



Research Article



The Impact of Negative Gossip in Educational Institutions on the Job Performance of School Teachers: The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust

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Abstract: The current study was designed to evaluate the effects of negative gossips in school environments on teachers' job performance and explore the mediating role of organizational trust in the relationship between negative gossips and job performance in educational organizations. The study used a descriptive-analytical research. A questionnaire was prepared to record the study variables, and was applied on a sample of teachers at school in the Open Educational College – Tuz Branch in the Republic of Iraq. These data were then statistically analyzed using SPSS version 27 using correlation coefficient, regression analysis and mediation analysis using Bootstrap method. The results indicated that the intensity of negative gossips in the workplace was moderate, while the trust within the organization was high and the job performance was very high. The findings also showed that the direct effect of negative workplace gossip on the job performance was not statistically significant. The negative effect of negative workplace gossip, on the other hand, was significant on the organizational trust, and organizational trust was significant on job performance. In addition, the study showed that organizational trust completely mediated the relationship between negative workplace gossip and job performance, implying that the negative workplace gossip has an indirect influence on job performance through reducing organizational trust in the educational institution. The study found that creating a school culture that is built on trust and cooperation helps to mitigate the harmful impacts of school gossip and support teachers' effectiveness. It also suggested creating positive organizational culture, enhancing positive communication among employees and further training and guidance programs based on the principles of organizational trust and elimination of negative behaviors in education work environment.

Keywords: Negative workplace gossip, organizational trust, job performance, educational institutions.



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INTRODUCTION

The basic social relationships between teachers are generally friendly or work-related at the school. People join groups because of sex, age, ethnicity, or other commonalities. These relationships can evolve and grow and can build a sense of familiarity and togetherness among members of the group as they go about their daily work lives and engage in informal workplace interactions. These interactions have the potential to impact positively or negatively on a teacher's psychological wellbeing, trust and job performance.

It is common in most companies to hear negative rumors about their employees. Research shows that about 95% of the staff gossip in the workplace [1]. In many situations, some people make a point of gossiping about their peers or simply like to hear gossip, to join in or to add to gossip among fellow workers. This can ultimately result with the breakdown of social relationships and social isolation.

Organizational trust is one of the key elements to which organizations aspire, and there are a number of workplace considerations that can help to build it. But it takes time for colleagues to trust one another. Conversely, the same kind of trust can fade out of existence very quickly as a result of bad attitudes, including gossips in the work environment, which is detrimental to the level of cooperation and job productivity. Yahya [2] noted that the creation of a trust-based environment in the organization is essential to inspire knowledge-sharing behaviors in academic institutions, which in turn will enhance the quality of academic performance and boost the quality of research and education results.

The performance of any organization is mainly reliant on the performance of its human resources. Thus, the adequate provision of a work environment depends upon the building of relationships that foster cooperation between managers and subordinates, the provision of rewards for excellent performance and the improvement of low performing employees in order to meet the organizational goals, including meeting employees' needs and enhancing institutional productivity.

Research Problem

Given the role of educational institutions as centers of science, culture and development in society, it is vital to solve the problem of negative gossips in the workplace. This can be done by building organizational trust, grounded in mutual respect, which can both hinder and help teachers to fulfill their duty. This can be done by building organizational trust based on mutual respect, which can have a negative or a positive effect on teachers' job performance. Therefore, the following research questions are set:

How negative gossips in the workplace affect the performance of teachers in the school setting with the mediating role of the trust in the organization?

Is there a statistically significant effect of negative workplace gossip on teachers' job performance?

Does organization trust mediate the relationship between negative workplace gossip and job performance?

Research Objectives

To examine the relationship between negative workplace gossip and organizational trust among the teachers included in the study sample.

To investigate the relationship between negative workplace gossip and job performance among the teachers included in the study sample.

To examine the relationship between organizational trust and job performance among the teachers included in the study sample.

To test the nature of the relationship between negative workplace gossip and job performance in the presence of organizational trust as a mediating variable.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in enhancing the theoretical understanding of an important topic that has received limited scholarly attention, thereby contributing to bridging gaps in the existing academic literature. From a practical perspective, the findings will provide managers and organizational leaders with empirical insights based on field evidence to improve job performance. Furthermore, the study seeks to mitigate the negative consequences of workplace gossip while

capitalizing on its potential positive aspects, thereby strengthening a climate of organizational trust within educational institutions.

Study Terminology

Negative Workplace Gossip

One place where informal communication naturally arises out of interpersonal communication is schools. The informal organization of the school is thus strengthened, as schools are informal organizations with a high degree of socialization compared to other organizations, and the human factor is emphasized [3]. Gossip has three main purposes: to share information, exert influence and provide entertainment [4]. The negative gossips in the workplace are described as a covert attack against the targeted person with the aim of harming them [5]. It is not just about chatting and talking about things that have nothing to do with the organization, but is used to spread negative information about its members [6]. It is also described as communication that is "informal, negative, and evaluative" about a missing colleague and the spread of rumors about that person in the organization [7].

