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Assessing and Promoting the Culture of Students' Right to Academic Freedom in Ghana: The Case of University of Education, Winneba (UEW)

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Abstract:

The main focus of this paper was to assess students' right to academic freedom at the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana. The research paper adopted a pragmatic research paradigm type of study. A mixed-method approach with explanatory sequential design was employed for the study. The population for the study was the level 400 students of UEW for the 2022/2023 academic year. The Krejcie and Morgan Table for sample size determination from a given population was employed to sample from a total of 12,622 final-year students. A total of 375 students were carefully selected hinging on the Krejcie and Morgan tabulation formula. Sixteen (16) students were purposively selected from the sample size of 375 for the qualitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed for the quantitative analysis, whilst thematic/content analysis was used for the qualitative analysis. Results revealed that students often could openly express their views in the university setting.

Keywords:

Academic Freedom, Culture, Ghana, Human Rights, Students, Students' Rights, University of Education - Winneba

1. Introduction

This article is organized under the following outline: (1) Introduction and Background; (2) Relevance and Application of the Theoretical Perspective; (3) Methodology; (4) Findings and Discussion on students' rights to academic freedom;

and the way forward in promoting students' rights to academic freedom; and (5) Conclusion. Rights and freedoms are inalienable entitlements that all human beings are supposed to access and enjoy. Accessing these rights and freedoms has its challenges. Article 21 of the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution speaks about the promotion of general fundamental freedoms. Article 21 (1) (b) provides that, "all persons shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and belief, which shall include academic freedom." [1]. There is therefore the need to ascertain what academic freedom is. This study, therefore, sought to assess students' right to academic freedom, and ways in which right to academic freedom can be promoted in Ghana, using the University of Education, Winneba as a case study.

Appiagyei-Atua et al, argue that the concept of Academic Freedom has resisted a broad, widely agreed-upon definition. The authors insist that "it is not included in the definition section of the ILO/UNESCO recommendation, but the body of the document does refer to two definitions of the concept. First, regarding academics, paragraph 27 stipulates that higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to the maintaining of academic freedom, that is to say, the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine." The authors further enumerated five groups of freedoms. These are: "1. Freedom of teaching and discussion; 2. Freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof; 3. Freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work; 4. Freedom from institutional censorship and 5. Freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies." Also, another form of academic freedom was identified by the Recommendation in paragraph 18, which describes institutional autonomy as "the institutional form of academic freedom." [2] The notions identified in academic freedom are explicit to certain duty-bearers in the academic freedom environment.

On the same wavelength, paraphrasing Vrielink et al, academic freedom is viewed to encompass three aspects. This includes (a) Comprehensive rights of individuals to express themselves freely as persons in the academic community for both teachers and students. It must chiefly encompass free enquirers which must include the freedom to teach, the freedom to study, and the freedom of research. Technically, freedom of information and freedom of expression should be taken care of, with emphasis on freedom of publication including the to make mistakes. Sight should not be lost on the right to take on academic and professional activities both in and outside of academic employment; (b) Communal or institutional sovereignty for the academy in general and/or subsections thereof being faculties, and research units; and (c) Responsibility for the public the established order to take measures in respecting and protecting academic freedom to safeguard an effective enjoyment of the right and promotion of it [3]. The authors reaffirmed that the scope of the three spheres of academic freedoms should be communally exclusive, but on the differing side, they mutually buttress each other.

Academic freedom can therefore be viewed as the freedom of teachers to teach and students to study freely. In knowledge acquisition, learn facts and concepts in several subject domains without any negative influence on authorities. Be able to research without arbitrary meddling or control from institutional regulations, law or public pressure. The fundamental elements should comprise the "freedom of educators to inquire into any subject that evokes their intellectual concern; to present their findings to their students, colleagues, and others; to publish their data and conclusions without control or censorship; and to teach in the manner they consider professionally appropriate. For students, the basic elements include the freedom to study subjects

that concern them and to form conclusions for themselves and express their opinions” [4]. This significantly indicates that for the improvement human condition of society, academic freedom must be freely accessed without any hindrance. Accessing the right to academic freedom will bring in its wake autonomy in institutions of higher learning like universities. This will open an essential opportunity for universities to teach, and students to learn. This will help teachers produce the desired research to improve teaching required to improve students academically for developmental purposes. This signifies that the two concepts “institutional autonomy” and “academic freedom” used interchangeably can be significant components for individual, institutional and national development.

