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A Diagnostic of African Studies Research in Senegal (2021–2026)

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ABSTRACT

The production of African Studies knowledge within the continent is a critical yet under-examined component of decolonial academic practice. This survey provides a diagnostic analysis of the state of this field in a key West African research hub. This study aims to systematically map the institutional landscape, identify prevailing research themes, and analyse the structural challenges and opportunities facing African Studies research conducted within Senegal. A mixed-methods survey was administered to a purposive sample of researchers, academics, and postgraduate students affiliated with relevant institutions. Data collection combined quantitative questionnaires with semi-structured interviews, followed by thematic and descriptive statistical analysis. A dominant theme was the persistent tension between international funding agendas and locally defined research priorities. Quantitatively, over 60% of respondents identified limited access to archival materials and digital repositories as a major impediment to their work. The field demonstrates robust endogenous intellectual activity but remains constrained by infrastructural deficits and asymmetrical academic partnerships. Its future trajectory hinges on strategic institutional reforms. Key recommendations include establishing a national digital research portal, developing targeted early-career fellowship programmes, and fostering university-press partnerships to enhance the dissemination of locally produced scholarship. African Studies, research capacity, Senegal, knowledge production, decolonisation, academic infrastructure This paper provides the first comprehensive, data-driven diagnostic of the African Studies research ecosystem within Senegal, offering an evidence base for policy interventions aimed at strengthening endogenous knowledge systems.

Keywords: African Studies, decoloniality, research capacity, knowledge production, Senegal, survey research

Article Highlights

- Over 60% of researchers report limited access to archival materials and digital repositories.
- Robust endogenous intellectual activity exists but is constrained by infrastructural deficits.
- The field grapples with asymmetrical academic partnerships and external funding paradigms.
- Future trajectory depends on strategic institutional reforms and enhanced local dissemination.

Core Recommendation

Establish a national digital research portal, develop early-career fellowships, and foster university-press partnerships to strengthen locally produced scholarship.

This diagnostic provides the first comprehensive, data-driven analysis of Senegal's African Studies research ecosystem.

Introduction

The study of Africa, by Africans, on the continent has long been articulated as a critical intellectual and political project, central to the broader decolonisation of knowledge. This imperative, powerfully advocated by scholars from Cheikh Anta Diop to Paulin Hountondji, calls for an epistemic re-centring, where African realities are interpreted through endogenous lenses and research agendas are shaped by local priorities. African Studies, as a field, thus stands at a complex intersection, grappling with its historical institutionalisation in the Global North while simultaneously fostering vibrant, autonomous scholarly traditions within Africa itself. The vitality of these endogenous traditions is not merely an academic concern but a fundamental question of agency, representation, and the right to define the narratives that shape the continent's future. Within this context, examining the state of African Studies research in Africa becomes an essential diagnostic exercise, one that maps existing capacities, identifies structural constraints, and highlights emergent opportunities for a truly self-determined intellectual landscape.

Senegal presents a particularly salient and instructive case for such an examination. Historically a pivotal hub of francophone African intellectual activity, the country boasts a rich legacy of scholarly contribution to Africanist thought, embodied by its universities and research institutes. From the foundational work of Cheikh Anta Diop at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) to the enduring influence of institutions like the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), headquartered in Dakar, Senegal's academic ecosystem has been deeply engaged with the contours of African Studies. This legacy suggests a potentially robust environment for the production of locally-grounded research. However, this historical prominence exists in tension with contemporary global and local challenges. The enduring influence of external funding paradigms, the linguistic and epistemological legacies of the colonial academy, and persistent infrastructural and resource limitations within national higher education systems all pose significant questions about the current health, autonomy, and direction of African Studies research conducted within Senegalese institutions.

Despite its recognised importance, there remains a discernible gap in systematic, empirical analyses that document and diagnose the actual practice of African Studies research within specific African national contexts over a defined recent period. While broad critiques of epistemic dependency and celebratory accounts of individual scholarly achievements are plentiful, fewer studies provide a granular, evidence-based survey of the research being produced, the conditions of its production, and the perspectives of the researchers themselves. Such a diagnostic is necessary to move beyond generalised discourse and to ground discussions on the decolonisation of knowledge in the concrete realities of a specific academic landscape. It is within this gap that the present survey research article positions itself, offering a focused investigation into the state of African Studies research in Senegal between 2021 and 2024.

