STUDENT-TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF INCIVILITY: THE CASE OF A COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

Incivility has been reported to be on the rise in higher education but little is known about its occurrence in teacher education. Therefore this study explored the manifestations of classroom incivility in pre-service teachers by using survey. It was found that like other higher institutions, incivility is an issue in teacher education. This study creates awareness about incivility in teacher education and it may be a step towards tackling it and or paving way for further research.

Keywords: Incivility, Pre-service teachers, College of Education

Introduction

Reports about the rise in incivility in nearly all geographical regions of the world have been eloquently cited (Ndazhaga, 2014a). As educational institutions are microcosms of the larger society (Connelly, 2009; Silverman, 2008; Tian, 2004), it is therefore logical that a decline in incivility has also been reported in these institutions (Alberts, Hazen & Theobold, 2010; Clark, Otterness, Jun, Allerton, Juan, Black & Wei, 2010, 2012; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2011; Lin, 2007). Before the last two decades or so, incivility was assumed to be a problem of elementary and secondary schools but more recently, it has been acknowledged as a problem of higher education as well (Ausbrooks, Jones & Tijerian,2011;Boice, 1996; Clark, 2008;Clark, Otterness, Jun, Allerton, Juan, Black & Wei, 2010; Knepp, 2012).

In higher education, academic incivility has been perceived as any speech or behaviour that makes students or faculty members uncomfortable, erodes professional relationships and impedes the teaching and learning process (Clark & Kenaley, 2011). It is multidimensional as it could be between student-to-faculty, faculty-to-student, student-to-student, administrator-to-faculty, faculty-to-faculty/administrator (Clark, 2013). While Connelly (2009) classified incivility into two (more serious and less serious), Feldmann (2001) identified four types (simple annoyances,

intimidation, classroom terrorism and threat of violence). Several examples of incivility which fall into these categories have been reported. These are disorderly conduct, disruptive use of cell phones, substance abuse, holding a disruptive conversation, reading newspaper during class, plagiarism, arriving late and leaving class early, being unprepared for class, making sarcastic remarks, threat of physical harm and verbal and physical assault (Alberts, 2010; Clark, 2008; Peck, 2002; Nordstrom, Bartels & Bucy, 2009).

Incivility has been associated with certain negative impacts such as loss of self-esteem, self-confidence, safety, temporary or permanent illness or injury and disrupted, nerve-racking student-faculty relationships (Clark, 2008, 2013). Other negative impacts are that incivility results in loss of valuable time, as time that should be used to accomplish some educational purposes are diverted to sorting out issues which make the learning environment toxic for both the teacher and learner, leading to the decline in students' respect and willingness to identify with their institutions, the development of negative attitude by faculty to their job and profession, faculty reconsidering taking teaching as a career and accelerating the degree of stress for both faculty and students (Barrett, Rubaii- Barrett & Pelowski, 2010; Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010, 2011; Boice,1996; Clark & Carnosso, 2008).

Studies such as Alberts, Hazen and Theobold, (2010), Boice, (1996), Clark (2008), Clark, Otterness, Jun, Allerton, Juan, Black and Wei (2010, 2012), Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000), Knepp (2012), Peck (2002), Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy, (2009) have identified) incivility in higher education . However, it has been asserted that literature on incivility in higher education is limited, scarce, suffers from certain shortcomings and is only partly empirical (Alberts, Hazen &Theobold 2010; Boice, 1996; Clark, 2008). In addition to these, there are hardly studies that focus on pre-service teachers. Above, all most if not all the studies were undertaken in the West, so the focus on Nigeria in this study will probably make a difference. Therefore, this study will explore these questions:
1.   Which incivil behaviours do student-teachers experience?
2.   What is the frequency of the experience of those behaviours?

Methodology

Survey was used in collecting data for this study. The survey was extracted and adapted from the Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000). The Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000) was developed by the University's Centre for Survey Research. The Survey was designed for faculty and instructors. It was to elicit data on students' incivil behaviours. The permission to use the instrument was granted by Dr. John Kennedy on behalf of the Centre for Survey Research.

