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Exploration of Philosophical and Legal Reasons for Inclusion of Academic Freedom in the Bill of Rights

Mohammed Xolile Ntshangase*

Abstract

The Bill of Rights forms part of the South African constitution and is the cornerstone of reference as it enshrines all human rights recognised in the Republic of South Africa. While the Bill of Rights enshrines all human rights and affirms democratic values like human dignity, equality, and freedom, it still has not found a space to include academic freedom, which is this paper's focus. The debate today about whether to include academic freedom in the Bill of Rights is long overdue, and academic freedom should have come into the Constitution together with institutional autonomy. The non-inclusion of academic freedom in the Bill of Rights makes it seem strange to those who want to undermine it and invasively overpour their authoritative tyranny over academics. Since it has been a long moment of silence on academics from different institutions of higher learning, this conceptual desktop study adopts an analytic theoretical framework to argue that academic freedom must be included in the Bill of Rights. Since academic freedom will empower/protect the freedom of expression in teaching and assessment in universities, it is high time that scholars call for the recognition of a "right to academic freedom."

Keywords: Bill of Rights, Academic freedom, Academic operandi, Africanisation, Academic management

^{*} University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus), Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, Polokwane (Limpopo province), South Africa; mohammed.ntshangase@ul.ac.za

Introduction

Academic freedom is defined by Vokhobzhonovna (2023) as the state whereby academics have all necessary rights (to apply methods that academics/lecturers deem fit in both teaching and accessing) to engage in their academic activities in ways they deem fit without any unnecessary interference. Joudieh et al. (2024) add that academics in institutions of higher learning should be free to do their activities freely, without limitations, especially those that negatively affect their productivity and innovativeness. Therefore, this study argues that academic freedom (like in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland) speaks to academics being free from oppression by institutional authorities and doing what they deem productive regarding their profile growth. On the one hand, academics struggle for their freedom, but universities always emphasise their freedom and autonomy from external bodies like SAQA, CHE, and DHET (Adewumi & Duma, 2024). For clarity's sake, SAQA stands for South African Qualifications Authority, CHE stands for Council on Higher Education, and DHET stands for Department of Higher Education & Training. According to Beluigi (2023), academic freedom should have been understood as one factor that supports comfort, innovativeness, productivity, and creativity within academia. However, as things are, university authorities enjoy autonomy at the expense of oppressing academics with strict rules and denial to exercise their academic liberties (Hlatshwayo, 2020).

According to Fumasoli and Hladchenko (2023), institutions of higher learning in South Africa have theoretical frameworks that guide their modus operandi and regulations that talk about their conduct, governance, and so forth. However, most surprisingly, while having all those statutory injunctions, there is not even a single document in South African institutions of higher learning that mentions academic freedom. Then, when an academic encounters an unfair situation whereby academic freedom is infringed, he/ she has no way of voicing it clearly and about any statute. This unfair infringement of academic freedom here would be understood from the literature because, in South Africa, no statute explains academic freedom, which is a serious factor that makes this study necessary. To specify the violations of academic freedom that this study discusses, the following scenarios spell out some of the cases in

reference. Heffernan (2024) mentions instances whereby the university would enforce that all lecturers must be in their offices and set particular assessments. For assessments like x number of tests, no assignments will count in the class mark, and all that must be done at the lecturers' discretion. In another case, Roth and Vatansever (2020) mention that some academics are restricted from attending academic conferences. The authorities would refuse to approve submissions, citing a lack of funds, while those academics have publications that draw funds from the university.

Schöpf (2020) also narrates that in some instances, academics would face a situation whereby they are expected to be productive while given no enablers, and due to lack of reference to any statute, they cannot voice out their displeasure or depression. These are a few cases that exacerbated the formation of this study. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is the highest law in the country, and in section 2, it has the Bill of Rights (Dube, 2022). Perhaps it is worth mentioning that regardless of South African constitutions being promoted by scholars like Wawrzynski et al. (2024) as the best constitution in the world with the promotion of freedom and democracy, it still lacks mention of academic freedom like others. The Bill of Rights lists all rights, except the academic rights, which would emphasise academic freedom, this is perhaps why the university management teams hear the debates about academic freedom as mere circumlocution. Therefore, this study's significance lies in delving into a topic that is less addressed in proper academic settings.