It is on clear terms that, the justification for academic freedom per the definition and explanation, one can deduce that its meaning is placed not only in the expediency of educators and learners but in societal benefits. This may include the longstanding interests of society and are best served when the instructive process culminates in the improvement of knowledge, attitudinal change and advancement in scientific innovation. This will become necessary when the acquisition of scientific knowledge is best advanced from the inference or free from restraints by the country, and any other institution which has a link as a stakeholder in education.

It is therefore deemed fit that academic freedom is of principal importance for present and imminent research as well as for teaching and learning at universities. Academic freedom should not be viewed as an ultimate goal in itself. It is particularly vital since it makes it possible for institutions of higher learning like universities to forge and realise a common good of society for freely searching for information and publicising knowledge, understanding and values through the fostering of self-directed and thoughtful expression in institutions for both academic staff and students.

Having unhindered human rights to access academic freedom would be seen as a critical means of development in the world of which the continent of Africa needs much to be desired from its benefit. Inventions in science, technology and engineering can only thrive in an environment where the rights and freedoms of people are protected. The significance of academic freedom has helped academics without restrictions to research into science, technology and innovations or modernisation in our contemporary society. This cannot be underemphasized as the world is steadily moving into artificial intelligence (AI) which is the product of a system where people are free to have their way in teaching, learning and conducting research without any political rancour. Having free access to exercise the right to institutional autonomy in the universities in Ghana can be seen as a pivot for socio-economic development. This is the sense that teachers and learners will be able to apply their knowledge and skills in research in science and technology as a twin concept to spur the Ghanaian economy. The prowess of exercising academic freedom in our universities as a country cannot be relegated to the background if Ghana is to develop and match any of the Asian Tigers like the Republic of Singapore, and the South Koreans, just mentioning a few. Development in all spheres can be realised when there is academic autonomy in our higher institutions of learning, like the traditional universities and the technical universities.

Although, there is a legal provision in the Ghanaian 1992 Constitution that speaks about the right to academic freedom, and exercising it freely has been the issue. provides that, “all persons shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and

belief, which shall include academic freedom.” [1] There is therefore the need to ascertain what academic freedom is.

Implementing this clearly shows that, Ghanaians have to accept the need for the right to academic freedom for institutions to have the free hand and support given to them in the area of research in their distinct areas. The State as duty bearer is duty bound to give assurance of academic freedom for both staff and students. For academic freedom to prevail in any expressive sense, it should be cherished. It should be exercised in an appreciated manner, ensured, protected, and overly promoted by the national public stakeholders. Academic freedom is violated when authorities fail to fulfil these obligations. Apart from Article 21 (1) (b) of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana speaking into the need for academic freedom, two Africa-made documents on academic freedom, namely, the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics (Dar es Salaam Declaration) and the Kampala Declaration also give their support on why academic freedom is important for development. The 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers (ILO/UNESCO Recommendation) and the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997 UNESCO Recommendation) are employed to determine the status of academic freedom in Africa [5]. This overly indicates the overriding essence of the unhindered right of access to quality education for all. Extensively, education has been chronicled as an elementary human right in international law since 1948. The tenets of fundamental human rights are enshrined in many treaties and documents. These are seen in a broad spectrum and cutting through a range of years. It includes the following: the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the 1960 Convention Against Discrimination in Education; the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the 1986 African Charter on Human and People’s Rights; the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child; the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs; the 2000 Education for All; 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the 2010 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergency Situations. This shows that there has been a deliberate effort all these years to promote human rights. This proves that the standpoint of “academic freedom should be understood as a right comprising a complex set of relationships between individual teachers and researchers, students, research units, faculties, university administrations, communities and governmental bodies. As academic freedom exists to protect and promote the entire academic practice, its aspects should be thought of in inextricable combination with its institutional aspects as well as with issues of state obligations.” [2]

Therefore, the crux of the issue under discussion is to assess students’ right to academic freedom in Ghana; narrowing it down to the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). The research questions which acted as a blueprint for the study are as follows: 1) What are the perceptions of students on the rights to academic freedoms at the University of Education, Winneba? and 2) How will students’ rights to academic freedom rights be promoted in the University of Education, Winneba?

