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Undergraduate students' perception of academic freedom in Russia

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My life shattered after February 24th. The only reason I have made it through is thanks to the people around me. Thanks to my partner, my friends, my sister, and my mother. Thank you for being there for me, both physically and virtually. For talking to me, listening to my thoughts, reading my chapters, taking me out for coffee and on walks.

When I chose this dissertation topic, little did I know about the future. Before even coming to Oxford, I knew that academic freedom in Russia is important to research, especially given the country's political context. After February 24th, my understanding of students' academic freedom drastically changed. I have seen the immense importance of continuing research — of further understanding how the current regime has profoundly impacted academia and students' independent thinking and learning.

While working on this dissertation, talking to my respondents and writing it all together, I have hoped, and continue hoping, for one thing: peace in Ukraine and freedom in Russia.

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List of Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
EU	European University
GPPi	The Global Public Policy Institute
HSE	Higher School of Economics
MGIMO	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
MSSES	Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences
SPbU	Saint Petersburg State University
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

This study aims to explore students' academic freedom at Russian universities. Following the growing state control on universities, the restrictions on academic freedom at Russian universities have been gradually increasing. The existing literature on students' academic freedom is extremely limited in contrast to a relatively well-established body of literature on academic freedom as it pertains to academics. To address this research gap, this dissertation attempts to answer two research questions: i) how do students define their academic freedom in Russian higher education?; ii) how much academic freedom can students in Russian higher education exercise? Through these research questions, the researcher investigates students' understanding of academic freedom and the scope of academic freedom limitations at Russian universities. The study uses Biesta's classification (2008) of the purposes of education (qualification, socialization, subjectification) to further elaborate on these research questions. Although Biesta's framework does not directly engage with the questions about students' academic freedom, it enables an analysis of how academic freedom limitations impacts students learning.

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. The data was collected through 20 online in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research setting covers four Russian universities in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. The study participants include third- and fourth-year undergraduate social science and humanities students completing their studies at the four selected Russian institutions. Interviews included questions about participants' experiences at these universities and ways of exercising their academic freedom. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The findings indicate that students predominantly define academic freedom as freedom of research and freedom of discussion. Students' understanding of freedom includes the opportunities to choose any research topic, irrespective of how sensitive these topics might be. The 'sensitivity' is defined by the scope of critical analysis of Russia's current political situation. Students' perceptions of academic freedom are also linked with how much academic freedom students can exercise. Most students reported that they enjoyed a relatively great scope of academic freedom in universities. However, based on the students' answers, this study identified explicit and implicit limitations on students' academic freedom. Explicit limitations include administrative guidelines for changing research topics, avoiding discussing sensitive topics and strongly discouraging students' engagement in politics. In contrast to explicit limitations, which were reported only in a few cases, most students indicated that they had experienced implicit limitations. These were not directly imposed on students but appeared in the subtle forms of recommendations and self-censorship practices from other members of the university community.

1. Introduction

‘As Russian social policy analysts working in international academic networks, we are deeply alarmed about current developments in our country which make it harder and harder for us to continue with our work. We believe that if these trends cannot be stopped, Russian social scientists will become as isolated again as they were before 1989 [...] Central and Eastern European countries have become an important part of the academic discourse, empirically and theoretically. However, this integration is threatened by the regression into authoritarianism that is currently taking place in Russia’ (Romanov & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2015, p. 359).

This quote comes from the article by Romanov and Iarskaia-Smirnova (2015), in which the authors discuss the consequences of the foreign agent law, first introduced in 2015 in Russia. This law has been one of the turning points in restricting academic freedom in Russia. It clearly shows how academic freedom is inextricably linked with the internal political processes taking place in the country. As a result of the increasing control of state authorities on universities, this law has a profound impact on how Russian scholars can collaborate with international academic bodies and which topics of research scholars are ‘safe’ to choose (Romanov & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2015). Limitations of academic freedom in Russia continue to be exercised in ‘soft’ ways, followed by the infringements from the state institutions on academic community (Kaczmarska, 2020). This creates a climate of uncertainty and widespread self-censorship (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021; Kaczmarska, 2020).

Recently, the war in Ukraine has further aggravated ideological control over public discourse and universities by the state authorities, affecting scholars and teaching staff, as well as students and their experience at universities (Gerber & Chapman, 2022). Students represent the learning body in universities. For students, universities – aside from their academic purpose – are a place for informal exchange and accumulation of ideas, which often lead to the development of student-led organizations that advocate for and participate in democratic movements (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Ertem, 2021). Thus, exploring the phenomena of academic freedom in Russia from the students’ perspective can help one understand the socio-political processes in Russia and how these processes affect students’ academic formation.

To engage with academic freedom in Russia, the introductory chapter of this dissertation will outline the background of Russian higher education. Then, it will explore the legislative underpinnings of the protection of academic freedom in Russia and examine recent laws that reflect increasing state control of academia. The next section of this chapter will lay down the landscape of recent attacks on universities, academics and students in Russian universities. The

last part will introduce research questions, the researcher's position, and the dissertation's overview.

Background of the study

In the 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, academic freedom in Russian universities was characterized as being in a state of 're-emergence' (Altbach, 2001). This time could be defined as a transition period, introducing a neoliberal phase into education, which was then followed by a lack of funding and ideological pressure (Smolentseva, 2003a). Eventually, the state regained control over higher education and the growing space for academic freedom started to shrink in 2000, especially after the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin. (Dubrovskiy, 2017). According to the V-Dem indicator, Russian academic freedom has been in decline since 2007 (V-Dem, 2022). More regulations, such as restrictions on non-state actors and freedom of information and speech, were introduced during the third term's authoritarian-conservative turn of Putin's presidency (2012-2018). This period in particular contributed to the creation of an uncertain climate, which also impacted the academic environment and academic freedom (Kaczmarska, 2020). Dubrovskiy (2017) argues that humanities and social sciences again became a target for state control as the overall climate of political freedom started to diminish, together with the state's growing power over science and education (Dubrovskiy, 2017).

One of the prerequisites of limited academic freedom can be found in the limited scope of the institutional autonomy of Russian universities. Roch and Ignatieff (2017) consider these definitions to be closely related, yet it is important to differentiate them. Whereas academic freedom often refers to the right to teach and learn, institutional autonomy is about capacity to manage managerial structures, budget and priorities (cite). In fact, as explained further by the authors, 'academic freedom and institutional autonomy are related, but different. We may say, in fact, that institutional autonomy is a precondition for academic freedom' (Roch & Ignatieff, 2017, pp. 29–30). Universities' autonomy in Russia is limited and the system of higher education in Russia is considered to be highly centralized (Dubrovskiy, 2017; Kaczmarska, 2020; Potapova, 2022). There are two main bodies that exercise control over higher education institutions in Russia: the Ministry of Science and Higher Education as well the Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education is responsible for legislations and finances and the Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science is in charge of accrediting higher institutions in Russia. As such, since the majority of universities are budgetary funded, there is a profound dependency between federal ministry and universities' finances (Kaczmarska, 2020; Kaczmarska & Dubrovsky, 2022).

In the administrative area, there is a limited autonomy to be exercised by universities. The universities' governance is equally highly centralized and financially interdependent on the state. The state authorities also exert control over quality assurance and degree programs (Kaczmarska & Dubrovsky, 2022). Rectors are appointed by the Ministry of Education, and the rectors of the two main universities in Russia – Saint Petersburg State University (SPbU) and Moscow State University – are directly appointed by the Russian President. In other universities, rectors are appointed by the federal government or regional authorities. The vast majority of rectors have close connections with or are themselves members of the state ruling party 'United Russia' (DOXA, 2021). The vertical subordination is very strict within the universities: departments usually follow the guidelines by senior management and the self-governance practices remain very low (Kaczmarska & Dubrovsky, 2022). There is a small percentage of private institutions in the whole system of higher education in Russia. There are, however, a few exceptions – for example, the European University in Saint Petersburg and Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES), both of which remain fairly autonomous in their structure with a limited amount of government funding.

Legally, there are regulations which protect academic freedom in Russia. According to Article 29 of the Constitution, everyone is guaranteed freedom of thought and speech (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 2022). Article 29 specifically bans censorship, whereas Article 44 states that 'everyone is guaranteed the freedom of literary, artistic, scientific, technical and other forms of creativity and teaching' (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 2022). Russia has also ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which formally protect academic freedom. Furthermore, there is a federal law 'On Science and State Scientific and Technology Policy' that protects academic freedom and freedom of research at universities.

Practically, legislations remain formal; legislative changes in the past several years, as argued by Kaczmarska (2020), brought about new challenges and restrictions for Russian academics. One of the first examples is the law on penalization for the rehabilitation of Nazism (2014) in the Criminal Code. Kurilla (2014) defined this as an attempt to perpetuate national patriotic propaganda and 'legislate the way of state's historical righteousness' (Kurilla, 2014). Another example is the above-mentioned law on foreign agents (2015). This law imposes limitations on any organizations, including not-for-profit and non-state research centers, who receive funding from abroad and are 'politically engaged' (Federal Law N 121-FZ, 2015). However, it is difficult to measure the scope of what could be defined as 'politically engaged' and 'internationally funded'. This creates an environment of stigmatization for all those recognized as foreign agent organizations. Many businesses, organizations and contributors refuse to continue to work with these organizations due

to the precautionary measures. Another law (2015) introduces the term ‘undesirable organizations’ [*nezhelatel'nye organizacii*], claiming, in the opinion of the authorities, that any foreign or international non-governmental organization (both not-for-profit and commercial) can be deemed ‘undesirable’ if it poses a threat to Russia, the foundations of its constitutional order, its defense capability or its security (Article 3.1, Federal Law N 129-FZ, 2015). Consequently, many not-for-profit and independent research institutions were deemed either ‘foreign agents’ or, more recently, ‘undesirable organizations’ and were forced to suspend their activities, restrict them, or even close down¹.

The new law on higher education activities (2021) is another attempt to control international cooperation of educational organizations. According to the law, educational activities, including popular science lectures and any work of universities related to international cooperation, will have to be controlled by the government (RBC, 2021). The document gives the government the right to determine and control the procedure for implementing educational activities. All these newly introduced regulations might not directly interfere with scholarly activities; however it certainly creates a space for more regulatory mechanisms by government authorities. Due to the vague legal formulations, authorities could misuse these laws, especially if scholars are engaged with topics that the government considers particularly ‘sensitive’ to the state agenda (Kaczmarek, 2020).

An increasing number of attacks – both at an institutional (universities) or personal (scholars and students) level – is another method of imposing limitations on institutional autonomy and academic freedom in Russia. Two internationally renowned non-state universities were partially closed down. The European University lost its state accreditation² in 2016 (The Moscow Times, 2016), while MSSES lost its accreditation in 2018 after numerous inspections by the state authority *Rosobrnadzor* (Meduza, 2018). Recently, the dean of MSSES, Sergei Zuev, was suspected of embezzling 21 million rubles and detained. It is believed that the case is purely political in nature (Times Higher Education, 2021). Employment contracts of some academics were terminated due to their active support of opposition organizations in Russia. For example, in 2020, several HSE professors from the Higher School of Economics (HSE) were dismissed under the pretext of reorganizing the faculties and improving the use of resources. These professors actively expressed

¹ Some of the examples include The Levada Center, the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Gender Studies in Saratov, the Center for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg, The Russian Research Center for Human Rights.

² State accreditation is one of the essential licenses for universities in Russia. Accreditations are considered a form of ‘confirmation’ that you can get an education that meets state quality standards at the university. Diplomas from such institutions are valued higher than those issued by organizations that have not been verified.

oppositional political views or engaged in political activities. HSE, one of the leading research universities in Russia and considered one of the most liberal institutions in the country, also introduced recent amendments that prohibited students' and professors' political engagement on behalf of the university (Takié Dela, 2020). Some Russian universities started to collect information on students participating in protests, and student councils and deans' departments warned students about the dangers and consequences of participating in 'unauthorized actions' (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Other universities have expelled students for participating in political activity due to violating moral and ethical norms (Luxmoore, 2021; Open Democracy, 2017). Although there are no direct guidelines about what constitutes a violation of rules, students are constantly being warned about the consequences of active participation in oppositional activities or expressing opinions.

While I was working on this dissertation, the war in Ukraine started (February 2022). After that point, researching academic freedom in Russia became even more relevant than before the war. Internal and external political processes significantly impact the academic environment in Russia. The Russian education system faced the consequences of the invasion of Ukraine from the offset: foreign universities began to refuse to cooperate with Russian universities, and teachers were forced to stay in Russia and give students lectures 'explaining' the war. At the same time, propaganda reported on the alleged 'persecution' of Russians in Western universities (Meduza, 2022). The teachers and academics who left Russia were labelled 'foreign agents', and anonymous groups appeared on social networks where students and university staff were hounded for anti-war posts (Meduza, 2022). The war in Ukraine has polarized the entire Russian academic community. 200 rectors signed an open letter supporting the Russian army at the same time as thousands of scholars, teachers and students signing open letters, petitions and joint statements opposing the war, in spite of the dangerous consequences of such actions³. As a result, numerous scholars had to flee Russia due to their anti-war views, while some students were expelled from their universities for their anti-war statements (The Moscow Times, 2022).

Research questions and rationale

Thus, numerous factors contribute to the furthering limitations on academic freedom in Russia: universities' strong dependency on the state and state funding, a rising level of ideologically-driven state control and new legislative mechanisms to control international connections and any other

³ According to the new amendments in the State Duma, it is now possible to go to jail of up to 15 years for 'fake statements' about the actions of the Russian army (State Duma, 2022).

'controversial' topics in public (as well as academic) discourse. All of these factors contribute to an academic climate of uncertainty.

