

GOSSIP AND PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION DAMAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY TEACHERS: A SURVEY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the spread of gossip and its impact on professional reputation among university teachers, controlling for designation, gender, and institution type.

Design of Study: Cross-sectional research design.

Place and duration of the study: from 1st September 2024 to 1st June 2025 at COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus.

Sample and Method: A sample of 210 participants, both males and females, with ages ranging from 25 to 55, completed standardized self-report survey questionnaires

Results and Conclusion: Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess group differences. Considerable disparities in gossip effects on reputation of faculty members were found based on the university type (private or public), gender, and professional rank. Findings shows that gossip had a significant impact on the perceived professional competence, career progression, collaborative interaction, and social connectedness, and the effects of gossip varied across demographic and organizational groups. The results are especially focused on the idea that associate professors in a private institution, particularly women, were the most affected by reputational and relational harm. This allows concluding that gossip is more likely to be used as a means of exclusion and control in a competitive academic environment, hence its critical but overlooked role in educational workplaces and its unequal distribution along the gender and institutional lines.

Keywords: gossip in the workplace; damage of the professional reputation; institutional type; academic hierarchy; gender dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Professional gossip involves casual, changeable communication relating to staff that takes place beyond the formal communication. Sharing of unverified information spreads across people and builds specific images about the recipient, affirmative and degrading (Kim et al., 2023). Whereas researchers on gossip have focused on its social functions in creating group norms and solidifying teams (Kim et al., 2023), Gibson (2013) also demonstrates its harmful effects such as spreading harmful information.

Gossip has a dual role: it connects the colleagues into a social network; and at the same time, it may be a harmful tool by spreading misinformation that tarnishes the reputation, creates conflict, and destroys trust between the team members (Zinko et al., 2017). This effect is more harmfully uneven in the academic field, where faculty status holds the utmost importance, shaping all aspects of the professional progression, including the promotion or tenure decisions (Gendron & Bédard, 2015).

Academic success depends on a strong professional image whereas a weakened image can trigger professional isolation and disappointments. Garcia and Lopez (2024) explore the question of how gossip can influence the reputation of leaders, thereby, influencing the organizational behavior. Besides, gossip may serve as a means of social control in workplaces. Miller and Davis (2023) demonstrate the application of gossip to impose social norms and to regulate behavior. Individual personality traits are another topic that is attracting increased interest regarding their role in the distribution of gossip. Brown and Wilson (2024) review the personality characteristics that predispose people to gossiping at work. Taken together, these papers demonstrate the significance of learning how to handle gossip in the workplace, how the problem is complex in its impacts on the team dynamics, leadership perception, and individual behaviors. They emphasize that there is a need to devise strategies that would reduce the adverse effects of gossip and use it as an opportunity to benefit.

Many universities are full of gossip especially in the institutions that practice strong hierarchical or in institutions where faculty members feel disconnected with the leadership of the university (Abrahamson & Park, 1994). When gossip becomes malicious, it may end up having severe consequences which include reputational damage and also interpersonal conflict. Gossip at work, which usually entails rumours or exaggerations about co-workers, creates

work-related problems that ruin careers and sever work-related relationships (Cohen & Spector, 2018). Aggression targets of negative gossip experience reduced chances of participating in salient professional decisions or career advancement (Ritter et al., 2018), and employees who have been gossiped about are unlikely to have career promotion opportunities since their work colleagues have linked them to lack of trust and poor performance (Bradly et al., 2017). Even though studies on the reputational damage in the workplace, based on the gossip, are well-documented, the empirical research in the setting of higher education, especially the examination of certain damages to the reputation of the faculty, is limited (Bergstrom et al., 2020). Academic organizations are extremely hierarchical, and the issue of reputation is a critical component influenced by the informal factors like gossips.

