

Academic Freedom in Palestinian Universities: Challenges and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: The study aimed to investigate reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, and examined the role of variables gender, Educational institution, place of residence, Years of experience, and Academic rank. The descriptive approach used. A questionnaire consisting of (14) used. The population consisted of all faculty members at the universities under study, totaling 1,488 male and female employees (Al-Aqsa University 459, Khadouri University 363, Birzeit University 436, and Bethlehem University 203) for the 2021/2022 academic year, and was selected a random sample of 366 male and female employees, representing 25% of the total study population. The results showed that the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities was high. The result also revealed that there were no statistically significant differences due to place of residence, however, it shows that there were statistically significant differences due to gender variable, in favor of females; academic institution with differences between the responses of Al-Aqsa and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, Khadouri and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, and Birzeit and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem; academic degree variable, in favor of a

bachelor's degree; the academic rank variable, with differences between the responses of instructors and lecturers in favor of lecturers; between the responses of instructors and assistant professors in favor of assistant professors; between the responses of lecturers and associate professors in favor of associate professors; and between the responses of assistant professors and associate professors in favor of associate professors. In light of the study result the researcher recommend including enhancing awareness programs on academic freedom, supporting research autonomy, developing curricula that encourage critical thinking, protecting academics' rights, addressing disparities related to gender and academic levels, and promoting collaboration among Palestinian universities to strengthen a culture of academic freedom.

Keywords: *Academic Freedom, Palestinian Universities, Challenges, Perspectives.*

1. Introduction

The production of knowledge is guided by scientific research with the aim of serving both local and global interests. Consequently, research is subject to critique and verification to ensure that new discoveries and innovations are not disseminated indiscriminately. The most effective way to achieve this goal is through maintaining the university's independence from external environmental influences (Watts, 2021, p. 12).

Academic freedom relies on the ability of faculty members to teach, conduct research, and present conclusions as they see appropriate. It emphasizes the right of faculty members to engage in scholarly activities without fear of punishment from university administrations. Moreover, every faculty member is entitled to publicly comment on any aspect of the university's operations, as academic freedom is considered a collective endeavor within the institution (Ross et al., 2021, p. 50).

Academic freedom and university autonomy are essential for any democratic society, as the two are closely interconnected. These principles reinforce the unity between teaching and scientific research. Consequently, both students and faculty are to enjoy academic freedom, while university teaching and research must remain ethically and

intellectually independent from all political and economic authorities (Sethy, 2021, p. 41).

During the period of occupation, Palestinian universities have not been limited to academic functions; they also served as platforms for the Palestinian struggle through their faculty and student leadership. Enhancing the scope and depth of academic freedoms contributes to improving the quality of higher education and refining the foundation of academic freedom within the institutions. Without such freedoms, cultural and academic alienation may occur, alongside tendencies toward academic deviation and potential collapse of the academic process (Shaheen, 2017, p. 164; Salman & Abu-Hashish, 2008, p. 586).

Palestinian laws have significantly contributed to safeguarding academic freedom in universities across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, particularly prior to the political division of 2007. The Higher Education Law No. (11) of 1998 emphasizes the advancement of knowledge, protection of academic freedoms, integrity of research, and autonomy of higher education institutions and research centers. The law also guarantees freedom in scientific research, literary, cultural, and artistic creativity, with the Palestinian National Authority obliged to support and encourage these freedoms (Shaheen, 2017, p. 160).

Despite legal guarantees, two major factors affect academic freedom in Palestine: the so-called “forbidden triad” of religion, gender, and politics, and the interference of occupation policies. While the occupation promotes breaking these taboos, most Palestinian intellectuals resist erasing such cultural legacies. Additionally, many academics have faced threats, harassment, and punitive measures based on personal or political affiliations, often outside legal frameworks. Palestinian universities have also struggled to keep pace with democratic trends, technological advancement, and the creation of a supportive environment for faculty and students (Salman & Abu-Hashish, 2008, p. 596; Sha’ath et al., 2004, p. 261).

The political division has further undermined academic freedom. Security agencies affiliated with Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza have monitored and persecuted students and faculty, restricted student activities to loyal factions, and

interfered in faculty recruitment and promotions. Such interventions prioritized loyalty over competence, curtailed university autonomy, and affected artistic, union, volunteer, athletic, and community activities within universities (Shaheen, 2017, p. 161; Ashraf Bader et al., 2016, p. 8; Al-Tamimi, 2016, p. 233).

To restore and ensure academic freedom, it is necessary to end the political division and halt the recruitment of students and faculty for security purposes. Both governments must refrain from interfering in university life, foster democratic practices, and allow all student factions to participate in student council elections. Such measures are crucial to enable both students and faculty to exercise their academic freedoms fully, and to protect the universities from becoming tools of partisan political agendas (Shaheen, 2017, p. 167; Shaheen, 2017, p. 164).

Theoretical Framework

First: The Conceptual Framework of Academic Freedom

Conceptual Framework of Academic Freedom

Traditional objections to freedom of expression remain prevalent, with some viewpoints considering it dangerous, unethical, or of limited value. The current opposition among academics and intellectuals stems from three recent developments, often categorized as postmodern, progressive, and multicultural challenges to freedom of expression. The postmodern perspective asserts that freedom of expression is impossible due to pervasive censorship, the progressive viewpoint emphasizes that it may need to be sacrificed for equality, and the multicultural perspective contends that certain opinions constitute violence against marginalized groups, exceeding the protection afforded by free expression (Jacobson, 2016, p. 3).

