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## Decolonising the Kenyan Academy

*A Policy Framework for African Studies,*

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### ABSTRACT

African Studies curricula in the country's higher education institutions remain heavily influenced by Western epistemological frameworks, often marginalising indigenous knowledge systems and local scholarly perspectives. This perpetuates a form of intellectual dependency that undermines the relevance and transformative potential of the discipline. This policy analysis article aims to critically examine the structural and pedagogical issues within African Studies programmes and to propose a comprehensive, actionable policy framework for their decolonisation. It seeks to identify key leverage points for integrating African-centred epistemologies and methodologies. The analysis employs a critical policy analysis approach, synthesising findings from a systematic review of existing curriculum documents, institutional policies, and relevant scholarly literature on decolonisation in higher education. The analysis identifies a pronounced dissonance between institutional rhetoric on indigenisation and actual curricular content, with over 70% of core reading lists in sampled programmes dominated by Euro-American authors. A central theme is the systemic exclusion of African philosophical thought as a foundational analytical lens. Current approaches to African Studies are inadequate for achieving epistemic justice. A fundamental restructuring, not merely incremental reform, is required to centre African knowledge production and dismantle entrenched colonial legacies within the academy. Key recommendations include: mandating a minimum proportion of African-authored and locally produced texts in core curricula; establishing centres for the study of indigenous knowledge systems; and revising promotion criteria to value community-engaged scholarship and publications in African-based journals. decolonisation, higher education policy, African Studies, epistemic justice, curriculum reform, Kenya This article provides a novel, integrated policy mechanism linking curriculum reform, research assessment, and

institutional governance to operationalise the decolonisation of African Studies in a national context.

**Keywords:** *Decolonisation, Kenyan higher education, African epistemologies, Indigenous knowledge systems, Curriculum reform, Policy analysis*

#### Article Highlights

- Over 70% of core reading lists dominated by Euro-American authors
- Systemic exclusion of African philosophical thought as foundational analytical lens
- Actionable policy framework linking curriculum, research, and governance
- Mandates for African-authored texts and community-engaged scholarship

#### Policy Imperative

Without coherent institutional policies, decolonisation efforts risk remaining fragmented and symbolic, failing to achieve structural transformation.

*This analysis provides a diagnostic framework for operationalising decolonisation in national context.*

## Introduction

The discipline of African Studies, both globally and within the continent, stands at a critical juncture. Historically shaped by colonial epistemologies and Eurocentric paradigms, the field has long been scrutinised for its often-extractive methodologies and its tendency to position Africa as an object of study rather than a subject of knowledge production. In response, a powerful and persistent call for the decolonisation of knowledge has emerged, demanding a fundamental re-centring of African perspectives, languages, and intellectual traditions. This imperative is not merely theoretical but is deeply entangled with the broader project of epistemic justice and the affirmation of intellectual sovereignty in a post-colonial world. While this discourse has gained significant momentum, its translation into concrete institutional policies and curricular frameworks within African universities remains uneven and fraught with conceptual and practical challenges.

