

## EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Gassim, Dohal

 Dohal Gassim

Independent Researcher, Arabia Saudita

### REVISTA EDUCARE

Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, Venezuela

ISSN: 1316-6212

ISSN-e: 2244-7296

Periodicity: Cuatrimestral

vol. 26, no. 2, 2022

revistaeducareupelipb@gmail.com

URL: <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/375/3753481025/>

**Resumen:** Siempre que hay libertad, por un lado, también hay una obligación [trabajo por hacer, espacio por llenar, etc.] por otro lado, así como restricciones que los académicos pueden desconocer. Limitaciones como la ideología, los sistemas educativos y las convenciones, por otro lado, siempre están presentes, se reconozcan o no. Tales límites tienen un impacto en nuestras ideas y conversaciones, que son fundamentales para los maestros que con frecuencia manejan problemas sociales, culturales y controvertidos. Por otro lado, como profesores, debemos brindar oportunidades para que nuestros alumnos descubran, investiguen y profundicen sus conocimientos por sí mismos. A la luz de lo anterior, mi trabajo se centrará en el concepto de libertad académica en el entorno educativo, haciendo referencia a mi experiencia personal.

**Palabras clave:** aprender, académico, limitaciones, fuerzas, enseñar.

**Abstract:** Whenever there is freedom on the one hand, there is also an obligation [work to be done, space to be filled, etc.] , as well as restrictions that academics may be unaware of. Limitations such as ideology, educational systems, and conventions, on the other hand, are always present, whether or not they are recognized. Such limits have an impact on our ideas and conversations, which are critical for teachers who frequently handle contentious social, cultural, and controversial problems. On the other hand, as teachers, we must provide opportunities for our pupils to discover, investigate, and deepen their knowledge on their own. In light of the foregoing, my paper will focus on the concept of academic freedom in the educational environment, referring to my personal experience.

**Keywords:** learn, academic, limitations, forces, teach.

## INTRODUCTION

*The most important aspect of freedom of speech is freedom to learn. All education is a continuous dialogue - questions and answers that pursue every problem on the horizon. That is the essence of academic freedom. (Douglas, 2021)*

When we discuss academic freedom of speech and expression in the context of teaching and learning, we raise several questions. What does academic freedom imply in general, and in particular for those who study

and teach? When, where, and how does it exist? What are the forces that influence and constrain this liberty? These, as well as a slew of others, are valid concerns.

The term "academic freedom," according to Merriam-Webster, was coined in 1901 and means: "freedom to teach or to learn without interference (as by government officials)." This term was introduced during a critical juncture in history, when universities were established as state-run institutions with social and political goals. The definition is succinct while being thorough. This independence is exercised at educational academic institutions, which are today universities and colleges, as indicated by the phrase "to teach or to learn." Faculty members have this flexibility because they "teach," whereas students, especially those studying texts with contentious problems, have this freedom because they "learn."

There are external and internal forces that can affect this freedom in terms of "interference." By "internal forces," I mean one's own ideals, wants, and dispositions. They may limit the research to reaching a particular outcome; Anyone with such internal forces may desire to serve a special purpose. External pressures, on the other hand, include dominant culture, and university boards of trustees and administrators. Because the main concerns in education are ideas and opinions, both types of forces may limit and/or obstruct the search for knowledge in assigned texts more than in any other topic.

## ARGUMENT

Any society's common good is dependent on the pursuit of knowledge that leads to the free expression of truth. Academic freedom is critical to the presentation of truth in all places of learning and teaching. According to Pincoffs (1972),

When a professor or a student claims that he is entitled to academic freedom he is generally understood to be claiming the right to pursue the truth unhindered (viii).

Any institution's growth depends on discovering, publishing, and teaching of concepts that may be controversial and perplexing to some. Exploring well-known theories, studying various literary texts, and debating viewpoints and ideas necessitate academic freedom. As a result, in a well-known novel like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, let alone any other novel, a variety of issues such as the ego, the center, the self, the public atmosphere of the time, religion, colonialism, and so on may be addressed, and in a closed and/or conservative society, some, if not all, of these points, should be avoided or ignored on purpose.

