

## Understanding Academic Freedom in Addis Ababa University: The Views of the Academics

Demoze Degefa  
demozed2008@gmail.com

Department of Educational Planning and Management  
Addis Ababa University

**Abstract:** One of the academic debates about academic freedom has been the extent to which academic freedom has been exercised by academics by using some normative and quantitative approaches. Often times studies on academic freedom deal with the extent to which institutions comply with norms in terms of the rights of the academics on some international standards. This paper takes its departure by making an empirical investigation of how academics understand academic freedom by employing a qualitative approach. It presents an empirical investigation of the different conceptions of academic freedom among instructors of social sciences in Addis Ababa University. The study was undertaken from a phenomenographic point of view and four qualitatively different ways of understanding academic freedom, based on the distance between the self and perceived threats to academic freedom, were identified. The relationship between the different ways of viewing academic freedom suggests that a more pragmatic provisions for academic freedom and policy debates need to begin with and accommodative of academics' views on the subject before making any meaningful point.

**Keywords:** academic freedom, higher education, governance, Addis Ababa University

### Introduction

Academic freedom is one of the most debated, defended professional rights, the yet it is least enjoyed by the academia both at international and national levels. Adopting the UNESCO *Recommendation*, a study that covered 27 EU member states showed that the “level of compliance with the UNESCO *Recommendation* is generally lower in the EU states than might be expected” (Karren, 2009, p.311). The EU member states are expected to be at the forefront in the global commitment in protecting academic freedom as Europe is a continent where the ideal of a university and the principles of academic freedom said to have their genesis. It is also interesting to note that Europe is the birth place of the idea of democracy and other human rights. In relative terms, it has better track records of democratic progress which is quite famous globally. Nationally, a study, sponsored by Forum for Social Studies (FSS), was undertaken in seven public universities and four private colleges followed the same suit and found that compliance with the UNESCO *Recommendation* is generally low (Taye, 2008).

A number of forces are worsening academic freedom across the world nations. Though the idea and value of academic freedom seems uncontested across modern universities globally, as evidenced in UNESCO *Recommendation*, constraints of academic freedom emanate from various sources. The fiscal pressures on universities throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the accompanying concern for accountability and evaluation of academic performances;

consequently increasing pressures and trends towards commercialization of knowledge and research are the major ones. In a similar vein, the fact that academic freedom is undermined in universities of developing nations can be attributed to fundamentally immature and/or absence of democracy in the regime organization.

The UNESCO *Recommendation* and studies that used it as frame of analysis rarely provide a clear and consistent meaning of academic freedom. For instance, FSS (2008) publication makes an inventory check on range of issues such as institutional autonomy, institutional accountability, terms and conditions of academic staff employment, salaries, disciplinary problems, terms and conditions of service. This study, though informative in terms of assessing Ethiopia's compliance with UNESCO's *Recommendation*, it rarely captures the meaning and values of academic freedom from the academics' point of view. Simply the normative and quantitative approach adopted does not allow doing so. Generally, the literature shows that the parties to academic freedom are rather astute at defending, advocating for it than agreeing on what academic freedom means for them.

Evidences show that there seems lack of agreement as to how academic freedom is understood both globally and locally. To begin with the UNESCO *Recommendation*, setting the norm, attempts to provide what constitutes academic freedom at a global level. It includes terms and conditions of employment; institutional autonomy; institutional accountability; individual rights and freedoms; civil rights; self-governance and collegiality; and tenure (UNESCO, 1997). The key issues and the details of the *Recommendation*, as it tries to provide a universal conceptualization of academic freedom, lack clarity as to what academic freedom should mean and entail in its true sense. This lack of clarity can be observed easily as some of the rights tend to include those rights that are human by their nature. The *Recommendation* simply fails to provide uncontested understanding of academic freedom as it applies to academics only. Instead it draws on comprehensive human rights that have been advocated for citizen irrespective of one's professional background. This can simply be seen in the lists of conventions- ILO, United Nations, - appended to the UNESCO *Recommendation*.