While scholars remain the primary target of increasing state control, it is important to consider how the current academic environment impacts students and their learning. Universities continue to play one of the fundamental roles in students' formation as active citizens, young academics and critical thinkers. At the beginning of their academic journey, young researchers have already faced numerous challenges. The inability to choose controversial or 'sensitive' research topics could impact the attitude towards science in Russian academia and further develop self-censorship. As such, current limitations of freedom might influence the students' experience in universities.

Overall, despite the growing interest in this topic, the number of empirical studies on academic freedom remains extremely limited. There are no empirical studies on this issue in terms of student academic freedom. To address these considerations, this qualitative study explores the academic freedom of students in Russian higher education institutions. Two research questions will seek to explore the phenomena. The first is: How do students define their academic freedom in Russian higher education? Through this question, I will explore the conceptual stances on academic freedom from students' perspectives. The second question is: How much academic freedom can students exercise? I will investigate the scope and domains of student freedom in academic institutions through these research questions.

When exploring academic freedom, I have adhered to Biesta's conceptualization of the purposes of education as qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2008). Biesta's classification has great potential for conceptualizing the importance of academic freedom for student learning in higher education. Although it was not specifically designed to address the limitations of students' academic freedom, it can help conceptualize the relevance and implications of the study. Through Biesta's lenses on the purposes of education, it is possible to draw out the categories of what defines student experience in universities and how the impact of academic freedom on students' learning can be explored.

Researcher's positionality

Before starting my discussion on academic freedom in Russia, this section of the introductory chapter will focus on the researcher's position. For this, I will elaborate on the distinction between the insider versus the outsider in the research field. The distinction between these definitions can be 'misleading' (Schatz, 2013, p. 7). In fact, anyone conducting research can experience moments

of being, to a certain degree, an outsider or insider at the same time (Merriam et al., 2001; Schatz, 2013). The divide between these two can thus be fluid (Yusupova, 2019). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will however place a distinction between these definitions and use the term ‘insider researcher’ as someone belonging to the research group, whereas ‘outsider researcher’ can be defined as someone not originally belonging to the research group (Yusupova, 2019).

I place myself in the middle of this insider-outsider dichotomy. In this case, I as a researcher have an insider perspective as someone originating from Russia. I was integrated for a long time into the Russian education system, firstly as a pupil at primary and secondary school and later as an undergraduate student at a Russian university. Through these experiences, I witnessed different stages of the education system in Russia. During the first four years of my academic journey as an undergraduate student in social sciences, I witnessed the position of the university in the political scene in the country and the overall development of the political and academic situation in Russia. This experience ultimately developed my interest in Russian Higher Education, particularly in terms of academic freedom. At the same time, I could currently consider myself an ‘outsider’, as this research has been conducted outside of Russian university settings. As a Master’s student at the University of Oxford, I have a voice as well as a capacity to share the reflections on this subject matter. This subject matter cannot easily be studied within Russia. Furthermore, my position equally reflects the aim of the research. This dissertation focuses mainly on the students as a research group. Academic freedom in Russia continues to be a very relevant topic today. However, there is currently no public discourse regarding academic freedom in Russia, particularly in terms of university students. This research could potentially offer students the opportunity to speak up, raise their voices and concerns about the current situation and contribute to this topic by sharing their experiences.

Dissertation Overview

The dissertation is divided into the following chapters: literature review, methodology, findings section, discussion and conclusion. In the literature review, I explore the existing literature on academic freedom, its forms in different contexts and its relation to scholars and students. Then, I delve deeper into the context of academic freedom in Russia. In the methodology section, I outline the research design and detailed procedure of data analysis, explain the choice of participants and universities, and discuss the limitations, ethical considerations, and rigor of the study. The finding section presents the collected data from interviews with 20 participants, which are structured according to the research questions. The first part of the findings is devoted to the students’ definitions and conceptual understandings of academic freedom. The second part considers

students' academic freedom limitations and is equally divided into two subgroups: explicit (direct) and implicit (tacit) forms of constraints. In the discussion part, I critically analyze obtained findings and explore the potential impact of these limitations on students' learnings. Finally, I conclude this dissertation with my considerations.

2. Literature review

Academic freedom is an essential part of university functioning and it is closely connected to students' freedoms (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). Berdahl (1990) defined academic freedom as *'the right of the scholar in his/her teaching and research to follow truth where it seems to lead without the fear of punishment for having violated some political, social or religious orthodoxy'* (Berdahl, 1990, p. 171). The definition of academic freedom introduced by Berdahl (1990) can equally be applied to students' academic freedom as having the right to study and research without fear of punishment. At the same time, academic involvement is only one part of the students' experience. The role of the university has expanded throughout time. While initially the university functioned solely as an educational institution, it later started to serve as a vehicle for research and, more recently, for social engagement (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Ertem, 2021). Biesta (2008) put forward three functions of education (Biesta, 2008). The first function is a qualification, which is the traditional function of the university: to obtain knowledge and skills. The second one is socialization: the ability to socialize with others and establish networks. The last function is subjectification, meaning that education contributes to a person's autonomous, independent thinking and acting (Biesta, 2008). Applying Biesta's lens enables us to consider how academic freedom and its respective limitations affect student experience in universities. The next section of this study will discuss the implications of students' academic freedom limitations through Biesta's classification.

Before considering students' academic freedom, this chapter explores all the substantive literature devoted to the subject of academic freedom. The first two sections explore the conceptual underpinnings of academic freedom's definition and contexts in which academic freedom has been studied differently. The third section examines the literature on students' academic freedom. The last part of this chapter narrows down the scope of existing literature to that which addresses academic freedom in Russia, emphasizing the scarcity of research, particularly on student academic freedom. It also introduces two research questions for this dissertation, based on the existing research gap.

Conceptualizations of academic freedom

Many scholars claim that academic freedom is essential and a universal freedom (Akker, 2002; Altbach, 2001; Berdahl, 1990; Heisler, 2007; Karran, 2009; Matei & Iwinska, 2018). Academic freedom is central to the mission of the university, without which it is impossible for a university to operate (Altbach, 2001). Limitations of academic freedom indicate limitations of

other freedoms in society (Karran, 2009). One attempt to universalize the definition of academic freedom is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Recommendations on the Status of Higher Education (UNESCO, 1997). UNESCO recognizes the fundamental role of academic freedom, identifying it as a basic human right, such as freedom of speech. It defines academic freedom as:

... the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. (UNESCO, 1997)

UNESCO's definition draws out the basic principles on freedom to research, teach and engage in public discussion of certain opinions and topics without any potential violations (UNESCO, 1997). It can be claimed comprehensive, yet there has been an ongoing scholarly discussion about what other essential elements academic freedom should include (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003; Berdahl, 1990; Heisler, 2007; Karran & Mallinson, 2019; Matei & Iwinska, 2018; Roch & Ignatieff, 2017). One of the ways to explore the conceptualization of academic freedom is to look at the scope of freedoms inside and outside of academic settings and what are the freedoms that should be protected by the concept of academic freedom. Originally, the roots of academic freedom can be found in the ideas of Humboldtian university back in the 19th century (Metzger, 1987). The concepts of *Lehrfreiheit*, *Lernfreiheit*, and *Freiheit der Wissenschaft* were the underlining concepts emerging in 19th century German universities. *Lehrfreiheit* means the freedom to research and teach, enabling oneself to be engaged in the scholarly work without any permission from the state or church (Metzger, 1987). *Lernfreiheit* is defined as a freedom to learn, advocating for students' independent learning (Commager, 1963). *Freiheit der Wissenschaft* stands for the autonomous university's right to self-governance (Metzger, 1987; Pritchard, 1998).

For a long time, the Humboldtian tradition continued to be one of the most influential thought-pieces in the understanding of academic freedom (Goldstein, 1975). More recently, researchers from the University of Oslo drew out two distinctive models of academic freedom – the traditional modal and the social model (Hunler, Quinn, & Cohen, 2018). The traditional model of academic freedom assumes that everything inside academia is protected by academic freedom, as teachers have complete freedom in what they do. This academic freedom should not be interfered by the state at the expense of knowledge (Hunler et al., 2018; Potapova, 2022). Based on this model, the Humboldtian approach towards academic freedom can be considered as an example of the traditional model of academic freedom, as it only covers freedom and activities inside academic institutions. Another model of academic freedom, introduced by the scholars from the University

of Oslo, is the socially-oriented model (Hunler et al., 2018). In contrast to the traditional model, it encompasses areas outside academia, claiming that public expression and involvement are both an extension of academic freedom (Hunler et al., 2018). Academic freedom, in this sense, covers the freedom of speech of the academics, as ‘academics have no right to silence’ (A°kerlind & Kayrooz, 2003, p. 329). This model can be found in the case of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) 1940 document, where freedom of public expression is covered together with the freedom to teach and learn (AAUP, 1940). This model protects freedom of speech – an essential part of academic freedom, as academic spaces cannot be separated from public discourses (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021; Hunler et al., 2018).

Another way to approach theoretical understanding of academic freedom is to consider positive and negative freedoms. This first approach is based on the positive and negative freedoms, originally introduced by Berlin (1969) and later further elaborated by Sen (1985, 1992). Negative freedom is being defined as a freedom ‘from interference’ (Berlin, 1969). Sen called it a ‘control freedom’ (Sen, 1985). In this sense, the subject can act free from any constraints or external threats and no limitations can be exerted from elsewhere. The second form of freedom – positive freedom – is ‘freedom to’ or ‘*capacity to do things*’ (Berlin, 1969, p. 178). Positive freedom fosters scholarly engagement and individual development. In the Sen’s interpretation, this freedom can be viewed as ‘freedom as power’ or ‘effective freedom, enabling people to act’ (Sen, 1985, 1992). Sen also introduces a third category of freedom: ‘agency freedom’. Agency freedom is interdependent on the first two freedoms and is defined as the capacity for people to make conscious actions and exercise choice and self-realization (Sen, 1985). Various scholars use the approaches of Berlin (1969) in their engagement with academic freedom conceptualizations (A°kerlind & Kayrooz, 2003; Tierney & Lanford, 2014) as well as Sen’s (Macfarlane, 2011). The concept of negative freedom will be used later in this dissertation. I argue that students’ academic freedom in Russia has been externally infringed in various ways. I base my argument on the definition of negative freedom, as, in the case of students in Russia, academic freedom is freedom from constraints, rather than freedom to foster academic engagement.

Thus, there is no universal conceptualization of academic freedom, as definitions have different routes, contexts and meanings. In general, the literature on academic freedom infers the ability of scholars to pursue autonomous research, teaching and learning without external interference. In some cases, academic freedom also implies the freedom of speech and the protection of academics’ right to public expression. Another way of looking at academic freedom is to define it as the freedom to foster research or the freedom from external infringements. The definition of academic

freedom varies across historical and cultural contexts within universities and can thus be interpreted differently, as universities continue to operate in different political, economic and social contexts.

Academic freedom in different contexts

Within different institutional, political and social contexts, academic freedom can be perceived in various ways. In the West, limitations on academic freedom are explored differently to parts of the world with alternative political and social cultures (Altbach, 2001). In some contexts, political activism in universities can be seen as ordinary practice of academics and students. In other locations, the freedom to engage with political activism can fall under constant pressure and threats from university management and state authorities. Another example is university funding and university autonomy (Roch & Ignatieff, 2017). Autonomy from government funding systems enables academics and students to openly raise their concerns and opinions and conduct independent research. In contrast to other places, government funding can limit institutional autonomy and thus its academic freedom, with politically sensitive research topics being under close investigation and even censorship (Yusupova, 2019).

There have been attempts to study academic freedom worldwide. Kinzelbach, Saliba, Spannagel, and Quinn (2021) within the Global Public Policy Institute came up with the Academic Freedom Index (Kinzelbach, Saliba, Spannagel, & Quinn, 2021). This Index is composed of five expert-coded indicators that capture key elements in the *de facto realization of academic freedom*: (1) freedom to research and teach; (2) freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; (3) institutional autonomy; (4) campus integrity; (5) freedom of academic and cultural expression. They have grouped all countries into five categories and have scored them in the range between 0 and 1. The groups (A, B, C, D, E status) are formed in the spectrum from ‘relatively free’ to ‘unfree’ (Kinzelbach et al., 2021).

As such, context matters in the analysis of the substantive literature on academic freedom. The limitations of academic freedom in the Western context are explored mainly through neoliberal framework (Boden & Epstein, 2011; Marginson, 1997; Stone, 2015; Tierney & Lanford, 2017). The infringements on independent scholarly activities appear in the form of the rapid marketisation of education (Badley, 2009; Kayrooz, Kinnear, & Preston, 2001; Marginson, 1997) and the growing tendency of relations between universities and students to be market-oriented, where students are treated akin to customers. Due to the rise of economic interests in research funding, freedom of research is threatened by capital needs (Boden & Epstein, 2011). There are also threats

to tenure in the American academic setting (Tierney & Lanford, 2014). The political aspect of academic freedom in Western institutional settings considers the equal distribution of discussion space, focusing on political correctness and rising tensions between the right- and left- wing agendas on campus (Kaufmann, 2021; Stone, 2015).

However, this context differs from ones where the political situation is found within authoritarian political landscapes (Altbach, 2001). In other academic contexts, academic freedom can be inextricably linked with the restricted physical access to universities in conflict zones (Butler, 2015). Many political regimes attempt to control academic environments to combat criticism; severe physical restrictions and even imprisonment of academics can be found in Burma and Iran (Altbach, 2007; Daniel, Hartley, Lador, Nowak, & de Vlaming, 1992). In some cases, especially in places of politically unstable environments and growing authoritarian regimes, there are restrictions on exploring politically and ideologically sensitive topics. In some cases, limited institutional autonomy directly impacts limitations of academic freedom (Roch & Ignatieff, 2017; Yusupova, 2019). Different examples of academic freedom limitations in various contexts include arrests of social scientists in Egypt (Altbach, 2001; Saliba, 2020), limitations of some research and public expression in Singapore (Altbach, 2001), and dismissal of academics and departments' closures in Turkey (Ertem, 2021).