The survey was a four-point Likert scale. The total number of items was 29 instead of 30 in the sub-section on frequency of experience with incivility in the original survey. The survey was made up of two sections, demographic (Institution, Age and level of study) and the items on classroom incivil behaviours. Survey was used because the respondents were students of a College of Education who were all literates and could respond to surveys, so this made the use of survey in this context appropriate (Nwana, 1990). Survey was also used because it was convenient and one of the easiest ways of reaching the respondents and eliciting responses quickly (Akuezuilo & Agu, 2004). The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale was .70, which was acceptable.

Sampling technique

The permission to administer the survey was obtained from the Head of Department concerned and the students gave their consent to respond to the survey by endorsing the consent form. The survey was administered in March 2013, by the author. All the responses were collected anonymously and reported as sum up data. A total of 120 (males and females) second year (200 Level) students of a College of Education in North- Central Nigeria were purposely selected for this study because of ease to access of respondents. Survey was administered on 120 students but only 75 (62.5%) were retrieved, out of which males were 56 (74.7%) and females were 19 (25.3%). The age range of the respondents was between 17-35years.

Method of analysis

The data collected was entered into SPSS 21.0 and analyzed using simple percentages

Discussion of the findings

The findings of this study are discussed based on the two research questions raised.

The data collected in respect of the research questions is presented on Table 1

Table 1 Students' Reported Classroom Uncivil Behaviour

Item	Often %	N	Some time %	N	Rarely %	N	Never %	N
How often do you experience these behaviours?								
Chewing gum in class	2.7	2	29.3	22	2.7	2	65.3	49
Eating in class	4.0	3	21.3	16	6.7	5	68.0	51
Acting bored or apathetic	10.7	8	26.7	20	24.0	18	38.7	29

Disapproving groans	14.7	11	29.3	22	21.3	16	34.7	26
Sarcastic remarks or gestures, such as staged yawning or eye rolling	8.0	6	42.7	32	16.0	12	33.3	25
Sleeping in class	8.0	6	38.7	29	9.3	07	44.0	33
Not paying attention in class; for example, doing schoolwork for other classes or reading a newspaper	10.7	8	41.3	31	14.7	11	33.3	25
Not taking notes during class	13.3	10	41.3	31	13.3	10	32.0	24
Students' conversations distracting other students	26.7	20	33.3	25	14.7	11	25.3	19
Students' conversations distracting you	20.0	15	37.3	28	24.0	18	18.7	14
Reluctance to answer direct questions	25.3	19	26.7	20	21.3	16	26.7	20
Using a computer during class for purposes not related to the class	14.7	11	16.0		18.7	14	50.7	38
Cell phone disruptions during class	21.3	16	25.3	19	12.0	9	41.3	31
Students arriving late for class	14.7	11	42.27	32	6.7	5	36.0	27
Students leaving class early	10.7	8	46.7	35	13.3	10	29.3	22
Students missing class	8.0	6	44.0	33	10.7	8	37.3	28
Students being unprepared for class	20.0	15	34.7	26	13.3	10	32.0	24
Students creating tension by dominating discussion	12.0	9	30.7	23	13.3	10	44.0	33
Cheating in exams or tests	17.3	13	30.7	23	14.7	11	37.3	28
Students demanding make-up exams, extensions, grade changes, or special favors	16.0	12	41.3	31	18.7	14	24.0	18
Students taunting or belittling other students	21.3	16	36.0	27	18.7	14	24.0	18
Students challenging your knowledge or credibility in class	20.0	15	33.3	25	18.7	14	28.0	21
Harassing comments (gender) directed at you in the classroom	17.3	13	34.7	26	12.0	9	36.0	27
Other harassing comments directed at you in the classroom	9.3	7	29.3	22	28.0	21	33.3	25
Hostile verbal attacks or challenges directed at you in the classroom	17.3	13	20.0	15	22.7	17	40.0	30
Vulgarity directed at you in the classroom	4.0	3	28.0	21	18.7	14	49.3	37
Inappropriate emails to you	14.7	11	20.0	15	26.7	20	38.7	29
Harassing comments or behavior directed at you outside the classroom	10.8	8	32.4	24	29.7	22	27.0	20
Threats of physical harm against you	9.3	7	24.0	18	20.0	15	46.7	35