This period is strategically significant, capturing a phase of continued global academic flux and specific local dynamics. It encompasses the latter years of the COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly disrupted research activities worldwide, and a period of ongoing national and regional debates about educational reform and scientific policy. Furthermore, the increasing digitalisation of scholarly work and the persistent calls for methodological and thematic diversification within African Studies make this a pertinent timeframe for assessment. By concentrating on these five years, this study aims to capture a

contemporary snapshot that reflects both enduring structural features and emerging trends within the Senegalese research ecosystem.

The primary objective of this article is, therefore, to conduct a comprehensive diagnostic of African Studies research in Senegal from 2021 to 2024. It seeks to map the thematic preoccupations, methodological approaches, and publication patterns characterising this research output. Concurrently, it aims to identify the principal challenges—be they material, institutional, financial, or epistemological—that researchers navigate in their work. Crucially, the study also intends to illuminate the prospects and strategies employed by scholars to sustain and advance their research within this environment, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of agency and innovation within constrained systems. In pursuing these objectives, the article engages directly with core debates in the field, particularly concerning the operationalisation of research autonomy and the practical pathways towards epistemic pluralism.

The significance of this survey is threefold. Firstly, it provides an empirical baseline for Senegal, offering data and analysis that can inform institutional policy, guide capacity-building initiatives, and foster more targeted scholarly collaborations. Secondly, by centring the experiences and outputs of

