THE IMPACT OF LEADER'S SELF-INTEREST BEHAVIOR ON SILENCE BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AT SHANDONG X UNIVERSITY, CHINA

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of leader's self-interest behavior on silence behavior among university teachers, using faculty members at Shandong X University as a research sample. leader's self-interest behavior refers to leadership that is driven by personal interests while neglecting sub-ordinates and organizational goals. Silence behavior among teachers refers to the tendency to withhold opinions or suggestions when facing problems. Using validated measurement scales, the study surveyed 352 teachers and conducted a quantitative analysis through descriptive statistics, difference analysis, and regression analysis. The results indicate that there are no significant differences in perceptions of the two behaviors across gender, age, teaching experience, or education level. However, a significant positive correlation was found between leader's self-interest behavior and teacher silence. When teachers perceive that leaders prioritize their own interests over organizational goals, they are more likely to remain silent. The study recommends that universities promote democratic and participative leadership styles, foster a culture of open communication, and explore organizational strategies to reduce self-serving leadership behavior. Future research should extend to different cultural and institutional contexts to enhance the generalizability and depth of findings.

Keywords: Leader's Self-Interest Behavior, Silence Behavior Among University Teachers, Higher Education

Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous deepening of higher education reform in China, university teachers, as key agents of knowledge dissemination and academic innovation, have been facing increasing pressure in teaching, research, and institutional management. Against this backdrop,

science behavior among university teachers has become more prominent, emerging as a critical factor affecting governance effectiveness in higher education. Teacher silence refers to the choice to withhold opinions when confronted with organizational issues or managerial shortcomings, influenced by both internal and external factors. It typically manifests in three forms: acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and disengaged silence (Van Dyne et al., 2003; Zheng et al., 2008; Zhao, 2010). The widespread presence of silence not only weakens organizational communication but also suppresses academic vitality and decision-making quality.

Leader's self-interest behavior refers to leadership driven by personal interests, with disregard for collective goals and the needs of subordinates. Its key characteristics include abuse of power, unfair resource distribution, and neglect of subordinates (Wu, 2016). Compared to other forms of negative leadership, self-interested leadership tends to be more covert and more damaging in the long term (Camps et al., 2012). In higher education settings, such leaders may focus excessively on personal academic status or financial gain while overlooking faculty development needs, ultimately affecting teachers' psychological states and work motivation and contributing to silence behavior (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

Studies have shown that self-serving leadership has a significantly negative effect on employee attitudes and behaviors, particularly by triggering feelings of suppression and neglect (Decoster et al., 2014). Milliken et al. (2003) emphasized that employee silence often results from the combined influence of organizational climate and leadership style. In the context of universities, such silence can erode institutional culture and hinder both administrative effectiveness and academic innovation (Edmondson, 1999).

The mechanisms through which this occurs include: (1) self-interested leaders consolidate power and suppress dissent, creating a hierarchical and risk-averse environment that discourages teachers from speaking up (Zhang, 2016); (2) unfair distribution of resources and rewards reduces teacher satisfaction and organizational commitment, increasing the likelihood of silence (Camps et al., 2016); and (3) leaders' disregard for subordinates' input undermines trust and a sense of belonging, making teachers more inclined to withhold their opinions to avoid conflict or disappointment (Gao, 2016).

In summary, leader's self-interest behavior intensifies teacher silence through multiple pathways, limiting internal communication and management effectiveness within universities. Exploring the mechanisms of its influence holds significant theoretical and practical value: on the one hand, it helps to uncover the formation process of silence behavior in academic institutions; on the other, it provides direction for improving leadership styles and fostering open communication environments, thereby encouraging teacher voice and enhancing institutional governance capacity.

Research Objectives

    (1) To examine the current status of leader's self-interest behavior at Shandong X University across different demographic and background variables.

    (2) To investigate the current status of teacher silence behavior at Shandong X University across different demographic and background variables.

    (3) To explore the impact of leader's self-interest behavior on teacher silence behavior at Shandong X University.

