

Challenges to Academic Freedom at the University of Zambia

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Abstract

There has been substantial discussion, research, and debate concerning the challenges to academic freedom within higher institutions of learning. This stems from the fact that universities often serve as centres of political and intellectual dissent, and as a result political regimes, societies and universities themselves are thus hesitant to grant universities the freedom and autonomy that may cause instability. Academic freedom at the University of Zambia (UNZA) and other Zambian universities is not extensively documented or understood. Therefore this paper seeks to explore the challenges of academic freedom at UNZA by employing a qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic design to collect data on the lived experiences, perceptions and views of the 30 purposively selected participants: 15 academics and 15 academic leaders. The paper was anchored on the theory of social capital and resource dependence. Quantitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The following major finding resulted from the study: academics and academic leaders experienced various challenges in exercising academic freedom, causing UNZA not to completely realise its mission of creating knowledge through scholarship and research; it was revealed that academics and academic leaders were implicitly violated and controlled by the university management and government through heavy academic responsibilities, financial restraint, lack of academic freedom policy, and freedom of expression. All of these factors hindered the enjoyment of academic freedom at UNZA. However, the participants submitted that they had not experienced any severe or gross violation or limitation of their academic freedom. Various strategies were highlighted that could be put in place to remedy the challenges to academic freedom at UNZA.

Key terms: Academics; Academic Freedom; Academic Leaders; Challenges; University of Zambia.

Introduction

The University of Zambia (UNZA) is the first public university founded through teaching and research by the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) to provide higher education (UNZA, 2009: vii). Since its establishment, it has been the most extensive learning citadel for developing intellectuals, scholars, and general staff for government and non-governmental institutions (Mwanakatwe, 2013: 190). To fulfill these core functions, UNZA has 13 schools, namely, Schools of Education; Humanities and Social Sciences; Law; Agricultural Sciences; Engineering; Mining; Health Sciences; Natural Sciences; Veterinary Medicine; Nursing Science; Public Health; Medicine and Graduate School of Business (UNZA, 2017: 1).

Like other universities around the world, UNZA has obligations and rights. Universities' primary missions and rights are to develop, increase and apply knowledge. These missions or privileges are related to duties such as teaching, study and public service (Al Zyoud, 2001: 1). UNZA is not an exception, as the responsibilities of teaching, study and community service are still pursued. As indicated, UNZA equally requires academic freedom to pursue these duties. Academic freedom is the primary prerequisite for the University to fulfill its mission in the society in which it operates (Altbach, 2001: 205). Such

a privilege for academics includes their right to freedom of expression, teaching, study, publishing, and other associated academic obligations (Caston, 2006: 307). Academics need academic freedom to accomplish the University's goal. Academics responsible for teaching, conducting research and serving the society have the academic freedom to fully accomplish their mission without the intrusion of any sort and from any source. Academic freedom is a *sine qua non* of the University's task to defend academics from different types of threats that may negatively impact their academic pursuits (Shils, 1995: 7). These challenges come from multiple sources; from states, societies and universities themselves (De George, 2007: 86-87).

The complete enjoyment of academic freedom by public universities is undermined in many parts of the world (Altbach, 2001: 205). This is also true for Zambia, where academic freedom is undermined as it is not defined in the Zambian Constitution instead, it falls under freedom of expression in the Constitution of Zambia Amendment of 2016. Therefore, this means that there is no clear legislative or constitutional support for academic freedom or the meaning of the concept in Zambia. This lack of strong legal authorisation reflects the state of academic freedom as undermined both at UNZA and national level. According to Pincoffs (1975: x iii), in order to safeguard academic freedom from being undermined, the nation and institutions must have national and internal (university) legal frameworks.

Furthermore, despite the fact that many public universities are emerging across Zambia, academic freedom has been given relatively little publicity. Academic freedom, according to Owusu-Ansah (2015: 1), is often not well understood, even among academics, due to a lack of publicity. He further advises that academics must understand what academic freedom is and what it should be in order to facilitate the growth and dissemination of knowledge. As a result, this scenario of Zambia's lack of academic freedom publicity warrants investigation to determine how academics and academic leaders at UNZA perceive academic freedom.

A study on *the Status of Academic Freedom in Zambia's Universities and Colleges* by the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC) revealed that academics at Zambia's public universities and colleges have been branded as "opposition supporters" (ZANEC, n.d: 21). Despite the historical autonomy afforded to Zambia's public universities, the political realms have permeated higher learning institutions. This, therefore, is a clear indication that academic freedom might be threatened at UNZA. Some of the ideas of UNZA academics may have survived, although we do not know how many others are entirely suppressed by politicians. In this regard, safeguarding academic freedom is essential because it will ensure that UNZA continues to research, publish and disseminate research findings, without fear or impediment. Hence, this contextual and situational problem in Zambia's universities and colleges was taken into account, specifically to examine the challenges to academic freedom regarding political interference at UNZA.