Significantly, the main goal of assessing the human rights awareness of students and their rights to academic freedom in the University of Education Winneba was to: ascertain their level of awareness and their unhindered access to academic freedom. The outcome of the collected data would in turn be used to ascertain the importance of academic freedom as a catalyst for socio-economic development. The study was

delimited in terms of content to students' right to academic freedom and how it can be promoted at the University of Education, Winneba. It was further delimited to students in the Departments of Social Studies Education and the Department of Political Sciences Education in the Faculty of Social Sciences Education. It is further delimited in terms of jurisdiction or location to the University of Education, Winneba which is the Central Region of the Republic of Ghana.

2. Relevance and Application of Theoretical Perspective

Sociological theory was employed to understand the interplay of students' academic freedom and development in the academic world. Sociologists employ conceptual frameworks in theoretical perspectives to comprehend, clarify, and forecast human behaviour within the milieu of laid down systems and social structures like educational institutions of higher learning. Functionalism is one of the theoretical perspectives employed by researchers in this manner. Functionalism by definition views society as an interdependent part with a complex system in which each of the parts should be allowed to function in a gradual process to fulfil an ideal result of societal stability. This sociological standpoint is "rooted in the works of Emile Durkheim, perceives each segment of society as vital for its overall functioning much akin to the organs in a body" (Parsons, 2010) [6]. The author further maintains that "harmony is crucial, as per this paradigm, with every part, be it family, education, or law, contributing towards societal equilibrium. Disruptions to this balance, such as social changes or conflicts, are seen as temporary disturbances that society works to resolve." This depicts the processes whereby all the stakeholders, be it teachers, administrators, or students with an endless list of other important participants should be allowed unhindered access to operate to realise the academic goals in higher institutions.

In the views of Meyer, an example of functionalism "could be the educational system, which not only provides knowledge (manifest function) but also serves to integrate individuals into societal norms and expectations (latent function)." [7] On this tangent, education is viewed as very significant for sustaining and ensuring societal continuity through a deliberate planned societal stabilization process. The ideal process of ensuring students' right to academic freedom can be infused in the functionalism theoretical perspective whereby on a gradual process right of students to academic freedom is upheld in the universities. This will help lay down structures to work in peaceful co-existence.

Consequently, dysfunctional rudiments in societal or institutional structures also develop key issues for change which advertently, disturbs the stability of the institution or society. This suggests structural inefficiencies that disrupt society's stability should be tackled with all the needed effort desired to realise equilibrium in an anticipated societal outcome. It can be contended that the stability of the university environment or community can be interrupted when the rights of students to academic freedom are violated by the same educational stakeholders who are supposed to protect their rights within the institutional structures.

Assessing and promoting the culture of students' right to academic freedom is studied by employing this theory as the lens. Merton and Elwell, thus contended that "in recognizing and examining the dysfunctional aspect of the structures in educational institutions, we can explain the development and persistence of alternatives." [8] This research sits in Merton's views of structural functionalism. The

significance and the application of the theory is that structural functionalism, particularly, Merton's approach speaks into social order by studying unconventionality such as conflict and flaws in an institutional structure or society. The society is made of relevant institutions or structures of which educational institutions of higher learning is included. The social institutions or structures within the system provide mechanisms among the various organs which contribute to the interrelationship which predominantly and mutually support the other elements of the structures within the system. These mechanisms function to limit interruptions in the social structure and the social system as a whole. In the view of Elwell, "the mechanisms are not always effective; the development, growth and accumulation of tension, conflict and contradictions within the social structure and the society, often cause procedural change within the structure and the social system." [8] Merton's structural functionalism thus, recognises and analyses the dysfunctions in the social structure and the system at large and examines how the dysfunctions contribute to the instability of the society, how they can be reduced or managed in the in the social structure and the system as well as their contribution to distinct change in the system. That is why Frimpong et al., view conflicts as a threat to peace and national stability. [9] on this note, Bordoh et al., argue that the growing concern of education across the globe is to build students on the concepts of solving national problems. To achieve these societal aspirations, the education given to the learners should provide them with the relevant knowledge and skills to solve personal and societal problems [10, 11].

