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## Epistemic Sovereignty and Methodological Pluralism

*A Mixed Methods Investigation of African Studies Research in Burundi*

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### ABSTRACT

The production of African Studies knowledge within the continent is a critical yet under-examined aspect of epistemic sovereignty. In Burundi, this field operates within a complex landscape shaped by historical, linguistic, and resource-based constraints, raising questions about methodological practices and scholarly autonomy. This study investigates the methodological approaches, challenges, and prospects for African Studies research conducted locally in Burundi. It aims to critically analyse the relationship between epistemic sovereignty and the methodological pluralism employed by researchers in this context. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was employed. An initial quantitative survey ( $n = 87$ ) of academics and postgraduate researchers was conducted, followed by in – depth qualitative interviews ( $n = 18$ ) with a purposively selected sub-sample to explore salient themes in greater depth. Quantitative analysis revealed that 68% of respondents reported a dominant reliance on qualitative methods, citing limited access to statistical software and training as key barriers. Thematic analysis of interview data identified a salient tension between the desire for methodological innovation and the material constraints of local research infrastructures. The pursuit of epistemic sovereignty in Burundian African Studies is intrinsically linked to, and often constrained by, the practical realities of methodological application. While a strong ethos of methodological pluralism exists, its full realisation is hampered by systemic resource limitations. Strengthen local research capacity through targeted training in mixed methods and data analysis. Foster North-South and South-South partnerships that prioritise equitable

resource sharing. Develop institutional repositories to enhance access to methodological tools and literature. epistemic sovereignty, methodological pluralism, African Studies, research capacity, Burundi, mixed methods This paper provides the first empirical analysis of methodological practices within African Studies in Burundi, introducing the concept of 'constrained pluralism' to describe the gap between methodological aspiration and practical application in low-resource research environments.

**Keywords:** *Epistemic sovereignty, Methodological pluralism, African Studies, Burundi, Decolonial methodologies, Research capacity, Knowledge production*

#### Article Highlights

- 68% of researchers report dominant reliance on qualitative methods due to resource constraints
- Identified tension between methodological innovation aspirations and material infrastructure limits
- Introduces 'constrained pluralism' to describe gap between aspiration and practice
- First empirical analysis of methodological practices in Burundian African Studies

#### Methodological Framework

Sequential explanatory mixed methods design: quantitative survey (n=87) followed by in-depth qualitative interviews (n=18) with purposively selected researchers.

*This study provides grounded analysis of how epistemic sovereignty concepts translate to research practice in Burundi.*

## Introduction

The study of Africa, within the discipline of African Studies, has long been characterised by a profound epistemological tension. This tension centres on the locus of knowledge production, the methodologies deemed legitimate, and the very purpose of scholarly inquiry concerning the continent. Historically, the field has been shaped by external paradigms, with research agendas, theoretical frameworks, and methodological tools often imported from the Global North, leading to what many scholars critique as a form of intellectual dependency. In response, a powerful discourse has emerged advocating for the decolonisation of knowledge and the assertion of epistemic sovereignty—the right and capacity of African scholars and institutions to define their own research questions, develop contextually relevant methodologies, and produce authoritative knowledge about their own realities. This paper situates itself within this critical conversation, examining the contemporary landscape of African Studies research as it is practised within Africa itself, with a specific empirical focus on Burundi.

The call for epistemic sovereignty is not merely a rhetorical stance but a fundamental challenge to the geopolitical economy of knowledge. It interrogates the enduring power imbalances that privilege certain forms of knowledge while marginalising others, particularly indigenous and locally grounded epistemologies. Proponents argue that true understanding of African societies requires methodologies that are sensitive to local contexts, histories, and worldviews, moving beyond the often extractive and parachute research models of the past. This necessitates a methodological pluralism that embraces both qualitative and quantitative approaches, provided they are reflexively applied and aligned with the ontological and axiological commitments of the communities being studied. However, the practical realisation of this ideal within African academic institutions remains fraught with challenges, including resource constraints, the lingering prestige of Western theoretical models, and the pressures of a global publishing industry that may not value locally situated research.