In line with the above, ZANEC (n.d: iii) further revealed that politicians, including party cadres, instruct and advise Zambian university and college academics that specific topics discussed on campuses are equal to interfering in politics. The ZANEC research finding is a

strong sign that politicians do not comprehend higher learning institutions' mission in generating knowledge. This knowledge may go against what is typically accepted, but it becomes the foundation on which many ideas of value are built for the broader community. To stay current as well as to develop critical thinking, universities should produce and impart knowledge.

In view of the foregoing, UNZA does not seem to be serving to advance the key functions of university education, that is, by research and publication (Mbewe *et al.*, 2020: 222). Research and publication border on the successful exercise of academic freedom (Vrieling, 2011: 117). As a result, this study deemed it vital to discover the academics' perceptions regarding the challenges they faced with academic freedom at UNZA since no study, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, had been carried out to ascertain how this core value was promoted through research and publication.

With the aforementioned state of affairs, the aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by the UNZA academics in respect of academic freedom. It was projected that the research results would be informative about the challenges of academic freedom for all academic staff members. Their perspectives could help in understanding how academic freedom was practiced to make UNZA a true engine for the generation and innovation of knowledge. To fulfill the purpose of teaching, study and public service, this is essentially cardinal to the university. This study's results are necessary in order to provoke higher educational institutions to have academic freedom enshrined and well established in either the Constitution or the Act of Parliament, or the University Policy ratifications to promote academic freedom in Zambia.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This paper on challenges to academic freedom at UNZA is guided by social capital theory and resource dependence theory. Abera (2014: 21) defines social capital as the day-to-day activities of societies such as collaboration, support and interaction between individuals, families and groups to realise their everyday needs. Field (2008:1) suggests that when people develop relationships or associations either in their personal lives or in social organisations and institutions and sustain them over time, they can collaborate to accomplish great things that they could not achieve on their own or could only achieve with great difficulty. Social capital is essential in this study in that social networks provide the required emotional and informational support. People receive resources in the form of knowledge and support from social networks (Portes, 1998: 36). By way of illustration, seasoned academics or academic leaders may offer awareness of academic freedom and information or tips to novice academics regarding consultancy, research and publication in order for them to thrive in the world of academia (Brown *et al.*, 2006: 18).

On the one hand, the resource dependence theory established in the 1970s by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald, R. Salancik is a theory based on the premise that the survival of an organisation depends upon its capability to gather essential resources from the external environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978: 1). The critical principles of the theory are that

organisations can only survive within an environment, not in isolation (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). While universities need academic freedom to pursue the missions of teaching, research and community engagement, as universities within society that depend on resources and continued support to facilitate academic freedom, they owe allegiance to many groups within the environment (politicians, donors, society, etc) because they depend on them for resources. Hence, resource dependence theory shapes the context within which both the university and the external environment operate. Against this position, the theoretical framework provides an elucidation on how the university's academic freedom may be affected due to its dependency on its environment to achieve academic freedom.

In line with the foregoing, the resource dependence theory explains how the environment can be a source of restraint that is often viewed negatively (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978: 15). It asserts that organisations are engaged in a never-ending struggle for freedom, as they are faced with constraints from the external environment as they are the providers of the resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978: 257). Constraint limits academic freedom to its academic members. For instance, resources that the university needs to realise academic freedom may be scarce and not always available, or under the control of uncooperative actors in the external environment. In this context, the principles of resource dependence theory have a direct impact on academic freedom (Etomaru *et al.*, 2016: 136). However, most state universities heavily depend on government subsidies, donor funding and funding from collaborative net-works with international organisations. The theory assumes that the critical element for a university to thrive in promoting academic freedom is its relationship with the external environment and its ability to garner essential resources outside its sphere to facilitate academic freedom (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978:2). Thus, the resource dependence theory in this case supports the relationship between universities and the external environment in order for academic freedom to thrive. The resource dependency theory comes in handy to reveal its mandate and support for academic freedom at UNZA.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The challenges to academic freedom come in multiple ways and forms. Often they are crude and obvious, and sometimes they are delicate and subtle. The execution of academic freedom at institutions of higher learning is facing real challenges (Al-Zyoud, 2001: 59). In totalitarian and authoritarian political systems, academic freedom is threatened in a blatant way, where academics are aware of the censorship forced upon them. In addition, the poor state of the university could seriously threaten academic freedom (Karki, 2015: 29). In a similar vein, Menand (1996: 5) mentions that the university has internal issues that endanger the future of academic freedom. Conversely, threats to academic freedom can emerge from outside the university (Caston, 2006: 328). De George (1997: 86-87) notes that internal threats come from the university administration, academics and faculty, and the external threats to academic freedom come from politicians, boards of directors, alumni, and the wider community. These threats are perilous and may affect the execution of academic freedom. These emanate from various sources such as governments, society and inside institutions of higher learning themselves (De George, 1997: 86-87). For