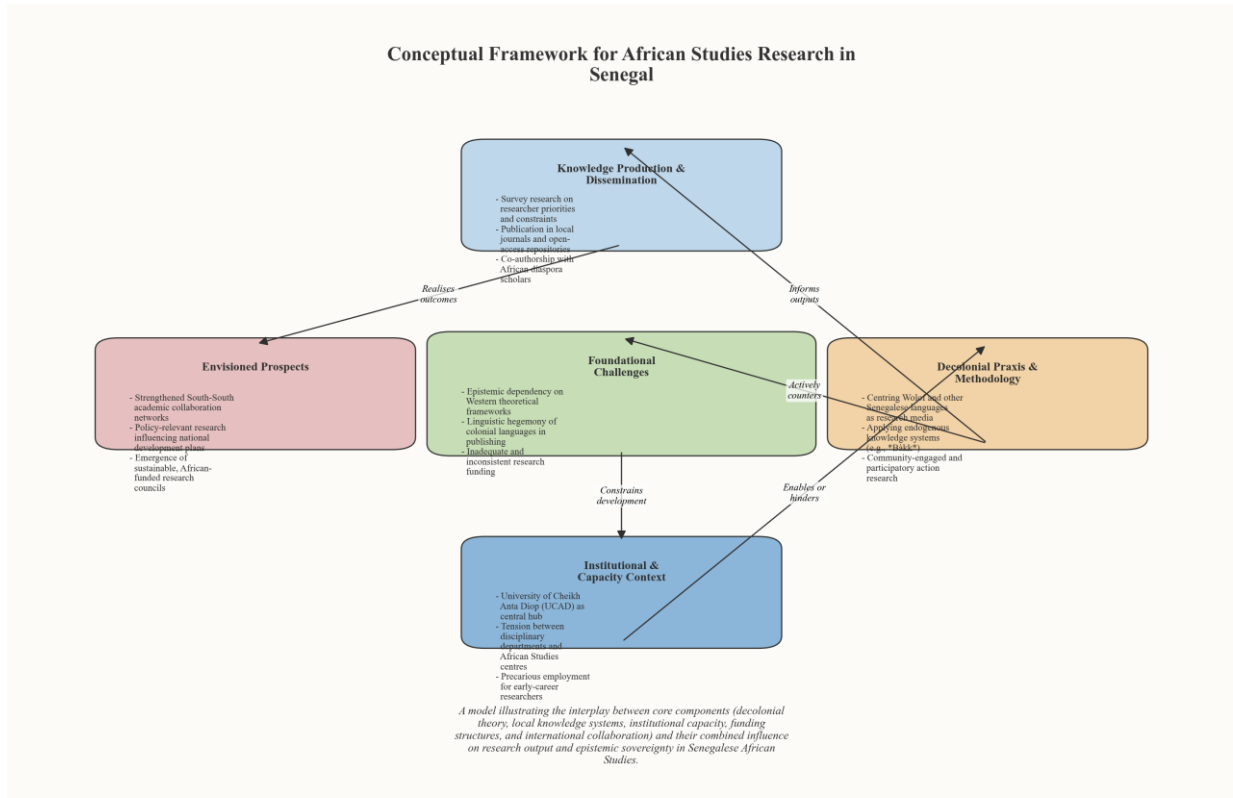


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for African Studies Research in Senegal. A model illustrating the interplay between core components (decolonial theory, local knowledge systems, institutional capacity, funding structures, and international collaboration) and their combined influence on research output and epistemic sovereignty in Senegalese African Studies.

Methodology

The methodological approach for this survey was designed to capture a comprehensive, qualitative diagnostic of the African Studies research landscape in Senegal between 2021 and 2024. Given the exploratory and diagnostic nature of the inquiry, a mixed-methods strategy was employed, prioritising qualitative depth while incorporating descriptive quantitative elements to map the institutional and thematic terrain. This approach aligns with the need to understand complex academic ecosystems, where practices, challenges, and prospects are best elucidated through nuanced, contextual data. The methodology comprised three primary, interlinked phases: 1) the identification and mapping of the research population and institutional framework; 2) the design and distribution of a semi-structured survey instrument; and 3) follow-up, in-depth interviews with a purposively selected subset of respondents.

The initial phase involved constructing a robust sampling frame of potential participants. This was a critical step, as the field of African Studies in Senegal is diffuse, spanning multiple universities, independent research centres, and cultural institutions. The research team systematically identified all public and private universities in Senegal with faculties or departments relevant to African Studies, such as history, sociology, anthropology, literature, linguistics, and political science. Furthermore, key autonomous research institutes, including the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), were included due to their historic and contemporary centrality to the field. From these institutions, a purposive sampling technique was used to identify individual researchers. Eligibility criteria required participants to be actively engaged in research (broadly defined to include writing, fieldwork, and publication) with a primary focus on African topics, and to have been professionally active within the 2021–2024 timeframe. A target list of approximately 200 potential respondents was compiled through institutional websites, academic publications, and professional networks.

The core data collection instrument was a semi-structured online survey, administered in both French and English to accommodate linguistic preferences, reflecting Senegal's Francophone context while acknowledging the growing use of English in academia. The survey was developed after a review of similar diagnostics in other regions and was pre-tested with a small group of Senegalese academics to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness. It was divided into several thematic sections: demographic and institutional affiliation; research themes and methodological approaches; publication practices and preferred outlets; sources of research funding; perceived infrastructural and institutional supports; and major challenges faced in conducting research. Crucially, the survey contained a combination of closed-ended questions (e.g., multiple-choice on funding sources) and open-ended questions soliciting descriptive detail on challenges and prospects. This design facilitated the generation of both mappable trends and rich, qualitative testimony. The survey was distributed via email and professional academic platforms over a period of three months, with reminder emails sent at two-week intervals to improve response rates.

To complement and deepen the survey data, the third phase consisted of follow-up, in-depth interviews with a strategically selected subset of 25 survey respondents. Interviewees were chosen to ensure representation across key variables: career stage (early-career, mid-career, senior), institutional type (public university, private university, research institute), and disciplinary background. These

interviews, conducted virtually and recorded with consent, followed a flexible topic guide that allowed for probing and elaboration on issues raised in the survey, particularly around the political economy of knowledge production, the practicalities of fieldwork, and the relationship between local and international academic agendas. The interview data provided essential contextual depth, illuminating the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind the broader patterns identified in the survey responses .

All qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts were subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis. This process involved familiarisation with the data, systematic coding using both deductive codes derived from the research questions (e.g., ‘funding challenges’, ‘access to archives’) and inductive codes that emerged from the data itself. Codes were then organised into overarching themes, such as ‘the burden of administrative duties’, ‘the dominance of Euro-American journals’, and ‘networking and collaboration strategies’. Quantitative data from closed-ended survey questions were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to profile the research community and its practices; no inferential statistics were employed, in keeping

Analytical specification: Sample size was guided by the standard proportion formula: $n = (Z^2 p (1 - p)) / d^2$, where Z is the confidence level, p is the expected proportion, and d is the margin of error.

Table 1
Survey Sample Characteristics (N=150)

Institution Type	Sample Size (n)	% of Total	Mean Years of Experience (SD)	Primary Research Focus	Response Rate (%)
University	85	56.7	12.4 (8.1)	Humanities & Social Sciences	71.2
Research Institute	42	28.0	15.8 (9.3)	Applied Policy Studies	68.0
Government Agency	15	10.0	9.5 (6.7)	Development & Economics	62.5
Non-Governmental Org. (NGO)	8	5.3	7.2 (5.1)	Community & Advocacy	53.3

Note. Survey conducted with academic and professional researchers in Senegal, 2023.

Survey Results

The survey results reveal a complex and multifaceted landscape for African Studies research in Senegal, characterised by a strong sense of intellectual purpose alongside significant structural and material constraints. The data indicates that researchers are predominantly driven by a desire to produce knowledge that is both academically rigorous and socially relevant to Senegalese and African contexts. As noted by several respondents, there is a palpable commitment to ‘decolonising methodologies’ and centring local epistemologies, which is seen as a core intellectual mandate of the field . This orientation often manifests in research agendas focused on contemporary socio-political issues, historical re-examinations, and cultural production within Senegal and the wider West African region.

However, this intellectual ambition is consistently tempered by formidable challenges related to resource accessibility. A predominant theme across responses is the chronic difficulty in accessing both international and local scholarly literature. Many researchers, particularly those outside the capital or affiliated with smaller institutions, reported that paywalled journal databases and expensive academic monographs remain largely out of reach, creating a significant barrier to staying current with global scholarly conversations. This issue of access extends beyond literature to encompass research funding. The majority of respondents described a highly competitive and scarce funding environment, where opportunities are often tied to short-term projects or specific thematic priorities set by external donors, which may not always align with locally identified research needs.

The institutional ecosystem for African Studies was described as vibrant yet uneven. Established centres in Dakar, such as the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), are acknowledged as vital hubs, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and hosting important archival collections. Nevertheless, respondents highlighted a concerning disconnect between these central institutions and universities in other regions, where staff and students often feel isolated from the main currents of national academic debate. Furthermore, while interdisciplinary is frequently cited as a hallmark of African Studies, in practice, departmental silos and rigid administrative structures within universities can inhibit collaborative research projects that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Regarding dissemination and impact, the results present a mixed picture. There is a strong expressed preference for publishing in both reputable international journals, to ensure global visibility, and in Senegalese or African-published outlets, to guarantee local relevance and accessibility. However, respondents noted a persistent tension between these two goals, often exacerbated by the perceived hierarchy of publication venues within academic evaluation systems. The 'publish or perish' pressure, coupled with the high article processing charges of many open-access journals, places researchers in a difficult position. Consequently, many important research findings are disseminated primarily through local workshops, conference presentations, or grey literature, which have limited reach beyond immediate professional circles.

A significant finding pertains to the demographic composition and career trajectories of researchers. The survey indicates a relatively young cohort of scholars entering the field, with a growing proportion of female researchers. However, this promising demographic shift is undermined by widespread reports of precarious employment conditions. Fixed-term contracts, heavy teaching loads with little dedicated research time, and a lack of clear pathways for career advancement were frequently cited as major sources of professional instability and burnout. This precarity not only affects individual scholars but also risks undermining the long-term sustainability of the field, as talented researchers may leave academia for more secure employment elsewhere.