Gossip only arises when there is a certain level of intimacy, familiarity and trust between the sender and the recipient [8]. People typically join and observe negative workplace gossip, which is usually confidential information, as it is interesting to them [9]. When employees engage in gossiping, they are trying to get attention through comparing themselves with others, hurting other employees' reputations, making certain impressions, or gaining personal benefits [10]. Similarly people can also spread rumors about others to hide their own mistakes and meanness from the eyes of the public by talking about others and understanding their actions according to their own outlook [11].

Given that gossip is usually considered to have more negative than positive aspects, and that negative gossip can have a greater impact than positive gossip in drawing attention of employees to the gossips, the present study limited its focus to negative gossip in the workplace. Positive gossip is gossip that is about socially acceptable behavior [12]. While some studies have indicated that gossip within the workplace may have positive effects, including providing enjoyment and relaxation for those who gather together to escape daily stress, it also has been shown to help identify issues within the organization, enhance interpersonal relationships among workers, promote friendly interaction, and encourage them to get the correct information [10], [13]. In addition, gossip can facilitate the individuals' ability to compete more effectively, or enhance their performance, by allowing them to compare themselves with those they are gossiping about in an implicit way [4]. However, the research consensus so far is that gossip in the workplace is mainly seen as something bad, not only because it is a non-formal communication but also because it is a matter of personal conversation between two or more people about a third person who is absent from the scene [14]. Some signs of difference between positive and negative gossip are the actions of the gossipier during the talk. Negative gossip is avoiding the direct confrontation by not talking about the issue with that person while positive gossip is the direct confrontation where advice and constructive warnings are given instead of defamation or sensationalism.

One of the most profound words about gossip is Imam Ali's (peace be upon him): "Beware of gossip, for it causes hatred". This here statement is an alert against negative gossip due to the fact that it spreads information with the motive of creating disunity, hostility, animosity among personalities, people and amongst members of society which leads to unravelling of social relationship and lessening of social cohesion and trust.

Factors that have been linked to employees' intentions to quit include negative workplace gossip [7], [15]. It fosters an environment of distrust and tension and decreases teachers' involvement in the workplace events [5]. It is also said to be linked to workplace procrastination [14]. Previous studies have shown that negative gossips in the workplace are common in many organizations, and that there are a number of reasons for this [16]. The results of Himmetoglu et al. [3] showed that personal factors like jealousy, envy, individual interest, lack of information and information askew, organizational and administrative factors were the main reasons behind the rumours and gossips in schools. Similarly, Yavuz and Levent [17] found income level, total working time at the school and total professional experience years to be factors related to the workplace gossip. In school principals' perspectives on the causes of gossip, Osal [18] found that 59% of principals attributed the problem to managerial attitudes and behaviors that upset employees, which is unfair, or an inability to evaluate situations objectively. Moreover, distinct features of the

workplace, including uncertainty, low wages, high workloads and experiences of workplace bullying, lead employees to engage in unhelpful behaviors, such as negative workplace gossip [19]. Other reasons for gossiping are sadness, anger, organisational isolation [20], unfairness in the distribution of resources in the organisation between employees [21], boredom [22] and the perception of being marginalised from the organisation and not getting access to information about work [23].

Organizational Trust

The concept of trust does not have an all-encompassing and universally accepted definition. It is interpreted by each scholar according to the aims of his/her discipline. For instance, psychology tends to stress goodwill and positive intentions, the social sciences tend to be more inter-personal and interpersonal, and economics tends to be more on reliability, dependability and security.

A practical view of organizational trust is defined as an optimistic expectation by one party about the actions of another party. The expectation includes the choices made about work conducted as a dependent and/or trusted party [24]. In the educational environment, teacher trust is teachers' trust in their senior managers, supervisors, and peers, and the belief is associated with teachers' actions, performance, and job satisfaction [25]. Trust can only be built on the basis of previous knowledge or calculations, but it must be deposited in another party before the results of the party's actions are known [26]. It can also be described as "a willingness to be vulnerable with another person because they are competent, transparent, relevant, and trustworthy" [27]. Similarly, Lee and Choi, as cited in El-Sayed [28] say that organizational trust is a general expectation of other people, including colleagues and management, who are reliable and willing to perform expected behaviors and responsibilities.

In a study by L. Chiel et al. [29], one of the significant factors that was found to influence gossip-related decisions was trust; gossip is usually spread to only those who are highly trusted and can keep it confidential. A different study by Danish [30] showed that trust between two or more people could be affected by external influences, in particular third parties. Trust is always accompanied by risk thus it can be built internally between two or more people or it can be built externally via the involvement of a third party.

In organizations with high trust, formal procedures are less costly, as they are not required to monitor employees so closely. This, in turn, improves job performance, increases job satisfaction and boosts organizational loyalty [31]. Conversely, the lack of organizational trust has a negative impact on communication, organizational commitment, employee cooperation, stress and discomfort feelings, and greatly decreases job satisfaction, and consequently, job performance [25].

