Article

The Role of Universities in Promoting Intellectual Security: A Study on a Sample of University of South Africa Students

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Abstract: The intellectual security is a necessary condition in order to develop critical thinking and independent thinking, students will be able to face the complicated modern global problems. In the wake of the rapid societal and ideological changes, universities and colleges are becoming more important in the processes of ensuring the cognitive resilience of the students in the academic setting. Thus, the key aspect of the current research is whether universities play a crucial role in fostering intellectual security among a sample of University of South Africa students.. Accordingly, this study explores the importance of universities in ensuring intellectual security among a sample of students of the University of South Africa. A descriptive research design was employed, using a random sample survey of 60 students from University of South Africa during the 2025 academic year. The findings revealed a high level of awareness of intellectual security among university students. Additionally, the results indicated no significant differences between male and female students in their levels of intellectual security. The study recommends conducting further research to develop social policies that support the advancement of intellectual security across various societal sectors. The undergraduate phase is particularly critical in shaping a student's intellectual and personal identity, as it is a period during which young people are exposed to numerous influences—including family, university environment, social media, and digital platforms—all of which play a pivotal role in strengthening intellectual security.

Keywords: *Intellectual security, university students, critical thinking, society. Social values.*

Introduction

Intellectual security plays a vital role in shaping and strengthening individuals' minds, guiding the development and transmission of knowledge and values within society. It serves as a foundational element of overall security, ensuring that information passed between individuals and across generations promotes constructive, rather than destructive, ideas. In doing so, it supports the advancement of society by rejecting ideologies that promote violence, social decay, or harmful behaviours (Alhafit, 2020).

In recent decades, the significance of intellectual security has become increasingly evident in light of global technological advancements, the rise of digital platforms, and the widespread use of social media. These tools have greatly influenced social awareness and the exchange of ideas. They have also reinforced the need to develop critical thinking in young people, enabling them to distinguish between beneficial and harmful behaviours and ideas, and to maintain balanced mental and social development (Tamimi, 2020).

Educational institutions—particularly schools and universities—have a central responsibility in cultivating intellectual security. These institutions influence the intellectual and personal development of individuals from early childhood through adulthood, playing a major role in fostering positive values, rejecting deviant behaviours, and nurturing independent thinking (AlJahni, 2019). Universities, in particular, serve as a critical environment for developing intellectual security. From the age of four to early adulthood, students progress through formative educational stages. During this time, faculty members significantly contribute to shaping students' cognitive frameworks, behaviours, and belief systems. Their role is to empower students with the tools to assess, select, and apply values and ideas that promote societal harmony and individual integrity (Aldabaikhi, 2021).

The current study aims to provide a theoretical and empirical examination of the role of South Africa universities—specifically South Africa university—in promoting intellectual security among youth. The development of intellectual security is crucial for helping students reject extremist and deviant ideologies, which could otherwise lead to social harm, radicalisation, or susceptibility to terrorism. This study explores how universities contribute to fostering balanced thought, positive identity formation, and protection from harmful influences in a rapidly changing world.

Problem

Over the last few years, communities worldwide have been experiencing an increasing number of issues connected to intellectual polarisation, online disinformation, tension on identity basis, as well as the dissemination of extremist discourse (Pizolati, 2024; Duck Brown, 2023). However, the South African setting of historical inequalities, socio-economic inequalities, political contentions and high rates youth unemployment have provided intricate conditions whereby youngsters can be susceptible to radical ideologies, social fragmentation and institutional mistrust (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2021; Chetty, 2014; Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2014). The academic institutions are not closed off to these larger processes in society, and hence universities are places of intellectual construction and critical practice. Instead, they exist in them and are directly affected by the discourses of change, decolonisation, freedom of expression, and social justice (Mamdani, 2019; Albertus, 2019; Hendricks, 2018; Mutongoza, 2025).

