

School Administration Practices, Occupational Challenges, and Teacher Morale in Jordanian Secondary Schools

ممارسات الإدارة المدرسية، والتحديات المهنية، ومعنويات المعلمين في المدارس الثانوية الأردنية

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the association between school administration practices and teacher morale, and the extent to which occupational challenges mediate or relate to this association, among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate, Jordan. A quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational design was adopted. The study involved 500 male and female secondary school teachers selected through simple random sampling from a target population of 3,410 teachers. A 66-item questionnaire measured six dimensions of school administration (teacher guidance and support, conflict and tension management, communication and interaction, motivation and professional improvement, trust and guidance, and evaluation and performance pressure), two dimensions of occupational challenges (coping with work pressure and shortages in teacher numbers and experience), and three dimensions of teacher morale (morale evaluation, coping strategies for work pressure, and general satisfaction with the school environment). Multiple linear regression showed that school administration practices were strongly and positively associated with teacher morale, $R^2 = .664$, $F(6, 493) = 162.05$, $p < .001$, with motivation and professional improvement and teacher guidance and support emerging as the strongest predictors. School administration practices were also associated with occupational challenges, $R^2 = .308$, $F(6, 493) = 36.50$, $p < .001$, driven almost entirely by the evaluation and performance-pressure dimension. Occupational challenges, in turn, were significantly associated with teacher morale, $R^2 = .210$, $F(2, 497) = 65.87$, $p < .001$. A multivariate analysis of variance indicated statistically significant differences in the study variables according to academic qualification and years of experience, but not according to gender. The study concludes that school administration is a central lever for teacher morale, but that evaluation-related administrative pressure can simultaneously function as an occupational stressor, requiring a more balanced, supportive approach to performance monitoring in secondary schools.

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الملخص

تناولت هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين ممارسات الإدارة المدرسية ومعنويات المعلمين، ومدى تأثير التحديات المهنية كوسيط أو ارتباط بهذه العلاقة، وذلك بين معلمي المرحلة الثانوية في محافظة إربد، الأردن. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً كمياً وصفيًا ارتباطيًا مستعرضًا. شملت الدراسة 500 معلم ومعلمة من معلمي المرحلة الثانوية، تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا من بين 3410 معلمين. وقد قاس استبيان مكون من 66 بنداً ستة أبعاد للإدارة المدرسية (توجيه المعلمين ودعمهم، وإدارة النزاعات والتوترات، والتواصل والتفاعل، والتحفيز والتطوير المهني، والثقة والتوجيه، والتقييم وضغط الأداء)، وبُعدين للتحديات المهنية (التعامل مع ضغط العمل ونقص أعداد المعلمين وخبراتهم)، وثلاثة أبعاد لمعنويات المعلمين (تقييم المعنويات، واستراتيجيات التكيف مع ضغط العمل، والرضا العام عن البيئة المدرسية). أظهر تحليل الانحدار الخطي المتعدد وجود ارتباط قوي وإيجابي بين ممارسات الإدارة المدرسية ومعنويات المعلمين، $R^2 = 0.664$ ، $F(6, 493) = 162.05$ ، $p < 0.001$ ، حيث برزت الدوافع والتطوير المهني وتوجيه المعلمين ودعمهم كأقوى المؤشرات. كما ارتبطت ممارسات الإدارة المدرسية بالتحديات المهنية ($R^2 = 0.308$ ، $F(6, 493) = 36.50$ ، $p < 0.001$ ، مدفوعة بشكل شبه كامل ببعد التقييم وضغط الأداء. بدورها، ارتبطت التحديات المهنية ارتباطاً وثيقاً بمعنويات المعلمين، $R^2 = 0.210$ ، $F(2, 497) = 65.87$ ، $p < 0.001$. وأشار تحليل التباين متعدد المتغيرات إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في متغيرات الدراسة وفقاً للمؤهل الأكاديمي وسنوات الخبرة، ولكن ليس وفقاً للجنس. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن إدارة المدرسة هي رافعة أساسية لمعنويات المعلمين، ولكن الضغط الإداري المتعلق بالتقييم يمكن أن يعمل في الوقت نفسه كعامل ضغط مهني، مما يتطلب نهجاً أكثر توازناً ودعماً لمراقبة الأداء في المدارس الثانوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

