

Organizational Gossip and Teachers: Threat or Opportunity?

Örgütsel Dedikodu ve Öğretmenler: Tehdit mi Fırsat mı?

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ABSTRACT: This research examines teachers' perceptions of gossip in schools. The research employed an explanatory approach of mixed methods. Quantitative data were obtained through the "Organizational Gossip Scale" and qualitative data were obtained through the semi-structured interview form. Quantitative data were collected from 302 teachers selected by simple random sampling method in secondary schools in Turkey. Qualitative data were collected from ten teachers chosen by the maximum variation sampling method. The research first revealed that gossip is a frequently used communication mechanism in schools, although participants have different perceptions of gossip. In addition, the results showed that gossip might be seen as an opportunity in school, given its functions of having information and developing relations. However, in terms of harmful effects such as poor performance and burnout in the qualitative results, gossip will be a threat to the school's stakeholders. Still, it can also be a threat in terms of organizational harm. In conclusion, gossip's significance in informal processes in schools was emphasized. Implications were made to practitioners and researchers that the threat aspect could be turned into an opportunity.

Keywords: Organizational gossip, teacher, threat, opportunity.

ÖZ: Bu araştırma, öğretmenlerin okullardaki dedikoduya ilişkin algılarını incelemektedir. Araştırmada, karma yöntemin açıklayıcı deseni kullanılmıştır. Nicel veriler "Örgütsel Dedikodu Ölçeği" ile toplanırken, nitel veriler ise yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu aracılığı ile toplanmıştır. Nicel veriler, Türkiye'deki ortaokullarda basit tesadüfi örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen 302 öğretmenden elde edilmiştir. Nitel veriler ise, maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilen on öğretmenden toplanmıştır. Araştırma bulguları ilk olarak, katılımcıların dedikoduya ilişkin farklı algıları olmasına rağmen, dedikodunun okullarda sıklıkla kullanılan bir iletişim mekanizması olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bununla birlikte bulgular, haberdar olma ve ilişki geliştirme işlevleri göz önüne alındığında, dedikodunun okulda bir fırsat olarak görülebileceğini göstermiştir. Ancak nitel sonuçlarda, düşük performans ve tükenmişlik gibi zararlı etkiler açısından düşünüldüğünde, dedikodu okul paydaşları için bir tehdit oluşturacaktır. Diğer taraftan dedikodu, okullarda örgütsel zarar boyutu açısından da bir tehdit olabilir. Araştırma sonucunda, okullardaki informal süreçlerde dedikodunun önemi vurgulanmıştır. Dedikodunun tehdit boyutunun, okullarda bir fırsat dönüştürülebileceğine ilişkin uygulayıcılara ve araştırmacılara yönelik çıkarımlarda bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Örgütsel dedikodu, öğretmen, tehdit, fırsat.

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Communication, one of the administrative processes, is a crucial component of the organizational structure. The quality of communication influences the quality of bilateral relations between people (Roberts, 1984). Since educational organizations are human-intensive, the school process occurs through person-to-person interaction (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1988). For the school organization to function effectively, communication networks in schools with a complex structure must be understood (Campbell et al., 1983) because well-functioning communication is considered a prerequisite for effective school cooperation processes (Schad, 2017). It is even suggested that educational relationships are communicative (Fritzell, 1996). Communication can take various forms in schools, such as organized meetings, informal conversations, bulletin boards, notes, and handbooks (Eden, 2001). Communication in organizations occurs not only through official communication channels such as official meetings and procedures but also through informal channels such as gossip (Rauschenberg, 1988).

Many researchers have called gossip a ubiquitous phenomenon in the workplace and an inevitable part of organizational behavior (Grosser et al., 2010; Wert & Salovey, 2004). According to research conducted by Grosser et al. (2010), it was concluded that more than 90% of employees participated in gossip activities in an organizational environment. On the other hand, De Mare's (1989) research showed that 70% of all organizational communication occurs at the informal level. It is clear that gossip is widespread and influential as informal communication. However, due to a limited number of studies, understanding its nature in organizations is still very uncertain.

Researchers note that gossip can serve either a positive or a negative function (Foster, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004). When the first studies on gossip in organizations are examined, it is seen that they mainly focus on recommending strategies to discipline the workforce and manage and eliminate gossip in the workplace (Mishra, 1990). However, it has recently been accepted that gossip has positives (Michelson & Mouly, 2004). In general, it is stated that organizational gossip has positive aspects such as information, social bonding, entertainment, and influencing others (Stirling, 1956). Although the researchers have shown that gossip has its positives, it is seen that talking about people who are not in the environment will continue to be a social problem (Litman et al., 2009), especially when it crosses ethical and legal lines. Although researchers were encouraged to do more research on the benefits of gossip (Noon & Delbridge, 1993), studies have been limited to gossip in an organizational environment.

Studies in schools dominated by informal structure (Hoy & Miskel, 2010) were also limited. These studies are related to the results of the gossip (Himmetoğlu et al., 2020), management of gossip in schools (Levent & Türkmenoğlu, 2019), how and why gossip was made (Algharabali et al., 2014), reactions to the gossip (Arabacı et al., 2012), where gossip appeared (Hallett et al., 2009), and how gossip spread among students in American schools (Lind et al., 2007). It has been observed that teachers are the focus of the studies on the gossip mechanism in schools. On the other hand, the studies were carried out mainly by qualitative method, and the improved scales related to organizational gossip (Han & Dağlı, 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2018) can be explained by its small number. Furthermore, research on gossip in schools has shown that gossip does not focus on the causes of results based on different personal variables.

