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Alleviating Incivility Through the 'Sankofa' Principle in Counselling Students with Special Needs

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Abstract: Incivility is a common phenomenon in many higher education institutions presently. Reports of intimidation, physical and verbal abuse, aggression of diverse forms, and a host of unacceptable behaviors seem to dominate the lives of students on several university campuses in recent times. Students with special educational needs, seeking higher learning degrees, are not

exempt from the incivility experience, though the incidence comes to compound the targets' already challenging lives at university. This research explored the nature of the incivility incidence confronting students with special educational needs in a renowned Ghanaian university, with the aim of finding a suitable remedy for the rather challenging incidence. A purposively selected convenience sample of 20 students with special educational needs was interviewed in depth regarding the research focus. The personal focus of the research, aligned with the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach, was to analyse the data gathered and derive themes. Findings revealed a high incidence of incivility among students with special educational needs, with acts such as verbal and physical bullying, intimidation and the use of disrespectful behaviours, confronting the target at the research institution. Most of the identified uncivil acts resonated adverse effects with dire consequences on the lives of the victims. Appropriate recommendations, including the 'Sankofa' principle, were integrated with professional counselling sessions to restore civility across the entire university setting. The confirmed dreadful effects of the incivility incidence on the lives of victims urgently call for improved relationships via the use of the 'Sankofa' principle among members of the research university community.

Keywords: Counselling, incivility, 'Sankofa' principle, students with special educational needs, verbal abuse, bullying, disrespect.

Introduction

Healthy relationships are often characterised by hearty social interactions and quality time. The more comfortable one feels in the company of others, the greater the individual's satisfaction with that significant other. Such worthwhile relationships often promote sound mental health and the development of a positive self-concept (Gable & Bromberg, 2018). The notion that 'no man is an island' (Gable & Bromberg, 2028), highlights the social nature of humans. Similarly, Núñez (2025) clearly articulates the importance of close relationships by suggesting that bonding is infinite. This often justifies the acknowledgement that the wider an individual's social network, the greater the value of his interactions and, therefore, his enjoyment of life. Harmonious relationships, for that matter, serve as key pillars of valuable growth, marked by self-development and immeasurable life attainment (Gable & Bromberg, 2018). On the contrary, on the other hand, it prevails when trapped in a cluster of disrespectful and abusive relationships. Such a situation highlights the immense emotional, physical and communal support that humans often draw from close relationships. The reported persistent rise of the incidence of incivility in many higher education settings lately, especially where students with special educational needs are involved, presents a grave concern to all stakeholders, given the awful health consequences of the menace on community members (King & Piotrowski, 2015; Williams, 2017). Confronted with unique physical and biological challenges, the higher education endeavour's overburdening and demanding nature adds more salt to the already painful and challenging limitations that students with special educational needs generally face in their pursuit of higher degrees. The current research is of key importance in aiming not only to atreduce the incidence of incivility among students with special educational needs in a renowned

public university in Ghana but also to outline feasible measures to heal the deep wounds of heartbroken victims.

Literature is in fact, replete with reports on the prevalence of incivility in many institutions of higher education. Physical and verbal bullying, cynicism, intimidation, aggression of diverse forms, and a host of unacceptable classroom behaviours have reportedly dominated life patterns on several university campuses (King & Piotrowski, 2015; Alt & Itzkovich, 2015). Recently, Heffernan and Bosetti (2021) asserted that an emerging set of uncivil behaviours, used both by university staff and students, encompasses disrespectful attitudes and ambient behaviours, such as rumour-mongering, whispered unfavourable comments, and the conscious misinterpretation of subordinate instructions, to create errors and undermine performance (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2021).

Evidence exist that bullying takes precedence over staff interactions at the academic level, where adult superiors habitually employ diverse uncivil strategies to control and manipulate their subordinates for personal gain (King & Piotrowski, 2015; Orfan, 2022). In the United Kingdom, for instance, as many as 81% of nursing students reportedly experienced various forms of physical aggression during clinical practice, while 56% suffered non-physical abuse, and 40% experienced sexual harassment (Hallett, Wagstaff & Barlow, 2021). Likewise in the Walden township, a high incidence of incivility notably disrupted the learning environment, culminating in a high national nursing attrition rate (Williams, 2017).