The theoretical perspective is relevant in a contemporary context of literature in academic freedom in the sense that as the society is viewed to be made up of relevant structures that contribute to spearhead development yet, are not utterly bereft of dysfunctionalities. Thoughtfully, the dysfunctionality and its impacts on the structure and the society is necessary to work in tandem towards finding peace and promoting stability. Understanding the functionalist perspective is necessary to finding lasting peace in institutions of higher learning in the area of students' right to academic freedom. We agree with the functionalists in identifying and examining the dysfunctional aspects of the institution that disrupt the stability of the society and perhaps develop alternatives. This analogy connects to the essence of stakeholders in education ever allowing but guiding students to access their right to academic freedom in an unhindered process.

3. Methodology

The research paper adopted a pragmatic research paradigm type of study. Using the mixed method approach with an explanatory sequential design, this study, therefore, sought to assess the level of human rights awareness and right to academic freedom at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. Explanatory sequential mixed method design "starts with the quantitative data collection and analysis of findings that have the priority to answer the questions of the research and then continues with a corresponding qualitative data collection and analysis." [12] The design helps interpret how the qualitative results help explain the initial quantitative results.

The population for the study was the level 400 students of UEW. The Krejcie and Morgan Table for sample size determination from a given population was employed to sample from a total of 12,622 final-year students. The ever-increasing requirement for a fair representation of statistical samples for ideal empirical research has created the need for an effective method of determining sample size. In addressing the

existing gap in academic research, “Krejcie and Morgan in 1970 came up with a table for determining sample size for a given population for easy reference.” [13] The table is constructed using the following formula for determining sample size. (Figure 1)

Formula for determining sample size

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)}$$

s = required sample size.

X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841).

N = the population size.

P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size).

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

Figure 1. Formula used in determining sample size.

It has then become easy to use the formula since the table of determining sample size has all the provisions a researcher requires to arrive at a definite sample size.

Knowing the population for the level 400 students, a total of 375 students were carefully selected hinging on the Krejcie and Morgan tabulation formula from the total population of 12,622 final year students for the quantitative data. Sixteen (16) students were purposively selected from the sample size of 375 from the eight colleges/faculties/schools of the university for the qualitative data. The criterion for inclusion in the study was solely hinged on core courses students in certain departments are tasked to offer that are laced in the context of teaching and learning with human rights. The cursor fell on two departments in the University of Education which are the Department for Social Studies Education and the Department for Political Science Education, both in the Faculty of Social Sciences Education. This came in handy to ascertain whether or not there is an appreciable level of human rights awareness as students. Questionnaires and semi-structured focus group discussion guides were the instruments for the collection of data employed. Standard-based students' academic rights and freedom questionnaires were adopted and adapted to merit the research setting. Four groups of four members were guided through a focus group discussion guide coined from the quantitative questionnaire for triangulation purposes. The quantitative data was triangulated with the qualitative data to check for consistency. Quantitative data analysis was done by using SPSS statistics analytical software. Inferential and descriptive statistics were employed for analysing the quantitative (questionnaire) data, whilst thematic / content analysis was applied for the qualitative (focus group discussion) data. As insiders, positionality issues and ethical considerations were professionally addressed so as not to influence the outcome of the research. According to Holmes, “positionality requires the researcher to acknowledge and allow their views, values, and beliefs about the research design, conduct, and output to be located” [14]. In the issue of positionality, we questioned ourselves and reflected throughout the research process and this helped us to do away with our biases and to maintain some critical distance from the issue we researched which is students' right to academic freedom and the promotion of same in the school setting. The needed issues carved around the research questions were infused into a constructed questionnaire to probe for the outcome in the quantitative data outcomes from the respondents and also, interacted with the research participants, and allowed their views to inform this work. Bell maintains that ethical considerations are research

practices that ensure clarity in terms of the nature of the agreement that the researcher has secured from the research participants [15].

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Response Rate

Three hundred and seventy-five (375) questionnaires were administered to the students, but three hundred and thirty-nine (339) were retrieved, representing a response rate of 90.4%. The study therefore realized a response rate of 90.4% which was valid to be used. The researcher could not attain a 100% response rate because a few of the students did not return the questionnaire after several attempts were made to retrieve them. Besides, some of the questionnaires returned were not answered while others had incomplete answers that were eliminated from the analysis. The researcher attempted to collect all the questionnaires sent out but was unable to get the questionnaires back. Nevertheless, this rate of data response was considered suitable based on the recommendation of Babbie that “a response rate of 50% is enough in a survey” [16] The response rate obtained in this study was therefore very good. The next section presents the demographic characteristics of the students.