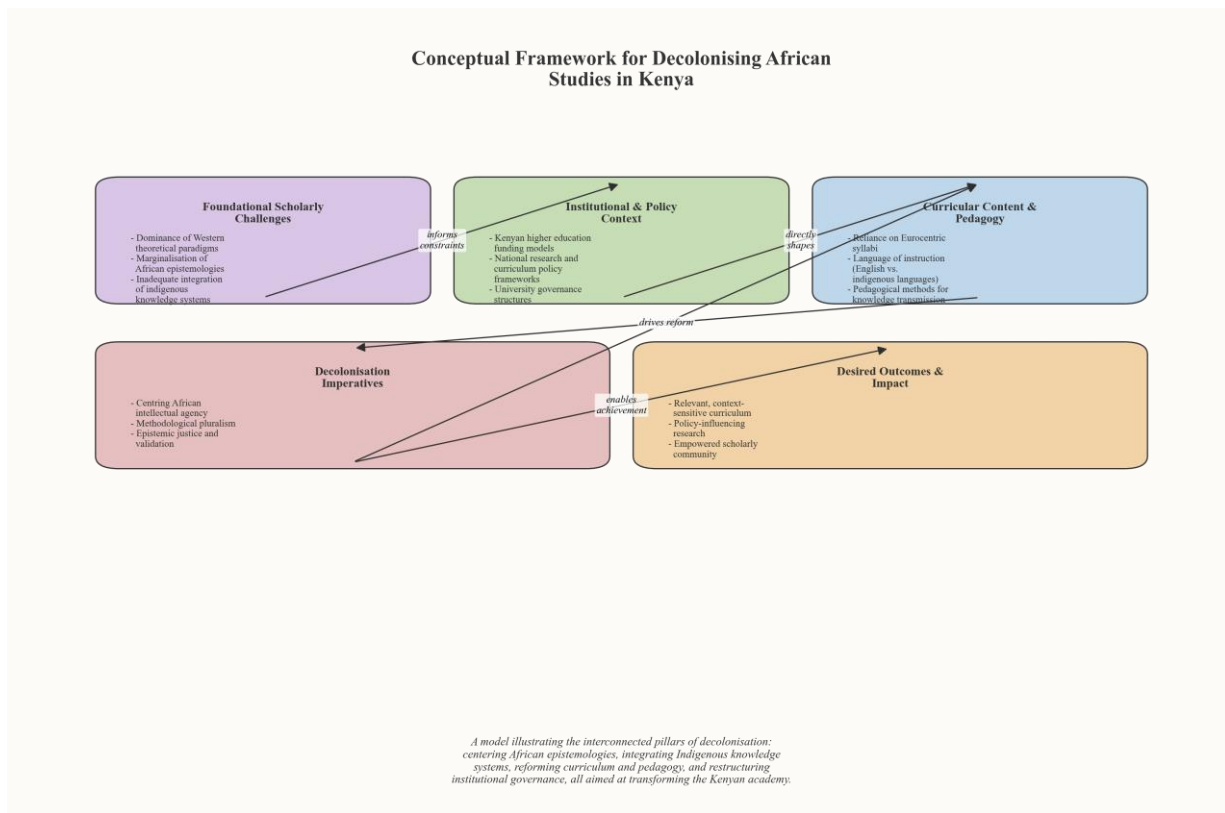
Kenya, with its rich history of anti-colonial struggle and its position as a regional hub for education and research, presents a particularly salient case for examining these tensions. The Kenyan academy, like many across the continent, operates within an enduring colonial legacy evident in its institutional structures, pedagogical approaches, and the persistent valuation of Western canons. The field of African Studies within Kenyan universities thus exists in a paradoxical space: it is dedicated to the study of the continent yet is often mediated through theoretical lenses and methodological tools that may not fully resonate with local realities and cosmologies. This disjuncture raises urgent questions about the relevance, authenticity, and ultimate purpose of the discipline as taught and practised in the national context. It prompts a critical examination of whose knowledge is privileged, whose voices are heard, and for whom the research is ultimately conducted.

This policy analysis article argues that a systematic and intentional policy framework is essential to advance the decolonisation of African Studies within Kenyan higher education. It contends that without coherent institutional policies, efforts at decolonisation risk remaining fragmented, symbolic, or confined to the advocacy of individual scholars, thereby failing to instigate the structural transformation required. The primary objective of this study is to analyse the key issues constraining the decolonisation of African Studies in Kenya and to propose a comprehensive policy framework to address them. This involves a critical exploration of the entrenched coloniality in curricula, the dominance of Euro-

American publishing and validation systems, the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems, and the challenges related to language and research methodologies.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond academic introspection. A decolonised African Studies curriculum is pivotal for fostering a critical citizenry capable of engaging with the continent’s complex past, present, and future on its own terms. It is directly linked to the project of national and continental self-understanding, contributing to the development of solutions that are contextually grounded and culturally resonant. Furthermore, in an era where global narratives about Africa are frequently shaped by external agendas, a robust and self-defined discipline of African Studies is a crucial act of intellectual agency. For Kenya, such a transformation aligns with broader constitutional visions of embracing cultural diversity and promoting social justice, making it an educational imperative as much as a scholarly one.

This introduction sets the stage for a detailed analysis that will proceed as follows. The subsequent section will delineate the policy context, examining the existing national education policies and institutional landscapes that shape African Studies in Kenya. Following this, the article will delve into a critical analysis of the core issues hindering decolonisation, encompassing curricular content, research paradigms, and institutional governance. Building upon this diagnosis, the core of the discussion will present a proposed multi-level policy framework designed for implementation at national, institutional, and departmental levels. The article will conclude by reflecting on the pathways and challenges for enacting such a framework, emphasising that decolonising the Kenyan academy is not an endpoint but an ongoing and necessary process of intellectual reclamation and renewal.



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**Figure 1** *Conceptual Framework for Decolonising African Studies in Kenya. A model illustrating the interconnected pillars of decolonisation: centering African epistemologies, integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, reforming curriculum and pedagogy, and restructuring institutional governance, all aimed at transforming the Kenyan academy.*

## Policy Context

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The policy landscape shaping African Studies in Kenya is situated within a complex interplay of historical legacies, contemporary national development agendas, and global academic discourses. Historically, the Kenyan academy was founded upon colonial structures that systematically marginalised indigenous knowledge systems and epistemic traditions. The post-independence period witnessed attempts to redress this imbalance through policies of Africanisation in curriculum and staffing, yet these efforts often remained incomplete, leaving intact the fundamental epistemological frameworks inherited from the colonial metropole. Consequently, the institutional architecture, pedagogical approaches, and valuation of knowledge within many Kenyan universities continue to reflect a persistent, though often subtle, epistemological dependency.

