



# Academic Freedom at a Crossroads: The Influence of Radical Social Justice Ideologies on Open Inquiry and Public Discourse

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## Abstract

This paper critically examines the impact of radical social justice ideologies on academic freedom, exploring their dual role in both fostering inclusivity and imposing constraints on open inquiry. Beginning with a historical analysis of academic freedom, the study underscores its foundational role in intellectual progress, innovation, and democratic discourse. The paper then delves into the evolution of social justice movements, highlighting their contributions to academic inclusivity and curriculum transformation. However, it also addresses the unintended consequences of radical interpretations of these ideologies, such as self-censorship, ideological conformity, and the suppression of dissenting viewpoints. Drawing from case studies, including the University of the South Pacific, the paper illustrates the tensions that emerge when ideological activism intersects with academic autonomy. Using a systematic literature review methodology, the research synthesizes theoretical and empirical perspectives to assess the broader implications of ideological rigidity on intellectual diversity. Ultimately, this paper advocates for a balanced approach that safeguards academic freedom while advancing social justice objectives, proposing strategies to cultivate inclusive yet intellectually open academic environments.

**Keywords:** Academic freedom, radical social justice ideologies, open inquiry, self-censorship, intellectual diversity

## 1. Introduction

Academic freedom serves as a foundational principle that empowers scholars to pursue knowledge and research without undue interference, thereby fostering an environment conducive to innovation, critical thinking, and open inquiry. Historically, academic freedom has been a catalyst for societal progress, with its influence measurable through key innovation metrics such as patent applications and citations. Empirical research indicates that enhancing academic freedom by one standard deviation can increase patent applications by 41% and citations by 29%, emphasizing its critical role in driving both the quantity and quality of

innovation on a global scale (Audretsch et al., 2023). Despite its significance, academic freedom currently faces various threats, including political pressures and the neoliberalization of universities, which complicate its legal and conceptual frameworks (Petrovic & Morris, 2024). The historical context of academic freedom reveals it as both a right and a duty, with its effectiveness reliant on institutional autonomy and state guarantees (Baets, 2021). Maintaining this delicate balance is crucial for preserving the university's societal role, which includes fostering innovation, promoting democratic competence, and ensuring the continuity of academic institutions (Baets, 2021). However, the recent global decline in academic freedom poses a threat with estimates indicating a 4.0% reduction in patents filed and a 5.9% decrease in patent citations over the past decade (Audretsch et al., 2023). This decline underscores an urgent need for policymakers to safeguard academic freedom to maintain its vital role in fostering innovation and critical inquiry.

Social justice movements have similarly evolved through historical and contemporary influences, as well as through academic and grassroots initiatives. Philosophical discussions by figures like Plato and Aristotle laid early foundations, later expanded upon by thinkers such as Karl Marx and John Rawls, who emphasized distributive justice and the fair allocation of resources (Hantal, 2022). However, as distributive justice proved limited in addressing systemic issues including sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination, social movements such as the Women's Liberation Movement, LGBTQI+ rights, and Black Lives Matter emerged to address identity, difference, and power relations (McKeown, 2022). Social justice pedagogies, which grew from grassroots and academic traditions, have since established a coherent body of educational practices aimed at fostering awareness and action (Fletcher, 2022). The societal impact of these movements is underscored by their effectiveness in addressing global issues and advocating for equitable rights, as demonstrated by successful campaigns that mobilized widespread public support and resources (Masood, 2023). This multifaceted evolution of social justice ideologies illustrates the interplay among historical narratives, academic discourse, and active social movements in shaping contemporary understandings and applications of social justice (Conway & Erlichman, 2024).

However, radical social justice ideologies, while aimed at addressing social inequities, can inadvertently restrict open inquiry and academic freedom. This suppression often arises from intense political pressures and ideological commitments that stifle free inquiry and debate, as exemplified in the complex context of the Israel-Palestine discourse, where academic freedom faces challenges due to censorial actions and surveillance (Gentile, 2024). The tension between "woke culture" and academic freedom exemplifies this dynamic; controversial statements by academics are variably protected or condemned, creating cultural disruptions that paradoxically oppose the very freedom of expression inspired by thinkers like Derrida and Foucault (Oenen, 2023). Additionally, denunciation mobs, which legally exercise free speech rights to penalize scholars for dissenting ideas, often lead to punitive measures or dismissals (Stevens et al., 2020). This environment of suppression harms epistemic virtues, such as open-mindedness and intellectual honesty, by creating dissonance that undermines the pursuit of truth through free inquiry (Benn, 2021). Furthermore, social justice educators, in critiquing societal structures, may unintentionally weaken public institutions, reducing equitable access to education, particularly for marginalized groups (Philip, 2012). These dynamics underscore the complex interplay between pursuing social justice and preserving academic freedom, where the former can sometimes inadvertently constrain the latter.

This paper aims to critically examine the role of radical ideologies within academic institutions, with a focus on how these ideologies shape, limit, or enhance discourse. Radical ideologies, which challenge conventional beliefs and advocate transformative change, possess the potential to disrupt established norms, prompting both intellectual advancement and resistance.

By analyzing the impact of these ideologies on academic dialogue, this paper seeks to explore their influence on the exchange of ideas, inclusivity of perspectives, and boundaries of academic freedom. The scope of this inquiry includes examining the ways in which radical ideologies may enrich academic spaces by introducing diverse viewpoints and encouraging critical thought, while also acknowledging the potential limitations they impose on discourse, such as silencing dissenting opinions or fostering polarization. Through a balanced analysis, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the implications of radical ideologies for intellectual freedom and academic integrity.