Studies on gossip in schools show that gossip has both positive and negative functions, as indicated above. However, there is no clear understanding of why teachers gossip. In addition, it was considered an essential element that the studies did not have precise results on the conditions under which gossip appeared and when it was beneficial for teachers. The current situation shows the difficulty of understanding the reflections of gossip in schools, which has a complex structure in its perception and effects. In particular, this research reinforces the importance of research that gossip can be seen as a threat or an opportunity for educational organizations. This research aims to establish whether gossip can be considered a threat or an opportunity in schools based on teachers' perceptions of the gossip mechanism in schools and whether these perceptions differ according to various variables. Since the research was done by mixed methods, the first and third research questions were created as positivist, and the second and fourth questions were created below with the constructivist paradigm:

1. What is the level of perception of teachers regarding organizational gossip?
2. What are the reasons for the results of teachers' perception levels regarding organizational gossip?
3. Is there a significant difference in gender, marital status, professional seniority, and school size among the teachers' perceptions of organizational gossip?
4. What are the reasons for significant differences in gender, marital status, professional seniority, and school size variables among the teachers' perceptions of organizational gossip?

Organizational Gossip

We defined gossip in this study as “the process of informally communicating value-laden information about members of a social setting” (Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p. 25). The concept of gossip, which is explored in different fields such as anthropology (Dunbar, 2004), psychology (Rosnow, 1977), sociology (Bergmann, 1993), and organizational communication (Mills, 2010), has recently been examined in the field of organizational behavior under the name of gossip or organizational gossip in the workplace. The fact that it was the subject of research in different areas was seen as an indication of the importance given to gossip (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Gossip has positive and negative functions in the organizational environment. In the information exchange process (Foster, 2004), individuals in the organization can often learn information about individuals through gossip without meeting other individuals. Through gossip, information can be transmitted more quickly to those in the organization (Ribeiro & Blakeley, 1995). In addition, it is possible to learn information that is difficult to understand within the scope of official procedures through gossip. Organization managers can use the information exchange function of gossip to get employees' reactions related to new policies and exchange processes (Michelson & Mouly, 2004). Most of the time, managers can go out of their way to pass on official information primarily to those in the organization through gossip. Thus, the coordinated progress of official processes can be achieved (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Because in this way, employees will have the opportunity to convey their opinions to their managers through gossip, preventing disruptions in official processes.

Another function of gossip is considered social attachment (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007), which involves establishing and maintaining social relationships. Gossip connects the members of the organization and creates social networks between them. Knowing what behaviors are required to maintain group membership contributes to group compatibility, strengthening group identity (Ribeiro & Blakeley, 1995). Moreover, it is suggested that gossip is an “informative and rich tool” to learn the secret social norms of the organization (Gabriels & Backer, 2016, p. 684). It can be said that the group members are informed about what they can do or what they should stay away from, thanks to gossip. For group members who act outside the group’s norms, it is also suggested that gossip has an exclusionary function. In other words, it will be inevitable that the members of the group, who are in a position that does not concur with the norms of the group, will be pushed out of the group by being subjected to the gossip (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Research by Vaidyanathan et al. (2016) found that academics use gossip to warn colleagues who violate norms and believe that gossip can be used as an audit tool in organizations.

Gossip also has a function of fun (Ribeiro & Blakeley, 1995). Gossip can be a way for employees to get rid of the routine at work (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Crampton et al. (1998) found that employees resort to gossip when they feel threatened and stressed. It is thought that employees can resort to recreational gossip to reduce the pressure on them, especially during breaks or while waiting for the end of the working hours. Gossip also influences social status (Hom & Haidt, 2001). Spreading gossip can elevate a person’s social group because it can be said that the people who spread the gossip have special knowledge or understanding (Baumeister et al., 2004), thus increasing their power within the organization (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). Kurland and Pelled (2000) suggested that gossip may do with power typology. Thus, individuals can use gossip to compete with the power derived from gossip and improve performance. However, obtaining the potential ability may negatively motivate some individuals to use gossip (Foster, 2004). It can also be said that the positive dissemination of information will positively affect the organization (Watson, 2011). With the power to obtain from gossip, gossip can become more competitive in the organization, and their performance can increase (Grosser et al., 2010). Besides its positive functions, gossip discredits and damages people and organizations (Van Iterson & Clegg, 2008), wasting time, low productivity, lowering team member morale, and creating a climate of insecurity (Michelson & Mouly, 2004).

The current study focuses on the positive and negative functions such as having information, developing relations, and organizational harm (Han & Dağlı, 2018). “Having information” means to be informed about what is going on in the organization through gossip. “Developing relations” is one of the positive functions of gossip, like “having information” and helps those in the organization improve their social relations. Unlike the first two dimensions, “organizational harm” refers to the negative functions of gossip. Among the negative functions that come to the forefront, especially due to destructive gossip that does not reflect the truth, are the demoralization of those in the organization and the decrease in their motivation.

Method

Model

In the study, the explanatory approach of mixed methods was employed. The quantitatively weighted research in this model is supported by qualitative data (Creswell et al., 2003). The use of mixed methods is that quantitative data related to gossip, which has a complex structure, explains the general picture of the problem. In contrast, qualitative data provides a deeper understanding of the causes of quantitative data. In this context, the scale was applied to the research sample, and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the working group of qualitative research as a result of the results obtained. While the descriptive survey design was employed in the quantitative section of the research, the phenomenology design was used in the qualitative section.