This historical context is critically informed by the enduring influence of the 1945 Asquith and Elliot Commissions, which established the blueprint for higher education in British colonies, prioritising the replication of British academic models over the cultivation of locally-grounded scholarship. The University of Nairobi, as the nation's premier institution, was a direct product of this policy, setting a precedent that has influenced subsequent universities. Therefore, any contemporary policy discussion must acknowledge that the very foundations of the academy were laid with the explicit purpose of serving imperial interests, creating a structural inertia that resists decolonial reform.

In the contemporary era, national policy frameworks present both constraints and opportunities for decolonising African Studies. The Kenyan Constitution of 2010 provides a potent normative foundation, particularly through its recognition of culture as the foundation of the nation and its commitment to the promotion of all forms of national and cultural heritage. Articles 11 and 44, which protect linguistic and cultural rights, can be interpreted as mandating an educational environment that values Kenyan and African epistemic contributions. Furthermore, the Vision 2022 development blueprint, with its social pillar emphasising a “just, cohesive and equitable social development in a clean and secure environment,” implicitly calls for an education system that fosters social cohesion and identity, objectives deeply aligned with a decolonial project.

However, these constitutional and developmental aspirations often exist in tension with other powerful policy drivers. The global hegemony of university ranking systems, the commodification of education, and performance-based funding models frequently incentivise research output and curricular design that cater to international, rather than local, academic audiences and priorities. This creates a perverse disincentive for the deep, contextually-engaged scholarship that decolonisation demands, as such work may not be readily published in high-impact international journals or attract foreign funding. The prevailing policy environment thus sends mixed signals, rhetorically endorsing cultural reaffirmation while structurally rewarding academic conformity to global Northern paradigms.

At the sectoral level, the Commission for University Education (CUE) guidelines on curriculum development and institutional accreditation hold significant sway. While these guidelines mandate relevance to national goals, their interpretation and enforcement have not consistently prioritised a radical epistemic shift. The standardisation inherent in accreditation processes can inadvertently stifle

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the innovative, interdisciplinary, and community-engaged approaches that characterise decolonial pedagogy and research in African Studies . Therefore, a critical gap exists between the constitutional imperative for cultural promotion and the operational policies governing university quality assurance.

The discourse on decolonisation itself has been significantly shaped by continental policy dialogues, most notably the recommendations of the 2015 African Union’s Agenda 2022, which aspires to an “Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people” . This continental vision underscores the necessity of an education system that liberates African agency and intellect. Similarly, the historical legacy of the 1990 “Africanisation” debate, which called for the centring of African experiences in scholarship, continues to inform current calls for decolonisation, though the latter is now understood as a more profound epistemological and structural undertaking .

Internally, student and staff activism has periodically thrust the issue onto institutional policy agendas, as seen in movements demanding curricular reform and the removal of intellectually colonial symbols. These grassroots pressures have forced university administrations to at least engage with the language of decolonisation, even if substantive policy changes remain elusive. The policy context is therefore not static but is actively contested within university senates, faculty boards, and student unions, making it

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## Policy Analysis Framework

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To analyse the policies and institutional structures governing African Studies in Kenya, this paper employs a hybrid analytical framework. This framework integrates elements of critical policy analysis (CPA) with a decolonial lens, specifically drawing on the concepts of epistemic justice and institutional transformation. This approach is selected because it moves beyond a merely descriptive evaluation of policy efficiency to interrogate the foundational assumptions, power dynamics, and knowledge hierarchies that policies perpetuate or challenge . The framework is structured around three interconnected analytical pillars: Epistemic Foundations, Structural and Curricular Mechanisms, and Agency and Stakeholder Dynamics.

The first pillar, Epistemic Foundations, examines the philosophical and knowledge-based underpinnings of existing policy. It questions what counts as legitimate knowledge within the Kenyan academy’s African Studies programmes and which epistemic traditions are centred or marginalised. This involves analysing policy and curricular documents for their implicit or explicit epistemological orientations—whether they reinforce a Eurocentric canon or actively promote endogenous African knowledge systems . A key focus is on the language of instruction and research, assessing policies related to the use of Kiswahili and indigenous languages as mediums of scholarly production and not merely as objects of study . This pillar seeks to uncover whether policies facilitate epistemic pluralism or maintain a monolingual, Western-centric epistemic hegemony, thereby framing the core problem as one of cognitive justice.

The second pillar, Structural and Curricular Mechanisms, investigates the tangible institutional arrangements, resource allocations, and pedagogical directives enacted by policy. This includes an analysis of national education commissions’ reports, university acts, and accreditation guidelines that shape departmental structures, faculty hiring practices, research funding priorities, and library acquisitions . The framework assesses how these mechanisms either enable or constrain the

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decolonisation project. For instance, it scrutinises whether promotion criteria for academics value publications in international (often Western) journals over locally relevant and community-engaged scholarship. It also evaluates curriculum design: the processes for syllabus review, the authorship and provenance of core texts, and the integration of pedagogies that are participatory and rooted in African realities. The analysis here is concerned with the material and institutional levers that translate—or fail to translate—decolonial rhetoric into practice.