Thus, university is shaped by systematic factors, which is why it is difficult to promote one universal definition of academic freedom. One of the challenges of exploring academic freedom lies with context. The above examples contribute to an understanding of academic freedom as a broad, diverse and context-related term. As such, it seems fairly problematic to create a universal framework, as universities and their freedoms depend on political, cultural and socio-economic factors. Another challenge is the lack of empirical studies available. Although the existing literature covers a wide range of issues related to academic freedom, there is still a substantive lack of empirical study conducted by scholars in different locations in the world. Finally, academic freedom is mostly explored through the angle of freedom for academics and teachers. This challenge will be addressed in the subsequent section, where I will engage with existing literature on students' academic freedom.

Students' academic freedom

Traditionally, students' academic freedom has been defined as an integral part of the Humboldtian *Lernfreiheit* concept – the ability to learn and freely pursue knowledge (Commager, 1963). Students are the main recipients of knowledge (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). Obtaining knowledge and skills are the main components of education, elaborated by Biesta (2008) as a qualification function (Biesta, 2008). At the same time, the purpose of education extends beyond academic engagement (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). Argued further by Biesta (2008), the two other functions of education include socialization and subjectification, which contribute to the development of independent thinkers and autonomous subjects (Biesta, 2008). This argument is further considered by Marginson (2014) in the student self-formation theory (Marginson, 2014). Education brings about constant changes in students' identities and perceptions; originally, this theory was introduced with regard to international students and how the experience of studying abroad shapes students' identities (Marginson, 2014). But it could be equally implemented in exploring how, through different practices and networks, university and academic environments shape students in different ways (Marginson, 2014).

As such, academic freedom is an integral part of students' experience at university. There is an interdependence between students and teachers, which is why it is not possible to leave students out of discussions on academic freedom (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). As followed by Article 13 General Comment of The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'the right to education can only be enjoyed if accompanied by academic freedom of staff and students' (ICESCR, 1999). And yet, literature does not pay substantive attention to the academic freedom of students (Jackson, 2021; Macfarlane, 2011).

Existing literature on academic freedom is often focused on the importance of freedom for scholars and teachers, and students are mostly overlooked (Bissell, 1969). Macfarlane (2011) argued that students are often seen as a 'by-product of academics' protections' (Macfarlane, 2011, p. 720), as they are considered less powerful than the ones who educate them (Jackson, 2021; Macfarlane, 2011). As such, as argued by Jackson (2021), students' academic freedom needs to be deconstructed and further theorized, as 'the student's fundamentally different social position to that of the scholar must be foregrounded in theorizing student freedom, and student academic freedom' (Jackson, 2021, p. 1114). The roots of mentioning students' academic freedom lie in the works of Freire (1968) and Hooks (1994). They specifically considered the consequences of the banking system of education (the passive receipt of knowledge from teachers by students) and

advocated for the active engagement of students in the learning process and course content (Freire, 2018; Hooks, 1996).

The 'learning' argument could be taken further: Kunkel and Radford-Hill (2011) argued that active student learning is an essential part of academic freedom (Kunkel & Radford-Hill, 2011). Active learning includes critical thinking and listening, active participation in discussions and exposure to different points of view (Kunkel & Radford-Hill, 2011). Macfarlane (2011) examined student's academic freedom in terms of their capabilities, drawing his conceptualization from the work of Sen (1999): students' capabilities can empower other students and contribute to their development as independent thinkers (Macfarlane, 2011). The author also considered threats to students and their academic freedom: attendance policies, exploitation of students' intellectual property and domestication of the student voice (Macfarlane, 2011). The issue of students' political correctness and indoctrination were also explored in the framework of students' academic freedom, since being free academically means to be 'free from indoctrination' (Jackson, 2021; Macfarlane, 2011; Oleksiyenko & Jackson, 2021; Pavela, 2008). Students' academic freedom can also be regarded as a part of their right to democratic involvement and engagement (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). Zain-Al-Dien (2016), in their work on students' academic freedom in Egypt, proposed four categories, saying that students' academic freedom consists of: being able to express ideas and opinions; being able to select content and subject of studies; being able to participate in decision-making; and being able to freely publish research and findings (Zain-Al-Dien, 2016). Yet, literature on students' academic freedom remains scarce, as there has been very limited research and almost no empirical studies devoted to the issues of students and their freedoms in academia.

Academic Freedom in Russia

Academic freedom in Russia has been scarcely studied, despite a growing interest in and importance of this issue in Russian universities (Kaczmarska & Dubrovsky, 2022; Potapova, 2022). Partially, it is due to the lack of research on Higher Education in Russia (Smolentseva, 2003b). The majority of topics in educational research explore education as an instrumental field of study and the main scope of research lies in pedagogy, management and result-oriented studies (Potapova, 2022). The lack of discussion on academic freedom is also related to funding matters in Russian universities and their limited institutional autonomy. Yusupova (2019) argued that 'the government becomes the primary source of funding for most social research that is carried out, making it the main client of almost any research institution and giving it the power to set a specific research agenda.' (Yusupova, 2019, p. 1463). The choice of researched topics relies on institutions that support this research. In case of Russia, the government continues to be the main supporting

body for universities, thus making it challenging for researchers to explore potentially sensitive topics (Smolentseva, 2019; Yusupova, 2019).

Despite the growing importance and interest in this topic, discussion of academic freedom in Russia has not yet been established, with a few exceptions. Dubrovskiy (2017) draws out historical perspectives on academic freedom in Russia (Dubrovskiy, 2017). The author claims that there are challenges to academic rights in Russian academia. There has been growing state control over education and humanities have become a target of ideological pressure (Dubrovskiy, 2017). Romanov and Iarskaia-Smirnova (2015) investigated the impact of the Foreign Agents' Law which came into force in 2015 and how it affected academic freedom. One of the negative consequences of this legislation is that it has become difficult in Russian universities to collaborate with Western scholars, especially when the topics of research are considered sensitive (Romanov & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2015).

Other issues connected to academic freedom have been explored by Yusupova (2019), Oleksiyenko (2021) and Yudkevich (2014). They looked at how social research operates and is impacted by authoritarian context (Yusupova, 2019), self-censorship (Oleksiyenko, 2021; Zavadskaya, 2019) and academic feudalism (Yudkevich, 2014). Kaczmarska (2020), in the latest The Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) report, underlines the role of the state in the academic institutions, illustrating this argument with the list of recent attacks on scholars, teachers and students in different Russian universities (Kaczmarska, 2020). The qualitative study by Olimpieva, Dubrovsky and Ezhova (2020) is one of the only empirical studies conducted on academic freedom in Russia. The study explores the definition of academic freedom from the perspective of social sciences and humanities teachers and scholars and how they evaluate academic freedom in their subjective experience (Olimpieva, Dubrovsky, & Ezhova, 2020). Understanding the concept of academic freedom in the Russian context has been also examined in the doctoral research by Potapova (Potapova, 2021).

There has been, however, no precise focus on students' academic freedom in Russian Higher Education and on how the limitation of academic freedom can affect the academic process and experience of young learners. The majority of academic freedom studies is intertwined with professors or administrative and legislative structures, yet there is a large group of people within universities who similarly suffer from academic threats. Some ideas of students' limitations within academia have been presented previously by Kaczmarska (2020), Dubrovskiy (2017), Gerber and Chapman (2022). In particular, Kaczmarska (2020) mentions the case of the Russian online student

magazine at HSE DOXA as one of the limitations exerted on students in Russian universities (Kaczmarska, 2020). DOXA – the biggest HSE student magazine – was banned from holding activities at HSE and from receiving any financial support, following their active campaigns advocating for students arrested during the Summer 2019 Election Protests (Gerber & Chapman, 2022; Kaczmarska, 2020; Open Democracy, 2021). Dubrovskiy (2017) referred to cases when universities have attempted to prohibit students' participation in protests and have framed civil protests as 'extremist' actions in their public statements as a way to prevent students from participating (Dubrovskiy, 2017; BBC News, 2017). Other cases include students being expelled from universities for participating in protests or anti-war campaigns and posting on social media (Gerber & Chapman, 2022; Luxmoore, 2021). However, Kaczmarska and other scientists did not allow the investigation of further influence of such restrictions on students in universities. There is a clear research gap in the existing literature on academic freedom, as no specific studies are conducted on students' academic freedom.

The next part of the dissertation will allow an investigation of students' academic freedom. To address this research gap, this study aims to explore academic freedom of students in Russian Higher Education institutions. The research questions that it will attempt to answer are i) how students define their academic freedom in Russian Higher Education and ii) how much academic freedom can students exercise. Through these research questions, I intend to investigate various kinds of students' freedoms in academic institutions (freedom of research, freedom of discussion in academic settings and freedom of speech in academic institutions), define how students view academic freedom and discuss whether academic freedom impacts on their learning.

3. Methodology

This study was designed as a qualitative case study, which explores how undergraduate students from social sciences and humanities in four Russian universities conceptualize the definition of academic freedom and how much academic freedom, according to the students, they have. The universities chosen for the study include SPbU, HSE, the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), and MSSSES. Participants were recruited through snowballing and in-person sampling methods. 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted online and later transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed. The first half of the chapter considers the research design and explains philosophical underpinnings. Then, it discusses in further detail the selection of participants and universities with the overview on the Russian Higher Education background. The last part of the chapter explores data analysis, the researcher's ethics, and the rigor and limitations of the study.

Research design

This study is a qualitative case study. The plurality of the investigated phenomena has predisposed me to design a study qualitatively. This qualitative research is based on the constructivist paradigm as it explores the plurality of the participants' realities (Fairbrother, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivists' underpinnings enable research on students' academic freedom analyze through their subjective experiences and interpretations. This study emphasizes the diversity of the students' personal experiences in academic freedom. Through students' understandings, voices, concerns, and their construction of reality, it has become possible to investigate how Russian universities' academic freedom has been limited.

In the constructivist paradigm, interviews reflect the multiplicity of the subjective experience of studied phenomena (Miller & Glassner, 2021). Therefore, I have chosen the interview as this study's research method. Firstly, interviews can provide qualitative richness to the data (Presser & Sandberg, 2016). Through conversations with different people, it is possible to obtain detailed and rich data through personal understandings of the investigated phenomena and people's constructions of the social world (May, 2011; Miller & Glassner, 2021). As such, one could say that studying students' academic freedom is best done through interviews, as, through this format, it is possible to gather information and insights provided by students. Secondly, as Gorman and Clayton (2004) argue, the detailed focus of interviews contributes to an understanding of causation and the answering of the 'why' questions while investigating certain social phenomena (Gorman & Clayton, 2004). In this case, through conducting interviews, students contribute to a

comprehensive understanding of their academic freedoms. They succeeded in sharing how they perceive their freedoms and the main factors of academic constraints in Russian academic institutions.

Research instrument

The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted online. The format of semi-structured interviews enabled me as a researcher to have a specific structure for the questions and have space for further elaboration on particular questions and answers (May, 2011) if it suited the context of the participants in the interviews. As such, the structure of the questions helped me follow the plan, according to which questions were based on the substantive literature and research questions. Yet, it was also possible to pursue further dialogue with students. The interviews were conducted entirely online with 20 participants from four Russian universities, interviewing 4-5 students from each. The choice of online interviews was made due to the physical restrictions followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the war in Ukraine. Another reason for conducting the interviews online was the personal safety of the participants, as it might be safer for them to raise their academic concerns online rather than conducting a meeting in person.

Participants were asked about experiences at these universities and their ways of exercising their academic freedom. Questions were divided into four categories. The first category covered general questions about the participants' basic information: their year of study, research interests, and reasons for applying to their particular university. The second group of questions looked at academic freedom during the study process: choosing topics for research, communication with their supervisor, and scope of freedom discussions during seminars. The third category focused on extracurricular activities outside the academic curriculum: participation in student organizations, political engagement, and its impact on their lives. Finally, the last category concluded by asking participants for their definitions of academic freedom and whether they experienced academic freedom limitations in their studies. A full list of the questions, both in Russian and English, is available in the supplementary section (Appendix 1).

Participants' selection

The study sample includes third- and fourth-year undergraduate students completing their studies at the chosen four Russian institutions. The participants' age range is a minimum of 18 years old as this is the age of undergraduate students in the third and fourth years. One of the reasons to choose this range is that during the last two years of undergraduate studies, students can reflect

more on their academic experience and research interests. Most students narrow down their research topics with their supervisors during their third or fourth year. Participants were also selected based on their study area, particularly social sciences and humanities. My choice was determined by a higher vulnerability of academic freedom in this area. Ideologically-driven political agendas and political processes in the country have spread their influence on the public discourse in Russia. Given the state-funded nature of the universities, social sciences are under pressure in terms of their freedom of research and discussion spaces. That is why it was particularly important to select the sample for this study in social sciences. The selected students major in various subjects: international relations, political science, sociology, and international law. The full table of all the participants' details is presented below (Table 1).

Another factor for selecting the participants was based on the universities that the participants attend. This section explains in further detail the landscape of Russian universities and why I chose the following four universities for my study. To explore academic freedom in Russian universities, I chose four Russian universities where I interviewed approximately five students from each institution. The following universities are SPbU, HSE, MGIMO, and MSSSES. This choice of universities is further explained by historical factors of social science development in Russia. SPbU was chosen because it is one of the oldest universities in Russia. It co-exists with the Smolny College of Liberal Arts and Science faculty – a joint project between Smolny, SPbU and Bard College (USA). One of the specifics of SPbU is its unique status: together with Moscow State University, rectors of both universities are appointed directly by the President (Federal Law N 259-FZ, 2009) and have a right to issue their own educational standards (Kaczmarska, 2020). This makes it a special case. Within the old classic university, there is an 'independent' faculty of Liberal Arts, one of the first Russian projects to develop liberal education (cite). Since 2010, there has been a lot of tension or pressure between the head administration of SPbU and Smolny. In 2021, The Russian General Prosecutor's Office recognized Bard College as an unwanted organization for its funding from the Soros Organization and shut down all projects. One of the main representatives of Bard College in Smolny, Michael Freese, was later deported to the USA (Gerber & Chapman, 2022; Kaczmarska & Dubrovsky, 2022).