Participants

The study sample consisted of 302 teachers selected by simple random sampling method at 28 public secondary schools in a southeast province of Turkey. We reached the names of all teachers and randomly selected those who would participate in the research from the list. 88.1% of the teachers who participated in the study were undergraduates, and 11.9% were graduates. 22.5% of the participants have seniority of 1-5 years, 26.5% 6-10 years, 26.2% 11-15 years, 15.6% 16-20 years, and 9.3% 21 years or more. 58.3% of the participants were female, and 41.7% were male. 77.5% of teachers are married, and 22.5% are single. 48.3% of the participants work in small school (SS), 10.6% in medium-sized schools (MSS), and 41.1% in large schools (LS). When determining the school size, the classification made by Jones (1997) was based. Schools with 1-28 teachers are small, 29-39 are medium-sized, and schools with 40 or more teachers are large. The working group in the qualitative part of the study consisted of ten teachers who represented different features with the maximum variation sampling method. The nicknames and demographics of those in the study group are given in Table 1. School names were not given to prevent revealing teachers' identities.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group

Teacher Code	Seniority	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Educational Level
T1	10	Male	Single	38	Undergraduate
T2	5	Female	Single	26	Graduate
T3	8	Male	Married	29	Graduate
T4	11	Female	Single	29	Undergraduate
T5	12	Female	Married	35	Undergraduate
T6	7	Female	Single	26	Undergraduate
T7	9	Male	Married	30	Undergraduate

T8	4	Female	Single	26	Undergraduate
T9	15	Male	Single	30	Undergraduate
T10	17	Male	Married	40	Undergraduate

Data Collection Tools

In the research, “Organizational Gossip Scale (OGS)” developed by Han and Dağlı (2018) was employed. The scale consisted of 3 factors (having information, developing relations, organizational harm) and 24 items. Sample items from the scale include that “I learn many things about my colleagues at my school through gossips” for the having information dimension; “I try to relax by gossiping with my colleagues at my school” for the developing relations dimension; and “The gossips in my school cause disagreements among us” for the organizational harm dimension. The scale is rated as a 5-way Likert as “1: Totally Disagree – “5: Totally Agree”. We used the formula $(5-1)/5$ in the interpretation of the scale items; the mean values are in the range of 1.00-1.79 “Totally Disagree”, 1.80-2.59 “Disagree”, 2.60-3.39 “Partly Agree”, 3.40-4.19 “Agree” and 4.20-5.00 “Totally Agree. “In the quantitative part of the study, the fit indices obtained in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the validity of the data ($\chi^2/df=4.84$, GFI=.89, CFI=.91, RMSEA=.08) were acceptable (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients calculated for reliability (ranged .81-.95) are sufficient (George & Mallery, 2003).

A semi-structured interview form was used as a qualitative data collection tool. In the process of developing the form, first of all, a comprehensive literature review was made, and the framework was determined. The interview form was created based on the experiences of the participants and quantitative findings. A draft interview form was prepared, and the draft form was finalized after receiving peer debriefing (Creswell, 2013). In the interviews, we asked the teachers thirteen open-ended questions. We asked additional questions when there were unclear questions or for teachers to elaborate on their views. After analyzing the data obtained to ensure internal validity in the qualitative part of the research, the teachers’ opinions were presented, and member checking was provided. The research process and what is done in this process are explained in detail to increase external validity. In order to improve reliability, all of the qualitative results were given directly without comment; researchers examined each form during the editing phase of the data, compared and in case of difference, the data collection tool was reviewed and revised, and resolved together (Patton, 2005).

Procedure and Data Analysis

The data were collected in the 2020-2021 academic year. Participation was based on voluntary. Teachers have been informed about protecting their identities and how they can be withdrawn without prejudice to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews were videotaped with Zoom software and lasted between 32-50 minutes. The video was recorded with the participants’ permission, and the data were converted into writing.

Quantitative data of the study were analyzed using SPSS software. The data is primarily interpreted by descriptive statistics. The skewness coefficients of the OGS range from -1.80-1.24 and the kurtosis coefficients to -.47-1.72. T-test and ANOVA

were used from parametric tests to test the difference between group means because the data were distributed close to normal (Kline, 2011). LSD was applied to determine the source of the difference in ANOVA. The effect size (Green & Salkind, 2005) was also examined. CFA was made using AMOS software for the construct validity of the OGS. Qualitative data were analyzed by descriptive analysis method. We performed the descriptive analysis in four stages (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). First, we created a framework for descriptive analysis. Next, we processed the data according to the thematic framework. After describing the findings, we finally interpreted the findings. Direct citations were used to add a remarkable feature to the participant's opinions. The data collected by video recordings have been written and edited. Qualitative results supported by direct quotations. When quoting directly, the teachers in the working group were encoded and given their opinions. Coding was carried out as T1-T10 (see Table 1).

Ethical Procedures

Ethics Committee of Mardin Artuklu University has granted ethical approval for this study with the number 2021/2-2.

Results

In this section, quantitative results are presented in tables, and qualitative results are included immediately after the quantitative results.

Results regarding the First Two Research Questions

Quantitative results regarding the dimension of having information are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results regarding the Dimension of Having Information

Dim.	Items	Mean	SD	Level
Having Information	1. "I learn many things about my colleagues at my school through gossips."	3.79	1.03	Agree
	2. "I learn some colleagues' thoughts in my school in gossip environments."	3.70	.98	Agree
	3. "Through gossips, I learn a lot of information about newcomer colleagues at my school."	3.62	1.03	Agree
	4. "I learn about the experiences of my colleagues in gossip environments at my school."	3.76	.99	Agree
	5. "I hear the information about my colleagues at my school through gossips before formal communication channels."	3.61	1.10	Agree
	6. "I learn many things about my colleagues through gossip, which I cannot learn from their own."	3.66	1.01	Agree
	7. "I hear gossips about some incidents that are tried to be covered up in my school."	3.85	.93	Agree
Dimension		3.71	.90	Agree

In Table 2, it was observed that all item means were at the level of “agree”. Considering the results, teachers were asked, “What kind of information is learned through gossip?” We understand from this teacher’s opinion that teachers learn all kinds of information through gossip, and the subject of the information may differ from school to school.