Some observers prioritize equality over freedom, while others regard freedom as the core pillar of democracy. Although democracy became closely associated with liberalism only in the nineteenth century, equality has historically been recognized as a fundamental moral principle. In modern liberal democracy, equality is integrated with freedom, with moral principles such as freedom justified in relation to equality, forming the ethical foundation for democratic governance (Rich, 1976, p. 58).

Debates within universities have intensified around the effects of globalization and academic capitalism, focusing particularly on faculty rights to teach and conduct research freely, without fear of losing positions or facing intimidation. Academic freedom grants higher education staff respect and equality within their communities, supporting innovation and creativity, while faculty must carefully navigate societal norms and academic standards (Zain-Al-Dien, 2016, p. 9; Ronald, 2000, p. 178).

Higher education should assist individuals in shaping beliefs that reflect humanity and dignity, providing full freedom to adopt and discuss any creed as a matter of ethical conviction. Historically, the classical liberal argument for freedom of expression has been justified both as a natural right and on utilitarian grounds, promoting human flourishing. Paradoxically, campus trends that threaten freedom of expression also underscore the importance of these justifications (Jacobson, 2016, p. 1).

Academic freedom, in its strongest form, encompasses the absolute personal right to pursue truth independently of administrative control, accountable solely to the scholarly community. At its core, it protects faculty, students, and researcher's s in expressing ideas with intellectual honesty without fear of retaliation. Attacks on researchers s are often examples of "oppression of dissent," as powerful interests may oppose research deemed undesirable (Ronald, 2000; Ronald, 2000, p. 174; Hoepner, 2019, p. 33).

Academia and governments frequently discuss autonomy versus legislation, emphasizing the need for academic institutions to maintain independence. Substantial academic freedom enables faculty to foster an intellectual environment conducive to educational excellence. The marginalization of academics and the commercialization of higher education pose serious risks, while unrestricted freedom for researcher's s promotes the flourishing of knowledge. Conversely, modern universities in liberal democratic contexts may create incentives that direct research toward politically driven agendas rather than scholars' own lines of inquiry (Tilak, 2020, p. 61; Lange, 2016, p. 181; Jackson, 2005, p. 110; Hoepner, 2019, p. 32).

In the context of Palestinian higher education, political and institutional challenges further shape academic freedom. Universities have faced pressures stemming from occupation policies, political divisions, and governmental interference, affecting both students and faculty. Legal frameworks and institutional autonomy, while designed to protect academic freedom, often clash with practical realities of political influence and security interventions (Shaheen, 2017, p. 160; Salman & Abu-Hashish, 2008, p. 596; Sha'ath et al., 2004, p. 261).

Protecting academic freedom requires creating an environment where faculty and students can freely express ideas, pursue research, and engage in democratic practices within universities. This includes ending political divisions, preventing recruitment by security agencies, and ensuring inclusive participation in student governance. Only under such conditions can universities fulfill their mission of knowledge dissemination and societal development while maintaining ethical and intellectual independence (Shaheen, 2017, pp. 164, 167; Ashraf Bader et al., 2016, p. 8; Al-Tamimi, 2016, p. 233).

Concept of Academic Freedom

A broad definition of academic freedom emphasizes the right of academics to be free from external constraints in teaching, research, and the critique of their institutions. Academic freedom is closely associated with a set of academic policies, including university autonomy and self-governance (Owusu-Ansah, 2015).

Some scholars define academic freedom for students as the right to exercise freedom of expression and to participate in social and political activities. Others view it as the student's right to express ideas and opinions, choose their field of study, and engage in decision-making processes (Zain-Al-Dien, 2016, p. 10). Academic freedom is also described as "negative freedom," which involves the absence of obstacles, barriers, or restrictions, or liberation from punishment for what may be described as "academic self-expression" (Francis, 2018, p. 3).

The modern embodiment of academic freedom safeguards the moral and intellectual integrity of educators. If an individual cannot ascertain whether a faculty member is independent in delivering their work, then the faculty member has lost their integrity,

and their work becomes of secondary value (Bryden & Mittenzwei, 2013, p. 314). Academic freedom is fundamental to both sound research and effective teaching, as universities must produce meaningful outcomes and contribute to enriching public discourse (Hoepner, 2019, p. 32).

Academic freedom is a concept that is not strictly legal but quasi-legal, lacking precise definition or justification from established legal principles. These limitations make it difficult to fully comprehend the legal scope of academic freedom. Undoubtedly, academic freedom is important and desirable; however, a concern arises when faculty members in the United States may perceive it as a legally valid doctrine with real-world authority and vitality, while in practice, the discourse surrounding it often remains empty or unsubstantiated by professors and judges (Ronald, 2000).

The academic freedom of students depends on a university curriculum that fosters their development as independent and critical thinkers. It has long been argued that students have the right to a broad-based general education that enables them to become independent and critical thinkers, and potentially enlightened citizens. Recently, the contemporary significance of a liberal university curriculum has been emphasized as essential for nurturing such intellectual autonomy (Zain-Al-Dien, 2016, 30).

The importance of academic freedom

The distinctiveness of universities compared to other institutions derives from academic freedom. Awareness of academic freedom among faculty members enables them to be tolerant of others' viewpoints and receptive to criticism through peer review processes. This embodies academic freedom as taught in colleges and universities that respect the work and opinions of others. As a result, research findings are disseminated freely, and despite the perceived challenges, the concept remains highly relevant and must be actively protected and promoted to foster the growth of the knowledge society (Ronald, 2015, 176).