Literature Review

    1. Leader's Self-Interest Behavior

Leader's self-interest behavior is a negative leadership style characterized by the pursuit of personal interests while ignoring organizational goals and the needs of subordinates. Its key features include centralized power, unfair resource distribution, and a lack of transparency in decision making (Camps et al., 2012; Wu, 2016). Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) argued that this behavior stems from distorted self-identity, which undermines organizational fairness and trust. In universities, self-interested leaders often consolidate power by controlling research resources and promotion opportunities, thereby harming teachers' career development and academic motivation (Takeuchi et al., 2009; Zhang, 2016). Moreover, this leadership style is often covert and difficult to detect, yet it profoundly impacts employees' psychological states and sense of organizational identification (Milliken et al., 2003). Burris et al. (2008) pointed out that non-transparent decision-making weakens employees' psychological contracts and trust, increasing their tendency toward silence. University teachers, when faced with perceived unfairness and resource limitations, often develop alienation and adopt passive coping mechanisms (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Liu et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2007). In sum, self-serving leadership—both explicitly and implicitly—undermines communication and reduces teachers' willingness to speak up, making it a key organizational factor behind teacher silence.

Research on leader's self-interest behavior is mainly grounded in three theoretical perspectives: Social Exchange Theory, Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. Social Exchange Theory emphasizes the principle of reciprocity in organizational interactions; when leaders prioritize personal interests, employees perceive the exchange relationship as unfair and reduce their input and feedback accordingly (Blau, 1964; Camps et al., 2012; Wu, 2016). LMX Theory argues that high-quality leader–member relationships enhance employee performance and loyalty, whereas self-interested leadership damages this relationship and fosters employee alienation and silence (Decoster et al., 2014; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Zhang, 2016). COR Theory posits that when employees perceive a threat to their psychological resources under self-serving leadership, they tend to adopt silence or avoidance as a way to conserve energy (Hobfoll, 1989; Zhao, 2010). Collectively, these theories suggest that self-serving leadership leads to

employee silence by disrupting fairness, damaging relationships, and generating resource anxiety.

Due to its hidden and multifaceted nature, measuring leader's self-interest behavior poses methodological challenges. Early studies relied mainly on employees' subjective evaluations, which—while feasible, were prone to emotional bias (Camps et al., 2012). To improve measurement accuracy, Decoster et al. (2014) developed a tool based on employees' emotional and cognitive responses, assessing leadership's impact on trust, engagement, and perceived fairness. Zhang (2016) proposed a multidimensional scale that includes dimensions such as unfair resource allocation, neglect of employee needs, and biased decision-making, thus improving the comprehensiveness of the assessment. Recent studies have also emphasized the cross-cultural applicability of measurement tools, calling for integrated approaches that combine behavioral indicators, psychological reactions, and emotional experiences (Zhao, 2010). As research advances, there is a growing need to develop tools that can accurately capture the organizational impact of leader's self-interest behavior across different cultural and institutional contexts.

2. Silence Behavior Among University Teachers

Silence behavior among university teachers refers to the choice of withholding opinions, suggestions, or feedback in the face of organizational issues, administrative decisions, or academic challenges (Milliken et al., 2003). This type of silence is not simply the absence of speech, but a deep response to management practices, academic culture, and perceived workplace safety. It reflects teachers perceived influence and organizational identification.

Silence behavior is commonly categorized into three types: Acquiescent Silence, which arises when teachers feel that voicing opinions is ineffective or powerless to change the status quo (Zhao , 2010); Disengaged Silence, which reflects disappointment or detachment from the organization, often expressed as emotional withdrawal or indifference (Zheng et al., 2008); and Defensive Silence, which is motivated by self-protection, as teachers refrain from speaking up to avoid potential negative consequences (Peng et al., 2022).

Teacher silence is also influenced by leadership style, organizational culture, and individual characteristics. For example, self-serving leaders tend to suppress dissent, thereby reducing teachers' willingness to speak up (Zhang, 2016). Teachers with lower ranks or under promotion pressure may remain silent to avoid risk, while more senior faculty may adopt disengaged silence due to disillusionment with institutional reform (Zheng et al., 2008). Silence behavior affects work motivation, academic engagement, and organizational commitment, and represents a hidden cost in university governance.

Measurement of teacher silence initially relied on self-report scales focusing on teachers' silence responses to administrative decisions or academic resource allocation (Zheng et al., 2008). While convenient, such tools are subject to bias. Milliken et al. (2003) emphasized that silence is shaped by both organizational culture and leadership style, and self-report measures can help capture

its context-specific manifestations.

To improve the dimensionality and validity of measurement, Van Dyne et al. (2003) proposed a three-dimensional model: acquiescent, defensive, and disengaged silence. Based on this model, Peng (2023) developed a more targeted scale to uncover teachers' motivations for silence in various contexts. Knoll and van Dick (2013) expanded the model into four dimensions by adding passive silence and dissatisfied silence, providing a more refined analytical tool.