إدارة المدارس؛ التحديات المهنية؛
معنويات المعلمين؛ التعليم الثانوي؛
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1. Introduction

Teacher morale is one of the most consistent predictors of instructional quality, retention, and the overall health of a school as a workplace. When teachers feel supported, recognized, and able to manage the demands of their profession, they are more likely to remain committed to their schools and their students; when morale erodes, the consequences extend to attrition, absenteeism, and diminished classroom effectiveness (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). School administration occupies a pivotal position in this dynamic. Principals and school leadership teams shape the conditions under which teachers work by directing and supporting staff, managing conflict, communicating expectations, motivating professional growth, building trust, and evaluating performance. A large and growing body of international research confirms that school leadership is one of the strongest school-level correlates of teacher job satisfaction and wellbeing (Eryilmaz et al., 2025; Hallinger et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2024). At the same time, teachers in many education systems face mounting occupational challenges that can undermine morale regardless of the quality of leadership above them. These challenges include heavy workloads and the pressure of coping with competing demands, as well as shortages in the number and experience of available teaching staff, which increase the burden placed on those who remain (Li et al., 2024; McPherson et al., 2025). Occupational stress and inadequate staffing are now recognized internationally as

central threats to teacher wellbeing (Nwoko et al., 2023), and understanding how school administration interacts with these challenges, rather than treating either factor in isolation, is essential for developing a realistic picture of what sustains or erodes teacher morale. Research on this triad of relationships remains comparatively limited in the Jordanian and wider Arab context, where secondary education faces distinctive pressures related to staffing, administrative structures, and evaluation practices. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the association between school administration practices and teacher morale among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate, Jordan, and examines how occupational challenges relate to both administration and morale within the same model.

1.2. Study Objectives

- Determine the psychometric adequacy of the school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale scales.
- Examine the association between school administration practices and teacher morale.
- Examine the association between school administration practices and occupational challenges.
- Examine the association between occupational challenges and teacher morale.
- Test whether school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale differ according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience.

1.3. Research Questions

- What are the latent factors and psychometric properties of the school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale scales?
- What is the association between school administration practices and teacher morale among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate?
- What is the association between school administration practices and the occupational challenges reported by teachers?
- What is the association between occupational challenges and teacher morale?
- Do school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale differ significantly according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

- H1: The scales used (school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale) do not possess construct validity and adequate psychometric properties.
- H2: There is no effect of school administration on teacher morale among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate.
- H3: There is no relationship between school administration and occupational challenges among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate.
- H4: There is no effect of occupational challenges on teacher morale among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate.

- H5: There are no substantial differences between school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale on one hand, and gender, academic qualification, and years of experience on the other.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Empirically, the study extends the literature on school leadership and teacher outcomes to a Jordanian secondary-education context that remains under-represented relative to Western and East Asian settings (Özdemir et al., 2024). Conceptually, it treats occupational challenges as a construct in its own right rather than an undifferentiated backdrop to administration and morale, distinguishing workload pressure from staffing shortages. Practically, the findings can inform how school principals allocate attention across guidance, communication, motivation, trust-building, and evaluation, and can help ministries of education anticipate the unintended costs of intensified performance evaluation on teacher morale.

2. Literature Review

2.1. School Administration and Teacher Outcomes

Empirical work over the past two decades has consistently linked school leadership practices to teacher job satisfaction, wellbeing, and morale. Hallinger, Liu, and Chen (2025), synthesizing 68 quantitative studies using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, found a moderate and significant relationship between principal instructional leadership and a composite of teacher attitudes, including job satisfaction, trust, and commitment. Similarly, Shi et al. (2024), in a meta-analysis of 98 studies covering more than 740,000 participants, reported that transactional, instructional, authentic, transformational, distributed, and ethical leadership styles were all positively associated with teacher job satisfaction, with ethical and servant leadership showing the strongest effects. Using large international datasets, Eryilmaz, Kennedy, Strietholt, and Johansson (2025) found that effective school leadership, alongside better student behavior and lower perceived workload, was linked to greater teacher job satisfaction across dozens of education systems, while a companion analysis of the same data source found that leadership support had a small-to-moderate positive effect on satisfaction specifically among secondary-level mathematics and science teachers (Eryilmaz & Strietholt, 2025). Distributed and shared forms of leadership have received particular attention: García Torres (2018) found that both principal-reported and teacher-reported distributed leadership predicted teacher job satisfaction in Singapore, and Liu, Bellibaş, and Gümüş (2021) showed that instructional and distributed leadership were associated with teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction partly through a supportive school culture and teacher collaboration. Not all administrative functions, however, operate identically: Üztemur, Gökalp, İlğan, and Dinç (2025) found that leadership behaviors were directly associated with wellbeing and satisfaction, but that the strength of this relationship depended on mediating organizational conditions such as professional autonomy and trust, while Fidan (2025) showed that instructional leadership predicted teachers' subjective wellbeing largely through a climate of trust, autonomy, and collaboration rather than through leadership alone.

