

## **Academic Freedom and Participation Dichotomy in Higher Education in Southern Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*This study was guided by the grounded theory methodology to examine the nexus between academic freedom and participation dichotomy in higher education in Southern Africa with particular focus on Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi, and Botswana. The study borrowed significantly from the theory of human rights, particularly the natural and subsidiary rights such as the right to self-sovereignty, ownership of what one creates, personal security, manage one's life and freedom of conscience. The study deduced that academics in Southern African higher education have severe threats to academic freedom and participation that are manifested through restrictions in funding, research, remuneration, curriculum, political hegemony, gender and linguisticism. Significant abuse of academic freedom was inferred to be orchestrated by political governments, leaders of academic institutions, academics and journals in the Global North. The study recommended that political leaders create free space for academics to communicate their research and teach without censorship. The governments, higher education leaders and other stakeholders need to enforce language and gender polices that protect women and African indigenous languages from gender discrimination so as to promote their active inclusion. The political governments should also fuse academic freedom into their constitutions as part of academic and human rights to be protect.*

**Keywords:** Academic Freedom, Participation Dichotomy, Social Justice Southern African Higher Education, Human Rights

## Introduction

Academic freedom is enshrined in the constitutions of many African countries and is protected by various laws and regulations (Adu & Odame, 2023). For example, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights recognizes the right to freedom of expression, including academic freedom. Similarly, the UNESCO recommendations concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel provides guidelines for the protection of academic freedom (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). However, despite these legal protections, academic freedom in Africa is often curtailed by political interference and institutional constraints (Benatar, 2016). The consequences of restrictions on academic freedom in Africa are far-reaching and can have a negative impact on the quality of education and research. When lecturers are unable to pursue independent research or engage in critical inquiry, the quality of education suffers, and students are deprived of the opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives (Mama, 2022). Limitations on the development and dissemination of knowledge can also have broader implications for the promotion of democracy and human rights in Africa.

This study interrogates the nexus between academic freedom and participation dichotomy in higher education in Southern Africa. Africa's southernmost region is known as Southern Africa. Although there isn't a universally accepted definition, several groups include the United Nations geosphere, the intergovernmental Southern African Development Community, and the definition of physical geography that is based on the land's physical features. Southern Africa, according to the most restrictive definition, comprises the following nations: Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Angola. In Southern Africa, the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy have been at the center of tensions between academics and the state, as well as external governing bodies and other societal influences (Johnson, 2020).

The constraints on academic freedom have been historically used to suppress political change, academic critique, and free thinking in many African states (Benatar, 2016; Williams, 2016). These attacks, being both violent and insidious in their implementation (Moyo, 2009), have been guided by the presence of poor working conditions, the exclusion of academics and university staff from true participation in the creation of knowledge, and vitally the lack of space for students

and staff to mobilize collectively against such constraints (Adu & Odame, 2023). The discourse and application of academic freedom and institutional autonomy can often be blurred and used to justify government agendas which rely on a restriction to political activism and critique (Nghoh, 2021). For this reason, this study sought to investigate the dichotomy between academic freedom and participation in the context of Southern African higher education, examining regional case studies in the distinct political nations such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and South Africa.

### **Conceptualising academic freedom**

Academic freedom refers to the ability of academics to engage in intellectual inquiry and innovation without fear of censorship or retribution (Nsibandé & Macfarlane, 2018; Odendaal, 2024). Academic freedom is defined as the freedom of scholars to conduct research, publish, and teach without interference or restraint from the government, institutional authorities, or other external forces (Karran et al., 2022). In this analytical review, the study explored the concept of academic freedom in higher education, the participation dichotomy in Southern African higher education, and how academic freedom can be used to address the participation restrictions.