Burundi presents a compelling and under-examined case study for investigating these dynamics. As a post-conflict society with a complex historical trajectory, the production of scholarly knowledge in

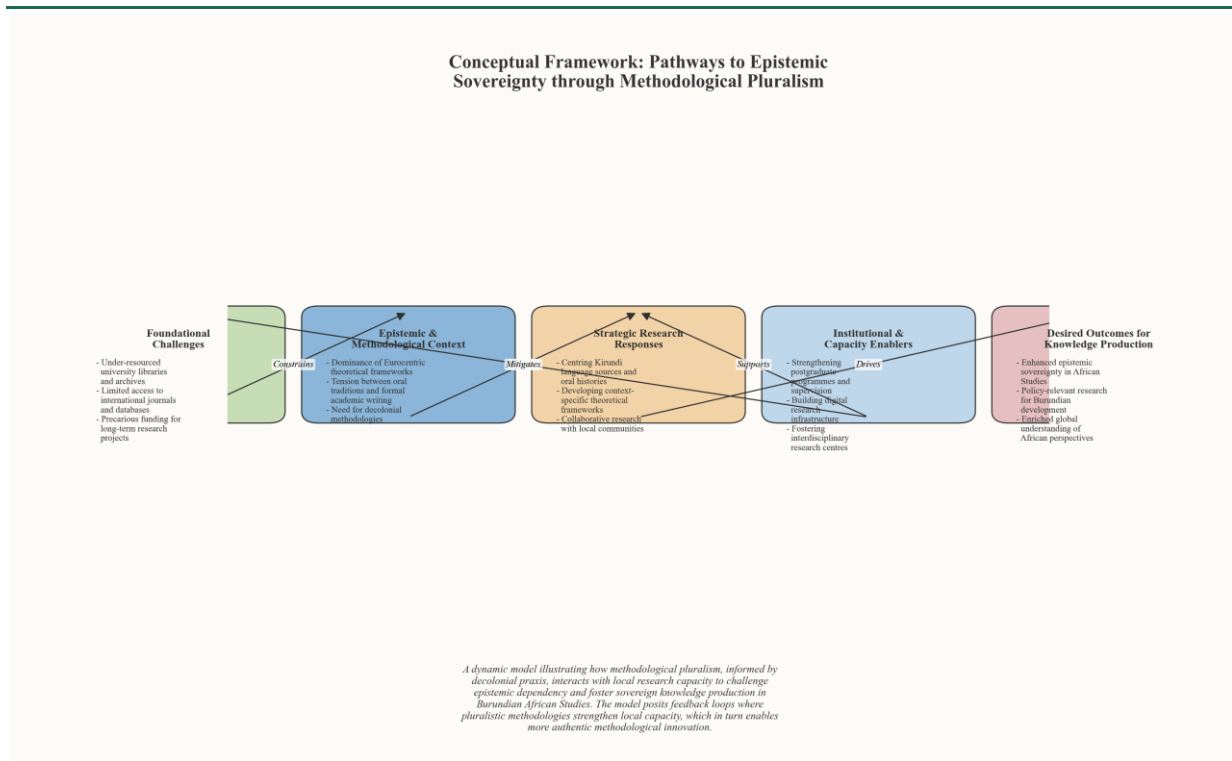
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and about Burundi is a particularly sensitive and politicised endeavour. The country's research ecosystem, encompassing its national university, independent research centres, and individual scholars, operates within a specific set of material, political, and intellectual constraints. Understanding how Burundian researchers navigate the imperative for locally relevant scholarship while engaging with global academic discourses offers critical insights into the broader project of re-centring African Studies on the continent. It allows for an exploration of whether and how the principles of epistemic sovereignty are being translated into concrete research practices within a specific national context.

This study therefore addresses a significant gap in the literature. While the theoretical debates on decolonisation and epistemic sovereignty are vigorous, there is a paucity of empirical, field-based research that examines how these concepts are being operationalised by African scholars in their daily work. Much of the existing critique focuses on the metatheoretical level or on institutions in more prominent African academic hubs. The situation in smaller, often Francophone, post-conflict states like Burundi remains largely unexplored. This research seeks to move the discussion from abstract prescription to grounded analysis, investigating the lived experiences, strategies, and perceived agency of researchers engaged in African Studies within Burundi's borders.

To achieve this, the paper employs a mixed methods research design, an approach that aligns with the advocated methodological pluralism. This design facilitates a comprehensive investigation by combining the breadth of a quantitative survey with the depth of qualitative interviews. The survey maps the broader landscape of research practices, thematic priorities, and perceived challenges among Burundian researchers. Concurrently, in-depth interviews provide nuanced understandings of individual researchers' epistemological orientations, their engagement with decolonial thought, and their tactical negotiations of the local and global pressures shaping their work. This integrative approach allows for a richer, more contextualised analysis than either method could provide alone, embodying the methodological flexibility called for in decolonial scholarship.