The current research paper uses several theoretical frameworks to examine this phenomenon in its entirety. The concept of social identity theory forms the view that the self-esteem of individuals depends heavily on the status of groups to which they belong (Tajfel et al., 2001) and explains how categorization processes result in stereotyping and labelling of people in the academic milieu (Tajfel et al., 2001). Also, Evolutionary Psychology formulated by Dunbar (1996) proposes that gossip is a classical social tool that helps in the establishment of trust and unity among social groups, which strengthens the social boundaries and unity. Lee and Garcia (2024) discuss the impact of gossip on workplace relationships, they note the possibility of hostile work environment, broken trust, among others. Lastly, Rodriguez and Taylor (2022) reflect on the issue of gossip potentially influencing whether a teacher can obtain funding on research, which reveals that a bad reputation can have an impact on the funding process. The research on gossip in the workplaces has experienced recent growth, as the overall impact thereof has proven to be a complex phenomenon.

Studies have shown that gossip plays a huge role in the team dynamics and performance. The article by Chen and Wang (2024) investigates the ability of gossip to strengthen or weaken a team, showing that it is dualistic in a group context. Besides, the influence of gossip is also visible in the changing nature of remote working. Kim and Park (2023) discuss the gossip context on the web, stating that online communication conditions the gossip spread and its effect. Besides, gossip is of vital importance in forming leadership opinion. Lastly, Organizational Behaviour and Reputation Management Theories mentions reputation as a key strategic resource (Fombrun, 1996) and gossip is the key tool of social control which requires reputation repair strategies.

This paper draws attention to the neglected yet strong aspect of a university teacher's professional reputation. Although formal tools such as peer reviews are used, informal communication, including gossip, has a significant impact on faculty members' perceptions and the course of their careers (Sun et al., 2022). The study advances knowledge of psychology in the workplace and organizational behaviour by analyzing the implications of gossip and its influences across institutional settings and demographic factors. The complex hierarchical organization of public universities can make faculty members more prone to negative gossip (Gabriel et al., 2024). On the contrary, the intimate and personal character of private universities can exacerbate the effects of gossip incidents (Friedman et al., 2017). The available research shows that gender and rank mediate exposure to gossip, and females with low organizational rank tend to be more exposed to negative gossip (Martinescu et al., 2021). Through these considerations, this research will provide specific knowledge to avert adverse communication and promote the well-being and job satisfaction of the faculty (Singh, 2025).

The objectives of the study were to evaluate the degree of impact that gossip has on the professional status of faculty in both private and public learning institutions, to provide a comparative study between gender and institutional sector (private vs. public), professional positions (assistant professor, associate professor, full professor), along with a gender analysis for both sets of institutions. Following Hypothesis was formulated

1. There will be significant differences in the impact of gossip on professional reputation among faculty members based on university type (private vs. public), gender, and professional rank.

METHOD

A cross-sectional research design is used in this study uses a cross-sectional research design to examine the impact of gossip on professional reputation among university teachers.

Participant

This study was carried out by conducting a survey consisting of a sample of 210 participants, including 101 females and 109 males, aged from 25 to 55 years (Mean age = 38.49, SD = 7.92), including both from private and public

institutions, all of them having a position as an academic faculty member. A sample was recruited from four public sector universities, including COMSATS University, Punjab University, Government College University, and Lahore College for Women University, and four private universities, including the University of Central Punjab, University of Management & Technology, University of South Asia, and Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. The sampling strategy used was convenience sampling. The sample varied in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status to improve the general applicability of the findings.

Inclusion criteria

The sample included people, who met the following inclusion criteria: (a) faculty of a private and a public university; (b) faculty holders in their present job (i.e., assistant, associate, full professor); (c) a person of any sex, thus making the sample heterogeneous; (d) a person, who had at least one year of teaching experience during his or her current employment, to guarantee the familiarity with the modern realities in the workplace; (e) a member of the sample who gave informed consent to participate and fill out the survey.

Exclusion criteria

The participants were not allowed to take part in the event who fit in the following: (a) non-faculty staff, including administrative staff or part-time lecturers; (b) retired faculty; and (c) faculty members whose work is non-academic, i.e. those who are in administrative workload but do not have any teaching obligations.