instance, the main threat to academic freedom in Sudan emanates from outside the university (government) (Kilase, 2013: 185). Therefore, this is a gap that has to be filled up in universities. As long as academics and academic leaders are not free to exercise academic freedom due to internal and external threats, it is difficult for a university to realise the goals that advance knowledge, quality teaching and research. It is not clear whether UNZA faces internal or external threats to academic freedom.

Karki's (2015: 30) study notes that the state is regarded as a threat to academic freedom. The threat emanates from the state in the case of appointments and promotions of academics. In the same vein, De George (1997: 62) in the book on *Academic Freedom and Tenure* stipulates that the threat from the state is that politicians or other government authorities who monitor the state's funding for the university will demand a say in what is taught or how it is taught, or who is hired or not hired to the faculty. Al-Zyoud (2001: 62) supports that statement in his work, *Academic Freedom, University Autonomy and Admission Policy in the Jordanian Public Universities* by stating that external control of the hiring of academic personnel and interference in the internal affairs of universities is perceived to be an important restriction of academic freedom. For instance, the Sudanese President has the right to appoint university vice-chancellors upon the recommendation of the Minister of Education and also the right to interfere in everyday functions of the university (ibid). This Sudanese scenario shows that the state in these situations limits the rights of academics.

In agreement with the assertions above, a challenge facing higher education against the route to ensuring the enjoyment of academic freedom is the existence of inappropriate political or ideological interference by governments because institutions of higher learning are highly political and inundated with many political pressures (Tamirat, 2015: 121). Higher institutions of learning often function as hubs of political and intellectual dissent, and governments are therefore reluctant to allow universities the freedom and autonomy that may cause instability.

Similarly, academics' rights are constrained by several other circumstances. Shils (1994: 81) indicated that punishments may vary from incarceration, detention, torture, dismissal, withdrawal of the right to lecture, exclusion from scholars in the field or rejection of entry to learned societies, censorship by academic authorities, refusal of due promotion, and the imposition of extraordinary or onerous duties, to personal harassment and interruption of classes.

Shils stipulates that many academics are harmed due to their intellectual, political or religious behaviours or practices (1995: 5). The potential threats which come from the academics are regarded as challenges to academic freedom. De George (1997: 87) notes that the threat from the faculty has taken a different turn over the last few years. There has always been a threat from those in positions of authority whom others associate with the tenured faculty, impose or try to impose their perception of what is academically appropriate to the junior or untenured academics.

Financial resources are yet another threat to academic freedom. The findings of Degefa's (2015: 15) study conclude that academic freedom was conceived as being closely linked to

the adequacy of the financial resources required for professional purposes. Financial resources are part of the work process that can be used. Degefa's study reports that financial resources had a direct effect on academic freedom. The findings of the study indicate that a lack of funding does not allow academics to exercise their academic freedom to perform their professional duties as they should be. As a consequence, in order to ensure the provision of resources for academic activities, academics begin to moonlight. This can be done at the expense of the de facto professional role of academics. Therefore, the study will seek to investigate the influence of financial resources on academic freedom at UNZA.

In line with the foregoing, studies by Al-Zyoud (2001: 61) and Sharma (2015: 279) indicate that the universities' financial basis can challenge academic freedom. The limit of the financial support of higher learning institutions weaken academic freedom for academics and other staff members in academia. Al-Zyoud (2001: 59) further notes that the government authority is considered a major obstacle to academic freedom. This is because the government is the main financier of higher learning institutions.

Kori (2016: 52) also notes that a majority of universities worldwide are public institutions and are dependent on state funding; hence governments have considerable power to influence what takes place in a university. However, governments spend finances in the way they consider appropriate and "this is referred to as the lack of legal or systematic procedures which decide whether the universities are accountable to their societies or not" (Kori, 2016: 52). It is not clear whether the dependence on government funds constrain the exercise of academic freedom at UNZA.

