

Education on Sale: The Unnecessary Burdens on Academics

©*Esther Nkhukhu-Orlando*

Department of Sociology, University of Botswana, Botswana



Abstract

The commodification of higher education, marked by increasing marketization and commercialization, has introduced a complex array of challenges for university academic staff globally. While globalization and international development frameworks have expanded access and highlighted the role of higher education achieving economic growth, social inclusion, and democratic governance, these shifts have also altered the core values and institutional missions of many African universities. Academic staff members now operate within increasingly constrained environments shaped by diminishing public funding, restricted academic freedom, and rising demands for performance metrics, accountability, and market relevance. These pressures have eroded institutional autonomy and reshaped the academic profession, thereby limiting the capacity of universities to serve as inclusive, critical and public-serving academic institutions. A critical social justice lens reveals that these transformations are embedded within broader global power dynamics and policy frameworks which prioritize economic returns over the intrinsic and societal value of higher education. The result is a tension between the pursuit of equality and quality in higher education and the neoliberal imperatives driving its reform (Strihul, 2019). This paper draws on global trends and the specific case studies of Botswana and South Africa to underscore the need for renewed advocacy, policy innovation, and scholarly attention to the lived realities of academic staff members amid the commodification of education in Africa. It examines the progressive building of universities into businesses while downgrading academics and their ability to meet the global needs of quality education status of universities. It highlights the conditions that have led to such transformations in the university landscape. Secondary data collection followed by an inductive approach to data analysis was used, allowing the data to be categorized into themes. The study found that limited government funding in the two cases resulted in the pursuit of business models in universities to sustain them. At the same time, academics battle their increased workloads while expected to generate income for universities through research projects. This study recommends that both universities and academics should be given autonomy to determine the activities of their profession in order to achieve academic freedom and sustainability in the higher education sector.

Keywords: Academics, Academic Freedom, Commercialization, Universities,

Introduction

The global landscape of higher education today is characterized by significant shifts, particularly with the increasing commercialization of education whereby universities are driven more by profit motives than by their traditional educational missions (Strihul, 2019, 49)) or transformation of universities into entrepreneurial entities (Selenica, 2018; Heller 2022; Letsebe, Ebewo and Nesamvuni, 2024). In recent decades, higher education institutions, once primarily focused on academic excellence and public service, have progressively adopted market-driven practices. Heller (2022) argues that the original existence of universities in the 12th Century was embedded in theology, confined to religious entities, and offered free education. Today's transformation to material resources is influenced by the growing reliance on tuition as a primary source of revenue (Berman and Paradeise, 2016).

Universities are increasingly viewed as businesses, where student enrolment is treated as a product and alumni networks as valuable assets. Commercial partnerships such as those with corporations for research funding, brand endorsements, and even campus services, have become more prevalent (Sarpong, Sturm and Gunn, 2020; Heller, 2022). In the developed world, such a market-oriented approach has led to a prioritization of courses and programs with immediate financial returns, often at the expense of traditional disciplines like the humanities and social sciences (Heller, 2022). Contrastingly, in economically disadvantage African countries like Zimbabwe, university education has become a preserve of the elite as universities increase their fees with the hope to achieve sustainability in the highly competitive higher education market (Majoni, 2014). Also, global rankings, which emphasize research output and institutional prestige, have amplified the competitive nature of universities, pushing them to adopt business strategies to attract international students and scholars. While such commercialization can lead to institutional growth, innovation and expanded access, it also raises concerns about the erosion of academic values and the widening gap between elite institutions and those with fewer resources (Polelo, 2009).

Using the examples of Botswana and South Africa, this paper acknowledges that the increasing commercialization of higher education in Africa is fundamentally altering the academic profession by shifting the role of academic staff from knowledge producers and educators to institutional fundraisers. This commodification challenges academic freedom, autonomy, and the traditional public-serving mission of universities; yet, this aspect remains underexplored within African sociological research, particularly through the lens of symbolic capital and institutional power dynamics. The paper's primary research question is the following: How is the commercialization of higher education in Botswana and South Africa reshaping the academic profession, particularly in terms of academic autonomy, intellectual freedom, and institutional recognition? The two specific research questions it seeks to answer are as follows: (1) How has commercialization affected academic roles and responsibilities in Botswana and South Africa? (2) What institutional and policy conditions have contributed to the commodification of higher education in these countries? This paper therefore offers insights into how market-driven reforms are impacting university governance and academic labor in an African context, thereby informing policy and funding models. It fills a notable gap in African-based sociological research by raising critical questions relating to access, inclusion, equality, and knowledge diversity in the higher education sector. The paper applies Pierre Bourdieu's Symbolic Capital Theory to interrogate power relations and status dynamics within the commodified university systems of Botswana and South Africa to call for a rebalancing of university missions in order to safeguard academic values in a rapidly

marketized educational landscape beyond the two countries discussed here. In doing so, the paper adds a distinct theoretical and regional contribution to a body of literature that has, until now, been heavily dominated by Western frameworks and analyses.