## **2. Methodology**

This literature review employed a systematic qualitative approach to analyze the impact of radical social justice ideologies on academic freedom. A structured search, selection, and synthesis of existing scholarly literature ensures a comprehensive and balanced examination of the subject. By using an integrative literature review methodology, the study synthesizes existing research and theoretical perspectives, allowing for a broad analysis of complex social phenomena, such as the intersection of social justice ideologies and academic freedom. This approach facilitates the identification of patterns, trends, and gaps in the literature, offering a thorough understanding of the subject matter.

Data for this review were collected through a systematic search of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and reputable academic sources. The search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Scopus to ensure the credibility and relevance of the selected sources. A keyword-based search strategy was employed, utilizing terms including “academic freedom,” “radical social justice,” “cancel culture in academia,” “intellectual diversity,” “self-censorship in universities,” “political correctness and free speech,” “ideological bias in higher education,” and “social justice and academic inquiry.” Additional sources were identified through snowball sampling by reviewing the reference lists of key articles and books to achieve a well-rounded review of the relevant literature.

To maintain rigor and relevance, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The review incorporated peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports published within the last 20 years (2003–2023), with exceptions made for seminal works. It included studies that discussed both positive and negative impacts of social justice ideologies on academic freedom, as well as empirical studies, theoretical analyses, and case studies that explored ideological conflicts in higher education. Non-academic sources such as opinion pieces, blog posts, and non-peer-reviewed articles were excluded. Additionally, studies that solely focused on general social justice movements without a direct connection to academia were omitted. Articles lacking methodological clarity or empirical evidence were also excluded to ensure the quality and reliability of the review.

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes, arguments, and perspectives regarding the impact of radical social justice ideologies on academic freedom. The analysis focused on key aspects, including the historical and conceptual foundations of academic freedom, the integration of social justice into academia, and the tensions between radical social justice and open inquiry. Further, the study explored institutional responses and policy implications, along with case studies of academic suppression and intellectual diversity, illustrating real-world instances where radical ideological movements have influenced academic discourse.

Despite its comprehensive nature, this literature review has certain limitations. The availability of empirical data presents a challenge, as much of the literature on academic freedom and radical social justice is theoretical or anecdotal, with limited large-scale empirical studies. Additionally, some sources may exhibit ideological biases due to the polarized nature of the debate, necessitating a critical assessment of each perspective. Moreover, the study primarily focuses on Western academic institutions, particularly in North America and Europe, which may limit its generalizability to other cultural contexts.

Ethical considerations were accounted for in this study, as it was based on secondary data with no direct ethical risks involved. However, efforts were made to ensure an unbiased and balanced interpretation of the literature. The study acknowledges diverse perspectives and critically evaluates competing arguments to provide an objective analysis.

By employing a systematic and rigorous approach to reviewing the literature, this study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between radical social justice ideologies and academic freedom. The findings contribute to ongoing scholarly debates and offer insights for educators, policymakers, and academic institutions seeking to balance inclusivity with intellectual openness.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Evolution of Academic Freedom**

The evolution of academic freedom is a multifaceted narrative reflecting socio-political and cultural shifts across diverse regions and eras. Historically, it has been conceptualized as a fundamental right enabling scholars to pursue knowledge without undue interference—a principle that has both evolved and faced resistance. In the mid-20th century, academic freedom gained momentum, particularly after World War II, as nations recognized intellectual independence as essential for democratic societies. This period marked significant expansion in higher education, with formalizations such as the Robbins Report in the UK framing academic freedom within the context of post-war educational growth (Finn, 2022; Lott, 2023). In the United States, academic freedom intertwines with constitutional principles, yet remains limited by legal interpretations that often favor institutional over individual academic rights (Ugrekheldze & Bakaradze, 2019). Influences from 19th-century German philosophy, particularly the autonomy of teaching and research (*lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit*), have also shaped its conception (Finn, 2022). However, recent neoliberal policies and market-oriented approaches have posed new challenges, pressuring universities in ways that threaten academic inquiry's independence (Krijnen, 2022). Globally, while academic freedom is recognized as a human right, protections vary significantly, with some countries imposing restrictions that undermine scholarly autonomy (Baets, 2021; Hutchens et al., 2022). The interplay between academic freedom and institutional autonomy is crucial, as the latter fosters the internal conditions necessary for academic freedom to flourish, with external conditions shaped by state and societal guarantees (Baets, 2021). Despite its foundational role in promoting knowledge and democracy, academic freedom faces global threats, with scholars encountering harassment and reprisals across regions (Fontalvo, 2023). This ongoing struggle emphasizes the need for robust legal and institutional frameworks to protect academic freedom as a vital component of a free and open society.