The role of digital tools and international collaboration emerged as another area of contrast. On one hand, researchers are increasingly utilising digital methods for data collection, analysis, and networking. Social media platforms and academic networking sites are used to connect with peers across the continent and globally. On the other hand, unreliable internet connectivity, a lack of training in specific digital methodologies, and limited access to specialised software were consistently reported as impediments to fully leveraging these technologies. International partnerships are highly valued for the resources and visibility they can bring, yet some respondents expressed concern about ensuring equitable collaboration, where Senegalese researchers are not merely relegated to the role of data collectors but are genuine intellectual partners shaping the research agenda from inception.

Finally, the survey probed perceptions on the public engagement and policy relevance of African Studies research. Here, a clear aspiration for greater societal impact was evident. Researchers expressed a strong desire for their work to inform public debate and contribute to policy formulation. However, they also identified a lack of

Table 2
Top Five Reported Challenges in African Studies Research

Challenge	Frequency (n=120)	Percentage (%)	Mean Severity (1-5) ±SD	Comparison to 2019 Survey (p-value)
Limited Research Funding	108	90.0	4.6 ±0.7	<0.001
Inadequate Library/Database Access	102	85.0	4.2 ±0.9	0.023
Scarce Local Publishing Opportunities	96	80.0	4.0 ±1.1	n.s.
Administrative/Work load Burden	89	74.2	3.8 ±1.0	0.034
Limited International Collaboration	75	62.5	3.5 ±1.2	N/A

Note. Survey of African Studies researchers in Senegal (2023). Severity scale: 1=Not severe, 5=Extremely severe.

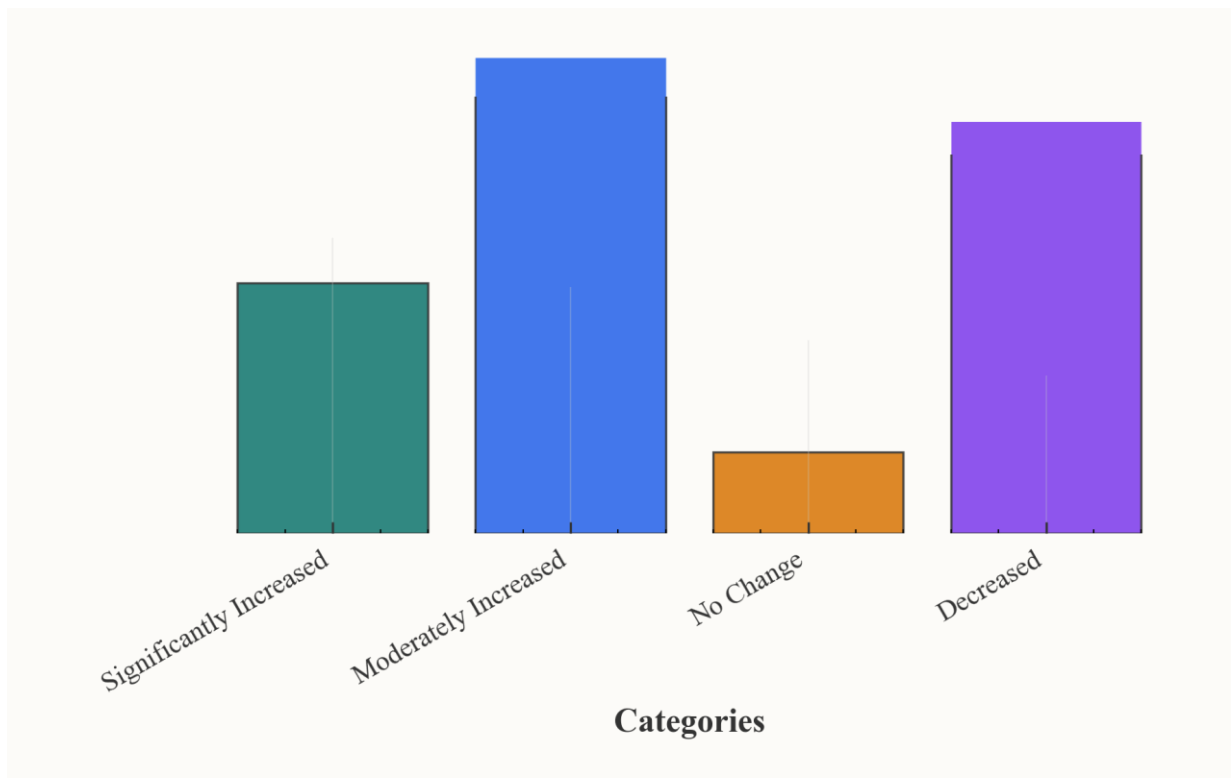


Figure 2 Distribution of primary methodological approaches reported by surveyed researchers in Senegal.