“In general, information about the courses, profiles of students, the working environment at the school, etc., may even have a scientific side. In addition to this information, information about the characters of the individuals, about the administration, about the parents can be obtained.” (T1)

Quantitative results regarding the dimension of developing relations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Results regarding the Dimension of Developing Relations

Dim.	Items	Mean	SD	Level
Developing Relations	8. “Gossiping with my colleagues at my school increases our sincerity.”	3.80	.96	Agree
	9. “I share my opinions freely in gossip environments in my school.”	3.81	.97	Agree
	10. “I try to relax by gossiping with my colleagues at my school.”	3.73	.98	Agree
	11. “I express my thoughts comfortably in the gossip environments of my school.”	3.80	.94	Agree
	12. “I make new friends in gossip environments in my school.”	3.57	1.02	Agree
	13. “Gossip environments in my school strengthen my friendship.”	2.02	1.03	Disagree
	14. “I am having fun by gossiping with my colleagues at my school.”	1.90	.97	Disagree
	Dimension	3.23	.67	Agree

In Table 3, it was observed that the means of items related to strengthening friendship ties and having fun were at the level of “agree”. Accordingly, teachers were asked, “What are the reasons for gossip?” It is understood from the following teacher’s opinions that the reasons were inability to attract, unfair practices, not to offend the other, to relieve stress, to have fun and jealousy.

“I know people who do not enjoy life when they don’t gossip. They are having fun in the process. It wouldn’t be so common if it weren’t for a type of entertainment.” (T1)

“There can be many reasons for gossip. Sometimes it can lead to inability to suffer, and sometimes it can lead to gossip, such as the desire to share your admiration or just want to get rid of loneliness and strengthen social relations by sharing information.” (T2)

“Teachers’ gossip about governance is famous. If the school board is not transparent enough and does not consider the teachers’ opinions, this will be revealed in a gossip environment. The attitudes of the school administration towards teachers are among the reasons why teachers feel they love them or do not consult teachers’ opinions or apply what they know.” (T3)

“He may be afraid of breaking, he may be afraid of management, he may not like the other people. Therefore, he considers it more appropriate to speak behind his back.” (T5)

“It could be jealousy. Not feeling completely alone, looking for followers, results in people who share the same thoughts or identify negative thoughts...” (T7)

The second question posed to teachers in the dimension of “developing relations” is the question “Does gossip increase intimacy?” It is understood from the following teacher opinions that teachers can develop intimacy through gossip, but not much should be expected from the intimacy that develops through gossip.

“It has to have an impact on friendship relationships. You only gossip when you are sincere, which increases your intimacy with your friends.” (T5)

“It would be wrong to expect positive things from something that develops through gossip. If intimacy is based on gossip, nothing is expected.” (T6)

Another question posed to teachers in the dimension of “developing relations” is “To what extent do you trust gossip environments?” They stated that they do not have general confidence in gossip environments and that the most important factor in trusting is the credibility of the person being gossiped about.

“I don’t trust these environments because there’s a thought that there’s going to be a job behind the back of what’s going on.” (T4)

“I don’t trust you, to be honest... In general, we see each other in a school setting, or you can gossip with people with whom you are intimate. Something happens and you lose that intimacy. If it’s someone we’ve shared a lot with, I can’t afford it.” (T6)

“The place of the resource in me is an important issue... I’ll see if the source is independent or not. For example, if he is involved in something related to governance, your perspective will be a little different.” (T7)

The last question posed to teachers in the dimension of “developing relations” is the question “Are there any positive aspects of gossip personally?” Teachers stated that they could socialize by gossiping, relaxing in situations of anger, stressing out, and having fun in gossip aimed at ridicule.

“Gossip can be useful in environments where there are small groups. In terms of getting used to the newly entered environment, it can positively affect socializing the person and strengthening relationships. At the same time, acquiring information about the environment makes it easier to get to know and familiar with the environment and people in this way, speeding up this process. Contributes to the development of intimacy.” (T2)

“Scientifically, it has been proven to relieve stress, and I know it causes relief. For example, an angry person can go to a friend he is intimate with and count on the person he’s mad at. People have fun doing it; of course, you will see more people gossiping about it to make fun of it.” (T5)

Quantitative results regarding the dimension of organizational harm are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results regarding the Dimension of Organizational Harm

Dim.	Items	Mean	SD	Level
Organizational Harm	15. "The gossips among my colleagues at my school demoralize me."	1.96	.96	Disagree
	16. "The gossips in my school cause disagreements among us."	1.89	.93	Disagree
	17. "I see it as a waste of time to be in the gossip environments at my school."	1.75	.83	Totally Disagree
	18. "The gossips at my school cause groupings among my colleagues."	2.42	1.03	Disagree
	19. "I lose my confidence in my colleagues who gossips at my school."	2.48	1.00	Disagree
	20. "The gossips among my colleagues at my school reduce my motivation."	2.23	.88	Disagree
	21. "I am reluctant to go to school at times when gossips are common in my school. "	2.27	.86	Disagree
	22. "The gossips about my colleagues in my school cause me to misunderstand them."	2.25	.91	Disagree
	23. "The gossips about my colleagues at my school create prejudice against them."	2.17	.91	Disagree
	24. "I keep distance with my colleagues who gossip about me in my school."	2.24	.97	Disagree
Dimension		2.17	.70	Disagree

In Table 4, it was observed that teachers' perceptions of organizational harm were very low. Accordingly, teachers were asked, "Are there any personal negative aspects to gossip?" Teachers have expressed that they are very negatively affected by the gossip. Just as teachers questioned the accuracy of the gossip about themselves by making a "self-criticism", it was emphasized that it was also important who made the gossip. Teacher opinions on the results are as follows.

