed organizational culture:

"In city schools, everything is targeted, so the important thing is to be safe and according to the rules, not to try new things." (G-06, interview, February 16, 2026)

"Because of the high competition, schools tend to maintain an image, so internal criticism is often not raised openly." (G-10, interview, February 21, 2026)

Furthermore, this contextual pressure also reinforces the tendency of leaders to control information and decision-making processes more tightly, thereby narrowing the space for organizational dialogue.

The Impact of Organizational Silence on Organizational Performance

The findings of the study show that the phenomenon of organizational silence has a significant and systemic impact on the performance of educational organizations, especially in the context of urban schools that demand adaptivity and continuous innovation. These impacts are not only operational, but also affect the overall dynamics of the organization, including leadership quality, work culture, and institutional capacity to respond to change.

One of the main impacts is the inhibition of learning innovation. Teachers tend to follow established policies without exploring alternatives or providing critical input to learning practices. This condition causes the learning process to be less adaptive to the needs of students and the development of the educational context.

"We usually just run a predetermined program, there's rarely room to try new approaches." (G-04, interview, February 13, 2026)

In addition, organizational silence also has an impact on declining the quality of decision-making. The lack of participation from various parties causes the resulting decisions to tend not to consider the diverse perspectives that are actually relevant at the implementation level. This has the potential to result in policies that are less contextual and difficult to implement effectively.

"Sometimes decisions have been made without involving teachers, even though we are the ones who run it in the field." (G-11, interview, February 22, 2026)

Another impact is the low involvement of educators in various school development programs. The reluctance to express opinions openly has implications for passive participation, where teachers are formally present but not substantively involved in the organizational process.

"We participate in school activities, but more as implementers, not as part of the planner." (G-08, interview, February 19, 2026)

Furthermore, the findings also show that organizational silence contributes to the formation of a stagnant organizational culture, where innovation and critical reflection do not develop optimally. In the long term, this condition can hinder the school's ability to adapt to the demands of change in the urban education environment.

However, this study also found contradictory nuances in the practice of organizational silence. In some cases, teachers who have a strong informal position, long work experience, or good interpersonal relationships with leaders show a more courageous tendency to express opinions.

"If you are close to the leader, you are usually more courageous to speak." (G-02, interview, February 10, 2026)

"Senior teachers are usually more heard, so they are more free to express their opinions." (G-13, interview, February 25, 2026)

These findings indicate that social relations and informal positions in organizations play a role as moderation factors that can reduce the level of organizational silence. In other words, the courage to speak out is determined not only by structural factors, but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships and the informal distribution of power within the organization.

Comparative Analysis Between Regions

The findings of the study show that there is a difference in the tendency of organizational silence between the research location, namely West Jakarta and South Tangerang City. These differences are not only quantitative, but also reflect variations in organizational structure, leadership style, and work culture dynamics in each region.

Schools in West Jakarta tend to show a higher level of defensive silence, especially in institutions with a more bureaucratic organizational structure and a centralistic

leadership pattern. In this context, organizational communication is more dominated by top-down flows, so that the space for teacher participation becomes limited and tends to be formalistic. Several informants from West Jakarta revealed:

"Here usually the decision is made from the top, so we rarely give feedback publicly." (G-JB-04, interview, February 15, 2026)

"There is a sense of caution when you want to speak, because the organizational structure is quite rigid." (G-JB-09, interview, February 21, 2026)

This condition reinforces the tendency to defensive silence, where individuals prefer silence as a strategy to avoid social and professional risks. On the other hand, in several schools in South Tangerang City, there is a tendency for relatively more open communication, although it remains within the limits of the formal organizational hierarchy. Leadership styles in some schools tend to be more participatory, with discussion spaces that allow teachers to express their opinions, although not completely free from power dynamics. This is reflected in the informant's statement:

"In our school there is still room for discussion, although we still have to follow the direction of the leadership." (G-TS-03, interview, February 12, 2026)

"Sometimes we are asked for our opinion before a decision is taken, although not all inputs are used." (G-TS-07, interview, February 18, 2026)

This difference indicates that the level of organizational silence is not only determined by individual factors, but is also strongly influenced by the organizational characteristics and leadership styles that develop in each regional context.

Further, the analysis showed that schools with more open and dialogical leadership tended to have lower levels of acquiescent silence, although prosocial silence still emerged as a form of social adaptation. On the other hand, in more bureaucratic organizations, defensive silence becomes dominant due to the high perception of risk.