First: Dimensions of Organizational Trust

Organizational trust can be classified into two main types. The first kind of trust is horizontal trust, that is, trust between colleagues or peers in the same role, and the latter is a trust of the potential negative outcomes of the organization's activities. The second is vertical trust, a bond between staff and managers and the upper echelons of management. This is a formalized type of trust that is rooted in employees' adherence to the organizational structure when assessing the trustworthiness and fairness of the organization [32].

Despite the identification of several dimensions of organizational trust in the literature, most studies agree that there are three major dimensions of organizational trust: trust in the CEO, trust in one's supervisor, and trust in one's coworkers. The present study only takes one dimension, which is the trust in coworkers, as the quality of coworkers trust is a key aspect of the quality of overall trust in the organization, and is a fundamental element directly influencing the overall quality of the organizations' trust.

Trust in Coworkers

Trust in coworkers is the willingness to be vulnerable and vulnerable in a cooperative action without knowing what the other party will do [26]. It has also been described as employees' confidence in working colleagues in a team-based and decentralized work environment. This trust is crucial for fostering collaboration and information sharing among colleagues, driving shared success [33]. It also indicates a feeling of employees' trust in their colleagues' capabilities and readiness to assist and support, which contributes to a positive working environment with reduced conflict and increased knowledge sharing [2].

Job Performance

Job performance is the results obtained from a worker to perform a particular job within a certain time duration [11]. It has also been described as a set of anticipated outcomes, which is the result of the interaction of individuals that aspires to reach the organisation's goals, and on which the performance of individuals is measured in the organisation [34]. Teachers' performance is the ultimate product of the educative process, it has a profound effect on the educational environment and the community at large. This performance is influenced by the quality of the education, its academic achievements and the activities that take place outside of the classroom, where all of these play a role in either creating an effective or ineffective educational environment, thus affecting the overall performance of the educational institution.

The performance of the teacher can then be described as how well the teacher is able to carry out the assigned duties and responsibilities as stated in their job description for a particular duration. The responsibilities can be associated with administration, classroom instruction, or teacher professional development, and in all cases, these responsibilities should help to ensure the efficient and effective attainment of the school's educational goals [35]. Effort is the amount of energy invested, but performance is judged according to the actual performance of the individual [24].

Teachers, to carry out their educational functions well, must also have a good knowledge of the subject they specialize in, pedagogical skills and teaching experience. They also need to be able to communicate effectively with students according to Sukut [36]. Hence, school administrators need to be able to determine the factors that affect teachers' performance and take the necessary steps to enhance their performance in order for the school to realize the overall objectives.

Chapter Two: Relationships Among the Study Variables, Hypotheses Development, and Previous Studies

The Relationship Between Negative Workplace Gossip and Teachers' Job Performance

Gossip and rumors in the workplace are negative and put a strain on productivity. It makes employees frustrated, can cause people to leave the company, can result in conflicts outside of the workplace, and can negatively impact performance, productivity and work quality [37]. When negative voices about an organization circulate in the workplace, these voices can hurt an organization's reputation and position by painting a picture of a workplace where professional standards are not upheld, relationships are not healthy and trust levels are low. It also fosters a negative emotional temperature that diverts the attention of the employees from their work duties, so that they start to be preoccupied by negative emotions instead of their job performance [14]. Negative gossip about others in the workplace can negatively affect the reputation and social standing of the person who is the subject of the gossip, which can lead to negative emotional responses that might reduce enjoyment of the work and adversely affect performance [8], [1]. Similarly, Bilginoglu and Yozgat [38] found that gossip in the workplace has a detrimental impact on employee morale as well as employee output.

Lee et al. [1] conducted a study with 384 teachers that found there is a statistically significant negative relationship between negative workplace gossip and the job performance of kindergarten teachers. The findings showed that negative gossip within the work environment is indeed verbal aggression which leads to invisible stress that impacts teachers' job performance. He et al. [39] also reported a negative relationship between negative workplace gossip and thriving at work among Chinese kindergarten teachers. They found that negative gossip can deplete psychological resources and restrict learning and development opportunities, thereby undermining thriving at work.

In addition, Ozgener and Ugurlu [40] found that negative comments about peers negatively affected the contextual performance of front desk staff in tourism sites. Related evidence likewise indicates that negative workplace gossip can operate as a workplace stressor that depletes psychological resources and undermines performance-related outcomes [1], [39].

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Negative workplace gossip has a statistically significant negative effect on the job performance of school teachers.

The Relationship Between Negative Workplace Gossip and Organizational Trust Among Teachers

Negative gossip at work negatively influences the nature of interpersonal relationships between coworkers and fosters a distrustful environment in the workplace [8]. Past research has found that the lack of trust and rumors, negative work talk, are inversely related. Therefore, trust can be one of the important factors that can decrease the likelihood of gossip and rumours [12]. Similarly, the study by Al-Habil and Dabour [37] found that organizational gossip was negatively correlated with several organizational practices statistically significantly such as training and development, employee empowerment, relationship management, incentive systems, organizational justice and managerial trust. The results of these findings suggest that improving organizational practices like this can help reduce the amount of negative gossiping among employees.