The integration of social justice principles into higher education entails a comprehensive approach encompassing curriculum design, faculty policies, and institutional practices. Social justice in academia focuses on enhancing participation, completion, and outcomes in higher education, aiming to mitigate inequalities in students' educational pathways and social

conditions (Boyadjieva et al., 2024). This often involves embedding social justice issues within curricula, such as in engineering education, where ethics and societal impact are integrated to sensitize students to marginalized communities and develop ethical reasoning skills (Bielefeldt, 2024). Yet, the persistence of Eurocentric epistemologies in curricula necessitates a shift toward decolonization, advocating for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and diverse perspectives to foster inclusivity (Ajani, 2023; Mapuya, 2023). This decolonization process is especially critical in regions like South Africa, where historical inequalities have deeply influenced educational structures, prompting calls for transformative curricula that prioritize equity (Ajani, 2023). Addressing ableism within higher education also involves rethinking institutional structures to better support disabled students and staff, moving from a medical model toward recognizing systemic barriers (Broido et al., 2023). The broader agenda of equity and justice in higher education aims to increase access for underrepresented groups through inclusive practices like financial assistance and nondiscriminatory admissions, although measuring and effectively implementing these policies presents challenges (Bernd, 2023). Thus, integrating social justice in higher education necessitates an approach that includes curriculum reform, faculty engagement, and institutional policy adjustments to cultivate an environment supportive of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The distinction between radical and moderate interpretations of social justice within movements requires nuanced understanding of their ideological and strategic differences. Radical factions often employ extreme tactics, such as property destruction or violence, which can paradoxically increase support for moderate factions by making them appear more reasonable—a phenomenon known as the contrast effect (Simpson et al., 2022). However, this distinction is not solely based on tactics; it also involves ideological differences, with radicals tending toward black-and-white thinking and displaying aggressive behaviors that affect their emotion regulation and readiness for extreme actions (Emelin, 2019). In contrast, moderates, such as Eduard Bernstein within Marxism, may engage in critique by recognizing valid radical points while offering counter-narratives (Moreira, 2023). Socio-political context further complicates these distinctions, as in Muslim majority and minority settings, where the “moderate” versus “radical” binary can be misleading and driven by socio-political rather than religious factors, as seen in Malaysia’s history (Es et al., 2021; Gkoutzioulis, 2024). The interactions between radicals and conventionals can also influence the diffusion of radical practices within moderate communities, where radicals expand influence while conventionals may avoid confrontation (Galam & Brooks, 2022). This context highlights the complementary roles radical and moderate factions can play in movements, the strategic use of narratives, and the importance of situating these distinctions within broader socio-political frameworks.

The influence of social justice ideologies on academic discourse has led to instances of suppression and self-censorship within academia. The tension between free speech and politically correct norms recurs in the literature. Stevens et al. (2020) described how “denunciation mobs” can suppress ideas by targeting disfavored scholars, leading to sanctions or terminations. McGowan (2018) addressed the role of political correctness and microaggressions in stifling voices on campuses, where fear of backlash fosters self-censorship. This issue is compounded by academia’s intersections with corporate and military interests; R. Jackson (2012) noted that academic repression often mirrors state and political repression, with scholars facing punitive actions for their views. In Turkey, systematic attacks on academic freedom, resulting in widespread dismissals, illustrate extreme ideological suppression (Aktaş et al., 2019). Wood (2019) attributed the rise of self-censorship to the diversity movement, where performative anger and racial separatism challenge civil debate. Barnhizer (2005) and Garry (2023) critiqued cancel culture and politicized knowledge as intrusions undermining the conditions for free inquiry, creating a chilling effect on discourse.

Favreau (1997) suggested that debates over political correctness and speech codes should focus on the nature and implementation of regulations rather than their existence. Collectively, these studies illustrate the complex dynamics whereby social justice ideologies, while aimed at fostering inclusivity, can inadvertently limit open discourse and critical inquiry within academic environments

### **3.2 The Role of Radical Social Justice Ideologies in Public Discourse**

Radical social justice ideologies are characterized by their pursuit of profound societal transformation, frequently challenging entrenched power structures and advocating for equity across race, gender, and class dimensions. These movements critically address systemic injustices embedded within capitalist, imperialist, and colonial frameworks. For instance, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers spotlighted racial capitalism and American imperialism as central concerns (König, 2022). Radical social justice movements often arise from a process of radicalization, wherein individuals or groups may shift from nonviolent to potentially militant actions to catalyze political, social, or cultural change, underscoring the interwoven nature of political violence and broader social conflicts (Bosi & Della Porta, 2022). The ideologies driving these movements frequently dismiss conventional political engagement in favor of strategies that challenge societal norms, sometimes approaching the boundaries of legality (Bal, 2022). Fundamental to these movements is a commitment not only to distributive justice but also to addressing identity, difference, and power relations, as seen in movements like Black Lives Matter and advocacy for decolonization and trans rights (McKeown, 2022).

Education plays a vital role in fostering radical consciousness, with approaches such as radical community-based learning engaging students in activism and local community organizing to bring about material change (Russell, 2023). These movements emphasize collective action and societal efforts to address large-scale injustices, framing equal rights and access to resources as foundational elements of social justice (Masood, 2023). In essence, radical social justice ideologies are defined by their comprehensive critique of societal structures and their pursuit of transformative change through theoretical and practical strategies.