The second choice of university is HSE. HSE was established in 1992 as an applied research institution and is now one of Russia's leading social science research institutions. The exclusive position of the university enables HSE to remain one of the most 'academically free' universities in Russia due to the close ties of the former HSE rector to the State Duma. However, in the last several years, there has been a steady increase in government subsidies and a turn of political

limitations. Recent cases include dismissing politically active academics in 2020 – which were officially carried out due to the reorganization of the universities’ departments – and banning students and staff from HSE affiliation if they publicly expressed their opinion on various political issues (BBC News, 2020).

MSSSES is another post-soviet educational institution established in 1995, promoting liberal education in Russia. This institution is primarily based on private funding, making it one of the unique cases of a private institution in Russia with prestigious status and research. However, the state continues to exert pressure on MSSSES in their academic freedom. Previously, the state accreditation of educational programs was withdrawn from MSSSES in June 2018 and was returned only in 2020. Currently, the dean of MSSSES faces a criminal investigation under, presumably, a political context.

The last university chosen for the study is MGIMO. MGIMO is a government-based institution. The functions and powers of the founder of MGIMO are carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. It is considered one of the most prestigious universities in Russia, predominantly for future foreign service specialists. Due to its solid government affiliation, MGIMO’s agenda is regarded as very pro-governmental. The academic tradition of this institution has also inherited much from the Soviet tradition of social sciences.

Table 1: Participants’ profiles

Number	Code	Date	University	Year, study
1	SH1	13/03	MSSSES	4 th year, world politics
2	SH2	23/03	MSSSES	4 th year, world politics
3	SH3	29/03	MSSSES	4 th year, sociology
4	SH4	01/04	MSSSES	4 th year, sociology
5	B1	13/03	HSE	4 th year, economy and politics of Asia
6	B2	13/03	HSE	3 rd year, international relations
7	B3	17/03	HSE	3 rd year, political science
8	B4	21/03	HSE	3 rd year, political science

9	B5	25/03	HSE	3 rd year, sociology
10	M1	19/03	MGIMO	4 th year, international economics
11	M2	25/03	MGIMO	3 rd year, international law
12	M3	25/03	MGIMO	3 rd year, diplomacy and politics of foreign countries
13	M4	30/03	MGIMO	3 rd year, international law
14	M5	07/04	MGIMO	3 rd year, international relations
15	M6	11/04	MGIMO	3 rd year, international economic relations
16	C1	15/03	SPbU (Smolny)	4 th year, faculty of liberal arts
17	C2	25/03	SPbU (Smolny)	4 th year, faculty of liberal arts
18	C3	26/03	SPbU	4 th year, international relations
19	C4	30/03	SPbU	4 th year, international relations
20	C5	12/04	SPbU	4 th year, international relations, sociology

Sampling method

As for the method of recruiting participants, I used snowballing and an in-person approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018a). The sampling techniques were selected as follows: I used an in-person approach to recruit participants for the study. I contacted several participants as I had already established a broad network in Russian universities before conducting this research. I used an in-person method to ask my potential participants about their interest in my research. Afterwards, I used snowball sampling as it was helpful to reach out to any other potential candidates from the same universities. One of the primary social media sources through which I have communicated with respondents is Telegram, because most Russian students use Telegram as their main social media platform. The snowballing technique was chosen as a sampling method because of the specifics of the research topic. Through the snowballing technique, it was possible to find participants, although the research topic is sensitive and so requires additional consideration (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018b).

Data analysis

The data was collected through audio recordings. Before recording the interviews, all participants gave oral consent on recordings. The copy of the oral transcript in Russian and English is attached to the Appendix section (x) at the end of the dissertation. The interviews were conducted in Russian as this language is the most comfortable for participants; the recordings were later transcribed verbatim in Russian. I used thematic analysis to approach qualitative data for this study. Thematic analysis was chosen as the main data analysis for this study as it enabled me structure the interview data in the relevant categories (Flick, 2018). For the thematic analysis, I incorporated the approach introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly, I re-read transcripts several times and thoroughly searched for patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, I manually highlighted all relevant information for the research. This step helped me create the first set of generalized codes. Codes were connected to the structure of my interview questions, which were also based on the initial research questions. After the first coding process, a set of overall themes arose: research topics (term papers and theses), freedom of discussion at seminars, pressure on the university, the context of the war with Ukraine, student organizations and initiatives, self-censorship, the concept of academic freedom, examples of academic freedom's limitations. Next, I reviewed these themes and further analyzed transcripts within these themes. Based on the final analysis of the themes, several categories were created to structure the themes, which are the basis for the findings section outline. These categories include i) definitions of academic freedom, ii) explicit (direct) limitations of academic freedom, and iii) indirect limitations. The analysis was conducted entirely in Russian, and all the direct quotes selected for the findings section were later translated into English.

Rigor

Rigor in social science research draws out a quality criterion that ensures authenticity (Coryn, 2007) and certainty of obtained knowledge. The set of rigor criteria in the quantitative research is different from the qualitative one, as the latter represents the participant's plural realities (Winter, 2000). This study has considered the criteria of rigor based on the conceptualization of Guba and Lincoln (1982). Lincoln and Guba (1982) have introduced the criteria of rigor in qualitative research through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

The first criterion is credibility, which considers appropriate representation of realities. Data triangulation strategy is used to ensure credibility in this study, meaning that I have collected data

from different sources and institutions, interviewing 20 participants in total. As a rigor criterion, transferability is responsible for the applicability of research indifferent content and the detailed description of studies context (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Seale, 1999). The transferability is ensured through the detailed description of the Russian educational system, Russian political context, and state-university relations. The third criterion is dependability, which stands for the consistency of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The audit trail is one of the main strategies used to ensure dependability criteria. Every step of conducting the interviews and analysis was well documented in this study, including the interview tracking. The last criterion of qualitative rigor is confirmability, how neutral the research is and how other researchers could further interpret it (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). It can be argued that it remains challenging and sometimes impossible to avoid biases while conducting qualitative research in qualitative research. I will further explain my positionality as research in this chapter. At the same time, confirmability can be ensured through further possible interpretation of my results. Although there is a substantive lack of empirical studies conducted on students' academic freedom, my study can potentially contribute to this area's further research and development.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is a small sample of participants from four universities. I have interviewed approximately five students from each university. This is due to the time limitations as well as specifics of the study. Following the start of the war in Ukraine and the ensuing unstable political situation in Russia, it was impossible to conduct interviews in-person and reach out to a wider audience of students. It has become more difficult to express certain opinions publicly. As such, many students could not give their consent to the study out of fear for their personal safety. Another limitation to mention is a limited choice of universities. Regional representation of universities in Russia would present a great opportunity to study academic freedom, especially the universities that have established liberal art programs, where one could look at how their programs compare with traditional universities' curricula. Because of the limited time allocation and physical restrictions, it was not possible to cover a more representative sample of universities in Russia.

Ethics

Because of the sensitivity of the research topic and the current instability of the research context, several steps were made to ensure ethical procedures of the interviews. Informed oral consent was obtained from the research participants before the interviews. Due to the cultural specifics, I used

oral consent as a form of informed consent, as students might be reluctant to fill out and sign paper forms. Participants were also told at the start of the interview that they could withdraw during and after the interview and that their data would be deleted if they chose to withdraw from the study. No-one except the researcher and the researcher's supervisor could listen to the interview recordings. To protect the participants' safety, all participants' transcripts are pseudonymized and the recordings do not contain any personal or identifiable information about the individuals. To further protect the safety of the participants, Telegram was used as a communication platform because it is a safe and encrypted application. I also asked participants to keep their participation in the study confidential to secure the safety of both sides entirely.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the data collection and is structured according to the research questions. The first section is devoted to students' definitions of academic freedom. The second part draws out the limitations of students' academic freedom in Russian universities. The limitations of academic freedom can be divided into two main categories – explicit and implicit limitations. The former category outlines direct external infringements of academic freedom on students' academic works, discussion spaces, and their activities inside and outside academia. The latter category is limitations of academic freedom in 'tacit' forms. Based on the findings, most students studying at the selected Russian universities reported that they can exercise academic freedom, yet in the rather restricted way. Although there is a growing number of explicit limitations, implicit limitations from students as well as academics remain predominantly high.

Students' definitions of academic freedom

The first section of the findings is devoted to the first research question: how do students define their academic freedom in Russian Higher Education? Most students noted three features of academic freedom: (1) freedom to choose topics for research; (2) freedom to discuss; (3) freedom of speech, such as freedom to express opinions without any potentially damaging consequences. Freedom of research was one of the most predominant answers when students were asked about the definitions of academic freedom. Most students indicated that academic freedom implied the freedom to choose any topic for research, whether it be the dissertation thesis or coursework essays. However, most respondents considered that this freedom to choose any topic of research can be sometimes constrained if the research topics are considered 'sensitive'. Sensitive topics are topics which imply a political or social nature, contradicting current governmental ideological narratives. Universities, according to some students, should not constrain students' choices on investigating these topics, but should provide academic help on how it would be best to approach their investigations. Some students mentioned that universities should operate without political agendas. As one HSE political science student shared, the goal of academic freedom in universities for students is to have access to all discourses and positions. Even if there are 'undesirable' or ideologically-driven topics, it should be possible to research any issues in the country without facing potential consequences or threats:

It seems to me that academic freedom is just the opportunity to speak and raise any topic in the academic field. The bottom line is that the main thing is that you can discuss, write, conduct some kind of research, even if it seems that the topic is somehow 'forbidden' or 'undesirable'. If there is academic freedom, then it is possible to study it. 'Smart voting' [*Umnoye golosovanie*], protests, propaganda

discourse – all this should be available to study. This does not mean that a person can speak and express his opinion in any form, because the academy still has certain standards. But academia strives for neutrality and objectivity. The very opportunity to write on these topics is a sign of academic freedom.

The second most mentioned element of academic freedom for students was freedom of discussion, as freedom of being engaged in open discussions during seminars at the university. Freedom of academic debate, according to most students, implies freedom to defend any position in discussions during seminars, conferences and any other academic environments. As such, it should be possible for students to support any well-elaborated point of view. ‘Fear’ and ‘judgment’ were two concepts which were mentioned by respondents when answering the question about freedom of academic discussions. They noted that discussions during seminars should be conducted without fear of judgement when presenting one's position. This threat of fear as well as judgement could potentially come from either fellow students or academics with opposing views. That is why some students included freedom from indoctrination as one element of freedom of discussion. According to the students, academics who lead the classes are equal participants of academic discussion; they should not be politically engaged while leading the seminar or discussions. Academic freedom, in that case, is more about the fact that students should be able to engage with all points of views, and academics should not simply outline their position, but should instead engage in all possible points of view.

Most, but not all, students, included the third category – freedom of speech – as a subtheme of freedom of discussion. Here, these students highlighted freedom of speech as a freedom to raise one’s voice inside and outside the university and defined that freedom of speech as a freedom of raising one’s opinion and point of view without any fear of negative consequences. The main difference between this freedom and freedom of discussion was that academic exchange at university does not just happen during classes. University is a shared space for students to exchange ideas, initiatives and organize extracurricular activities. As such, one of the functions of university is providing space of diverse opinions, including different political discourses. Some students connected this freedom of speech with the freedom of political expression. According to this opinion, a university can also be a place of informal exchange, and political views should also be discussed and shared. Academic freedom can equally mean the possibility to share like-minded political opinions among students without any harmful impact on the university community. When these students mentioned this freedom of speech, they also mentioned freedom ‘from potential consequences.’ One of the respondents shared:

It is clear that this [academic freedom] is also getting up-to-date knowledge at seminars, lectures, but this is also an opportunity to share this current political agenda with the community so that the community can discuss it.

Other definitions of academic freedom were raised in single opinions, such as freedom of student associations and organizations, freedom of self-development, opportunities outside the university without political boycott, and having the opportunity to influence the learning process. One student from HSE said that freedom of student associations and organizations can be considered one of the functions of the university, as it is not only about academic knowledge and skills, but also about students' development of a sense of community. In the previous section, one of the elements raised was having an opportunity to express different opinions in a shared space. In this case, student mentioned freedom of community development at university. The university is a broad institution that has influence on a large number of areas. When freedoms in student organizations are violated, this is also a clear sign of lack of academic freedom. Another student mentioned the freedom of exchange within universities, raising the question of international exchange between universities. Due to the recent war in Ukraine, many students met limitations of academic international involvement. Academic freedom here was defined as an opportunity to communicate academically [through conferences] and stay in touch with the international academic community, as students and scientists should not be considered '*an appendix of their country*' if the government and political state elite are pursuing a policy that the academic community do not support. Additional elements raised by a student was the opportunity to have the power to have an impact on education and its programs. As such, some students felt powerless when it came to their ability to complain about teaching staff, the availability of help for students who are experiencing mental health issues, or support for students who have conflicts of interest.

Thus, students explored the definitions of academic freedom in broad terms. According to the students' perspectives, academic freedom can contain various elements. This section of the chapter particularly analyzed how students in Russian universities conceptualize academic freedom in their own academic experiences. Predominantly, students associate academic freedom with the freedom of research, academic discussions and speech. Freedom of research in the conceptualization of academic freedom enables young researchers to explore any topics of interests irrespective of their ideological sensitivity. Freedom of discussion is supported by the similar argument, including the opportunity to elaborate on any arguments without being judged or being afraid of potential negative consequences. Freedom of speech includes the ability to be engaged in discussions and raise any opinions in other non-academic spaces. As such,

ideologically-driven government agendas limit the discourse in public discussion and expression, which may equally impact academic activities.