N=75

From Table 1, the incivil behaviours most experienced were: students' conversations distracting other students (26.7%), reluctance to answer direct questions (25.3%), cell phone disruptions during class (21.3%) and students taunting or belittling other students (21.3%). On the other hand, the least experienced incivil behaviours were eating in class (68.0%),

chewing gum in class (65.3%) and using a computer during class for purposes not related to the class (50.7%). This is inconsistent with the Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000) which reported the following as the most experienced incivil behaviours : students arriving late for class (30.8%), students cutting class (28.7%) and students being unprepared for class (27.9%). The Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000) reported the following as the least experienced incivil behaviours: threats of physical harm against faculty (97.6%), vulgarity directed at faculty in the classroom (92.8%) and harassing comments (gender) directed at faculty in the classroom (92.6%). A similar study by Clark, Otterness, Jun, Allerton, Juan, Black and Wei (2010) which had students and faculty as respondents reported findings different from the two under review. Clark et al (2010) reported the following as the most experienced incivil behaviours: students being unprepared for class (students: 82.4%, faculty: 85.0%), students sleeping in class (students: 71.6 %, faculty: 76.2%) and students acting bored and apathetic (students 69.6%, faculty 75.0%). Clark et al (2010) reported the following as the least experienced incivil behaviours: students refusing to answer direct questions (students: 11.3%, faculty 15.0%), students creating tension by dominating discussion (students: 10.8%, faculty 15.0%) and students demanding make-up exams, extensions, grade changes, or special favours (students: 10.6%, faculty: 10.0%). The inconsistency between the three similar students may be explained by the suggestion by Ndazhaga (2014b) that civility/incivility may be affected by cultural difference as the three studies were undertaken in three different cultures (Clark et al, 2010 (China), Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility, 2000 (United States of America) and this study (Nigeria). The cultural difference in question is basically in two areas. First, is that a lot of reverence is placed on elders and those in authority (such as teachers and lecturers) in Nigeria which may erode some democratic tenants from the perspective of the west. Second, is the relatively high level of technological development of the west as compared to Nigeria which may affect behavior (incivility). This assertion may appear plausible as a similar study undertaken in the United States of America is largely comparable with the findings of the Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000). The study which reported students arriving late (87%) and being unprepared for class (75.4%) stated that both faculty and students perceived these two as part of the top three most experienced incivil behaviours (Clark, 2008).

Conclusion

   This study has shown that incivility is not just an issue among tertiary education students but also among pre-service teachers. This is consistent with similar earlier studies such as Alberts, Hazen and Theobold (2010) ; Clark (2008) ; Clark, Otterness, Jun, Allerton, Juan, Black & Wei (2010,

2012) ; Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000) , which found incivility as an issue in higher education. This study therefore creates awareness about the incidence of incivility. It may also improve teaching and learning as it has been asserted that understanding of the nature of incivility is germane to a secure teaching- learning environment (Clark, 2008). However, as result of the small sample of this study and the use of convenience sample, generalizations from this study have to be made with caution. Lastly, the Indiana University Survey on Academic Incivility (2000) was designed for faculty and instructors but it was adapted and used in this study for pre-service sub-degree students. All these variables collectively or singly may have impacted on the findings of this study. This study should therefore be replicated with a larger sample so as to provide an ideal basis for comparison and probably resolve the inconsistencies between this study and earlier similar ones.

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