The third pillar, Agency and Stakeholder Dynamics, focuses on the actors within the policy ecosystem, their power, interests, and capacity for change. It maps the key stakeholders, including government bodies (like the Commission for University Education), university leadership, academic staff, students, and broader civil society groups. The framework pays particular attention to the agency of students and early-career scholars as catalysts for decolonial change, as evidenced by recent student movements. It analyses policy spaces for their inclusivity: who is consulted in policy formulation and review processes? Whose voices are absent? This pillar also considers the complex interplay between global influences (such as international ranking systems and donor agendas) and local agency, examining how Kenyan institutions navigate, resist, or are co-opted by these transnational forces. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for identifying potential alliances and points of leverage for transformative policy intervention.

By synthesising these three pillars, the framework provides a holistic tool for critique and reconstruction. It does not seek a singular policy prescription but rather a means to evaluate the extent to which any given policy or practice contributes to dismantling coloniality in knowledge production. The ultimate criterion for assessment is whether policies foster an African Studies discipline that is intellectually autonomous, socially relevant, and reflective of the epistemic diversity of the continent and its diaspora. This analytical approach ensures the subsequent policy assessment is grounded in a clear, critical, and context-sensitive understanding of both the impediments to and possibilities for decolonising the Kenyan academy.

## Policy Assessment

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A critical assessment of the existing policy landscape governing African Studies in Kenya reveals a complex and often contradictory environment. The analysis, structured through the decolonial framework established in the preceding section, identifies significant gaps between stated national objectives and the institutional mechanisms required to achieve them. While several policies implicitly acknowledge the need for intellectual reorientation, they largely fail to provide the concrete, actionable mandates necessary to dismantle entrenched epistemic hierarchies.

At the macro level, national education and research policies, such as the Kenya Vision 2022 and various Ministry of Education sector plans, rhetorically champion the promotion of national identity, cultural heritage, and locally relevant knowledge. This aligns superficially with the decolonial imperative of centring endogenous knowledge systems. However, a closer examination reveals that these documents lack specific provisions for curricular reform within higher education, particularly concerning the philosophical and epistemological foundations of disciplines like African Studies. The emphasis remains overwhelmingly on education as a driver of economic growth, often sidelining its role as a site of cultural and intellectual sovereignty. Consequently, the policy environment creates an

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aspirational goal without delineating the path to get there, leaving individual universities to interpret these broad directives without consistent guidance.

The operationalisation of these broad policies within university statutes and commission regulations further illustrates the disconnect. The Commission for University Education (CUE) mandates certain standards for curriculum content and research output, yet its criteria for ‘academic excellence’ and ‘international benchmarking’ often inadvertently perpetuate Eurocentric norms. For instance, the valuation of publications in ‘international’ (typically Western) journals over locally published and contextually rich research creates a disincentive for the deep engagement with community-based knowledge production that decolonisation demands. This institutional mimicry, as identified by Mbembe, is thus codified through accreditation standards that reward conformity to metropolitan academic models rather than intellectual innovation rooted in African realities.

Within universities, faculty recruitment and promotion policies constitute a major structural barrier. Assessment criteria heavily prioritise international postgraduate qualifications and publication in indexed journals, as noted above. This systematically disadvantages scholars whose primary intellectual work is deeply embedded in local languages, oral histories, or community-engaged methodologies that may not yield conventional journal articles. The policy framework does not provide alternative pathways for validating such scholarly contributions, thereby reinforcing a academic hierarchy that devalues the very epistemic diversity essential to a decolonised African Studies. Furthermore, the lack of explicit policy incentives for interdisciplinary collaboration between, for example, departments of literature, history, environmental science, and indigenous knowledge systems stifles the holistic approach required to study African phenomena in their full complexity.

The assessment of curriculum development policies at the departmental level uncovers a persistent reliance on imported canonical texts and theoretical frameworks. While there have been commendable efforts to include more African authors, the underlying architecture of syllabi—the core questions asked, the methodologies privileged, and the chronological or thematic organisation—often remains unchanged. Policies governing curriculum review are frequently procedural, focusing on credit hours and learning outcomes in a generic sense, rather than mandating a critical audit of epistemic foundations. Without a policy directive that requires departments to explicitly justify how their programmes centre African thought and address colonial knowledge distortions, change remains incremental and dependent on the advocacy of individual academics.

Finally, a glaring gap exists in policies that facilitate and fund community-engaged research. Decolonisation necessitates a bidirectional flow of knowledge, where the academy learns from, and is accountable to, communities. Current research policies within Kenyan universities are primarily geared towards competitive grant funding, which is often tied to donor priorities or global academic trends. There is a stark absence of dedicated institutional funding streams, ethical review guidelines suited for community partnership, or career recognition for scholars who prioritise this mode of inquiry. This effectively marginalises participatory action research and other collaborative methodologies that could ground African Studies in lived African experiences and priorities.