Likewise, the local understanding of academic freedom lacks clarity and consistency. The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003), though a milestone in the Ethiopian higher education sector, does not sufficiently spell out what constitutes academic freedom in its articles. For instance, in its article 7, sub –article 3, the proclamation provides that "... any institution shall have academic freedom "(FDRE, 2003, p.3). Although the international good practice was not spelt out clearly, it can be argued that the UNESCO *Recommendation* must have been referred to as Ethiopia is a signatory to the recommendation and expected to endorse it in managing its higher education institutions. The absence of strong connection between the Ethiopian higher education proclamation and the UNESCO *Recommendation* coheres with the country's low level of compliance with the Recommendation as confirmed by a recent survey study.

A careful review of the proclamation shows that articles 17 and 18 make provisions on institutional autonomy of public institutions and academic units within them respectively. Taking the issue further, article 31 of the proclamation includes some 11 sub-articles on the rights of academic staff in which majority of the provisions are rather deal with those rights that are supposed to be exercised by any civil servant of the country. For instance, some of the rights include: leave of absence, professional development and training, career promotion, fairness in remuneration for their service, participation in institutional planning etc. It is also important to note that none of the provisions in article 31 and in subsequent articles has to do with the key professional exercises of the academics-teaching and research. This way the proclamation fails to provide a clear meaning and conceptualization of academic freedom in the Ethiopian context.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the academics' conceptions of the meaning of academic freedom using a qualitative approach. The uniqueness of the study lies in the qualitative approach that is chosen to address the issue. This way the study tries to fill in the gaps observed in previous studies mainly employing quantitative and normative approaches. It particularly focuses on exploring how academics conceptualize academic freedom from their vantage points and understand the values it has for them. It is important to be able to fill this gap for it enables policy makers and advocates of academic freedom develop better insight in their effort to suggest interventions for academics' concerns. The study is guided by a key research question: *How do academics in Addis Ababa University understand academic freedom?*

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

To explore the meaning of academic freedom from subjects' point of view, a qualitative approach seems appropriate. Qualitative research leads to a better understanding of the meaning of what is observed and results in data of greater depth and richness (Patton, 2002). As academic freedom is individuals' construction of reality (their work environment), exploring the different conceptualizations of academic freedom would require situating the phenomenon by employing qualitative approach. Furthermore, this study takes its departure in the investigation of academic freedom by adopting qualitative approach for what seems to be in the domain of quantitative approach thus far.

### **Research Methods and Procedures**

Despite the intense debate about academic freedom in the literature and the policy domain, there seems multitude of conceptions owing to variations in the social, economic, legal, and academic traditions of university contexts globally. For instance, Akerlind and Kayrooz (2003, p.328) have convincingly argued that “the concept is open to a range of interpretations and has been used at times to support conflicting causes and positions”.

Much of the literature attests that there exist a varied understandings of academic freedom among academics, policy makers, think tanks and advocates of democracy to mention only a few of them. This is evident in the UNESCO (1997) *Recommendation* as the substantive element of the concept of academic freedom seems to encompass those rights that are reasonably academic and/or non-academic, institutional/personal, professional/democratic; moral/legal otherwise. What is more, those studies adopting the UNESCO (1997) standards (FSS, 2008; Karran, 2009) for analytical framework tended to mix up those rights that are supposedly academic with those that are human by default. In addition, lack of consensus about the concept of academic freedom is evident in relation to tracing those constraining factors across universities. Some constraints are coming from within the rubric of the universities while others are from outside the universities. It is also evident in the debates staged that the position mostly taken is more of in favor of the academia as there seems little attention has been paid to addressing the social responsibilities of the academia and tax payers concerns at large.

This study tries to further explore variations in the Addis Ababa University by employing phenomenographic research methods. Rooted in the study of learning, phenomenographic research is a “research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in the world around them” (Marton, cited in Bowden, 2000). It helps researchers describe how people conceive their aspects of reality where the concepts under study are mostly phenomenon confronted by subjects in everyday life (Bowden, 2000). This method seems appropriate for investigating academic freedom as the latter is confronted by academics in everyday life at Addis Ababa University. The phenomenographic method was employed in this study as the purpose of the study was to explore the different ways academia understand academic freedom in the context of their professional experiences.