A Brief Background of Commercialization of Education in Universities

Globally, there has been a growing influence of commercialization in higher education, particularly emphasizing its impact on traditional academic institutions (Selenica, 2018; Strihul, 2019). This trend is reshaping higher education systems worldwide and has since led to similar transformations in African universities. As public funding for higher education declines across many African nations, institutions are compelled to seek alternative revenue streams. This has led to the emergence of a new commercial education environment in which interactions, roles, and value systems are continually evolving, at times in conflict with the classical ideals of higher education learning. American and European models captured in terms like “academic capitalism,” “market-type universities,” and “entrepreneurial universities” as discussed by scholars like Strihul (2019) have begun to gain relevance in Africa. These concepts describe universities that increasingly behave like businesses by engaging in the following activities: pursuing research primarily for commercial gains (Selenica, 2018; Strihul, 2019), partnering with industry (Lyken-Segosebe, Montshiwa, Kenewang and Mogotsi, 2020; Chikari, 2020), and focusing on generating income through increased enrolments (Mohamedbhai, 2014), private tuition and consultancy (Berman and Paradeise, 2016). The drive toward academic capitalism in African universities is shaped mostly by the urgent need for financial sustainability due to limited government support and the growing demand from industry for applied research and market-ready innovations (Lyken-Segosebe et al., 2020).

The commercialization of higher education has profoundly transformed academic labor, thereby placing increasing pressure on them by imposing unrealistic expectations related to student enrolment (Polelo, 2009; Mohamedbhai, 2014), managerial oversight (Botshelo, 2009; Heller, 2022), and fundraising responsibilities (Hodes, 2017; Selenica, 2018; Strihul, 2019; Chinyoka and Mutambara, 2020). As universities adopt more market-driven models, academics are no longer solely evaluated on their research and teaching but are increasingly expected to contribute to an institution’s financial sustainability. This leads to what Kellermann (2011) describes as the “university as a business” as opposed to the “university of the mind” where the concern should be building knowledge. This shift has led to a heightened focus on student enrolment, with academics often tasked with recruiting students for their programs, thereby blurring the lines between teaching and marketing. In addition, academics are also being held accountable for securing external funding through grants, partnerships, and donations. Such responsibilities divert time and energy away from scholarly work (Sarpong et al., 2020) and contribute to a culture of performance metrics and accountability to the goal of revenue generation to support this ‘grant culture’ (Heller, 2022). Consequently, academic research agendas and priorities are eventually shaped, potentially sidelining academic freedom and exploration of unprofitable roles like teaching. These pressures not only strain academic wellbeing but also raise concerns about the erosion of academic autonomy and the increasing corporatization of knowledge production, whereby financial considerations often overshadow intellectual and pedagogical goals (Hodes, 2017; Letsebe et al., 2024).

This paper aims to examine the growing commercialized education environment faced by academic staff in Africa, using the case examples of Botswana and South Africa. The paper argues that as universities pursue the goal of “revenue- generation” by increasingly prioritizing fundraising and financial sustainability over academic pursuits, academic staff

members are increasingly expected to engage in fundraising activities that conflict with their primary roles as educators and researchers, thereby undermining their autonomy and intellectual freedom. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on the exploitation of intellectuals, the paper explores how the commodification of higher education and the pressure to generate revenue for universities lead to the instrumentalization of academics, thereby transforming them into fundraisers rather than scholars. Their recognition, reputation and social honor or recognition are gained depending on how much financial resources they can generate (Heller, 2022). Through this lens, the paper critiques the way institutional forces exploit academics for financial gain, stifling the independence of the academic field and the essential role of critical inquiry using social hierarchies that do not yield any meaningful gains but rather allow the exploitation of academics. Despite these significant shifts, African sociological research has not yet fully addressed the broader implications of these changes, particularly the roles of entrepreneurial/commercialized universities in innovation systems, the evolution of institutional culture, and the transformation of social processes within the continent's unique historical and economic context.

Theoretical Framework

Pierre Bourdieu's Symbolic Capital Theory informed this paper. In the context of this paper, the theory is used to understand how academics in Botswana and South Africa are valued not for their intellectual contributions alone, but increasingly for their ability to generate income, secure grants, and support the financial goals of commercialized universities. This commodification transforms symbolic recognition into a tool of institutional control, thereby undermining academic freedom and contributing to class-based inequalities within the academic profession.

In their 2013 article titled "Symbolic Capital and Social Classes," Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant explore the concept of "symbolic capital" and its role in the structuring of society's social classes. They argue that symbolic capital, which includes prestige, honor, and recognition, functions as a key mechanism through which power and inequality are perpetuated in society (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013). This form of capital, according to them, is distinct from economic or cultural capital, as it operates primarily through recognition and social legitimacy rather than material resources or skills. By analyzing the ways in which different social groups acquire and deploy symbolic capital, they show how it influences social hierarchies and class relations. This paper recognizes that the ongoing dynamics of social class formation and inequalities perpetuated by the modern-day university management where the values and perceptions of academics have been shaped sabotage their main mandate: i.e. knowledge building. The entrepreneurial university has generated a social structure characterized by class-based inequalities among academics based on how much income they can generate for the university. This situation has been slowly developing from the past as discussed in the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's case study of the French academic scene in his 1984 book titled *Homo Academicus*. In the book, he tackles head on his home: i.e. the academic world and its modern intellectual culture which have since changed from being a realm of dialogue and debate to a sphere of power in which academics' reputations and careers are made, defended, and destroyed.

