



ZAMBIA NATIONAL EDUCATION COALITION

# POLICY BRIEF

## THE STATUS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOMS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN ZAMBIA

### INTRODUCTION

#### CONTEXT

In the landscape of Zambian Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs), academic freedom stands as the bedrock of intellectual exploration, enabling scholars to navigate the realms of knowledge without constraints. This study, employing a mixed-methods approach, delves into the intricate dynamics of academic freedom within this context. Set against the backdrop of the 2015 research and 2021 symposium on academic freedom and subsequent recommendations, the research sought to unveil the current state of academic freedom in HLIs.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to gauge the ongoing progress made by HLIs in achieving academic freedom since the 2015 study and the subsequent 2021 symposium and to evaluate the contribution of academic freedom towards the broader aspiration of "Education for All" in Zambia.

#### METHODOLOGY

The consultancy utilized surveys, interviews, and document analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the present academic landscape.



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## KEY FINDINGS

The findings unearthed both strides and challenges, offering a nuanced view of the current state of academic freedoms as follows;

### 1. INSTITUTIONAL PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING ACADEMIC FREEDOM:

**a) Statutory Instrument on Academic Freedom:** the study finds that despite the recommendations, the envisioned statutory instrument to guide academic freedom policies remains unrealized. This absence poses a significant hindrance, impeding HLIs from formulating comprehensive policies on academic freedom at the institutional level

**b) Formulation of Policies:** The delay in launching the revised education policy and the absence of the statutory instrument hinder HLIs from crafting effective academic freedom policies, creating a policy vacuum.

**c) Student Involvement in Governance:** Despite students being included in

governance structures, their voices often face resistance, highlighting the importance of genuine respect for student perspectives.

**d) Academic Freedom Policies for Registration:** The recommendation for academic freedom policies as a prerequisite for HLI registration remains unimplemented, as it awaits legal backing.

### 2. CONTRIBUTION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO EDUCATION FOR ALL:

**a) Increased Funding for Research:** the study reveals that academic freedom plays a pivotal role in attracting external funding for research. This autonomy to conduct unbiased research proves instrumental in enhancing institutions' reputations and facilitating infrastructure development.

**b) Establishment of More Universities:** The liberalized higher education landscape, driven by academic freedom, has seen the establishment of more universities. This not only expands access but fosters knowledge production.



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### 3. CHALLENGES HINDERING STUDENTS' ENJOYMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOMS:

#### **a. Inadequate Accommodation and Funding:**

The surge in student enrollment faces a bottleneck due to limited accommodation. Funding challenges, coupled with high living costs, impede access to education and compromise academic freedom.

#### **b. Insufficient Lecture Rooms and Library Facilities:**

The scarcity of adequately equipped lecture rooms and updated library resources impedes knowledge dissemination, hindering both students and lecturers.

#### **c. Lack of Effective Internet Connectivity:**

Poor internet access further compounds the challenges, restricting students and lecturers from leveraging online resources.

**d. Merit-Based Student Enrolment:** The merit-based approach becomes a barrier, disproportionately affecting students from underprivileged backgrounds.

### CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The study underscores the centrality of academic freedom in HLIs, illuminating both accomplishments and impediments. The essence lies not just in its presence but in its unrestrained manifestation, cultivating an environment where ideas thrive, students prosper, and the pursuit of knowledge knows no bounds. The journey ahead involves a collective commitment to dismantling barriers and fostering an academic landscape where freedom is not just a concept but a lived reality.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

**1. Statutory Framework:** Develop and enact a statutory instrument that explicitly outlines and safeguards academic freedom

in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs). This legal instrument should provide a clear framework for the exercise of academic freedom rights and responsibilities.

**2. Institutional Policies:** HLIs should formulate and implement robust institutional policies on academic freedom. These policies should align with national regulations and the statutory instrument, fostering a consistent and supportive environment for academic expression.

**3. Government Support:** The government should actively support policies that strengthen academic freedom. This includes advocating for the inclusion of academic freedom considerations in national education policies and providing necessary resources to ensure their effective implementation.

**4. Student Involvement:** Encourage active participation of students in governance and academic committees within HLIs. This involvement ensures that student perspectives are considered in decision-making processes, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse academic environment.

**5. Transparency in Registration:** Make adherence to academic freedom principles a mandatory requirement for the registration of Higher Learning Institutions. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should enforce this requirement through clear guidelines and assessments during the registration process.

**6. Ethical Guidelines:** Develop and disseminate ethical guidelines for academic staff to observe while exercising academic freedom. These guidelines should balance the freedom to conduct research and express ideas with the responsibility to maintain professionalism and ethical standards, thinking about educational institution outcomes

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