### ***Sample and Data Generation Tool***

The study included six faculty members selected purposefully. Attempts were made to include faculty members that represent cross-section of the faculty in the social sciences of Addis Ababa University “not to ensure statistical rigor but to maximize the perspectives encountered” (Bowden, 2000, p. 9). The composition of informants was based on seniority (academic rank) of the instructors in the University as a major criterion for inclusion in the study. A total of six, two from each rank (associate professor, assistant professor and lecturer) instructors were selected and interviewed about their conceptions of academic freedom. This composition of informants was supposed to provide the maximum variations in the perspectives academics hold about academic freedom in their professional experiences. The study employed the snowball technique to select the required individual subjects for the study. This helped the researcher select those informants that are supposed to have better understanding of the phenomena understudy-academic freedom.

With regard to data generation tool, open-ended interview was used for collecting data as interview is the most common method for data collection in phenomenographic research (Walsh, 2000). In order to allow free expression of understandings and conceptualizations, I used an open-ended interview to generate data from informants. As deemed necessary; however, I also used some leading points so as to refocus the interview appropriately for the purpose of the study.

All the individual interviews were audio tape-recorded. With the exception of one interview all interviews for the study were conducted in Amharic and then transcribed into English for further analysis. The transcripts of these interviews were the main sources of data for analyzing instructors' conceptions of academic freedom.

During the interview, aided by some prompts, I encouraged informants to reveal their ways of understanding of academic freedom from their own professional experiences. I urged the interviewees to clarify expressions that looked a bit vague or poorly explained by using questions such as: could you explain that further? What do you mean by that? Is there anything you would like to add to this?

### *Methods of Data Analysis*

Analysis of the transcripts of the interview data was conducted using a phenomenographic method. Phenomenographic interview transcripts can be analyzed via either of the two methods- constructing and discovering categories-of data analysis. The idea of constructing categories implies that the researcher analyzes the data in terms of some predetermined framework whereas discovering categories assumes that categories are constitutive of the data (Walsh, 2000). Discovering how academics understand academic freedom being the main objective of the study, I employed the discovery method in figuring out the different conceptualization of academic freedom by the faculty members.

I first read all the interview transcripts and marked the parts where instructors mentioned their main ideas about academic freedom. Then I highlighted the selected part of the transcripts and started figuring out those categories of the conception of academic freedom while rereading the transcripts. Then I developed 'qualitatively different' categories of descriptions that were used to characterize the conceptions of academic freedom of these social science instructors.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The ethical consideration, in this study, aimed at the protecting subjects from any danger as a result of their involvement in the study. First, I approached them and secured their consents to participate in the study and I also asked them if I could use audio taping for recording the interviews. I did this by mentioning the purpose of my research endeavor and assuring that I will use pseudonyms for their real names. I also refrained from describing my informants in the final report so as to avoid the danger of being known to readers following detailed

description of each informant. I simply used symbols (#1, #2...) in making the necessary identification in the reporting process. Finally, to avoid the researcher bias in describing the understandings emerged during the analysis (to increase trustworthiness of the researcher); I showed the draft of my transcripts to the informants so as to ensure maximum data validation. I also used this not only for validation but also to seek some clarifications on confusing ideas that I discovered during the transcription.

## Findings

As a result of the phenomenographic analysis of the instructors' interview descriptions; four qualitatively different conceptions of academic freedom are identified in this study. The four categories of conceptions of academic freedom are described.

- (1) Academic freedom as a freedom from unwarranted self-censorship
- (2) Academic freedom as a freedom from indoctrination
- (3) Academic freedom as a freedom from shortage of resources for professional exercises
- (4) Academic freedom as the right to an enabling work environment for academics to discharge their professional responsibilities

The four different ways of viewing academic freedom are outlined in detail below, represented as the following "categories of description".