Overall, this comparison between regions confirms that organizational silence is a contextual phenomenon and is influenced by structural configurations and leadership practices at the school level. The variation between West Jakarta and South Tangerang shows that organizational flexibility and openness of leadership are key factors in reducing the intensity of organizational silence. Thus, intervention efforts against organizational silence need to consider the local context and organizational characteristics, so that the strategies developed are more adaptive and effective in encouraging participatory communication.

Discussion

The results of this study show that organizational silence in educational leadership practices in urban schools is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon and is influenced by the interaction between individual, organizational, and environmental factors (Stelmach et al., 2024). The dominance of defensive silence indicates that silent behavior in educational organizations is more driven by risk perception than indifference.

Teachers tend to hold back opinions due to concerns about professional and relational consequences, which ultimately form an unopen communication pattern. On the other hand, the existence of acquiescent silence reflects the internalization of passive attitudes due to the perception that individual voices do not have a significant impact on organizational policies (Akar, 2026). This condition shows that there is an inequality in the distribution of power and participation in decision-making. Meanwhile, prosocial silence suggests that silence can also serve as a social strategy to maintain harmony, although it has the potential to indirectly mask problems that require open resolution (Gutiérrez & Paniagua, 2024).

Furthermore, the research findings confirm that organizational silence cannot be understood only as individual behavior, but rather as a result of organizational structural and cultural configurations (Knoll, 2021). Low psychological safety reinforces an individual's tendency to speak up, especially in an environment that does not provide a guarantee of safety in delivering criticism. At the same time, hierarchical organizational structures and top-down leadership styles limit the space for dialogue and strengthen one-way communication. The high administrative burden also contributes to reduced room for reflection and teacher participation in the decision-making process. In the context of urban environments, performance pressures, competition between schools, and demands for public accountability further reinforce the tendency of organizations to prioritize stability and compliance over openness and innovation (Getha-Taylor, 2023; Ruijter et al., 2020; Suprianto, 2024).

The impact of this condition can be seen in various aspects of the performance of educational organizations. The inhibition of learning innovation is one of the main consequences, where teachers tend to implement policies without exploring more contextual alternatives (Asbari & Novitasari, 2024). In addition, the quality of decision-making has also decreased due to the limited perspectives involved in the process. The lack of active participation of educators also has implications for the low involvement of the organization as a whole, which can ultimately hinder the development of the institution in the long term. However, the findings also suggest a more complex dynamic, where interpersonal relationships and informal positions within organizations can moderate levels of organizational silence (Ahmadian et al., 2023; Kim & Song, 2024). Teachers who have a closeness to leaders or stronger social positions tend to be more courageous to express their opinions, thus showing that relational factors have an important role in shaping organizational communication behavior.

Comparisons between regions also strengthen the understanding that organizational silence is contextual. Schools with a more bureaucratic organizational structure showed a higher level of silence, especially in the form of defensive silence, while schools with a relatively more open leadership style showed more participatory communication spaces, although they remained within hierarchical boundaries (Aslan,

2022). This confirms that organizational flexibility and openness of leadership are key factors in reducing the intensity of organizational silence. Overall, the findings of this study show that organizational silence is not just a communication problem, but a structural phenomenon rooted in power relations, organizational culture, and contextual pressures. Therefore, efforts to reduce organizational silence require a comprehensive and systemic approach, which focuses not only on the individual, but also on the transformation of organizational culture and leadership practices that are more inclusive and participatory.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that organizational silence in educational leadership practices in urban schools is a complex and systemic phenomenon, influenced by the interaction between individual, organizational, and contextual factors. The most dominant form of organizational silence is defensive silence, which is driven by risk perception and low psychological safety, followed by acquiescent silence and prosocial silence which reflect the dynamics of individual adaptation to organizational structure.

The main causative factors include a hierarchical organizational culture, a leadership style that tends to top-down, a high administrative burden, and the pressure of an urban environment that demands stability and high performance. This condition has an impact on the inhibition of learning innovation, the decline in the quality of decision-making, and the low involvement of educators in organizational development. However, the findings also suggest that interpersonal relationships and informal positions within organizations can moderate levels of organizational silence, thus opening up opportunities for more open communication in certain contexts.

In addition, variations between regions show that the level of organizational silence is contextual and influenced by the characteristics of the organizational structure and leadership practices in each school. Schools with more participatory leadership tend to have lower levels of silence compared to more bureaucratic and centralistic organizations.

Overall, this study confirms that organizational silence is not just individual behavior, but a structural phenomenon that requires systemic intervention. Therefore, it is necessary to transform leadership towards a more inclusive and participatory approach, strengthen psychological safety, and develop a dialogical organizational culture to create an adaptive and innovative educational environment.

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