According to Danish [30], negative gossip in the workplace affects organizational trust and has a negative impact on the job performance and interpersonal relationships of coworkers. While positive workplace gossip can impact employee morale, negative workplace gossip can have a more far-reaching impact, leading to a rise in mistrust. Likewise, Grosser et al. [4] found that negative gossip rumors are more likely to be passed on when two people are friends outside of the workplace as well as in the workplace. The authors used this data to suggest that the affect-based trust that is present around interpersonal relationships is a mechanism that contributes to the transmission of negative workplace gossip in comparison to strictly professional relationships. Furthermore, Zhu et al. [6] confirmed that negative workplace gossip increases employees' knowledge-hiding behaviors. This relationship was mediated by interpersonal trust; that is, when there was a negative tone of gossip within the workplace, interpersonal trust was lower, which in turn led to employees withholding knowledge and information from other employees. Furthermore, Karasu and Comert [41] recommended that the building of organizational trust through supportive leadership practices, communicating effectively, and being more present in the school environment are related to an increase in teachers' trust of their school principals and a decrease in their dependence on workplace gossip for information and interpersonal relationships.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Negative workplace gossip has a statistically significant negative effect on the organizational trust of school teachers.

The Relationship Between Organizational Trust and Teachers' Job Performance

It is clear when looking at the factors that influence job performance, that the quality of the relationship between coworkers as well as between employees and management affects performance. According to Taha and Abdo [42], the dimensions of organizational trust (trust in the top management, trust in the supervisors, and trust in the coworkers) had statistically significant positive correlation with Job Performance. On the contrary, the study carried out by Juhayd et al. [33] on the organizational trust-performance link among teachers in universities in Algeria showed that the organizational trust has a positive and significant correlation with organizational trust with only two dimensions of organizational trust, namely organizational trust in top management and organizational trust in department head, and organizational trust in coworkers was not statistically significant.

Likewise, Siyagh et al. [34] also determined that the effect of organizational trust on job performance was moderate, with trust in supervisors being the highest predictor of job performance of the respondents in the study. Increasing levels of trust among the people that they are interacting with leads to greater willingness to engage in social exchanges and cooperative relationships. In a study, which was conducted on 260 participants working in Marmara ports in Türkiye, Yorulmaz and Karabacak [27] reported organizational trust as having a positive indirect effect on job performance, which means that the influence of organizational trust on job performance was partially mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similarly, Judeh [43] showed that organizational trust has a significant relationship with job performance with employee engagement as a mediating variable. Thus, a trustful and effective organizational culture among employees is regarded as a basic prerequisite for improving job performance.

The lack of trust in a school can have serious repercussions, as it can negatively affect the productivity and effectiveness of the organization, as well as make the working environment uncomfortable for school principals [12]. From the above discussion, organizational trust can be understood as positive or negative expectation of employees based on the behavior of fellow employees and administrative policies adopted by the educational institution which can be seen from the overall performance of the educational institution. Based on this, it is hypothesized that: Hypothesis 3 (H3): Organizational trust has a statistically significant positive effect on teachers' job performance in the workplace.

The Role of Organizational Trust in the Relationship Between Negative Workplace Gossip and Teachers' Job Performance

There are many studies that have been conducted on organizational trust, both directly and indirectly. This section, however, is concerned with the mediation effect of organizational trust between negative gossip at work and job performance. Saad and Ibrahim [31] examined the role of organizational trust in the relationship between administrative transparency and organizational citizenship behavior and found that organizational trust as whole and its three dimensions (trust in management, trust in supervisors and trust in coworkers) were significant mediators between administrative transparency and organizational citizenship behavior. This discovery indicates that the trust in the organization can be strengthened by the employees' understanding of the transparency of procedures, policies, communications and performance appraisals.

Likewise, the study by El-Sayed [28] concerned the effect of management by walking around (MBWA) on the service quality in Egyptian public commercial banks, the results showed that the effect of management by walking around (MBWA) on the service quality was an indirect effect mediated by the organizational trust factor. This result shows that organizational trust is a crucial linkage between the variables. The study by Al-Habashi and Hassan [44] on indirect relationship of perceived organizational justice on organizational citizenship behavior via organizational trust found that the indirect effect of perceived organizational justice on organizational citizenship behavior through organizational trust was not statistically significant, thus indicating that there was no positive indirect effect of perceived organizational justice on organizational citizenship behavior.

From the above discussion and the results of the previous studies, it could be hypothesized that organizational trust would mediate the relationship between negative workplace gossip and teachers' job performance. Based on this, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Organizational trust mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and teachers' job performance.

Based on the relationships among the study variables discussed above, the conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure (1).