### *Category 1: as a freedom from unwarranted self-censorship*

Within this category, academic freedom is conceived as a freedom from unwarranted self-censorship. For these respondents, self-censorship is vital in the exercise of academic duties as it would help them to be fair to their audiences. For example, an instructor responded that:

The freedom that an individual instructor would have in a class is not boundless. One cannot claim all the freedom under the sky. At times you need to be fair to yourself, to your students and to the society. To this effect, you need to employ your consciousness to determine what is worth saying or putting in writing. (#5)

Reasonable self-censorship, using one's own consciousness, would have helped academics exercise academic freedom in a responsible manner. In this category, respondents argued that academic freedom should be exercised within ones' field of study and that one should use his/her judgment to discern what is fair to the audience if unfolded.

This idea of setting limits to the opportunity of exercising academic freedom for academics has been echoed by interview #6:

Academic freedom is a relative concept. It is limited by expectations or responsibilities assigned to the academics. My field of training and my teaching responsibilities set the boundaries. I think the watch dog for the boundary should be the academics itself as there is trust in the motives of the professionals. (#6)

The problem is when the self-censorship goes beyond what it ought to be. Under such circumstances, it harms academics and academic life when it is based on perceived fears. In relation to this, a respondent argued that:

I cannot recall of a single instructor in Addis Ababa University being punished for his/her speeches or writings. But I know that many academics are suffering from unwarranted self-censorship. They often assume that saying it this way, that way, or writing on this and that issue ... might offend the government and might bear grave consequences to one's career...(#1)

As there has not been a single incident that can be leveled to an academic infringement, the self-censorship is more profound than the real danger posed by the political environment. This perceived fear, however, is not without reasons. The concrete source for such fear is associated mostly with the sacking of some 42 professors two decades back from Addis Ababa University. It is claimed that:

Some 42 colleagues were unduly dismissed from their university positions. Earlier to that there was not any such an attack on the university community even when there were professionals who critiqued the then regimes openly. (#1)

This very incident, according to the respondent, has induced such fears and the academics spend good deal of their times censoring themselves in the classes they conduct, and the research they carry out. In support of their perceived fear and self-censorship exercises, they still strongly believe that the prohibitive environment might be inevitable as:

There are go-betweens, who join the campus at different capacities not for academic purposes but to spy on academics. (#2)

The activities/practices that induce the fear have affected the career life of academics including promotion. For instance, an instructor said that:

I have not known academics that lost their university positions or got punished because of their academic exercises but I often see people being labeled or branded unfavorably, or intimidated by campus authorities. I have known of academics that are also alleged for instigating campus riots routinely. Verbal intimidations are common on campus. (#3)

### ***Category 2. As a freedom from indoctrination***

In the second category, respondents conceptualize academic freedom as freedom from indoctrination in one's area of teaching and research. They argue that academics at the university could be entrusted with the responsibility to produce graduates with the required level of qualification but there should not be any undue intervention into how to go about doing so. For example, respondent said that:

The government's role in the business of higher education should be limited to the expression of its interests. If it goes beyond that, I think, it would ignore academic freedom. However, this doesn't mean that academic life and higher education should be regarded as an ivory tower. There should be some accountability to the stakeholders for results. (#2)

Echoing the same idea, another instructor said that:

There are always frameworks and guidelines that stipulate what is expected of academics at a higher learning institution. The government, representing the tax payers concerns, can state its interests via the organizational operating frameworks, but it cannot go into the how of discharging such responsibilities by the academics. (#6)

The data further reveals that the degree of such indoctrination varies from discipline to discipline. It gets worse in social sciences than in the natural sciences. For example, one respondent argued that:

By indoctrination, I mean that academics should be free to think in their disciplines. However, in the social sciences there are facts that scholars couldn't help unfolding though doing so could be offensive to some segments of the society. In my view, the indoctrination gains momentum when one is dealing with facts in the social sciences. (#2)

The informants have had hard times teaching some social facts; facts that contradict those perceived to be the reality among the laypeople. For example, an instructor said:

