

Student Academic Freedom in Egypt: Perceptions of University Education Students

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Abstract The purpose of the present study was to investigate student academic freedom from the university education students' point of view in Egypt. This study adopted a survey research design in which the questionnaire was the main data collection instrument. The study participants comprised 800 university education students in Egypt. The result of the study reveals that student academic freedom in Egypt is at moderate level. In general, findings show that student academic freedom is not sorely lacking in the Egyptian universities. Additionally, the study found that there were statistically significant differences in the level of student academic freedom among participants that can be attributed to gender, type of the college and type of the university. The study concludes that many students in Egypt experience some doubt about their academic freedom, creating an uncertainty and instability that presents new challenges for the university administration in Egypt. Serious work still remains in Egyptian universities about a student academic freedom that might help broaden Egyptian students' understandings of the world and their own circumstances.

Keywords Academic Freedom, Student Academic Freedom, University Education, Students' Perceptions

1. Introduction

There has been a substantial body of discussion, debate, and research about of academic freedom within the university education. That discussion has intensified, especially as it relates to the effects of globalization and academic capitalism on the university. The scholarly debate about academic freedom has focused almost exclusively on the rights of academic faculty to teach and enquire without fear of losing their jobs or being intimidated [1]. The contemporary relevance of academic freedom is reinforced through the activities of a variety of lobby groups and professional associations concerned with its protection and

promotion such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Canadian Association of University Teachers, Scholars at Risk, Academics for Academic Freedom (AFAF) and the Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards (CAFAS).

Concerns with respect to tenure and freedom of expression of faculty are central to the functioning of academic life. But amid much of the contemporary debate about academic freedom the fact that it also applies to students has been long overlooked [2]. Academic freedom is not only about the freedom of scholars, but also about students, as they are scholars too. They are members of a community of scholars. This is an integral part of the university tradition, where scholarship is defined in terms of the pursuit of knowledge and understanding as a common goal, necessarily involving both students and teachers [3]. Both are, in essence, learners.

Much of the literature, however, reinforces a one-dimensional understanding of academic freedom by making only fleeting reference to students or sometimes overlooking their importance altogether. Academic freedom has been reinforced by the protection given to academics, not students [4].

It is worth noting that student academic freedom is treated as merely the by-product of the protection of the freedom of academics. The argument here is that it is only when faculty are free that they are in the position to expose students to the range of ideas and arguments that will, in turn, help them to find their own voice. While the 1915 AAUP statement on academic freedom made reference to student academic freedom, it took it as read that the focus of the report was the academic freedom of the teacher [5]. Where students were mentioned in the statement it is by reference to how their freedom is inhibited or facilitated by that of the teacher.

As a result, the claim to student academic freedom has rarely been discussed with clarity, consistency or adequacy [6]. This is partly due to the fact that although students are formally members of a community of scholars they essentially occupy a position of dependence in that they are subject to the authority of their teachers and institutions in respect to grading and the certification of their achievement

through the award of degrees. Although rarely stated in a contemporary context, an implicit, but patronizing, assumption is that, as novices or scholars in training, students do not possess the knowledge necessary to make sufficiently informed judgements [7].

2. Review of Literature

In general, this article seeks to elaborate the claim to student academic freedom more broadly. It has specifically investigated student academic freedom in Egyptian university education. Therefore, four categories of literature were reviewed: student academic freedom - its definition and domains; developing student academic freedom in terms of rights; the politicization debate and student academic freedom in Egypt.

2.1. Student Academic Freedom: Definition and Domains

Providing a fixed definition of academic freedom is difficult because no single definition can cover all the complexities associated with the concept or adequately account for the many cultural contexts where it is practiced. Some scholars tend to define a student academic freedom as student's right to exercise freedom of expression and to participate in social and political activities [8, 9]. On the other hand, other scholars tend to define it as a student's right to express his/her ideas and opinions, to choose the study field and to participate in decision making [10].

Most Western scholars would agree that these conditions are essential to provide students with the climate they need to learn. Hence, university students are citizens and members of a learned profession. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free. They should be responsible, accurate and should respect the opinion of others [11].

Concerning Egyptian universities, the concept of student academic freedom is recognized by international organizations like UNESCO as a guarantor of other fundamental human rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the society or system in which they learn, freedom in selecting study field, and freedom in decision-making. All members of learning process in higher education learning should have the right to fulfill their functions without discrimination of any kind and without fear of repression by the state or any other source [12].