Measures

Demographic Data Questionnaire

This demographic questionnaire provides information on the age, gender, marital status, and teaching experience of the respondents. It also explores the central point of gossip within the institution, the frequency of these exchanges, and the channels of transmission, whether face-to-face, email, or social networks. By collecting such data, the instrument hopes to shed light on communication trends and workplace relationship dynamics.

Self-made Survey Questionnaire

A custom-made questionnaire was administered to determine how workplace gossip affects the professional reputations of the university's faculty. The tool consisted of two parts: a demographic sheet and a five-point Likert-type scale that evaluated the outcomes of reputation. The scale of principal included 18 items, Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates Strongly Disagree and 5 indicates Strongly Agree and covered some of the aspects of reputational damage that could be caused by gossip. For instance, things that were found to hurt the perceived damage to professional image (e.g., being challenged by colleagues on his or her competence or causing disrespect in students), social consequences (e.g., isolation, bad relationships, misunderstandings with supervisors), and career consequences (e.g., fewer opportunities, avoidance of leadership position, career anxieties). Other supplementary items covered the decrease in motivation, decline in teaching performance, psychological stress that transferred to personal life, and reduced engagement in academic activities. An increase in aggregate scores indicated a greater perceived adverse effect of gossip on professional reputation. The measure was designed to be the least obtrusive, situation-specific, and representative of faculty experiences in higher education.

Procedure

First of all the approval was sought from the Ethical Review Board of the Humanities Department of COMSATS University with the reference number Ref.No.CUI/LHR/HUM/385. Ethical behaviour requires prioritizing confidentiality and harm reduction when investigating gossip and its potential impact on the professional lives of university teachers. All participants provided informed consent for the study and ensured they fully understood the study's purpose and their participation. This was done by getting institutional approval to assert whether the ethical standards are being adhered to. In addition, investigators addressed sensitive matters that could tarnish the profession and offered referrals or assistance to those negatively impacted by the harm to the profession's reputation.

Statistical Analysis

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) is a suitable method for analyzing survey data. The dependent variables discussed are Professional

Reputation, Competence and Performance, Relationships and Collaboration, Career Opportunities, Social Isolation, and Support. The MANOVA enables simultaneous measurement of these correlated results, which is convenient since they are related. The research examined group differences among independent variables, including Type of Institution (private/public), Gender, and Professional Rank/Status (e.g., assistant, associate, full professor). MANOVA is test for statistically significant differences in the dependent variables across these classifications.

RESULTS

Table 1

Percentages and frequencies of the sample demographic variables

Measures	<i>F</i>	%
Gender		
Men	110	52.1%
Women	101	47.9%
Marital Status		
Married	157	74.4%
Unmarried	44	20.9%
Divorced/Widowed	10	4.7%
Designation		
Lecturer	70	33.2%
Assistant Professor	70	33.2%
Associate Professor	70	33.2%
Type of institution		
Public	74	35.1%
Private	137	64.9%

Table 2

Multivariate Analysis of variance (MANOVA) based on the effect of Gossip on Professional Reputation of Teacher by gender, designation and type of institution

Gender	Designation	Institution Type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	Lecturer	Public	12.33	1.53	3
		Private	6.86	2.53	49
	Assistant Professor	Public	7.63	1.51	8
		Private	8.47	1.30	15
	Associate Professor	Public	7.28	2.95	18
		Private	9.00	0.82	16
Female	Lecturer	Public	7.67	1.03	6
		Private	8.42	1.24	12
	Assistant Professor	Public	12.33	1.53	3
		Private	6.86	2.53	49
	Associate Professor	Public	7.63	1.51	8
		Private	8.47	1.30	15

Note. $F(11, 212) = 2.78, p = .002, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .12.$

Directly, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine the impact of gossip on teachers' professional reputations, controlling for gender, rank, and type of institution. The general model provides statistically significant results, $F(11, 212) = 2.78, p = .002, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .12$, indicating a moderate effect size. The most substantial effect of gossip on the professional reputation of male lecturers in the public institutions was observed ($M = 12.33, SD = 1.53$). On the other hand, male lecturers in the private institutions had the least effect ($M = 6.86, SD = 2.53$). The adverse effect of gossip was also viewed by female faculty across different designations and institutions as not high, but female assistant professors across institutions reported higher means ($M = 9.30$). Teachers in private institutions, regardless of gender, reported higher mean scores, suggesting that gossip could have a more

significant negative impact on professional reputation in private institutions than in public ones. Such findings imply that gender, professional status, and institutional environment interact in complex ways to determine the effects of gossip on educators' professional reputations.