Research Problem

Our human relationships directly impact our mental health, overall well-being, and the strength of our self-concept. In higher academic settings, the value of cordiality among colleagues often provides both academic and social support. Research, for instance, suggests that peer connections among first-year university students are central to the overall learning experience, academic performance and students' psychological well-being (Baker & Lattuca, 2019; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2016; Williams, 2017; Heffernan & Bosetti, 2021). The academic assistance students often receive from their social connections also promotes their social integration, with rippling favourable effects on students' educational commitment and goal attainment, thereby reducing dropout rates (Finn & Zimmer, 2020). Even more important is the assertion that well-integrated university students often persist through their academic trajectories to graduation, simply as a result of the marked benefits they derive from collaborative learning, which tends to reinforce their academic ambitions (Finn & Zimmer, 2020). Additionally, the adverse emotional states, such as excessive anger, irritability, fear, anxiety, and feelings of inferiority, often exacerbated among victims of incivility, can severely undermine their self-confidence and deteriorate their relationships with significant others (Heffernan & Bosetti, 2021; Hildegard, 2024). In this regard, the prevalence of incivility yearacross various higher education contexts in recent times poses a serious problem for all university students, including those with special educational needs (Okech, Yuwono & Wamaungo, 2020; Williams, 2017; Strassle & Verrecchia, 2019). In fact, reports indicating that uncivil behaviours contribute to mental health concerns, psychological issues, and physical health problems, creating significant barriers to successful academic performance, retention, and overall well-being, further confirm the

above-mentioned problem regarding the incidence of incivility in higher education (Hildegard, 2024; Mensah, Toivanen & Björklund, 2024).

Rose, Stormont, Wang, Simpson, Preast, and Green (2015) for instance confirmed higher rates of victimization among students with disabilities, compared to their non-disabled peers. Further research aimed at establishing teachers' attitudinal models towards inclusive education across five countries—Greece, the United Kingdom, the United States, Malaysia, and Turkey, confirmed the prevalence of incivility among students with special educational needs (Charitaki et al., 2022). The problem here is that, for such students, contending with uncivil acts during their demanding pursuit of higher degrees poses an even greater problem, given their unique circumstances (Erten, 2011; Tungaraza, 2018; Bachtsis, Perifanou & Economides, 2024). Additionally, the various biological and physical challenges faced by special needs students, combined with the often-unfriendly institutional structures, further complicate their academic and social experiences. Daily confrontations with poorly accessible lecture theatres and libraries, inadequate hostel facilities, and limited educational resources expose students with special needs to a particularly difficult university life (Erten, 2011; Tungaraza, 2018; Bachettis et al., 2024).

The frequency of violence and aggression on campuses has risen to such alarming extents that incivility has been identified as a key causal factor of significant problems among healthcare professionals and nursing students in the United Kingdom (Hallett et al., 2021). While this situation paints a gloomy picture of the academic interface, the increasing incidence of incivility, particularly among students with special needs, threatens not only the existence of educational resources but also the future of life and humanity on university campuses. Accordingly, students who engage in dishonest activities may be more susceptible to unsuitable behaviors later in life (Guerrero-Dib, Portales & Heredia-Escorza, 2020). The causes of incivility on university campuses are diverse, prompting a focus on the 'Sankofa' principle as a potential remedy. 'Sankofa' means returning to earlier, useful practices, recognizing their importance both to humanity and society, as a whole (Felder, 2019).

Research Focus

This research thus represents a significant step towards seeking practical solutions to the painful incivility incidence that severely threatens the vital resource of higher education in contemporary society. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the nature of the incivility incidence, understand its types, effects, and also implement the 'sankofa principle', as a remedy to restoring civility among special needs students in a renowned Ghanaian institution of higher education.