In this light, South Africa institutions of higher learning have a strategic role to play in ensuring intellectual security through encouraging students to think critically, be tolerant, engage in dialogue, and be responsible citizens (Pullen, 2022; Terblanche, 2019; Bergsteedt, 2025). Nonetheless, regardless of the pivotal role of universities in cultivating civic and intellectual awareness, the little empirical evidence exists about how students view the role of their institutions in developing intellectual resilience and resisting negative ideologies (Chiramba, 2024; Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). It is based on this that this study attempts to find out the views of students in the University of South Africa on the role of the university in enhancing intellectual security, and to determine the degree to which institutional practices can be used to enhance cognitive awareness and balanced thinking in a complex socio-political context.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the role of University of South Africain developing intellectual awareness from the perspective of its students.
2. To explore students' suggestions for enhancing the university's role in fostering intellectual awareness.
3. To determine whether statistically significant differences exist in perceptions of South Africa university's role in developing intellectual awareness based on gender.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of University of South Africain the development of intellectual awareness from the perspective of its students?

2. What proposals can enhance the role of University of South Africain fostering intellectual awareness among its students?

Research Hypothesis

H0: There are no statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of South Africa university's role in developing intellectual awareness attributable to the gender variable.

Literature review

The recent academic research in Arab affairs has become more interested in exploring how institutions of higher learning can foster intellectual security and address ideological extremism.

The article by Alkhawaja (2022) is called A Forward-Looking Vision to Enhance Intellectual Security among Egyptian University Students, and it relies on the descriptive method on the sample of 400 students. The results uncovered weaknesses in the structure and new menaces that restrict the capacity of the universities to market intellectual security effectively. This paper has come up with viable implementation policies that would enhance institutional structures and student participation mechanisms. In a similar way, Alfawwaz (2021) examined how Saudi universities contribute to the improvement of intellectual security and the needs of the national dialogue in the context of strategic planning. With 72 respondents comprising of faculty members at Umluj College of Tabuk University, the study found the moderate level of institutional engagement. It suggested the implementation of intellectual security as mandatory academic program and enhanced collaboration between universities and national institutions concerned.

Similarly, Qazan (2021) discussed how academic leaders of Tabuk University can contribute to intellectual security among 920 students. The findings showed a medium level of actual practice, and students have a high expectation of desired role of academic leadership. The research suggested the institutionalization of intellectual security duties by setting up academic leadership functions. Al-Saleh (2020) previously examined the issue of university administration regarding the encouragement of

intellectual security at the Al-Jouf University. The results of the survey carried out among 274 faculty and academic leaders indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceived difference between job title, gender, or academic qualification. The paper has highlighted the significance of well-organised awareness campaigns and administrative determination in intellectual stability among students.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research approach, which is appropriate for examining and documenting the current status of intellectual security awareness among university students. This method allows for detailed data collection and analysis of students' perceptions and suggestions.

Sample

The study population includes all students at University of South Africa. A simple random sample of 60 male and female students was selected for the academic year 2023/2024.

Table 1
Distribution of the Study Sample According to Personal Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	29	48%
	Female	31	52%
	Total	60	100%
Age	20–30 years	10	17%
	31–40 years	29	48%
	41–50 years	10	17%
	51 years and above	11	18%
	Total	60	100%
Marital Status	Single	16	27%
	Married	28	47%
	Divorced	10	17%
	Widowed	6	10%
	Total	60	100%
Family Size	Less than 4 members	11	18%
	5–8 members	37	62%
	9–12 members	8	13%
	More than 12 members	4	7%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Total	60	100%

It is evident from Table 1 that 48% of the study sample were male students, while 52% were female. The highest percentage of participants by age group was 48%, falling within the 31–40 years category.

The lowest percentage was 17%, observed among participants aged 20–30 years. Regarding family size, the largest proportion of respondents (62%) belonged to families with 5–8 members, whereas only 7% came from families with fewer than 4 members.

Instrument

To achieve the objectives of the current study, a structured questionnaire was developed. It consisted of two main sections. The first section collected demographic information, including gender, age, marital status, and family size. The second section comprised 10 items, distributed across two axes. Axis 1: The Role of University of South Africain Developing Intellectual Awareness (5 items). This axis explored students' perceptions regarding the university's efforts, including (1) Organising scientific seminars to counter deviant ideologies. (2) Promoting moderation through student activities. (3) Raising awareness of tolerance and coexistence. (4) Implementing awareness programmes addressing the risks of cultural invasion. (5) Encouraging values of dialogue and cooperation among students Axis 2 Proposals to Enhance South africa university's Role in Intellectual Awareness (5 items). This axis captured student suggestions, including. (1) Establishing student forums on intellectual security. (2). Integrating intellectual security into academic courses. (3). Using teaching strategies that support dialogue and discussion. (4) Developing student activities aligned with students' intellectual needs. (5) Promoting openness to and discussion of diverse ideas