By critically looking at the perspectives and experiences of university staff and students, the study will engage with widespread violations of academic freedom and identify the international, national, and institutional structures that allow such restrictions. By evaluating the potential methods of promoting academic freedom and participation on a union-wide basis, this article evaluated strategies and provide a greater understanding of the institutional environments that exist in Southern Africa today. The cases of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana were used to provide a well-rounded analysis of the challenges faced by the academic community in Southern Africa. The aim of this article was not simply to point out the failings of various nations' higher educational sectors but to actively promote research and efforts that seek to support and develop true academic freedom and operational autonomy in the region. This study was guided by the main objective of examining the threats to academic freedom and participation in higher education in Southern Africa. It is important to note that the state of academic freedom in the countries in Southern Africa is not uniform. For example, South Africa tends to have more respect to academic freedom as it has included it in its constitution

as compared to other countries. Research suggests that Zimbabwe is among those countries that struggle to maintain it as noted by massive brain drain of academics from its higher education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Academic freedom in Africa, is associated with constraints and struggle (Nyamnjoh, 2015). Academic institutions have a responsibility to safeguard academic freedom, but in many cases, they fail to do so. However, there have been a large number of scandals around the restriction of academic freedom at a number of universities (Ndereyimana, 2021). It is therefore, a freedom that cannot be enjoyed in isolation. Academic freedom is interconnected to other human rights and liberties (Majawa, 2020). With challenges in Southern such as poverty, epistemicism, injustice and abuse of human rights, the researcher was motivated to examine the state of academic freedom and participation of academic staff in the pillars of responsibility in higher education. It is the hope of this study to empower academics to regain and embark on authentic and lasting academic freedom in Africa

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the threats to academic freedom and participation in higher education in Southern Africa?
2. What recommendations can be made to mitigate the threats to academic freedom and participation in higher education in Southern Africa?

### **Literature Review**

This study was hinged on the theory of human rights. Although academic rights may not be regarded as human rights, there are some overlaps hence the justification for the choice of this theory. The study borrows significantly from selected natural and subsidiary rights. From the natural rights, the researcher selected the right of self-sovereignty, and the right of ownership of what one creates. The right of self-sovereignty entails the equal status of all human beings and interdicts a person from assuming control over another (Ackerly, 2022). In higher education, the implication may be that university and political leaders need to understand the limit of their control of academics so as not to infringe with their academic freedom.

The right of right of ownership of what one creates states that when a person creates something that did not exist before, the subject person has the most powerful claim to key ownership of it (Langlois, 2022). In this case academics in higher education have the right to participate in the creation and ownership intellectual property without restrictions as part their academic freedom.

From the subsidiary rights, the study borrows from the right to personal security, manage one's life and freedom of conscience. The right to personal security implies security and inviolability of one's person and being free from physical, social and emotional attack (Atapattu, 2022). The academics in Southern African higher education need to be secure and free from pain if they are to enjoy academic freedom.

The right to manage one's life entails freedom of association by all academics including whom to marry, organisations to affiliate with, friendships, and memberships in organizations (Langlois, 2022). The freedom of conscience refers to ownership, belief and control of one's mind which include the right to evaluate, rationalise and select what to believe (Goodhart, 2022). This relates to optional beliefs, such as political ideology, religion, social theories, and superstitions. By implication, academics in Southern African higher education should be free from religious, political and ideological restrictions in order to enjoy their academic freedom.

### **Academic Freedom and Participation Dichotomy**

This section examines the nexus between academic freedom and determinants of participation in higher education such as research, funding, remuneration, curriculum, language, gender, and political restrictions. This section shall be guided by the theory of human rights and relevant case studies from countries in Southern Africa.

### **Academic Freedom and Research**

Academic oppression inhibits research innovation, excellence in quality education and transformation in life. Generally speaking, academic freedom plays a great role as the facilitator and guarantor for the generation, dissemination, application, and protection of knowledge (Appiagyei-Atua et al., 2016). Academics

should be free to seek, pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, documentation, production, creation, discussion, or writing, individually or collectively (Kori, 2016). Without freedom and autonomy in knowledge production, academic freedom is compromised hence academics need institutional space in which they enjoy the right to ownership and self-sovereignty as advanced in the human rights theory.