I usually face with cold welcome from my audiences when the knowledge (facts) I am unfolding goes against with those culturally established one or what can be regarded as a "Public wisdom". Then I am usually constrained by the social norms. (#2)

The respondents did not however, claim that academics should disclose to their audiences everything they know. For example, an instructor argues that:

Academic freedom is tied with some responsibility. By virtue of your position, you may access information that could be strategic to the national interest; you are not expected to disclose such information. You need to guard yourself against issues that would be inciting. Academic freedom doesn't mean that academics would have an absolute right. (#1)

### ***Category 3: as a freedom from shortage of resources for professional exercises***

In this third category, instructors conceptualize academic freedom as a freedom from the shortage of resources required to discharge professional responsibilities. They think that



absence or short supply of resources is tantamount to failure to discharge professional responsibilities. For these academics academic freedom simply means freedom from such constraints. For instance, an instructor says:

I am a professional working for an educational institution to serve the society ultimately. Discharging such professional responsibility demands the availability of resources of different types at the professionals' disposal. Then, academic freedom is, in my view, is the freedom from shortage of resources needed to discharge professional responsibilities. (#3)

Respondents in this category perceive resources needed for the completion of their duties in a wider sense. They go beyond the conventional ones like finance and space and materials. The resources referred to by these respondents even included salaries and other benefits that would have affected the professional in one way or in another. For example, an instructor argued that:

I would not have the courage and psychological preparedness when I am not able to pay the different bills. How can I authoritatively speak in front of my students when I have to dress down compared to my students? (#4)

***Category 4. As the right to enabling work environment for academics to discharge their professional responsibilities***

Respondents in the fourth category perceive academic freedom as an enabling work environment for the exercise of academic activity. They conceive academic freedom to be beyond the freedom to speak and write freely. For instance,

Academic freedom includes the process and provisions that would help me discharge my professional responsibility. The way I interact with my students, colleagues, and operate in a particular institution matters most for me. I usually ask myself questions like: Is there a welcoming environment to teach and research? By welcoming environment, I mean the suitability of my workplace from its administration points view, possibilities for professional development, publishing and professional links with professionals domestically or abroad. (#4)

They further argue that academic freedom is relative concept restricted to ones professional domain. For example,

By virtue of their position, academics are required to teach and research and offer community service. Academic freedom is the right to discharge this professional responsibility in an enabling environment with commensurate accountability. (#6)

In addition to the accountability for the freedom exercised, respondents argue that there should be trust on the part of the academics to use academic freedom for socially desirable ends.

... Behind such a freedom, there should be trust on the part of the academics to exercise academic freedom responsibly. (#6)

## Discussion

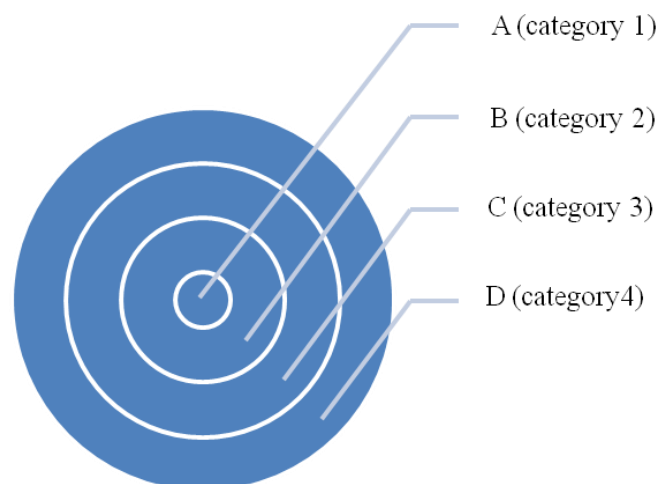
In this paper I have undertaken an empirical analysis of the range of ways of understanding academic freedom, as experienced by social science academics. An inclusive hierarchy of understanding of different aspects of academic freedom emerged from the analysis. Four categories of conceptions of academic freedom have been identified, including, academic freedom as:

- (1) A freedom from unwarranted self-censorship
- (2) A freedom from indoctrination
- (3) A freedom from shortage of resources for professional exercises
- (4) The right to an enabling work environment for academics to discharge their professional responsibilities

### *Relationships between the categories*

The categories (1-4) are seen as mapping the main qualitatively different ways of understanding academic freedom present among the study sample. The categories are not independently constituted but rather linked in a hierarchical relationship based on commonness (see Figure 1).