To ensure the validity of the study tool, the initial version of the questionnaire was reviewed by the research supervisor, who provided feedback on the wording and relevance of each item. Necessary modifications were made, and the tool was finalised accordingly. To verify the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency for both axes of the questionnaire. The reliability coefficients obtained were deemed appropriate and acceptable for the purposes of this study. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Internal consistency reliability coefficient of the study instrument

Instrument	Internal Consistency
Entire Tool	0.87

It is clear from Table 2 that the overall internal consistency coefficient of the instrument reached 0.87, which is considered acceptable and appropriate for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. Each response was assigned a numerical weight (from 5 to 1). The range of the scale was calculated by subtracting the lowest value (1) from the highest value (5), resulting in a range of 4. Based on this range, the levels of response were categorised as follows: Low agreement: 1.00 – 2.33, Moderate agreement: 2.34 – 3.67, High agreement: 3.68 – 5.00.

Results

Results Related to the First Research Question: What is the role of University of South Africain the development of intellectual awareness from the perspective of its students?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of student responses were calculated to assess the perceived role of University of South Africain promoting intellectual awareness.

Table 3
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Items Measuring the Role of University of South Africain Developing Intellectual Awareness (from Students' Perspectives)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Students are made aware of the values of tolerance toward others.	4.20	0.83	High
The university organises awareness programmes to discuss the risks of cultural invasion.	4.19	0.91	High
Universities organise scientific seminars to refute deviant ideas.	3.63	1.41	Moderate
The university promotes the values of dialogue and cooperation among students.	3.47	1.32	Moderate
The university emphasises moderation through student activities.	3.34	1.11	Moderate
Overall Score	3.68	0.94	High

It appears from Table 3 that the overall arithmetic mean for the role of University of South Africain

developing intellectual awareness from the perspective of its students is 3.68, indicating a high level of

agreement. The individual item means ranged between 3.34 and 4.20. Two statements received high

approval ratings, the highest being: *"Students are made aware of the values of tolerance toward others"*,

with a mean score of 4.20, followed by *"The university organises awareness programmes to discuss*

the risks of cultural invasion", with a mean of 4.19. The remaining items were rated at a moderate level,

with mean scores between 3.34 and 3.63. Among these, the highest was: *"Universities organise*

scientific seminars to refute deviant ideas" (3.63), while the lowest was: *"The university emphasises*

moderation through student activities" (3.34).

Results for the Second Research Question: What are the proposed actions to enhance the role of

University of South Africain developing intellectual awareness from the perspective of its students?

To address this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of students' responses were

calculated for the proposed measures aimed at activating the university's role in intellectual awareness

development.

Table 4
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Proposals to Enhance South Africa university's Role in
Developing Intellectual Awareness (from Students' Perspectives)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Developing student activities in line with students' intellectual needs	4.32	0.86	High
Establishing student forums to raise awareness of intellectual security	4.23	1.16	High
Openness to others' ideas and discussing them	3.43	1.25	Moderate
Using teaching strategies that support dialogue and discussion	3.40	1.20	Moderate
Linking academic courses with intellectual security	3.12	1.14	Moderate
Overall Score	3.70	0.97	High

It appears from Table 4 that the overall arithmetic mean of the items related to proposals for enhancing

the role of University of South Africain developing intellectual awareness—according to students'

perspectives—was 3.70, indicating a high level of agreement. The mean scores for individual items

ranged from 3.12 to 4.32. Two items received high approval ratings *"Developing student activities in accordance with the intellectual needs of students"* scored the highest with a mean of 4.32. *"Establishing student forums to raise awareness of intellectual security"* followed with a mean of 4.23. The remaining three items received moderate approval ratings, with mean scores ranging from 3.12 to 3.43. The highest among these was *"Openness to others' ideas and discussion"* with a mean of 3.43, while the lowest was *"Linking academic courses with intellectual security"* with a mean of 3.12.