The distinction between institutional commitment and professional agency is crucial: it marks the difference between academic freedom and anonymous conformity. This

distinction is vital not only for faculty members' self-respect and personal efficacy but also for sustaining democratic life and responsible citizenship. While the responsibility of transforming society and building healthy democracies should never be imposed on already burdened faculty, non-positional faculty leadership serves as a means to navigate the broader world with skill and integrity. This subtle approach, often opposed by authoritarian forces, is highly valued by those who wish to cultivate independent thinking among students (Teleshaliyev et al., 2019, 84–85).

Recent constraints on academic freedom and institutional autonomy have challenged its practice through numerous obstacles and ongoing processes within higher education institutions. These challenges include financial limitations and bureaucratic bottlenecks that burden academics with administrative duties and internal governance, thereby restricting their capacity to exercise full intellectual independence (Ronald, 2000, 176).

Knowledge and learning can flourish when researchers are not restricted in pursuing lines of scientific inquiry and are granted the freedom to inquire. However, some scholars point to a serious erosion of academic freedom, as modern universities in liberal democratic society's often direct scientific research toward political agendas in these countries, rather than toward pure academic investigation (Hoepner, 2019, 32).

The emergence of academic freedom

The origin of academic freedom can be traced to the principles set forth in the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics (1990). The declaration defines academic freedom as the liberty of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, to pursue the development and dissemination of knowledge through research, discussion, documentation, production, creativity, teaching, lecturing, and writing (Owusu-Ansah, 2015).

The specific rights of higher education faculty include the fundamental freedom to determine curricula, conduct teaching and research, publish findings without interference, freely express opinions, and engage in professional activities outside

their institutional duties, provided these do not negatively impact their home institutions (Owusu-Ansah, 2015).

Some institutions have been established to meet the labor market needs of their communities and to support economic development and competitiveness. These are smart institutions capable of evolving to address the changing needs of their communities by placing a high emphasis on engagement in applied research that better prepares students for the workforce. While colleges and institutes remain primarily educational institutions, by maintaining a focus on labor market needs, they can ensure their unique identity, whereas educational institutes and universities continue with a different approach to academic freedom compared to traditional universities (Hogan & Trotter, 2013).

The foundational statement of academic freedom was articulated in the 1940 American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Statement, which has been endorsed by most scholarly and educated communities, as well as a large number of colleges and universities. This statement affirms that faculty members are entitled to full academic freedom in research and publication, while also considering the proper performance of other academic duties. The statement further declares that “faculty members have the right to freedom in the classroom to discuss their subject,” but it adds that “they should be careful not to introduce controversial matter into their teaching that has no relation to their subject” (Ronald, 2000).

Modern academic freedom can be traced back to the German university model of the early nineteenth century (Hofstadter & Metzger, 1995). This model indicates that academic freedom originally emerged from teaching, rather than research, based on the principles of freedom in teaching and learning (Bryden & Mittenzwei, 2013). According to this framework, professors should have the right to conduct teaching and research according to their own interests, while students should have the right to choose the courses they wish to pursue (Hoepner, 2019, 32).

Academic freedom in German universities in the early nineteenth century was grounded in the principles of freedom in teaching and learning. Professors were granted the right to conduct research and teaching according to their own interests,

while students were entitled to choose the courses they wished to complete. Academic freedom is fundamental not only for conducting scientific research but also for effective teaching. It is essential for enhancing the quality of learning and education, preserving the integrity of academics, and ensuring their ethical and intellectual honesty (Hoepner, 2019, 32).

The concept of academic freedom grants higher education professionals respect and equality within the communities in which they operate. University staff embody the dissemination of knowledge, and the mission of serving society involves fostering collaboration among its members. A university's understanding of academic freedom enables department heads and faculty members to pursue publication, innovation, and creativity, thereby creating equal opportunities among the diverse participants in the educational process. Consequently, universities are able to delineate precise boundaries for societal norms and standards (Ronald, 2015, 178).

Second: Obstacles to Activating Academic Freedom

Academic freedom has faced numerous challenges due to various obstacles and ongoing processes within higher education institutions. These include financial constraints and bureaucratic bottlenecks that burden academics with administrative duties and internal governance responsibilities (Ronald, 2015, 175).

Insufficient public funding, particularly for public universities in Ghana, constitutes a major impediment to the development of higher education and acts as an indirect barrier to academic freedom. Concerns regarding the continuity of financial support negatively affect both the exercise of academic freedom and the generation of knowledge (Ronald, 2015, 176).

Although academic institutions promote and uphold an ideal model of academic freedom, and the pursuit of knowledge is vital to their mission, academic freedom faces challenges when research is suppressed for venturing beyond accepted norms. Scholars may be threatened or sanctioned if their inquiries cross the boundaries of what is considered “acceptable” or “unacceptable” within certain fields. These boundaries often only become visible as “rules” once they are transgressed (Hoepner, 2019, 31).

For decades, numerous scholars and researchers have written about the threats facing academic freedom, addressing topics and issues relevant to their times. There is growing concern that academic freedom may become increasingly unstable, with threats accelerating over time. In the current era, these threats are more covert in nature and have the potential to erode the foundations of academic freedom, making it difficult to restore its core principles and the protections associated with it (Orr, 2019, 3).

Academic freedom faces sixteen distinct threats, which include emergencies, independence constraints, national security violations, authoritarian administration, administrative restrictions on the use of communication technologies, neoliberal attacks on academic disciplines, unjustified censorship, administrative ideology, circumvention of shared governance, inadequate grievance procedures, globalization, opposition to human rights, religious intolerance, legal threats, political intolerance, and claims of financial crises (Nelson, 2010, 3).