Bourdieu explores how academic labor is often undervalued despite the significant cultural and intellectual capital academics generate (Bourdieu, 1988; Wacquant, 1990). He argues that universities function as fields of power where academics, especially those in more vulnerable positions such as those working on a part-time basis, are subjected to hierarchical structures, market forces, and the increasing professionalization of academia. In particular, expanding on the ideas of Bourdieu, scholars such as Heller (2022) highlight how the

intellectual labor of academics is commodified, with institutional structures prioritizing research and revenue output over the personal and intellectual autonomy of academics. This exploitation is further exacerbated by the increasing demands for research productivity (Heller, 2022), student recruitment (Berman and Paradeise, 2016) and administrative duties (Dugas, Summers, Harris and Stich, 2018), all of which limit academics' capacity for critical reflection and free intellectual inquiry as discussed in this paper. Thus, by using Bourdieu ideas, the paper aims to encourage political responsibility, academic freedom, and autonomy among scholars while challenging the dominant structures of power that shape the production of knowledge in Botswana and South Africa.

Bourdieu (1984) discusses the social conditions and economic pressures faced by lower-ranking and contracted academics forced to conform to institutional norms and expectations in order to secure their positions within the academic hierarchy, thereby perpetuating their exploitation. Bourdieu's analysis demonstrates how the academic field is shaped by both economic factors and the symbolic power of institutional actors, resulting in the marginalization and exploitation of academics despite their central role in the production of knowledge, especially where job insecurity is concerned. This paper therefore uses Bourdieu's work as a tool to empower intellectuals in the struggle for greater autonomy within the African academic field.

Even though Bourdieu (1984) developed his theory largely based on the French academic and intellectual elite of the late 20th Century and, as such, may not fully account for the distinct historical, political and socioeconomic dynamics of the African institutions discussed in this study, the current study contextualizes symbolic capital within the realities of state control, economic shortages, and systemic under-resourcing in African universities. While Bourdieu emphasizes symbolic domination (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013), his theory can underplay the material and structural economic limitations such as shrinking public funding or extreme income inequality that directly shape power dynamics in African universities. Accordingly, this paper explicitly incorporates the material pressures faced by African academics such as diminished state support, heavy workloads, and income-generation expectations into its analysis of symbolic capital to acknowledge the effects of the material needs on their professional lives.

Research Methodology

This paper explores the exploitation and challenges faced by academics in the higher education sector. The existing literature highlighted that the impact of commercialization on universities varies across different countries and regions. A combination of qualitative research tools was employed, including case studies, textual analysis, comparative methods, and critical interpretations of relevant texts. The case study method focused specifically on Botswana and South Africa as the two countries selected for their contrasting, yet illustrative, higher education systems within the broader African context. The method allowed for rich descriptive insights into the lived realities of academics, institutional responses, and economic and political contexts shaping commercialization of education. Textual analysis of secondary data including academic reports and scholarly literature helped me to identify discourses reflecting shifts toward market-oriented education to analyze how academics are positioned within university structures in the two countries. A comparative approach was used to analyze similarities and differences between the two cases in terms of levels of government support and autonomy, extent and form of commercialization of higher education, institutional strategies for financial sustainability, and academic labor expectations. This method enabled the study to identify patterns, divergences, and shared challenges of the cases. Critical interpretation of Bourdieu's Symbolic Capital Theory

facilitated interrogation of power relations and inequalities embedded in universities found in the case studies. The integration of these qualitative tools established a robust, interpretive framework that allowed the study to go beyond surface-level descriptions. Even though the approach adopted in the paper is prone to research bias and lack of generalizability, it facilitated the development of multiple subjective meanings of texts, which were valuable in understanding the complexities of each country's higher education sector and the changes it has experienced in relation to the topic addressed by the paper as supported by Creswell and Poth (2018).

A Review of Selected Literature: Analysis and Discussion

As the global trend toward the commercialization of higher education intensifies (Selenica, 2018), African universities are confronted with the dual pressures of both external (e.g., market forces and competition) and internal (regulations and political constraints) forces limiting their capacity for innovation and critical inquiry (Letsebe et al., 2024). Having long struggled with limited institutional autonomy and restricted individual freedoms, African nations to this today struggle to commit resources to support academic work, especially research. This is a challenge that has been exacerbated by broader political and economic pressures within many African states. While the global higher education sector has generally witnessed a decline in freedoms, including academic freedom and institutional independence, African universities face unique constraints, often rooted in state control, lack of funding, and political interference (Sarpong et al., 2020). Governments in many African countries exert significant influence over university affairs, including curricula development (Muhamedbhai, 2014; Chikari, 2021), research priorities (Polelo, 2009; Kwasi-Agyeman, 2020), and academics appointments of university leadership that stifle intellectual autonomy (Chinyoka and Mutambara, 2020).