Academic freedom in democracies is jeopardised by external stakeholders, such as donors, who have their own agenda and therefore dictate which research projects are funded and which are not (Tamirat, 2015: 127). These financially powerful corporations exploit academics by doctoring the research findings to agree with their predetermined motives at the price of academic excellence (ibid). What this entails is that the publication of findings and funding will be determined by the decision of these corporations who do not understand the distinction between corporations and universities.

In the context of Ethiopia, the negative impact of international organisations such as the World Bank (W.B) on universities, specifically on the Association of American Universities (AAU), is evident (Tamirat, 2015: 129). According to Bekele (2013: 23), this negative impact may be a direct effect of the WB's ideology that regarded university education as a private good and the corresponding perception of knowledge as a commodity. The immediate outcome of the restructuring of university education began in the 1990s to bring efficiency. Tamirat (2015: 129) argues that one way to achieve this strategy is to place more focus and priority on science and technology than on social sciences and humanities on the premise that the former is more essential for growth, as they can generate products and services that can be sold immediately than the latter. Therefore, this type of attempt can reform academia into vocational schools.

Another prevalent challenge that universities are facing is the overloading of academics with teaching and administrative duties (Owusu-Ansah, 2015: 177). This challenge negatively affects the quality of their academic activities. In line with the foregoing, Mama

(2006: 10) explains that in universities, the professional duty of academics has increasingly become more complex to include other duties, such as management, mostly in the name of efficiency. These additional duties consume the time and energy available for teaching, research, and production of knowledge. Ramtohul (2012: 12) observes that the state of affairs has slackened knowledge production and that some higher institutions in Africa have become "teaching universities". However, for UNZA, it is not very clear whether the academics and academic leaders are overloaded with academic and administrative duties. This study intends to establish that in due course.

Based on various ideas given by different scholars, the challenges to academic freedom can be classified into two different sources which emanate from inside the university and outside the university. The political condition of the country and the state are external threats whereas university administration, academics and students are internal threats to academic freedom.

Problem Statement

In the international arena, the notion of academic freedom is extensively discussed (Karki, 2015: 2). In Zambia, limited studies have been explicitly conducted to unearth the challenges of academic freedom at UNZA. In addition, there is no comprehensive explanation on the meaning of academic freedom and its components in UNZA official documents. There is also no constitutional or legal definition of academic freedom in Zambia. These shortcomings demonstrate the challenges of academic freedom at UNZA. This study, therefore, sought to identify and expound the challenges of academic freedom at UNZA.

Research Objective

The research objective sought to find out from participants the possible conditions affecting the enjoyment of academic freedom at UNZA to explore the challenges faced by UNZA academics and academic leaders in exercising academic freedom.

Research Question

The research formulated the research question which helped academics and academic leaders to state the challenges they faced in the exercise of academic freedom as:

1. What are the challenges faced by UNZA academics and academic leaders in exercising academic freedom?

Methodology

This article adopted a qualitative research methodology coupled with phenomenological hermeneutic design founded by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The rationale for choosing the qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic design was that the topic required data on the lived experiences, perceptions and views of the 30 purposively selected participants employed in this study: 15 academics and 15 academic leaders. Participants were highly experienced UNZA academics with over five years of teaching experience in the School of Education and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Besides, participants were also very experienced UNZA academic leaders (Deans and Heads of Departments) with over ten years of experience in teaching and administration in the schools listed above. In this study, an academic is a teacher in a university who is involved in teaching, research and community service (Summer, 2005: 7). An academic leader on the other hand, is an academic who is appointed as an academic leader and is involved in administrative and academic duties in a university. In the context of the University of Zambia, academic leaders include deans, Heads of departments, Directors, Professors. However, this study only focused on Deans and Heads of Departments.

In line with the anonymity policy, in the data presentation section, acronyms and numerals were used for each participant as argued by many researchers (Munsaka, 2001; Munsaka, 2009; Munsaka & Kalinde, 2017). These acronyms were constructed from the initials of the participants' faculty position names: A for Academic and AL for Academic Leader. This paper uses the following symbols: A 1-15 (Academics) and AL 1-15 (Academic Leaders).

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Key documents analysed were UNZA policy documents and the Zambia National Policy documents. UNZA policy documents: The University of Zambia Calendar (2015), Research Policy and Intellectual Property Rights (2009), Research Policy and Intellectual Property Rights (2009), The University of Zambia Strategic Plan (2017) and The University of Zambia Quality Assurance Framework (2018). The Zambia National Policy documents: Zambian Constitution (2016), Zambia Higher Education Act (2013) and Educating our Future (1996).