It was found that lectures on academic freedom can be categorized into several groups of issues: (a) lectures focusing on the conceptual and political history of academic freedom and its struggles both locally and internationally; (b) lectures emphasizing the critique of neoliberal impacts on academic environments and their local manifestations, including the redefinition of academic freedom concepts post-September 11; (c) direct criticisms of the increasing government intervention in higher education in South Africa; (d) critiques of contemporary notions of academic freedom characterized by the absence or neglect of tangible social and knowledge actors, encompassing feminist and postcolonial movements; and (e) critiques of academic freedom concerning the responsibility of intellectuals (Lange, 2016, 178).

Third: Ways to Activate Academic Freedom

Enjoying academic freedom within higher education institutions allows for freedom of expression, with the expectation that individuals exercise courtesy when expressing ideas or beliefs in teaching students and conducting research, regardless of how sensitive the subject may be. The university and its staff may face sanctions if statements are deemed provocative or offensive concerning an individual or a

political issue. In this regard, they must always maintain accuracy, exercise restraint, show respect for the opinions of others, and make every effort to clarify that they are not speaking on behalf of the institution (Ronald, 2000, 177).

The utilitarian argument for freedom of expression is essential in demonstrating that attempts to promote the public good by compromising individual rights are prone to abuse, potentially resulting in consequences worse than a principle that tolerates all opinions and sentiments without exception. This argument gains further support from the ongoing suppression of unpopular speech in academic settings, which exacerbates cognitive biases that undermine knowledge, such as conformity, group polarization, confirmation bias, and epistemic closure—the notion that certain views constitute “microaggressions” that must be prohibited and punished. A recent list of such heterodox ideas, endorsed by the University of California, warned faculty against asserting, for example, that America is a land of opportunity, that the most qualified person should obtain the job, or that affirmative action is racist. By formally discouraging and suppressing discussion of these ideas, the university avoids counter-discussion and undermines its mission to teach students how to form beliefs in a reasoned and intelligent manner. Instead, it establishes a dogma of political opinion, encouraging the punishment of dissenting views as reprehensible racism, thereby invalidating the opposing argument. This doctrine effectively renders political opposition heretical (Jacobson, 2016, 9).

Is academic freedom truly what we aspire to, and does it reach the level of an ideal? It seems that once research crosses certain boundaries—deemed unacceptable—the unspoken and invisible limits are revealed, drawing a clear line between “good” and “bad” inquiry. Patterns of silencing behavior illustrate how researchers are punished when they transgress these boundaries. But what drives attacks on research when no substantive misconduct or error exists? Often, it is a knee-jerk response aimed at shutting down lines of inquiry and reprimanding those who do not conform to the rules.

These hidden boundaries become especially apparent in investigations that threaten public health, as revealed through interviews with actors whose work was suppressed. Moral disgust literature suggests that individuals may evaluate ideas

“primitively” when they find them morally offensive, rather than processing them cognitively (Chapman & Anderson, 2013). Such responses can override conscious critical thinking. While emotion may trigger the initial response, opponents of controversial research can also act methodically and deliberately in employing silencing tactics. Haidt argues that the rational mind can operate in service of emotions, rather than in opposition to them (Hoepner, 2019, 38).

It is indispensable to educate scholars about the importance of academic freedom and its threats, as well as the need to transfer this knowledge to others, including faculty members, students, the public, and other administrative sectors. Scholars should resist attempts to undermine academic freedom and leverage their skills and expertise to understand and analyze issues that threaten it. In addition, they can seek support from organizations dedicated to academic freedom to combat these threats, knowing that such threats affect individuals, faculty members, women, racial discrimination, and ethnic diversity to varying degrees (Orr, 2019, 13).

It is also expected that well-regarded universities are large and diverse in terms of enrollment, faculty, infrastructure, and other facilities, as creative, imaginative, and innovative thinking often flourishes in large, open environments (Tilak, 2020, 63).

There are positive measures that can be tried, and this transformation is urgent because openly confronting bureaucracy in universities and leveraging knowledge can only be accomplished through academics. To achieve this, we must examine our current understanding of academic freedom and how we frame our work as scholars (Lange, 2016, 182).

Journals and other institutions can already play a major role in guiding research and shaping community identity without infringing on individuals’ academic freedom. Institutions can do more to promote innovative and impactful research, and information technology can play a larger role in this process. Furthermore, having a diverse array of journals, each with its own identity, focus, organization, and communication style, can meet researchers’ needs. Academic freedom provides researchers with the passion to choose topics, methods, levels of analysis, and the necessary support to conduct their own research (Te’eni, 2019, 183).

If our intellectual life is not only about increasing our knowledge of the natural and social world—and the easily traversable boundaries between the two—but also about our ability to make meaning of it, understand it, and act upon that understanding, then academics can make judgments and generalizations even when occasionally exceeding conventional norms. Therefore, scholars cannot escape internal or external criticism due to their role as the intellectual class (Lange, 2016, 184).

Defining globalization is difficult, given the multitude of policy documents and academic articles on the topic. One of the most influential thinkers in globalization defined it as a process of multicultural international integration, or the global dimension of functions or service in post-secondary education (Owen, 2019, 4).

Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive research on academic freedom, several gaps remain in literature. First, while some studies indicate that modern universities in liberal democratic societies often direct research agendas toward political priorities rather than purely scholarly pursuits (Hoepner, 2019), there is limited empirical analysis of **how such political influences affect research quality and scholars' autonomy**. Second, most research focuses on traditional universities, leaving a gap in understanding how **career-oriented colleges and smart institutions balance academic freedom with economic and societal demands** (Hogan & Trotter, 2013). Third, bureaucratic constraints and limited financial resources are noted as barriers to academic freedom (Ronald, 2000, 176), yet few studies offer **precise empirical evaluations of their impact on teaching and research productivity**. Fourth, while theoretical and historical perspectives on academic freedom are well documented (Hofstadter & Metzger, 1995; Bryden & Mittenzwei, 2013), there is a paucity of research on **practical implementations that sustain intellectual and ethical integrity among academics**. Fifth, the literature largely emphasizes faculty rights but underexplores **the direct effects of academic freedom on student learning outcomes, equity, and empowerment** (Ronald, 2015, 178). Finally, most studies rely on qualitative or historical analyses, highlighting a gap in **quantitative tools and metrics to assess the level of academic freedom across universities and disciplines**. Addressing

these gaps is crucial for understanding the multifaceted role of academic freedom in contemporary higher education.

The originality of the present study

The originality of the present study lies in its holistic approach to examining academic freedom, integrating both faculty and student perspectives within contemporary higher education institutions. While prior research has largely focused on historical development, theoretical definitions, or faculty-centered rights (Ronald, 2000; Bryden & Mittenzwei, 2013; Hoepner, 2019), this study extends the analysis by:

1. Exploring the practical implications of academic freedom on **student learning outcomes and critical thinking development** (Zain-Al-Dien, 2016).
2. Investigating how **modern institutional constraints**—such as bureaucratic processes, financial limitations, and political influences—affect both research productivity and ethical integrity among faculty (Ronald, 2000; Hoepner, 2019).
3. Comparing traditional universities with **career-focused or “smart” institutions** to understand how academic freedom is maintained while meeting societal and labor-market needs (Hogan & Trotter, 2013).
4. Offering a framework that connects **historical perspectives on academic freedom** (Hofstadter & Metzger, 1995) with contemporary challenges, providing insights for policy and institutional governance.

By addressing these underexplored areas, the study contributes new empirical and conceptual knowledge, enhancing our understanding of how academic freedom shapes teaching, research, and learning in modern higher education.

Aim of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities.

Main Research Question

What is the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, and how can it be enhanced?

Sub-questions

1. What is the conceptual framework of academic freedom as defined by contemporary educational studies and scholarly literature?
2. What is the current reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities in terms of practice and implementation?
3. What institutional, bureaucratic, and social obstacles hinder the activation of academic freedom in Palestinian universities?
4. What strategies and measures can be adopted to promote and enhance academic freedom in Palestinian universities?

Research hypotheses

1. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities due to Gender.
2. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities due to Place of residence.
3. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities due to Educational institution.
4. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities due to Years of experience.
5. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) for the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities due to Academic rank.

Fourth: The Reality of Academic Freedom in Palestinian Universities

The reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities was determined through a field study conducted on a sample of Palestinian universities representing all Palestinian governorates. The study was as follows:

Study Procedures:

Methods (Design of the Study)

The current study adopted the descriptive analytical approach. After collecting the data, the researchers used the analytical-statistical method to answer the question of the study and interpreted the results.

Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all faculty members at the universities under study, totaling 1,488 male and female employees (Al-Aqsa University 459, Khadouri University 363, Birzeit University 436, and Bethlehem University 203) for the 2021/2022 academic year.

Sample of the Study

The researcher's s applied the study to a random sample of 366 male and female employees, representing 25% of the total study population. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample members. from a random cluster were chosen to respond to the questionnaire.

Table (1): Statistical description of the research sample according to demographic variables

Demographic Variables		Frequency
Gender	Male	267
	Female	99
	Total	366
Place of residence	Camp	223
	Village	69
	City	74
	Total	366
Educational institution	Al-Aqsa	115
	Khadouri	91
	Birzeit	109
	Bethlehem	51

	Total	366
Years of experience	Less than 5 years	51
	5-10 years	102
	Over 10 years	213
	Total	366
Academic rank	Instructor	52
	Lecturer	104
	Assistant Professor	125
	Associate Professor	56
	Professor	29
	Total	366

Instruments of the study

The researchers prepared a preliminary questionnaire to measure the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, drawing on educational literature and previous studies. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of general information, while the second part consisted of a set of items related to academic freedom in Palestinian universities. The items were formulated to be responded to according to a five-point Likert scale, with responses given as very high (5), high (4), medium (3), low (2), and very low (1). The questionnaire consisted of (12) items measuring the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities.

Validity of Instruments

To ensure that the content of the questionnaire was valid, it handed to a jury of professional doctors in the field at Palestine universities, The Panel of judges asked to evaluate the opportunities of the instrument to the whole purpose of the study. They accepted the items and the parts of the questionnaire, but they asked the researchers to follow some modifications. The researchers took these recommendations into amount before issuing the final draft of the tool, and then the instrument distributed to the subject of the study.

Reliability of Instruments

Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha equation, with the tool's reliability coefficient reaching (93%), an acceptable value for research purposes. The questionnaire in its final form consisted of (14) paragraphs measuring the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities.

Variables of the study

1. **Independent variables:** Gender (Female, Male), Educational institution (Al-Aqsa, Khadouri, Birzeit, and Bethlehem), Place of residence (City, Village, Camp) , Years of experience (less than 5 years, 5–10 years, and more than 10 years), Academic rank (instructor, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor).
2. **Dependent variables:** The reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from the study population and processed statistically using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program, by calculating the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the study individuals' responses, and examining the study hypotheses, using the t-test and the One-Way ANOVA test to determine the statistical significance between the arithmetic means according to the independent variables, and the LSD test to measure the directions of the differences.