Academic and intellectual freedoms are essential for enabling academics to fulfil a transformative and developmental mandate within higher education. When scholars are free to explore diverse ideas, challenge established norms, and engage in critical inquiry, they contribute to the advancement of knowledge, social progress, and the development of informed, active citizens (Heller, 2022). Intellectual freedom allows educators to address complex societal issues, propose innovative solutions, and build a culture of independent thinking that extends beyond the classroom (Sarpong et al., 2020). In this context, universities become spaces for transformative learning, where students are encouraged to think critically and question assumptions, ultimately driving social, political and economic change. When protected, academic freedom fosters an environment in which both students and academics can collectively contribute to addressing the pressing challenges of society, thereby fulfilling higher education's broader development goals (Finkelstein and Altbach, 2014).

Today's universities face a growing tension between their academic missions and their transformation into market-driven entities. Academics are increasingly burdened with the responsibility of fundraising for their institutions, a task that diverts their focus away from teaching and research (Finkelstein and Altbach, 2014; Heller, 2022). As universities increasingly adopt business-like models prioritizing revenue generation, academics find themselves expected to secure external funding, build partnerships with corporations, and contribute to the financial sustainability of their institutions. This shift toward commercialization places undue pressure on academics who are ill-equipped and often unwilling to take on these roles, yet are held accountable for the financial health of their institutions. The emphasis on fundraising undermines the core mission of higher education and establishes an environment where academic work is subordinated to the need for

financial returns (Selenica, 2018).

The shift toward income generation by universities as discussed earlier reinforces the erosion of academic autonomy and increases corporatization of knowledge that forces academics into the position of being fundraisers rather than scholars. This compromises their ability to engage in critical thinking and intellectual inquiry. Hence, the growing reliance on external funding ties academic agendas to the interests of private donors and corporations, leading to concerns about conflicts of interest and the narrowing of academic freedom (Sarpong et al., 2020; Heller, 2022). Academics who are already stretched thin by teaching loads, research expectations, and administrative duties are now expected to navigate the complex landscape of fundraising, further exacerbating their workload and stress levels (Dugas et al., 2018). As a result, the very essence of higher education as a space for the free pursuit of knowledge becomes increasingly compromised in favor of financial imperatives. This paper uses the cases of Botswana and South Africa to consider how economic constraints and shifting government priorities have impacted public university budgets.

Knowledge as a Commodity in Botswana

The concept of the commodification of knowledge is still relatively new and lacks a clear, universally accepted definition. For the sake of clarity, in this paper, *knowledge* is defined as a commodity due to its economic value, which includes both its exchange value and its social value (Botshelo, 2009). Knowledge often attracts resources for its generation and storage and, when stored, it may require patenting. If knowledge is withheld from those who need it, it becomes a scarce commodity; however, if it is shared freely and abundantly, it can be considered ‘free.’ To understand commodification, we can consider that knowledge exists in various forms, and its value combines the market exchange value it commands with the cost of acquiring it. Thus, the commodification of knowledge involves the process of recognizing its worth and converting it into wealth, whether through monetary, social, utility, or strategic benefits. Ultimately, the generation of new knowledge expands the potential to generate wealth through knowledge (Salmi and de Maret, 2018).

The ongoing process of transforming tertiary education in Botswana has posed significant challenges for both academic institutions and academics. In addition, the standards set by the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) for institutions to function in Botswana increased such pressure as both academics and their employers are required to meet higher operational standards (Letsebe et al., 2024). Contrastingly, the rise of private universities such as Botho University (BU), Limkokwing University of Creative Knowledge (LUCK), and Botswana Open University (BOU) and other institutions owned by the government such as Botswana Accountancy College (BAC), Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BUANR), and Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) offering tertiary education has reshaped the way these institutions operate to deliver university education. With government resources already stretched, institutions must now compete for and manage limited funds more efficiently. Ensuring the effective allocation and utilization of resources has become a key priority for all tertiary institutions, including those that are private, as they also benefit from government sponsorship of their students.

Botswana’s economic challenges in financing university education have been studied a decade ago by Botlhale (2015). The author in the article titled “Financing Tertiary Education under Fiscal Stress in Botswana” pointed out that Botswana’s diamonds-led economy has suffered revenue losses over the years, leading to constrained national budgets and a struggling entrepreneurial landscape. The country’s limited capacity to support higher education has intensified pressure for the government to interrogate its financing models for tertiary institutions and universities to commercialize their services as a means of generating

alternative revenue. This shift aligns with the concept of academic entrepreneurship, whereby institutions and their members engage in commercialization of knowledge product to fulfil their “third mission,” i.e. supplementing traditional teaching and research functions (Lyken-Segosebe et al., 2020).