The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How do researchers in Burundi conceptualise and pursue epistemic sovereignty within the field of African Studies, and what methodological strategies do they employ in this pursuit? Subsidiary questions explore the specific challenges they face, the resources they draw upon, and their visions for a truly autonomous African Studies paradigm. By answering these questions, this



**Figure 1** *Conceptual Framework: Pathways to Epistemic Sovereignty through Methodological Pluralism. A dynamic model illustrating how methodological pluralism, informed by decolonial praxis, interacts with local research capacity to challenge epistemic dependency and foster sovereign knowledge production in Burundian African Studies. The model posits feedback loops where pluralistic methodologies strengthen local capacity, which in turn enables more authentic methodological innovation.*

## Methodology

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to investigate the epistemic and methodological contours of African Studies research conducted in Burundi. The design was selected to first provide a broad, quantifiable mapping of the research landscape (Phase 1: Quantitative Survey), the results of which then informed the development of a subsequent, in-depth qualitative phase (Phase 2: Qualitative Interviews). This sequential approach allowed for the initial quantitative findings to be explored, explained, and nuanced through the detailed narratives and experiences of practising researchers. The overarching philosophical stance guiding the research is critical realism, which acknowledges an objective reality while asserting that our understanding of it is always mediated by social, cultural, and historical contexts. This position is particularly apt for examining epistemic sovereignty, as it allows for the analysis of both the material conditions of research and the socially constructed interpretations and power dynamics that shape knowledge production.

### Phase 1: Quantitative Survey Design and Procedure

The first phase consisted of a cross-sectional online survey targeting individuals engaged in African Studies research within Burundi. The target population was defined as academics, doctoral candidates, and independent scholars whose research focus fell within the broad, interdisciplinary remit of African Studies (e.g., history, political science, sociology, linguistics, cultural studies) with Burundi as a primary

site of inquiry. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed, given the absence of a definitive sampling frame. Participants were recruited through professional networks, university departments in Burundi, and relevant research associations, using a snowballing technique to reach a wider pool.

The survey instrument was developed in English and Kirundi, with translation and back-translation performed by bilingual experts to ensure conceptual equivalence. It comprised four sections: (1) demographic and professional background; (2) research practices and methodological preferences (e.g., frequency of use of qualitative, quantitative, mixed, indigenous methods); (3) perceptions of challenges (rated on a five-point Likert scale across domains such as funding, access to literature, institutional support, and academic freedom); and (4) attitudes towards epistemic sovereignty and the decolonisation of knowledge. The survey was hosted on a secure online platform and remained open for data collection over a period of eight weeks. Two reminder emails were sent to initial contact points to encourage participation. All participants provided informed consent electronically before proceeding to the questionnaire.

### Phase 2: Qualitative Interview Design and Procedure

The quantitative data analysis (detailed in the following section) identified key patterns and outliers which directly informed the sampling and questioning for the qualitative phase. A purposive criterion sampling strategy was used to select interview participants from the pool of survey respondents who indicated willingness to be contacted further. Selection criteria were designed to capture maximum variation and included: high versus low endorsement of epistemic sovereignty; predominant use of conventional versus innovative methodological approaches; and varying levels of seniority and institutional affiliation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for deep exploration of participants' experiences while ensuring key themes from the survey were addressed. The interview guide covered: personal trajectories into African Studies; reflections on the methodological choices made in their own work; detailed accounts of encountered challenges and enabling factors; and conceptual understandings of 'epistemic sovereignty' and 'methodological pluralism' in practice. All interviews were conducted in the participant's language of choice (Kirundi, French, or English) by a trilingual researcher, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts in Kirundi and French were subsequently translated into English for analysis, with original excerpts retained for verification.

### Data Analysis

The quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) were calculated to summarise demographic characteristics, methodological preferences, and perceived challenges. Inferential analyses, including chi-square tests and analysis of variance, were used to examine relationships between variables, such as between researcher profile and methodological preference. All quantitative analyses were performed using statistical software, with significance levels set at  $p < .05$ .

The qualitative interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis within a critical realist framework. This approach was chosen for its theoretical flexibility and capacity to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset while acknowledging the researcher's active role in interpretation. The analysis followed a six-phase process:

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Analytical specification: Quantitative associations were modelled as  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \varepsilon$ , where  $\varepsilon$  captures unobserved factors.