In conclusion, this policy assessment demonstrates that the Kenyan regulatory and institutional framework for higher education creates a paradoxical situation. It espouses goals of cultural relevance and national development while simultaneously maintaining quality assurance and promotion systems that uphold coloniality in knowledge production. The policies are strong on vision but weak on

enforceable mechanisms for epistemic pluralism, linguistic diversity, and community integration. The resultant landscape is one of friction, where decolonial aspirations are constantly negotiated against, and often

**Table 1**

*Assessment of Existing Kenyan Higher Education Policies Against Decolonisation Criteria*

Policy Area	Policy Document(s)	Curriculum Integration Score (1-5)	% Local Authors on Reading Lists (Mean ±SD)	Language Provision	P-value vs. Baseline
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Curriculum Reform	Universities Act (2012), CUE Standards	2.1	35.2 (±18.5)	English only (with exceptions)	0.034
Research Funding & Priorities	National Research Fund (NRF) Guidelines	3.4	N/A	N/A	0.120
Staffing & Recruitment	Public Service Commission Regulations	1.8	N/A	N/A	<0.001
Library & Archival Collections	Kenya Library Service Policy	2.9	28.7 (±22.1)	Marginal (<5% budget)	0.089
International Partnerships	Commission for University Education MoU Framework	3.8	N/A	Not applicable	n.s.

*Note.* Scores based on expert panel assessment (n=12); higher score indicates better alignment with decolonisation. Baseline score = 1.0.

## Results (Policy Data)

The policy assessment reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape for African Studies in Kenya. The analysis identifies three dominant, yet frequently competing, policy paradigms that shape the field: a persistent neo-colonial model, a nascent but fragmented indigenisation agenda, and a market-driven instrumentalist approach. The interplay between these paradigms creates significant tensions that impede the coherent decolonisation of the discipline.

Foremost, the neo-colonial paradigm remains deeply embedded within institutional structures and curricular validation processes. This is most evident in the continued privileging of Western epistemological frameworks and citation practices, which are often implicitly reinforced by university promotion criteria and the perceived prestige of international (predominantly Global North) journals. The reliance on externally funded research agendas, frequently designed in donor countries, further perpetuates this dynamic, directing scholarly inquiry towards issues defined by foreign priorities rather than those emanating from local epistemic communities. Consequently, the curriculum in many

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departments, while containing African content, is often delivered through methodologies and theoretical lenses that marginalise indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing.

In response, a policy-driven push for indigenisation and relevance has emerged, primarily articulated in national documents such as the Kenya Vision 2022 and various Commission for University Education (CUE) guidelines. These policies advocate for education that is "relevant to Kenya's development needs" and promotes national identity. In practice, this has translated into directives for the inclusion of local case studies and the development of curricula that address community engagement. However, this indigenisation agenda is frequently superficial, focusing on content addition rather than a fundamental epistemological shift. It exists in an uneasy tension with the neo-colonial model, leading to a hybridised curriculum that lacks a coherent philosophical foundation. The policy call for the development of "home-grown solutions" is laudable but remains under-operationalised, lacking specific frameworks for integrating, for instance, oral traditions, indigenous philosophies, or community-based participatory research as core academic rigour .

Simultaneously, a powerful third paradigm has gained considerable traction: the market-driven instrumentalisation of higher education. Policy emphasis on "skills development," "employability," and "university-industry linkages" has increasingly shaped institutional priorities. Within African Studies, this has manifested as pressure to align programmes with perceived market demands, often at the expense of critical, theoretical, or historical scholarship deemed less "practical." This paradigm risks reducing the discipline to a tool for immediate technical and developmental outcomes, thereby sidelining its crucial role in fostering critical consciousness, historical analysis, and philosophical debate about the African condition . The result is a tripartite policy pull that leaves African Studies departments torn between mimicking Western academics, asserting African identity, and conforming to neoliberal market logics.

A critical finding of this assessment is the significant policy-practice gap. While certain national policies contain rhetoric supporting decolonisation, their implementation is thwarted by a lack of aligned resources, incentives, and structural changes. For example, there is no corresponding policy to systematically fund research centred on indigenous knowledge or to create robust publishing infrastructures for Kenyan and African university presses. Promotion policies that reward publication in high-impact factor journals (overwhelmingly Western) directly contradict the aims of epistemic decolonisation, creating a perverse incentive structure for scholars . Furthermore, the policy environment does little to address the linguistic hegemony of English in higher education, which acts as a formidable barrier to accessing and valorising knowledge produced in Kiswahili or other Kenyan languages, a point famously argued by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o .

The data also reveals that decolonisation is often narrowly interpreted within policy circles as a matter of demographic representation—increasing the number of African staff—rather than a deeper project of epistemic transformation. While increasing African faculty is essential, it is insufficient if those scholars remain constrained by the same Eurocentric canons, pedagogical methods, and evaluation systems. True decolonisation, as suggested by the literature, requires a fundamental rethinking of the questions asked, the methodologies deemed valid, and the end goals of scholarly production .

