The study is conducted to examine the students' perceptions of academic freedom. The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between academic freedom and the academic performance of prospective teachers at University of Sargodha. The study was quantitative in nature. The target population of the present study was all prospective teachers enrolled in the department of education, University of Sargodha. Convenient sampling techniques were used to select a representative sample (n=236) of the population. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequencies) and inferential statistics (t-test and correlation test) were used for the analysis of the data collected. The major findings of the study were that there is no difference between the perceived academic freedom of male and female prospective teachers and there is a weak positive relationship between academic performance and academic freedom of prospective teachers. So it is recommended that policies for academic freedom might be formulated by the institutes and an extensive study to explore academic freedom and its relationship with academic performance of students in academic institutes may be carried out by future researchers. It is also recommended that academic freedom seminars, workshops, and conferences may also be conducted by the educational institutes to create an awareness and understanding of academic freedom.

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1. Introduction

Students have the right to study in an unrestricted environment for more outcome based achievements. The concept that students might be able to study without constraints is known as academic freedom in the literature. It is noted that academic freedom has taken on various meanings in historical times and at various levels of academic institutions. Academic freedom appears to be a fundamental idea, and it is in essence, but it is also difficult to express (Altbach, 2001). Academic freedom appears to be a basic concept, and it is, but it is also not easy to describe, and most of the time academic freedom is supposed as the freedom of the students to learn, this conceptual understanding is known since medieval times.
George (1997) quoted that “it does not mean that academic freedom liberates a teacher to teach any subject under any title or description. Academic freedom encourages the growth of knowledge in research, as well as the protection and critical transfer of knowledge in education.”

According to Altbach (2001), “The University’s foundation is based on academic freedom. It is necessary for both education and research.” Academic freedom, according to Streb (2006), is "the basis of the university mission to teach students and advance the bounds of knowledge." The students are supposed to be the university's primary concern and require academic independence to fulfill their objectives without external or internal influence. Academic freedom refers to students' ability to study and conduct research without undue influence or control from the departments in which they are enrolled (Russel, 2002 & Fish, 2021). Students are citizens as well as members of the academic community, and as citizens, they should have the same rights to freedom of expression, work, and collaboration as other citizens (Pratt, 1996 & Karran, 2007).

Instead of effective performance in educational institutes, with special reference to teaching and learning, the freedom of the academic community i.e., teachers and learners must have the intellectual freedom to enjoy the quality of teaching, learning, and research. Though academic freedom is not a personal privilege but rather to enjoy the activities that are the main aspect of academic institutions (Fuchs, 1963). Academic freedom has three components: freedom in research, freedom in the classroom, and freedom of expression as citizens (Hofstedler & Greiger, 2017). It is pertinent to mention that a student's right to express themselves and participate in social and political activities is commonly recognized as academic freedom. Students have complete freedom to share their thoughts and opinions. Students' freedom to choose a study field and the content of subjects studied, as well as their participation in decision-making (Dworkin, 1996).

It is pertinent to mention that the quality of teaching and learning is directly linked with the way teaching and learning practices are being carried out in an academic institute. It is found that there is a significant relationship between academic freedom and the way opted for teaching and learning activities in the classrooms of educational institutes (Pongton, & Suntrayuth, 2019). In the pursuit of effective performance of academic institutions, teachers’ role is expected to be more professional that can support the freedom of learning to students so that they achieve their learning goals and so the academic institute to develop the individuals (Wilt & Albatch, 2021). There is a lot many discussion of about developing creativity among the graduates of higher academic institutes and literature reports that creativity is structured in the freedom of academic stakeholders (Kronfeldner, 2021). The current study is an attempt to explore the awareness of students enrolled in the teacher education department and further, to measure the relationship of academic freedom with the academic achievement of the prospective teachers.