In most cases, academics want to obey protocols such as voicing their concerns through the university speaker. This study argues that such a demand is a weakness because the speaker is part of tyrannical management. Biyela (2025) states that the university speaker is directed and mandated to protect the university management. This is why such a person cannot be trusted to present any view that seeks to transform the system toward empowering the academic staff over management authorities.

In other words, this study argues for academic freedom's inclusion in the Bill of Rights for purposes of (i) enlightening academics about their rights and privileges within the South African institutions of higher learning, (ii) serving as the reference when

academics complain about the infringement of their rights, and (iii) establishment of structures to address cases of academics' oppression as well as rendering support to academic staff members who have suffered under the tyranny of managerial forces within the university. Therefore, as this study becomes available literature, it is possible that one day, there will be a serious debate that will transform the current status quo. This study argues that including academic freedom in the Bill of Rights will do better for the academic staff members of different institutions of higher learning in South Africa because part of it will empower academics who have no one to turn to. In precise terms, the main aim of this study is to argue and defend the importance of including academic freedom in the Bill of Rights, which is part of the South African constitution.

The main question for this study is why academic freedom is still not included in the South African constitution. In contrast, academics suffer different forms of oppression from the university authorities in this democratic age. The sub-questions that emanate from this main question are: (a) Do academics have rights, or do they have general rights that all citizens have? (b) Do academics in different universities have a station/ office to report oppression and have their grievances satisfactorily addressed? (c) Does any South African university have any statutory document that mentions academic freedom, rights, responsibilities, and privileges? (d) Does any South African university entertain the debate about academic freedom and constitutionality of academic rights? Moreover, (e) Why is it necessary to enshrine academic rights and freedom in the Bill of Rights in this era? From these sub-questions, this study's objectives are as follows: (i) to explore academics' knowledge of their academic rights, responsibilities, and privileges, (ii) to engage on the issues of how academics' freedom infringements and grievances are handled in different South African universities, (iii) to find out if there are any statues which talk about academic freedom in South African institutions of higher learning, (iv) to explore how serious do South African universities entertain the idea of inclusion of academic freedom in their statutes, and (v) to reasonably justify the inclusion of academic freedom in the Bill of Rights in this era of democracy in South Africa.

With these interlinked sub-questions and objectives, this study seeks to obtain findings from literature and philosophically engage them through the lens of analytic theory. So, from this point, the outline of this study includes the following sections: (1) methodology, which clearly explains the design and methods followed in putting this study together; (2) theoretical framework, which unpacks the analytic theory as it is the lens through which this study can be seen, assessed, and evaluated, (3) findings which are listed in point form as they are obtained directly from literature, (4) discussion which thematically arranges the findings while analytically putting some narrative under them, (5)recommendations which are suggestions of how to confront the unpleasant phenomenon being addressed in the study, (6) conclusion which summarises the argumentative discussion of this study, and (7) bibliography which comprehensively acknowledges all sources that appear in the in-text citations.

Methodology

This qualitative desktop study seeks to argue the inclusion of academic freedom in the Bill of Rights, which forms section 2 of the South African constitution. Since this is a desktop conceptual study, it does not use primary data collected directly from participants. According to Eaton (2020), when data is collected from participants through interviews, there need to be ethical clearance certificates and other forms of permissions that need to be collected. However, for a conceptual desktop study like this one, which relies on published literature, there is no need for documents like ethical clearance or permissions, as those were satisfied during primary data collection (Hewett et al., 2023). In other words, this study requires other forms of ethical considerations than discussing and evaluating issues of ethical clearance and protecting participants from harm. This study initially sampled four journal articles, four books, and 4 YouTube video presentations on academic freedom and its constitutionalisation. That led to many other sources cited in those few purposively sampled sources, and that channelled this study to some limitations that serve as discrimination of sources for inclusion and exclusion in this study.