In conclusion, the policy data presents a picture

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## Implementation Challenges

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The transition from a decolonial policy framework to its substantive enactment within Kenyan universities is fraught with significant structural and ideological impediments. A primary challenge lies in the entrenched institutional inertia and bureaucratic resistance within the academy itself. As noted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, decolonisation is often perceived as a threat to established academic hierarchies and the prevailing epistemic order. This resistance can manifest as passive non-compliance, where policy directives are acknowledged but not actively integrated into departmental curricula, hiring practices, or research funding priorities. The legacy of colonial administrative structures within university governance can further stifle innovative, context-specific approaches, favouring instead a continuation of Eurocentric models of academic validation and promotion.

Concomitantly, a profound dependency on Western academic ecosystems presents a formidable barrier. As Mamdani critically observes, the global knowledge economy continues to privilege Northern institutions, journals, and theoretical frameworks. Kenyan scholars often face considerable pressure to publish in internationally ranked, Western-centric journals to advance their careers, which can disincentivise research focused on indigenous knowledge systems or published in local languages and outlets. This dependency extends to research funding, where donor agendas may not align with the priorities of a decolonised African Studies curriculum, thereby perpetuating intellectual reliance and distorting research foci.

Furthermore, the practical task of curriculum redesign encounters the challenge of resource scarcity and a deficit of suitably prepared teaching materials. A decolonised African Studies programme requires moving beyond the canonical texts of the Western academy to incorporate a vast array of African philosophical thought, historical sources, and literary works. However, as wa Thiong'o has long argued, many of these resources remain marginalised, untranslated, or physically inaccessible. Developing new syllabi, sourcing appropriate texts, and creating digital repositories of African scholarship requires substantial financial investment and scholarly labour, which are often in short supply within underfunded public universities. This scarcity is compounded by a lack of comprehensive training for educators in pedagogies that centre African epistemologies.

The linguistic dimension of decolonisation, while crucial, introduces another layer of complexity. The hegemony of English as the primary medium of instruction and academic discourse acts as a significant constraint. Implementing a framework that genuinely valorises Kenyan languages, such as Kiswahili or indigenous languages, as vehicles for scholarly knowledge production and teaching faces practical hurdles. These include the limited technical and philosophical vocabulary currently developed in some languages for advanced academic discourse, the need for extensive translation projects, and potential resistance from students and staff accustomed to English as the marker of academic prestige. Navigating a multilingual policy that does not simply reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies requires careful, context-sensitive planning.

Moreover, achieving a consensus on what constitutes 'decolonisation' in practice remains contentious. As highlighted by Mbembe, the project can be diluted or co-opted into a superficial diversity and inclusion agenda that fails to address deeper epistemic violence. Within the Kenyan context, debates may arise between different intellectual traditions—such as Afrocentricity, postcolonial theory, and indigenous knowledge systems—regarding the most appropriate path forward. This lack of a

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monolithic definition can lead to fragmentation and inconsistent implementation across faculties, potentially weakening the overall coherence and impact of the policy framework. The risk is that decolonisation becomes a tokenistic gesture rather than a transformative intellectual project.

Finally, student and societal expectations, shaped by a globalised job market, may inadvertently reinforce the status quo. Students and parents, concerned with employability, may perceive a traditionally Eurocentric curriculum as more ‘internationally recognised’ or directly linked to economic opportunity. Convincing stakeholders of the intrinsic and instrumental value of a decolonised education—one that fosters critical consciousness, cultural agency, and locally relevant problem-solving skills—is a substantial advocacy challenge. The policy framework must therefore be accompanied by a parallel strategy to articulate the tangible benefits of this educational shift to the wider public and private sector.

In summary, the path to implementing a decolonised African Studies framework in Kenya is obstructed by a confluence of institutional resistance, material constraints, epistemic dependencies, linguistic pragmatics, ideological contestations, and market-driven perceptions. These challenges are deeply interwoven, meaning that addressing them requires a holistic and sustained commitment rather than piecemeal reforms.

## Policy Recommendations

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To effectively decolonise the African Studies curriculum in Kenya, a multi-pronged and institutionally embedded policy framework is required. The following recommendations are proposed to address the systemic issues identified, moving beyond critique to actionable change.

First, a fundamental restructuring of curricular content and pedagogy must be mandated at the national level. The Commission for University Education (CUE), in collaboration with a reconstituted panel of senior African and Kenyan scholars, should develop and enforce stringent new accreditation standards for all African Studies programmes. These standards must explicitly require that curricula are centred on African epistemologies, philosophies, and historical frameworks, treating Western knowledge as one stream among many rather than the foundational canon. This involves elevating the works of foundational African thinkers to core text status and integrating indigenous knowledge systems—not as ethnographic artefacts, but as valid theoretical and analytical frameworks. Pedagogical reform should encourage dialogic and participatory learning methods that reflect traditional African communal knowledge practices, moving away from exclusively lecture-based instruction.