2. Literature Review

Academic freedom (AF) was identified as a faculty member’s freedom to teach and a student's freedom to use his/her ability to learn independently without fearing interruption and influence from and time being the different factors in academic institutes that may include the interruption from the management of the academic institute as well (Nelson, 2011).
Academic freedom shapes the learning experiences of an individual in the academic organization while impacting the teaching learning practices and at large the teaching and learning environment in that institute (Karran2009; Kinzelbeck, et al.,2021). Literature quoted that the word "academic freedom" is used differently by different researchers (Finkin, 1982). Academics argue that academic freedom is a faculty member's right that s/he can use while performing his or her job duties. It is not so much a personal benefit as it is a requirement of employment. Academic freedom, as narrated by Nelson(2011) is "the freedom of distinct university teachers to explain allowing to their principles and beliefs and to express their opinions on their topic." This viewpoint suggests that academic freedom is allowed since it is thought to be necessary for instruction and information generation.

According to some experts, AF is the independence of academia to pursue and communicate reality (Barenst2010; Byme & LJ, 1989; Lackey, 2018). It is noted in the literature that academic freedom is defined as the "freedom of the individual researcher in his or her teaching and research to seek truth wherever it appears to lead without fear of penalty or conclusion of service for consuming violated nearly governmental religious or social belief (Berdahl, 1990)." It is academic freedom that shields people from being forced to teach and conduct research based on their capability and trained morals. In reality, "academic freedom" is "little more than a liberty granted to academics to say and do whatever they want" (O'Hear, 1988).

Therefore, Academic freedom, according to this viewpoint, is meant to defend academics' rights to perform academic activities without interference. These rights, on the other hand, are concerned with specialized ethics. In addition to these rights, academic freedom refers to the ability of academics to participate in a variety of activities within the institution. "Academic freedom is also the right of the academic to participate in those activities within the institution that directly affect the performance of academic things," Shils (1994) clarified. There is a bulk of literature discussing academic freedom with reference to the teachers/professional workforce. The present study is exploring the perception of students who are enrolled in undergraduate programs at a university and its relationship with academic performance.

There are researches in the literature that report the relationship between academic freedom and the academic achievement of students. These researchers support and argue that academic freedom enables students to learn freely and achieve their learning goals thus enhancing the performance of the academic institutes (MCFarlane, 2016; Karan & Mallinson, 2019; Muda, 2008). Further, in the literature, researchers also report that intellectual freedom has a direct and significant relationship with the creativity of the students (Timothy, 2015; BAsheka, 2009). Few researchers report that there is a strong relationship between academic freedom and autonomy of higher education that directly impacts the learning outcomes of the students (Berdahl, 1990; Ren & Li 2013; Cowen, 2022). Likewise, Bashka(2009) reported in a research study that academic freedom is a key parameter in successful higher educational institution governance and it was further concluded that academic freedom while significantly contributing to the effective management of the academic institution strongly related to the academic performance of the students in academic institutions.

3. Methodology
The research, undertaken, is quantitative and used a correlational research design. The accessible population was all students (350) of B. S Education, M.A Education and M.Phil Education programs. The sample size, using a random sampling technique was 236 students.
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from undergraduate programs of the department of education. Academic freedom questionnaire (AFQ) comprising 36 items on subscales of Institutional policy, Freedom in classroom teaching freedom to participate, Freedom in learning (to innovate) Freedom in Assessment and Freedom in TP (teaching practice) was developed with a review of related literature. The validity of the tool was established using expert opinion by the relevant subject experts and identifying the relevant literature. Pilot testing was carried out to calculate the reliability. The reliability was determined through Cronbach’s alpha (.96).