2.2. Occupational Challenges Facing Teachers

Occupational challenges in teaching are most often studied through the lens of workload, job demands, and staffing adequacy. Nwoko, Emeto, Malau-Aduli, and Malau-Aduli (2023), synthesizing 38 studies, identified personal capability, socio-emotional competence, responses to

work conditions, and professional relationships as the four major factors shaping teachers' occupational wellbeing, with excessive workload and inadequate support repeatedly implicated as risk factors. Staffing shortages compound these pressures: McPherson, Lampert, and Baptista (2025) documented how unfilled vacancies, high staff turnover, and a limited relief workforce intensify the burden placed on the teachers who remain in hard-to-staff schools, echoing concerns raised internationally about the consequences of teacher shortages for workload and instructional quality. Maas et al. (2022), using longitudinal data from more than a thousand teachers, showed that principals' social support relates to teachers' basic psychological need satisfaction largely through its effect on perceived job demands and job resources, underscoring that occupational challenges are not simply an external condition but are shaped by the administrative environment in which teachers work.

2.3. Teacher Morale as an Organizational and Psychological Outcome

Teacher morale reflects an evaluative and affective judgment about one's work, encompassing confidence, satisfaction, and a sense of belonging within the school community. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), in a large-scale study of Norwegian teachers, found that school-context variables were related to job satisfaction and motivation to leave the profession primarily through their effects on feelings of belonging and emotional exhaustion, illustrating that morale is best understood as the outcome of a chain of organizational and psychological processes rather than a direct reaction to any single condition. Li, Xue, and Liu (2024) extended this logic across four countries, showing that distributed school leadership predicted teacher job satisfaction directly, while also indirectly increasing administrative burden and job stress in ways that could offset some of its benefits, a pattern consistent with the idea that administrative practices can simultaneously support and burden teachers.

2.4. School Administration and Occupational Challenges

A smaller strand of research has examined how administrative practices themselves relate to the occupational challenges teachers report, rather than treating administration only as a direct predictor of morale. Ersan Albayrak, Dinç, Hacımustafaoğlu, and Özdemir (2024) found that school leadership was associated with teacher work engagement largely through its effect on job satisfaction, suggesting that some administrative dimensions operate indirectly through teachers' appraisal of their working conditions. Evaluation and accountability practices in particular occupy an ambiguous position in this literature: while structured feedback and performance monitoring are generally presented as supportive functions of instructional leadership (Özdemir et al., 2024), several studies caution that intensified accountability and evaluation pressure can itself become a source of stress when it is not accompanied by adequate support (Nwoko et al., 2023).

2.5. Occupational Challenges and Teacher Morale

The relationship between occupational challenges and morale is well established but multidimensional. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) found that time pressure and workload were consistently associated with lower morale-related outcomes through emotional exhaustion, while Li et al. (2024) confirmed that job stress mediated the relationship between administrative practices and job satisfaction across several national contexts. Teacher shortages introduce a distinct pathway: McPherson et al. (2025) argued that persistent staffing gaps not only increase individual workload but also erode the collegial and mentoring relationships that sustain morale

over time, indicating that the effects of occupational challenges on morale may operate through more than one mechanism simultaneously.

2.6. Demographic Variables and Study Constructs

The literature does not support a uniform expectation of gender differences in perceptions of leadership, occupational challenges, or morale; findings vary by context, role, and measurement approach. Eryilmaz et al. (2025) found that female teachers reported somewhat higher job satisfaction than male teachers in most of the education systems they examined, but the effect was inconsistent across countries. Academic qualification and years of experience appear more consistently linked to how teachers experience administration and occupational demands, since more experienced and more highly qualified teachers may occupy different roles, carry different workloads, and interact differently with school leadership (Özdemir et al., 2024).