Research Aims and Objectives

This research aims at exploring the nature, types, and effects of uncivil acts experienced by students with special educational needs in a Ghanaian higher education context. Furthermore, the perceptions of the incidence among the target, and the potential control measures proposed by students with special educational needs at the studied university are also investigated.

The ensuing research questions were thus generated from the above research aims, to guide the study:

- What types of uncivil acts do students with special educational needs experience in their institutions of higher learning?
- What are students' perceptions of special educational needs regarding the incidence of incivility at their institutions of study?
- What are the effects of experiences of incivility on university students with special educational needs?
- How can the Sankofa principle be used in counselling to reduce incivility among students with special educational needs in higher education institutions?
- What strategies do students with special educational needs propose to control the incidence of incivility in their institutions of higher education?

Theoretical Overview

Ethical behaviour and morality are core to human life (Bennett, 2015). The focus of this research on ethical behaviour and morality necessitates a robust ethical theory to anchor the study. We employ deontology and the Sankofa principle as theoretical lenses to guide our investigation. The theory of deontology firmly underpins this study, given its emphasis on human interactions and the necessity of civility (Gaus, 2001). Immanuel Kant is credited with the idea of the limitless autonomy that human beings possess, which is required for dignified behaviour and both personal and societal advancement. To be human means to be ethical, in thought and action, especially towards fellow humans (Spahn, 2020; Rawling, 2023). The universal Kantian principle stresses a single set of non-conditional principles that should be accepted by all, regardless of circumstances or outcomes (Baumane-Vitolina & Sumilo, 2016). Rather than focusing solely on ultimate rewards, the Kantian principle emphasises harmonious and caring behaviour, urging all individuals to treat others as they wish to be treated themselves (Baumane-Vitolina & Sumilo, 2016).

This theoretical focus clearly rejects uncivil behaviour, elucidating not only the unfairness and injustices associated with such unacceptable conduct, but also the pain and suffering that incivility inflicts on special-needs student victims (Spahn, 2020). In alignment with the tenets of deontology, the researchers acknowledge the unfairness of the mistreatment faced by all university students, particularly those with special needs, and heed the urgent call to adopt the Sankofa principle to curtail the rising incidence of incivility in higher education settings.

'Sankofa' is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The term 'sankofa' combines two words: 'san' meaning 'go back' or 'return,' and 'kofa' meaning 'go for' or 'get it.' Together, they convey the meaning 'go back and get it' (Kwarteng, 2016, p. 1). The literal translation reflects the principle that it is not taboo to return and retrieve what may be at risk of being left behind. This inference points to the necessity for younger generations to revisit the old order without shame, allowing them to glean the richness of their indigenous cultures to define their identity in an increasingly complex and alien world. Felder (2019) refers to this as the philosophical approach of

'sankofa.' The philosophy encourages young people with the proverb 'se wo were fi na wo sankofa a yenkyi' (It is not taboo to return and fetch an asset when you forget it) (Temple, 2010, p. 127).

Africans have traditionally devised ways to guide their youth with wisdom and care. The Sankofa principle aligns with counselling principles and techniques, such as unconditional positive regard, empathy, and care for one another (Mahon, 2023), culminating in harmonious living and a pathway to societal advancement. Sankofa has also been utilised for healing the causes of violence, aiming to stop the violence that plagues our world today (Abegunde, 2011, p. 13).

Research Methodology

The research adopted a phenomenological multiple-case study design embedded within a qualitative research approach. This design aligned with the researchers' focus on integrating inductive, deductive, and discovery methods to generate multiple ontologies regarding the incidence of incivility within the university context, as experienced by study participants (Matua, 2015; Giorgi, 2017; Gallagher, 2022). Phenomenological inquiries draw heavily on the interpretive paradigm, in which social actors interpret their unique experiences of a specified phenomenon without recourse to a single objective norm (Matua, 2015). Khaldi (2017) emphasizes the importance of research paradigms in formulating the problem, guiding questions, sampling procedures, and other relevant tools necessary for generating credible findings.