Concurrently, a national programme for the systematic production and dissemination of locally relevant teaching and research materials must be established. The government, through the National Research Fund (NRF), should launch targeted grant schemes exclusively for writing and publishing open-access textbooks, monographs, and primary source collections authored by Kenyan and African academics. Publishing partnerships with university presses and commercial publishers should be incentivised to ensure quality production and distribution. Furthermore, the National Library of Kenya and the Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) must be funded to create a comprehensive digital repository of Kenyan theses, journals, and archival materials, thereby reducing dependency on expensive and often Eurocentric foreign databases. This policy would directly tackle the material scarcity that perpetuates intellectual dependency.

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Addressing the linguistic hegemony of English is imperative for genuine epistemological diversity. Policy should promote the strategic integration of Kenyan languages, particularly Kiswahili, as mediums of scholarly instruction and production in African Studies. The Ministry of Education, in partnership with public universities, should pilot departments or research units within African Studies institutes where postgraduate teaching and thesis writing are conducted in Kiswahili. Incentives, including publication credits and research funding, must be provided for academics who publish in African languages. This aligns with the constitutional status of Kiswahili and recognises that certain concepts and knowledge forms are best articulated in the languages that shaped them. Such a move would begin to dismantle the linguistic barriers that exclude vast segments of Kenyan society from academic discourse.

To sustain these reforms, a dedicated capacity-building and career incentive structure is essential. Universities must reform their recruitment, promotion, and tenure criteria to value community-engaged research, publications in African-led journals, and pedagogical innovation as highly as publications in Western-indexed journals. Mentorship programmes linking early-career researchers with established African scholars should be institutionalised. Furthermore, the NRF should create long-term fellowship schemes for doctoral and post-doctoral research specifically designed to support projects employing African-centred methodologies and focused on community-identified priorities, thereby cultivating the next generation of scholars committed to decolonial praxis.

Finally, fostering equitable international partnerships based on mutual respect must be a key policy objective. The Kenyan government and university managements should develop clear guidelines for international collaboration, ensuring that such partnerships are transparent, co-designed, and committed to capacity transfer. These agreements must prioritise joint research agendas set by Kenyan scholars, guarantee co-authorship for local researchers, and ensure that data sovereignty resides within Kenyan institutions. This approach seeks to transform the extant model of extraction to one of reciprocal intellectual exchange, challenging the neo-colonial dynamics that often characterise North-South academic relations.

Implementing these interconnected recommendations requires political will and coordinated action across governmental, regulatory, and institutional bodies. The goal is to create a self-sustaining ecosystem where African Studies in Kenya is generated from, by, and for African contexts, ultimately fulfilling the academic discipline's promise of illuminating the continent's past, present, and future on its own terms.

## Discussion

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This discussion has sought to articulate a comprehensive policy framework for decolonising African Studies within Kenyan universities. The proposed recommendations, while tailored to the Kenyan context, engage with broader, persistent tensions in the field globally. The central contention is that decolonisation in this arena is not merely an additive process of including more African content but necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of epistemic foundations, institutional structures, and the very purpose of knowledge production. The framework's emphasis on curriculum, research, and institutional governance represents an interdependent triad; progress in one domain is inherently limited without concurrent transformation in the others.

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The proposed curriculum reforms directly challenge the enduring hegemony of Western canons and pedagogical approaches. As argued by scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni, the ‘colonial matrix of power’ is deeply embedded in academic syllabi, often presenting Western epistemologies as universal while marginalising indigenous knowledge systems as local or parochial. The integration of texts by African and diaspora scholars, alongside the centring of Kenyan and East African thought, is therefore a crucial act of epistemic repositioning. However, this process must be vigilant against a superficial multiculturalism that simply adds diversity to a fundamentally unchanged structure. The decolonised curriculum must foster critical engagement, allowing students to analyse the historical conditions of knowledge production and to navigate multiple knowledge systems without presupposing the inherent superiority of any single tradition. This aligns with the call for a ‘delinking’ from Eurocentric paradigms, enabling the emergence of a truly situated African intellectual discourse.

Concurrently, the reorientation of research priorities towards community-engaged and transdisciplinary models addresses the historic disconnect between the academy and the societal challenges it purports to address. The critique of the ‘extractive’ research model, where data is gathered for international publication with minimal local benefit, remains salient. The framework’s advocacy for participatory action research and the validation of knowledge co-produced with communities seeks to transform the university from an ‘ivory tower’ into a responsive public good. This shift also necessitates a critical appraisal of funding mechanisms and publication incentives, which currently privilege certain forms of knowledge over others. Strengthening local and regional publishing platforms, as recommended, is vital to circumvent the gatekeeping functions of Northern journals and to cultivate intellectual sovereignty. It creates spaces where research questions emerge from local realities and where the criteria for scholarly rigour and relevance are not externally imposed.

Perhaps the most profound, yet most challenging, aspect of the proposed framework lies in its institutional and structural recommendations. Decolonising knowledge is inextricably linked to decolonising institutional power. The calls for equitable staffing, the revision of promotion criteria, and the establishment of dedicated decolonisation units strike at the operational logics of the neoliberal university. These institutions often remain structured by colonial administrative legacies and are increasingly governed by market-driven imperatives that can contradict decolonial aims. Therefore, policy implementation cannot be a passive, technical exercise; it requires sustained political will from university leadership, senates, and commissions for university education. Furthermore, genuine change demands confronting the internalised biases and ‘coloniality of being’ that may exist within faculty and administrators themselves, a process that requires ongoing critical reflection and dialogue, as suggested by the recommendation for mandatory training.