In addition to questionnaires, behavioral observation and in-depth interviews are also widely used methods. Behavioral observation captures teachers' non-verbal expressions of silence in real-life teaching or administrative settings. Although more authentic, it lacks access to internal motivations (Brinsfield, 2013). In-depth interviews offer insights into the psychological mechanisms behind silence, particularly in relation to perceived control and organizational identification (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2017).

Methodology

This study targeted faculty members at Shandong X University as the overall research population. Using a convenience sampling method, an electronic questionnaire was distributed, and a total of 1,399 valid responses were collected. According to the sample size determination method proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the minimum required sample size is 302, which meets the requirements for statistical analysis.

The study adopted two validated measurement instruments: the Leader's Self-Interest Behavior Scale developed by Camps et al. (2012), and the Silence Behavior Among University Teachers Scale developed by Zheng et al. (2008). The leader's self-interest behavior Scale consists of 4 items that assess the extent to which teachers perceive their leaders to act in self-serving ways, such as fabricating facts, being self-centered, ignoring subordinates' interests, or misusing organizational resources. A 5-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating lower levels of perceived leader self-interest.

The Silence Behavior scale includes 12 items, divided into three dimensions: Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and Disengaged Silence, with 4 items in each dimension. The items assess whether teachers choose silence due to perceptions of ineffectiveness, fear of interpersonal conflict, or low organizational identification. This scale also uses a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger silence behavior.

Regarding reliability, the Cronbach's α coefficient for the leader's self-interest behavior Scale in this study was 0.88 (original scale α = 0.86), and for the Silence Behavior Scale was 0.81 (original scale α = 0.89), both exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.80, indicating high internal consistency.

For validity, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of the leader's self-interest behavior Scale

was 0.84, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating suitability for factor analysis. Principal component analysis extracted one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1, explaining 73.207% of the total variance, demonstrating good construct validity. For the Silence Behavior Scale, the KMO value was 0.83, and Bartlett's test was also significant. Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted, with a cumulative variance explanation rate of 68.707%, confirming its construct validity as well.

The questionnaire was distributed and collected online, with teachers completing it via a web-based platform. Responses were automatically compiled by the system. Preliminary data processing was conducted using Excel 2024, and then imported into SPSS 27.0 for coding, screening, and statistical analysis.

The data analysis procedures consisted of the following four steps:

Descriptive Statistics: To summarize the overall level and dimension-specific scores of leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers.

Difference Analysis: Independent sample *t*-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences in behavior scores across demographic variables such as gender and academic rank.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationship between leader's self-interest behavior and the three dimensions of teacher silence.

Regression Analysis: Multiple linear regression was conducted to further test the predictive effect of leader's self-interest behavior on silence behavior among university teachers.

Results

1. Descriptive Analysis of Teacher Demographic Variables

The questionnaire used in this study was titled "Survey on the Impact of leader's self-interest behavior on silence behavior among university teachers", and it consisted of three main sections: personal background information, items measuring leader's self-interest behavior, and items measuring silence behavior among university teachers. A total of 352 valid responses were collected from university teachers, and these were used for subsequent analysis.

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information and understand the distribution of the sample. Four demographic variables were measured: gender, age, years of teaching experience, and educational background.

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis (frequency and percentage) are presented in Table 4.1, which shows the demographic characteristics and sample distribution of the participating teachers. The findings are summarized as follows:

Gender: The gender distribution of respondents was relatively balanced. Among the 352 participants, 169 were male teachers (48.0%), and 183 were female teachers (52.0%).

Age: The majority of participants were aged 31–40, with 191 individuals (54.3%). There were

136 teachers aged 20–30 (38.6%) and 25 teachers aged 41 and above (7.1%).

Years of Teaching Experience: Most respondents had 1–10 years of teaching experience, accounting for 311 individuals (88.4%). Teachers with 10–20 years of experience numbered 22 (6.3%), and those with over 21 years of experience numbered 19 (5.4%).

Educational Background: The largest proportion of teachers held a postgraduate degree, with 192 individuals (54.5%). This was followed by 133 teachers with a bachelor's degree (37.8%), and 27 teachers with an associate degree (7.7%).