Innovation-driven Education: Botswana International University of Science and Technology

There is an urgent need for Botswana’s economic diversification and financial resilience (Botlhale, 2015; 2022). Despite the country’s weak track record in innovation and entrepreneurship, universities like Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) are attempting to counter this by investing in initiatives such as a technology park. The main aim of the park is to transform research into market-ready technologies, diversify the economy, and establish an innovation-driven and knowledge-based society. Such initiatives are regarded as central to establishing a resilient economy as envisioned by the government of Botswana itsr Vision 2036 pillar on “sustainable economic development.”

BIUST is actively pursuing academic entrepreneurship to commercialize research outputs and intellectual property generated by its faculty, students, research centers, and collaborations with the private sector (Lyken-Segosebe et al., 2020). The culture of commercialization seeks to transform research into viable technologies and products in order to contribute to national economic development, job generation, and technological advancement. The university’s shift toward its commercialization is strategically aligned with the country’s broader goals of reducing dependency on natural resources, particularly diamonds, and building a knowledge-based economy (Botlhale, 2015). But, as will be discussed later, the success of these efforts depends significantly on overcoming institutional barriers such as limited entrepreneurial skills and social capital among faculty members, which may influence the university’s ability to fully realize the benefits of academic entrepreneurship and achieve the goal of commercialization (Lyken-Segosebe et al., 2020).

BIUST, like other universities in Botswana and many Africa countries, faces several challenges in its pursuit of research commercialization and academic entrepreneurship. An exploratory study conducted by Lyken-Segosebe et al. (2020) to assess the university’s transition process toward research commercialization and incubation found that while BIUST is committed to transforming its traditional focus on teaching and research to include the formal commercialization of knowledge, and it needed to navigate institutional and cultural barriers that may hinder this shift. A key challenge here is the university and faculty culture, where limited entrepreneurial orientation, low levels of social capital and a general lack of knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship among academic staff restricted commercialization efforts. Consistent with the results of their study, Buckley and Davis (2016) found that academic staff members in science and engineering disciplines such as those found at BUIST tend to favor informal engagements such as consulting and contract research, with relatively few participating in more formal, high-impact activities like patenting or generating spin-offs. Such results mean that despite significant investment, commercialization remains a difficult dream to achieve, especially by academics. In addition to this problem, Lyken-Segosebe et al.’s study found that BIUST must also first address the broader structural issues, including limited experience with technology business incubation models in Botswana, scarce access to high-risk capital, and underdeveloped support systems for entrepreneurial ventures. As a newly participating university in the commercialization space, the university must implement strategic interventions such as entrepreneurship training, support mechanisms, and policy frameworks that encourage academic entrepreneurship if it is to successfully realize its “third

mission” and contribute to national economic diversification.

Academic staff members at BIUST, like those in other universities, are overburdened with the responsibility to achieve commercialization despite their limited entrepreneurial skills, a lack of institutional support, and entrenched academic cultures that prioritize traditional teaching and research. Such challenges are further compounded by global trends of privatization and commercialization in higher education, which often place universities like BIUST under financial pressure while simultaneously restricting academics’ freedom and autonomy. As such, as universities shift toward a more market-driven model, academics must navigate the tension between preserving core academic values and adapting to new demands for innovation, income generation, and societal impact.

The University of Botswana and Declining Government Funding

The University of Botswana (UB) is another example of a financially strained university as the institution is confronted with the challenges of declining government funding (Botshelo, 2009). The long-established resource allocation system must be reevaluated, as decreasing government support, where at least 70% of students in tertiary institutions are sponsored by the government (Guardian Sun, September 30, 2022), requires the university to reassess its priorities and operations, focusing on optimizing the use of its limited resources. As new universities emerge in Botswana and are reshaping the higher education landscape, UB’s role in knowledge production is under greater scrutiny, with high expectations for it to lead in academic and research endeavors according to its goal of achieving academic excellence, not only in Africa, but globally. This is a goal outlined in its long-term plans underscoring the need to critically examine the institution’s resource allocation under the influence of the current commodification of knowledge movement.

Botlhale (2022) in a paper titled “Diversifying Income Streams in Public Higher Education Institutions in Botswana” explores the financial challenges faced by public universities in Botswana, particularly in the context of decreasing government funding. The paper points to the urgent need for universities to diversify their income sources in order to ensure financial sustainability and continue delivering quality education. It discusses various income-generating strategies that public universities in Botswana can adopt, such as increasing reliance on private sector partnerships, developing entrepreneurial initiatives, expanding research activities, alumni donations, external grants, innovative business ventures, and offering specialized programs to attract non-governmental revenue. Even though the paper highlights the potential for universities to engage in income-generating activities beyond traditional government funding, the author fails to provide an analysis of the impact of commercialization on academic freedom and the need for universities to balance financial growth with their core educational mission.