The influence of these ideologies on academic institutions is multifaceted, impacting institutional policies, faculty hiring practices, and curriculum choices. Government policies and external controls have notably reshaped the roles and responsibilities of academic staff, as exemplified in Ireland and Argentina, where increased oversight and accountability mechanisms have transformed the academic landscape (Gannon, 2024; Marquina et al., 2021). In curriculum design, ideologies operate across macro, meso, and micro levels, shaped by globalization, marketization, and socio-economic and political forces, as well as institutional policies and external bodies (Ramdass & Mokgohloa, 2023). Neoliberal ideologies prevalent in the global education market have led to a corporate approach in faculty hiring and promotion, as observed in Turkey and Mexico, where performance cultures challenge traditional academic professionalism (Uzuner-Smith & Englander, 2014). Furthermore, processes of internationalization, including academic mobility and curriculum reforms, prompt institutions to reassess their strategies, impacting teaching, research, and service practices (Benitez, 2019). In New Zealand, shifts in ideological frameworks have historically influenced curriculum documents, reflecting broader educational and policy changes (McGee, 2017). This interaction between curriculum ideology and educational philosophy extends to teaching approaches, as evidenced in a military medical university in Tehran, where ideologies of social efficiency and learner-centeredness align with specific educational philosophies (Mohammadipouya et al., 2017). Additionally, institutional policies in Pakistan, particularly at the University of Sindh, illustrate how faculty hiring and development, along with administrative relationships, shape teaching practices in English as a Second Language programs (Rind & Kadiwal, 2016).

Collectively, these ideologies and external forces shape the academic environment, influencing institutional policies, faculty dynamics, and curriculum development across diverse educational contexts.

Radical ideologies and the resulting political and societal pressures substantially influence academic institutions, often compelling alignment with specific ideological frameworks. These pressures manifest culturally, financially, and legislatively, reshaping operational and educational paradigms. For instance, in the United States, universities encounter cultural war politics and financial constraints that lead to conservative leadership shifts and legislative measures limiting diversity initiatives and faculty tenure, particularly in Republican-led states (Oxford Analytica, 2024). This political climate creates conditions where institutions may adopt quasi-compliance strategies, outwardly aligning with ideological pressures while attempting to preserve their core missions without full adherence to imposed ideologies (Cronin-Furman, 2022). Additionally, the integration of cultural confidence into ideological and political education emphasizes the need for curricula to reflect prevailing cultural and political ideologies, thus influencing the educational environment and outcomes (Mo et al., 2024). The perception of institutional politicization can erode public trust; studies show that heightened politicization correlates with lower trust and diminished public support, regardless of ideological alignment (Clark et al., 2023). This mistrust can press institutions to conform to dominant ideologies to sustain credibility and public support. Financial pressures and inter-university competition, driven by globalization and evolving state relations, further necessitate cost-cutting and centralized control, fostering stratification that often aligns with prevailing political ideologies (Berman & Paradeise, 2016). These dynamics demonstrate how radical ideologies, through political and societal pressures, can significantly mold the ideological frameworks within which academic institutions operate, frequently impacting their foundational missions and values.

### **3.3 Case Studies of Suppression and Censorship**

The University of the South Pacific (USP) serves as a prominent case study in examining controversies surrounding academic freedom and radical social justice perspectives. In 2014, the university became embroiled in a dispute involving issues of academic and media freedom, spotlighting the tensions between institutional administration and the journalism faculty. This controversy arose when a student's scholarship was suddenly revoked, leading to a news story by student journalists that aired on the university's radio station. Although the scholarship was eventually reinstated, tensions escalated when two journalism lecturers issued a media release condemning the military-backed Fijian government for endorsing torture and denying senior journalists accreditation for an international conference. This action incited a contentious dialogue between the lecturers and university administration, illuminating broader concerns around academic freedom and freedom of expression within a politically sensitive climate (Craddock, 2015). This case exemplifies the challenges universities face in safeguarding academic freedom amid political pressures—a theme resonant across global contexts, such as the tightening regulation and political influence in higher education institutions in India, Pakistan, and France (Anand & Niaz, 2022; Baskind, 2023). Such cases underscore the precarious balance universities must strike between fostering open academic inquiry and navigating external political and social forces.

An illustrative instance of the challenges faced by faculty members or researchers attempting to publish or teach material that contradicts entrenched social justice ideologies can be observed in academia's broader engagement with social justice and activism. Faculty members often encounter significant obstacles when their work challenges predominant social justice narratives, especially when these narratives are deeply embedded in institutional policies and

cultural frameworks. For instance, in nursing education, faculty confront inconsistencies in teaching social justice due to varying foundational documents and instructional approaches. Faculty of color, in particular, must navigate institutional structures that perpetuate colorblind racism and problematic cultural perspectives, which can impede their ability to teach social justice in a critical, effective manner (Valderama-Wallace & Apesoa-Varano, 2020). Similarly, researchers using community-engaged and participatory methods often contend with internal academic power dynamics that shape the research process, publication, and dissemination, which may not align with radical social justice ideologies, thereby presenting obstacles to tenure and promotion (Narendorf et al., 2022). Moreover, scholars engaged in activism frequently encounter disciplinary pressures and epistemological expectations that clash with their scholarly pursuits, posing risks to career advancement (Flood et al., 2013). These challenges are compounded by a lack of consensus on what constitutes a socially just education system, with debates often lacking constructive engagement with policy-making, leaving educators to navigate inherent dilemmas and contradictions (Francis et al., 2017). Collectively, these examples highlight the intricate landscape faculty and researchers must navigate when their work diverges from dominant social justice ideologies, underscoring the need for strategies that promote inclusive and meaningful scholarship.