Table 3

Self-Performance and Competence of teachers based on gender, rank and type of institute

Gender	Designation	Institution Type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	Lecturer	Public	10.00	3.00	3
		Private	7.41	2.65	49
	Assistant Professor	Public	7.75	2.25	8
		Private	10.00	1.56	15
	Associate Professor	Public	7.44	2.09	18
		Private	9.75	1.61	16
Female	Lecturer	Public	9.00	1.26	6
		Private	8.83	0.94	12
	Assistant Professor	Public	8.96	2.21	27
		Private	9.05	1.10	20
	Associate Professor	Public	8.25	2.99	12
		Private	8.75	1.85	24

Note. $F(11, 212) = 1.92$, $p = .039$, partial $\eta^2 = .091$.

A multivariate test of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the effects of gossip on teachers' performance and self-competence, while controlling for gender, designation, and type of institution. The total model showed statistical significance ($F(11, 212) = 1.92$, $p = .039$, partial $\eta^2 = .091$), which was a small to moderate effect size. Male assistant professors in the private sector and male lecturers in the public sector had a relatively more substantial influence of gossip on their competence and performance ($M=10.00$, $SD=3.00$, 1.56) than male lecturers in private institutions. Conversely, the performance ratings of female teachers were comparatively unchanged across designations and institutions, with mean scores ranging from 8.25 to 9.05. All in all, for teachers placed in private institutions, the mean scores are higher, indicating that gossip may negatively affect competence and performance. These

results highlight how gender, designation, and institutional affiliation interact in complex ways to influence perceptions of the impact of gossip on teacher professional efficacy.

Table 4

Professional collaboration and teacher relationships by gender, Rank, and Institution type

Gender	Designation	Institution Type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	Lecturer	Public	12.67	5.03	3
		Private	11.80	4.36	49
	Assistant Professor	Public	13.50	4.75	8
		Private	15.27	1.98	15
	Associate Professor	Public	12.00	3.61	18
		Private	14.63	2.47	16
Female	Lecturer	Public	12.50	1.64	6
		Private	13.00	1.86	12
	Assistant Professor	Public	13.78	2.82	27
		Private	15.55	2.58	20
	Associate Professor	Public	13.00	1.21	12
		Private	15.71	2.27	24

Note. $F(11, 212) = 2.15$, $p = .019$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$.

To determine the effect of gossip on teachers' professional relationships and collaborative engagement, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used, controlling for gender, designation, and type of institution. The analysis yielded a significant multivariate effect, $F(11,212) = 2.15$, $p = .019$, eta

$p^2 = .10$, with a small-to-moderate effect size. In the case of female associate professors at privately based institutions, the value was the highest ($M=15.71$, $SD=2.27$), indicating a strong negative impression of the effects of gossip on interpersonal relationships and collaboration. On the other hand, the mean score was lowest among female lecturers in the public institutions. Male assistant professors who worked in a private institution had the highest mean disruption (mean=15.27, $SD=1.98$) and female lecturers in a private institution had the lowest (mean=11.80, $SD=4.36$). These trends suggest that the level of disturbance will differ by gender and designation. Cumulatively, the faculty members of private institutions, regardless of gender or rank, provided more significant negative responses, suggesting that the institutional context may moderate the alleviation of the harmful effects of gossip.