Fig: Pictorial representation of conception of academic freedom



Source: Author

Where:

- A: freedom from unwarranted self-censorship
- B: freedom from indoctrination
- C: freedom from shortage of resources for professional exercise
- D: the right to enabling work environment

The four categories are inclusive of one another the fourth category being an all encompassing one. Though the categories are different qualitatively they are not unrelated. The categories are threaded together via the distance between the self (academics) and the perceived constraint of academic freedom. In the discussion that follows I begin from the inclusive category and ends in the most specific one (see Figure 1).

To begin with, category 4 maps academic freedom and its constraints as a phenomenon residing in one's work place. It is also comparable with an organizational climate. This enabling environment is, of course, almost the sum of all other categories. It is important to note that for some academics academic freedom takes on a wider perspective and academics think that dozens of factors can either infringe or facilitate the exercise of academic freedom. They perceive the self as acting in a web of issues that would have cumulative effects on their professional experiences. The effects can be directly or indirectly, remotely or closely related to the exercise of academic freedom.

In the third category, academic freedom is conceived as closely associated with availability of all resources required for professional purposes. Resources, as constraint of academic freedom, could be part of the enabling work environment referred to earlier. In category 3, the understanding of resources as facilitator of academic freedom goes beyond the customary reference to material resources at work places. It is understood as including all the resource inputs to maintain the physiological and psychological well being of academics. This includes salaries, clear policy expectations and institutional strategies, working guides etc.

According this conception of academic freedom, the academics could not or are having hard time concentrating on their teaching let alone researching in a situation where the already meager salary is nullified by brutal inflation around. It can be argued that shortage of resources, salaries being the major ones, would not let academics discharge their professional duties as it ought to be. For instance, it has become a matter of ensuring the supply the basics by moonlighting. This is mostly done at the expense of academics de facto professional duties.

Category 2 takes the constraints of academic freedom closer to the self (the academics) as the constraints directly affect academics' freedom in their teaching and research endeavors. The academics interviewed complained that there have been undue pressures against the contents of their teaching in particular and their disciplines in general. The external forces (presumed to be threats to academic freedom) are very much closer to the core activity-teaching- of the academics. The academics in this scenario have complained that there have been pushes against unfolding some professional knowledge in favor of public wisdom. Hence academics

in this category have felt that they are forced to overlook those facts that are worth unfolding in their classes on the assumption that such an act would lead to public unrest.

The threats are not directly challenging the self but they come in different forms. Associated with an act of causing/instigating public unrest, the self would usually develop fear of being “branded or labeled” unfavorably. The forces will put academics names in the bad book.

Finally, in category 1 constraints of academic freedom is perceived to be residing in the self. It is the perceived fear that academics complained. It is not mainly shortage of resource, indoctrination or the work environment rather the unwarranted self-censorship that affects the self. Though self –censorship would help academics to be fair to their audiences; its extreme experience seems to prevent academics from the proper exercise of their academic rights.

### **Comparison with Other studies**

Most studies thus far are mostly normative and quantitative oriented. It may not sound fair to compare the current study with these ones in that depth. Nonetheless, some sort of passing remark is warranted in here. To begin with, a national study sponsored by FSS has described the status of academic freedom in Ethiopia as constrained by limited institutional autonomy, absence of institutional charter, campus raids by gunmen, fear of punishment, limited right to establish professional association, deterioration of academics’ pays and the student explosion (Taye, 2007).