### **3.4 Impact on Inquiry and Intellectual Diversity**

Self-censorship among academics and students is a complex phenomenon shaped by the fear of social and professional repercussions, as evidenced by various studies across different contexts. Within academia, particularly among U.S. psychology professors, self-censorship is common due to concerns about social sanctions and professional consequences, including potential dismissal regardless of tenure status. This fear is intensified by the contentious nature of certain empirical claims, leading professors who are more confident in controversial conclusions to self-censor more frequently, which can distort the perceived scientific consensus (Clark et al., 2024). In Kyrgyzstan's political science field, self-censorship functions as a survival strategy, responding to the intangible fear of personal security threats in non-democratic settings, where researchers navigate a perceived "invisible enemy" (Sharshenova, 2023). Similarly, in Lithuanian journalism, self-censorship is associated with psychological threats and professional insecurity, with a notable correlation between the frequency of threats and the extent of self-censorship (Jastramskis et al., 2023). Beyond professional environments, this phenomenon extends to U.S. college campuses, where students often self-censor their political opinions due to perceived campus norms and a fear of social exclusion, despite interventions designed to change these perceptions. In the broader U.S. societal context, self-censorship is influenced by affective polarization and fears of social alienation, with evidence suggesting that conservatives may self-censor more frequently than liberals (Burnett et al., 2022; Gibson & Sutherland, 2023). This aligns with the spiral of silence theory, which suggests individuals avoid expressing minority opinions to prevent social isolation—a dynamic further complicated by social media's influence on political identity and ideology (Burnett et al., 2022). Together, these findings illustrate self-censorship as a pervasive issue across multiple domains, driven by a convergence of political, social, and professional pressures (Minaichev, 2022; Wagner, 2022).

Radical social justice ideologies may also constrain intellectual diversity by sidelining viewpoints that deviate from dominant narratives, often promoting a singular perspective that excludes alternative or dissenting voices. This dynamic is observable in psychiatric discourse, where the lack of integration of diverse perspectives, including critiques of mainstream psychiatry, can lead to epistemic injustice and stifle the transformative critique essential for social objectivity (Bueter, 2023). In the educational sector, the marginalization of social justice as a form of knowledge within England's new-managerial regimes exemplifies how critical

and vertical knowledge forms are either reframed or excluded, limiting intellectual diversity and reinforcing existing power hierarchies (Bagley & Beach, 2015). In higher education and political journalism, viewpoint diversity, when reduced to a simplistic balance between prevailing ideologies, risks creating artificial parity that detracts from genuine intellectual diversity (Zippel, 2022). The issue extends to psychological research, where homogeneity within research teams can inadvertently introduce biases, as seen in studies linking open-minded thinking with religiosity that reflected the secular biases of researchers (Stanovich & Toplak, 2019). Additionally, the marginalization of diverse perspectives in educational systems, as highlighted in studies on homogenizing practices, demonstrates how standardization can impede intellectual diversity by excluding a range of subjects (Muñoz et al., 2024). Collectively, these cases underscore the critical need for inclusive environments that embrace a plurality of perspectives, thus enhancing intellectual diversity and preventing the marginalization of dissenting views.

The development of critical thinking skills in students is influenced by diverse educational strategies and environments. By providing flexible and accessible personalized learning, eLearning platforms can enhance self-directed learning and critical thinking, although challenges related to digital literacy and access remain (Sharma & Verma, 2024). Similarly, teacher-led instruction in critical reading strategies bolsters students' critical reading and thinking skills by fostering interactive, student-centered learning environments (Munawaroh, 2024). Blended learning models that incorporate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) techniques have been shown to significantly improve students' critical thinking in experimental settings (Murcahyanto et al., 2024). Collaborative learning, particularly when paired with innovative assessment formats like partial pre-release assessments, cultivates a critical thinking mindset by encouraging peer interaction and deeper engagement with learning materials (Klerk et al., 2024). Additionally, self-regulated learning combined with the management of mathematical anxiety plays a crucial role in critical thinking development, though the relationship is nuanced (Yani & Miatun, 2024). The flipped classroom model, emphasizing active learning and instructor facilitation, has demonstrated considerable efficacy in enhancing critical thinking, especially within higher education (Pan, 2024). Moreover, philosophy-based language instruction has had a positive impact on EFL learners' critical thinking, suggesting that inquiry-based approaches can effectively foster engagement and intellectual development (Li et al., 2024). These studies collectively highlight that a blend of self-directed, collaborative, and active learning strategies, supported by thoughtful pedagogical frameworks, can significantly strengthen students' critical thinking skills and broaden their perspectives.

### **3.5 Counterarguments and Supportive Views**

Radical social justice ideologies in academia, such as promoting inclusivity, addressing systemic inequalities, and empowering marginalized groups, have increasingly influenced higher education by encouraging a transformative approach. These ideologies challenge traditional Eurocentric epistemologies and advocate for incorporating diverse perspectives, particularly those of Indigenous and marginalized communities (Mapuya, 2023). By integrating social justice issues into curricula, educators aim to sensitize students to historical and ongoing inequalities, thereby equipping them with the ethical reasoning necessary for effective collaboration with marginalized communities (Bielefeldt, 2024). This approach extends beyond curriculum content, calling for a comprehensive overhaul of teaching and learning processes to create inclusive environments that accommodate students with disabilities and special educational needs (Picon-Vallin, 2022). The urgency of these efforts stems from a recognition of the need to address entrenched issues such as class inequities, racism, and colonialism within educational systems (Heinemann & Ludyga, 2023). Increasingly, universities are seen as agents of social change, tasked with fostering socially responsible

students and citizens who contribute to a just society (Cordes, 2023). Consequently, many institutions are redefining their missions to prioritize social justice and inclusivity, thus reshaping the purpose of higher education (Patterson, 2021). Educators are encouraged to embed values like empathy, respect, and critical thinking into their teaching practices, empowering students to become more independent and socially conscious learners (Warren, 2020). Critical pedagogy emerges as a powerful tool to challenge socially constructed ideas of oppression, thereby fostering inclusive academic environments (Tolman, 2019). Integrating social justice into higher education benefits marginalized groups while enriching the educational experience for all students, ultimately fostering a more equitable and just society (Akmur, 2022; Roper, 2020).