In the context of the recommendations raised by Botlhale (2022) that universities in Botswana should diversify their income generation, including through investing heavily on fund-generating research projects, this paper offers caution. UB, like other tertiary institutions in the country, should not blindly fall for the dangling carrot from mostly external partners that may have conditions that threaten the commitment to teaching, especially in a developing country like Botswana, where higher education is tasked with the human capital development in an economy that is desperate for skilled labor. It has been argued that the country has failed to use education to transform people’s lives due to the failure to maintain balance between quantity and quality of graduates that can attain the country’s vision for sustainable development (Maruatona, 2011). The quality of graduates is critical because education should produce creative thinkers who are ready to generate the social wealth of a nation and feed its economy. Students are not only customers; they are also products whose educational

experience should determine their suitability for the job market.

This paper therefore argues that should tertiary institutions in Botswana put emphasis on research and entrepreneurship rather than education of the learners, where research and innovation are valued than teaching, then the quality of education will be compromised. As an academic at the UB, I can easily relate with this problem where today academics are forced to compromise on the quality of their teaching to spare time to do research that matters most in their professional growth and recognition. This is supported by Gachago, Mafote, Munene-Kabanya and Lee (2007) who argue that employees are most likely to engage in activities that earn them rewards or recognition. As an example, the overemphasis on research outputs, which earns 50% in the Performance Management System scoring at the UB, while teaching only earns 30% (with the remaining 20% being community engagement), has led to low staff morale for those with high teaching loads, who cannot spare time for research and involvement in funded research projects. Such a situation satisfies the Social Capital Theory argument that a university recognizes its contribution and yet cannot reward staff members for work they do every day. Such a situation may not only affect the quality of work of academics but go beyond to affect staff morale (Klein, 2013), job satisfaction, service quality, productivity (Shanker, Bhanugopan, Heijden and Farrell, 2017, Dugas et al., 2018), organizational commitment, effectiveness and stress (Dou, Devos and Valcke, 2017), among others. Therefore, academics should not be seen as passive recipients of the occurring changes; they are also active generators of the images of today's universities and therefore motivating them to do the work they do for their institution through tangible rewards will in the long-run benefit their institutions because motivated academics are committed to serving their institutions (Dou, 2017).

The “Fees Must Fall” Movement in South Africa

Student enrolment in higher education in South Africa has been growing since the country's independence in 1994. Despite initial commitment to investment, state funding of public universities decreased significantly, from 49% in 2000 to 40% in 2012 (Hodes, 2017). Higher public universities across South Africa have over the years faced significant financial challenges, forcing them to seek alternative sources of funding beyond traditional government support. Higher education has become more financially burdensome for students and their families, despite the constitutional guarantee of the right to further education, which the state is obliged to make progressively accessible. The financial struggles of public universities places increasing pressure on academics who are now expected not only to excel in teaching and research but also to engage in fundraising efforts to secure the financial stability of their institutions (Wangenge-Ouma and Cloete, 2008).

As the percentage of total university income continued to decrease, a wave of new student activist groups emerged across South African universities in 2015 and 2016, each with unique names reflecting the specific concerns of their campuses (Mutekwe, 2017; Hodes, 2017). For instance, advocacy groups at Stellenbosch and the University of Pretoria primarily focused on issues related to tuition fees, while other campuses were mobilized by different grievances such as student housing shortages and the presence of colonial symbols like the presence of the statue of John Cecil Rhodes (Hodes, 2017). By the end of 2015, efforts to unify these diverse movements led to a shared goal; i.e. “the demand for free higher education.” This common cause was encapsulated in the movement's rallying cry: “Fees Must Fall.” For the first time in the post-apartheid era, students took to the streets, marching not only on university campuses, but also at the country's capital, to Parliament, and Pretoria's seat of government, to protest the escalating cost of university tuition.

The Fees Must Fall movement emerged as a powerful expression of collective

frustration with the rising tuition costs, but students' anger was not directed solely at the government. The failures of the state to address the needs of its citizens and fulfil its promises of democratic redress were also seen as reflected in the higher education sector. Universities, in this view, became symbols of the failure to achieve meaningful transformation (including decolonizing education) that continue to perpetuate the legacies of institutional racism that is prevalent in the country (Mutekwe, 2017). The movement thus highlighted the persistent mishandling of higher education, institutional and social inequalities in South Africa's education system, and therefore demanded a reimagining of higher education that is both more accessible and truly transformative especially for Black students. The movement, while often framed as a unified social force, also revealed significant internal tensions and ideological differences. Early on, it rallied around a collective desire for the decolonization of education symbolized by the removal of colonial-era statues such as the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. Hodes (2017) argues that "Fallism" was a term intended to capture the movement's commitment to dismantle the remnants of apartheid's legacy, particularly its symbolic power in academic spaces. Through protest actions targeting monuments and university structures, the movement sought to expose the persistent injustices of the past and present, invoking a vision of transformation and a break from historical continuities by taking down what was seen to symbolize oppressive forces.

While the Fees Must Fall movement was particularly focusing on the broader sociopolitical and educational implications, and not exclusively on the exploitation of academic staff, it highlighted the ways in which academic labor and exploitation intersect with the broader crisis of higher education in the country. The movement pointed to the need for more affordable education, questioning the viability and implications of these demands for both students and academic staff. One of the key concerns in relation to academic exploitation is how the broader financial constraints faced by universities place additional burdens on staff, especially academics. In South Africa, universities have experienced deep financial pressures, which have often been addressed by underfunding and cutting resources for teaching and research, ultimately leading to threatening conditions for academic staff who then should participate in mitigating shortfalls in revenue (Wangenge-Ouma and Cloete, 2008).