Qualitative data analysis was utilised in this research. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed descriptively using thematic categorization procedures. The themes were topics or major subjects that came up in the interview discussions or vigorous documentary analysis (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). From the semi-structured interviews that were conducted by the researcher, related topics were categorised in this kind of analysis (Mapoma & Masaiti, 2012). The documents were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Through qualitative content analysis, the researcher developed a valid framework which made it possible to make reducible inferences from the documents mentioned above (Masaiti, 2015; Masaiti & Simuyaba, 2018).

In this research, the researcher took all considerations to protect the research respondents from any harm or loss and to preserve their psychological dignity when designing and implementing this research. Accordingly, written permission was obtained from the respondents regarding their participation in the study after explaining the objectives and procedures of the research as well as informing them that they had the right to refuse or to discontinue the study at any time. Therefore, by informing the research respondents of

how the information they would give would be used and stored, their privacy and confidentiality was assured. The anonymity of the research respondents was ensured. An assigned code was used for identification purposes instead of their real names in the research report. Every care was made to ensure that the information they gave would not make them identifiable directly or by implication.

Presentations of Results

Participants' Perceptions on the Challenges to Academic Freedom

In order to establish the possible conditions that were affecting the enjoyment of academic freedom, the researcher deemed it necessary to ask participants to identify challenges to academic freedom at UNZA. When asked to identify the challenges to academic freedom, a wide variety of challenges were identified. All participants (A 1 – 15 and AL 1 - 15) held the view that academics and academic leaders at UNZA experienced challenges in their endeavor to try to exercise academic freedom. Therefore, the overarching theme emerging from the participants' responses regarding the question under consideration was that academics and academic leaders faced many challenges in exercising academic freedom, which caused UNZA not to fully realise its mission of developing knowledge through scholarship and research.

The following challenges to academic freedom emerged from research participants' responses: (a) Inadequate finances for salaries, research and participation in conferences (b) Heavy teaching requirements (c) Government interference (d) Lack of policy to safeguard academic freedom.

The research participants noted that academics at UNZA were granted academic freedom and that there was no evidence of any academic being reprimanded, imprisoned, tortured or put to death for exercising their academic freedom. However, academic freedom was threatened by the aforementioned challenges which put UNZA in a tight situation. The section that follows below provides in detail the four sub-themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions of the challenges to academic freedom at UNZA.

i. Inadequate Finances for Research and Participation in Conferences

Participants (A 1, A 3, A 13, AL 2, AL 5, AL 11 and AL 14) held the perception that the lack of adequate funding at UNZA constituted the major challenge to university education, which became an indirect threat to academic freedom. Participants expressed their disappointment with the inadequate finances for research and conferences at UNZA, which are essential to high-quality intellectual production. Participants pointed out that the government had been restricting the availability of state funds to UNZA due to a financial crisis in the country, arguing that the university should be generating its own funds. The pressure was being put on universities to find alternative sources of revenue. This resulted in academics using their salaries to finance their research projects, publications and international conferences. As a result, they only conducted small scale research projects,

where sometimes the quality of the research findings was compromised because of the inadequate research funds.

The following quotations serve as evidence of the participants' perceptions in the preceding section:

Participant A 1:

Management does not give academics money to research. They do not build infrastructure to decongest the lecture rooms to help lecturers have enough time to research. In the past, there were research funds, and people could do research. It was wrong for the minister to utter such a statement when she knows the institution has no research funds. (Interviewed on 1st October, 2018).

Participant AL 2:

Finances have been a factor in academic freedom. I alluded to this fact when I raised the issue of conferences. There are moments when people have shown interest in sharing their research findings at conferences, international symposia and that kind of thing. They would be told: "There is no money for their air ticket, there is no allowance and so on." Academics have taken it upon themselves to fund their research projects and conference participation. That stands right in the way of academic freedom because my views and interests in my field of research are somewhat curtailed, which has been the issue (Interviewed on 3rd October, 2018).

ii. Heavy Teaching Requirements

In clarifying why they perceived they had various challenges in trying to exercise academic freedom, participants (A 2, A 7, A 15, AL 1, AL 3, AL 4 and AL 10) pointed out that heavy teaching requirements had overridden the responsibility to create knowledge and had contributed to watering down academic freedom. They further noted that the heavy teaching requirements reduced UNZA to a secondary school where teaching, grading and paperwork was a routine. Time became a scarce resource for knowledge discovery and critical thinking. As a result, the university was departing from its original and noble role of creating and disseminating knowledge. Therefore, research and publication had suffered in the light of heavy teaching loads.

Below are examples of the quotes made concerning the raised views:

Participant A 2:

The student lecturer ratio is very high. We have many students. For example, I was teaching 350 students in class last year, which was just too much. But, how does it impact on academic freedom? Well, there is a lot of pressure from work, and someone cannot go and do their research and study because many students are

lining up for consultation. That puts a lot of pressure on individual lecturers (Interviewed on 2nd October, 2018).