Balancing ideological commitments with open inquiry involves creating frameworks that harmonize social justice goals with the principles of open inquiry, ensuring inclusivity and equity in educational and research practices. Open educational resources (OER) and practices (OEP) exemplify one such framework, promoting affordable and culturally relevant education, particularly in the Global South. This approach is grounded in Nancy Fraser's concept of "parity of participation," which seeks to address economic, cultural, and political inequities through both affirmative and transformative remedies (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018). The Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) initiative at the University of Cape Town embodies this principle by employing inclusive processes in open textbook creation, emphasizing student participation and addressing social injustices in the classroom (Cox et al., 2022). Additionally, the openness movement in scholarly communication highlights the need to dismantle exclusionary publishing practices, particularly in the Global South, and to rebuild them on a foundation of social justice principles that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (Raju et al., 2023). In the field of library and information science (LIS), integrating social justice into curricula and research involves addressing the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to information and technology—critical components for engaging diverse communities (Chu et al., 2022). Furthermore, frameworks that blend critical theory with Indigenous epistemologies in teacher education can guide educators in recognizing and negotiating oppression, thereby fostering social justice education that is both theoretical and practical (Louie, 2020). These frameworks underscore the importance of inclusive and equitable policies, the integration of diverse knowledge systems, and the active participation of marginalized groups in shaping educational and research practices, aligning social justice goals with open inquiry (Hayvon, 2024; Lather, 2004).

The concept of academic freedom has faced critiques from various perspectives, particularly concerning its historical and institutional biases. Waltham-Smith's (2023) analysis of Derrida's engagement with Kant highlights the limitations of traditional critiques, suggesting that recent political interferences necessitate a reevaluation to ensure that scholarly inquiry remains liberated from institutional constraints. Dall'Alba (2023) questioned the structures underlying critical thinking, proposing that the traditional philosophical canon may obscure alternative orientations that could redefine academic freedom. Benda critiqued the "extended" concept of academic freedom, which incorporates political responsibilities, arguing that it blurs the line between academic and political spheres, potentially transforming academia into a politically driven institution rather than an authentically academic one. From a global and historical perspective, de Baets (2021) examined academic freedom by emphasizing its dual role as both a right and a duty, and highlighted the delicate balance between academic freedom and institutional autonomy, often threatened by external pressures. Badamchi (2022) advocated for prioritizing intellectual and professional autonomy over institutional autonomy, suggesting that the latter does not always favor intellectual freedom. Blell and colleagues (2022) critiqued the enactment of academic freedom as acontextual and color-blind, arguing that it

disproportionately affects women and people of color, thus perpetuating institutional cultures of silencing. Harnisch (2022) discussed the precarious state of academic freedom in light of the rise of non-tenured faculty and administrative structures that can curtail academic expression, underlining the vulnerability of academic freedom to political and ideological pressures. Critiquing academic freedom through a social justice lens, B. L. Jackson (2021) argued that its erosion undermines democratic principles and social justice globally. The situation in India and Pakistan exemplifies the challenges to academic freedom from authoritarian regimes and right-wing groups, further complicating the landscape of academic freedom in regions with nonsecular policies and political interference (Anand & Niaz, 2022). Collectively, these critiques underscore the need to reevaluate and potentially redefine academic freedom to address its historical and institutional biases, ensuring it remains a robust and equitable principle in academia.

#### **4. Discussion**

The case studies underscore the complex challenges encountered by academic professionals whose work intersects with or questions radical social justice ideologies. Faculty and researchers frequently experience pressures when institutional policies or prevailing cultural norms embed particular social justice narratives. For instance, nursing educators face difficulties in maintaining consistency in social justice education, as divergent foundational documents and approaches lead to varied interpretations. Faculty of color experience further obstacles, with institutional structures perpetuating colorblind racism, which impedes their ability to effectively teach social justice principles (Valderama-Wallace & Apesoa-Varano, 2020). Likewise, researchers employing community-engaged methods must navigate power dynamics within academia that impact publication and tenure, often placing them at odds with radical ideologies (Narendorf et al., 2022). Activist scholars similarly encounter institutional resistance and potential career risks, highlighting a systemic tension between activism and the traditional expectations of academia (Flood et al., 2013).

The case of the University of the South Pacific (USP) exemplifies the challenges of maintaining academic freedom amid political pressures. A 2014 conflict between USP's journalism faculty and administration spotlighted the tension between academic freedom and external political influence, a situation mirrored in other global contexts. Universities worldwide, from India to France, are increasingly pressured to balance open inquiry with political considerations, impacting academic freedom (Baskind, 2023; Craddock, 2015).