When applying the term of students' academic freedom to the context of Russian universities, it can be noted that students base the definition of freedom on 'freedom from' constraints. As most students indicated, the absence of negative consequences is one of the elements of academic freedom. University is equally viewed by many students as a space for other non-academic, extracurricular activities. As university can provide a space for mutual ideas and exchange, academic freedom is also important to keep this space free from limitations to discuss any points of view. How students define academic freedom will potentially help to understand how they consider actual limitations of their academic freedom, which are considered in the second section of this chapter.

Limitations of academic freedom

The second section of the findings is based on the second research question, particularly how much academic freedom students in Russian universities can exercise. This section is structured as follows: the first sub-section considers explicit limitations of academic freedom, whereas the second part looks at the implicit ones. By analyzing the findings, respondents shared that they have academic freedom at universities and thus have not experienced many limitations during their studies. However, students reported the rising number of external limitations imposed by the university or other authoritative bodies. At the same time, there has been a significant amount of self-regulation and self-censorship, which, as students agree, are mainly exercised to protect themselves as well as the university.

Explicit limitations

Explicit limitations are those limitations directly imposed by the university administration or any other state governing body. As introduced above, explicit limitations are indicated in single restrictive measures reported by students. As such, these are not widespread across all the universities. However, these cases contribute to the comprehensive understanding of Russian universities' current environment of academic freedom. The overall line among these limitations is how political agendas influence universities' actions when introducing these limitations.

One explicit form of limitation is when the discussion space is narrowed. Limitations of discussion space appeared in both written and verbal forms. Written forms of limitations were seen in the

recent increase in ‘verification’ of thesis titles from the state authorities. Particular emphasis was placed on topics related to the current political agenda and all the related political subjects, especially if these subjects were connected to opposition organizations and oppositional leaders in Russia (such as ‘Smart Voting’ [*Umnoje glasovanije*] or Alexej Navalny). University staff advised students to remove trigger keywords related to politics in their thesis’ titles. Recently, with the war in Ukraine, particular caution was exerted on military-related topics. As one student noted, their supervisor recommended to change their sensitive dissertation topic, especially if their topic covered political issues or military topics:

I wanted to research [paratroopers], their wives and to look how being married affected their career. And then ‘the special operation’ [war in Ukraine] began. And, at first, [the supervisor] gently asked if I wanted to change the subject, to which I said no, everything was super, the respondents were ready to talk with me. And then, after another two weeks, he wrote to me more imperatively that ‘it might be worth thinking about changing the subject.

Limitations of thematic spaces included the recommendations to remove certain phrases from the title, whereas the thesis content could remain the same. If students included a political agenda or critical political analysis in a thesis, they needed to do it ‘carefully’ and use indirect language to write the title of the thesis. In this way, students would be able to continue working on their research, but not draw much external attention to their potentially ‘politically triggering’ research topics:

I researched the humor of the President of the Russian Federation and I saw an interest in this topic. It may not be super safe, but I have never been dissuaded from anything. The only thing that will probably be useful to say is that when I applied for the conference, my supervisor advised me to censor myself and not mention the name of Putin, and simply write ‘The Russian president's jokes’. That is, writing without any surnames, just so not to attract any attention.

Verbal forms of thematic space limitation can be viewed, for example, in the inability to discuss certain topics. The recent war in Ukraine provoked this verbal form of limiting the discussion space. As reported by other students, there was a direct limitation, or, as mentioned by some students, ‘censorship’ on discussing the ongoing war in Ukraine. In one university, as reported by one student, tensions were high as students were directly discouraged from talking about current events:

Even the dean said that we don’t discuss this in class, you have to take exams on other topics. Not on the subject of ‘Russia's special operation in Ukraine’. Well, even the fact that the dean told us not to discuss Ukrainian politics during the course – well, what if the seminar is about international law? Why not ask the teacher how legal this and that is?

Most of the interviewed students indicated that political topics have an impact on the academic space in Russian universities and is a relatively triggering point in Russian universities. Not only did the students mention limitations which are directly related to their academic programs or studies, but also to other activities inside university. Political engagement can be one of the other forms of explicit limitations. Students' organizations, in this case, were another example of how universities' management under the sanction of state authorities attempts to restrict students' political participation.

Limitation of political participation continues to be present in Russian universities. Respondents from all 4 universities indicated that there has been a rising level of universities' engagement in student political activism. For example, all HSE students mentioned the year 2019 as a starting point for these limitations, as the administration influenced the university on any 'political initiatives.' In 2019, there was a case of Yegor Zhukov – an undergraduate HSE student who was detained for involvement in unsanctioned political protests. At this time, students and teaching staff expressed solidarity with Zhukov, participated in demonstrations, and signed open letters in support. Yet, after this incident, HSE started to promote the idea of being a 'university beyond politics' which limits the participation of students in political activities and prohibits the use of HSE affiliation in any political movements. One respondent shared that she has been working at HSE for a year and a half, and, when she signed the employment contract, she noticed that in the contract there was an amendment that that she could not speak out about the political situation and at the same time affiliate herself with the HSE. Another example which all interviewed students from HSE mentioned is the case of DOXA losing its student organization status at HSE. Students linked this to DOXA's increasingly political agenda. DOXA became another impetus for students' increasing political involvement and, as a result, HSE stopped sponsoring some student organizations, specifically student media organisations. After this DOXA case, the university introduced new ethical guidelines for student organizations. Due to the new ethical guidelines, political topics in HSE organizations were no longer permitted. One student, who was actively involved in a student organization, shared the following:

There was a whole code of rules about what we could not release [in TV HSE media]. I do not remember the list right now, but things like protests are prohibited [in the TV HSE coverage]. There was a situation where at first, a group of student media organizations were excluded from affiliation with HSE; it was at the same time that they decided to deprive DOXA of the status of a student organization. The TV HSE temporarily lost it as well, but then got it back. But to keep the media status of the student organization, they had to comply with these guidelines, to this code of ethics. The producers [of TV HSE] periodically checked themselves with this ethics code.

Half of the interviewed MGIMO respondents stressed the control on the part of the administration, including over students going to protests or, in the light of recent war in Ukraine, publicly expressing an anti-war position. Discussions with students were happening in the dean's office, where university administration invited students for conversations regarding their participation in protests or signing anti-war petition. Students from other universities also noted strong pressure associated with the protests. As one of the respondents from SPbU shared, since 2015 the SPbU policy on students' participation in protests has dramatically changed. Before, SPbU would release a statement that students have a right to freedom of speech. Now, SPbU is ready to expel students for their administrative offence due to participation in protests, including current anti-war protests:

Yes, if there were protests before, for example, they [the university] tried to find lawyers or something like that, well, at least tried not to expel students, there was no talk of expulsions. But now, as soon as the students were caught at these protests, rumors immediately arose that they should be expelled, that they were rebels, and in general, protesting was not a worth action of university students. Quite harsh sanctions, although there were not such sanctions before. Even before, protests were organized in support of Navalny, and this was not necessarily forbidden and the students did not suffer any kind of consequences.

As such, direct academic freedom limitations on students are present in Russian universities, but they are not yet widely disseminated as common university practice. Students' definitions of academic freedom are connected to the aforementioned limitations. Most of the respondents mentioned that they enjoy a great amount of academic freedom at university and had no challenges of choosing a particular topic for research or expressing their views and opinions during seminars and discussions groups. At the same time, limitations arose if the topic of research or discussion was politically-driven and involved any critical analysis on the current political landscape in Russia, including any military topics. Nevertheless, mostly all students reported a lot of cases where limitations were not directly imposed on students, but appeared in the subtle, or, tacit forms of recommendations. The next section of the findings looks at the various forms of implicit limitations on students in Russian universities.

Implicit limitations

Subtle or 'soft' recommendations and self-censorship practices are the main features of implicit limitations of academic freedom, affecting both teachers and students. These practices can be expressed in different forms. One of the forms was to narrow the scope of thematic spaces. In contrast to the first section of the direct infringements, thematic spaces limitations are considered here in different 'tacit' forms. Students, for example, tended to practice self-censorship, as they understand that there is certain list of sensitive topics that are unavailable for research. The

unavailability of these topics for research could be inferred from students' expressions like 'they would never let me research this' or 'everyone understands that it would be impossible to pursue such a topic'. One student shared that it was possible to spot these 'red line topics' by looking at the number of available papers covering any sensitive political subject:

There were no specific cases, but everyone understands that on topics related to the position that opposes the official Russian political position on Crimea, Donetsk and, in general, any actions of the Russian Federation, any topics related to corruption in the highest ranks, they definitely will not pass [...]. Of course, there are specific situations where this would not have been allowed, this did not happen. But this can be confirmed by the fact that there *were no such works*. If there are no such works, despite their relevance, it means that everyone understands that they *will not be allowed* and therefore [students] do not even try. Therefore, there are, for example, works on the topic of 'justifying the annexation of Crimea', but there are no works justifying the opposing position. And all sorts of risky topics such as corruption, they are written very theoretically, that is, there are never any [written works] with a more practical application.

Sensitive or 'red line' topics were perceived differently in Russian universities among respondents. As there is a growing control on the universities from the state authorities on Russian state-funded universities, less space could be given to diverse discussions. As such, there are avoidance practices, in particular, when teaching staff choose to leave sensitive topics out of discussions. Most students noted that teachers prefer to move away from 'uncomfortable' topics related primarily to politics and not mention sensitive topics at all. Some students were sure that if students were to bring up political topics, teachers would stop them and advise them to discontinue the discussion in this direction. One of the students shared her concern that 'if suddenly someone starts talking about Navalny in a positive way, then, most likely, the teacher will stop him/her'. Avoidance practices were also exercised in a form of *discourse substitution*. Due to the fact that there is a very limited field for critical discourse on Russian political reality, a field for discussion is created and distributed for any other unrelated topics. Some students made some interesting analogies. For example, one student from MGIMO shared that there is a lot of freedom for research in political science, yet one can study any country and any country's politics *other than* Russia and Russian politics. 'It seems that they cover everything except Russian politics. We'd better dig deeper into the structure of Hamas or into the parliament of Burkina Faso'. Another student said that practices of discourse substitution can be seen in how certain concepts and definitions are viewed differently:

I am a research intern at the Civil Society Lab. And for me, I went there, for me civil society means a lot of things, including protests. To my surprise, when I came there, there was not a word about politics. All our research topics are on charity and volunteering. But what is happening now is not investigated in any way. We have projects funded by the state. State money and this is perhaps the most important

thing. I proposed a project based on my diploma, since I already have a developed methodology. I suggested studying the term ‘political participation’ and its change in Russia. One man said yes, a very interesting topic, but I'm not sure if it will be accepted. As a result, I sent this to the boss and she answered: change the subject, no one is involved in politics in our center. Although for me it is just a civil society. It's a shame.

The recent war in Ukraine significantly impacted the freedom of thematic spaces in Russian universities. Students raised their concerns that avoidance practices are becoming more widespread as academics were reluctant to share their opinion on the ongoing war. When asked about the war in Ukraine, many teachers, often from MGIMO and SPbU, did not comment on the ongoing events. Some students from the department of international law shared that professors avoided mentioning the war before or during the seminars. Other students highlighted how silence impacts the seminars, thus creating an uncomfortable atmosphere in class:

Everyone is silent. There is a feeling that nothing is happening [about the war with Ukraine], at every seminar we read news, and last time no-one said any news about Ukraine. There was news like ‘Uruguay joined some international organization, Pakistan signed an agreement with India’. The war is going on, and we are discussing Pakistan!

Avoiding certain sensitive topics in academic discourse can also be seen through unspoken communication rules. Students saw these ‘rules’ as one method of self-censorship. Using these ‘coded phrases’ assumes that students themselves know about these unspoken rules and that they understand everything that is happening in Russia. These phrases create such discourse where everybody assumes that certain sensitive topics are off limits and that, with a high probability, sensitive research topics would not be approved for study, research or discussions. A common phrase used by students to describe situations during seminars (where thematic space for discussion is relatively limited) was ‘everyone just *gets it*’ [*vse vsjo ponimajut*] and ‘carefulness’ [*akkuratnost*]:

Well, at seminars, at conferences, when you can't call a spade a spade. Self-censorship on the part of both academics and students. [...] I was at a scientific conference just a week ago, and the conference discussed Russia in the global world. And there they very carefully called what is happening now, that no-one directly knows, did not name the very same one, and very carefully, smoothed over everything that was discussed. I would say that there is some kind of self-censorship, I don't know why people are afraid to call a spade a spade. [...] Everyone tried to speak very carefully or not to speak at all.

Another way of looking at unspoken rules of communication in Russian universities was through framing. The framing of certain topics can be viewed as a coping mechanism to tackle self-censorship practices during seminars. Almost all respondents spoke about ‘hints’ among teachers.

Many HSE students, as well as one MGIMO student, said that professors expressed their position carefully, in tacit forms. Some students shared that this was expressed through jokes as a way to relieve anxiety. For example, in a political science class, one student noticed that when they broached events related to the war, academics leading the seminar would laugh it off and say something like ‘call it not a war, but a special operation’. Other student shared another anecdote where jokes were used: at a seminar on political economy, the first ‘joke’ from the teacher was to ‘build a model where it can be argued that it is profitable to start a war’. In that moment, as mentioned by the student, it was clear that everyone there understood what they were talking about and that the teacher was like that too [i.e., against the war]. The third student explicitly talked about ‘hints’ and how, through hints, students could infer the opinion or standpoint of the professor. For example, one student shared that you can usually see what the academics wear at the university. Some of them wear badges saying things like ‘everyone has the right to freedom of speech’. In that way, students would see it as a sign or ‘hint’ that it might be possible to raise certain politically sensitive topics with those teachers. Another case of introducing the position in a subtle form was through indirect references, so the students knew that certain sensitive topics could be discussed with this teacher:

[The professor] once recommended a book about the problems of the German party system and he said that this book was also published in Russian, because, as he told us, ‘a Russian person loves to read about the problems of other countries’. And, from such small phrases, his opinion became clear, but he could not express it openly.