2.7. Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by a job demands–resources perspective in which school administration functions largely as a resource that can buffer occupational demands and sustain morale, while certain administrative practices, particularly evaluation and performance monitoring, can simultaneously act as a demand. Occupational challenges, in turn, are treated as demands that draw on teachers' coping capacity and are expected to relate negatively to morale when they exceed available resources, consistent with the job demands–resources model referenced across the reviewed literature (Maas et al., 2022).

TABLE I. STUDY CONSTRUCTS AND OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Construct	Dimensions	Operational Focus
School Administration	Teacher guidance and support; conflict and tension management; communication and interaction; motivation and professional improvement; trust and guidance; evaluation and performance pressure	The administrative practices through which school leadership directs, supports, and evaluates secondary school teachers.
Occupational Challenges	Coping with work pressure; shortage of teachers and experience	The workload-related and staffing-related demands teachers face in performing their duties.
Teacher Morale	Morale evaluation; coping strategies for work pressure; general satisfaction with the school environment	Teachers' evaluative and affective state regarding their profession and workplace.
Grouping Variables	Gender; academic qualification; years of experience	Comparison of reported levels across demographic subgroups.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational design, appropriate for describing teachers' reported levels of school administration, occupational challenges, and morale, and for examining associations and group differences without manipulating the school environment. Because the design is correlational, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of association rather than causation.

3.2. Population and Sample

The target population comprised all teachers in government secondary schools, male and female, in Irbid Governorate, Jordan, totaling 3,410 teachers across eight directorates for the 2022/2023 academic year according to Ministry of Education statistics. Sample size was initially set at 339 respondents following Krejcie and Morgan (1970) tables; however, to offset anticipated missing data, outliers, and non-response, 500 questionnaires were distributed using simple random sampling, which was considered appropriate given the relative homogeneity of the target population. After screening for missing values and multivariate outliers, 500 valid responses were retained for analysis.

TABLE II. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS (N = 500)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	243	48.6%
	Female	257	51.4%
Academic Qualification	Bachelor's degree	282	56.4%
	Postgraduate (Master's/Doctorate)	218	43.6%
Years of Experience	Less than 10 years	212	42.4%
	10 years or more	288	57.6%

3.3. Research Instrument

Data were collected using a 66-item questionnaire developed after reviewing prior instruments used in related Arabic and international studies, and informed by the first author's professional experience as a school administrator. The questionnaire comprised a demographic section (gender, academic qualification, years of experience) and three substantive sections. The school administration section (38 items) covered six dimensions: teacher guidance and support (6 items), conflict and tension management (6 items), communication and interaction (6 items), motivation and professional improvement (6 items), trust and guidance (7 items), and evaluation and performance pressure (7 items). The occupational challenges section (10 items) covered two dimensions: coping with work pressure (5 items) and shortage of teachers and experience (5 items). The teacher morale section (18 items) covered three dimensions: morale evaluation (6 items), coping strategies for work pressure (6 items), and general satisfaction with the school environment (6 items). All items used a five-point Likert scale.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through review by a panel of specialists in educational administration and measurement from Jordanian universities, who evaluated item wording and

dimension fit and whose feedback informed refinement of the instrument. Construct validity was subsequently examined through exploratory factor analysis for each scale. Sampling adequacy was confirmed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure, which reached .934 for the school administration scale and comparably adequate values for the occupational challenges and teacher morale scales, all exceeding the recommended minimum of .75; Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant for all three scales ($p < .001$), and correlation matrices showed no evidence of problematic multicollinearity among items. Internal consistency, assessed through Cronbach's alpha, exceeded the conventional threshold of .70 for all scales and subscales, supporting the reliability of the instrument for the subsequent analyses.

3.5. Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, and the questionnaire did not collect directly identifying information. Teachers were informed that participation had no bearing on their professional standing. Data were collected during the first semester of the 2023/2024 academic year in accordance with institutional research procedures.