METHOD

In this section, the empirical part of the study is presented, which includes the applied framework used to test the research hypotheses and the conceptual model, that is, the intervening role of organizational trust (OT) in the relationship between negative workplace gossip (NWG) and school teachers' job performance (JP). All data obtained from the study sample were analyzed in SPSS version 27. The analysis procedures adopted for this study were descriptive, validity and reliability test, descriptive statistics of study variables, correlation analysis between variables, and simple and multiple linear regression test to test the hypotheses. In addition, the mediating role of organizational trust was investigated using the hierarchical regression analysis and indirect effect analysis method (Bootstrap resampling method, 5000 bootstrap samples, 95% confidence interval). All results were judged to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

It is important to note that the data had been numerically coded based on the five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Neutral = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1). The coding procedure was checked before analysis, including the checking for the reverse coding of the negatively worded items. These items were OT3 (Organizational Trust Scale) and JP6 (Job Performance Scale) and JP7 (Job Performance Scale). The verification showed that reverse coding

had been performed correctly beforehand, and all the items on the questionnaire were directionally consistent, and appropriate for statistical analysis.

Population and Sample of the Study

The study subjects were the permanent teachers of the educational institutions who were undergraduate students of the Open Educational College – Tuz Branch of the academic year 2026 – 2027. This population was chosen for the following reasons: (1) it was possible to obtain an access to a database of their names and job information; (2) they had a large amount of teaching experience due to their permanent employment in educational institutions; (3) they were easily accessible for data collection.

Of the 158 respondents, only 158 samples were valid. The answers were in the expected range (1-5) for all items on the questionnaire and there were no missing answers so there was no need to throw out any answers and the answers were suitable for statistical analysis. The distribution of the study sample with respect to the three demographic variables (gender, educational qualification and years of experience) is shown in Table (1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Female	97	61.4
	Male	61	38.6
	Total	158	100.0
Educational Qualification	Institute (5 years post-intermediate)	68	43.0
	Institute (2 years post-high school)	85	53.8
	High School (or equivalent)	5	3.2
	Total	158	100.0
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	23	14.6
	5 – 10 years	32	20.3
	More than 10 years	103	65.2
	Total	158	100.0

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

From the data in Table (1) it was clear that the majority of the study sample were female (61.4%) as compared with male (38.6%). This distribution is in keeping with the gender ratio of teachers in schools, which is higher in favour of females. As to educational qualifications, majority of the respondents held a teacher training institute qualification (67.5%) followed by secondary school (32.5%). This suggests that in the sample, most of the teachers were from the institutes. As far as experience is concerned, the highest percentage was more than 10 years (65.2%), followed by 5–10 years (20.3%) and less than 5 years (14.6%). These characteristics taken together suggest that the sample was experienced enough and had enough exposure to the school world to be suitable for the study's objectives and able to give realistic estimates of the phenomenon of negative workplace gossip and its impact on organizational trust and job performance.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The Negative Workplace Gossip scale created by Kuo et al. [45] was used for the study, and one more item was added to meet the context of the present study. The Organizational Trust scale developed by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran [46] was also adopted with one item removed to make it more relevant for this study. Williams and Anderson [47] Job Performance scale was also used. The revised questionnaire was given to a panel of experts for face validity. The research instrument (internal consistency) was evaluated by calculating the Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each of the three scales of the study instruments and all the three as a whole. The following criteria were used to interpret the reliability coefficients: poor, <0.60; acceptable, 0.60-<0.70; good, 0.70-<0.80; very good, 0.80-<0.90; and excellent, ≥0.90. Table (2) shows the reliability analysis results.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results for the Study Scales

Scale (Variable)	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Statistical Decision
Negative Work Gossip (NWG)	6	0.892	Very Good
Organizational Trust (OT)	7	0.781	Good
Job Performance (JP)	7	0.782	Good
Total Scale	20	0.679	Acceptable

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

Data analysis revealed that Cronbach's Alpha for each scale is within the acceptable range as shown in Table (2). Specifically, the coefficients obtained were (0.892) in the Negative Work Gossip scale which is within the "Very Good" range, and (0.781) in the Organizational Trust scale and (0.782) in the Job Performance scale, both in the "Good" range. This is observed that the total scale coefficient value is (0.679) which is acceptable. The relative reduction when compared with the subscales is due to the fact that the total scale includes the conceptual dimensions and the directions are different (negative gossip is a variable that has a negative effect, while organizational trust and job performance have a positive effect). This is theoretically predicted and does not impact on the trustworthiness of each individual scale. Therefore, the study instrument is valid for analysis and drawing conclusions, it can be said that the study instrument has sufficient level of reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The **arithmetic mean** and **standard deviation** were calculated for each questionnaire item and for each of the study variables. The level of respondents' agreement was interpreted according to the following criteria for the five-point Likert scale: **1.00–1.80 = Very Low**, **1.81–2.60 = Low**, **2.61–3.40 = Moderate**, **3.41–4.20 = High**, and **4.21–5.00 = Very High**. **Table (3)** presents these results at the item level, together with a summary of the descriptive statistics for the three main study variables.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Items and Variables of the Study