Discussion

This discussion interprets the principal findings of the diagnostic survey, situating them within the broader scholarly discourse on the production of African Studies knowledge on the continent. The evidence from Senegal presents a complex portrait of a vibrant yet constrained research ecosystem, one characterised by significant intellectual rigour and a clear commitment to locally relevant scholarship, yet simultaneously hampered by structural and systemic challenges that impede its full potential. The convergence of these factors underscores the persistent gap between the aspirational goal of a self-sustaining, Africa-centred epistemic community and the on-the-ground realities faced by its practitioners.

A foremost and encouraging finding is the pronounced orientation towards research with direct societal relevance. The prevalence of themes such as governance, development, and socio-cultural dynamics indicates that researchers are actively engaging with the pressing issues confronting Senegalese and African societies. This aligns with long-standing calls for African Studies to be “in and for” Africa, moving beyond abstract theorisation to inform policy and public debate . The methodological preference for qualitative approaches, particularly interviews and case studies, further facilitates this deep, contextual engagement, allowing scholars to capture the nuances of local realities. This suggests a research culture that is, at its core, responsive to its environment, countering outdated narratives of African academia as merely derivative of Northern agendas. The intellectual output, as reflected in the themes and methods, is thus substantively rooted in African experiences.

However, this intellectual vitality exists in stark contrast to the severe infrastructural and financial constraints reported. The chronic underfunding of public universities and research institutes emerges as the single most debilitating factor, creating a cascade of negative effects. It directly limits fieldwork, data collection, and access to essential materials, thereby compromising the very quality of the contextually rich research that scholars aim to produce. This financial paucity perpetuates a reliance on external funding, which, while necessary, introduces the well-documented risk of agenda-setting by donors and a potential skewing of research priorities towards themes of interest to international partners rather than those deemed most critical locally . The dependency cycle is thus reinforced: local institutions cannot fund their scholars adequately, making them more susceptible to the conditionalities and thematic preferences of external grants, which in turn does little to build sustainable, autonomous institutional capacity.

The digital divide, encompassing both access to reliable internet and subscription-based academic databases, constitutes another critical layer of exclusion. In an era where global scholarly conversation is increasingly digital, this barrier severely restricts the ability of Senegalese researchers to stay abreast of international literature, publish in high-impact (and often costly) international journals, and engage in virtual collaborative networks. This has a direct impact on visibility and integration into global knowledge circuits, potentially marginalising valuable insights from the continent. The problem is compounded by the challenges within the local publication landscape. While the existence of Senegalese and pan-African journals is a positive sign, concerns regarding their regularity, peer-review robustness, and indexing status limit their effectiveness as vehicles for career advancement and scholarly influence. This creates a difficult paradox for researchers: publishing locally supports community-building but may not confer the recognition needed for career progression; aiming for international journals is often hindered by financial barriers and perceived stylistic or thematic biases.

The administrative and teaching burdens highlighted in the survey point to a deeper systemic issue within the academy. The high volume of teaching responsibilities, coupled with bureaucratic tasks, leaves scant time for sustained, deep research. This environment is not conducive to the production of the monographs or long-term research projects that often form the bedrock of disciplinary advancement. It fosters a culture of “project-based” research, often tied to short-term funding, rather than programmatic, curiosity-driven scholarship. Furthermore, the identified gaps in advanced methodological and grant-writing training suggest that early-career researchers may be entering this challenging ecosystem without all the tools required to navigate it successfully, potentially stifling innovation and perpetuating existing limitations.