Beyond traditional activities such as lectures and seminars, university is a shared space for other activities. For all respondents, student community plays an important role in Russian universities. The predominant number of respondents also shared that political activities and solidarity have become a part of students’ activities. As such, unspoken rules of communication could equally be traced in relation to ‘institutional versus individual practices’ in the university space. In particular, one can see how university administration co-exists with students’ activities. Almost all students from HSE noted that the university is currently pursuing a ‘dual policy’. On the one hand, the student council actively supports students at protests and helps them in general, and there was solidarity between students and teachers; the university does not interfere with these initiatives. On the other hand, political affiliation is forbidden, and students are sometimes given verbal warnings of the consequences of political participation in protests. As explained by one respondent, unspoken practices are seen in the double-politics of the university – meaning that students in some (liberal) universities in Russia are able to help during protests and detainments,

while, at the same time, the university is able to maintain an image of being a university beyond politics and they can persecute any political activities at the university:

It's hard to say, because the university administration has no opinion, there is a manual. No one was asked for their opinion. Our rector, unfortunately, signed the letter supporting 'the special operation', that is, the war, but it is also clear that he cannot speak out against it simply because he is the rector. But at the same time, the vice-rector's administration, together with the student council, organized a situation center, this is the headquarters where volunteers and members of the student council are located – they deal with detainees at protests, student requests for mobility and those who have financial problems, students who are in Ukraine. They deal with student problems. There are even requests 'I'm in a bomb shelter, can you transfer me online?'

As such, constraints of students' academic freedom are being imposed in different ways and forms. After discussing how and when limitations were implemented, a lot of questions remained about the possible motives of these limitations. Overall, students, when explaining the reasons behind these practices, mentioned the factor of fear. The 'carefulness' in these situations can be regarded as a way of their own protection. At the same time, according to the students, this was also the way of the teachers' protection:

At a seminar on international law, it would seem that there is such an event [war in Ukraine], everyone is silent. Everyone is afraid. It seems that the lecturers understand that everything they taught us is, in fact, contrary to what happened, but at the same time they cannot say something against it. Because they understand that there is someone who will inform on them. Therefore, everyone is engaged in such self-censorship, and teachers are afraid, and students are afraid of other students, because when such a split happened, they really began to be afraid, because people can sometimes hate each other because of disagreements on these issues. Everyone is silent of their own accord.

When elaborating further on the question of fear and protection and students' reflections upon academic restrictions, most students raised the question of safety. Due to the factor of safety, universities' measures can be justified as protective. Measures for 'safety' and 'protection' can be expressed in different ways. Firstly, academics, in particular the supervisors, can be worried about students' safety and the potential consequences of them researching sensitive topics:

But [my supervisor] didn't [recommend I change the topic of research] because I'll write something wrong, but rather he feels some kind of responsibility for me and doesn't want his career as a supervisor to start with me, the one who 'wanders around the camps. [*in this case the respondent referred to the 'camp' as a camp for political prisoners*].

Secondly, students raised concerns about university security. They said that they cannot blame universities for the restrictive measures because universities are not the ones in power. The overall justification mentioned by students is that there is no university autonomy and most of the universities are government-funded. As universities are directly dependent on government funding, they have to follow ‘the rules of the game’. In the current situation, there has been growing control from authoritative bodies on universities. In this case, students consider that the limitations of academic freedom and all the imposed restrictions are ways of ‘not having problems’ and, thus, protecting the university:

It seems to me that this is also the problem of the fact that, well, that is, in fact, the HSE ‘gnaws on the hand from which it [HSE] eats’. Because it is sponsored by the Government of the Russian Federation. So, when HSE papers appear about the falsifying of elections in Russia or why the protests are good, then the government of the Russian Federation has questions [for HSE].

The question of government funding continues to be one of the most important elements in the discussion of university autonomy and academic freedom in Russia. One of the unique cases in Russia (together with the European University in Saint Petersburg) is MSSSES – one of the non-state-funded social sciences universities who are working in affiliation with British universities. Yet, the recent detention of the MSSSES dean shows attempts to control the academic space, despite MSSSES’s less pronounced dependence on the state budget. Overall, almost all students from HSE and MSSSES noted these universities (new-established, post-soviet social science universities) remain one of the most ‘academically free’ universities in Russia, compared to other Russian universities (Moscow State University, MGIMO, etc.), assuming that they have more academic freedom than other universities, being ‘*here on a higher level of academic freedom*’:

I often remember the case of my friend, who studied political science at Moscow State University, and they would talk about how academic freedom works in our universities. In 2017, when we had just entered, they were forbidden at Moscow State University to write about Crimea, they said no, it was impossible. And I say: damn, go nuts. You think that you are an eleventh grader, you come to the university and the world opens up for you, there will be something new, but in fact you are faced with real life, with propaganda, with prohibitions. But I didn’t have this, no-one ever told me directly that I couldn’t write something. And for those 4 years while I was studying and while they were studying, their situation really worsened, to the point that they couldn’t speak out at all. Well, it’s better to sit in pairs and be silent. Here. And I did not encounter this, but who suffered? University leadership. Zuev [former dean of Shaninka] is [in prison], Zuev is responsible for our academic freedom, for the fact that we can calmly speak out in class, for example, for the fact that teachers on Facebook can write posts. That’s why Zuev is in prison.

Summary of findings

The first chapter concluded by indicating that students gave different definitions for academic freedom, yet two conceptualizations are particularly present amongst almost all the respondents' answers. Students highlighted freedom for choosing any topics for academic research as one of the key definitions of academic freedom. The second widespread definition included freedom of discussion. The third definition is the freedom of speech, which most of the students connected to the freedom of discussion. As noted by the respondents, the freedom of speech is equally important, as universities are diverse spaces which not only include academic activities. Academic freedom is defined as freedom from constraints and external threats. The potential topics which can be chosen for discussion or research should not bring about any potential negative consequences for students. This freedom from constraints can thus be fundamental in protecting students and their right to investigate sensitive topics or express opinions towards any subjects. Other definitions included freedom of student organizations, mobility programs, and having the right to impact the program's curriculum.

Students' perceptions of academic freedom are intertwined with how much academic freedom students can exercise. The second chapter analyzed the 'extent' of academic freedom in Russian universities for students in terms of two categories – explicit and implicit limitations. The findings indicate that there are cases of explicit or direct limitations to academic freedom. However, direct limitations of freedom are reported in single cases and have not had an expansive tendency. These direct limitations included administrative guidelines for changing research topics, changes in universities' policies and regulations, and universities' narratives regarding students' participation in politics. As such, these limitations revolve around political agenda and active political participation.

Students reported that they have academic freedom in their universities, yet the majority of the students were more inclined to talk about academic freedom in the form of internal or implicit limitations. Different forms of implicit limitations included tacit recommendations of excluding sensitive research topics and avoiding certain discussion topics. Firstly, one method of tacit limitation is the general yet unwritten understanding that certain topics cannot be chosen for research. This has been mentioned together with avoidance practices. Avoidance practices include not mentioning sensitive topics at all or the practice of discourse substitution – talking about anything but sensitive topics. Secondly, tacit forms of limitations include unspoken communication rules or coded forms of language. To grasp specific discussion topics, especially during current war in Ukraine where it is not possible to express an anti-war position, several tacit

forms of communication are used. Students particularly mentioned jokes or indirect hints, signs and different indirect references. Overall, students have justified the reasons for these limitations: universities receiving government funding and universities' willingness to protect themselves and students.

The analysis and implications of the findings will be further analyzed and discussed in the next chapter.

5. Discussion

Based on the findings, this chapter discusses students' academic freedom in Russian universities in relation to the existing literature. First, I will delve deeper into exploring how students' conceptualizations enable an understanding of the context of academic freedom in Russia and other processes that might impact this phenomenon. Then, I will examine the connections between explicit and implicit limitations of academic freedom and how students' responses are connected to the existing studies on academic freedom in Russia, particularly Russian social science scholars and their perceptions of academic freedom. Finally, I will also discuss how limitations on students' academic freedom might potentially impact students' learning, their academic development, and self-realization.

Definitions of academic freedom

The first research question addressed how students conceptualized the definition of academic freedom and how they saw the elements of academic freedom in Russian universities. The first and most frequently mentioned element of academic freedom was the freedom to carry out research. Respondents defined research as their intellectual works such as a theses, dissertations or papers for their courses or conferences.

Regardless of the diverse definitions of academic freedom in different countries, this 'research' element of academic freedom aligns with the ones [definitions] from existing literature. Most scholars, when elaborating on the fundamental principles of academic freedom, mention freedom to research (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003; Altbach, 2007; Berdahl, 2010; Karran, 2009). The traditional Humboldtian perspective on academic freedom defines the freedom to research in the *Lehrfreiheit* as the ability to research and teach (Metzger, 1987). Yet, when the elements of freedom to research are identified by students, the context becomes relevant. In Russian context, freedom for research implies the opportunities to choose any research topic, including the most sensitive ones. The sensitivity of these topics is defined by the scope of the controversy and critical analysis of the current political agenda in Russia. Respondents raised their concerns about the freedom to choose any research topic and mentioned that sensitive topics might not be recommended to pursue for a thesis or essay. In examples given by students, these sensitive topics included: studying military groups in Russia, corruption, the rise of opposition movements, and civil protests, as well as a critical analysis of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This finding can be supported by the study on how social science research is conducted differently in an authoritarian context (Yusupova, 2019). Yusupova (2019) argued that in illiberal societies, the research agenda

is strictly framed by the ‘main client of this research’, which in this case is the state (Yusupova, 2019, p. 1464). Two elements impact this issue. The first one is universities’ great dependency on the state for funding research and their limited institutional autonomy. The second one is the political nature of this government. In an authoritarian context, a government attempts to secure the legitimization of power; thus, particular discourses will be supported while others are silenced (Yusupova, 2019). The limits of public discourse are ‘enforced coercively’ (Yusupova, 2019, p. 1464); this was also discussed in other works (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021; Kaczmarska, 2020; Olimpieva et al., 2020).

The second frequently-mentioned element of academic freedom is the freedom to engage in discussions. Discussions take place in university during seminars with other students and professors. These active and diverse discussions are part of the ‘active learning process’ classes in the literature on academic freedom (Kunkel & Radford-Hill, 2011). Freedom of discussion was elaborated by some students as the ability to be exposed to different opinions and be free from teacher-imposed opinions. The existing literature seems to confirm this, highlighting students’ academic freedom as a freedom of active discussions and freedom from indoctrination (Jackson, 2021; Macfarlane, 2011; Pavela, 2008).

Most of the students also mentioned freedom of speech as an important element of academic freedom. Freedom of speech can be defined as a freedom of sharing opinions and viewpoints in different university spaces, not only the ones in the seminar rooms. These students view freedom of speech as an ability to be engaged in public discussions outside academia without the university attempting to interfere with it. Only a few students mentioned that expressing opinions ‘outside’ is a separate issue from the university; thus, academic freedom protects academic discussion and the chance to conduct this discussion without having any other external threats and concerns. The rest of the respondents did not put these definitions into different categories and talked about ‘freedom to have any discussions.’

This divide in categories is fixed in two models of academic freedom, which Dubrovsky (2021) mentioned in the recent study on how social science scholars in Russia view academic freedom (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021). There has been a separation of opinions on what academic freedom should protect. Some Russian academics lean toward identifying freedom of speech as part of academic freedom, thus, toward the socially-oriented model of academic freedom. Especially, these are academics who are politically active outside the university (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021). Others view academic freedom only in terms of within the university space, thus, adhering to the

traditional model of academic freedom. At the same time, it has become challenging to identify where academic freedom for solely academic discussion ends and the freedom of speech begins. As previously mentioned in Karran (2009), limitations of other spheres of freedom in the society limit academic freedom too (Karran, 2009).

Lastly, individual students' opinions were raised regarding the freedom of student organisations. This correlates with Appiagyei-Atua's argument on democratic participation and civil engagement of students in universities, which forms an important part of academic freedom (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019). Other individual definitions included the empowerment of students in the decision-making process, which coincides with Zain-Al-Dien's category of student academic freedom (Zain-Al-Dien, 2016). Overall, by analyzing students' definitions of academic freedom, it can be argued that they are predominantly framed through, what Berlin (1969) would call, 'negative' freedom, or freedom 'from' constraints (Berlin, 1969). Only two respondents framed one of their definitions of academic freedom in terms of 'positive freedom'. They mentioned self-enhancement and self-development [*samorealizacija*] and implied the freedom to enjoy the studying process, participate in students' extracurricular activities and have a chance to study abroad. All the other respondents based their definitions on the freedom 'from constraints' – they felt there was an external threat in the academic space that they had to always consider. Research topics should be possible to choose regardless of the sensitivity of the topics; discussions should be held no matter how ideologically deviant the opinions might be from the government agenda. Engagement in academic discussions – as well as engagement in any other discussions in academic spaces – should not be accompanied by fear of being externally surveilled when speaking out. The predominant 'negative freedom' in respondents' conceptualization of academic freedom conjures up an image of an environment where students are engaged in the education system with a permanent sense of external threat and control.

Limitations of academic freedom

The second research question was to explore how much academic freedom students exercise. Most students indicated that they enjoyed a relatively great scope of academic freedom in universities. Yet, as revealed through the interviews, there were certain limitations to students' academic freedom, especially regarding politically-driven topics and activities. Based on the students' answers and examples, the finding section was structured in two categories – explicit and implicit limitations of academic freedom. Explicit limitations are direct violations of academic freedom, whereas implicit limitations are undertaken in subtle, tacit forms.