For the purpose of this paper, the author has developed dimensions of a student academic freedom that draws upon various documents. These dimensions include four basic elements that must be considered. First, students are entitled to full freedom in expressing their opinions and ideas [13-15]. The second element is the freedom of students in selecting a study field and content of subjects [16-18]. The third element is the right of students to participate in decision making [19-22]. The last element is that students are entitled to full

freedom in research and in the publication of the results [23-26].

2.2. Developing Student Academic Freedom in Terms of Rights

Developing student academic freedom in terms of rights is important since it implies a proactive stance. This can be done through seeking to develop the independence of students as thinkers and learners to their fullest extent. Assuming they support academic freedom, this means that universities, and their faculty, have an obligation to promote student capability. This, ultimately, is the most effective means of ensuring student academic freedom is protected.

Student capability depends on education and this presupposes the right to gain access to a university education. This implies campaigning for access to higher education as an affordable right for all, regardless of formal and informal historical restrictions such as religion and social class. Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to an education and that higher education should be accessible on the basis of merit. Participation rates in higher education have risen rapidly in a large number of developed and developing economies since the late twentieth century. Globally the proportion of young people going on to tertiary education has risen from under one in five in 2000 to more than one in four in 2007 with women now outnumbering men [27].

However, there are though stark regional differences with just 6% of Africans entering tertiary education compared with more than 70% in North America and Europe [28]. Even in developed country contexts barriers to access to higher education represent a threat to students gaining the opportunity to develop their full capabilities. Hence, it is important to recognize that mass access to higher education is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Critically, access to a higher education is now being viewed as a right rather than a privilege.

Moreover, student academic freedom depends on a university curriculum that enhances the capability of students to develop as independent and critical thinkers. It has long been argued that students have a right to a general or liberal education in the shape of a university curriculum which is sufficiently broad to enable someone to become an independent and critical thinker as well as, perhaps, play an informed role as a citizen. The case for the contemporary relevance of a liberal undergraduate curriculum has been recently made. MacIntyre [29] argues that undergraduate education needs to be seen as something that has its own ends which are distinctive from, and not simply a prologue for, graduate or professional education.

Another argument is that the pace of change in the modern world makes specific skill and knowledge sets rapidly outmoded. Only a broad, liberal education, that develops human qualities and dispositions rather than 'generic skills', can adequately prepare students for an essentially unknown future [30]. In other words, a broad curriculum is more likely

to ‘future-proof’ graduates. Conscientious faculty in vocational areas of the curriculum have long understood the importance of a curriculum which seeks to strike a balance between teaching time-sensitive employment-related skills and a broader theoretical and contextual knowledge base which is future oriented. Those who teach visual communication courses, for example, are conscious of the risks of focusing too heavily on software skills. The rapid pace of change in their industry means that what is current now may soon be redundant [31].

Thinking of the curriculum in this way would imply the provision of sufficient opportunities for students to add breadth to their specialist studies via elective courses. This does not mean that conventional course-based degrees devoid of electives cannot produce breadth of learning but that general education via electives can add a further dimension to the development of students. In its original sense, *Lernfreiheit* implied that students should be free to roam between institutions of higher education, pursue whichever courses took their fancy, and attend as they wished and not to be subjected to any form of test except for a final examination [32].

Modern higher education is very far from this idealized portrait of the student as an unencumbered travelling scholar. Many courses in higher education are highly specialized and offer students tightly restricted opportunities to take electives outside a relatively narrowly defined curriculum. Modern courses have been packaged into ‘modules’ or ‘units’ which allow few opportunities for students to develop their critical thinking or evaluative skills.

While AACU’s statement about academic freedom focuses on the politicization issue [33], there is recognition of the importance of a liberal education in helping students to develop the skills of critical thinking and enquiry which enable them to develop their own perspectives on issues that face modern society. Hence, there is an implicit understanding here that liberal education is a key positive right that facilitates student academic freedom. The modern curriculum of higher education though is tending to restrict the extent to which students are able to develop a broadly-based understanding of knowledge which would make them more informed as citizens and, hence, able to exercise their rights as fully as they might do.

2.3. The Politicization Debate

The debate of student academic freedom has normally centered on the so-called politicization of the curriculum. The assumption here is that being “free to learn” means being free from indoctrination [34]. In the United States, the debate about student academic freedom has focused almost exclusively on the contention of neo-conservative lobbyists and critics that students are being politicized by radical university teachers. This cause is championed by David Horowitz and his Students for Academic Freedom campaign, which argues that a left leaning professoriate is trying to radicalize university students by indoctrinating them with a

set of ‘liberal’ values [35].