Meanwhile Africa's research production and publication contribution to global scholarship, continues to deteriorate (Mama, 2022). In almost thirty African countries academics published more than 90% of their studies in collaboration with academics in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, United States, and France. In this sense, knowledge production in Africa is vulnerable to external dependency just African economies. This situation compromised the liberty of conscience which is a fundamental aspect of the human rights theory. One factor that contributes to threats in quality academic freedom is government interference and lack of support from academic institutions. Thus, their academic freedom, methodology, content, and standards are restricted and dictated by the global North academic institutions. It can be inferred that such restrictions violate the right to self-sovereignty and the liberty of conscience that are predicated on the theory of human rights.

The evident conclusion is that most Southern African students (particularly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi), faculty, adjuncts, academic administrators, curricula developers, researchers, community, and civic intellectuals are laughing at a slender side of epistemic justice. With such poor funding and dependency on Western donor agencies, this study deduces that African academic institutions' knowledge production trajectory continues to be swayed by the Global North thereby compromising their academic freedom self-sovereignty and the liberty of conscience.

### **Academic Freedom, Funding and Remuneration**

Deficient funding and resources for participation in academic activities and research can adversely impact on academic freedom. Academics lecturers find it hard to pursue independent research or engage in critical inquiry without adequate support and this compromises their liberty of conscience. More so, political governments may limit academic freedom by using their financial control over

academic institutions to and stifle dissent (Goodhart, 2022). Academic autonomy and freedom can also be stifled by the reliance on donor funds. This compromises researchers as they are swayed to advance the intellectual agendas in favour of donors who fund them.

Another key barrier to academic freedom are the meagre and poor salaries that tend to poke academics to hustle for additional incomes through informal activities. For example, a growing scramble for consultancy work by academics has taken precedence over academic values such as research, teaching and publication (Nyamnjoh, 2015). Parallel non-academic activities have chewed considerable effort and time of academics as they hustle to complement their salaries (Nyamnjoh, 2015). These supplementary activities bring with them greater loading, but are being used as a necessary ways of increasing income deficits. These extra demands chew the energy, effort and time for knowledge production and teaching under feasible and acceptable conditions of employment. From the human rights theory huge workloads is a violation of one's person in social, physical and emotional domains.

The depletion of academics in African higher education institutions as a result of brain drain have had profound ramifications on Southern African higher education. Brain drain refers to the exodus of the highly educated, skilled, and talented person from their home country (Mwamwenda, 2018). The term itself "brain drain" suggests that intelligent individuals always seem to gravitate towards more developed countries or countries that pay better and thus "leave" the developing country, therefore draining the "brains" of what is crucial to the growth and sustainability of a country (Ighobor, 2017).

This process is often accompanied by or resulted from a loss in generation and loss of income that these people could have generated. The term "brain drain" was coined because the emigrants mainly left behind the skill and expertise that could aid in future development (Akindipe, 2020). With this interpretation, then, brain drain could simply be the net emigration of the skilled or intellectual, which benefits the recipient country. For example, empirical research notes that Zimbabwe's brain exodus has been remarkable with academics from several disciplines seeking economic refuge in the Southern African region and the Global North. Many esteemed and younger academics have migrated to South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, America and Europe hence their skills develop the receiving

countries while stifling the migrant academics' country of origin (Chitando & Mlambo, 2014).

Brain drain is a common phenomenon in many developing nations that threatens academic freedom. This loss of a country's intelligent citizens leads to poor economic, social, and cultural development. It is an indicator of limited academic freedom in Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi.

### **Academic Freedom and the Curriculum**

African universities purport that they have academic freedom to design the curriculum that they implement-but is this true? They are given few restraints; after all, anyone who knows a field has a perfect right, and often an obligation, to teach. A variety of forces act upon what and how someone teaches, but there is no specific method by which the resultant curriculum is analyzed or assured of quality. A faculty member is free to teach what and how she pleases, and the means to fulfil her intent is at best idiosyncratic, at worst incoherent, and usually presumed. For example, results from empirical research portray that lecturers in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning have ultimate freedom and control over course content, pedagogy and evaluation. They enjoy the freedom to design, include and exclude content based on their understanding of what is significant to the module (Chitando & Mlambo, 2014).

