

Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Classroom Incivility and Character Concepts

Summary

Introduction

Tertiary education emphasizes the development of academic professions and often disregards maintaining classroom discipline. Incivility is any kind of disruptive classroom behavior that shows disrespect or disregard for the instructor and fellow-students. The classroom incivilities of undergraduate students, such as arriving late, leaving early, and using mobile phones during class, may disturb instructional activities, thereby affecting the learning effectiveness of students (Feldmann, 2001; Hirschy & Braxton, 2004). Many researchs have shown that an immature psychological development and biased cognition in students are among the factors causing classroom incivilities (Berger, 2000; Patron & Bisping, 2008). If students identify their behaviors as inappropriate, they would be unlikely to perform such behaviors during class. In addition, the character concepts of undergraduate students, such as sincerity, responsibility, and self-discipline, are related with classroom incivilities (Alkandari, 2011; Altmiller, 2012; Boice, 1996). Thus, according to the perspective proposed by Bjorklund and Rehling (2010), classroom incivilities are divided into passive and active incivilities. The character concepts comprise three core values: respect, responsibility, and self-discipline. The objective of this study was to explore the relationship between the character concepts and classroom incivilities of undergraduate students.

Method

This study conducted a questionnaire survey to collect data from

730 undergraduate students from 6 universities in Northern, Central, and Southern Taiwan. The research instruments consisted of a questionnaire of Undergraduate Students' Classroom Incivilities that we adapted from Bjorklund and Rehling (2010). The questionnaire entails a 4-point scale that comprises 10 questions on passive and active classroom incivilities. The character concept questionnaire, in which a 4-point scale was also adopted, consists of three core value subscales, namely respect, responsibility, and self-discipline.

Results

The results of this study are presented as follows: (a) The students perceived more passive classroom incivilities compared with active incivilities and tended to disapprove of classroom incivilities. (b) Students in Southern Taiwan perceived more classroom incivilities and expressed a lower approval of such behaviors than did the students in Northern and Central Taiwan. Public university students disapproved of classroom incivilities more than did private university students. Third year students perceived more classroom incivilities than did first year students. (c) There is no difference both in the perceived frequency and the approval of classroom incivilities between male and female students. (d) The character concept scores of the students were above average, and respect and self-discipline attained the highest and lowest scores, respectively. (e) The character concept scores of the students in Southern Taiwan were higher than those of the students in Central and Northern Taiwan. The character concept scores of public university students were higher than those of the private university students, and male and female students exhibited no differences. (f) Student perceptions of classroom incivilities and their frequencies were significantly and positively correlated with student character concepts, but the degree of student approval of classroom incivilities was significantly and negatively correlated with these character concepts; thus, the students' integrity of character concepts can predict perceptions of classroom incivilities and the way students conceive respect can predict their approval of classroom incivilities.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study indicated a significant correlation between the classroom incivilities and character concepts among the undergraduate students. The integrity of their character concepts can be used to predict their perception of classroom incivilities. The respect concept of the students negatively predicted their approval of classroom incivilities. These findings are nearly identical to those of Patron and Bisping (2008) who asserted that the cognitive concepts of students are related with their behaviors. However, the findings differ from the research results about undergraduate students' incivilities obtained by Altmiller (2012) and Alkandari (2011) who contended that students' sense of responsibility was relevant to whether they approved of or demonstrated uncivil behavior in class. The responsibility and self-discipline concepts in this study did not significantly predict students' approval of classroom incivilities. According to Chien (2006), the perspective regarding civic virtues in an Eastern society involves passive or inactive civic behaviors, instead of active participation in public affairs, such as condemning those who disrupt orders, that Western society emphasizes. Thus, if the character education that has been promoted in elementary or high schools for a long time prompts students to develop character concepts tending toward Eastern civic virtues, students had not been encouraged to participate in public affairs during school years; they were only asked to obey the school disciplines, not to condemn the people with violence in the context. Whether students' perceptions and approval of classroom incivilities are affected by their character concepts should be addressed.

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