"Yes, there is. It can cause prejudices, exclusion, and anger if it reaches advanced dimensions. In many ways, I was negatively affected by slander-sized gossip, false rhetoric, or sharing information I did not want. My trust in my colleagues would be undermined, I would become increasingly isolated, and after a while, working in such an insecure, insincere, empathetic environment would probably turn into torture." (T2)

"At the point of gossip about me, I look at myself first. If I am short on teaching, I'll try to fix it. If the administration is not happy with my work, I can speak out and wait for the administration to come and warn me. But I think it is just jealousy for my friend to gossip that I have the same status." (T6)

In the dimension of "organizational harm" teachers were asked, "Is there a positive aspect of gossip in school?" It has been demonstrated that gossip has positive effects on the subjects that are tried to develop within the school culture. In addition, it has been emphasized that the positive contributions of teachers can be appreciated and make positive contributions to the school culture both in honoring the teacher and creating role models. Teacher opinions on these results are as follows.

“From the students’ point of view, it is possible to learn information about some students that we would not normally have through gossip.” (T2)

“It has a positive effect. When it is a positive topic, for example, if a guidance counselor goes to class and teaches and is talked about by this administration, the gossip of it is comforting, people are not robots, people are emotional beings.” (T7).

“If the principal and the assistant principal speak among themselves without having the teachers present, and they make the issues that they think will benefit the school transparent and pass them on to the teachers, it can help. Teachers can also be equally useful if they gossip among themselves and then pass it on to the administration.” (T8)

“There are usually groupings in our school... Teachers who enter the teachers’ room in the morning and do not say good morning can immediately join the gossip environment and get in touch. In this respect, teachers can contribute positively to communication.” (T10)

Another question posed to teachers in the dimension of “organizational harm” is, “Are there negative aspects of gossip in school?” It is understood that gossip has many adverse effects on school culture, from the following teacher opinions.

“It can cause feelings of jealousy among teachers. This kind of gossip and unsafe environment that is swirling around the school can also be heard by the environment and negatively affect the school profile.” (T2)

“There are too many of the negatives to counting. It’s not something we approve of; I try not to. It may have a unifying feature among teachers and a parsing feature.” (T10)

“Groupings between teachers, negative events among those who work for no reason, disrupting the work to be done together, creating a psychologically unsettling working environment.” (T9)

The last question posed to teachers in the dimension of “organizational harm” is the question “In what periods is the most intense gossip in the school environment?” The teachers’ opinions are as follows.

“I rarely see gossip in my school. And that is because I think the conditions don’t happen very often. Since the number of teachers is quite small, groupings do not occur much, and gossip is rarely done outside certain periods. The periods I mentioned are usually when education starts and ends, i.e., seminar periods, when curriculums are prepared, and various meetings are held.” (T2)

“For example, when there will be a workload, when the job distribution will be made, when the distribution is unfair.” (T6)

Results regarding the Third and Fourth Research Questions

T-test results regarding the gender are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Results regarding the Gender

Dimension	Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Having Information	1. Female	176	3.59	.98	300	-2.86	.00*
	2. Male	126	3.88	.74			
Developing Relations	1. Female	176	3.25	.76	300	.39	.69
	2. Male	126	3.22	.54			
Organizational Harm	1. Female	176	2.24	.66	300	2.22	.02*
	2. Male	126	2.06	.74			

**p* < .05

As seen in Table 5, there was a significant difference in the sub-dimensions of “having information” and “organizational harm” ($t(\text{having information}) = 2.86$, $t(\text{organizational harm}) = 2.22$, $p < .05$). Calculated effect sizes ($d_{\text{having information}} = -.33$, $d_{\text{organizational harm}} = .25$) indicate that the differences are moderate. Accordingly, it can be said that male teachers in the sub-dimension of “having information” have a higher perception than female teachers, and female teachers in the lower dimension of “organizational harm” have a higher perception than male teachers. In this context, the question posed to teachers is, “do female teachers gossip more in school or male teachers?” It has been emphasized that this is not a gender-related issue but that both sides can gossip. Teacher opinions on these results are as follows.

“Contrary to popular belief, I don’t see any gender difference. The difference is only felt in the subjects spoken.” (T2)

“I think it is in women’s personalities. Men usually gossip about work, but women have a wider range... For example, clothing comes into play, and love comes in, hair, makeup...” (T1)

“I am against gender. My old school was a school of 60 or 70 people, and you cannot imagine the extent of the gossip there, and it was the married male teachers who did it. Women can do that a lot; men can do that. At my old school, boys were doing more; it is wrong to tie it to a gender...” (T4)

“Women do it a little more. Because they think more thoroughly and differently, for example, the female teacher, the principal didn’t say hello in the morning; it can happen.” (T5)

“Contrary to popular belief, I think men gossip more. It is known that gossip that can be considered degrading based on making opinions about people’s private lives revolve among men. Women’s gossip is a little more innocent than what men do. I think that men’s interests are sexuality and women are usually physical appearances or emotional situations.” (T9)

T-test results regarding the marital status are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Results regarding the Marital Status

Dimension	Marital Status	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Having Information	1. Married	234	3.76	.78	300	1.39	.16
	2. Single	68	3.55	1.21			
Developing Relations	1. Married	234	3.29	.57	300	2.16	.03*
	2. Single	68	3.03	.93			
Organizational Harm	1. Married	234	2.16	.68	300	-.39	.71
	2. Single	68	2.20	.78			

* $p < .05$

Given in Table 6, a significant difference was observed in the sub-dimension of “developing relations” ($t = 2.16$, $p < .05$). The calculated effect size ($d = .29$) indicates moderate difference. It can be said that the perceptions of married teachers are higher than that of single teachers. Regarding the “marital status” variable, teachers were asked, “Does the marital status affect gossip? Why?” His marital status can lead to groupings at the point of gossip, but this does not happen in small schools. It has been emphasized that single teachers have a lot of free time due to not having as much

responsibility as married teachers, leading to more gossip. It has been stated that married teachers can gossip more due to years of experience. Another result of the research is that single teachers develop more intimate relationships with the convenience of being single, and these relationships can be turned into gossip material. Teacher opinions on these results are as follows.