3.6. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were computed for all study variables. Preliminary diagnostics included tests for normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis distance). Multiple linear regression was used to examine the associations between school administration and teacher morale, between school administration and occupational challenges, and between occupational challenges and teacher morale. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), preceded by Box's M and Levene's tests, was used to examine differences in the study variables according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

Screening of the 500 valid responses indicated no serious departure from normality; skewness and kurtosis coefficients for all study dimensions fell within the ± 2 to ± 3 range conventionally accepted as evidence of an approximately normal distribution, and histogram inspection supported this conclusion. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the hypothesized dimensional structure of the school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale scales, with adequate sampling adequacy ($KMO = .934$ for the school administration scale) and significant Bartlett's tests of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 24640.99$, $df = 465$, $p < .001$, for the school administration scale). On this basis, H1 was rejected: the scales used possessed satisfactory construct validity and psychometric properties, supporting their use in the subsequent inferential analyses.

4.2. School Administration and Teacher Morale

Multiple linear regression was used to examine the association between the six dimensions of school administration and teacher morale. The overall model was statistically significant, $R = .815$, $R^2 = .664$, adjusted $R^2 = .659$, $F(6, 493) = 162.05$, $p < .001$, indicating that school administration dimensions jointly accounted for approximately 66% of the variance in teacher morale.

TABLE III. REGRESSION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION DIMENSIONS ON TEACHER MORALE

Predictor	B	Beta	t	p	VIF
Teacher guidance and support	.344	.413	7.24	<.001	8.67
Conflict and tension management	.090	.130	1.69	.029	1.28
Communication and interaction	.206	.262	2.99	.003	4.44
Motivation and professional improvement	.380	.427	7.77	<.001	5.36
Trust and guidance	.164	.205	3.38	.001	1.84
Evaluation and performance pressure	.302	.276	7.78	<.001	4.78

Motivation and professional improvement emerged as the strongest predictor of teacher morale ($\beta = .427$, $p < .001$), followed by teacher guidance and support ($\beta = .413$, $p < .001$), evaluation and performance pressure ($\beta = .276$, $p < .001$), communication and interaction ($\beta = .262$, $p = .003$), trust and guidance ($\beta = .205$, $p = .001$), and conflict and tension management ($\beta = .130$, $p = .029$). All six dimensions were positive and statistically significant predictors of morale. On this basis, H2 was rejected.

4.3. School Administration and Occupational Challenges

A second regression examined the association between school administration dimensions and occupational challenges. The overall model was significant, $R = .555$, $R^2 = .308$, adjusted $R^2 = .299$, $F(6, 493) = 36.50$, $p < .001$, but the pattern of individual predictors differed sharply from the morale model.

TABLE IV. REGRESSION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION DIMENSIONS ON OCCUPATIONAL CHALLENGES

Predictor	B	Beta	t	p
Teacher guidance and support	-.075	-.121	-1.48	.141
Conflict and tension management	.049	.094	0.86	.392
Communication and interaction	.029	.050	0.39	.694
Motivation and professional improvement	-.004	-.006	-0.08	.935
Trust and guidance	-.114	-.091	-2.20	.052
Evaluation and performance pressure	.523	.636	12.51	<.001

Only evaluation and performance pressure was a statistically significant predictor of occupational challenges ($\beta = .636$, $p < .001$); the remaining five dimensions were not significant. This indicates that, while most school administration practices are unrelated to the occupational challenges teachers report, more intensive evaluation and performance monitoring is closely and specifically associated with greater occupational challenges. On this basis, H3 was rejected, though the association is concentrated in a single administrative dimension rather than distributed across all of them.

4.4. Occupational Challenges and Teacher Morale

A third regression examined the association between the two dimensions of occupational challenges and teacher morale. The model was significant, $R = .458$, $R^2 = .210$, adjusted $R^2 = .206$, $F(2, 497) = 65.87$, $p < .001$.

TABLE V. REGRESSION OF OCCUPATIONAL CHALLENGES ON TEACHER MORALE

Predictor	B	Beta	t	p
Coping with work pressure	.603	.458	11.34	<.001
Shortage of teachers and experience	-.125	-.147	-3.63	<.001

Teachers' capacity to cope with work pressure was positively associated with morale ($\beta = .458$, $p < .001$): teachers who reported greater capacity to manage work pressure also reported higher morale. In contrast, the shortage of teachers and experience was negatively associated with morale ($\beta = -.147$, $p < .001$): greater perceived staffing shortages were linked to lower morale. Notably, the zero-order correlation between the shortage dimension and morale was positive ($r = .710$), which reversed sign once the two occupational-challenge dimensions were considered jointly, suggesting a suppression effect driven by their shared variance; this pattern warrants further investigation with alternative modeling approaches. On this basis, H4 was rejected.