2. Descriptive Statistics of Leader's Self-Interest Behavior and silence behavior among university teachers

As shown in Table 1, the mean scores for each item under leader's self-interest behavior range from 2.4 to 2.9. The item with the highest mean score is "I believe my leader uses university resources for personal gain," with a mean of 2.829. The item with the lowest mean score is "I believe my leader is selfish and considers themselves very important," with a mean of 2.480. The overall mean score for leader's self-interest behavior is 2.654, indicating a moderately low level of perceived self-interest behavior among university leaders.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Leader's Self-Interest Behavior

	N	Mean	SD	Analysis
Leader's Self-Interest Behavior	352	2.654	0.993	Low to medium
Total Score of Leader's Self-Interest Behavior	352	2.654	0.993	Low to medium

As shown in Table 2, the mean scores for each item under silence behavior among university teachers range from 2.2 to 3.1. The item with the highest mean score is: "In actual work situations, I do not feel emotionally connected to the university, so I choose to remain silent," with a mean score of 3.037. The item with the lowest mean score is: "In actual work situations, my suggestions will not influence the current implementation of the plan, so I choose to remain silent," with a mean score of 2.264. The mean score for Acquiescent Silence is 2.438, for Defensive Silence is 2.809, and for Disengaged Silence is 2.881. The overall mean score for silence behavior among university teachers is 2.709, indicating a moderately low level of teacher silence behavior.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Silence Behavior Among University Teachers

	N	Mean	SD	Analysis
Acquiescent Silence	352	2.438	0.955	Low to medium
Defensive Silence	352	2.809	0.935	Low to medium
Disengaged Silence	352	2.881	0.992	Low to medium
Total score for silent behavior	352	2.709	0.659	Low to medium

3. Difference Analysis of leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers Across Demographic Variables

There were no significant differences in leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers across different demographic variables.

Specifically, there were no significant differences in perceived leader's self-interest behavior among teachers of different gender, age, years of teaching experience, and education level.

Likewise, no significant differences were found in teacher silence behavior across these same demographic groups

4. Correlation Analysis Between Leader's Self-Interest Behavior and Silence Behavior Among University Teachers

Correlation analysis and regression analysis were conducted to examine the impact of leader's self-interest behavior on silence behavior among university teachers. As shown in Table 3, Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between leader's self-interest behavior and the various dimensions of teacher silence behavior.

The results indicate that leader's self-interest behavior is significantly and positively correlated with Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, Disengaged Silence, and the overall silence score, with correlation coefficients of 0.32, 0.25, 0.18, and 0.36, respectively.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis Between Leader's Self-Interest Behavior and Silence Behavior Among University Teachers

	1	2	3	4
1.Leader's Self-Interest Behavior				
2.Acquiescent Silence	0.32***			
3.Defensive Silence	0.25***	0.17**		
4.Disengaged Silence	0.18***	0.24***	0.21***	
Total score for silent behavior	0.36***	0.68***	0.66***	0.72***

Note: *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$

5. Regression Analysis Between Leader's Self-Interest Behavior and Silence Behavior Among University Teachers

A regression analysis was conducted with silence behavior among university teachers as the dependent variable and leader's self-interest behavior as the independent variable. As shown in Table 4, regression analysis was further used to examine the predictive effect of leader's self-interest behavior on teacher silence. The results indicate that leader's self-interest behavior has a significant

positive predictive effect on Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, Disengaged Silence, and the overall silence score.

Table 4 Regression Analysis Between Leader's Self-Interest Behavior and Silence Behavior Amon-g University Teachers

Implicit variable	b	se	R^2	t	F
Acquiescent Silence	0.31	0.05	0.10	6.26***	39.23***
Defensive Silence	0.24	0.05	0.07	4.92***	24.17***
Disengaged Silence	0.18	0.05	0.03	3.34***	11.18***
Total score for silent behavior	0.24	0.03	0.13	7.26***	52.73***

Note:*$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$

Discussion

1. Differences in leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers Across Demographic Variables

The findings of this study indicate that there are no significant differences in leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers across various demographic background variables. The results are elaborated as follows:

No significant difference in perceived leader's self-interest behavior by gender. This result is consistent with the findings of Decoster, Stouten, and Tripp (2021), which suggest that gender does not influence the perception of leader self-interest. One possible explanation is that the expression of leader's self-interest behavior, such as power use and resource control—is generally gender-neutral. Egocentric and authoritarian behaviors from leaders may affect subordinates of all genders similarly. Additionally, the higher awareness of gender equality in the education sector may further minimize gender-based differences in perception of leadership behavior.

No significant difference in perceived leader's self-interest behavior by age. This finding aligns with Decoster et al. (2014), who found that age does not significantly influence perceptions of leader self-interest. This may be due to the universal nature of the effects of self-interested leadership, which are independent of employee age. Both younger and older teachers may experience the same pressure caused by resource control and centralized decision-making.