“Singles gossip more. Married people are a little more orderly, busy with the troubles of their own home... A little more emotional relationships are at the forefront of singles... Single teachers are a little younger and do not know the school culture, so there’s a little more gossip to learn, and as you experience it, it disappears.” (T1)

“Perhaps the effect of marital status on friendship relationships may be in the direction of grouping. However, this does not happen much in small-population schools. Married people can group and gossip in terms of the similarity of their subjects, leading to them getting close to those people. But I think it’s personal, too. I have observed that some people can strike that balance. Some have the same sincerity as their married friends and single friends and share similar posts.” (T2)

“Married people gossip more. Single people dress like teachers because they are new to the profession; they want me to be stylish, to raise good students. Middle-aged married teachers have seen things, teachers who have seen things, their jaws open more, do not gossip more, they steal everything drier.” (T5)

“Single teachers can find more time. It can be more intimate among themselves, leading to more gossip.” (T6)

ANOVA results regarding the professional seniority are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Results regarding the Professional Seniority

Dim.	*	N	Mean	SD	Homogeneity		Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p**	Dif.
					Levene	p							
Having Information	1	68	3.60	.97			Between G.	16.81	4	4.20			
	2	80	3.41	1.06			Within G.	227.93	297	.76			2-3
	3	79	3.81	.71	5.11	.10	Total	244.75	301		5.47	.00	2-4
	4	47	4.02	.56									2-5
	5	28	4.07	.87									
Developing Relations	1	68	3.07	.80			Between G.	6.36	4	1.59			1-3
	2	80	3.11	.84			Within G.	132.48	297	.44			1-4
	3	79	3.34	.45	7.22	.20	Total	138.84	301		3.56	.00	1-5
	4	47	3.40	.41									2-3
	5	28	3.42	.56									2-4
Organizational Harm	1	68	2.10	.61			Between G.	.82	4	.20			2-5
	2	80	2.16	.78			Within G.	149.86	297	.50			
	3	79	2.23	.60	3.09	.21	Total	150.69	301		.41	.80	-
	4	47	2.12	.72									
	5	28	2.23	.91									

*1:1-5 years, 2:6-10 years, 3:11-15 years, 4:16-20 years, 5:21 years and above

** $p < .05$

Table 7 showed a significant difference in the sub-dimensions of “having information” and “developing relations” ($p < .05$). Calculated effect sizes ($\eta^2_{\text{having information}} = .06$, $\eta^2_{\text{developing relations}} = .04$) indicate that the differences are moderate. The difference occurs with 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21 years and above in the dimension of “having information”; 1-5 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21 years and above in the dimension of “developing relations”; 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21 years and above in the dimension of “professional seniority”. As professional seniority increases, it can be said that the perception of the dimensions of having information and developing relations increases. Accordingly, we asked the teachers, “Does professional seniority affect gossip? Why?” As teachers’ seniority increases, their experience and experience increase, and therefore their tendency to gossip increases as follows.

“Yes, it can be. Senior teachers can share and exchange ideas more comfortably due to their experience and self-confidence. Teachers who have just started work prefer to remain silent for at least a while due to some concerns and lack of experience. They take care to be cautious. The following factor is also effective; experienced teachers have more time to chat and exchange ideas than less experienced teachers in school because they are practical, planning for course processing, etc. Likewise, senior teachers communicating more and sharing information for reasons such as guiding younger friends may lead to an observation that they gossip more.” (T2)

“I certainly do. So after ten years, you start complaining about something. I know it from myself. At the first school, I started, I was just trying to do my job properly. There were teachers with a lot of seniorities; they were calling. I was sitting there listening. But now it’s so different... After ten years, you cannot keep your mouth shut.” (T5)

ANOVA results regarding the school size are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Results regarding the School Size

Dim.	*	N	Mean	SD	Homogeneity		Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p**	Dif.
					Levene	p							
Information	1	146	3.91	.84			Between G.	11.76	2	5.88			
	2	32	3.35	1.12	4.15	.16	Within G.	232.98	299	.77	7.54	.00	1-2 1-3
	3	124	3.58	.85			Total	244.75	301				
Developing Relations	1	146	3.33	.65			Between G.	4.65	2	2.32			
	2	32	2.92	.82	2.75	.14	Within G.	134.19	299	.44	5.18	.00	1-2 2-3
	3	124	3.20	.64			Total	138.84	301				
Organizational Harm	1	146	2.07	.69			Between G.	2.71	2	1.35			
	2	32	2.23	.83	3.12	.15	Within G.	147.97	299	.49	2.74	.06	-
	3	124	2.26	.68			Total	150.69	301				

*1: Small school, 2: Medium-sized school, 3: Large school

** $p < .05$

When Table 8 was examined, there was a significant difference in the sub-dimensions of “having information” and “developing relations” ($p < .05$). Calculated effect sizes ($\eta^2_{\text{having information}} = .04$, $\eta^2_{\text{developing relations}} = .03$) indicate that the differences are moderate. The difference is with SS in the dimension of “having information”; MSS and LS; MSS in “developing relations”; it appears to originate between SS and LS groups. It is understood that the perception of gossip in SSs is higher. Accordingly, we asked the teachers, “Does the school’s size affect gossip? Why?” It has been stated that school size is effective, different gossip groups are formed in large schools, and gossip is more about work intensity. It was emphasized that ideological ideas and trade unions were influential in forming these groups. Teacher opinions on these results are as follows.