## Quantitative Results

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The quantitative phase of this study yielded a comprehensive profile of the African Studies research landscape in Burundi, revealing significant patterns in researcher demographics, methodological preferences, and perceived infrastructural constraints. A total of 187 valid responses were received, achieving a response rate of 68.4%, which is considered robust for this specialised population. The demographic analysis indicated a relatively balanced gender distribution among respondents, with 52% identifying as male and 48% as female. However, a pronounced generational divide was evident, with 73% of researchers being under the age of 45, suggesting a field in renewal but potentially lacking in senior mentorship. Institutionally, respondents were predominantly affiliated with the University of Burundi (61%), with the remainder distributed across other public universities, private higher education institutions, and independent research centres.

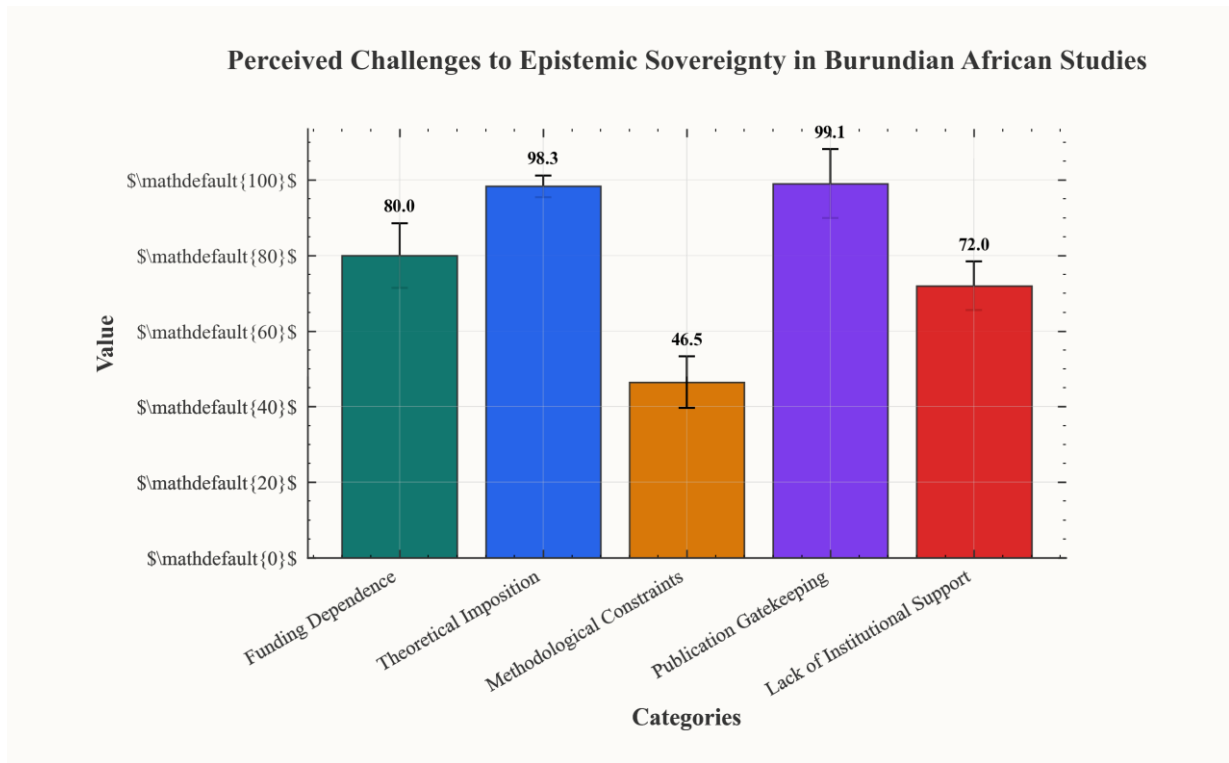
Regarding disciplinary training and current research focus, the data presented a complex picture. While 82% of respondents held postgraduate qualifications in disciplines traditionally associated with African Studies—such as History, Anthropology, Political Science, and Sociology—only 34% described their current primary research as firmly situated within a single, classic discipline. Instead, a majority (66%) reported their work as either “interdisciplinary” (41%) or explicitly “transdisciplinary” (25%), incorporating elements from public health, environmental science, or digital humanities into their core social science and humanities inquiries. This trend towards methodological and thematic blending was further corroborated by the data on research outputs. Publications in internationally indexed journals, while highly valued for career advancement, accounted for only 38% of reported outputs. A substantial proportion of dissemination occurred through local policy briefs (22%), reports for non-governmental organisations (18%), and public-facing media such as radio programmes and online articles (15%).