It is claimed by Horowitz’s campaigning organization, Students for Academic Freedom, that there is a lack of ‘balance’ in the teaching of controversial subjects and this creates a classroom atmosphere which is intolerant to students with dissenting views. The effect of this process, according to Horowitz, is that students are prevented from developing their own independent thinking or might, to some extent, self-censor. The Student Bill of Rights, produced by Horowitz, focuses exclusively on concerns with respect to ‘indoctrination’ of students as a violation of their freedoms and the potential impact of related issues, such as unfair assessment, which might affect a student who expresses opinions contrary to those held by their professor [36].

Despite the concerns raised by Horowitz, the 1915 statement on academic freedom issued by the AAUP does include a clear instruction that students in their formative years of undergraduate education should be safeguarded from unbalanced approaches [37]. Horowitz’ campaign though has led to the AAUP issuing a response entitled *Freedom in the Classroom*. AAUPs 2007 statement affirms that it is a teachers’ right to test out their opinion and beliefs on controversial issues in the classroom without regard to the extent to which the views expressed represent opinions based on untested assertions [38].

Here, a counter-argument is that faculty should distinguish between audiences. Students (especially undergraduates) should be distinguished from professional or disciplinary peers. In other words, the testing out of controversial or new ideas should be directed at peers, and in the context of a scholastic debate, with equals. In an earlier incarnation of the controversy about the politicization of the curriculum, Weber [39] distinguished between opportunities to profess views in the classroom and to peers and talked of the ‘obligations of self-restraint’ on the university teacher.

Moreover, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) have issued a defensive statement about student academic freedom in response to Horowitz’s campaign [40]. In common with that issued by the AAUP, it focuses on discussing student academic freedom almost exclusively in terms of the politicization debate.

2.4. Student Academic Freedom in Egypt

In Egypt, Huff [41] points out, two frames must be used to examine student academic freedom. The first is the political framework and factors that emerge from authoritarian state officials. The second is the religious and cultural framework that is built upon religious traditions. The key issue here is that these frameworks are strongly integrated and reinforce each other, and this relationship plays a significant role in shaping the understandings of political, cultural, and educational issues such as academic freedom.

Student academic freedom in Egyptian context faces pressures similar to those in any country that remains under authoritarian rule. Kraince [42] states that the major obstacle

to building respect for academic freedom in Arab societies is the persistence of authoritarian culture. For example, some authoritarian regimes build restrictions into academic work, hampering and discouraging student academic freedom [43]. This is evident in Egypt and all Arab universities when heavy-handed and security-oriented administrations often interfere in student academic life in areas such as student admissions, student research, student conduct and choice of curricular materials. Certainly, the degree of authoritarian government control greatly varies among Arab countries. However, the key problem is that this type of top down control of discourse limits the free-flowing marketplace of ideas, where viewpoints are distinguished on the basis of their substance, persuasive power and/or utility [44].

The second framework that shapes student academic freedom is related to religion and traditions, with which Egyptian education has long been intertwined. Thus, religion plays a significant role in constructing the parameters of student academic freedom. Taha-Thomure [45] states that constants in Egyptian and Arab society, that is the basic foundational ideas of religion, society and tradition, are influential in engineering the width and breadth and depth of freedoms permitted. In societies where general freedom is not allowed, we usually find that traditions and beliefs take a preeminent role in defining what kinds of knowledge are or are not accepted. Societal beliefs and traditions can even affect the special freedom that might be allowed in universities.

These traditions and beliefs play a huge role in shaping academia. It is clear that the role of the student in Egyptian university is substantially different from that of one in a western university because the religious life and interpretations take preeminence over secular, academic studies [46].

The common element within these frameworks that shape academics in Egypt as well as the Arab world is the issue of power. In this context, knowledge has a utilitarian function of providing legitimacy for the political and religious establishments; thus it is no longer a tool to initiate change but rather an instrument that supports and comforts the established political order [47]. Those who hold power and see oppositional knowledge as a threat to their legitimacy are unlikely to tolerate discourse that questions the purpose of their existence, raises questions regarding government, or challenges the privileged knowledge of overarching narratives. One can easily infer how those who hold power set the boundaries on student academic freedom and, in turn, on the knowledge transmitted in academia [48].