“Yes, there is. As the number of teachers increases, so do the groupings and, naturally, the diversity of subjects. There will also be more people and situations to talk about. At the same time, teachers are more likely to come together in crowded schools. This inevitably means more gossip.” (T2)

“Different groups are formed in large schools. Ideological thoughts are very effective in establishing these groups. More gossip is done with people with whom they agree. You gossip with people who think like you.” (T1)

“Diversity is increasing, of course... It creates groupings. Ideological thoughts and trade unions are also causing discrimination. In particular, the union is leading the way.” (T5)

“It is a little more about the environment... A little more private life is at the forefront of a small school. When the number of teachers increases, this evolves towards a little more work intensity.” (T7)

Discussion

We examined teachers’ perceptions of the gossip mechanism in schools, and we discussed the results within the scope of the relevant literature. The study found that the highest mean was in the dimension of “having information”. The qualitative results of the study also support quantitative results, where teachers can access all kinds of information through gossip. In the research of Han (2019), it was observed that the size of “having information” was at the level of “disagree”. In the study carried out by Himmetoğlu et al. (2020) for school administrators, it was determined that the information carried out by the gossip network in schools was mainly focused on the management of the school, other teachers, personal rights, students, and political issues. Some research results show that “having information” of gossip is low. In the research results of Arabacı et al. (2012), it was observed that nearly all of the teachers who participated in the study believed that gossip existed in educational organizations. This result reveals the existence of gossip in schools despite the presence of different perceptions and definitions of gossip.

The results of “developing relations” showed that gossip has positive consequences but does not strengthen or entertain friendship bonds. In the qualitative results of the study, the results that teachers can socialize by gossiping, relaxing in cases of anger, and relieving stress support quantitative results. However, contrary to quantitative results, it has been concluded that teachers are having fun in their mockery gossip. Guerin and Miyazaki (2006) showed that one of the important functions of gossip is to entertain the listener. Research by Brondino et al. (2017) found that women in gossip environments had significantly higher levels of happiness hormones than those

not in the gossip environment. The qualitative results of the study may be explained by the low levels of perception of teachers' entertainment function. Another reason may be that the participants do not adequately understand the substance. For example, treating the substance with a similar phrase as "fun in mockery gossip" could better understand the substance. The fact that the same article was seen at the level of "disagree" in Han's (2019) study can be considered as proof that the participants do not adequately understand the substance. Although the quantitative results of the study found that teachers expressed their opinions freely in gossip environments, the qualitative results of the study showed that teachers did not have general confidence in gossip environments. Although different results have been obtained regarding this substance, the results intersect at the point of "trust". It can be said that opinions are expressed freely in gossip environments where "trust" is heard in both dimensions of the research. Tekgöz's (2013) research results support these results, and the sharing between individuals is limited, and individuals are often timid about gossiping when they do not know each other enough and are not sincere enough, come together only to respond and often when the material gain is at the forefront.

While the quantitative results of the study found that gossip increases intimacy and helps make new friendships, qualitative results suggest that intimacy may develop through gossip, but not much should be expected from the intimacy that develops through gossip. Likewise, in Han's study (2019), the dimension of "developing relations" was at the level of "disagree", and it can be said that the function of developing relations that are capable of potentially contributing to the development of social relations is not sufficiently operated in schools. In some research results, it can be said that the results that gossip cannot develop relationships are because relationships have not set in a trusted environment. It has been observed that many situations cause teachers to gossip; one of them is the inability to attract unfair practices, not to break the other one, relieve stress at the moment of anger, have fun, and have free time., The research of Arabacı et al. (2012) indicated that the most effective situations among the causes of gossip were jealousy, inability to attract, skepticism, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, and aimlessness-leisure excess, ego satisfaction, social acceptance. In another research, jealousy and boredom came to the fore among the causes of school gossip (Yavuz & Levent, 2021). Han (2021), in his research on the sources of gossip at school, found that individual characteristics such as jealousy, envy, unethical behaviors, curiosity, smugness, and aimlessness are the most common sources of gossip in schools. It can be said that gossip, no matter why it is done, has positive psychological effects on the person, even at that moment.

The quantitative results regarding the "organizational harm" dimension indicated that gossip has no adverse consequences. Contrary to the quantitative results, teachers were negatively affected by the gossip made against them. For instance, they were demoralized, their trust in colleagues gossiped about them was shaken, their performance and motivation decreased, and they were reluctant to go to school. Arabacı et al. (2012), has been concluded that teachers who have been subjected to gossip have feelings such as sadness, anger, distancing from the organization, moral erosion, disregard, feeling victimized, shame. In the face of the gossip, the teachers questioned the accuracy of the rumor with "self-criticism" and who made the rumor. Yavuz and Levent (2021) reported that teachers exposed to gossip experienced deep sadness and

had to cope with psychological problems as a result. Tekgöz's (2013) study showed that individuals who gossip feel similar feelings after gossiping. It shows that gossiping includes contrasting situations for the person. While gossiping, people have feelings such as relaxing, stressing, having fun; gossiping about them has been seen to bring about conditions that upset people. This can also indicate that teachers do not empathize enough when gossiping. It has been observed that gossip can positively affect school and the environment when it is aimed at an integrative purpose. However, it has been observed that gossip about segregation and groupings can negatively affect the school and its environment. Han (2019) also showed that the level of "organizational harm" was at the level of "agree" and it was determined that the organizational harms of organizational gossip were seen at a high level in schools. A study conducted by Wang et al. (2020) on middle school students found that negative gossip at the school increased suicidal intentions. Based on this result, it is possible to say that the adverse effects of gossip are more severe in lower age groups.