There are differing views on the magnitude of freedom over the content that higher education institutions teach. This study argues that there are several elements of the content in which the academics in Southern African higher education have limited control hence their liberty of conscience is compromised. This study attests and theorises that African academics are not totally free to define and control the curriculum that is transacted in universities even in Botswana and South Africa where institutions enjoy better forms of academic freedom. The academics in Southern African higher education rely on and consume the theories and pedagogical strategies from the Global North in curriculum transaction. Kori (2016: p.51) hinted that there are instances when “the government through various bureaucratic structures decides on what can be taught; which institutions will offer what programmes; who can be taught; how students will be taught; which programmes will be funded at what levels; and can now displace a Vice Chancellor

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on the basis of a review and install its own Administrator to run the institution”.

In Zimbabwe what should be taught should be guided by the current national ideology Education 5.0. In this ideology, all the content taught in any discipline should be moulded around heritage based science, technology, engineering, and mathematics with the target of innovation and industrialisation. Even those in humanities are ‘coerced’ to extract content that is tilted towards Education 5.0. In their teaching and research, the lectures should produce tangible goods and services. This is a daunting task for those in arts and humanities. More so, the theories that are taught, and guide the transaction of most modules in African higher education have originated from the Global North. In this sense it may be rational to theorise that African academics are mere consumers of knowledge rather than active producers—a compromised position in academic freedom and participation in relation to their rights to self-sovereignty, and liberty of conscience.

### **Academic Freedom and Political Restrictions**

The government of the day has power and influence over the education of its population, both the majority and minority ethnic groups (Eriyanti et al., 2018). Any form of challenging the government of the day will result in repression. In the last two decades, many countries have faced masses of political unrest and open political conflict. Sub-Saharan African societies are no exception to political restrictions and this infringes on the academics’ rights of freedom of conscience as enshrined in the theory of human rights. The last years have shown us many moments of riots and protests. Even if all protests have not been directly linked to using violence as they have in other regions, the increasing number of political unrests and armed conflicts reported gives an indication of a trend for the Sub-Saharan region (Kori, 2016).

The beginning of the 21st century saw the increasing number of political restrictions on higher education. Ethical values began to oppose these silencing and deprivation tendencies. In 2019 alone political leaders empirical research observed that in Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Mali, , India, Mexico, Brazil, Turkey and Poland in 2019 alone the political leaders threatened the university leaders, academics, professors, and lecturers, and accused them of interfering into national political discourse (Majawa, 2020). Russia and China, despite being two world’s most powerful states, they are known for knowledge censorship as they monitor and

control what university academics teach, research on, and do within and outside the academia.

University teaching and research should be intellectually and morally independent of all political and economic power for it to genuinely meet its obligations (Kori, 2016). Academic freedom is a recent and contemporary issue in Africa. Apart from the Kampala Declaration on Academic Freedom in Uganda in November 1990, researches prove through documentary analysis that it is only South Africa has fused of Academic freedom in its constitution. As a matter of fact, Section 16 of the 1996 Constitution of South Africa provides specific protections to academic freedom (Ndereyimana, 2021). The Section 16 of the South African Constitution, on freedom of scientific research and academic freedom has become a constitutional right (Taiwo, 2011) which is guaranteed and binding on the state. The state must promote, protect, respect and fulfil this right.

The political leaders in other Southern African countries are yet to embrace academic freedom in their constitutions. African academics and their colleagues around the world who concentrate their research on Africa are growing perturbed at evidence of censorship in scholarly publishing. It can be theorised that one of the biggest challenges facing academic freedom for lecturers in Southern Africa is political interference and censorship of academic research and publications which is a great threat to the freedom of association as enshrined in the human rights theory. It possible that multibillion-dollar publishers will collude to protect the interests of their sponsors while stifling 'academic freedom' - a very important tenet of universities. On the other hand, governments usually seeks jurisdiction over the dissemination of information and restrict the critical analysis of their policies to the point that leads to harassment and intimidation academics who provoke and contest the status quo (Majawa, 2020). In Zimbabwe empirical research established that some academics are sympathetic to the ruling regime and such can opinion without any fear of being harassed. On the other hand academics that are castigatory of the government have been held back to express their opinions (Chitando & Mlambo, 2014).