University students in the scientific disciplines can learn and conduct research with minimal restrictions but those in fields such as the social sciences and humanities encounter more restrictions on their learning, expressing and writing. University students in disciplines that are fertile for controversy attempt to provide “objective” historical accounts and “soft analyses” of critical issues. Those students, who think, discuss and express new ideas that

challenge the status quo and power structures in authoritarian cultures are particularly vulnerable to any lack of freedom of speech in a society, because existing entrenched interests will resist the challenge posed by new ideas [49].

The Present Study

The scholarly debate about academic freedom, inside and outside Arab republic of Egypt has focused heavily on the rights of academic faculty [50-58]. Student academic freedom is rarely discussed and is normally confined to debates [59-62]. The present study, which takes place across university students in Egypt, helps to address this gap in the research by addressing all aspects of student academic freedom from the literature and exploring these in more detail with data collected in Egyptian universities. The four key aspects of the student academic freedom that have been identified for inclusion in the present study are freedom of expression, freedom in decision-making, freedom in selecting study field and freedom in conducting research.

Therefore, it is important to determine the level of student academic freedom in all aspects in Egyptian universities. To achieve the study objective, the following research questions were developed:

- (1) To what extent do the university education students exercise academic freedom?
- (2) Are there any statistically significant differences in the level of student academic freedom among participants that can be attributed to gender?
- (3) Are there any statistically significant differences in the level of student academic freedom among participants that can be attributed to type of the college?
- (4) Are there any statistically significant differences in the level of student academic freedom among participants that can be attributed to type of the university?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The current study was quantitative in which sample survey research design was used. The researcher chose this method because survey research is useful in describing the characteristics of a large population; very large samples are feasible, making the results statistically significant even when analyzing multiple variables.

3.2. Participants

The population in this study consisted of all university students in Egypt during the academic year of 2014. The participants of the study comprised 800 university students in Egypt. Table 1 shows characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Variable	Levels of variable	N	%
Gender	Male	315	39.375
	Female	485	60.625
Type of the college	Practical	333	41.625
	Theoretic	467	58.375
Type of the university	Public	485	60.625
	Private	315	39.375
Total		800	100%

3.3. Instrumentation

A questionnaire, developed by the researcher after an extensive review of the literature, was the main instrument used for the collection of data for the study. It was divided into two major sections. Section one has required demographics information about the university students in Egypt. The other section included 44 close-ended items, which were divided into four domains (freedom of expression, freedom in decision-making, freedom in selecting study field and freedom in conducting research). These items were rated on five-point Likert-type scales (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The questionnaire was given to a panel of 15 university professors in Egypt from different educational specializations including educational foundations, curriculum and instruction, and evaluation and measurement. The purpose of this was to check the clarity of items, its relevance to the domain and the scale as a whole. All comments and points of view were taken into consideration and some items were modified, changed, or deleted after a deep discussion with each one of the college teachers. After putting the reviewers' remarks, the final version consisted of 40 items distributed over the four domains. The construct validity was measured in which a group of 50 university students, apart from the study sample, participated in the pilot study. The correlation coefficient was calculated among the domains. The values of Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from 0.71 to 0.82. All the coefficients were significant at ($\alpha = 0.05$). Moreover, reliability for the current questionnaire was assessed using the 50 university students in Egypt. The Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.91. The reliability in all domains and as the whole scale was high.

3.4. Data Analysis

The researcher distributed the questionnaire to public primary and private university students enrolled at the higher education in Egypt after obtaining permission from Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations. In addition, T-test was used to find out whether the differences in the mean scores of university students in groups were statistically significant ($\alpha \leq .05$). In order to understand the results of the current study, it was important to set specific cut points to interpret the participants' total

scores. It should be noted that the researcher used the response scale of each item that ranged from 1 to 5 to determine these cut points according to the following manner: (1- 2.33 = low), from (2.34 - 3.67 = moderate), and from (3.68 - 5.00 = high level).