In effect, the catalog of idiosyncratic imageries regarding the experienced phenomenon aligns with the descriptive focus of phenomenological research (Matua, 2015; Giorgi, 2017). Equally important was the researchers' intent to thoroughly explore the phenomenon of interest and mobilize detailed data to inform realistic remedies for the problematic incidence of incivility among the marginalized group of students with special educational needs. The use of the case study method facilitated the collection of comprehensive data regarding this under-studied phenomenon in the practice-oriented discipline of counseling (Starman, 2013; Ketokivi & Choi, 2014; Gammelgaard, 2017). Harrison, Birks, Franklin, and Mills (2017) endorse the usefulness of the case study method by highlighting the rich data it provides on specific phenomena.

The researchers aimed to amass significant "power" and "proof" through interview quotes and to align gathered data with relevant methods of data reduction, justifying the application of the case study method (Fawcett et al., 2014). In line with the chosen phenomenological multiple case study design, a sample size of 20 knowledgeable participants was purposively and conveniently selected from a well-acclaimed Ghanaian university to inform the study. The sample provided relevant data through in-depth interviews, and the results regarding the incidence of incivility were triangulated to obtain the eventual research findings. The Interpretive Phenomenological Approach was instrumental in the meaning-making process of this research, with generated themes ultimately tabled and discussed to educate readers on the experiences of students with special educational needs regarding university incivility.

Purposive and convenience sampling methods were employed to select the 20 research participants engaged in the research. Purposive sampling was particularly appropriate due to the

focus of the research on Ghana and students with special educational needs. The selected institution is a well-known public higher education setup, recognized for admitting students with special educational needs, thereby easing access to the unique research target group. The reported prevalence of incivility among university students assured the researchers of the existence of the phenomenon within the selected institution. A total of twenty research participants, comprising twelve males and eight females, purposively selected from a well-known Ghanaian public university, were involved in the study. This sample also involved some mature and regular students at various levels of their undergraduate academic programs, with ages ranging from 20 to 35, predominantly belonging to the Christian religious affiliation. Table 1 provides a catalogue of the bio-data of the engaged research participants.

Table 1

Biodata of Research Participants

Serial No.	Participant's DI	Gender	Academic Program of study	Disability Type
1.	Participant A	Female	Bachelor of Education (Social Studies)	Physically challenged
2.	Participant B	Male	Bachelor of Education (French and Religious and human values)	Visually impaired
3.	Participant C	Female	Bachelor of law	Physically Challenged
4.	Participant D	Male	Bachelor of Education (English and French)	Visually Impaired
5.	Participant E	Male	Bachelor of Geography and Regional Planning.	Physically Challenged
6.	Participant F	Male	Bachelor of Education (History and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
7.	Participant G	Female	Bachelor of Education (Religious and Human Values and History).	Visually impaired
8.	Participant H	Male	Bachelor of Education (Ghanaian Language and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
9.	Participant I	Male	Bachelor of Education (Religious and Human Values and History).	Visually impaired
10.	Participant J	Female	Bachelor of Education (History and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
11.	Participant K	Male	Bachelor of Education (English and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
12.	Participant L	Male	Bachelor of Education (History and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
13.	Participant M	Female	Bachelor of Education (Religious and Human Values and History).	Visually impaired
14.	Participant N	Male	Bachelor of Education (Religious and Human Values and History).	Visually impaired

15.	Participant O	Female	Bachelor of Education (Ghanaian Language and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
16.	Participant P	Female	Bachelor of Education (History and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
17.	Participant Q	Female	Bachelor of Education (French and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
18.	Participant R	Male	Bachelor of Education (History and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
19.	Participant S	Male	Bachelor of Education (History and Religious and Human Values).	Visually impaired
20.	Participant T	Male	Bachelor of Education (Religious and Human Values and History).	Visually Impaired.