4.5. Differences by Gender, Qualification, and Experience

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to examine differences in school administration, occupational challenges, and teacher morale according to gender, academic qualification, and years of experience. Levene's test indicated homogeneity of variance across all dependent variables ($p > .05$ in all cases), supporting the appropriateness of the analysis.

TABLE VI. SUMMARY OF MULTIVARIATE AND UNIVARIATE EFFECTS BY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Effect	F	df	p	Partial η^2
Between-groups (overall)	19.30	7	<.001	.215
Gender	0.14	1	.706	.000
Academic qualification	20.81	1	<.001	.041
Years of experience	25.13	1	<.001	.049
Gender $\times$ Qualification	3.56	1	.060	.007
Gender $\times$ Experience	16.42	1	<.001	.032
Qualification $\times$ Experience	6.28	1	.013	.013
Gender $\times$ Qualification $\times$ Experience	0.58	1	.447	.001

Academic qualification and years of experience were both significantly associated with the study variables, with years of experience showing the largest effect size ($\eta^2 = .049$), followed by academic qualification ($\eta^2 = .041$). Gender alone was not a statistically significant factor ($F = 0.14$, $p = .706$, $\eta^2 = .000$). However, the interaction between gender and years of experience was significant ($F = 16.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .032$), as was the interaction between qualification and experience ($F = 6.28$, $p = .013$). Follow-up univariate tests indicated that qualification and experience were significantly related to school administration and teacher morale specifically, whereas gender showed a significant univariate association only with teacher morale ($p = .015$) and not with the other two variables. On this basis, H5 was rejected: substantial differences were found according to qualification and experience, and according to the interaction of gender with experience, but not according to gender alone.

5. Discussion

5.1. School Administration and Teacher Morale

The strong, positive association between school administration and teacher morale, accounting for roughly two-thirds of the variance in morale, is consistent with a substantial body of international evidence linking school leadership practices to teacher satisfaction and wellbeing (Hallinger et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2024). The dominance of motivation and professional improvement, followed closely by teacher guidance and support, echoes findings that instructional and supportive leadership functions, more than any single leadership style, are what teachers experience as

morale-sustaining (Eryilmaz et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2021). That evaluation and performance pressure was also positively associated with morale, despite functioning very differently in the occupational-challenges model, suggests that teachers do not necessarily experience structured performance feedback as purely burdensome; rather, when embedded within an otherwise supportive administrative relationship, evaluation may be read as a sign of attention and investment in professional growth, consistent with the constructive role attributed to feedback-oriented leadership elsewhere in the literature (Fidan, 2025).

5.2. School Administration and Occupational Challenges

The concentration of the school-administration–occupational-challenges association almost entirely within the evaluation and performance-pressure dimension is one of the more distinctive findings of this study. Rather than school administration broadly generating occupational challenges, it appears that a specific administrative function, namely evaluation and performance monitoring, carries the weight of this association, while guidance, communication, motivation, conflict management, and trust show no significant relationship with the occupational challenges teachers report. This pattern aligns with concerns in the literature that accountability and evaluation practices, even when intended to support instructional improvement, can simultaneously function as a demand that intensifies teachers' workload-related stress (Li et al., 2024; Nwoko et al., 2023). It suggests that the same evaluation practices that teachers may experience as motivating in the aggregate (Section 5.1) can, at the level of daily workload, register as an occupational challenge, underscoring that a single administrative function can carry both a supportive and a burdensome signal depending on how it is enacted and how frequently it recurs.

5.3. Occupational Challenges and Teacher Morale

The finding that teachers' capacity to cope with work pressure was positively associated with morale, while staffing shortages were negatively associated with morale once shared variance was accounted for, is consistent with international evidence that different occupational demands can operate through distinct pathways (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Teachers who reported stronger coping resources for managing pressure also reported higher morale, in line with a job demands–resources logic in which coping capacity functions as a personal resource that buffers demands (Maas et al., 2022). The negative association between staffing shortages and morale corroborates qualitative and survey evidence from hard-to-staff schools showing that unfilled positions and inexperienced replacement staff erode not only workload but also the collegial relationships that sustain morale (McPherson et al., 2025). The reversal in sign between the zero-order correlation and the regression coefficient for the shortage dimension indicates that its apparent positive association with morale at the bivariate level was confounded with the coping-with-pressure dimension, and that its net, independent relationship with morale is in fact negative; this is an important methodological caution for future studies that rely on bivariate correlations alone to characterize occupational challenges.