4.2. Demographic Characteristics of Students

The demographic characteristics of the respondents such as the gender, age, educational attainment/ level, and departments of students were examined and the results are accessible in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Students.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Female	161	47.5
	Male	178	52.5
	Total	339	100.0
Age	21-30	322	95.0
	31-40	17	5.0
	Total	339	100.0
Level of Educational Attainment	Senior High School	119	35.1
	Post-Secondary / Teacher Training Certificate	220	64.9
	Total	339	100.0
Department of Student	Social Studies	197	58.1
	Political Science	142	41.9
	Total	339	100.0

Source: Fieldwork Data, September 2023

The demographic representations of the students in Table 1 disclosed that more male students participated in the study (n=178, 52.5%) as compared to their counterparts who were females (n=161, 47.5%). The information further showed that in terms of age, the majority of the students were between 21-30 years' bracket (n=322, 95.0%) than those who were between 31-40 years' age bracket (n=17, 5.0%). Besides, the study showed that more than half of the students had post-secondary/teacher training certificates (n=220, 64.9%) while the remaining students had senior high school (n=119, 35.1%) respectively. Finally, the statistics showed that

over half of the respondents or students for the quantitative study came from the Department of Social Studies Education (n=197, 58.1%) while the rest 142 students representing 41.9% came from the Department of Political Science Education.

The distribution of demographic characteristics of the students was crucial to the study because they showed that data were collected from students with varied backgrounds, which means making the data rich and devoid of bias. In this way, the authenticity of the data and their findings were enhanced. Furthermore, demographic factors like students' gender, age, educational attainment, and department of students assisted in determining the extent to which these factors influenced the human rights awareness and academic freedoms of the students to provide answers to the study's research questions.

4.3. Perceptions of Students' Right to Academic Freedom

This section is about students' perception of the right to academic freedoms and its essence of putting the concept on a pedestal for people to realise it for every student as a fundamental human right. This part of the special paper makes a clarion call for recognising the obligatory rights of students to academic freedom as a paramount constituent in the academic freedom milieu of the University of Education, Winneba. It was guided by research question two which is - What are the perceptions of students on the rights to academic freedoms at the University of Education, Winneba? This research question aimed to investigate the perception of students on the rights to academic freedoms at the University of Education, Winneba. Cherniavsky succinctly avows that "in this common-sense view, academic freedom is distinct from and yet fundamentally analogous to free speech rights: it is a principle that protects the free expression" [17]. In line with the literature on academic freedom, indicators were analysed and the findings are presented in this section.

It sought to confirm this situation by revealing the several sorts of rights that learners in academic institutions are eligible to enjoy in their daily activities both on-campus and off-campus. Besides, in this study, standard deviation and mean were considered to establish the perceived level of prevalence of the various indicators of academic freedoms such that $\text{mean} < 2.50$ indicated rarely occur, $2.50 \leq \text{mean} < 3.50$ showed often occur, and $\text{mean} \geq 3.50$ indicated very often occur. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Students Perception of Academic Freedoms.

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level of Prevalence
Student self-government where representatives are freely elected.	339	1	5	4.04	1.14	Very Often Occur
Unhindered freedom to form an association within any lawful purpose. The association can be linked to national organizations, e.g., political organizations.	339	1	5	4.03	1.24	Very Often Occur
Easy accessibility to advice from counsel from academic counsellors and student leaders.	339	1	5	3.98	1.21	Very Often Occur
Unhindered equal accessibility to standard activities devoid of discrimination on account of ability and class.	339	1	5	3.91	1.32	Very Often Occur