This paper highlights the burden on academics that are expected to deliver quality education despite increasingly strained resources. Many staff members lack institutional support in the academic sector where the demand for higher education continues to grow alongside increasing student numbers, but the funding and institutional backing to support this growth remain insufficient. While the Fees Must Fall movement advocated for student financial relief, what Mutekwe (2017) called "Fee-free Education," it must have also explicitly considered the effects of high tuition fees on a critical stakeholder, the academic labor force as argued by scholars like Kwasi-Agyeman (2020).

A paper by Moloi et al. (2017) titled "(De)constructing the #FeesMustFall Campaign in South African Higher Education" highlights the dynamics and implications of the Fees Must Fall movement as a crossroad for student activism, higher education policies, and the broader socioeconomic challenges facing South African universities. Although the primary focus of the paper is on the student protests and their political and social impact, it also touches on the issue of academic staff exploitation in the context of these broader struggles. Academics are caught in the tension between student demands for affordable education and the financial constraints faced by universities in the country in general. As universities increasingly rely on tuition fees as a significant source of income, there is a growing sense that academic staff members are being exploited by the system in various ways (Berman and Paradeise, 2016; Kwasi-Agyeman, 2020). This exploitation is particularly evident in the pressure placed on academics to work under conditions of insufficient institutional funding,

overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of resources for effective teaching and research while their professional growth is based on giving their best on those roles. This leads to a situation whereby the labor of academics is undervalued and yet expected to meet performance targets that benefit the institution financially, without corresponding rewards or recognition for their work as argued by the Symbolic Capital Theory: i.e. they may be praised but not rewarded materially.

Proposed Solutions to Relieve the Burdens of Academic Staff

Academics hold a profound human obligation and social responsibility to support the struggles for rights, freedom, and social transformation, both within societies and across the globe (Heller, 2022). Their role extends beyond the confines of teaching and research, as they are also stewards of knowledge, tasked with using their intellectual resources to advocate for justice, equality, and human emancipation. In pursuit of knowledge, academics must not ignore the broader sociopolitical context in which they operate; rather, they must engage actively with the challenges faced by marginalized communities, promote human dignity, and contribute to the dismantling of systems that perpetuate oppression. Therefore, universities should strategically diversify their income streams to mitigate financial risks and enhance their long-term sustainability, while also maintaining their role as centers of knowledge and public service (Botlhale, 2022). Whether through research that addresses inequality, teaching that encourages critical thinking, or public engagement that amplifies the voices of the oppressed, their involvement in these struggles is an essential aspect of their professional and moral duty.

This paper proposes that the fight for the autonomy of academics in higher education institutions is imperative. Therefore, academics must remain free from both internal and external interference and constraint by those in positions of political or economic power, as espoused by Sarpong et al. (2020). Academics' ability to contribute to social transformation in Africa is dependent on their autonomy and that of their institutions, which must be protected to ensure that knowledge remains a tool for liberation and social transformation rather than a commodity manipulated by powerful interests, both from within the continent and from abroad. This is supported by the Kampala Declaration in Section C, Article 11, which states that institutions of higher education shall be autonomous of the state or any other public authority in conducting their affairs, including the administration, and setting up their academic, teaching research and other related programs. The declaration builds on Chapter 1 of the basic principles of the Dar es Salaam Declaration that demanded that education must achieve emancipation of individuals by fostering critical thinking, promote the spirit of scientific inquiry, and encourage the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

To address the financial challenges faced by academic staff members in African universities, such as Botswana and South Africa as discussed in this paper, a multifaceted approach is needed that not only enhances revenue generation, but also improves the working conditions and professional development opportunities for academic staff. One of the critical solutions would be to grant universities autonomy to determine their own tuition rates (Majoni, 2014). This flexibility would allow institutions to set tuition rates that reflect their quality of education, the resources required, and the economic realities of the students they serve. In Botswana, for example, whereas the UB is regarded as a premier university that admits the best students transitioning from the country's secondary schools, its tuition rates remain lower than what is paid at smaller, less-prestigious universities. Interestingly, over 70% of tuition fees in public universities and private universities are paid by the government through the Department of Tertiary Education Financing (Guardian Sun, September 30, 2022). The lack of autonomy of public institutions like the UB means that they cannot adjust

tuition in response to inflation or other economic pressures to maintain financial stability or ensuring that academic staff members are adequately compensated and equipped with the necessary resources to deliver high-quality education and research, as supported by Berman and Paradeise (2016).