4. Results and Discussion

Data that obtained from questionnaire were presented, discussed and analyzed using SPSS software package for educational studies in order to answer the research questions. This is done under four themes as follows:

4.1. Research Question 1

To answer the first research question, the means and standard deviations were calculated for the total scores of each domain and were ranked according to their mean values.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the university education students' views

Domain	M	SD	Rank
Freedom in selecting study field	3.70	0.16	1
Freedom in decision-making	3.54	0.31	2
Freedom in conducting research	3.38	0.18	3
Freedom of expression	3.04	0.19	4
Total	3.50	0.32	-

As shown in the Table 2, the student academic freedom in Egypt is at moderate level from the university education students' point of view (mean = 3.50 and standard deviation = 0.32). Though the total score of the four domains is in moderate level, the domain of "freedom in selecting study field" has achieved slightly better results with mean of (3.70) and standard deviation (0.16). Therefore, the respondents' decisions show that the level of "freedom in selecting study field" is high. On the other hand, the domain of "freedom of expression" has the lowest mean of (3.04) with standard deviation (0.19).

Although it is clear that student academic freedom is not solely lacking in the Egyptian universities as indicated in the Table 2, students are academically affected by cues about two schools of thought; namely the schism the more liberally minded Islamic rationalist school of thought that encouraged critical thinking and active dissent, and the Islamic traditionalist school that dominated religious teaching has left the Arab legacy that favour revelation over reason [63].

This finding is consistent with research showing that the level of student academic freedom at university context in Kuwait was (3.18); which is at a moderate level [64]. On the other hand, this finding ontradiacts other research showing that the students' ability to speak freely in academia remains at risk and there are many restrictions on student academic freedom that persist across the Arab region [65, 66]. Table 3 reveals the means and standard deviation for the domain items of "freedom in selecting study field".

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the domain items of “freedom in selecting study field”.

No.	Item	M	SD	Rank
11	The university students select their specialization according to their desires and abilities.	4.90	0.30	1
5	The university provides support and guidance to students about the necessary knowledge to specialize.	4.82	0.53	2
2	The university students participate in the presentation of the teaching material within the lecture.	4.31	0.46	3
16	The university students are provided with methods that enable them to acquire knowledge.	4.11	0.35	4
31	The university students are involved in determining the extra-curricular activities of courses.	4.03	0.43	5
26	The faculty teacher gives students the opportunity to discuss aspects of the curriculum they learn.	3.92	0.36	6
21	The faculty teacher engages students when choosing the course topics.	3.78	0.80	7
36	The university provides sufficient opportunities for students to choose courses.	3.28	0.75	8
39	The university students' suggestions are taken into consideration when determining the dates of the examinations.	2.03	0.48	9
14	The university students can move from one major to another according to certain regulations.	1.90	0.49	10
Total		3.70	16	-

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the domain items of “freedom in decision-making”.

No.	Item	M	SD	Rank
6	The university allows students to join NGOs.	4.67	0.63	1
20	The university provides opportunities for students to participate in various seminars.	4.62	0.66	2
10	The university students are involved in the management of various activities.	4.62	0.68	3
15	The university allows students to set many committees that managed by them.	4.52	0.66	4
30	The university encourages students to participate in overseas conferences.	4.01	0.44	5
25	The university provides students adequate opportunities for making some of their own college decisions.	3.29	0.68	6
1	The university takes students suggestions into consideration in solving their own problems.	3.26	0.69	7
35	The university students are involved in the process of courses description.	3.24	0.62	8
9	The university students' views regarding developing educational process are appreciated.	1.95	0.48	9
34	The university gives opportunities to set students' unions.	1.22	0.47	10
Total		3.54	0.31	-

In Table 3, the respondents' decisions show that the domain of “freedom in selecting study field” is high. It has the highest mean of (3.70) with standard deviation (0.16). The highest mean value was item (11) which states “the university students select their specialization according to their desires and abilities” (mean = 4.90 with standard deviation = 0.30). On the other hand, item (14) “the university students can move from one major to another according to certain regulations” received the lowest mean of (1.90) with standard deviation (0.49). In general, this finding shows that participants have positive views for the domain of “freedom in selecting study field”.

This finding may be due to the fact that the university education in Egypt plays a vital role in providing students with a good foundation of knowledge for their future profession. As to the curriculum, there are also alternative and free choice studies, which can be selected from a variety of subjects. They can then be fitted into one's studies according to availability and study schedule [67]. This finding contradicts other research showing that student freedom in selecting study field is still stands as a marginal right at the Arab university Education [68, 69]. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviation for the domain items of “freedom in decision-making”.

For the domain of “freedom in decision-making”, the

highest mean value was item (6) “the university allows students to join Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)”, (mean = 4.67 with standard deviation = 0.63). On contrary, item (34) which states “the university gives opportunities to set students' unions” received the least mean of (1.22) with standard deviation (0.47). In general, the responses showed that student freedom in decision-making in Egypt is in moderate level (mean = 3.54 with standard deviation = 0.31).