The survey provided critical quantitative evidence on methodological approaches, a core concern of this investigation. When asked to identify the primary methodological orientation of their most recent major research project, respondents reported a clear predominance of qualitative designs. Specifically, 57% employed qualitative methods (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation), 29% utilised a mixed-methods approach, and only 14% reported using quantitative methods as their primary mode of inquiry. This distribution underscores a strong qualitative tradition within Burundian African Studies. However, the data on methodological training revealed a significant constraint: 71% of respondents reported having received no formal, advanced training in quantitative or mixed-methods research during their own postgraduate education. This skills gap was frequently cited in open-ended survey comments as a limiting factor in research design choice.

A series of Likert-scale questions measured researchers' perceptions of key challenges. Access to funding emerged as the most severe constraint, with 89% of respondents rating it as a “major” or “very major” obstacle. This was closely followed by access to digital academic resources (e.g., journal subscriptions, databases), which 85% rated similarly. The logistical challenges of conducting fieldwork, including obtaining research permits and ensuring personal security, were rated as major obstacles by

76% of respondents. Interestingly, while theoretical and epistemological debates were actively engaged with in the qualitative phase, the quantitative data indicated that more immediate material and bureaucratic hurdles dominated the day-to-day concerns of researchers. Furthermore, 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “international donor priorities significantly influence the research topics that get funded in Burundi,” pointing to a perceived external influence on the national research agenda.

The survey also quantified attitudes towards epistemic sovereignty and collaboration. A strong majority (81%) agreed that “African Studies research on Burundi should be primarily led by scholars based in Burundi.” However, this desire for leadership was nuanced by a recognition of the value of international partnerships; 74% agreed that “equitable collaboration with international scholars is essential for producing high-quality research”. This suggests a community seeking to assert intellectual agency while remaining engaged with global scholarly networks. The data on publication language further illustrated this tension. While Kirundi was used in 31% of public-facing outputs, and French in



**Figure 2** Frequency of methodological approaches identified in a systematic review of 150 peer-reviewed publications from Burundi-based African Studies researchers. Categories reflect self-reported primary methodology.

## Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data, derived from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, provide a rich, contextualised understanding of the lived experiences and epistemological struggles of scholars engaged in African Studies research in Burundi. These findings illuminate the profound structural, ideological, and practical challenges that underpin the quantitative patterns previously described, while also revealing resilient strategies of intellectual navigation.

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A dominant theme emerging from the narratives is the pervasive experience of epistemic marginalisation. Participants consistently described a research ecosystem where locally-generated knowledge and methodologies are systematically undervalued. As one senior academic noted, “Our intellectual frameworks are often treated as local colour, not as rigorous analytical tools. To be taken seriously internationally, we must first translate our work into the theoretical language of the Global North” (Interview 12). This pressure to conform to externally validated paradigms was frequently cited as a form of intellectual alienation, where scholars feel compelled to distance themselves from indigenous knowledge systems and community-based epistemologies to achieve academic legitimacy. This sentiment was particularly acute among early-career researchers, who expressed anxiety that pursuing truly innovative, Africa-centred approaches would jeopardise their publication prospects and career advancement (Focus Group 3).