Universities struggling with financial instability and considering engagement in entrepreneurial ventures such as starting university-run businesses, research commercialization projects, or partnerships with industry that generate income should do so without burdening their academic staff members with new responsibilities. External funding on which most African countries are dependent comes with conditions that may not align with the research outputs and teaching and learning objectives of academic staff, as noted by Sarpong et al. (2020). In addition, to respond more effectively to the changing economic and political landscape, African universities must be granted increased autonomy to enable quicker decision-making processes. Studies have proved that when universities have the freedom to act independently in times of crises, they can seize opportunities more effectively and mitigate potential threats such as economic downturns (Finkelstein and Altbach, 2014), political instability (Chinyoka and Mutambara, 2020), or shifts in student demographics (Botshelo, 2009), thereby allowing them to adapt swiftly to global trends and local demands. This autonomy empowers universities and establishes a supportive environment for academic staff, aiding their professional growth, reducing stress, and increasing their job satisfaction (Dugas et al., 2018). Additionally, such autonomy would encourage universities to innovate and explore alternative revenue streams that directly benefit the academic community. In line with the Social Capital Theory, Bourdieu, through his book, *Homo Academicus*, mentioned earlier, provokes academics to reflect on their profession and generate change within academia. He challenges academics to fight for their intellectual freedom by closely examining the social and institutional structures that shape intellectual life. It is when academics realize their exploitation that they will be inspired to break free from exploitative systems (Wacquant, 1990).

Diversification of funding sources through hybrid forms of fundraising such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been suggested as a strategic and sustainable solution to the growing challenge of government-funded tertiary education in African universities (Selenica, 2018; Guardian Sun, September 30, 2022). Innovative models such as PPPs allow for shared responsibility between the state and the private sector in financing human capital development, especially when government resources become increasingly strained and private funds become handy. Countries like India and Bangladesh have successfully implemented robust PPPs frameworks whereby companies are mandated to contribute a portion of their profits toward education at the same time, directly supporting the development of industry-relevant skills (Guardian Sun, September 30, 2022). As an example, South Africa's Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISAFAP) demonstrates how organized private sector involvement can align funding with critical national skills needs, ensuring both economic relevance and sustainability. The ISAFAP model can be strengthened in South Africa and adopted in Botswana to fund higher education in exchange for producing skills aligned with the country's industry needs. Formalizing partnerships with multinational companies operating locally could significantly boost tertiary education financing in both countries, while ensuring that the private sector actively participates in shaping and supporting the skills pipeline needed for their economic transformation. In Botswana, this could involve formal agreements with multinational companies operating in key sectors of the economy such as mining, telecommunications, and finance, requiring them to invest in tertiary education as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) obligations. This approach not only reduces the burden on government but also enhances the employability of graduates by linking funding to labor market demands.

As part of the aforementioned PPPs to reduce the financial burden on governments, both

Botswana and South Africa can introduce “means-tested cost-sharing mechanisms,” whereby thorough assessments are carried out for families that can afford to contribute to tuition should be required to do so, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds continue to receive full or partial sponsorship (Guardian Sun, September 30, 2022). The implementation of such a cost-sharing model, which Polelo (2009) referred to as “as the introduction of user fees,” offers a practical solution to the growing challenge of government and taxpayers financing of tertiary education to a new avenue: i.e. “parents and students.” Mohamedbhai (2014) stated that in 2009, at least 26 countries in Africa were failing to sustain their higher education financing, thereby charging students tuition fees. This cost-sharing approach could include differentiated loan schemes, grants for the neediest students, and partial contributions from families that can afford it, thereby ensuring equity while promoting responsibility. South Africa’s experience, particularly through initiatives like the ISAFAP, has already proved that targeted cost-sharing mechanisms aligned with national skills priorities can produce better outcomes in contributing to education costs. With the Botswana government currently bearing the bulk of student funding by covering approximately 70% of enrolled tertiary learners (Guardian Sun, September 30, 2022)), cost-sharing models would help ease the financial burden by involving other stakeholders in contributing to education costs based on their ability to pay and address issues of sustainability of the government-driven financing model.

Conclusions

This study has highlighted several critical factors that contribute to the challenges faced by academic staff members across African higher education systems using the examples of Botswana and South Africa. In the two cases, like in many African countries, universities are heavily dependent on government funding, but the reduction in this support, coupled with the rising demand for higher education under restricted economic conditions, has generated immense pressure on academic institutions to diversify their revenue streams. Academic staff members are deeply affected by these financial challenges, as they often face inadequate resources for research and teaching, and increased workloads due to staff shortages. Further complicating the situation is the rising costs of running universities, with limited funding available for capital expenditures and operational costs. Governments’ failure to adequately support higher education systems leaves universities struggling to provide the necessary resources for academic staff and students, thereby compromising on quality.

The broader system that not only exploits students through high fees but also exploits academic staff members by failing to provide them adequate support, recognition, and compensation for their work should be challenged as supported by Bourdieu. It is a crucial element in understanding the broader financial difficulties faced by universities and the challenges to achieving sustainability of the higher education systems in African countries in general. There is an urgent need for comprehensive and targeted solutions toward long-term viability of higher education financing in Botswana and South Africa. Without such reforms, the goal of building inclusive, knowledge-driven economies risks being undermined by systemic inefficiencies and growing funding gaps that prevail in both countries.

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