Universities exist not merely to impart existing information but also to analyze, study, and develop that knowledge so that new knowledge might be proposed. As a result, no thought or point of view can be banned or forbidden on a free and open campus for inadequate grounds. Some texts have been banned for social, religious, and/or ideological reasons, according to what we've read. A colleague of mine used to teach Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for years before being asked to cease because of the witches in the play. Some elements of specific texts may be taken out of context and pose problems in some civilizations; in a Muslim society, the short morality play *Everyman* may not be allowed to be taught because God is shown and speaks in the play.

If an organization's mission is to prescribe ideas and opinions, it will fail to accomplish its goals. Administrators' prescribing views and norms may be introduced and presented to instructors and pupils through an internal constitution or legislation enacted by some controlling and powerful personnel. In order to maintain the prevailing culture, institutions usually offer and enforce a specific ideology. Thus if a European person decides to study in the United States, there is no doubt s/he will absorb their ideologies and imbibe their culture no matter how imbibed.

On the other hand, some instructors and students may cause the problem and hinder knowledge. Imagine a teacher allows only memorizing what he believes in; this obstacle might be found anywhere, even in the West. In this vein, academic freedom in the United States now is threatened less by fundamentalist churchmen, reactionary capitalists, and political demagogues than by ideological delusions among students

and professors, according to Hook (1971). What can be stated about other societies and countries if this is the case in the United States?

As Shumway (1994) puts it, ideology "is expressed everywhere, including in literary works where it may be explicit or implicit" (32), to varying degrees depending on norms, obligations, and people's limits. It's often difficult to tell whether academic researchers are influenced by the ideologies of the books they study, analyze, research, and investigate.

A lecturer is likely to select a text because it reflects their own opinions and habits. In this situation, rather than examining and exploring the text, s/he will defend it. As a result, this lecturer may impose his or her beliefs and opinions on their students. As a result, this professor will not provide any new information; instead, they will underline existing information. While highlighting old knowledge does not contradict academic freedom in and of itself, who can assure that this professor is not prejudiced against his or her gender, tradition, or ethnicity? In my experience, all professors at any school must adhere to the syllabus supplied by the administration, and the topics and subjects to be taught are predetermined to some extent. Apparently, as claimed by some pedants, it's a necessity for accreditation, but it's really a way of dictating what should be taught and how it should be taught. Moreover, the final goal is set in advance, i.e. by the conclusion of the semester; all students should be prominent in answering questions.

Many concerns, however, are relative. Pangle (1992) emphasizes that:

"We" relativistic liberals, who constitute the "civilized," cherish our freedoms "on the public side of our lives," while "on the private side of our lives," there are certain rather different claims that are "equally hard to doubt." (58)

There are a few points that might be mentioned here:

For starters, numerous factors influence one's life and influence many of their decisions, such as ideology, race, gender, and social class. Instead of being a critic, a professor may become an advocate for a theory, idea, or movement. Instead of exploring the depth, dimensions, and boundaries of such a movement, s/he supports it and does not offer students the academic freedom they need to investigate the topic in question. As a result, students are forced in a way to say or write things they do not believe in or accept as their honest beliefs. They write exactly what the lecturer requests in order to receive a decent grade in the course.

Second, courses should have broad and inclusive names. This allows a professor to designate specific topics or genres to be covered in that course. For example, a course called Postmodernism provides teachers more freedom, but not necessarily students. As I previously stated, when a lecturer becomes an advocate rather than a critic of what they are delivering, students may lose their academic independence.

Third, in many circumstances, professors are hired for a specific function. The faculty's freedom may be limited as a result of this assumption. The lecturer must present the course in such a way that students will want to enroll. Otherwise, they will have no students. Regardless of what has been said thus far, it is something relative. Hiring someone to fill a specific role could benefit academic freedom, especially if that individual has sufficient knowledge to deliver and is eager to learn more. On the other hand, some students may lose their independence due to their instructors' attitudes toward them. However, class discussions should go beyond the scope of the required readings. Many significant subjects should be discussed, and students should offer a variety of viewpoints to help deepen the conversation and study. Professors should also avoid pressuring students to do certain things or believe in them.

In any case, there is a loss of freedom anytime there is a responsibility [a work to complete, a space to fill, or similar things], and vice versa. When a professor or a student feels like they have something to accomplish or a place to fill, that person is under stress. Any form of load will impact one's level of liberty. It is a hardship to pay a professor to represent a minority or a concentration.