In terms of inclusion, this study purposively sampled sources that are (a) available in research spaces like Pubmed, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PhilPapers, Medlyn, and other sites for academic research, (b) published for scholarly utility/ consumption, which can be cited in academic works without compromising the research integrity, (c) not older than 8 years from the date of publication as that would raise questions about the relevance of this study, and (d) sources that are within the topic that this study seeks to address. In terms of exclusion, all sources from grey literature have been avoided in this study. Grey literature hereby refers to unverified data sources like Wikipedia, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and so on (Christensen et al, 2022). However, this study does not have anything negative about such sites/ sources, but it argues that such sources could specifically jeopardise the integrity of this study. The data collected from reliable published sources is thematically analysed after stating findings as they are directly absorbed from acknowledged literature.

For authenticity, reliability, and trustworthiness, this study commits to adequately referencing all sources in both in-text and bibliography. Thus, this study completely avoids plagiarism, which Ndebele (2022) refers to as literature theft that must be penalised by the rejection of the whole study. Therefore, the ethics enforced in this study include proper referencing of all sources and providing DOI links where possible. In addition, this study was presented at an academic conference organised by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) in March 2024 at the Emperor's Palace in Johannesburg, South Africa. That falls within measures to verify its authenticity, reliability, and trustworthiness because that conference got the attention of other academics from different universities who engaged it publicly, intending to improve the argumentation of this study. Limitations to this study include (a) this study is only qualitative, and someone may critique it by saying that perhaps it should have incorporated some aspects of quantitative inquiry, (b) this study uses only secondary data than primary data would be taken into account the direct and individually purported views, and (c) this study only focuses on South Africa as if it is the only country that needs to consider issues of academic freedom and constitutionality. However, all these limitations should be considered questions or foundations for further research within this

debate about including academic freedom in the Bill of Rights. The following section delves into the theoretical lens which guides this study and its argumentative discussion.

Theoretical framework

This study is committed to the analytical school of thought. Analytical philosophy emphasizes clarity and argument, often through logical and linguistic analysis (McGinn in Ntshangase, 2024). Frege (in Giroux, 2023) is considered the father of analytical philosophy, a tradition that emphasizes clarity of argument through the logical use of language in presenting thoughts. Within this framework, Bertrand Russell found a space to argue for logicism and logical atomism (Soames in Fleming, 2022). According to Fleming (2022), Logicism and logical atomism refer to breaking the argument into fundamental propositions to understand its coherence as a whole. Similarly, Wall (2018) argues for the analytical breakdown of issues into more straightforward and logical thoughts through logic in simple ordinary language. Wall (2018) believes that philosophical problems arise from misunderstanding language and that all necessary truths are a priori, analytic, and true in virtue if the meaning of words depends upon how the world is. Analytic theory helps produce not ideologically motivated philosophy but analytic and reflective (Hallen, 2005). Under Wittgenstein's inspiration, Carnap sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism as a development of this tradition (Akomolafe, 2023). Logical positivism holds that there are no specific philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts (Akomolafe, 2023). Ryle and Kerr (2020), Wall (2018), and Akomolafe contributed to this tradition by rejecting the doctrines of their predecessors of constructing artificial language to resolve philosophical problems. They argued that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because the "quest for systemic theories of language worked as a misguiding intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy" (Glock in Ntshangase, 2024: 4).