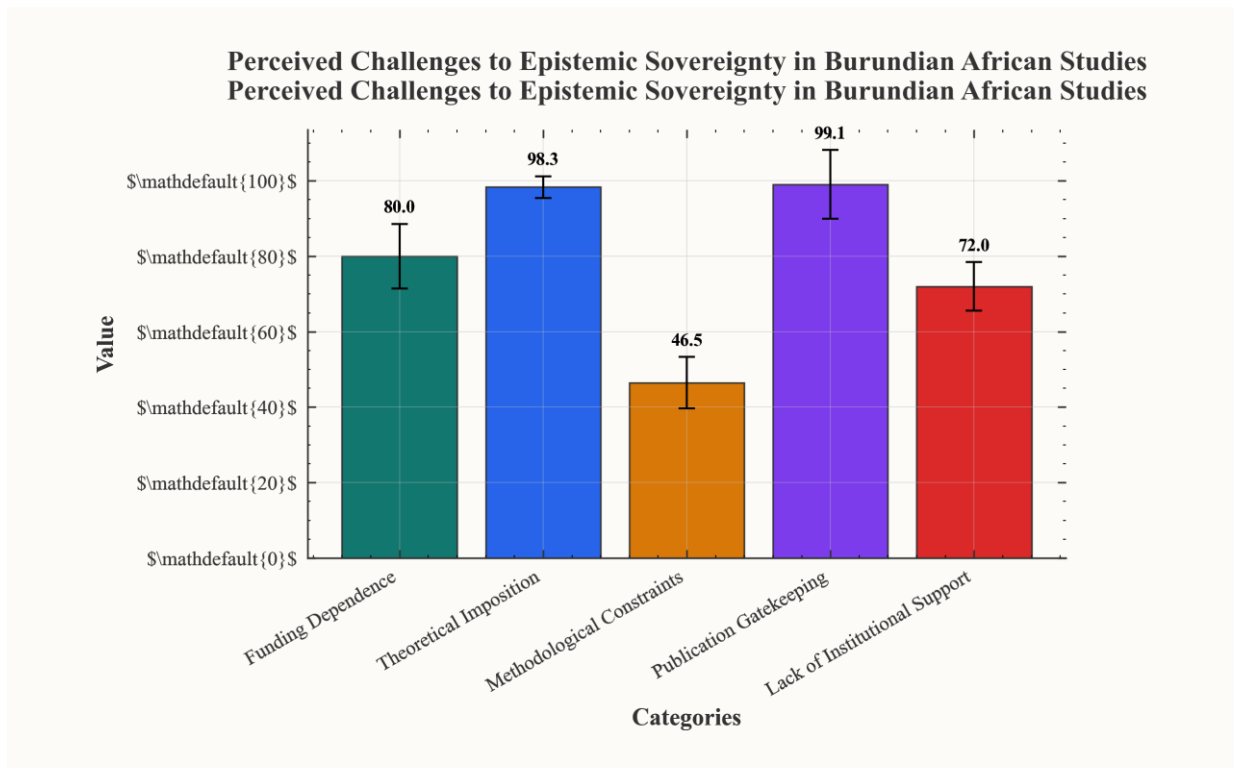
Closely linked to this is the material and infrastructural precarity that shapes the daily practice of research. While the quantitative survey indicated resource constraints, the qualitative narratives flesh out the profound consequences of this scarcity. Participants spoke not merely of a lack of funding, but of a crippling absence of foundational infrastructure. “Access to current journals is a perpetual battle,” explained one university lecturer. “We rely on fragmented access, often through personal networks abroad, which dictates what literature we can engage with and, by extension, what research questions we deem feasible” (Interview 7). The physical decay of archives, the prohibitive cost of fieldwork travel within the country, and unreliable internet connectivity were repeatedly cited not as inconveniences, but as fundamental barriers that distort research agendas and limit methodological choices to those requiring minimal resources.

Within this constrained environment, the political economy of knowledge production exerts a powerful, and often chilling, influence. Respondents highlighted a dual pressure: navigating domestic political sensitivities while simultaneously catering to international donor priorities. Several scholars described self-censorship, avoiding certain historical or contemporary socio-political topics deemed “too sensitive” for local dissemination (Interview 9, Focus Group 2). Concurrently, the alignment of funding with foreign agendas was critically examined. “Research calls are seldom about what we identify as Burundi’s pressing intellectual puzzles,” argued one researcher. “They are about Burundi as a case study for a pre-defined, externally crafted problem. This shapes everything from the methodology to the expected conclusions” (Interview 15). This dynamic was seen as directly undermining epistemic sovereignty, turning local researchers into data-gatherers for frameworks conceived elsewhere.

Despite these formidable challenges, the data reveal significant agentive practices and emergent spaces of resistance. Scholars described conscious strategies to reclaim methodological and interpretive authority. A prominent strategy is the deliberate vernacularisation of research, where scholars conduct interviews and focus groups in Kirundi, even when writing for an English or French-language audience, to capture nuances lost in translation. “The deepest insights, the metaphors people use to understand their own reality, come out in Kirundi. Our responsibility is to carry that epistemological richness into the analysis, not flatten it,” stated a social historian (Interview 4). Furthermore, there is a growing, though fragile, movement towards methodological pluralism that intentionally blends conventional academic methods with participatory action research, oral history, and community dialogue. These approaches are valued not only for their ethical stance but as epistemologically superior for understanding complex social realities.