5.4. Differences by Gender, Qualification, and Experience

The absence of a significant gender main effect is broadly consistent with the view that gender differences in perceptions of leadership and occupational conditions are neither universal nor stable across contexts (Eryilmaz et al., 2025). The significant effects of academic qualification and years of experience, by contrast, suggest that how teachers experience school administration and

morale is shaped more by their professional trajectory than by gender alone; more experienced and more highly qualified teachers may occupy different positions within the school hierarchy, interact differently with administrative evaluation, and draw on different professional networks, consistent with findings that experience and role differentiate teachers' relationship with school leadership more consistently than demographic characteristics (Özdemir et al., 2024). The significant gender-by-experience interaction indicates that gender differences, where they exist, are conditional on experience level rather than constant, a nuance that a main-effects-only analysis would have missed.

5.5. Educational Implications

These findings carry several implications for secondary schools in Jordan. First, school principals should continue to invest in motivation, professional improvement, and direct guidance and support, which show the strongest positive association with morale. Second, evaluation and performance-monitoring practices warrant particular care: because this is the one administrative dimension linked to greater occupational challenges, school leadership should pair evaluation with adequate support, manageable frequency, and transparent criteria so that it is experienced as developmental rather than purely burdensome. Third, addressing staffing shortages should be treated as a morale issue and not merely a logistical one, since unfilled positions and inexperienced replacement staff are independently associated with lower morale once workload coping is accounted for. Finally, professional development and support structures should be differentiated by experience level and qualification rather than applied uniformly, given the significant effects of these variables on the study outcomes.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among school administration practices, occupational challenges, and teacher morale among secondary school teachers in Irbid Governorate, Jordan. School administration was strongly and positively associated with teacher morale, with motivation and professional improvement and teacher guidance and support as the leading predictors. School administration was also associated with occupational challenges, but this association was concentrated almost entirely in the evaluation and performance-pressure dimension. Occupational challenges were, in turn, significantly associated with teacher morale, with coping capacity for work pressure showing a positive association and staffing shortages showing a negative association once shared variance was accounted for. Academic qualification and years of experience, but not gender alone, were significantly related to the study variables, and gender's relevance depended on years of experience. These findings indicate that school administration is a central lever for sustaining teacher morale in Jordanian secondary schools, but that its evaluation and performance-monitoring function occupies a dual role: it is simultaneously associated with higher morale and with greater occupational challenges. This duality highlights the importance of how evaluation is enacted rather than whether it occurs, and reinforces the need to address staffing shortages as a factor with direct consequences for teacher morale.

6.1. Recommendations

- Strengthen school leadership practices related to motivation, professional improvement, and direct guidance and support for secondary school teachers.

- Redesign evaluation and performance-monitoring procedures to pair accountability with adequate support, manageable frequency, and transparent, developmental feedback.
- Treat teacher shortages and inexperience gaps as a morale priority within staffing and recruitment policy, not solely as a logistical constraint.
- Provide school principals with training on the differentiated needs of teachers by qualification level and years of experience.
- Develop institutional mechanisms for monitoring the relationship between evaluation intensity and teacher-reported occupational challenges over time.

6.2. Limitations

The study relied on a convenience-adjacent probability sample drawn from a single Jordanian governorate, which limits generalization to other regions or educational levels. The cross-sectional, correlational design does not permit causal inference, and all variables were measured through self-report, which may be subject to social-desirability bias. The observed reversal between the bivariate correlation and regression coefficient for the shortage dimension illustrates the sensitivity of the findings to model specification and should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

6.3. Suggestions for Future Research

- Replicate the study across multiple Jordanian governorates and both secondary and other educational levels to assess generalizability.
- Employ longitudinal or experimental designs to test whether changes in evaluation practices produce corresponding changes in occupational challenges and morale.
- Examine evaluation and performance-pressure practices qualitatively to clarify how and when they are experienced as supportive versus burdensome.
- Investigate the suppression effect identified for the teacher-shortage dimension using structural equation modeling or alternative estimation approaches.
- Compare Jordanian findings with those from other Arab and international education systems to test the boundary conditions of the reported associations.

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