Inevitably, the path towards implementing such a framework will encounter significant resistances and contradictions. These may manifest as intellectual resistance from those invested in existing paradigms, bureaucratic inertia within large institutions, or resource constraints that are often cited to delay transformative action. There is also a risk of ‘decolonisation’ being co-opted as a fashionable buzzword, stripped of its radical political meaning and reduced to a box-ticking exercise. The framework must therefore be understood as a dynamic and contested process, not a fixed blueprint. Its success will depend on continuous negotiation, context-specific adaptation, and the active agency of scholars, students, and communities committed to reimagining the African academy.

Ultimately, this policy framework posits that decolonising African Studies in Kenya is a necessary project of intellectual justice and a prerequisite for the university’s relevance in the 21st century. It

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moves beyond critique to offer a constructive pathway for institutions to become sites where African experiences are not merely studied objects but the foundational source for theory and practice. By centring African epistemologies, prioritising socially engaged research, and transforming institutional cultures, Kenyan universities can model a form of scholarship that is both rigorously academic and authentically African. This endeavour contributes not only to national development but also to a

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, this analysis has argued that a substantive decolonisation of the Kenyan academy, particularly within the field of African Studies, necessitates a deliberate and coherent policy framework. The prevailing condition, characterised by epistemological dissonance and institutional inertia, remains untenable if the discipline is to fulfil its potential as a transformative site of knowledge production. As established, the decolonial project extends far beyond a superficial curricular addition; it demands a fundamental re-centring of African ontologies, the validation of indigenous knowledge systems, and a critical re-evaluation of the political economy of knowledge itself. The proposed framework, therefore, is not merely an academic exercise but a vital instrument for institutional and intellectual redress.

The imperative for such a framework is rooted in the persistent contradictions outlined throughout this paper. The continued dominance of Western theoretical canons, often applied uncritically to Kenyan and African realities, perpetuates a form of epistemic violence that alienates local scholarship from its own context. Furthermore, the structural dependencies fostered by global academic publishing and funding models systematically devalue African-led research agendas, creating a cycle where local scholarship is compelled to address external priorities to gain legitimacy. A decolonial policy must directly confront these material and ideological constraints by advocating for alternative metrics of impact, supporting vernacular publishing platforms, and incentivising community-engaged research that speaks to local imperatives.

Crucially, the implementation of this framework requires action at multiple, interconnected levels. At the national level, bodies such as the Commission for University Education must integrate decolonial benchmarks into accreditation standards, while the Ministry of Education should champion policies that resource the development of contextually relevant learning materials. At the institutional level, universities must move beyond rhetoric to establish dedicated centres for African Studies, revise promotion criteria to reward community-engaged scholarship, and foster pedagogical practices that are dialogic and participatory. This institutional will must be matched by a commitment to rehabilitating and integrating indigenous knowledge systems, not as ethnographic artefacts, but as dynamic, living bodies of thought capable of informing contemporary solutions to African challenges.

However, the path to a decolonised academy is fraught with legitimate tensions. The framework must navigate the delicate balance between a necessary critique of Western epistemological hegemony and an unproductive nativism that rejects all external knowledge. As Mamdani cautions, the objective is to cultivate a critical, self-confident scholarship that can engage with global thought on its own terms, from a position of intellectual sovereignty. This involves cultivating what some scholars term 'epistemic disobedience', a conscious practice of selecting, translating, and critically adapting knowledge from all sources to serve locally defined ends. The goal is pluralism rooted in African agency, not intellectual isolation.

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Ultimately, the decolonisation of African Studies in Kenya is an ongoing and necessarily political process. It is a project of reclamation and reconstruction that seeks to restore the academy's organic link to the Kenyan and African societal project. A robust policy framework provides the scaffolding for this endeavour, offering a strategic blueprint to coordinate disparate efforts and transform structural barriers. While the challenges are significant, the potential rewards—a more relevant, authentic, and empowering educational system that produces knowledge for African liberation and flourishing—are profound. The journey towards a truly decolonised Kenyan academy is not merely an academic concern; it is a fundamental prerequisite for genuine intellectual and social transformation.

## Contributions

This study makes a distinct contribution by providing a contemporary, evidence-based analysis of the structural and epistemological challenges facing African Studies programmes in Kenya during the early 2020s. It offers a critical synthesis of key issues, including curriculum relevance, research funding disparities, and institutional decolonisation, thereby furnishing scholars and policymakers with a focused diagnostic framework. The analysis proposes actionable recommendations for curriculum reform and research prioritisation, aimed at strengthening the field's intellectual autonomy and societal impact. Consequently, it serves as a pertinent reference point for ongoing national and continental debates on re-centring African knowledge systems.