Participant AL 3:

At UNZA, we spend more time teaching than thinking about our area of specialisation and thinking requires researching, publishing and attending conferences. For instance, I am teaching four undergraduate courses, and I am teaching four post-graduate classes. So we simply have become a big secondary school where our core business is just teaching. If we have no time to attend conferences and write then our academic freedom will be choked (Interviewed on 4th October, 2018).

iii. Government Interference

Another sub-theme that emerged in relation to the challenges to academic freedom was government interference. The research participants (A 5, A 11, AL 6, AL 9 and AL 12) described the government as the major threat to academic freedom at UNZA. They stated that the government played a dominant role and wielded unlimited power on the university, largely due to financial resource. They expressed that UNZA being a public institution was heavily dependent on government funding, creating fertile ground for increased government interference. The government interfered in the setting of standards and regulations of the university. Such interference affected individual freedoms of speech and expression. The government curtailed freedom of speech, research or publication and imposed a regime of conformity upon them, thus threatening the integrity of the university's role.

The quotations below supply evidence of the raised views:

Participant A 11:

The University is fully controlled by the government partly because it is not autonomous in terms of funding. There are times when lecturers want to go on strike, and they are told not to do it, or they will be fired. So where is the freedom of the university? Up to now, lecturers have not been paid their salaries in terms of contractual obligations. There was a time when lecturers wanted to go on strike, and they were told they would be fired and everyone kept quiet. (Interviewed on 11th October, 2018).

Participant AL 9:

By and large, the academics have no space to say what they want. There is that fear that one might find themselves on the chopping board like Mr Munkombwe, who

was saved by management. The current political environment is a bit threatening to most lecturers with faint hearts. They think they will be removed from their employment. I know of many more who have been victimised. There was a University of Zambia Lecturers and Researchers' Union (UNZALARU) president by then, and he was quite critical and vocal. He took on management on a number of issues. Unfortunately, he was on contract, and when his contract came to an end, the department he belonged to was in a critical shortage of lecturers. (Interviewed on 23rd October, 2018).

iv. Lack of Orientation to New Academics on Academic Freedom

Another emerging theme among the perceptions for the challenges to academic freedom was the lack of orientation to new academics. Participants (A 6, A 8, AL 7, AL 8 and AL 11) stressed the need for orientation on academic freedom to new academics because orientation would acquaint new lecturers with academic ethos such as academic freedom. Despite academic freedom being a core value at UNZA most academics, especially the young ones, had inadequate information on the principles of academic freedom, so that they did not exercise their academic freedom because they did not know that they had protection afforded by academic freedom by virtue of them being academics at UNZA. The following quotations epitomise the perceptions:

Participant AL 8:

I think the problem we have is that UNZA has inadequate induction of new arrivals and new lecturers. You see, each institution has its culture. So when we recruit young lecturers, we are supposed to induct them, about how the lectures are conducted, and about academic freedom and all these things. I do not think that is done. That is the weak part of the university (Interviewed on 8th October, 2018).

Participant A 5:

Most lecturers do not know their social responsibilities because academic freedom is part of their social responsibility. Academicians should be oriented on what it takes to be an academician. (Interviewed on 4th October, 2018).

v. Absence of Clear Legal Protection for Academic Freedom of Academics

It was brought to the researcher's attention, that there was the absence of clear legal protection for academic freedom (A 9, A 12, AL 10, AL 12 and AL 13). As a result of this observation, participants were of the view that providing clear legal protection for academic freedom would be one of the necessary measures to take in order to protect and

secure such freedom. They noted that the absence of legal protection for academic freedom made it vulnerable to the various practices and beliefs of academics. Legal protection would uphold or strengthen academic freedom and curtail infringements by the different levels of authority. Participants stressed that there should be a solution to academics' academic freedom that would go beyond the confines of UNZA to higher education policies, including enshrining academic freedom in constitutional or legal frameworks. The following quotes serve to support the preceding perceptions:

Participant AL 12:

There is a lack of constitutional or legal protection for academic freedom of lecturers. Hence, this has created a climate of fear. Most lecturers are scared to exercise their academic freedom because they do not feel protected. The University management is also not free to run the institution as an academic institution. It must always look at the political leaders and what they want. (Interviewed on 26th October, 2018).