Variable	Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Response Level
Negative Work Gossip (NWG)	NG1	3.01	1.18	Moderate
	NG2	3.06	1.16	Moderate
	NG3	2.95	1.09	Moderate
	NG4	2.94	1.06	Moderate
	NG5	2.67	1.15	Moderate
	NG6	2.32	1.18	Low
	General Index of the Variable	2.83	0.92	Moderate
Organizational Trust (OT)	OT1	3.96	0.87	High
	OT2	3.91	0.91	High
	OT3	3.42	1.09	High
	(Reversed)			
	OT4	3.89	0.86	High
	OT5	4.01	0.91	High
	OT6	4.01	0.86	High
	OT7	3.39	0.96	Moderate

Variable	Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Response Level
Job Performance (JP)	General Index of the Variable	3.80	0.61	High
	JP1	4.34	0.74	Very High
	JP2	4.26	0.69	Very High
	JP3	4.41	0.64	Very High
	JP4	4.45	0.59	Very High
	JP5	4.22	0.75	Very High
	JP6	3.84	0.95	High
	(Reversed)			
	JP7	4.27	0.86	Very High
	(Reversed)			
	General Index of the Variable	4.25	0.50	Very High

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

Table (3) shows that the variable negative workplace gossip overall mean score is 2.83 with standard deviation of 0.92, which is a moderate level of response. Items' means ranged from 2.32 on item NG6 to 3.06 on item NG2. This means that the school teachers that were included in the study sample were experiencing some workplace gossip in their school at a moderate level which should not be ignored. The variable organizational trust on the contrary had an overall mean of 3.80 with a standard deviation of 0.61; this shows that even though there was gossip among teachers, the teachers still experienced a relatively high degree of trust within their organization. The overall mean for job performance was 4.25 points with a standard deviation of 0.50, indicating very high level, which shows teachers' high commitment to their job performance and responsibilities. Finally, it should be noted that the standard deviations for organizational trust and job performance were rather small, meaning that the answers given were rather consistent, and hence there was great agreement between the respondents regarding the answers given to both these variables.

Correlation Analysis Among the Study Variables

To examine the nature of the relationships among the three study variables, **Pearson's correlation coefficient** was calculated. **Table (4)** presents the correlation coefficients, their significance levels, as well as the direction and strength of each relationship.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix Between the Study Variables

Relationship Between the Two Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (Sig.)	Direction of the Relationship	Strength of the Relationship
Negative Work Gossip × Job Performance	-0.116	0.147	Inverse	Weak (Insignificant)
Negative Work Gossip × Organizational Trust	-0.327	0.000	Inverse	Moderate (Significant)
Organizational Trust × Job Performance	0.313	0.000	Direct	Moderate (Significant)

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

The findings in Table (4) show that there was a weak negative correlation, and statistically not significant, between negative workplace gossip and job performance with a correlation coefficient of (− 0.116) and a significance level of (0.147) which is larger than the level of significance of

(0.05). This means that the correlation between these two variables is not statistically significant. A moderate negative and statistically significant correlation was obtained between negative workplace gossip and organizational trust ($r = -0.327$) with a level of significance of 0.000, meaning that as the negative workplace gossip scores increase, the organizational trust scores decrease. In addition, moderate positive and statistically significant correlation was found between organizational trust and job performance ($r=0.313$, $p=0.000$), meaning that increase in organizational trust will lead to an increase in job performance. Based on these preliminary findings, negative workplace gossip is suggested to affect job performance indirectly via the mediation of organizational trust, and the hypotheses of the connection between negative workplace gossip and job performance are presented.

Hypothesis Testing

The first three causal hypotheses were tested using **simple linear regression analysis**. The results are presented as follows.

Testing Hypothesis 1 (H1)

The first hypothesis states that: **"Negative workplace gossip has a statistically significant negative effect on the job performance of school teachers."** In testing this hypothesis, **job performance** was treated as the **dependent variable**, whereas **negative workplace gossip** was treated as the **independent variable**. **Table (5)** presents the results of this analysis.

Table 5. Results of Testing the Effect of Negative Work Gossip on Job Performance (H1)

R	R ²	F	Sig. (F)	Beta (β)	t / Sig.
0.116	0.013	2.126	0.147	-0.116	-1.458 / 0.147

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

The standardized regression coefficient (Beta) in Table (5), shows a negative relation (-0.116), which is consistent with the proposed hypothesis. The F-value of 2.126, and t-value of -1.458 , however, are greater than the significance level (0.05), and their P-values are greater than the significance level (0.147 and 0.147, respectively). Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was found to be only 0.013, which means that the variance in job performance due to negative workplace gossip explained only 1.3%. The negative direction of the relationship as predicted was found, but the effect was not statistically significant. Thus, there is not enough statistical support for the proposed direct effect. Hypothesis 1 (H1): The whole group of children cannot be classified as having specific learning disabilities. is rejected.