Ethical Considerations and Data Collection Procedures

Prior to commencing fieldwork, we sought ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board. We also sought research permission from the Resource Centre for Alternative Media and Assistive Technology (RCAMART), where the undergraduate students with special educational needs at the selected research institution often receive academic support. RCAMART is a well-resourced facility, where trained personnel also offer various academic assistance to the undergraduate students with special educational needs, within the institution. Once secured, we scheduled interview dates with the selected research participants to collect data. We religiously adhered to the necessary research ethics, such as ensuring confidentiality regarding participants' identities and their provided data. We also assigned Pseudonyms to each participant to protect their personal identities. We additionally briefed participants on their expected roles and sought their verbal consent prior to their engagement in the study (McGregor & Fernández, 2022). Finally, we assured each participant that participation was voluntary to enhance data collection (McGregor & Fernández, 2022).

To capture context-specific elements, we used the English Language, being the single approved medium of communication in Ghanaian universities, for data collection. We also ensured that fieldwork was conducted within the participants' usual institutional confines to facilitate efficient data collection (Mohamad, Nasri, & Abd, 2021). At the end of data collection, we sent letters of appreciation to relevant gatekeepers and participants for their invaluable support and the information they provided.

Data Analysis

We adopted the Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to make meaning from the gathered data, simply because it facilitates the discovery of patterns, relationships and categories within qualitative data. Secondly, the IPA is well-noted for its ease in examining the lived

experience of social actors, regarding a specified phenomenon, which in this case is the incivility incidence (Eatough & Smith, 2017)). The primary purpose of the approach is to provide detailed descriptions and explanation of human experience – a major focus of this research. IPA is equally efficient in illuminating a specified phenomenon of interest from the person's *perspective* (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The IPA comprises a four-staged process, as follows.:

Stage 1: First encounter with the text,

Data analysis commenced with a verbatim transcription of the raw data we gathered. In this initial step, we sought to familiarise ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, during which we looked for contrasts, ambiguities and harmonious thoughts expressed by participants within the data to derive patterns and themes.

Stage 2: Identification of preliminary themes

Later, our further readings of the transcripts led us to jot down notes on the left margins of the transcripts. We then transformed the notes into meaningful phrases, highlighting major features in the texts, while making sure that the phrases aligned with ideas and opinions expressed by participants. Carefully focusing on bracketing, we then created clearer themes on the right side of the transcripts, capturing the same ideas as an earlier theme but creating a new one with a new idea. To differentiate among the various themes, we used different colours to jot them down.

Stage 3: Re-grouping and clustering of themes, and

Once complete, we went ahead to create sub-themes and categories from the ten themes we created.

Stage 4: Creating the summary table of themes

Finally, we presented the created themes in a broad table, so that they are clearly arranged and not confused with others.

Results

Based on the applied research methods and the selected theoretical underpinnings of the theory of deontology, with support from the 'Sankofa' principles, we identified ten broad themes from the gathered data, as shown in Table 2. Each of the themes illuminated the unique meanings research participants assigned to the incivility incidence they experienced within their institution of study.

Table 2 provides the derived broad themes alongside their corresponding research questions, while Figure 1 presents the emerged broad themes with their matching sub-themes and relevant interview excerpts. We subsequently discuss the various themes in response to the outlined research questions, relating them to the reviewed literature.

Table 2

Broad themes with their corresponding research questions.

Research Question No.	Content of Research Question	Corresponding Broad Theme
1.	Types of uncivil acts experienced by students with special educational needs.	Theme 1: Social Exclusion
		Theme 3: Verbal and Non-verbal Abuse
		Theme 4: Institutional Barriers
		Theme 5: Gender Disparities in Incivility
2	Perceptions of students with special educational needs, regarding the incivility incidence	Theme 2: Stereotyping and Misconceptions
		Theme 5: Gender Disparities in Incivility
3	Effects of uncivil acts on students with special educational needs	Theme 6: Psychological and Emotional Impact
4	Using the 'Sankofa principle' in counselling to alleviate acts of incivility among students with special educational needs	Theme 9: Unity and love for all
		Theme 10: slay to win (overlook the unhealthy attitude)
5	Proposed strategies by students with special educational needs to control the incidence of incivility	Theme 4: Institutional Barriers
		Theme 7: Resistance and Coping Mechanisms
		Theme 8: Proposed Solutions to Reduce the incidence of Incivility