4. Results
Data was analyzed using SPSS and descriptive, inferential analysis was used to describe the data collected. The demographic information of the respondents was as follows:

| Table1: Demographics of the data |
|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 140 | 40.7% |
| | Female | 96 | 59.3% |
| Program | B.Ed. | 98 | 41.5% |
| | BS. | 138 | 58.5% |
| Residence | Rural | 113 | 46% |
| | Urban | 123 | 54% |

The table shows that there were 96(40.7%) male and 140(59.3%) female students in the total sample of these students. The table also indicated the distribution of students with respect to the program. There were 98 (41.5%) B.Ed., of BS 138(58.5%) in the total sample of the study. Resident wise113 (47.5%) belongs to the Urban and 123 (51.7%).

| Table2: Perception of Academic Freedom |
|---|---|---|
| Sr.no | Indicator | Mean | Sd. |
| 1 | Institutional policy | 2.6 | 1.1 |
| 2 | Freedom in classroom teaching | 3.4 | 1.2 |
| 3 | Freedom to Participate | 2.4 | 1.3 |
| 4 | Freedom in learning (innovate) | 3.6 | 1.1 |
| 5 | Freedom in Assessment | 3.2 | 1.1 |
| 6 | Freedom in TP | 3.6 | 1.2 |

Results indicated that prospective teachers perceive that they do not have the freedom to participate in classrooms (M=2.4 & Sd.1.3) and they are not known to institutional policy on academic freedom (M=2.6 & Sd.1.1). Table further shows that the majority of prospective teachers agreed that they perceive freedom in learning the content (M=3.6 & Sd.=1.1) and during teaching practice(M=3.6 & Sd.1.2). While results reported that prospective teachers are unsure about freedom in assessment procedures in classrooms (M=3.2 & Sd.=1.1)

<p>| Table 3: Correlational Analysis |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CGPA</th>
<th>Academic Freedom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation(Pearson)</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-Tailed)</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
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<td>229</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Academic Freedom Correlation (Pearson) .188**
Sig. (2-Tailed) .004
Table shows the correlational analysis using Pearson product moment correlation that the relationship between academic freedom and performance of students teachers. Results show that coefficient .188 that shows there is a positive and weak relationship between academic freedom and the performance of students. Results also show that this relationship is statistically significant (.004)

5. Discussion
This study was exploring the awareness of academic freedom and the academic performance of the student and also looks into its relationship with academic freedom at the undergraduate level. The major goal of this research was to determine the relationship among variables i.e., academic freedom and academic performance. The Academic Freedom Questionnaire (AFQ) consisted of indicators of institutional freedom (policy awareness), academic freedom in teaching, academic freedom in learning, academic freedom in assessment and evaluation, and teaching practice, comprising 36 items, and was used for the purpose. The results of our study showed that the majority of students perceive that they are not known about the institutional policy for academic freedom, this is in line with the results of the study conducted by Macfarlane (2012) and there is less academic freedom in assessment procedures adapted in classrooms to assess the students. This is in accordance with a study conducted by Caine, Jackson & matching (2016). The study further concluded that the value of correlation coefficient r is .188 and it shows that there is a positive and weak relationship between academic freedom and academic performance but the relationship between the two is significant. This finding of the study is in accordance with a study conducted by Haskell,1997) who concluded that academic freedom impacts the student’s evaluation of the faculty and hence impacts the performance of students in classrooms.

The current study findings are also in line with a study conducted by Svartefoss in 2020 that concluded a strong relationship between perceived academic freedom and the academic performance of students in higher educational institutes.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations
It is concluded that the majority of the students in the Education department regarding selection that are freely selected by the university and also concluded that curriculum planning and development and the developed course content are freely processed. It is further concluded that the relationship between academic freedom and academic performance. Coefficient r.188 shows that there is a positive but weak relationship between academic freedom and academic performance.

The study is delimited to one department of one Public Sector University so it is recommended that A Policy for academic freedom might be formulated by the institutes other departments as well as other universities may be added up to explore the meaning and understanding of academic freedom. Teachers might use strategies to support academic freedom in classrooms to support creative learning phenomena in the classrooms. It is also recommended that future studies might be conducted by considering the freedom of faculty members which may include freedom of publications as well as freedom of speech and the student’s freedom of access to higher education academic policies, plans and resources. The limitation of the study also recommended the conduct of a comparative study that may provide insight into the academic freedom phenomenon in private and public sector higher educational institutes.
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