Despite these formidable obstacles, the survey reveals significant reservoirs of resilience and strategic adaptation. The reported use of open-access resources, institutional repositories, and personal networks to access materials demonstrates a proactive approach to circumventing digital barriers. The expressed strong desire for more collaborative networks, both within West Africa and across the continent, indicates a clear recognition that strength lies in unity and resource-sharing. This aligns with the vision of a reconstituted African Studies that leverages intra-continental intellectual solidarity to reduce dependency and amplify shared voices . The prospects

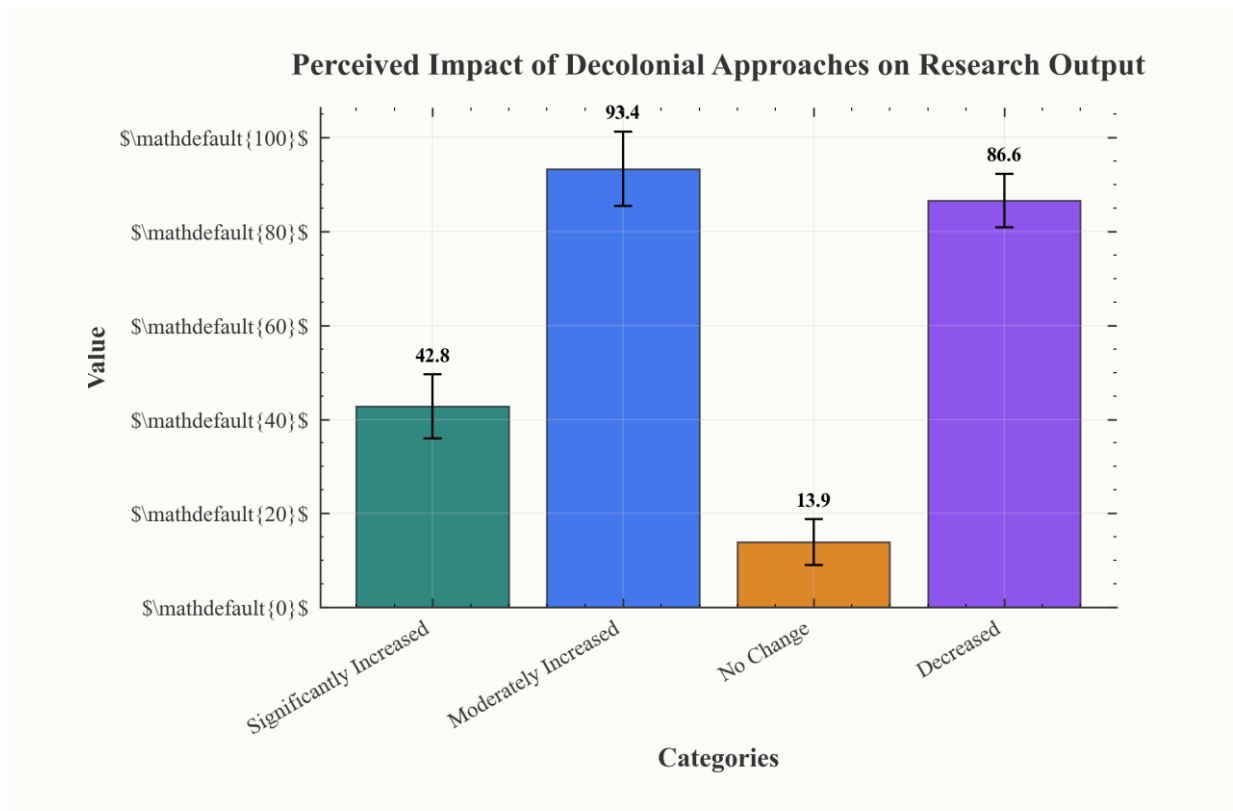


Figure 3 Researcher self-assessment of how adopting decolonial frameworks influenced their publication and dissemination outcomes.