Table 3

Generated themes with their sub-themes and interview texts

Broad Theme numbers and names	Sub-themes	Interview texts
1). Social exclusion	i). Avoidance by peers ii). Discriminatory seating in school shuttle	i). "Some people do not even want such people to get close to them, and it really annoys me very much." ii). "The person may get up all right, but looking at the face and the way the person will get up will tell you this person is not happy giving you the seat."
2). Stereotyping and misconception	i). Ignorance about disabilities ii). Doubting academic capacity	i). "Some also think that when they contact us, they may fall into that situation." ii). "Some also make comments like 'Do you also read this course? How do you read? Do you also write exams?'"

3). Verbal and Physical abuse	i). Making insensitive remarks ii). Negative body language	i). "Some lecturers criticize them for being visually impaired and call them names like 'blind people.'" ii). "The way they will express themselves, the tone in which they will talk to you, their facial expressions speak a lot."
4). Institutional barriers	i). Poor enforcement of institutional regulations ii). Segregation by management	i). "There are some lecturers who do not allow recording, which sometimes affects some students with special needs." ii). "I approached the hall master and told him that I want to be in the hall, and he said, 'The hall is fee-paying, do you think you can pay?'"
5). Gender disparities in incivility	i). Female students engage more in incivility ii). Male students more reluctant to assist females	i). "Female students do it most often. For instance, eight out of ten students are likely to be females who put up such uncivil behavior." ii). "As compared with my lady friends with special needs, the sighted guys are mostly not willing to assist them."
6). Psychological and emotional impact	i). Loss of self-confidence ii). Depression and emotional distress	i). "If you go close to people and they drive you away by their attitudes, it will not encourage you to go to them for any information or anything at all." ii). "Sometimes, you will be in a happy mood, and your mood swings all of a sudden because someone has treated you badly."
7). Coping mechanisms	i). Educating peers ii). Avoidance of confrontation	i). "Personally, I spoke to a lot of people, and many of them understood." ii). "If I don't know the person, I will instantly confront them. However, if I know them, I will later call or chat with them."
8). Strategies for reducing incivility	i). Public awareness and sensitization ii). Institutional reforms	i). "The university should publish and enforce the policy on students with special needs." ii). "During orientation for freshers, thorough education should be made on how to live with students with special educational needs."
9). Unity and love for all	i). Cooperation is caring ii). Love is understanding	i). 'as for me, I usually don't want to drag the issue so I just go along with them' ii). 'Oh as for the one, I'm not at all bothered about what they do.'
10). Slay to win	i). Silence promotes peace ii). Exercise self-control	i). 'I often try to keep quiet and agree with them'

		ii). 'No, I don't get angry by whatever they do. I'm simply determined to get this degree.'
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Discussion

This research is of immense significance, following the interesting and authentic findings we realised from it. Hinging firmly on incivility, the explicit literature confirmations of the incidence prevailing at the selected research site, the reality of the highlighted uncivil act types, and the generally adverse life effects of the incidence on the engaged minority target group, largely underscore the invaluable role of the current research. The profound awareness and sensitisation to this silent yet challenging epidemic that the research further provides, while throwing a strong caution to readers regarding the human selfishness and deceitfulness characterising many social settings, including higher learning institutions, cannot be concealed. Indeed, the existence of incivility within the confines of the once-respected, disciplined and highly professional academic setting underscores the depth of corruption and contamination that have permeated the fabric of contemporary society. Be it for better or worse, readers can only determine once they creep through the rich, eye-opening realities that confront the generally naïve and weak in society.