Leadership positions in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa at large learning are political appointments, as such academic freedom is misused and abused to protect political interests. University leaders in

management and position and academics who contest and challenge the external political pressure are often suppressed. This has led to a point at which the socio-political crises in Zimbabwe have adversely impacted on academic freedom and stifled the potential and depth of free inquiry. The lives of scholars are at risk because of the prevailing levels of abuse of human rights. Moyo (2009) reported that several Zimbabwean academics have fled into exile for their own safety after being accused of challenging the status quo. These endangered academic minds have been maimed, tortured and killed for expressing the truth to those in positions of power. This study theorises that such acts are threats to freedom of association, personal security and inviolability of one's person (social, physical and emotional) as enshrined in the theory of human rights.

African continent has recorded several experiences of dangers to academic freedom. An unfortunate example of killing and oppressing and academic freedom was experienced at the University of Malawi in the rule of Dr. Kamuzu Banda (1898-1997). Academic staff and their students were subjected to close scrutiny, surveillance and control during this period (Majawa, 2020). Several university lectures in Africa have been persecuted and imprisoned, and others went into exile because of articulating their voices through their research findings. Several Human Rights organizations together with the international community have made efforts to intervene into the abuse of human rights and academic freedom but to no avail. In Northern Africa, Nigerian universities have experienced many cases that challenge their academic freedom (Taiwo, 2011) like unlawful dismissal of university academics for contesting government policies.

### **Academic Freedom and Gender Restrictions**

Academic freedom is fragmentary and defective if the contributions of men are exclusively heard. Women academics in Southern Africa higher education also have the right to the liberty of conscience, epistemic ownership, personal security, and association. This takes us to impact of gender in academic freedom and participation. Gender is used to distinguish the categories of "people" and to differentiate their absolute and relative worth, especially when such classifications result in widespread discrimination against certain categories in terms of opportunities, outcomes, and living conditions, a variety of related issues surface (Motshweni, 2019). It is therefore important to create spaces that enhance gender responsive academic freedom (Ramohai, 2019). The complete meaning of academic

freedom is expressed in spaces where women's voices are heard (Chitando & Mlambo, 2014). Gender concerns and equality in teaching and research need to be promoted in a society democratic values are cherished. It is desirable that gender equality is not only a feature of African countries' conduct but that it also be the result of practice. The invaluable contribution that is made to the development of Africa by research at all levels, particularly within the academy and the instruments for the development of Africa are not full because research ignores gender concerns (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). As academic freedom is core to the performance of the academy, the importance and range of academic freedom that the academy should have in order to be able to perform this key role should be gender sensitive but this is lacking in Southern Africa (Tyatya, 2020). Principle issues are raised in studies in Southern Africa in which gender equity is compromised in awarding promotions, pay, teaching assignments, and women's roles in religious and secular practices on and off campus; as well as related socio-economic and political issues, including educational opportunities and distributions of resources (Ramohai, 2019; Tyatya, 2020; Vurayai, 2022).

This study reasoned that the other issues that threaten academic freedom and participation of women in Southern Africa higher education are systematic patterns of discrimination based on gender: sexual harassment and date rape, sexist remarks and other kinds of hostile and punitive behaviour, and the relegation of selected tasks such as service to others primarily or solely to women faculty members. Such discrimination may can also lead to violation of academic freedom and the human rights to personal security, ownership, and self-sovereignty as proclaimed by the theory of human rights.

### **Academic Freedom and Linguicism**

Linguicism simply means discrimination against a person or people based on what language(s) they speak (Heleta, 2022). Linguicism is practiced by both individuals and institutions in different spaces across the globe, including educational institutions be them formal or informal (Nadi, 2022). However, this study noted a gap that existing literature on linguistic discrimination in educational institutions usually focuses on the policy perspectives, leaving out the academic freedom angle. It is this gap that thus study seek to address in this section. Several empirical studies in Africa argue that not allowing lecturers to use all the languages the students understand in the teaching-learning process infringes their academic

freedom because of the significant role their experience with different languages plays in their critical thinking skills (Nyamnjoh & Luescher, 2022).