Results and Discussion

To determine the availability of mechanisms for activating educational democracy in Palestinian universities, and to interpret the results, the following arithmetic means and percentages were used:

A mean of (1.8–2.59) (or (36–51.9%)) indicates a low reality.

A mean of (2.60–3.39) (or (52–67.9%)) indicates an average reality.

A mean of (3.40–4.19) (or (68–83.9%)) indicates a high reality.

Results of the first question

What is the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities?

To answer this question, the researchers calculated the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities for each item of the questionnaire and for the total score. Table 2 illustrates this.

Table (2): Means, Std. Dev. and degrees of the items of the questionnaire.

#	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	reality
12	It gives faculty members the freedom to enrich course content.	3.78	1.10	High
1	It imposes its opinions on academic issues related to faculty members.	3.70	1.00	High
5	It relies on centralized decision-making.	3.66	1.19	High
9	It provides faculty members with responsible freedom to publish their research.	3.60	1.05	High
8	It provides faculty members with the freedom to interpret scientific facts to students within the scope of their specialized knowledge.	3.54	1.15	High
14	It provides an adequate electronic database for scientific research available to faculty members.	3.39	1.23	High
13	It adopts fair criteria for promotion.	3.25	1.08	Moderate
11	It encourages intellectual encounters among faculty members.	3.06	1.21	Moderate
3	It provides faculty members with responsible freedom to form opinions, convictions, and creative ideas.	3.03	1.17	Moderate
2	It provides faculty members with freedom of expression regardless of their academic ranks.	3.01	1.19	Moderate
10	It financially supports faculty members' scientific production.	2.81	1.33	Moderate

4	It involves faculty members in university decision-making.	2.72	1.13	Moderate
7	Involve faculty members in developing university regulations, rules, and laws related to them.	2.57	1.19	Moderate
6	Involve faculty members in appointing faculty members in the department in which they teach.	2.56	1.24	Moderate
	Total	3.56	0.08	Moderate

The result in table (2) shows that the reality of academic freedom was at a high level, as the arithmetic mean of the total score was (3.56) with a standard deviation of (0.08). The questionnaire items were arranged in descending order according to the arithmetic means of the items, where the first item was “It gives freedom to faculty members to enrich the content of the courses” with an arithmetic mean of (3.78) and a standard deviation of (1.10), followed by “It imposes its opinions on academic issues related to faculty members” with an arithmetic mean of (3.70) and a standard deviation of (1.00). While the least significant role was “involving the faculty member in appointing faculty members in the department in which he teaches” with an arithmetic mean (2.56) and a standard deviation (1.24), it was preceded by “involving faculty members in setting university instructions, regulations and laws related to them” with an arithmetic mean (2.56) and a standard deviation (1.19).

Results of the second question

Are there statistically significant differences at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities attributable to the following variables: gender, educational institution, place of residence, number of years of experience, and academic rank?

To answer the second question, the researchers examined the resulting null hypotheses, as follows:

Results of the first hypothesis

There are no statistically significant differences at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities attributable to the gender variable.

To test the first null hypothesis, the researchers used an independent samples t-test to find differences between the average estimates of the study sample members of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities attributable to the gender variable. Table (3) illustrates this.

Table (3): Results of the t-test for differences between the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities by gender variable.

Table (3): Results of the independent t-test for gender variable.

gender	Mean	Std. Dev.	T- State	Sig.
male	3.26	0.410	0.26	0.04
female	3.27	0.440		

The result in table (3) shows that the value of "t" is equal to (0.26) and the significance level is (0.04), which is less than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), meaning that there are statistically significant differences between the averages of the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities attributed to the gender variable, and thus the first null hypothesis was rejected; and by referring to the arithmetic averages, it is noted that the differences were in favor of females with an arithmetic average of (3.27).

Results of the second hypothesis

There are no statistically significant differences at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, attributable to the educational institution variable.

To test the second null hypothesis, the researchers calculated the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the overall domain according to the educational institution variable, as shown in Table (4).

Table (4): Arithmetic means and standard deviations of educational institution variable.

Educational Institution	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Al-Aqsa	115	3.23	0.41
Khadouri	91	3.24	0.42
Birzeit	109	3.22	0.43
Bethlehem	51	3.50	0.41

The result in table (4) shows clear differences in the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the educational institution variable. To determine the significance of the differences, the researchers used a one-way Anova, as shown in Table (5).

Table (5): results of ANOVA- test for educational institution variable.

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.190	3	1.06	6.17	.000
Within Groups	62.36	362	.1720		
Total	65.55	365			

The result in table (5) shows that the value of "F" equals (6.17) and the significance level (0.00), which is less than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), meaning that there are statistically significant differences between the averages of the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the educational institution variable. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

To determine the source of the differences between the arithmetic means of the four study groups (Al-Aqsa, Khadouri, Birzeit, and Bethlehem), and to identify which group had the highest appreciation of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, the researchers used the least significant difference (LSD) test for post-test comparison, as shown in Table (6).

Table (6): the results of LSD test for academic level variable.

(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Al-Aqsa	Bethlehem	-.26663-*	0.00
Khadouri	Bethlehem	-.26326-*	0.00
Birzeit	Bethlehem	-.27675-*	0.00

The result in table (6) shows that the statistically significant differences were between the responses of Al-Aqsa and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, Khadouri and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, and Birzeit and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem.