No significant difference in perceived leader's self-interest behavior by years of teaching experience. This result supports the findings of Lu and Chen (2023), who suggested that tenure does not significantly affect the perception of leader self-interest. A possible reason is that regardless of teaching experience, teachers may have similar levels of participation in management decisions and access to resources. Leaders with self-interested tendencies may not adjust their behavior based on

years of service.

No significant difference in perceived leader's self-interest behavior by education level. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Zhang, Peng, Wang, Akhtar, and Wang (2023), who also reported no significant effect of education level. One explanation may be that the negative impact of leader's self-interest behavior is broadly experienced across educational backgrounds. Leaders who concentrate on power and ignore subordinates' contributions may generate similar perceptions and responses among teachers regardless of their education level.

No significant difference in silence behavior among university teachers by gender. This result supports the findings of Xu, Loi, and Lam (2015), who found that gender does not significantly influence Acquiescent Silence. One explanation may be the relatively equal and open academic discourse environment in higher education, where communication is more often shaped by professional knowledge and academic stance than by gender identity.

No significant difference in silence behavior among university teachers by age. This finding is consistent with He, Wang, Wu, and Estay (2018), who suggested that age does not influence Acquiescent Silence. Teachers of all age groups may experience comparable levels of stress and academic pressure, which requires them to balance professional integrity and career stability. Therefore, age is not a decisive factor in determining whether teachers choose to remain silent.

No significant difference in silence behavior among university teachers by years of teaching experience. This result echoes the findings of Madrid, Patterson, and Leiva (2015), who found no significant effect of tenure on teacher silence. In universities, both senior and junior faculty may choose silence out of concern for their career development or to avoid disrupting interpersonal relationships.

No significant difference in silence behavior among university teachers by education level. This finding diverges from the conclusions of Wu, Peng, and Estay (2018), who suggested that education level does influence Acquiescent Silence. One possible explanation for the discrepancy is that teachers, regardless of their educational background, may have developed a shared understanding of their professional role, which shapes how they regulate their behavior and expression in the workplace. Even highly educated teachers, though theoretically more capable of critical thinking and expression, may choose not to voice their true opinions in order to adapt to institutional culture.

2. The Impact of leader's self-interest behavior on Acquiescent Silence Among University Teachers

The results of the regression analysis in this study indicate that leader's self-interest behavior is significantly positively correlated with Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, Disengaged Silence, and the overall silence score among university teachers.

According to Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, individuals tend to protect their resources and avoid potential losses. In an organizational environment dominated by self-

interested leadership, teachers may perceive that speaking up could lead to the loss of valuable resources such as social support or job security. As a result, they may choose to remain silent in order to protect themselves from perceived threats.

Morrison and Milliken (2000) argued that acquiescent silence often arises when employees feel powerless or believe that expressing their opinions will have no effect. In environments characterized by leader's self-interest behavior, teachers may sense that their leaders are uninterested in their feedback or unlikely to take it seriously. This perception may lead them to stop sharing ideas and suggestions, in order to avoid unnecessary conflict or feelings of futility.

Knoll and van Dick (2013) suggested that self-interested leadership may create a high-pressure and psychologically unsafe organizational climate. In such environments, employees may suppress their true opinions in order to avoid conflict or punishment, which results in silence. This type of leadership may also generate a sense of fear among teachers, making them afraid to express anything that could be perceived as criticism or as being misaligned with the leader's intentions. In turn, they may adopt defensive silence as a strategy for self-protection.

Detert and Edmondson (2011) explored how a lack of psychological safety and open organizational culture contributes to employee silence. Leaders who exhibit self-interested behavior often neglect teachers' professional development and well-being, which may lead to a sense of disconnection from the institution. This sense of alienation can cause teachers to adopt disengaged silence, where they become indifferent to organizational goals and success, and are thus unwilling to invest the effort required to voice opinions or participate in decision-making processes.

Conclusions

This study began by reviewing literature related to leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers. Through empirical data analysis, it was found that the level of leader self-interest has a negative impact on teacher silence. A series of statistical methods were employed to test the research hypotheses, leading to the following conclusions:

In terms of the overall status of leader's self-interest behavior and silence behavior among university teachers, both were found to be at a moderately low level at Shandong X University.

In the difference analysis, there were no significant differences in perceived leader's self-interest behavior or teacher silence behavior across different demographic variables, including gender, age, years of teaching experience, and education level.

Regression analysis revealed that leader's self-interest behavior has a significant positive impact on Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, Disengaged Silence, and overall silence behavior among university teachers.

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