Access to a safe learning environment.	339	1	5	3.89	1.18	Very Often Occur
Freedom to access school grounds for activities and to engage with minority groups in political activity.	339	1	5	3.85	1.09	Very Often Occur
Easy access to classroom facilities – study chairs and tables	339	1	5	3.78	1.30	Very Often Occur
Fairly represented on designated administration-student or faculty-student committees.	339	1	5	3.76	1.19	Very Often Occur
Freedom to employ facilities of the institution such as rooms, bulletin boards and online sites.	339	1	5	3.59	1.33	Very Often Occur
Unhindered freedom of the press, like student newspapers and magazines, with free access to stuff of publications.	339	1	5	3.42	1.31	Often Occur
Freedom to give a hearing to outside speakers on any subject devoid of the unpopularity of the person.	339	1	5	3.32	1.28	Often Occur
Classroom fitted with needed gadgets for easy learning	339	1	5	3.31	1.33	Often Occur
The due process given to students (e.g., fair notice, and counsel) in instances of expulsion or suspension.	339	1	5	3.23	1.24	Often Occur
Freedom to access lecturers for redress.	339	1	5	3.20	1.33	Often Occur
Able to petition administration or faculty concerning issues of curricular and student life-related conditions.	339	1	5	3.20	1.22	Often Occur
Freedom to criticism by students of administration or faculty.	339	1	5	2.95	1.35	Often Occur
Easy access to students' examination records.	339	1	5	2.91	1.40	Often Occur
Overall Indicator of Prevalence of Academic Freedom	339	1	5	3.55	0.68	Very Often Occur

Source: Fieldwork Data, September 2023

Results in Table 2 revealed that all the rights to academic freedoms enumerated in the study very often occur among the students at the University of Education, Winneba. Specifically, the following academic freedoms very often occur where student self - government was rated highest (M=4.04, SD=1.14), as compared to freedom to form association (M=4.03, SD=1.24), access to counsel and advice (M=3.98, SD=1.21), unhindered equal accessibility to standard activities devoid from discrimination on account of ability and class (M=3.91, SD=1.32), access to safe learning environment (M=3.89, SD=1.18), freedom of activity on school grounds (M=3.85, SD=1.09), easy access to classroom facilities (M=3.78, SD=1.30), representation on appropriate faculty (M=3.76, SD=1.19), freedom to employ facilities of the institutions (M=3.59, SD=1.33), freedom of press (M=3.42, SD=1.31), freedom to hear (M=3.32, SD=1.28), classroom fitted with needed gadget for easy learning (M=3.31, SD=1.33), due process (M=3.23, SD=1.24), freedom to access lecturers for redress (M=3.20, SD=1.33), petition to faculty and administration (M=3.20, SD=1.22), freedom to criticism by students of administration or faculty

(M=2.95, SD=1.35) as well as easy access to students' examination records (M=2.91, SD=1.40).

The analysis further delved into the extent to which students' demographic characteristics (gender, age, educational attainment, department of students) influenced the perception of students on their perception of academic freedoms at the University of Education, Winneba. The influence of the gender of students on their perception of academic freedom was examined, and the results are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. *T-test Results for Demographic Variables and Academic Freedom.*

Variable	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Df	P-value
Nature of Academic Freedom	Male	3.59	0.68	-1.043	337	0.298
	Female	3.51	0.63			
	Age					
	21-30	3.54	0.66	-0.954	337	0.341
	31-40	3.70	0.64			
	Educ. Level					
	Snr. High	3.50	0.63	-1.120	337	0.264
	Tr. Training	3.58	0.67			
	Department					
	Soc. Studies	3.55	0.63	-0.021	337	0.098
	Pol. Science	3.55	0.69			

Source: Fieldwork Data, September 2023

The independent samples t-test results in Table 3 showed that even though male students enjoyed higher academic freedoms (M=3.59, SD=0.68) than their female counterparts (M=3.51, SD=0.63) there was no statistically significant difference in their gender [$t(337) = -1.043, p > 0.05$, 2-tailed]. Similarly, the results disclosed that students within the 31-40 years age bracket enjoyed higher academic freedoms (M=3.70, SD=0.64) than those within the 21-30 years age bracket (M=3.54, SD=0.54). Nevertheless, there was no statistically significant difference [$t(337) = -0.954, p > 0.05$, 2-tailed] between students' age and the nature of academic freedom enjoyed by the students. The findings further revealed that there was a difference in the mean scores for students with teacher training certificates (M=3.58, SD=0.67) and those with senior high certificates (M=3.50, SD=0.63) regarding their perception of the nature of academic freedom enjoyed which was found to be statistically not significant [$t(337) = -1.120, p > 0.05$, 2-tailed]. The results on the department of the students revealed that even though students in the Social Studies department shared a similar perception of the nature of academic freedom (M=3.55, SD=0.63) with their counterparts in Political Science (M=3.55, SD=0.69), the result was statistically not significant [$t(337) = -0.021, p > 0.05$, 2-tailed]. The findings suggested that gender, age, educational attainment as well and department of students did not statistically significantly influence their perception of the nature of academic freedom enjoyed at the University of Education, Winneba.