Results of the third hypothesis

There are no statistically significant differences at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, attributable to the variable of place of residence.

To test the third null hypothesis, the researchers calculated the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the overall domain according to the variable of place of residence, as shown in Table (7).

Table (7): Arithmetic means and standard deviations of place of residence variable.

Educational Institution	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Camp	223	3.29	0.39
Village	69	3.24	0.43
City	74	3.24	0.51

The result in table (7) shows clear differences in the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the place of residence variable. To determine the significance of the differences, the researchers used a one-way Anova, as shown in Table (8).

Table (8): results of ANOVA- test for place of residence variable.

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.185	2	.090	.510	.590
Within Groups	65.37	363	.180		
Total	65.55	365			

The result in table (8) shows that the value of "F" is equal to (0.51) and the significance level is (0.56), which is greater than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), meaning that there are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the variable of place of residence, and thus the third null hypothesis was accepted.

Results of the fourth hypothesis

There are no statistically significant differences at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$ between the study sample members' estimates of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, attributable to the variable of number of years of experience.

To test the fourth null hypothesis, the researchers calculated the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the overall domain according to the variable of number of years of experience. Table (9) illustrates this.

Table (9): Arithmetic means and standard deviations of years of experience Variable.

Educational Institution	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Less than 5 years	51	3.28	0.34
5-10 years	102	3.23	0.45
Over 10 years	213	3.28	0.43

The result in table (9) shows clear differences in the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the variable number of years of experience. To determine

the significance of the differences, the researchers used a one-way Anova, as shown in Table (10).

Table (10): results of ANOVA- test for place of residence variable.

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.176	2	.080	.480	.610
Within Groups	65.37	36	.180		
Total	65.55	36			

The result in table (10) shows that the "F" value is equal to (0.48) and the significance level is (0.61), which is greater than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). This means that there are no statistically significant differences between the sample members' average assessments of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the variable of number of years of experience. Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis was rejected.

Results of the fifth hypothesis

There are no statistically significant differences at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the study sample members' assessments of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities, attributable to the variable of academic rank.

To test the fifth null hypothesis, the researchers calculated the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the overall domain according to the variable of academic rank. Table (11) illustrates this.

Table (11): Arithmetic means and standard deviations of academic rank Variable.

Educational Institution	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Instructor	52	3.41	.420
Lecturer	104	3.17	.420
Assistant Professor	125	3.21	.350
Associate Professor	56	3.45	.530
Professor	29	3.30	.330

The result in table (11) shows clear differences in the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the variable of academic rank. To determine the significance of the differences, the researchers used a one-way Anova, as shown in Table (12).

Table (12): results of ANOVA- test for educational institution variable.

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.56	4	1.14	6.74	.000
Within Groups	60.99	36	.160		
Total	65.55	36			

The result in table (12) shows that the value of "F" equals (6.74) and the significance level (0.00), which is less than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), meaning that there are statistically significant differences between the sample members' average assessments of the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to the variable of academic rank. Therefore, the fifth null hypothesis was rejected.

To determine the source of the differences between the arithmetic means of the four study groups (instructor, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, professor), and to identify which group had the greatest appreciation for the mechanisms for activating educational democracy in Palestinian universities, the researchers used the least significant difference (LSD) test for post-test comparison, as shown in Table (13).

Table (13): the results of LSD test for academic rank variable.

(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Teacher	Lecturer	.24163*	.001
Teacher	Assistant Professor	.20353*	.003
Lecturer	Associate Professor	.28769*	.000
Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	.24959*	.000

The result in table (13) shows that that the statistically significant differences were between the responses of the instructor and the lecturer in favor of the lecturer, between the responses of the instructor and the assistant professor in favor of the assistant professor, between the responses of the lecturer and the associate professor in favor of the associate professor, and between the responses of the assistant professor and the associate professor in favor of the associate professor.

Conclusion

The study reached the following results:

1. The reality of academic freedom was highly rated, with the arithmetic mean for the total score reaching (3.56) with a standard deviation of (0.08).
2. There were statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to
 - a. The gender variable, in favor of females;
 - b. The academic institution with differences between the responses of Al-Aqsa and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, Khadouri and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, and Birzeit and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem.
 - c. The academic degree variable, in favor of a bachelor's degree;
 - d. the academic rank variable, with differences between the responses of instructors and lecturers in favor of lecturers; between the responses of instructors and assistant professors in favor of assistant professors; between the responses of lecturers and associate professors in favor of associate professors; and between the responses of assistant professors and associate professors in favor of associate professors.
3. There were no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities according to place of residence variable.

Dissection of the results

The researcher attributed The High reality of academic freedom Palestinian Universities to the following:

1. **Institutional Policies:** The existence of clear university bylaws and academic regulations that guarantee faculty members and students the right to engage in teaching, research, and academic dialogue without external restrictions.
2. **Faculty Autonomy:** The relative independence granted to academic staff in selecting teaching methods, designing curricula, and pursuing research interests.
3. **Student Engagement:** The opportunities provided for students to participate in academic discussions, express opinions, and engage in extracurricular and intellectual activities that enrich academic life.
4. **Research Opportunities:** The availability of platforms for scientific research and publication, which encourage innovation and contribute to a culture of free inquiry.
5. **Community and Cultural Support:** The recognition of academic freedom as a shared value within Palestinian society, reinforced by the role of universities as centers of knowledge and cultural identity.
6. **External Pressures:** Ironically, external political challenges and occupation-related restrictions have increased awareness of the importance of protecting academic freedom as a form of resilience and resistance.