Testing Hypothesis 2 (H2)

The second hypothesis states that: **"Negative workplace gossip has a statistically significant negative effect on the organizational trust of school teachers."** In testing this hypothesis, **organizational trust** was specified as the **dependent variable**, while **negative workplace gossip** was treated as the **independent variable**. **Table (6)** presents the results of this analysis.

Table 6. Results of Testing the Effect of Negative Work Gossip on Organizational Trust (H2)

R	R ²	F	Sig. (F)	Beta (β)	t / Sig.
0.327	0.107	18.646	0.000	-0.327	-4.318 / 0.000

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

The findings of the negative workplace gossip on organizational trust were statistically significant as shown in table (6). The F-value was 18.646 and it was statistically highly significant at 0.000 level. The standardized regression coefficient (Beta) was -0.327 , t-value was -4.318 and significance level was 0.000 (less than 0.05). Organizational trust was explained by 10.7% of the variance of negative workplace gossip, as represented by the coefficient of determination (R^2). The regression coefficient is negative by the teachers' organizational trust is lower as the level of negative workplace gossip increases. Hypothesis 2 (H2) is thus accepted.

Testing Hypothesis 3 (H3)

The third hypothesis is that: "There is a statistically significant positive relationship between organizational trust and the job performance of school teachers. To test this hypothesis, job performance was used as the dependent variable, and organizational trust used as the independent variable. The results of this analysis are shown in Table (7).

Table 7. Results of Testing the Effect of Organizational Trust on Job Performance (H3)

R	R²	F	Sig. (F)	Beta (β)	t / Sig.
0.313	0.098	16.998	0.000	0.313	4.123 / 0.000

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

Table (7) shows that the organizational trust positively affects job performance at a statistically significant level. The F-value was 16.998 with a significance level of 0.000. The standardized regression coefficient (Beta) was 0.313 with a t-value of 4.123 and significance level of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Organizational trust accounted for 9.8% of the variance in job performance ($R^2 = .098$). The positive regression coefficient suggests that the higher the level of organizational trust, the better the job performance of teachers. Thus, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is accepted.

Testing Hypothesis 4 (H4)

The simple mediation model (Model 4) was used to test the fourth hypothesis: "Organizational trust mediates between negative workplace gossip and the job performance of school teachers. The mediation paths were estimated by hierarchical regression analysis and the significance of the indirect effect was tested by using the Bootstrap resampling method with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence interval. Furthermore, Sobel test was conducted to further confirm the mediation effect. X is negative workplace gossip, M is organizational trust, and Y is job performance. Table (8) presents the results of the path analysis.

Table 8. Results of Testing the Mediating Role of Organizational Trust

Path	Coefficient Value	Significance (Sig.)	95% Confidence Interval (Bootstrap)
Path (a): Negative Work Gossip → Organizational Trust	-0.216	0.000	
Path (b): Organizational Trust → Job Performance	0.251	0.000	
Total Effect (c): Negative Work Gossip → Job Performance	-0.063	0.147	
Direct Effect (c'): After introducing Organizational Trust	-0.008	0.851	
Indirect Effect (a×b) via Organizational Trust	-0.054	0.004	[-0.109 , -0.016]

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS 27 program.

Note: The Sobel test ($z = -2.862$) was used to obtain the significance value of the indirect effect, while the final judgment was based on the Bootstrap confidence interval, which is more accurate indicator of mediation.

Table (8) shows that the results of the effect of negative workplace gossip on organizational trust were negative and statistically significant ($a = -0.216$, Sig. = 0.000). Similarly, path (b) – the effect of organizational trust on job performance – was positive and statistically significant (0.251, Sig. = 0.000). For the indirect effect of negative gossip in the workplace on job performance through organizational trust, the effect was -0.054 . The Bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect was -0.109 , to -0.016 , and did not include zero, which indicates that the indirect effect was statistically significant. After adding organizational trust to the model, the direct effect

of negative workplace gossip on job performance (c') was very weak and statistically insignificant (-0.008 , Sig. = 0.851). The adopted decision criterion is that if the indirect effect is significant and the direct effect is not, then there is full (complete) mediation. Thus, organizational trust totally mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and job performance. Thus, Hypothesis 4 (H4) is accepted.

It is worth noting that in order to be scientific, the total effect (c) of negative workplace gossip on job performance was not statistically significant (-0.063 , Sig. = 0.147). The pattern is known in the current mediation analysis literature as "indirect-only mediation. In this type of mediation, the statistical significance of the total effect does not need to be established as a prerequisite to establishing mediation but rather evidence of mediation is based on the statistical significance of the indirect effect as determined by the Bootstrap confidence interval. In practice, it means that negative gossip in the workplace is not having a meaningful direct impact on job performance but rather only has a negative impact in terms of the loss of organizational trust.

Discussion

The following section discusses the findings of each research hypothesis by relating them to the theoretical framework and the context of educational institutions.

For Hypothesis 1 (H1), the conclusions are that it was rejected.