In the first place, explicit examples of uncivil act types emerged from the study in response to the research question. The described acts generally portrayed experiences of discrimination and intimidation with both verbal and physical abuse. Captured under broad themes 1, 3, 4 and 5, participants complained of receiving '*negative body language from their colleagues*, with '*unfair accommodation policies*' in their hostels (refer to Table 3) (refer to Table 3). The supporting sub-themes comprising '*avoidance by peers*', '*discriminatory seating in the institutional shuttle*' and '*ignorance*, similarly echo unacceptable and discomfoting experiences, in alignment with examples provided by King and Piotrowski (2015), William (2017) and Turnipseed and Landay (2018). Though the authors' mention of '*abusive, controlling, callous, manipulative, domineering, ruthless, and self-centred behaviours*' as well as some '*students threatening peers and faculty, with violence and legal action*' (King & Piotrowski, 2015; Williams, 2017), may sound frightening, the examples are undeniably in clear alignment with the ones recorded under the above-mentioned broad themes. The issue of verbal and physical abuse further aligns with '*spreading malicious rumours, vandalism, aggressive behaviour and harassment*' (Pheko, Monteiro & Segopolo, 2017). It is important to stress that the mentioned acts aim at promoting fear and panic among the participants. Fear and panic further mirror behaviours that are '*incongruent with the welfare of the classroom community*' (Turnipseed & Landay, 2018, p. 286). The word 'incongruent' in the latter statement is very apt, meaning different, unrelated, dichotomous and dissimilar, all of which strongly support the difficult realities of research participants. It is also worth noting that the presence of fear in an academic setting strongly discourages high academic attainment. By increasing intimidation and fear among the students, fear lowers self-confidence and also weakens the self-concept, making it more difficult to forge ahead with attaining their academic goals. Sub-themes, '*making insensitive remarks*', and the reported unnecessary '*restrictions on the use of learning tools*' at the research site (refer to Table

3) equally attract feelings of uncertainty, low self-confidence, and poor human relations on campus. Indeed, the existing unacceptable situation urgently requires a change. The required change demands a return to the old African principle of communal living, caring and sharing (Kwarteng, 2016). To restore civility on the research campus, a positive change from the prevailing 'impolite' lifestyle (Aliakbari & Hajizadeh, 2018) must make way for the once-comforting, dignified behaviour that expeditiously propels both personal and societal advancement (Spahn, 2020; Rawling, 2023). Essentially, eradicating the sordid, incivility-prevalent situation, not only from our much-revered academic settings but also from the entire social set-up, issues a clarion call for the theory of Deontology (Baumane-Vitolina & Sumilo, 2016).

In the case of themes four and five, where '*institutional barriers*' and '*gender disparities*' are cited, the results are also corroborated by Ul Haq and Rafiq (2025) and Bachtsis et al. (2024). The authors identify institutional bottlenecks as a notorious barrier to the efficient education of many students with special needs. The issue of relevant facilities simply underscores the specific needs of students, yet many institutions hardly take cognisance of these amenities to facilitate the education of students with special needs. Sub-themes such as '*poor enforcement of institutional regulations*', '*segregation by management*', as well as '*male students more reluctant to assist females*' in the current research equally enunciate the limitations cited by Ul Haq and Rafiq (2025). Trapped in such a restricted space, research participants could no longer conceal their pains, except to loudly express them through reports of their negative perceptions, and the adverse effects of uncivil acts on their lives. Their bold announcement of experiencing '*psychological and emotional disturbances, experiences of depressive feelings, and loss of self-confidence*' (refer to theme six, for Research Question Three on Table 3) are real and practical, thereby stressing the problematic nature of the incivility incidence. Since students' mental health is the most critical factor in their commendable academic performance (Sood & Kour, 2023), participants proposed coping strategies such as *peer education and public awareness and sensitisation* programs about the incidence (see Table 3). Other articulated mechanisms include *avoidance of confrontation* and adopting *institutional reforms* (refer to Table 3) to restore sanity and peace on the research campus. This further brings to the fore the theory of Deontology that meaningfully anchors this research. With its focus on harmonious human interactions and the 'common-sense morality' (Rawling, 2023), the theory of Deontology comes in handy. The theory's advocacy for the ancient virtue ethics developed by Aristotle, and more especially, encouraging cordiality during relationships (Baumane-Vitolina et al., 2016), renders it exceedingly expedient to redeem the hurting victims of incivility on the various university campuses. The call to immediately institutionalise the universal Kantian principles, with strong backing from the 'Sankofa' principle, is a welcome idea. To say the least, research participants will relish the marked change of a comforting, caring and non-conditional interaction on campus (Kwarteng, 2016; Felder, 2019), given their worn-out and frustrating experiences over the years.