The analytic framework in this research work helps acquire a deeper or adequate understanding of the research problem before forwarding different views. Since the framework guides the researcher in their methodology, it also helps to critically apply

analysis that cannot be accusable of any bias. This theoretical framework enables a researcher to be reflective and simultaneously within guards of rationality while being critical of their thoughts (Wall, 2018). With the guide of logical positivism, the researcher has dealt with dogmas and ideological speculations around the issue of "Ubuntu" and Modernist supremacy while operating as a neutral being in the battle between parties against and parties for current modernist supremacy philosophy. As Akomolafe (2023) argues, logical positivism holds that there are no absolute philosophical truths, but the object of philosophy is to clarify thoughts. This has helped the researcher to simplify his thoughts. In this paper, the researcher uses ordinary language to produce his critical thoughts while simultaneously analysing existing common thoughts. The use of ordinary language is essential because, in this work, the researcher deals with real issues that involve real human beings in the world, other than some fairies of metaphysical fantasies. The analytic theoretical framework is adequately relevant when dealing with sensitive topics like this, one of the academic misconceptions and lack of fulfillment of some colleagues' expectations, because many people talk about these issues in the emotional realm and do not rationalize them.

The significance of analytic theory in this study is marked by its alignment with the phenomenon discussed. This study seeks to critique the inclusion of academic freedom in the Bill of Rights within the South African constitution. However, since the argument must not be emotional or biased, the analysis has to be based on a philosophical perspective. Hence, the argument here is analytic in that all institutions have philosophical frameworks influencing their practice and perspectives. Therefore, analytic theory enables a broader view that can cut across many philosophical frameworks followed in different universities or related institutions of higher learning. The following section states the literature findings, which are directly acquired from different sources.

Findings

 Academics fall victim to managerial tyranny due to a lack of knowledge concerning their rights, responsibilities, and privileges.

- 2. In all South African universities, there are no stations/ offices to report or satisfactorily intervene in cases where academics experience grievances about their academic rights.
- 3. None of the South African institutions of higher learning have any statutes that mention academic freedom with its rights, responsibilities, and privileges.
- 4. None of the South African universities has been interested in facilitating debates about academic freedom and the constitutionality of academic rights.
- 5. In this democratic age, the South African constitution incorporates all freedoms, rights, responsibilities, and privileges, including academic freedom.

Discussion

Theme 1: Academics in South African universities have no refuge in the current state of having no academic freedom enshrined anywhere. Garner (2023) argues that any law or rule not written anywhere cannot be enforced, nor can anyone be liable for violating it. Freedom is a cumbersome concept under democracy because when everyone has a right to be free, there must be ways in which the unfair limitation of that freedom can be dealt with (Brooks et al., 2020). Since academic freedom speaks to the rights of academics, it should have reference to statutes to mark ways such freedom can be practiced and be limited when necessary. According to Weber (2024), freedom can be limited under certain circumstances, as it can be abused by those subjects who ought to enjoy it. This comes as Gilani and Rehman (2020) narrate that the reason for hesitation to legislate academic freedom is that academics are not trusted with reasonable practice when granted such freedom.

Since all rights come with responsibilities, it becomes important to consider the responsibilities that come with academic rights within the broader debate about legislating academic freedom. Since academics have engaged in debates about academic freedom and its constitutionality, it can safely be assumed that they know about the responsibilities that would come with it. When it gets to be included in the Bill of Rights, such responsibilities will be clearer to everyone. At the core of this whole discussion, there is a view that when academics face violations of their freedom, they endure suffering because they cannot refer to any statute to defend themselves. In addition, those who infringe on academic rights are immune to any consequences because of the lack of reference to legislation. Therefore, the problem does not start with violating academic freedom, but it starts from the absence of any statutory reference when discussing such freedom.