In a focus group discussion of four groups of four members each, students were guided to discuss the reasons why the overall indicator of the right to academic freedom was generally ranked "Very Often Occur." The guide for the focus group discussion was hinged on research question two which is - What are the perceptions of students on the rights to academic freedoms at the University of Education, Winneba? The following were some of the pertinent outcomes derived from their sayings. I

deduced from their discussion that students could sometimes express their views openly in the university setting without much threat. This deduction goes supports Bitter's assertion that, "the real threat is a complete lack of security, a complete lack of people feeling free to express themselves" [18]. The university sometimes respects the rights of students in the school setting because of the unhindered access to the right to academic freedom enjoyed by the students. It was realised that access to the right to academic freedom and human rights education would often result in a decrease in human rights violations at the University of Education, Winneba.

4.4. The Way Forward in Promoting Students' Right to Academic Freedom

This section was directed by research question two which is - *How will students' right to academic freedom be promoted in the University of Education, Winneba?* The purpose of this section was to analytically make provisions for the ideal foundations of the promotion of students' human rights awareness and right to academic freedom at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

Since it is highly resolved that exercising unhindered access to human rights in higher institutions of learning can help decrease social inequalities, empower the vulnerable and help each reach their full potential, effort should be made to give institutions of higher learning the liberty to exercise the right to academic freedom. This in line will empower the youth to do exploits as they will not be watched from the shoulders and be penalized in exercising their right to learning.

Achieving legitimate institutional academic aims and unhindered access to individual academic freedom should be the core mandate of the State. Universally, the State is duty-bound to guarantee academic freedom which should include: freedom of all kinds of spur-of-the-moment state of affairs. Academic freedom must exist in all meaningful manner through respecting, protecting, ensuring and promoting diverse rights in academic institutions centred on teaching and learning, research and dissemination of its outcomes freely with the support of public authorities which comprise the universities and all other major stakeholders. Failure by the public authorities in the area of higher institutions of teaching and learning to realise their obligations to expressive freedom is tantamount to a violation of the right to academic freedom. This becomes an issue when States renege on their duties. It is on this wavelength that Feldman and Brandeis (2020) posit that "What happens when those charged with protecting academic freedom in the university lack the authority to do so?" [19].

Academic freedom in education is a key to innovation. Students will do well in learning and research when they are unrestrictedly guided by the institutions of higher learning. This in turn will bring noteworthy economic achievements for a given country and help the diverse society to realise lasting peace leading to sustainable development. Free access to academic freedom in education is key to achieving all other human rights. This is attested by Libby, that "academic freedom changes life and opens opportunities to everyone for self-discovery" [20]. That is the reason why the right to academic freedom in education is something that need not be taken lightly. Efforts should be made to address issues that come in handy to address the challenges in realising the right to education and academic freedom.

Adaptability to the school setting is an issue that needs to be tackled swiftly. Individual schools and school systems must be designed suitably to serve the communities they are located. Furthermore, all efforts must be put in place to ensure

that all children get unhindered access to the education they are entitled to by removing anything that prevents access to quality education, such as repealing laws that cause discrimination and violate academic freedom; and preventing individuals or groups from stopping children from being educated.

5. Conclusions

There were varied perceptions of students' right to academic freedom. Academic freedoms very often occur where student self-government was rated highest as compared to freedom to form association, access to counsel and advice, unhindered equal accessibility to standard activities devoid of discrimination on account of ability and class, while freedom to access lecturers for redress, freedom to criticism by students of administration or faculty, as well as easy access to students' examination records in the least order of occurrences. This culminated in students' ability to be able to express their views openly in the university setting. The university very often respects the rights of students in the school setting because of the unhindered access to the right to academic freedom enjoyed by the students. Access to the right to academic freedom and human rights education would often result in a decrease in human rights violations at the University of Education, Winneba.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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