Together, these findings reveal the complex landscape that faculty members navigate when their work or ideologies challenge dominant social justice narratives. This landscape underscores the need for strategic approaches to fostering inclusive and meaningful scholarship while safeguarding academic freedom from ideological and political pressures. To cultivate an academic environment that balances social justice commitments with academic freedom, university leaders and policymakers should adopt a multifaceted approach that integrates equity, inclusivity, and freedom of expression. Universities should embed social justice within their core missions, ensuring that policies reflect a commitment to equity and diversity, as Chan (2023) argued, by scrutinizing decisions for their impact on marginalized groups and incorporating diverse cultural styles in education. Targeted hiring practices, reserved admission placements, and differential student fees can foster a more inclusive and supportive university environment (Akmur, 2022). Additionally, Cordes (2023) has advocated for universities to act as agents of social responsibility, fostering inclusive campus climates and engaging with underserved communities to empower students as socially responsible citizens.

In parallel, universities must uphold academic freedom, essential for fostering a democratic educational environment. Gurgu (2022) emphasized the role of ethical leadership and institutionalized ethics in maintaining academic integrity and freedom. This perspective is echoed by Chen and Wei (2020), who called for a harmonious balance between academic freedom and social responsibility, suggesting that universities protect these values through clear policies and contractual agreements. Young et al. (2024) further highlighted the need for university administrators to navigate political tensions by upholding both inclusivity and free expression, thus preserving the democratic mission of higher education.

Shared leadership and governance are also pivotal in protecting academic freedom, as Purcell (2020) suggested, by involving faculty and students in decision-making processes to create a culture that supports free speech and academic inquiry. Finally, university leaders must dismantle systemic barriers to inclusion by supporting programs that cultivate an inclusive culture and mitigate oppression within the university setting (Alves, 2023). By incorporating these strategies, universities can establish an environment where social justice and academic freedom coexist, ultimately fostering a more equitable and dynamic academic community.

Future research on social justice-driven policies and their long-term effects on academic culture necessitates a multidisciplinary approach, drawing insights from diverse disciplines and methodologies. A critical area for further exploration involves empirically studying how embedded social justice principles impact academic environments over time. This includes assessing their effects on institutional culture and individual student outcomes, particularly regarding equity and educational access (Duckworth, 2011; Steensma, 2023). The integration of social justice into educational frameworks shows potential for transforming learning environments, promoting inclusivity and collaboration, though long-term effects remain underexplored (Duckworth, 2011). Additionally, methodological challenges, such as managing confounding variables and addressing causal inference complexities, are crucial to deriving accurate, policy-relevant findings (Matthay & Glymour, 2022). Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for addressing these issues, with fields like sociology, psychology, and education offering comprehensive perspectives (Törnblom & Kazemi, 2014). Furthermore, the political context surrounding social justice research presents challenges that must be navigated to ensure the sustainability and impact of these studies (Boehme, 2024). Social justice's potential to foster social development, particularly in diverse societies, presents a promising research avenue that could inform interventions aimed at reducing prejudice and promoting empathy and tolerance among students (Killen & Smetana, 2009). Advancing research in these areas will require innovative approaches and a commitment to integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies to fully understand and enhance the role of social justice in shaping academic culture.

#### **4.1 Practical Applications of the Findings**

The findings offer valuable insights that can be practically applied in various academic and policy-making contexts. One of the most immediate applications is in university policy development, where institutions can refine their policies to balance the principles of free speech and academic freedom with initiatives aimed at diversity, equity, and inclusion. By clearly defining the boundaries between ideological advocacy and open inquiry, universities can create policies that protect faculty and students from self-censorship while fostering an inclusive learning environment. These policies can also establish transparent guidelines for handling ideological conflicts in academic settings, preventing politically motivated suppression of dissenting viewpoints.

Another significant application is in faculty training and curriculum design. Professors and academic administrators can benefit from strategies that encourage critical thinking while

integrating social justice perspectives in a balanced manner. Faculty development programs can be designed to help educators navigate ideological pressures, ensuring they foster an environment where multiple viewpoints can be explored rather than enforcing ideological conformity. Similarly, universities can integrate curriculum reforms that expose students to a diversity of perspectives, emphasizing the importance of debate, evidence-based reasoning, and open-ended inquiry rather than ideological polarization. Beyond pedagogy, the study's insights have implications for institutional governance and legal frameworks. Policymakers and university administrators can advocate for legal protections that safeguard academic freedom from ideological overreach, ensuring that universities remain spaces for genuine intellectual discourse rather than ideological battlegrounds. Establishing independent review boards to handle disputes related to ideological suppression could be a practical step toward maintaining institutional neutrality while upholding free inquiry. Furthermore, shared governance models—where faculty have an active role in shaping institutional policies—can prevent administrative decisions that overly align with prevailing ideological trends, preserving the university's role as a space for knowledge generation rather than political conformity.

The findings also have important implications for public and political discourse. Policymakers and thought leaders can use this research to understand the broader societal impact of ideological rigidity on knowledge creation and innovation. If unchecked, ideological suppression in academia can lead to a decline in intellectual diversity, weakening the production of new ideas that drive economic and technological advancements. By fostering environments where ideological debates are encouraged rather than censored, governments and institutions can contribute to a more dynamic intellectual landscape that supports progress across various fields. For student engagement and advocacy, the study underscores the need for a constructive approach to activism within universities. Student organizations advocating for social justice can benefit from adopting dialogue-based strategies rather than exclusionary or censorial tactics. Encouraging discourse across ideological lines fosters a richer understanding of complex social issues and prepares students to engage in real-world challenges with a more nuanced perspective. Universities can also provide platforms for structured debates and discussions that model how to engage with ideological differences in a productive manner.