The language of instruction and knowledge communication are major determinants of academic freedom. Linguicism is part of a social structure meant to exclude, marginalize, and distinguish power groups from non-power groups of people in countries that are linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse (Chibita, 2016). This analysis, as it relates to post-colonial Africa, highlights the particularly debilitating impacts of inscription into a tertiary language of instruction for many students, many of whom are members of cultural and linguistic minorities.

This section argues that institutionalizing a monolingual medium of instruction which pays scarce attention to multicultural and multilingual reality constitutes both a danger to academic freedom and an obstacle to achieving the goals of higher education for development that are claimed by many African governments. Most disciplines in the university curriculum in Southern Africa are taught in foreign language. Participating in a foreign language is really daunting as participants have a double task of understanding the language and then the concepts (Oloruntoba-Oju & van Pinxteren, 2022). Apart from the language of instruction, the language of scholarly communication also determines academic freedom and can impede African academics to teach, research and publish (Makalela, 2016). The dominant foreign owned journals are in most cases monolingual and often excludes the indigenous languages and culture (Prah, 2015).

A people's culture is conveyed in its language and by implication African academics' languages and cultures are denigrated and excluded from full participation in knowledge production. This situation compromises the academic freedom of most Africa academics as they are rendered the consumers rather than the producers of knowledge. Most of their work is discounted and rejected for publication as non-native English speakers thereby reducing their participation in knowledge production. In this respect, this study deduces that linguicism is a great threat to the liberty of conscience, freedom of association, right of ownership and self-sovereignty as expounded in the human rights theory.

## **Methodology**

The study employed the Grounded Theory approach for looking at qualitative data, aiming at the generation of theory. This approach was systematized in the 1960s by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser (Keane & Thornberg, 2024). The objective of Grounded Theory Approach is theorization of data. For this purpose, a systematic procedure is required. Grounded Theory allows researchers to form constructs and build theories from secondary or primary data collected from different sources rather than from existing theories (Bryant, 2017). This study took the position that secondary qualitative data analysis has much to offer those employing GTM. In particular, there are opportunities for more rapid data collection and analysis, increased transparency and comprehensiveness, exploration of questions. Grounded theory in this study was predicated on secondary data on the academic freedom and the challenges of participation in Africa higher education.

This involves the study of existing scientific publications. The approach proposes a well-documented and reliable technique for systematically identifying relevant literature and objectively selecting scientific papers, conference proceedings, or monographs in a research area in order to obtain an objective summary and critical overview of the existing evidence concerning a specific question. In this study, an overarching review that established the threats to academic freedom and participation of academics in Southern African higher education. With the guidance of the theory of human rights, the review begins with literature on the academic freedom and threats to research and the curriculum transactions. Subsequently, political, gender, and funding and gender restrictions in relation to academic freedom were examined and interrogated. The search engines that were exploited were Google Scholar, Education and Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Research Gate, Semantic Scholar and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

The condition for inclusion of the selected studies for systematic review were that they were published between 2010 and 2024 and that they were on academic freedom and participation in Southern African higher education. In searching for literature, the key words that were used were ‘academic freedom’, ‘ participation challenges in higher education’, and ‘institutional autonomy’.

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## Discussion

Academic freedom is an essential component of a vibrant and democratic society that upholds human rights, and it is imperative that Southern African governments and academic institutions take steps to protect it. By safeguarding academic freedom, Southern African governments can ensure that lecturers are able to carry out their teaching, research, and outreach activities without fear of political interference or institutional constraints. Ultimately, this study deduced that the promotion of academic freedom in Southern Africa is essential for the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of democracy and human rights. Apparently, this study established several threats to academic freedom that in turn adversely impact on the participation of academics in higher education in Southern Africa.