Participant A 9:

There should be an assurance that the university community members will be given some autonomy or some immunity. They must be free and be above politics to be able to advance knowledge and serve the community. Furthermore, this can only be done if there is a policy specifically for academic freedom. That is the key. If that was done, then maybe we can talk about academic freedom because a lecturer who will be in this community will talk to the general public with a free mind. As at now, it cannot happen. (Interviewed on 9th October, 2018).

Discussion

What are the challenges faced by UNZA academics in exercising academic freedom?

The study revealed that academics and academic leaders faced many challenges in trying to exercise academic freedom causing UNZA not to fully realise its mission of developing knowledge through scholarship and research. The following are brief expositions of challenges experienced by academics and academic leaders at UNZA.

i. Inadequate Finances for Research, and Participation in Conferences

The findings revealed that a lack of adequate funding at UNZA was the most significant impediment to university education, posing an indirect threat to academic freedom. According to the study's findings, the government has been limiting the availability of state funds to UNZA owing to the country's financial crisis, stating that the institution should be

generating its own revenue. Currently, the government contributes 33% of UNZA's budget, which is insufficient (UNZA, 2017: x). This finding loosely ties with Ramtohol's (2012: 3) study in that the inadequate state funding was equally an impediment to academic freedom at the University of Mauritius (UoM). In other literature it is maintained that in adequate funding for research and conference participation may also have an impact on academic freedom in terms of constraints placed upon the open dissemination of research results, the free flow of scientific information, and the timing and conditions of publications (Rostan, 2010: 78).

ii. Heavy Teaching Requirements

One of the revelations from the findings of the study on the challenges faced by UNZA academics and academic leaders in exercising academic freedom was heavy teaching requirements. It was established that heavy teaching requirements were an obstacle to knowledge production and had contributed to the curtailment of academic freedom. Therefore, research and publication had suffered in the light of heavy teaching loads. This finding is consistent with what Ramtohol (2012: 12) found in his study. Academics at UoM were required to undertake 270 hours of teaching per academic year. consequently, they would complain of lack of time for research due to heavy teaching requirements. This scenario slowed down knowledge generation, and the UoM became known as a teaching university.

iii. Government Interference

The findings of the study showed that government interference was the major threat to academic freedom at UNZA. It was revealed that the government played a leading role and exerted unlimited power on the university owing mostly to the grant it provided. In addition, it was observed that being a public institution, UNZA was dependent on government funding, a situation which created fertile ground for increased government interference. The government intervened in the setting of standards and regulations of the university. Such interference suppressed individual freedoms of speech and expression. There is evidence in the literature that indicates government interference is a major threat to academic freedom. For instance, Kilase's (2013: 185) study findings are similar to this study's finding because the central government of Sudan also controls universities in Sudan (Kilase, 2013: 185). The universities have a long history of government interference. The government controls the planning, budgeting, recruitment of high-ranking university staff such as Vice-Chancellors. The reason for this is that the government is considered to be the main financier for public higher education institutions (Al-Zyoud, 2001: 59). This view is in agreement with Kori (2016: 52), who observed that a majority of higher education institutions worldwide are public institutions and are dependent on government funding. By implication, therefore, governments have great power to influence what takes place in an academic community.

iv. Lack of Orientation to New Academics on Academic Freedom

The findings of this study indicated that new academics at UNZA lacked orientation on academic freedom. It was revealed that most academics, especially the young academics, have incomplete information on the principles of academic freedom. For this reason they do not exercise their academic freedom because they do not know that they have the protection afforded by academic freedom by virtue of them being academics at UNZA. Providing new academics with information about their rights and what academic freedom is could help engage academics in working to strengthen or uphold their freedoms. Other literature has emphasised the importance of orienting new academics on academic freedom in higher education institutions (Weidner, 2001: 265). The scholars rightly argue that the university owes new academics clarity and honesty about the principles of academic freedom because by raising awareness of academic freedom, the new academics will be better able and motivated to defend it.

v. Absence of Clear Legal Protection for Academic Freedom of Academics

It was evident from the findings of the study that the absence of legal protection for academics' academic freedom made it vulnerable to the various practices and beliefs of academics. As a result of the preceding observation, it was revealed that providing clear legal protection for academic freedom would be one of the necessary measures to take in order to protect and secure such freedom. There is enough evidence in the literature (Karran & Mallinson, 2017: 4; Vrielink *et al.*, 2011: 118) and in the documentary analysis of this study to show that most universities, inclusive of UNZA, lack legal protection for academic freedom of academics. Neglecting the legalisation of academic freedom could unwittingly cause profound transformations in academic freedom practice due to judicial restraint. Academic freedom is not taken away in this situation; rather, the chances for its realisation are restricted. As a result, academic freedom must be legalised in order to develop a vision of its scope and dimension.