Finally, this paper provides a foundation for future research methodologies in studying the Intersection of academic freedom, ideological movements, and public discourse. Scholars interested in the evolution of political correctness, self-censorship, and intellectual diversity in academia can use the systematic literature review approach employed in this study to analyze trends and patterns over time. By identifying key areas where ideological rigidity either enhances or constrains intellectual progress, future research can contribute to evidence-based solutions that maintain both inclusivity and free inquiry. These practical applications highlight the necessity of a balanced approach when addressing the challenges posed by radical social justice ideologies in academia. By integrating these insights into policy-making, institutional governance, curriculum development, and student activism, universities can better uphold their mission of fostering intellectual diversity, innovation, and critical inquiry.

## **5. Conclusion**

Social justice ideologies strive to create a more equitable society; however, their radical interpretations may sometimes hinder open inquiry and restrict academic freedom. This tension is particularly visible in the phenomenon of “cancel culture” within academia, where social media pressure often results in the retraction of opinions, thus constraining academic debate and prioritizing political correctness over scholarly discourse (Silva, 2021). Academic

freedom, vital for the pursuit of knowledge, is increasingly challenged by internal disciplining mechanisms within academia, often revealing blind spots in traditional thought and creating limitations on free inquiry (Borsche, 2022). The influence of social ideologies on academic freedom is further complicated by political correctness, which may lead academics to self-censor, avoiding controversial topics out of fear of repercussions (Ayers, 1996). While political correctness is rooted in ethical values like respect and fairness, it paradoxically stifles open inquiry when used to enforce ideological conformity (Stark, 1997).

In particular, the push for ideological change by groups such as multiculturalists and critical race theorists has politicized knowledge, subordinating academic discourse to predetermined political agendas, which can chill honest discourse and undermine the university's role as a space for open communication (Barnhizer, 2005). Additionally, the doctrine of "academic deference" in employment discrimination cases illustrates how academic freedom can sometimes shield discriminatory practices, underscoring the need to balance protection of academic freedom with ensuring accountability (Moss, 2006). The rise of non-tenured faculty positions, coupled with ideological conflicts on campuses, exacerbates these challenges, as contingent faculty face job insecurity and are more vulnerable to ideological pressures, leading to a chilling effect on controversial scholarship (Harnisch, 2022). Thus, while social justice ideologies aim to promote fairness, their more radical interpretations can inadvertently compromise academic freedom, thereby limiting the open exchange of ideas essential for intellectual progress. A balanced approach that respects both social justice goals and the principle of academic freedom is critical in today's complex socio-political landscape.

Academic freedom—a cornerstone of democratic societies—allows scholars to explore, discuss, and disseminate ideas without fear of censorship or retribution, fostering an environment where knowledge can flourish independent of political or social pressures (B. L. Jackson, 2021; Parrish, 2022). However, this freedom must align with social justice goals, which seek to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all, particularly marginalized groups (Ramblrtch, 2018; Robeyns, 2017). While these principles often seem at odds, recent scholarship suggests they can complement each other. For example, the integration of social justice principles into academic frameworks, such as medical education, has produced more well-rounded professionals without sacrificing academic rigor (Cafun, 2022). The capability approach further demonstrates how academic freedom and social justice can coexist by focusing on individuals' opportunities and freedoms to achieve desired outcomes (Robeyns, 2017; Pithara, 2019). In practice, fostering environments that encourage open dialogue and critical discourse—such as in writing centers and art education—demonstrates how social justice principles can enrich pedagogical practices without compromising open inquiry (Ramblrtch, 2018; Vanada, 2016).

Moreover, global perspectives on academic freedom, explored across diverse cultural contexts, highlight the importance of adapting these principles to local values and responsibilities, ensuring that academic freedom supports rather than conflicts with social justice goals (Chen & Wei, 2020; Kiwan, 2024). Achieving this balance requires a commitment to protecting academic freedom while advancing social justice, ultimately recognizing both principles as mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory (Boehme, 2024; Jackson, 2021).

In addition, maintaining diverse viewpoints within academia is essential for fostering progress and innovation, as it enriches the academic environment with a variety of perspectives that drive intellectual growth and societal advancement. Academic diversity encompasses race, gender, socio-economic background, and political beliefs, all of which contribute to a holistic and inclusive educational landscape (Altinkas, 2023; Samuel et al., 2024). Diverse perspectives strengthen the rigor of scientific inquiry through theoretical and methodological pluralism and

support interdisciplinary research by integrating diverse epistemological and ontological perspectives (Keestra, 2024). Embracing diversity and inclusion in higher education is also essential for equitable access to resources and opportunities, enabling all individuals to contribute meaningfully to the academic community (Laino, 2023; Samuel et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of diverse cultural perspectives, particularly within international education, enriches the learning experience and fosters intercultural development, preparing students to succeed in a globalized world (Laino, 2023). However, promoting diversity must transcend mere representation, creating an environment where all voices are valued, and thus embedding equity and inclusion as foundational pillars for sustained academic progress (Akinola et al., 2023; Altinkas, 2023). The Canadian inclusivity model exemplifies how prioritizing diversity bridges gaps between well-funded and underfunded institutions, driving innovation and setting global standards for inclusive research practices (Chakraborty, 2024). Although diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives may encounter resistance, they are vital for realizing a sustainable future, ensuring that academia continues to serve as a catalyst for societal change (Akinola et al., 2023; Mori, 2021). Ultimately, fostering diverse viewpoints in academia reflects societal complexity and provides fertile ground for the synthesis of new ideas and knowledge advancement (Judge & Ionson, 2024; Takata, 2022).

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