Theme 2: South African institutions of higher learning neither include academic freedom in their statutes nor entertain debates about it. Being open to the discussion about legislating academic freedom would help shed light on how academic freedom will look (Roberts et al., 2023). The management teams in all South African institutions of higher learning may not see the importance of discussing academic freedom, and discussing such a topic is an absolute waste of time for them. However, it is not a professional way of assessing issues just to think they are useless without thoroughly engaging them. According to Cain (2020), the workers' unions should pressurize the universities' management teams to open a space for discussing academic freedom. This study concurs with Cain's (2020) view because the main job of workers' unions is fighting for/ defending workers' rights. Therefore, since academics' freedom and rights fall within that portfolio, it is something they should be unapologetic about. Perhaps the struggle/difficulty in this matter happens due to a lack of a statutory injunction to base any action. However, scholars of analytic philosophy like Wall (2018), Fleming (2022), and Akomolafe (2023) would argue that such a statute with the mention of academic freedom will never exist if no one strives to bring it into existence. Therefore, the quandary in this phenomenon is that it seems like there is not enough pressure put by the concerned parties to legislate academic freedom.

Theme 3: It is quite abnormal that in more than 30 years of democracy in South Africa with many constitutional amendments, academic freedom is still not included in any version. In South Africa, a constitution has been amended more than 17 times within the 30 years of democracy (Ginsburg, 2022), and academic freedom has still not found its way to any part of it. Surprising as this situation may be, there is a sense in which it means that academics are viewed as immune to oppression, while that is not the case. Since different

groups of people in South Africa have, at some point, engaged in picketing to demand recognition of their rights, academics need to venture into that line of action. According to Kratou and Laakso (2022), in an almost old democracy like South Africa, academic freedom should still not be a matter under discussion. It should not be included in constitutional freedoms. Bérubé and Ruth (2022) express their surprise in this matter because academics are expected to be the most articulative people who can present their case clearer than anyone else. However, in the case of South Africa, academics find themselves more compliant than challenging the status quo, and to a greater extent, that compliance works against them. Therefore, the argument put forth by this study is not only significant but also uncommon in South African academic settings. The expectation is that as academics read this study, there might be a point of waking up and vividly engaging in the pursuit of having their rights and freedom legislated and included in the Bill of Rights. According to Spannagel (2024), including academic freedom in the Bill of Rights should not be a complicated and dragging process because the Constitution is commonly amended whenever needed. Hopefully, the South African constitution will have a space to include academic freedom, rights, and responsibilities in its following amendment.

Recommendations

This study puts forth only four suggestions that may mend the dire situation about academic freedom in South African institutions of higher learning. Recommendations by this study are as follows: (a) studies conducted by academics, in particular, from the field of psychology, indicate the importance of academic freedom and the dire effects of its absence (b) all academics must work together in amplifying the debates about the necessity or urgency of including academic freedom in the Bill of Rights as well as related institutional statutes, and (c) the inclusion of academic freedom in the Bill of Rights and related statues must come with ways to enforce it and an established body that deals with its violations within the university but not linked with the institutional management team.

Conclusion

Considering the whole argumentative discussion of this study, it can be concluded that in the current state of no mention of academic freedom in any statute, academics suffer in different South African universities. Although all South African institutions of higher learning have autonomy clearly stated in their statutes, none of them take academic freedom as seriously as it is supposed to. In many instances where academics encounter the tyranny of the university management, they fail to report those violations of academic freedom due to the lack of statutory reference. However, this study has leveled a few recommendations on how the academic freedom debate can be pushed until it reaches constitutionalisation in South Africa. This study also notes that the university authorities cannot be expected to seriously support the academic freedom debate because it prima facie seeks to empower academics against their managers. The central argument at the core of this study is that academics need to have rights, responsibilities, and privileges that should be enshrined in the Bill of Rights. In its depth, the argument of this study is philosophical because it settles within the parameters of logic rather than the emotional sensitivity of the topic at hand. For reasonability, this study has kept to the protocol set in the methodology section and avoided all factors that could harm its integrity. The conclusion of this study can be summarised by saying that any freedom, right, or privilege not listed in any statute cannot be successfully protected in South Africa. In addition, no one can successfully complain that his/ her freedom has been violated when such freedom is not acknowledged in any statute.

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