Firstly, as mentioned by the respondents, implicit limitations have been a widespread issue in universities, as almost all the respondents raised at least one example of these implicit forms. In their narratives on explicit limitations, students highlighted clear limitations on specific topics' discussions and students' political engagement outside the university. Yet, it remains challenging to draw a clear line between indirect and direct limitations due to the vague universities' articulations of their actions. That means that universities can interpret their restrictive measures differently. One of the examples from the findings is the use of language in the thesis papers. On the one hand, students were advised not to choose particular wording in their titles, thus receiving a directive from the more authoritative scholar, who was their supervisor in most cases. On the other hand, these measures were undertaken as a protective measure, as certain phrases or words might attract what students referred to as unnecessary attention from the state authorities. In general, this study participants sharing their opinions on academic freedom limitations coincides with the existing study on Russian social scientists (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021; Kaczmarcka, 2020; Olimpieva et al., 2020). As argued by Dubrovsky (2021), social science in Russia has become a target of state control; different forms of this control can be seen in the forms of limitation academic freedom imposed either by the state or the university management (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021).

Secondly, the phenomenon of self-censorship was one of the most used terms among the implicit forms of academic freedom limitations. In the findings section, examples of self-censorship were grouped into different categories. Some students mentioned discourse substitution as one of the forms of self-censorship. In this case, any topics could be chosen for the discussion, except those with sensitive political agendas. Some academics avoid discussing specific topics; others frame them in the forms of hints, jokes and the use of very subtle language and expressions. As Kaczmarcka (2020) found, teaching has also become uncertain, as many academics do not know how to handle sensitive discussions with students as they do not want provoke students to 'protest' and 'get them arrested' (Kaczmarcka, 2020, p. 122). It can be stated that ideological pressure and exceeding control on the governmental agenda creates the ground for the excessively cautious measures, taken from the academics, which ultimately impacts students.

Thirdly, the blurred boundaries between implicit and explicit restrictions of academic freedom can also be observed in the area of students' political engagement as opposed to universities measures to curb it. Students highlighted the increasing control of the university over the students' political participation. Explicitly, through emails, informal dean's gatherings and other forms of communication, universities' management attempt to tell students about the consequences of

administrative offenses, such as unauthorized protests. As for student organizations, some universities prohibit covering political topics under the pretext of promoting the university beyond politics. Likewise, Dubrovsky (2021) and Kaczmarcka (2020) mentioned the university practicing forms of limitations, which is referred to as university's unspoken limitations and prohibitions. The bureaucratization of education as well as vague legal frameworks are discussed to enable universities to repress and punish scholars:

‘Since there are no direct prohibitions on (oppositional) political or public activity, professors are formally punished not for their political views but for violations of internal rules or noncompliance with professional certification requirements. [...] In an environment of heightened political and ideological pressure, it is easier for universities to dismiss overly active faculty than to confront agents of the state’ (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021, pp. 49–55).

It still remains unclear where there could be the line between public expressions on behalf of the person without universities' affiliation and public statements as continuation of research-related discussions.

Lastly, it is interesting to observe how students justify universities and their actions. The similar line of argumentation was found in Dubrovsky (2021)'s study, exploring how scholars perceive rising ideological pressure and thus have ‘to accept new rules of the game’ (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021). Similarly, the current dissertation participants understand the inevitability of certain measures undertaken by their supervisors and the university. The ‘inevitability’ and full understanding of these measures from teachers and supervisors were justified by the factor of safety. By avoiding certain phrases in the titles or certain topics in general, students felt that teachers take care of them in that way, so the students have no potential negative consequences in the future. Another justification raised by students is to protect the university itself. Mostly all students who identify themselves as students from ‘more liberal’ universities in Russia mentioned that their universities are the ones with ‘still existing’ academic freedoms. As such, protective measures should be accepted to ‘save’ universities from the government and ensure that they [students] have a place to study and exercise the academic freedom that they still have.

University funding was another element of taking imposing limitations for granted. Strong dependency on the state justifies the limited scope of university autonomy. Thus, as most of the universities in Russia are governmentally funded, students are not surprised that the political processes in the country bring about these limitations in universities. Yusupova (2019) and Smolenseva (2019) discussed the strong dependency on the state in terms of funding, which restricts the autonomy of the university/ state as a ‘research client’.

Impact on students' learnings

The limited scope of academic freedom inevitably impacts academics' activities and the intellectual works they produce and publish. In the case of the students, however, it is interesting if it could be possible to foster students' learning in an environment where academic freedom is constantly infringed, and universities cannot operate autonomously. To consider the potential consequences of students limited academic freedom, Biesta's conceptualisation of the purposes of education can be applied. As presented earlier in the literature review for the analysis of university mission, Biesta drew out three functions of education: qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2008). Based on the findings of this dissertation, it can be argued that students' academic freedom in Russia has been limited in all the functions of the education and thus has an impact on their academic experiences and development.

Firstly, the qualification function stands for receiving knowledge and skills. Traditional view on university also sees higher education as a place for transmitting knowledge (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Ertem, 2021). In this category, limitations of academic freedom impact students' academic learning process, their ability to choose research topics, be exposed to different perspectives during lectures and openly express their opinions during seminars. Current limitations of academic freedom contribute to creating a space where it is not possible to 'call a spade a spade.' Most of the interviewed students mentioned that they are placed in an environment where ideologically sensitive things cannot be explicitly discussed. During lectures and seminars, the scope of open discussion will be primarily dependent on the political position of the academics. Specific ideologically sensitive issues could be substituted, framed differently or avoided. As one of the students previously mentioned in one of the interviews, how would it be possible to analyze the current actions of the Russian government in Ukraine if only a one-sided perspective is allowed to follow? These factors do not create a free and independent academic environment for learning and diverse discussion. Constant reinforcement of academics' and students self-restrains further reinforces the culture of threat and further practicing self-censorship in academic works and discussions. 'Self-censorship extends beyond research and teaching choices to impact any civic engagement or political activism outside the university, including public statements.' (Dubrovsky & Meyer, 2021, p. 56).

Secondly, the socialization function includes students' ability to engage in social groups, form networks and participate in peer learning. One of the forms of students' socialization could be considered as the ability to participate in different student organizations. Students' organizations remain the basis for gathering students with similar or opposing views, raising awareness on

certain topics inside and outside academia, and engaging in civil participation through university spaces. Recently, universities in Russia have attempted to control this sphere of students' engagement. Freedom to gather and organize active engagements is limited once politically sensitive topics occur. Attempts to control spaces outside university do not contribute to the development of active youth communities where it is possible to exercise their democratic freedoms and rights (Appiagyei-Atua, 2019).

Subjectification is the third function of education (Biesta, 2008). Through subjectification, students become autonomous thinkers and develop the capacity for critical analysis. Without the power to exercise academic freedom, universities cannot be a place for 'curiosity-driven places' (Chankseliani, 2022). The process of self-formation might also be an important part of the subjectification function. Self-formation, in this case, is an educational process for young learners throughout the four years of university. Spending these years in one academic setting impacts students' understandings and values, shapes their personality and choices (Marginson, 2014). When talking about conceptualizations of academic freedom, most of the students framed it as a negative freedom, freedom from constrains. The lack of what Berlin (1969) called 'positive freedom' [freedom 'to' development and knowledge], might create unfavorable environment for self-formations of students. Hence, operating in the culture of threat and constant external infringements might not contribute to the development of the independent subjects and pursue free, critical intellectual interests.

6. Conclusion

Current political processes in Russia and limitations of freedoms in all social domains equally impact the academic environment in Russia. This study mainly focused on students' academic freedom and argued how socio-political processes affect students at universities. Notably, under growing state control, universities impose their control over everything – from their academic curriculum and discussion space to the students' activities and public engagement. I started my dissertation with a quote from Romanov and Iarskaia-Smirnova article (2015) on how it has become difficult for academics in Russia to collaborate with their foreign colleagues due to the 2015 foreign agent law. These legal limitations partially described the whole institutional façade of further restrictions. The gradual increase of institutional constraints impacts the overall development of the academic environment, where science is becoming closely monitored. This research suggested evidence that limitations of academic freedom affect academics as well as students as the main recipients of knowledge. Overall, only a limited scope of literature covers the impact of restricted academic freedom on academics. The number of studies on students remains even lower, and no studies have been conducted on students in the Russian context. As it is uncommon to discuss politically controversial topics in Russian universities, there are no other sources of students' academic pressure. More extensive qualitative research needs to be conducted to draw more general conclusions for further elaboration on the following considerations: what are the implications of self-censorship? How do subtle forms of limitations impact the quality of produced research? What are the short- and long-term consequences of state control on social science in Russia? In the current situation, where Russian academics and students become more isolated. With social sciences being more controlled, academic freedom in Russia should be further investigated. As today's students will be the scientists of tomorrow, it might remain highly challenging for them to foster their independent and critical learning in the excising intellectual environment.

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Appendix A. CUREC Approval Letter

Dear Elizaveta,

Undergraduate Students' perceptions of academic freedom in Russia

Thank you for sharing the revised **CUREC** form and information letter. The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical **approval** of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, **approval** has been granted.

Please note that any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date COVID-19 fieldwork risk assessment in place. Please refer to the current guidance issued by **CUREC** during the pandemic, notably COVID-19: **CUREC** guidance on research involving human participants, <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/coronavirus>.

If relevant please also check the **CUREC** website for their best practice research guides, <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg>

Good luck with your research study,

Keep well and safe,

All good wishes,

Katharina

Member, DREC

Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet (English)

Undergraduate Students' perception of academic freedom in Russia

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference:

Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation entails. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there are any aspects of the project that are unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research.

Why is this research being conducted?

This study aims at exploring academic freedom of students in Russian Higher Education institutions. It attempts to understand various kinds of students' freedoms in academic institutions (freedom of speech, freedom of research, freedom of speech in academic institutions). The study attempts to define how students view academic freedom and how it impacts their learnings.

Why have I been invited to take part?

For this study, we are seeking third and/or fourth year bachelor students' participants studying at one of the social sciences departments in one of the following universities: St. Petersburg State University, Higher School of Economics, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. You have been identified as someone who could potentially be one of the study's participants. The hope is that by interviewing a range of students from these different academic institutions, the fullest possible picture of the issue such as academic freedom can be explored.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is your decision to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to.

What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

The results of this research will form the basis of an Oxford Master's dissertation. Some results may be published in academic journals concerned with exploring education. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next two to three months after which time the published results will be publicly available.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

The following research involves topics considered sensitive, as participants will be asked questions about academic freedom in Russia. One of the major risks for the participants might include the disagreement of their university supervisor. The risks for the following study have been acknowledged. Participation in this study will be entirely confidential to reduce the risk of distress. The researcher will ask the participants to keep the participation in the study confidential to secure the safety of both sides entirely.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

The benefits are obtaining a valuable reflection on their academic and any other relevant to the university experience. Your participation, as part of this study, will benefit those trying to understand the impact of academic freedom in Russian Higher Education institutions.

What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

Interview data (including oral consent forms) will be stored in Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. Other research data will be stored for 3 years after dissertation publication. All interviews will be recorded by the Voice Memo of my encrypted iPhone and the file will be named with pseudonyms and stored temporarily on the same encrypted iPhone. After transferring the audio files to Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, the files on the encrypted iPhone will be permanently deleted. The transcription of audio recorded interview will be done manually, and all the names of people or of institutions will be replaced with pseudonyms directly after the transcription. The transcription files will be named with pseudonyms and stored in Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. The researcher and the supervisor will have access to the research data.

Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in the dissertation. It will not be possible to be identifiable from the outputs. Every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality, so you cannot not be able to be identified in the final report.

Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Who is funding the research?

The research is funded by the University of Oxford and organized as an independent dissertation research project in conjunction with the Department of Educational Studies, Oxford University.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact, and we will do our best to answer your query. I will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible: elizaveta.belkina@kellogg.ox.ac.uk, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, UK OX2 6PY. Your inquiries are most welcome.

Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet (Russian)

Восприятие студентами бакалавриата академической свободы в России Информация для участников

Справка об утверждении Комитета по этике исследований Центрального университета:

1. Приглашение

Приглашаю принять участие в научном исследовании. Прежде чем принять решение об участии, важно понимать, почему проводится такое исследование и в чем заключается ваше участие. Постарайтесь внимательно прочитать следующую информацию. Можно также задать любые вопросы, если есть какие-либо неясные аспекты проекта, или если вам нужна дополнительная информация. Постарайтесь уделить этому некоторое время, чтобы понять, смогли бы вы поучаствовать в данном исследовании.

2. Почему проводится это исследование?

Настоящее исследование направлено на изучение академической свободы студентов российских вузов. В исследовании будут изучаться различные виды студенческих свобод в академических учреждениях (свобода выражения мнений, свобода исследований, свобода слова). В исследовании делается попытка определить, как студенты определяют академическую свободу и как она влияет на их обучение.

3. Почему меня пригласили принять участие?

Для этого исследования мы ищем участников третьего и/или четвертого курсов бакалавриата, обучающихся на одном из факультетов социальных наук в одном из следующих университетов: Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Высшая школа экономики, Московский государственный институт международных отношений, и Московская школа социальных и экономических наук. По этим факторам вы были выбраны как один из потенциальных респондентов для исследования. Есть надежда, что, опросив ряд студентов из этих учебных заведений, можно будет изучить максимально полную картину такого вопроса, как академическая свобода.

4. Должен ли я принимать участие?

Нет, участие в этом исследовании полностью добровольное. Вы можете отказаться от участия в любое время. Вам не нужно отвечать на вопросы, на которые вы не хотели бы отвечать. Будут приложены все усилия для сохранения конфиденциальности. Таким образом, вы не сможете быть идентифицированы на всех этапах исследования.

5. Что со мной будет, если я приму участие в исследовании?