It is instructive to observe that there is little congruence between the findings by Taye (2007) and those of the current study. As the self (academics) was distanced from the phenomena under study (academic freedom) via standard-like approach, all points made by that study descend away from self or only remotely affect academic exercise. Most findings by Taye (2007) are to do with institutional autonomy and governance- the other version of academic freedom – that have less direct impact on the academics’ career. I do not mean there is not any commonality between the current study and the previous one. There is a noticeable congruence between category 4 and partly category 3; and many of the findings by Taye (2007). However, category 1 and category 2 that are very much close to the self and their key activities- teaching, research and community service- have not been addressed in the previous study.

Secondly, Akerlind and Kayrooz’s (2003) work scores the breakthrough by investigating academic freedom from academics’ points of view. They undertook an empirical investigation of the range of meanings of academic freedom amongst academics in Australian universities. Akerlind and Kayrooz (2003) found five qualitatively different ways of understanding academic freedom:

- (1) an absence of constraints on academics’ activities;
- (2) an absence of constraints, within certain self-regulated limits;
- (3) an absence of constraints, within certain externally-regulated limits;

(4) an absence of constraints, combined with active institutional support ; and

(5) an absence of constraints, combined with responsibility on the part of the academics.

There is more commonality than differences between this study and the study by Akerlind and Kayrooz (2003). The conception of academic freedom as a freedom from undue interference in academics' activities is the thread that runs along both studies. The difference seems to be in the specification of the nature of the constraints of academic freedom. In the study referred to the locus of constraints to the exercises of academic freedom was mapped to be in the social space whose limit is regulated either by the self or by an external entity. However, no mention was made about the nature of these constraints and how they can obstruct academic freedom.

This study found a new and qualitatively different category, freedom from unwarranted self-censorships', which has not been revealed in the previous studies (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003; Taye, 2007). This is an interesting finding that could be counted as an added value of this study. It is interesting to note that the perception of academics matters more than any legal provisions for the protection of academic freedom in higher education institutions. Secondly, the specific descriptions of those constraining factors to academic freedom (as revealed in this study) is more telling in terms of crafting policy directions.

## **Concluding remark**

The objective of the study was to explore how academics understand a phenomenon-academic freedom- through a phenomenographic analysis of empirical data collected via interview. Four qualitatively different conceptions of academic freedom were identified in the study. This clearly revealed that academics understand academic freedom differently in different contexts. Owing to the differences in the economic contexts and the accompanying historical, social, cultural, and political variables affecting academic career, a blanket approach to defining and providing for academic freedom is fundamentally defective. The approach thus far has been to rely on norms and frameworks set by the international think tanks or associations. Academic career and its determinants are as much locally defined as they are globally. The current study is a good illustration for this.

Hence, it is instructive to note that as academic freedom is more about how academics perceive and experience their workplaces than the rhetoric and legal provisions. This also reminds that policy makers and researchers need to begin with and accommodate how academics experience academic freedom in their debates.

## **References**

- Akerlind, G.S & Kayrooz, C.(2003). Understanding academic freedom: The views of social scientists. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 22(3), 327-344.doi.10.1080/0729436032000145176
- Bowden, J.A. (2000).The nature of phenomenographic research, In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp.1-18).Melbourne: RMIT University Press.

- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). (2003). *Higher Education Proclamation No.351/2003*.Addis Ababa: Author.
- Karren, T. (2009).Academic freedom in Europe: Reviewing UNESCO's recommendation. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 57(2),191-215.doi:10.1111/j.1467-8527.2009.00430.x
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Taye Assefa. (2007). The status of academic freedom in Ethiopia, *Peace Review*, 19( 4), 479-485.
- Taye Assefa (Ed.). (2008). *Academic freedom in Ethiopia: Perspective of teaching personnel*. Addis Ababa: FSS (Forum for Social Studies).
- UNESCO. (1997).*Records of the general conference, twenty-ninth session*, Paris, 21October 12 November, Volume 1Resolutions (Paris, UNESCO).
- Walsh, E. (2000). Phenomenographic analysis of interview transcripts. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh, (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (PP.19-33).Melbourne: RMIT University Press.