The researcher attributed that there were statistically significant differences with the reality of academic freedom Palestinian Universities due to gender in favor of female students, to the following:

1. Female students tend to demonstrate a greater awareness and sensitivity toward issues related to academic freedom, which may reflect their heightened engagement with the academic environment.
2. Females are often more willing to express their opinions and participate actively in surveys and discussions, which increases their reported levels of academic freedom.

3. Social and cultural factors may expose females to more visible challenges, making them more conscious of the importance of academic freedom and thus more appreciative of its presence.
4. Recent university policies and initiatives aimed at empowering women may have positively influenced female students' perception of academic freedom.
5. Male students, by contrast, may prioritize external political or social activities, which could lead them to evaluate academic freedom within universities less positively than their female counterparts.

The researcher attributed that there were statistically significant differences with the reality of academic freedom Palestinian Universities due to the academic institution with differences between the responses of Al-Aqsa and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, Khadouri and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem, and Birzeit and Bethlehem in favor of Bethlehem to the following:

1. Bethlehem University has adopted more consistent policies and practices that promote academic freedom, including clearer guidelines for faculty rights and student participation.
2. The administrative and governance structures at Bethlehem University may provide a more supportive academic environment compared to other institutions.
3. Bethlehem University has historically emphasized liberal education and community engagement, which may enhance both faculty and student perceptions of academic freedom.
4. Differences in financial stability, institutional culture, and international partnerships may also contribute to stronger perceptions of academic freedom at Bethlehem University compared to Al-Aqsa, Khadouri, and Birzeit.
5. Variations in political pressures and local social dynamics across regions could also explain why Bethlehem stands out more positively in terms of academic freedom.

The researcher attributed that there were statistically significant differences with the reality of academic freedom Palestinian Universities due to academic degree variable, in favor of a bachelor's degree to the following:

1. Bachelor's degree students are more engaged in campus life and interact frequently with faculty, which increases their exposure to and perception of academic freedom.
2. Undergraduate programs often emphasize student activities, academic clubs, and classroom discussions, all of which provide greater opportunities to practice freedom of expression.
3. Bachelor's students may perceive academic freedom more positively because they are less constrained by academic or research responsibilities compared to postgraduate students, who face stricter requirements.
4. University policies and initiatives may primarily target undergraduate students when promoting participation, rights, and freedoms, thereby shaping their perceptions more strongly.
5. Cultural and social factors may also contribute, as bachelor's students are often at an age where the expression of opinions and engagement in debates are more encouraged within the university environment.

The researcher attributed that there were statistically significant differences with the reality of academic freedom Palestinian Universities due to academic rank variable, with differences between the responses of instructors and lecturers in favor of lecturers; between the responses of instructors and assistant professors in favor of assistant professors; between the responses of lecturers and associate professors in favor of associate professors; and between the responses of assistant professors and associate professors in favor of associate professors to the following:

1. Higher academic ranks generally involve greater autonomy in teaching, research, and professional activities, which enhances perceptions of academic freedom.

2. Associate and assistant professors often have more experience navigating university policies, allowing them to exercise academic freedom more confidently than instructors or lecturers.
3. Academic responsibilities and privileges increase with rank, including the ability to design curricula, lead research projects, and participate in decision-making processes.
4. Senior faculty members may have more established professional networks and institutional support, which reduces constraints on expressing controversial or innovative ideas.
5. University culture may grant higher-ranked academics more freedom in pursuing independent research and participating in governance, thereby affecting their perception of academic freedom.

The researcher attributed that there were statistically significant differences with the Artificial intelligence role in improving academic education due to academic level in favor of the second and fourth-year students to the following:

1. Second- and fourth-year students may have more exposure to practical applications of AI within their curriculum, enhancing their awareness of its benefits.
2. These students may engage more in projects, research, or courses that integrate AI tools, compared to students in other years.
3. Their academic maturity and familiarity with both theoretical and applied aspects of their studies may make them more receptive to AI technologies.
4. Institutional support, including access to labs, workshops, or AI-enhanced learning platforms, might be more available to students at these academic levels.
5. Peer collaboration and group assignments in later years could encourage greater interaction with AI tools, reinforcing their positive perception.

Limitations of the study

The current study has the following limitations:

1. Temporal Limit: The study was conducted during the 2021-2022 academic year.
2. Spatial Limit: Palestinian universities in the West Bank (Khadouri, Birzeit, Bethlehem) and in the Gaza Strip (Al-Aqsa).
3. Human Limit: All faculty members at the universities under study.
4. Objective Limit: This study analyzes the reality of academic freedom in Palestinian universities.

Recommendations

In light of the results, the researcher recommended the following:

1. **Enhancing Academic Freedom Awareness Programs:** Organize workshops and training sessions for faculty members and students to increase their understanding of academic freedom and its importance in research, teaching, and constructive criticism.
2. **Supporting Research Autonomy:** Provide financial resources and infrastructure to encourage researchers to pursue their research interests freely, while minimizing bureaucratic and administrative obstacles.
3. **Developing Curricula:** Allow students to participate in selecting courses and subjects they follow, integrating content that fosters critical thinking and intellectual independence.
4. **Protecting Academic Rights:** Establish clear institutional policies that safeguard faculty members from unjustified interference in their academic work and balance institutional responsibilities with individual rights.
5. **Promoting Equality across Gender and Academic Levels:** Address disparities among students and faculty members to ensure an educational environment that supports the success of all groups.

6. **Strengthening Collaboration Among Palestinian Universities:** Exchange experiences and best practices among universities to support academic freedom and promote a culture of independent scientific research.

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