Table 5

Career Opportunities of Teachers in terms of gender, designation, and the type of institutions

Gender	Designation	Institution Type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	Lecturer	Public	9.00	3.61	3
		Private	6.92	2.72	49
	Assistant Professor	Public	7.13	2.59	8
		Private	9.13	1.41	15
	Associate Professor	Public	6.28	2.19	18
		Private	7.56	2.53	16
Female	Lecturer	Public	5.33	1.97	6
		Private	6.75	1.91	12
	Assistant Professor	Public	7.93	3.00	27
		Private	8.60	1.88	20
	Associate Professor	Public	8.25	2.05	12
		Private	8.96	1.73	24

Note. $F(11, 212) = 2.41$, $p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the impact of teacher gossip on their perceptions of career opportunities, with gender, designation, and type of institution as factors. The statistical analysis showed a statistically significant multivariate effect, $F(11, 212) = 2.41$, $p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$, indicating a moderate effect size. Assistant professors in the

male category working at a private institution had the highest mean score, indicating the most undesirable attitude toward career opportunities associated with gossip ($M = 9.13$, $SD = 1.41$). On the contrary, associate professors in the government institutions had the lowest average score. The mean score for female associate professors in private institutions was the highest ($M = 8.96$, $SD = 1.73$), indicating that perceptions of career progression in the presence of gossip were more negative. On the other hand, female lecturers in public institutions had the lowest mean score ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.97$), indicating that they perceived less trouble. Generally, faculty at private institutions reported more adverse professional effects of gossip, highlighting the moderating influence of institutional type on the career-related effects of gossip.

Table 6

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) based on the effects of gossip on the perception of social isolation and support of teachers in terms of gender, designation, and type of school

Gender	Designation	Institution Type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	Lecturer	Public	12.00	3.61	3
		Private	9.63	2.78	49
	Assistant Professor	Public	8.75	3.11	8
		Private	10.47	2.59	15
	Associate Professor	Public	9.06	2.27	18
		Private	10.94	1.77	16
Female	Lecturer	Public	9.00	1.41	6
		Private	10.33	2.47	12
	Assistant Professor	Public	10.63	2.44	27
		Private	11.50	2.50	20
	Associate Professor	Public	11.50	1.93	12
		Private	12.25	1.89	24

Note. $F(11, 212) = 2.94$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the impact of gossip on teachers' social isolation and workplace support, controlling for gender, designation, and type of institution. The results revealed a statistically significant multivariate effect, $F(11, 212) = 2.94$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .132$, indicating a moderate to large effect size. Female associate professors in

private institutions reported the highest mean ($M = 12.25$, $SD = 1.89$), suggesting the lowest perceived social support and higher isolation. In contrast, male assistant professors in public institutions reported the lowest mean ($M = 8.75$, $SD = 3.1$), potentially reflecting the lowest impact on their sense of isolation and perceived social support. The findings imply that designation and institutional type may significantly influence how teachers perceive social connectedness in environments where gossip is prevalent. To test the impact of teacher gossip on their perceptions of career opportunities, with gender, designation, and type of institution as factors multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed. The statistical analysis showed a statistically significant multivariate effect, $F(11, 212) = 2.41$, $p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .111$, indicating a moderate effect size. Assistant professors in the male category working at a private institution had the highest mean score, indicating the most undesirable attitude toward career opportunities associated with gossip ($M = 9.13$, $SD = 1.41$). On the contrary, associate professors in the government institutions had the lowest average score. The mean score for female associate professors in private institutions was the highest ($M = 8.96$, $SD = 1.73$), indicating that perceptions of career progression in the presence of gossip were more negative. On the other hand, female lecturers in public institutions had the lowest mean score ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.97$), indicating that they perceived less trouble. Generally, faculty at private institutions reported more adverse professional effects of gossip, highlighting the moderating influence of institutional type on the career-related effects of gossip.

DISCUSSION

The influence of gossip is integral in social comprehension of university teachers. The association between gossip and social reputation, the popular culture trope of workplace gossip, is a phenomenon that friends gossip about. Workplace gossip undermines reputations and negatively affects social and vocational integration. The study intended to identify the impact of gossip on the professional reputation of faculty members, by type of university (private versus public), gender, and rank of the profession.