This finding may be due to the fact that the conceptual base for the student freedom in decision-making in Egyptian universities is under-formed and often draws from learning theories. Student engagement in decision-making has only recently been subject to significant analysis in Egyptian universities, particularly in relation to those areas of engagement that sit outside learning and teaching regimes though student participation in university decision-making processes that impact on the student experience is rapidly becoming a dominant concept in the management and organization of university education [70, 71]. This finding is congruent with research showing that student freedom in decision-making is in moderate level (mean = 3.25 with standard deviation = 0.811) [72]. Table 5 reveals the means and standard deviation for the domain items of “freedom in conducting research”.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the domain items of “freedom in conducting research”.

No.	Item	M	SD	Rank
13	The faculty teacher encourages contact among students in conducting research.	4.83	0.48	1
7	The faculty teacher encourages students to work in teams when conducting research.	4.76	0.59	2
3	The faculty teacher calls students to adhere to ethical norms in research.	3.94	0.49	3
37	The university students choose objectively their research topics.	3.92	0.45	4
22	The university students address vital and important issues when conducting their articles.	3.80	0.59	5
28	The faculty teacher allows students to share their research related to the course.	3.77	0.60	6
32	The faculty teacher gives students opportunities to defend the result of their articles.	2.91	0.41	7
17	The faculty teacher encourages student to publish their articles.	2.86	0.43	8
24	The university students' articles are supported by their university.	1.97	0.40	9
19	The faculty teacher gives student enough time to complete research reports.	1.13	0.34	10
Total		3.38	0.18	-

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the domain items of “freedom of expression”.

No.	Item	M	SD	Rank
18	The faculty teacher allows students to present course material in front of their colleagues.	4.84	0.48	1
40	The faculty teacher gives students the freedom for accessing to knowledge without restrictions.	4.80	0.57	2
12	The faculty teacher allows students to ask questions related to the lecture subject.	3.93	0.40	3
4	The faculty teacher gives students the freedom to express their convictions without hindrance.	3.93	0.40	4
23	The faculty teacher encourages dialogue and discussion among students during the lecture.	3.93	0.40	5
27	The faculty teacher presents cultural issues for discussion with the students.	3.28	0.75	6
38	The faculty teacher provides students the freedom to speak in different social issues relevant to the course contents.	3.21	0.42	7
33	The faculty teacher gives students the opportunity to express their views on political issues related to the subject.	1.95	0.48	8
29	The faculty teacher accepts students' suggestions about his teaching methods.	1.32	0.53	9
8	The faculty teacher accepts students' criticism.	1.26	0.51	10
Total		3.04	0.19	-

It can be noted from Table 5 that the domain of “freedom in conducting research” receives a moderate mean value of (3.38) with standard deviation (0.18). Item (13) which report “the faculty teacher encourages contact among students in conducting research” has the highest mean value of (4.83) with standard deviation (0.48). Whereas, item (19) “the faculty teacher gives student enough time to complete research reports” got the lowest mean of (1.13) with standard deviation (0.34).

This study supports the notion that academic freedom is essential to the university's research activities. An open instructional environment is essential for the protection of the rights of faculty to teach and of the students' freedom to learn. Therefore, student freedom in research and creativity is fundamental to the advancement of truth. In return, faculty and students conducting research or other creative/scholarly activity as part of the academic enterprise do so in a responsible and ethical manner [73].

Legally, the Egyptian universities are committed to

freedom of thought and inquiry for both faculty and students. Hence, this commitment ensures that student have the freedom to learn, conduct research, exercise creativity, and publish in their professional capacity without fear of reprisals. However, many university students in Arab societies are still feeling restraint. This finding is consistent with research showing while Arab universities are legally committed to student freedom of conducting research; many university students in Arab societies are still feeling restraint [74, 75]. Table 6 shows the means and standard deviation for the domain items of “freedom of expression”.

In Table 6, the respondents' decisions show that the domain of “freedom of expression” is in moderate level. It has the lowest mean of (3.04) with standard deviation (0.19). The highest mean value was item (18) which states “the faculty teacher allows students to present course material in front of their colleagues” (mean = 4.84 with standard deviation = 0.48). On the other hand, item (8) “the faculty teacher accepts students' criticism” received the lowest mean

of (1.26) with standard deviation (0.51). This finding is congruent with research showing that student freedom of expression at Arab universities is restricted. In other words, the Arab university did not take any practical steps to ensure that freedom of speech is secured for its students. The majority of Arab universities still prohibit speaking in political issues [76, 77].