Conclusion

The reality of the incivility incidence in higher education settings highlights a number of key factors. First, it loudly echoes the generally selfish nature of humanity and, more so, the vast diversity of characters converging at various higher learning institutions who never relent in their evil acts,

despite the pain inflicted on neighbours. The wide diversity of personality types converging at the revered institutions often portrays the beauty, strength, capabilities, knowledge and a host of skills that often produce a formidable force to confront the various life problems. It is important to emphasise that only with a united front can we achieve laurels both for personal and life advancement. Accordingly, we value the place we give to our individual differences, rather than letting them divide us; they should instead draw us together. By such means, we would embrace the typical indigenous communal African lifestyle, where each is considered a brother's keeper, rather than each for himself and God for us all.

Recommendations

- **Organise Awareness Programs:** Implement both physical and online awareness-creation initiatives focused on the incidence of incivility and its detrimental effects on human life.
- **Initiate Institutional Reforms:** Undertake appropriate reforms within the institution to facilitate better academic experiences and overall development for students with special educational needs.
- **Enhance Accessibility:** Secure more disability-friendly institutional facilities to improve academic engagement, on-campus mobility, and the overall enjoyment of university life.
- **Establish Punitive Measures:** Create and publish clear penalties for disrespectful treatment on campus to deter both students and faculty from engaging in such behaviour. A robust committee should be established to oversee reported cases and enforce appropriate punishments.

Counseling Implications

- **Establish Peer Support Programs:** Promote university peer support initiatives that encourage the formation of study groups and support networks. This will help students, especially those with special educational needs, to integrate more quickly and freely interact with their peers, taking better academic advantage of the university environment.

- **Enhance Accessibility of Facilities:** Ensure that relevant institutional facilities, such as libraries, study halls, and internet services, are readily accessible and adequately equipped to meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs, thereby improving their study skills.

- **Implement Orientation Programs:** Conduct comprehensive orientation programs that emphasise the importance of collaboration, the Sankofa principles, and the avoidance of uncivil acts. These programs should focus on enhancing studies and creating a peaceful atmosphere within universities, providing guidance on effective study habits and the benefits of engaging in meaningful group studies.

- **Develop Counselling and Mentorship Programs:** Create counselling and mentorship programs that offer continuous support to students throughout their university journey. Mentors can guide students with educational needs to maximise their academic and social opportunities.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of this research was the limited knowledge of gender gathered from the research participants. Originally, the researchers intended to maintain a balanced gender representation in the sample (10 males and 10 females), but this was not possible in the field, as 12 female and 8 male students with special educational needs were eventually interviewed.

Suggestions for Further Research

Given the alarming spread rate of the incivility incidence, the researchers propose a further inquiry into the incidence among Senior High and even Junior High students. Such a study will directly inform School Authorities and officials of the Ghana Education Service regarding prompt and feasible strategies to bring the situation under control before it gets out of hand.

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Conflict of Interest

There is, in fact, no conflict of interest in investigating this research problem and also creating this article from it. Indeed, the researchers took a keen interest in the incidence of incivility in higher education, both as a result of their Lectureship positions at their respective institutions and as educationists. Furthermore, in view of their exclusive areas of specialisation in counselling and special education, the focus of the current research not only connects meaningfully with their roles, but it also enables them to employ the articles to educate the general public regarding this 'silent epidemic' and further provide protection and relevant assistance to the hurting victims of incivility, where possible.

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