Hypothesis result: *There are no statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of South africa university's role in developing intellectual awareness attributable to the gender variable.*

To test this hypothesis, the researcher used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Results of One-Way ANOVA Examining Differences in Perceptions of South Africa University's Role in Developing Intellectual Awareness Based on Gender

Variable	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Significance Level (p-value)
Gender	Between Groups	0.372	0.186	1.703	0.18
	Within Groups	89.4	0.329		
	Total	88.81			

As shown in Table 5, the significance value ($p = 0.180$) exceeds the alpha level ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicating that the result is not statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted, confirming that no statistically significant differences exist in students' perceptions of South Africa University's role in developing intellectual awareness based on gender.

Discussion

The results suggest that the students of the University of South Africa see the role of the university in facilitating intellectual security as positive and at the institutional level. The greatest rates of consensus were connected with the programs to encourage tolerance and introduction to the threats of cultural and ideological differences. This indicates that the university is more pre-emptive in intellectual awareness by value based learning and systematic awareness campaigns. These results put the institution in a different position besides being a knowledge provider but an agent of socialisation who is normative in the development of cognitive resilience and critical orientation of students on ideological threats.

Nonetheless, the value-based awareness was highly ranked, whereas the elements of academic integration that are more organized, especially the association of academic courses directly to intellectual security, were ranked relatively lower. This suggests the possibility of disconnect between extracurricular awareness programs and integration on the curriculum level. That is to say, intellectual security seems to be enhanced by more of activities and programmes rather than systematic curricular entrenchment. This trend is in line with Al-Fawwaz (2021) who established that in the promotion of intellectual security, universities tend to pursue moderate institutional practices as opposed to complete integration curricular strategies. Once more, Al-Saleh (2020) has stressed the fact that intellectual development needs a stronger pedagogical integration and not just being stagnant in seminars and awareness campaigns.

The fact that students vigorously support the creation of intellectually customized student activities and the creation of specific forums also speaks of the fact that students prefer interactive and dialogic styles. This is an indication that there is a transition between passive awareness models and participatory engagement models. These results are consistent with modern research in the field of higher education

that proposes the idea that intellectual security can best be reinforced by dialogue-based pedagogies, student-led platforms, and critical discourse environments as opposed to strictly didactic interventions.

Furthermore, the result shows there is no statistically significant difference in gendering, which indicates that the university intellectual security programs are not viewed as unequal and unevenly available. This can signify institutional consistency with program and student engagement policies.

The outcome supports earlier research (Alfawwaz, 2021; Kazan, 2021; Alsaleh, 2020), and they also found out that there is no significant difference in the development of intellectual awareness between genders in case of equal institutional exposure. The implication is that structural design, and not demographic factors, could have a more decisive role in determining their perception of intellectual security to students.

Challenges and Limitations

Although the results were positive, there are a number of structural and methodological issues that should be admitted. First, it is possible that the dependence on self-reported perceptions will restrict the possibility to measure the real behavioural effect of intellectual security initiatives. Second, the sample of the study was limited to one institution and it limits generalisation between various higher education settings. Moreover, intellectual security is also a concept that can be construed in a number of ways across the contexts of culture and ideology and this might affect the way students formulate and appraise it. Lastly, the average score of the curricular integration implies that there is a structural issue: it is possible that universities are institutionally constrained in their efforts to entrench intellectual security in an institutionalized manner into academic programmes without undermining disciplinary autonomy.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The role of universities as key actors in the construction of cognitive resilience and ideological restraint is strengthened in the study as it augments the literature on the subject. It builds on current studies to prove that intellectual security is best felt when backed by interactive and inclusive dialogue environments. In practice, the implications of the findings are that universities must go beyond the awareness based programming into integrated pedagogical models that entrench intellectual security in teaching strategies, curriculum design, and co-curricular participation.

The institutional tactics must thus focus on platforms of organised dialogue, pedagogies of critical thinking, interdisciplinary seminars, and intellectual forums of students. Faculty training to be more intellectual moderate and constructive could also be strengthened, which can further improve the effectiveness of programmes.

Future Research Recommendations.

The next research would have a broader range of including more than one university in various national and cultural setting to evaluate comparative institutional models. Particularly longitudinal designs would be useful in determining the long-term cognitive and behavioural effects of intellectual security initiatives. Furthermore, qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups) can be introduced into the future studies in order to find out the way students conceptualise intellectual security in a way that is not connected to surveys. The analysis of the correlation between intellectual security and the variables (digital media exposure, political socialisation, academic discipline, etc.) can also offer more explanatory information.

Declaration of originality: The author declares that this manuscript is original, has not been published before, and is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.

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