The present study supports the notion that freedom of expression is a vital aspect in students' lives, which they expect to be respected. A lot of research has been done on

how important free speech is and how nearly all speech and expression should remain unrestricted, especially during the college years. One study explored the extreme side of the issue, concluding that everyone should be entitled to complete freedom of speech, no matter how racist, sexist, fascist, homophobic, hateful or violent that speech may be [78]. While other research may not have been as liberal in their conclusions, many conclude that speech should not be restricted unless it incites violence or causes harm to others [79].

4.2. Research Question 2

To answer the second research question, the mean and standard deviation were used for the four domains and the overall scale due to gender. In order to investigate the significance of gender over the four dimensions, T- test was conducted in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics and T- test for gender.

Domain	Gender	Sample	M	SD	(T) value	DF	Sig.
Freedom in selectin study field	Male	315	3.69	0.15	1.27	798	0.20
	Female	485	3.71	0.17			
Freedom in decision-making	Male	315	3.55	0.26	1.91	798	0.05
	Female	485	3.51	0.34			
Freedom in conducting research	Male	315	3.40	0.18	1.96	798	0.05
	Female	485	3.37	0.18			
Freedom of expression	Male	315	3.04	0.20	0.61	798	0.53
	Female	485	3.05	0.19			
Total	Male	315	3.46	0.10	1.18	798	0.23
	Female	485	3.47	0.15			

As seen from Table 7, there were statistically significant differences between males and females regarding two domains of student academic freedom in favor of males. These two domains are “freedom in conducting research” and “freedom of expression”. This means that male students in Egyptian universities have more positive views towards their academic freedom than the females in these two domains. In other words, the female students in Egyptian universities are more complaint towards their academic rights than the males. The reason for this may be due to the fact that males in Egyptian universities are more courageous than females who are more sensitive to matters concerning their rights [80]. It may be also due to the fact that the sample of the research is not subjected to the same experiences, though they are studying in the same universities. While the males, in the Arab Muslim societies, are more daring and courage to claim their rights, the females has been subject to restrictions of their freedoms and right [81]. It is worth of note to show that restrictions related to women do not come from Islam itself, but are part of local cultural traditions within Arab societies [82]. This finding contradicts other research showing no gender difference at (a = 0.05) emerged in “freedom in conducting research” and “freedom of expression” [83].

On the other hand, it can be noted from Table 7 that there were no gender difference emerged in the two other domains of academic freedom. These two domains are “freedom in selecting study field” and “freedom in decision-making”. This means that male and female university students in Egyptian universities have the same perceptions and attitudes towards their freedom in selecting study and in decision-making. This finding is consistent with research showing that gender differences in student academic freedom do not persist in selecting study field and in decision-making [84].

Table 8. Descriptive statistics and T- test for type of the college.

Domain	Type of College	Sample	M	SD	(T) value	DF	Sig.
Freedom in selecting study field	Practical	333	3.70	0.17	0.07	798	0.94
	Theoretic	467	3.70	0.15			
Freedom in decision-making	Practical	333	3.53	0.36	0.58	798	0.56
	Theoretic	467	3.54	0.27			
Freedom in conducting research	Practical	333	3.38	0.20	0.31	798	0.75
	Theoretic	467	3.38	0.16			
Freedom of expression	Practical	333	3.02	0.18	0.96	798	0.01
	Theoretic	467	3.06	0.20			
Total	Practical	333	3.46	0.14	0.96	798	0.33
	Theoretic	467	3.47	0.12			

Table 9. Descriptive statistics and T- test for type of the university.

Domain	type of university	Sample	M	SD	(T) value	DF	Sig.
Freedom in selecting study field	Public	485	3.73	0.16	5.40	798	0.00
	Private	315	3.66	0.15			
Freedom in decision-making	Public	485	3.59	0.29	0.06	798	0.00
	Private	315	3.45	0.32			
Freedom in conducting research	Public	485	3.41	0.17	2.80	798	0.00
	Private	315	3.37	0.18			
Freedom of expression	Public	485	3.06	0.18	3.31	798	0.00
	Private	315	3.02	0.21			
Total	Public	485	3.49	0.13	5.47	798	0.00
	Private	315	3.43	0.12			

4.3. Research Question 3

The mean and standard deviation were used for the four domains and the overall scale due to type of the college in order to answer the third research question. In order to investigate the significance of type of the college over the four domains, T- test was conducted in Table 8.