The results found indicated that there was no direct effect of negative gossip in the workplace on job performance ($p > 0.05$) and thus Hypothesis 1 was not accepted. The finding may be accounted by the fact that teachers with high ethical and professional commitment to their jobs can distinguish between their emotional response to gossips in the workplace and their job performance, especially as the job performance of the study sample was determined to be very high. Furthermore, this finding does not negate the negative effects of negative workplace gossip; it simply implies that such gossip has an indirect effect on job performance and thus relies on a mediating variable to get from one to the other. This is in line with the conceptual model that was developed in line with theory. This result differs from studies reporting adverse effects of negative workplace gossip on job performance, work effort, contextual performance, or work-related thriving [1], [38], [39], [40].

For Hypothesis 2 (H2), a discussion of the hypothesis was presented. A discussion of the hypothesis was presented for Hypothesis 2 (H2).

The results supported the hypothesis of a statistically significant negative effects of negative workplace gossip on organizational trust, so the hypothesis was accepted. This finding is in line with the theoretical perspective that negative workplace gossip is a damaging communication style that harms an organization's social capital. Negative conversations, rumors, are common among teachers and reduce teacher psychological safety and increase teacher distrust of other teachers and distrust of school administration. On a practical level, this discovery suggests that negative gossip in the workplace is a very real danger to the organizational climate of trust and that failing to address it could slowly erode organizational relationships in schools. 5.1.3 Discussion of Hypothesis 3 (H3) Accepted The interpretation is consistent with prior evidence linking negative workplace gossip with lower psychological safety, weaker trust, and impaired interpersonal relationships [8], [30], [6], [41].

The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between organizational trust and job performance, thus hypothesis 3 was accepted. This result is in agreement with the theoretical position that organizational trust is a psychological and social resource that encourages people to put in more effort, cooperate with others and to be more willing to take initiative. Trust among teachers and teachers and between teachers and their institutions is associated with greater willingness to collaborate and provide performance above minimum standards. In practical terms, this finding supports the notion that it's possible to invest in the development of organizational trust in schools that directly increases the performance of the teaching staff. This pattern is also supported by previous findings that organizational trust is positively associated with job performance and related work outcomes [42], [33], [34], [27], [43].

Hypothesis 4 (H4) Discussed

The findings indicated the significance of organizational trust as a full mediator of the negative workplace gossip and job performance; thus, Hypothesis 4 was accepted. This is the main contribution of the study because this finding provides the mechanism by which the negative impact of gossip in the workplace is passed onto job performance. In other words, negative gossip in the workplace does not directly affect job performance, but rather reduces the trust in the organization which in turn reduces job performance. This finding is not only logically consistent with the theoretical framework of the study which put forward organizational trust as a mediating variable but also it will also account for the lack of statistically significant direct effect in the first hypothesis. Adverse effects of negative workplace gossip can and should be mitigated by measures that protect and restore the trust within an organization as it is the most important factor in preventing such negative effects from reaching the performance of educational staff from the viewpoints of the school administration and teachers. The mediating role identified here is consistent with earlier research showing that organizational trust can function as an intervening mechanism linking organizational practices to employee outcomes [31], [28], [44].

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The research instrument was reliable with a good to very good level. No data was missing from the data set and all responses were within the valid range of the measurement scale, thus the data can be analysed statistically and generalized within the scope of the study population.
2. School teachers perceived the presence of negative workplace gossip at a moderate level, whereas organizational trust was found to be at a high level and job performance at a very high level.
3. The relationship between negative workplace gossip and job performance was not statistically significant, however, the direction of the relationship was in the negative direction as theoretically expected.
4. Organizational trust was found to have a statistically significant positive relationship with job performance and negative workplace gossip had a statistically significant negative relationship with organizational trust.
5. The negative effect of negative workplace gossip on job performance was completely mediated by organizational trust, suggesting that the effect of negative workplace gossip on job performance is primarily through the deterioration of organizational trust.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, the study recommends the following:

1. School administrators should take this issue of negative work gossip seriously and attempt to minimize its effects by fostering a culture of mutual respect and positive communication within the school environment and by establishing professional codes of conduct in schools.
2. School administrators and all employees in educational institutions should be sensitized on the dangers of negative workplace gossip through seminars and workshops where the issues that lead to negative workplace gossip and the appropriate responses should be discussed.
3. Educational institutions should establish strict monetary and non-monetary consequences for those involved in negative gossip at the workplace and reward and incentivize workers who practice positive professional conduct in the workplace to mitigate negative behaviors.
4. Employees should be encouraged to provide mutual support and promote cooperation and mutual assistance among themselves instead of pursuing their own interests.
5. Educational institutions should implement practical and cost-effective strategies to build and restore organizational trust, including regular open meetings, fair and transparent grievance procedures, and encouraging collaboration among educators, while emphasizing that organizational trust is the first line of defense in sustaining strong performance in the workplace.

6. For future research, a larger sample of teachers in more varied educational contexts should be used, as well as other mediating or moderating variables such as psychological safety or organizational justice, to better understand the processes by which negative gossip in the workplace affects job performance.

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