The core hypothesis of this study: gossip affects faculty members' professional reputation differently depending on the type of university (private vs. public), gender and professional rank, is validated. The findings strongly suggest that faculty members' reputations are affected by gossip, and the impact is significantly dependent on the aforementioned three elements.

The most notable result is that adverse gossip affects public Male Lecturers more. This increased sensitivity might result from the absence of flexible control of hierarchy and set organizational culture. On the other hand, the perceived lower impact reported by male faculty at private institutions may indicate greater control over individual autonomy, or a higher emphasis on tangible results might protect them.

The analysis identified certain risks associated with career transitions in private organizations. Male Assistant Professors in the private sector were negatively affected and were particularly vulnerable to workplace gossip that could be seen as harmful to one's career. This is further enhanced by the general adverse effect across private-sector institutions, which supports the theory that negative gossip is more readily available in smaller, more tight-knit workplaces.

Female faculty members tended to have a flat mean score (\$8.25 to \$9.05), which did not differ across rank or type of institution. This illustrates that, to a certain extent, gossip is not seen by female faculty as a variable, pervasive threat but rather as an unchanging, ubiquitous workplace problem. Nevertheless, the almost 10 score by Female Assistant Professors in private institutions alluded to the twin vulnerabilities of early-career disruption and the additional Gendered expectation. This is consistent with the literature, such as that of Smith and Lee (2022), in which gossip was found to have a more negative impact on one's reputation, which was more pronounced in private institutions, and female faculty were found to be more adversely affected by gossip in terms of their reputation than their male colleagues.

There are five distinct areas of Professional Reputation, Competence and Performance, Relationships and Collaboration, Career Opportunities, and Social Isolation and Support, in which gossip has an effect, as confirmed by a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA).

Professional Reputation:

Gossip has the potential to act as a form of gatekeeping, where individuals can develop a sense of vulnerability and fear of having their careers sabotaged.

Competence and Performance:

As the research suggests, “gossip has negatively influenced the perceptions of self-competence and self-performance of the teachers” (Wilson & Clark, 2019).

Relationships and Collaboration:

The quantitative data show that the impact of gossip is detrimental in establishing and maintaining collaboration and friendship ties.

Career Opportunities:

The effect of gossip is explicit in limiting/potentially hurting one’s career, as it affects the attainment of desirable promotional and leadership positions.

Social Isolation and Support:

More gossip is related to a greater sense of social isolation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research thoroughly meets its objectives by confirming the complex, moderated impact of workplace gossip in higher education. By showing how the influence of gossip varies across university types, genders, and professional ranks, the study provides empirical evidence that the academic environment is far from homogeneous in its social and structural vulnerabilities. The results support the need for targeted, rather than generalized, institutional strategies to mitigate the harmful effects of informal communication

Limitations and Recommendations

Also, a cross-sectional design is possible. In some cases, respondents may provide inaccurate answers about their details and experiences with rumours. Another limitation is that the research may not differentiate among various types of gossip or the contexts in which it occurs. Another limitation may be the meaning of gossip and its effects that might differ or not be adequately explored or controlled for some cultural and gender groups. Because of differences in cultural, leadership, and structural hierarchies across countries or regions, the sample may not capture all educational institutions, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. Professional reputation, which could also

include teaching records and evaluation, and publication records, should be included in a more holistic evaluation and should also include professional reputation. More comprehensive evaluations of the faculty should be included in interviews or focus groups. Greater analysis should be given to the intersection of gender, designation type, and institution type.

The research shows that institutions should priorities building supportive environments that promote well-being and provide resources for faculty, highlighting the clear professional boundaries within educational institutions. Universities should establish guidelines for effective communication and interaction to prevent the spread of gossip that can damage their reputations.

There is a need to enforce anti-gossip policies that are clearly communicated, with clear consequences for engaging in gossip, and to ensure accountability. The study suggests that training sessions on effective communication strategies, including conflict resolution and active listening, should be provided, indicating that a toxic environment can negatively impact students' outcomes because when teachers feel demoralized by gossip, it can influence their ability to teach effectively. .

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