According to Wallen (1998), certain people are hired to represent "specific cultural identities" (51). When a minority faculty member is employed to achieve diversity in terms of identity, the fact that they are a minority puts significant pressure on their to conform to the identity. On the other hand, traditional

academic freedom is based on a plurality of viewpoints because it is via varied viewpoints that we can study and improve our knowledge. Many issues, such as deconstruction, anti-religious, and anti-cultural points, are avoided by professors for religious, ideological, and cultural reasons at various schools and colleges, even though finding a text that does not cover any of these issues is challenging.

Another factor that influences academic freedom is whether or not a professor is hired to teach specific texts or courses. Professors are hired based on their areas of expertise. They must adapt the courses they have chosen to meet the mandated goals outlined and expected from teaching such courses. Now, as part of the Quality Unit's requirements, a detailed curriculum of what should be taught is delivered in advance at many schools. As a teacher of literary texts, such a syllabus will make things harder for me; thoughts, opinions, and ideas distinguish us and increase the sense of competitiveness in what we do. Indeed, by providing a list of detailed steps to be followed, one should make his/her focus on the list more than anything else. Hence, the opinions flow and divergence of ideas will be hindered, which may limit the contents' discovery of the available text and its complex dimensions. Wallen states unequivocally that "when it is specified in advance what a student is to hear from these 'other' voices, the power of dominant institutions to determine meaning is strengthened" (53).

Academic freedom is substantial, if not wholly, hampered anytime a student's or professor's opinions are to be appraised and expected in advance based on their significance for the speaker and the hearer. As a result, we understand why "the American Association of University Professors, which was formed in 1915 in order to promote and defend academic freedom, *no longer feels secure in its mission*" (Wallen 46) [emphasis added]. We currently have institutions that, in Althusser's words, constitute "Ideological State Apparatus" utilized to embed the dominating class's ideas. As a result, our academic freedom is limited and hindered.

Academic independence does, in fact, necessitate a high level of autonomy. Its autonomy must be protected from external dangers such as trustees, administrators, and other ardent colleagues, as well as internal threats such as personal bias. However, rather than establishing unnecessary norms and limiting the extent of freedom, freedom of expression necessitates tolerance of viewpoints and ideas we may not agree with.

Although the process of imposing and enforcing norms is hidden from the general public, academics must acknowledge that some individuals on the ground have vested interests. Shumway, an American Literature enthusiast, claims that "the constitution of American literature as a field served the interests of particular factions within the profession and those of dominant class, race, and gender within American society" (9); what pertains to the United States of America can be applied to any other society. If there are interests in this field, who can ensure that those with "interests" will not have an impact on academic freedom directly or indirectly? In truth, we must acknowledge that academic freedom does "often shield the interests of those in power" and is "part of the fabric of oppressive institutions, and only help produce a false sense of 'autonomy' or a misguided 'quest' for truth." (Wallen 38)

## CONCLUSION

Generally, we must acknowledge that any institution sends a message to society. It is a burden to have a message as a foundation, and the message is an obligation in some sense. This is dependent on how the message is interpreted. Academics, without a doubt, have greater privileges than anyone else. Even when students are given the opportunity to find out what is going on, it is evident that academics in institutions are influencing students according to the instructions they are given. We should not impose our opinions on our students as professors or teachers. Instead, we must provide students the opportunity to learn, investigate, and develop their knowledge for themselves while discussing issues and concepts.

On the other hand, academics worldwide should be open about influencing students and stating their true motivations for picking and teaching specific texts whenever they have the opportunity to do so. They must

be open and honest about their beliefs and habits. At the same time, if these academics wish to investigate and extend knowledge rather than convey existing knowledge, which involves less effort and freedom, they should be open.

## REFERENCES

- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Douglas, W. O. (2021). Forbes Quotes Thoughts On The Business Of Life. Forbes.com. 2 Sep. 2021.
- Hook, S. (1971). Conflict and Change in the Academic Community. In *Defense of Academic Freedom*. Ed. Sidney Hook. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., pp. 106-119.
- Pangle, T. L. (1992). *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of Postmodern Age*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP.
- Pincoffs, E. L. (1972). Introduction. *The Concept of Academic Freedom*. Ed. Edmund L. Pincoffs. Austin: U of Texas Press, pp. vii-xxiv.
- Shumway, D. R. (1994). *Creating American Civilization: A Genealogy of Academic Literature as an Academic Discipline*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press.
- Wallen, J. (1998). *Closed Encounters: Literary Politics and Public Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press.