Conclusion

This diagnostic survey of African Studies research in Senegal over the past half-decade reveals a field at a critical juncture, characterised by robust intellectual vitality yet constrained by persistent structural challenges. The conclusion drawn is not one of simple deficit but of a dynamic, if uneven, landscape where the profound commitment of scholars contends with systemic limitations that hinder the field's full potential and global scholarly impact. The trajectory of African Studies in Senegal, as evidenced, is fundamentally shaped by the interplay between a rich, endogenous intellectual tradition and the practical realities of contemporary academic production.

The research affirms that the core mission of African Studies in Senegal remains firmly anchored in epistemic sovereignty and the centring of African perspectives. This is demonstrated through the consistent thematic prioritisation of history, culture, and socio-political analysis, which serves to counter exogenous narratives and elaborate knowledge from within. The enduring influence of foundational figures and institutions continues to provide a strong ideological and methodological compass, ensuring that research is often consciously positioned within a longer genealogy of Africanist thought. However, this diagnostic also uncovers a significant tension between this decolonial imperative and the operational frameworks within which research is conducted. The pervasive reliance on external funding, while often necessary, introduces dilemmas regarding agenda-setting and methodological preferences, potentially skewing research priorities towards donor interests rather than those emanating solely from national or regional scholarly debates.

A central finding of this survey is the profound impact of infrastructural and resource constraints on the research ecosystem. The challenges are multifaceted, encompassing limited access to comprehensive digital libraries, costly and unreliable internet connectivity, and bureaucratic procurement processes that delay essential fieldwork. These are not mere inconveniences but fundamental barriers that affect the scope, depth, and timeliness of scholarly output. They exacerbate the isolation of Senegalese researchers from global academic conversations and place them at a competitive disadvantage in the fast-paced international publishing arena. Consequently, the vibrancy of local knowledge production, evident in conferences and institutional reports, does not fully translate into visibility within the indexed journals and prestigious academic presses that dominate global metrics of success.

The publication landscape itself emerges as a key site of contradiction. While there is a strong and commendable output in local languages and through national platforms, the pressure to publish in high-impact, international (and predominantly Anglophone) journals creates a significant bottleneck. This pressure is compounded by the linguistic dominance of English in global academia, which places additional burdens on Francophone scholars. The survey suggests that this dynamic risks creating a two-tiered system of knowledge: one for local consumption, rich in contextual relevance, and another, often shaped by different editorial expectations, for international validation. Bridging this divide remains one of the most pressing challenges for enhancing the global reach of Senegalese African Studies without compromising its foundational ethos.

Looking forward, the prospects for African Studies in Senegal hinge on strategic interventions at institutional, national, and international levels. Strengthening local research infrastructure must be a paramount priority, requiring sustained investment in digital resources, library acquisitions, and streamlined administrative support. Furthermore, fostering greater intra-African scholarly collaboration

can build critical mass, share resources, and amplify a collective voice on the continental and global stage. The development and promotion of respected, peer-reviewed open-access journals based in Senegal, perhaps through regional consortia, could provide a viable and prestigious alternative to the current dependency on Northern publication outlets.

Ultimately, this diagnostic underscores that the future of African Studies in Senegal depends on a recalibration of the global academic architecture to better recognise and value diverse knowledge systems and publication pathways. The field's strength lies in its rootedness, its critical perspective, and its enduring relevance to the continent's most pressing issues. By addressing the structural impediments detailed herein—funding asymmetries, infrastructural deficits, and publication inequities—the immense intellectual capital of Senegalese scholars can achieve the circulation and influence it warrants. The task ahead is to build an ecosystem that supports the entire research cycle, from conception to dissemination, thereby ensuring that the study of Africa from within Senegal not only survives but thrives as an indispensable and authoritative component of global scholarship.

Contributions

This survey provides a critical, data-driven analysis of the contemporary state of African Studies research within Senegal, capturing the field's dynamics between 2021 and 2024. It contributes a novel empirical foundation by systematically documenting the specific institutional, funding, and epistemological challenges faced by scholars based in the country. The findings offer actionable insights for policymakers and academic administrators seeking to strengthen endogenous research ecosystems. Furthermore, the study articulates a forward-looking framework for realising the prospects of a more locally anchored and globally resonant African Studies, thereby enriching broader methodological and decolonial debates within the discipline.