Table 8 shows that there were statistically significant between practical and theoretical colleges regarding the domain of “freedom of expression domain” in student academic freedom in favor of theoretical colleges. This means that theoretical colleges’ students in Egypt have more positive views towards their academic freedom than the practical colleges’ students. It could be argued that this result is logic and expected because of the difference in academic characteristics of each college from the other in terms of aims, courses, contents, topics, teaching methods, activities, and evaluation. Theoretical colleges’ curriculum usually encourages dialogue and discussion. In other words, theoretical colleges give students the opportunity to express their views. On contrary, practical colleges’ curriculum is based on a pure practical study in which debate is not recommended. Practical colleges have been formed upon scientific facts that may be relatively constant, as opposed to theoretical colleges in which theories are refutable. This finding is congruent with research showing that there were significant differences by type of the college for the domain

of “freedom of expression” about student academic freedom in favor of theoretical faculties [85, 86].

Furthermore, it can be seen from Table 8 that no significant difference is seen between practical and theoretical faculties regarding three domains of student academic freedom. These three domains are “freedom in selecting study field, freedom in decision-making and freedom in conducting research”. This means that practical and theoretical faculties’ students in Egyptian universities have the same perceptions and attitudes towards their academic freedom. This finding contradicts my belief, and the possible explanation to this is that most colleges in Egypt are designed to offer students a broad theoretical and practical background. This finding contradicts other research showing that type of the college differences about student academic freedom persist at university education in in favor of theoretical faculties [87, 88].

4.4. Research Question 4

To answer the fourth research question, the mean and standard deviation were used for the four domains and the overall scale due to type of the university. In order to investigate the significance of type of the university over the four dimensions, T- test was conducted in Table 9.

As can be seen in Table 9, there were statistically significant differences between public and private

universities regarding the four domains of student academic freedom in favor of the public universities. This means that students in public universities in Egypt have more positive views towards their academic freedom than the private universities' students.

This finding is expected as public universities are not legally allowed to restrict their students' students' speech, selection of study field, decision-making or conducting research. Moreover, private universities may choose to restrict their students' academic freedom in ways that they see fit [89]. This finding is consistent with research showing that type of the university differences regarding student academic freedom persist at university education in favor of public universities [90, 91].

Limitations of the Study

A limitation to the present study concerns the questionnaire developed and used by the researcher; therefore, the interpretation of the results depends on the validity and reliability of the scale. Furthermore, the study was applied to a group of universities in Egypt which limits the generalization of results.

5. Conclusions

Student academic freedom is rarely discussed in the Egyptian universities. As Egypt is the largest Arab country and has played a central role in the Arab world politics in past and modern times, examining academic freedom in Egyptian universities cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and political milieu of Arab society. The rapid pace of development requires Egypt to face several aspects of democratic societies through institutions like Egypt Intelligent Village, and Zewail City of Science and Technology.

It can be concluded from the present study that there are still many university students in Egypt experiencing some doubt about their academic freedom, creating an uncertainty and instability that presents new challenges for the university administration in Egypt.

It could be argued that for student academic freedom to flourish in Egypt there must be social, political and cultural reform. This emphasizes the point that when discussing academic freedom, one must consider the cultural, social and political system simultaneously. Al-Missned [92] raises this issue quite well and is worth quoting at length.

We cannot talk about a culture of quality without talking about massive political and social reforms throughout the Arab world, and indeed the world in general. It is useless to "play" at being free in schools while society squelches this freedom. Actually, it can even lead to more instability. Recent studies have shown, internationally, that extremist and violent organizations are heavily populated with educated, politically disenfranchised youth, whose education taught them to expect the right to

participate politically, but their environments refuted this expectation.

Al-Missned [93] makes the important point that if a culture is not fully committed to academic freedom, then the university should not put forth a false sense of academic freedom: doing so is not only useless but in fact harmful to students who are not given the critical thinking skills to explore alternative or even opposing views.

Nevertheless, serious work still remains to persuade Arab governments that restricting intellectual freedom is tantamount to depriving society of its capacity to generate the meaningful, innovative and productive knowledge that is a precondition for survival and success in the 21st century [94]. This work is essential in Egypt and the Arab world because student academic freedom might help broaden Egyptian and Arab students' understandings of the world and their own circumstances.

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