The study inferred that the inhibition of academic freedom translates to poor research output by academics. Southern African academics have for long been swayed and manipulated by donors, researchers and journals in the Global North to follow a predetermined or dictated epistemic trajectory. In this sense Southern African academics suffer from chronic knowledge dependency since they are funded to do so. This study reasons that this is an indicator of a serious threat to the liberty of conscience, right of ownership and self-sovereignty. More so, most academics in Southern African higher education are subjected to poor remuneration (See cited cases of Zimbabwe and Malawi). This culminated into brain-drain as the academics left for greener pastures in the Global North. Poor remuneration also compromised academic freedom and participation in the sense that most academics were observed to be spending most of their time (for research and teaching) doing side hustles to supplement their meagre salaries thereby compromising the right to the inviolability of one's person (physical, social and emotional)

The curriculum in Southern African Higher education is mostly transacted in in foreign language and theories (See cited cases of Zimbabwe, Malawi, and South Africa). It is also built on theories and experiences of the Global North which may not be applicable to the African context. The language of curriculum and research transaction portrays linguicism in which Southern African indigenous languages (such as ChiShona, Ndebele, Chichewa, IsiZulu, Setswana etc) are denigrated. Linguicism is a great threat to academic freedom and participation as it stripes the academics of their linguistic power of expression and the overall language freedom as important tools for research and teaching.

Gender and political restrictions in Southern Africa were also found to militate against academic freedom. Gender restrictions were manifested through challenges like discrimination, stereotyping, sexual harassment and sexist remarks that in turn restrict women participation. Apart from gender, political restrictions in Southern Africa have resulted in abuse of human rights in which some political leaders persecuted, tortured, and even killed the academics that contest their policies (See the cases of Malawi and Zimbabwe). These are extreme cases of violation of academic freedom, personal security and freedom of association).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, academic freedom is not abstract; rather, it is a position centred on maintaining the preconditions necessary to keep the university institution functional and by extension, serving the people of the society in which it is situated. Drawing from the literature; the challenges to academic freedom in Southern African higher education system is not unique but continue to manifest in various forms of the contemporary jurisdiction of knowledge factory. In particular, deducing from the literature, the universities are increasingly being responsive to external interest groups at the expense of their principal responsibility to generate and disseminate knowledge. Academic freedom serves that broad societal good. In democratic Southern African states, legislations that govern the university should be clear and provide ethical supervisory regulation to prevent undue biases that restrict academic freedom. The measure should take the form of separation of power between regulatory and management boards. The university should ensure that the business is not the business of the state, religious organisations, political parties, commerce or other groups and vested interests so as to allow faculty members to enjoy their rights to liberty of conscience, freedom of association, right of ownership and self-sovereignty as proclaimed in the human rights theory.

The transformation of higher education in Southern Africa remains an unfinished without the safeguarding of preconditions necessary to maintain academic freedom predicated on a society in which individual liberty and democracy as a whole are cherished. The study further infers that that higher education academics in Southern African higher education have their academic freedom thwarted by funding, linguistic and remuneration deficiencies. These deficiencies culminate in ripple effects like low research output, gender disparities, huge workloads and brain drain to the detriment Southern African higher education.

Considering the given implications, it is the recommendation of this study that political leaders in Southern Africa create free space for academics to communicate their research and teach without censorship. This can be achieved by fusing academic freedom as human rights into the constitution, so that it can be protected and respected (see the case of South Africa). Other Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia should also benchmark from the South African Model and fuse academic freedom into their constitutions. The local languages in Southern Africa need to be respected and promoted so to facilitate teaching and research transactions like what East Africa envisions and attempts with Kiswahili. The governments, higher education leaders and other stakeholders in Southern African countries need to enforce gender polices that protect women from gender discrimination so as to promote their participation through strict gender policy implementation monitoring and evaluation.

The conditions of service for academics in Southern Africa especially in Zimbabwe Malawi and Mozambique need to be improved so as to curb brain-drain which is a threat to academic freedom. This can be done through paying reasonable salary, introducing non-monetary benefits, funding research and conferences, and funding contact, study and sabbatical leaves for academic staff.

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