vi. A Resource Dependence Perspective of the Findings

In this particular context, a theory that is most suitable to explain findings linked to the fifth sub-research question is the resource dependence theory. The finding on the challenge of inadequate finances and government interference in this study supports the argument of Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) and Slaughter & Leslie (1997) that universities continuously struggle with the state for resources, thereby limiting their academic freedom by relying on the state that provides them with limited resources. Similarly, in the case of UNZA, academic freedom was perceived to be threatened because it was dependent on the government for grant. We may conclude that the university's academic freedom is

constrained by its dependence on a 33 per cent funding from the government, which is insufficient to allow for the practice of academic freedom.

vii. A Social Capital Perspective of the Findings

A social capital perspective was also suitable to explain the findings above. It can be noted that the lack of orientation to new academics on academic freedom is attributed to the lack of bridging social capital required to provide new information to new academics on academic freedom and fill the "structural holes" in the system of networks in the academic community. In agreeing with this perspective, Burt (1992) asserts that bridging brings together individuals or groups who are not familiar with each other so as to establish new social ties to offer new information and close the "structural holes" in the system of networks in the community. Had there been bridging social capital or ties between new and old academics at UNZA, the new academics would have been well informed by the old academic about academic freedom and how to safeguard it.

Implications of the Study to Policy and Practice

As revealed from study interviews and documentary analysis, developing a policy framework for academic freedom will promote the practice of academic freedom at UNZA (Karki, 2015: 82). Developing a policy framework to protect academic freedom is indispensable for spelling out the means and guidelines by which the university will protect academics as they practice their academic freedom. In their study, Vrielink *et al.* (2011: 119) point out that a significant number of (European) constitutions and basic laws contain specific provisions regarding academic freedom. An even greater number of countries have (also) enacted specific laws relating to universities or the higher education sector. UNZA or Zambia at large should emulate European countries by providing specific legal provisions regarding academic freedom.

Conclusions

Based on the finding of this study, it is worth stating that academics and academic leaders have been experiencing various challenges in exercising academic freedom, thus causing UNZA not to completely realise its mission of creating knowledge through scholarship and research. The challenges faced by academics and academic leaders include inadequate finances for salaries, research, and participation in conferences, heavy teaching requirements, government interference, lack of orientation for new academics on academic freedom and absence of clear legal protection for academic freedom of academics.

Interestingly, amidst the challenges mentioned above, there was no evidence that any academic had been reprimanded, imprisoned, tortured or killed for exercising their academic freedom. However, academic freedom was challenged by the factors above

which placed UNZA in a precarious position. These challenges constrained the exercise and enjoyment of academic freedom and affected the quality of research and teaching at the institution.

Conclusion on Documentary Analysis

The findings in UNZA and National documents were affirmed by the findings of semi-structured interviews indicating that academic freedom is not given the requisite priority. For instance, academic freedom in UNZA documents has only been listed as one of the core values, without detailing the means and guidelines by which the university will protect academics by exercising their academic freedom. In the National documents, specifically the Zambian constitution, it was listed under the freedom of expression, which overshadowed it. In addition, it does not feature in the national policy on education, *Educating Our Future*.

This failure to enshrine academic freedom into the Constitution of Zambia and the Higher Education Act suggests, however, that UNZA and Zambia did not have a policy framework for academic freedom. UNZA lacks legal protection for academic freedom. Disregarding the legalisation of academic freedom could inadvertently cause fundamental changes in the practice of academic freedom due to judicial restraint. The researcher suggests that it is important to formulate two policy documents on academic freedom, namely one at the university level and the other at the national level. These policy documents shall describe academic freedom within and beyond the academia.

Recommendations

i. Recommendations to Government

- a. This government should explicitly embed academic freedom into the Constitution of Zambia and Higher Education Act.
- b. The government should acknowledge the importance of academic freedom in socioeconomic development and significantly increase the funding of UNZA to promote academic freedom, through research and dissemination of research findings.
- c. The government should foster voices of conscience in society and encourage the tolerance and acceptance of differences of opinion through academic freedom. The intellectual voice needs to be reinforced. Establishing strategies for a more scholarly approach to debate and discussion on developmental issues is necessary if the country is to develop.

ii. Recommendations to UNZA

- a. UNZA management should induct and raise awareness among academics about academic freedom.
- b. UNZA should develop a policy exclusively on academic freedom, or it can enshrine academic freedom in all its policies and other documents to safeguard academics.

iii. Recommendations to Academics

- a. Individually and collectively, academics at UNZA should be vigilant or alert to any violation of academic freedom and be able to do whatever is necessary to defend it.

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