Результаты этого исследования лягут в основу магистерской диссертации в Оксфорде. Возможно, какие-то результаты будут опубликованы в академических журналах, посвященных исследованиям образования. Если вы хотите получить копию об опубликованных результатах, можно проинформировать исследователя. Исследование будет проходить в течение следующих двух-трех месяцев, после чего опубликованные результаты станут общедоступными.

6. Каковы возможные недостатки и риски при участии?

Это исследование затрагивает темы, которые считаются деликатными, поскольку участникам будут заданы вопросы об академической свободе в России. Одним из основных рисков для

участников может быть несогласие их университетского руководителя. Риски для следующего исследования были полностью учтены, поэтому участие в этом исследовании будет полностью конфиденциальным, чтобы снизить любой возможный риск. Я попрошу участников сохранить участие в исследовании конфиденциальным, чтобы полностью обеспечить безопасность обеих сторон.

7. Есть ли какие-либо преимущества в участии?

Преимущества участия исследования заключаются в том, что они получают ценные размышления об их академическом и любом другом опыте, имеющем отношение к университету. Ваше участие в этом исследовании будет полезно тем, кто пытается понять влияние академической свободы в российских высших учебных заведениях.

8. Какая информация будет собираться и почему сбор этой информации важен для достижения целей исследования?

Данные интервью (включая формы устного согласия) будут храниться в Nexus 365 OneDrive для бизнеса. Другие данные исследований будут храниться в течение 3 лет после публикации диссертации. Все интервью будут записаны с помощью приложения для записи голоса iPhone, а файлы будут названы псевдонимами и временно сохранены на том же зашифрованном iPhone. После передачи аудиофайлов в Nexus 365 OneDrive файлы на зашифрованном iPhone будут удалены безвозвратно. Транскрипция аудиозаписи интервью будет выполнена вручную, и все имена людей или учреждений будут заменены псевдонимами непосредственно после транскрипции. Файлы транскрипции будут называться псевдонимами и храниться в Nexus 365 OneDrive. Исследователь и научный руководитель будут иметь доступ к данным исследования.

9. Будет ли исследование опубликовано? Могу ли я быть идентифицирован по каким-либо публикациям или другим результатам исследований?

Результаты этого исследования лягут в основу магистерской диссертации в Оксфорде. Возможно, какие-то результаты будут опубликованы в академических журналах, посвященных исследованиям образования. Если вы хотите получить копию об опубликованных результатах, можно проинформировать исследователя. Исследование будет проходить в течение следующих двух-трех месяцев, после чего опубликованные результаты станут общедоступными. Будут приложены все усилия для сохранения конфиденциальности, поэтому участники не смогут никаким образом быть идентифицированными в исследовании.

10. Защита данных

Оксфордский университет является контролером данных в отношении ваших персональных данных и, как таковой, будет определять, как ваши персональные данные используются в исследовании. Университет будет обрабатывать ваши персональные данные в целях исследования, описанного выше. Дополнительная информация о ваших правах в отношении ваших персональных данных доступна по адресу <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

11. Кто финансирует исследование?

Исследование финансируется Оксфордским университетом и организовано в качестве независимого диссертационного исследовательского проекта совместно с Департаментом образовательных исследований Оксфордского университета.

Кто рассмотрел это исследование?

Это исследование получило этическое одобрение подкомитета Комитета по этике исследований Центрального университета Оксфордского университета.

12. К кому мне обратиться, если у меня есть сомнения по поводу исследования или я хочу подать жалобу?

Если вас беспокоит какой-либо аспект этого исследования, пожалуйста, свяжитесь с, и мы сделаем все возможное, чтобы ответить на ваш запрос. Если вы по-прежнему недовольны или хотите подать официальную жалобу, пожалуйста, свяжитесь с председателем Комитета по этике исследований Оксфордского университета, который постарается решить этот вопрос как можно скорее: elizaveta.belkina@kellogg.ox.ac.uk, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, UK OX2 6PY

Appendix D. Oral Consent Form (English)

Research Oral Consent Form

Project Title: Undergraduate Students' perception of academic freedom in Russia

Researcher: Elizaveta Belkina

In English:

Hello [again], my name is Elizaveta. I'm currently a Master student at the University of Oxford in the Department of Education.

In my study, I want to investigate students' academic freedom in Russian universities. I'm interested in how students exercise their academic freedom throughout their studies at the university in classrooms, research or any other students' activities. If you choose to be a part of this project, here is what will happen:

I will have a conversation with you where I will ask a range of questions about you, your time as a bachelor student at the university, your coursework and bachelor thesis as well as your experience outside classroom. The answers you give will form the basis of my dissertation. Me and my dissertation supervisor will have access to the interviews.

I will store your data safely and confidentially in the university-provided cloud storage with two-factor identification and will keep the research data for three years after publication.

With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of our discussion to make sure I'm getting an accurate record of the interview with you. If the audio recording would not work for you, I could take notes in my notebook.

I would also like your permission to keep your contact details so that I can re-contact you to clarify information you gave me in your interview.

You will not be identifiable, as your personal information will not be indicated. Instead, I will pseudonymise your personal information.

The following risks are involved in taking part, e.g. an interview could cover sensitive issues. You might find aspects of this interview difficult and sensitive as I'll be asking for your opinions about academic freedom. In order to reduce any potential risks, I will ask you to keep your participation in this research confidential. You could also choose not to answer any questions you don't want to, pause for a break or stop the interview.

You don't have to take part; you can ask me any questions you want before or throughout; you can also withdraw at any stage of the interview without giving a reason. After the interview you can withdraw your data until 15/06/2022 before the study is completed.

The project will be published in a dissertation. A copy of my dissertation, will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives.

If you have any complaints or concerns please feel free to contact me. You can also reach me at elizaveta.belkina@kellogg.ox.ac.uk, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, UK OX2 6PY

This research project has been reviewed and approved by an Oxford University ethics committee. If, after contacting me with any concern, you're still unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the ethics committee. Their email address is ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk.

Do you have any questions?

Do you give your permission for me to interview you and audio record you?

Do you give permission for me to re-contact you to clarify information?

Do you give me permission to quote you directly without identifying you?

Are you happy to take part?

Ok, thanks, let's start.

Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet (Russian)

Форма устного согласия на исследование

Название проекта: Восприятие студентами бакалавриата академической свободы в России
Исследовательница: Елизавета Белкина, магистр сравнительного и международного образования

Здравствуй [еще раз], меня зовут Елизавета. В настоящее время я учусь на магистра в Оксфордском университете в департаменте образования.

В своем исследовании я хочу исследовать академическую свободу студентов в российских университетах. Мне интересно, как студенты реализуют свою академическую свободу на протяжении всего обучения в университете в учебной деятельности, научных исследованиях или любой другой студенческой деятельности. Если ты решишь стать частью этого проекта, вот как это будет происходить:

У меня с тобой будет беседа, в ходе которой я задам ряд вопросов о тебе, о твоём времени и опыте, проведенном в качестве студента бакалавриата в университете, о курсовой работе и дипломной работе в бакалавриате, а также об опыте вне аудиторных занятий. Ваши ответы лягут в основу моей диссертации. Я и моя руководительница диссертации будут иметь доступ к интервью.

Я буду хранить все данные безопасно и конфиденциально в предоставленном университетом облачном хранилище с двухфакторной идентификацией. Также, я буду хранить данные исследования в течение трех лет после публикации. Ты не сможешь быть идентифицированы(а) в исследовании, так как вся личная информация не будет указана. Вместо этого я также псевдонимизирую личную информацию.

С твоего разрешения я хотела бы сделать аудиозапись нашей беседы, чтобы убедиться, что у меня есть точная запись интервью с вами. Если формат с аудиозаписью не подходит, я могу делать записи в своем блокноте.

Я также хотела бы, чтобы ты разрешил(а) сохранить твои контактные данные, чтобы я могла повторно связаться с тобой, чтобы уточнить информацию, которую ты дал(а) мне в своем интервью.

Есть некоторые риски, связанные с участием: например, интервью может затрагивать острые вопросы. Некоторые аспекты этого интервью могут показаться сложными и в целом довольно деликатными, поскольку я спрошу ваше мнение об академической свободе. Чтобы уменьшить любые потенциальные риски, я попрошу вас сохранить конфиденциальность твоего участия в этом исследовании. Ты также можешь не отвечать на вопросы, если вдруг посчитаешь, что на них некомфортно отвечать, сделать паузу или прекратить интервью.

Участие в интервью строго добровольное; ты можешь задать мне любые вопросы, до или во время интервью; ты также можешь отказаться от интервью на любом этапе без объяснения причин. После интервью ты сможешь отозвать свои данные до 15/06/2022 (до этапа завершения исследования).

Финальный проект исследования будет опубликован в виде диссертации. Копия моей диссертации будет храниться как в печатном, так и в электронном виде в архивах университета.

Если у тебя есть какие-либо жалобы или проблемы, пожалуйста, не стесняйся обращаться ко мне. Ты также можешь связаться со мной по адресу: elizaveta.belkina@kellogg.ox.ac.uk, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, UK OX2 6PY

Этот исследовательский проект был рассмотрен и одобрен комитетом по этике Оксфордского университета. Если после того, как ты обратилась/обратился ко мне с какой-либо проблемой, ты все еще чем-то обеспокоен и хотел бы подать официальную жалобу, то можно связаться с комитетом по этике. Их электронный адрес: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk.

У тебя остались какие-либо вопросы?

Ты разрешаешь мне взять у тебя интервью и записать тебя на аудио?

Ты разрешаешь мне повторно связаться с тобой для уточнения информации?

Ты разрешаешь мне цитировать тебя напрямую, не называя твоего имени и фамилии?

Ты готов(а) принять участие?

Хорошо, спасибо, тогда будем начинать.

Appendix F. Sample Interview Questions (English)

Sample Interview Questions

Project Title: Undergraduate Students' perception of academic freedom in Russia
Researcher: Elizaveta Belkina, MSc Comparative and International Education

Introductory questions:

- 1 Tell me a little about yourself and your background
- 2 Where are you currently studying?
- 3 What are you studying?
- 4 Why did you choose this major / this university?
- 5 What were your term papers about, what topics are you interested in?

Questions about freedom to research:

- 6 Have there been cases (for you or your friends) when your supervisor did not advise you to take some topic for a term paper / bachelor thesis?
- 7 Do you think teachers could potentially not recommend a topic because it might be "uncomfortable"?
- 8 Do you discuss the current political environment in your seminars?
- 9 Do you think that it is possible to discuss different points of view freely in seminars?

Questions about other freedoms in academia:

- 10 Are you involved in any kind of student activism? If so, what are the main projects you have at the university?
- 11 If you involved in any student's activism, could you think of many cases where university's administration was against your activities? Are there any topics students organizations prefer not to cover?

Concluding questions about academic freedom perception:

- 12 What is academic freedom for you? What can it include?
- 13 In your opinion, in your experience of studying at the university, would there be any cases, moments that could be attributed to the restriction of academic freedom?

Appendix G. Sample Interview Questions (Russian)

Вводные вопросы:

- 1 Расскажи мне немного о себе
- 2 Где ты сейчас учишься?
- 3 Что ты изучаешь?
- 4 Почему ты выбрала эту специальность / этот университет?
- 5 О чем были твои курсовые работы, какие темы тебя интересуют?

Вопросы о свободе исследования:

- 6 Были ли случаи (у тебя или у твоих знакомых), когда научный руководитель не советовал брать какую-то тему для курсовой или дипломной работы?
- 7 Как ты думаешь, могут ли учителя потенциально не рекомендовать какую-то тему, потому что она может быть «неудобной»?
- 8 Обсуждаете ли вы текущую политическую обстановку на своих семинарах?
- 9 Как ты думаешь, возможно ли свободно обсуждать различные точки зрения на семинарах?

Вопросы о других свободах в университете:

- 10 Участвуешь ли ты в какой-либо студенческой деятельности? Если да, то какие основные проекты у вас есть в университете?
- 11 Если ты участвовал/участвуешь в какой-либо студенческой деятельности, можешь ли ты вспомнить случаи, когда администрация университета была против какой-либо из ваших деятельностей? Есть ли темы, которые студенческие организации предпочитают не освещать?

Заключительные вопросы о восприятии академической свободы:

- 12 Что для тебя академическая свобода? Что она может включать?
- 13 На твой взгляд, были ли в твоём опыте обучения в вузе случаи, моменты, которые можно было бы отнести к ограничению академической свободы?

Appendix H. Recruitment Message to Participate in the Research (English, Russian)

Sample Social Media message:

Project Title: Undergraduate Students' perception of academic freedom in Russia
Researcher: Elizaveta Belkina, MSc Comparative and International Education

In English:

Hello!

My name is Elizaveta and I am Master student studying Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford. [X] gave me your contact.

I am writing a dissertation (master's thesis) on academic freedom in Russian universities from the students' perspectives. Would you be interested in taking part in the study and giving a short interview about your experience of studying at this [X] university?

Your personal data will not be indicated anywhere, and the names and surnames of the participants will be under pseudonyms. To make sure that everyone is comfortable, I will ask that to keep the participation of the interview confidential.

You can find all information about the study in English and Russian attached in this message and I will be ready to answer any questions you may have about it.

Thanks!

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In Russian:

Привет!

Меня зовут Елизавета, я учусь в магистратуре на программе сравнительное и международное образование. Твой контакт мне дала Х. Я пишу диссертацию (магистерскую работу) об академической свободе в российских университетах с точки зрения студентов. Скажи, пожалуйста, было бы тебе интересно принять участие в исследовании, дать небольшое интервью о своем опыте обучения в этом Х университете?

Твои личные данные нигде не будут указываться, а имена и фамилии участников исследования я скрываю под псевдонимами. Чтобы всем было комфортно, я попрошу оставить участи в интервью конфиденциальным. Также вся информации об исследовании на английском и русском языках в прикрепленном сообщении, и я буду готова ответить на любые интересующие вопросы по нему.

Спасибо!

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