Michelson and Mouly (2004) argue that gossip has a lot of harm to organizations but stresses that it can be helpful. In their research with school administrators, Himmetoğlu et al. (2020) found that gossip has positive results in improving performance in the school environment, providing information about norms, strengthening communication, and raising awareness of employees who may be malicious. He also said that school administrators should not be able to hear the gossip. It has been determined that they prefer informal communication to increase success, strengthen school culture, participate in decisions, socialize school members, and increase motivation. These results can be considered necessary to show that gossip can be used positively in the school environment, contrary to the widespread view that gossip has only negative consequences. On the other hand, it has been found that the periods when gossip is most intense in schools are seminar periods held at the beginning and end of the academic year, after the meeting, and periods when there is a workload. From this point of view, the periods when gossip is most intense are the periods in which teachers interact.

In the "having information" dimension, male teachers had a higher perception than female teachers, whereas, in the "organizational harm" dimension, female teachers had a higher perception than male teachers. Leaper and Holliday (1995) also suggest that women may be more inclined to gossip than men. In the qualitative results of the study, it was concluded that, contrary to quantitative results, gender does not affect gossip. Tekgöz's (2013) results also support the qualitative results of this study. It has been concluded that gossip is not unique to a species, it is wrong to treat it only as a woman, men gossip, and the only thing that varies between male and female gossip is the content of gossip. When the qualitative results of the study were examined, it was observed that gossip is not actually related to gender, that both sexes can gossip, but that the purposes of gossiping, the way gossiping, and the topics of gossip may differ. Some study results support this result. For example, a study by McAndrew (2014) concluded that women use gossip more competitively than men. In his research, Anthony (1992) discovered that men spread gossip to more people, while women gave more details to the people they gossiped with. Another study (Nevo et al., 1993) examined the gossip tendencies of men and women and found only a significant difference between men and women in favor of other people's physical appearance. There was no difference in

success and social relations in the same research. These results of the study are not only integrated with women within the social structure but can be considered as evidence of the rethinking and construction of the concept of gossip. Contrary to the research results, Han's (2019) research results found no significant difference in any dimension by gender. Different results can be explained by the need not treat gossip as "sexist".

In the "developing relations" dimension, the perceptions of married teachers were higher than those of single teachers. In the qualitative results of the study, it was observed that the marital status of teachers could lead to groupings. At the same time, it has been observed that single teachers have a lot of free time due to having less responsibility than married teachers, which can lead to more gossip. It has been observed that single teachers develop more intimate relationships with the convenience of being single, and these relationships can become gossip material. Han's (2019) research results did not see any significant difference in marital status. It is possible to say that the effect of marital status is related to the norms of the connected society. By explaining this situation with gender culture, Türköne (1995) refers to a wide range of areas in the community, including definitions of men and women, images of them, behavioral patterns, gender identities, relationship patterns of the sexes towards each other, attitudes, marriage customs, family types, beauty understandings, clothing. Within this area, the roles that society assigns to married and single individuals can play a decisive role in the influence of marital status variables. For example, in a community, when a married person is expected to behave as a faithful individual in friend relationships, conversations, behaviors, the same things may not be expected of a single person. Therefore, different results can be seen in the research involving other groups.

The highest means in the "having information" and "developing relations" dimensions of the OGS were seen in small schools. The result can be explained by the more intense relationships in small schools. The study conducted by Karakütük et al. (2014) concluded that small schools are superior to other schools in terms of communication and human relations. In the qualitative results of this study, it was observed that the size of the school affected gossip, while in small schools, there was a gossip group, while in large schools, there were multiple and different gossip groups. In the formation of these groups, ideological ideas and trade unions were seen to be influential. Han's (2019) research found a significant difference in the dimensions of "developing relations" and "organizational harm" according to school size. Still, it was found that teachers working in small schools had a lower perception of gossip for developing relations and organizational harm functions. The difference may be due to the different levels at which the research is carried out.

Conclusion and Implications

One of the most important results of the research is that although there are different perceptions of gossip, the existence of gossip in schools is revealed. The study concluded that the extent of having information of gossip has an essential function for the school. In this context, school administrators can take responsibility for developing open communication routes by adopting an open and transparent management style in school-related matters. Considering that male teachers also have high levels of knowledge through gossip, the rapid transfer of official information to teachers and the fast learning of teachers' reactions reinforce the importance of the gossip's function of

having information. Another research conclusion is that the developing relations dimension has a vital role. In cases where teachers resort to gossip to develop relations, relax in adverse situations, and sometimes for fun purposes, it is seen that gossip has important functions. Still, it has been concluded that trust is the basis of gossip. Therefore, it is important to manage gossip effectively by creating a trust-based school climate rather than preventing gossip by school administrations.

Gossip may be seen as an opportunity in school, given its functions of having information and developing relations. However, in terms of harmful effects such as poor performance and burnout in the qualitative results, it can be stated that gossip will be a threat to the school's stakeholders. Teachers and group heads with high professional seniority, especially school administrators, can play important roles in turning this threat into an opportunity. While school administrators are trying to provide an environment based on trust, open and transparent, increasing success, strengthening school culture, participating in decisions, ensuring the socialization of school members, and increasing motivation; senior teachers and group heads can support the process as a unifying, integrative, guiding and role model. On the other hand, during periods of high work intensity, an open, transparent, and fair regulation of work can help minimize the adverse effects of gossip.

Although the research has achieved its goal, it has some limitations. The first is that the work is done with secondary school teachers and in a city. It is thought that future research will be helpful in comparing and diversifying the study results with the participation of teachers at different school levels and cities from other regions. The second concerns how gossip perceived as a threat can be turned into an opportunity. Future research should focus on this. Third, it concerns the validity and reliability of qualitative negotiations. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were videotaped remotely. Conducting interviews in the same environment as the study group will help the researcher control his biases (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996) by providing long-term interaction. However, the risks prevented the negotiations in the same environment.

Statement of Responsibility

First Author: Conceptualization, methodology, software, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing-original draft, writing-review&editing, visualization. Second Author: Investigation, resources, data curation, writing-review&editing.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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