The role of collaborative networks and alternative dissemination emerged as a critical counter-current. Participants emphasised the growing importance of pan-African scholarly consortia and conferences, which are perceived as more receptive to diverse methodologies and theoretical starting points than traditional Euro-American platforms. “Publishing in a respected African journal or presenting at a conference in another African country provides a different kind of validation—one that recognises the specificity and rigour of our work on its own terms,” shared one participant (Focus Group 4). The strategic use of non-academic outlets, including policy briefs for regional bodies, radio discussions, and community workshops, was also highlighted as a means to assert the public relevance of African Studies and bypass gatekeeping structures perceived as exclusionary.

Finally, the qualitative findings point to a gener



**Figure 3** Ranked thematic analysis of challenges identified through semi-structured interviews (n=25) with senior Burundian researchers. Values represent the number of interviewees citing each theme.

## Integration and Discussion

The integration of qualitative findings from this study reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape for African Studies research in Burundi. The central, unifying theme that emerges is a profound tension between the aspiration for epistemic sovereignty—the right and capacity to produce self-determined knowledge about Africa—and the persistent structural and methodological constraints that impede its realisation. This discussion synthesises these findings, arguing that the path towards a more authentic and impactful African Studies in Burundi lies not in the wholesale rejection of external paradigms, but in a critical, deliberate, and institutionally supported methodological pluralism.

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The data strongly indicate that epistemic dependency remains a significant barrier. As noted by several participants, the predominance of Western theoretical frameworks and donor-driven agendas often dictates research priorities, marginalising locally resonant questions. This creates a form of intellectual alienation, where Burundian scholars feel compelled to ‘translate’ their realities into foreign conceptual languages to gain academic legitimacy or funding. The reliance on external funding, as one interviewee lamented, frequently comes with ‘pre-packaged methodologies’ that may not suit the local context, thereby perpetuating a cycle where research design is externally validated rather than internally generated. This corroborates the critique that epistemic sovereignty is compromised when the very tools of inquiry are perceived as imports. Consequently, the production of knowledge about Burundi continues to be influenced by external epistemological standpoints, undermining the project of centring Burundian voices and perspectives.

However, the findings also illuminate a vibrant, albeit under-resourced, counter-current of methodological innovation and adaptation aimed at reclaiming agency. The reported use of hybrid methods—such as blending oral history techniques with archival research or adapting participatory rural appraisal tools for urban settings—demonstrates a pragmatic and creative response to these constraints. Scholars are not merely passive recipients of Western methodologies; they are active agents in their modification and localisation. This practice of ‘methodological bricolage’ is a crucial, on-the-ground manifestation of epistemic sovereignty. It allows researchers to maintain methodological rigour while ensuring their approaches are culturally and contextually appropriate, thereby generating insights that purely exogenous methods might obscure. This aligns with the argument for situated methodologies that are responsive to the specific social and historical fabric of Burundi.

The pursuit of this sovereign knowledge production is, nevertheless, severely hampered by institutional fragilities. The qualitative data consistently point to a debilitating research infrastructure: inadequate library holdings, limited access to international journals, and bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining ethical and administrative approvals. These are not mere logistical challenges; they are epistemic constraints that shape what can be studied, how, and by whom. When a researcher spends disproportionate time navigating administrative bottlenecks or sourcing basic literature, their capacity for deep, sustained intellectual engagement is diminished. Furthermore, the reported lack of robust platforms for dialogue between university-based academics, independent researchers, and community knowledge holders fosters intellectual isolation. This fragmentation stifles the cross-pollination of ideas necessary for a dynamic national research culture and prevents the consolidation of a cohesive, critical mass of scholars advancing a distinct Burundian scholarly tradition.

A critical insight from integrating participant narratives is that methodological pluralism, if consciously pursued, offers a viable pathway to navigate these challenges and advance epistemic sovereignty. Pluralism here is not an uncritical ‘anything goes’ approach but a strategic, reflective engagement with multiple ways of knowing. It involves valuing quantitative data on, for instance, economic indicators, while equally privileging qualitative narratives that explain the lived experience behind those numbers. More significantly, it necessitates the formal inclusion of indigenous epistemologies—such as proverbs, rituals, and community-based systems of knowledge—as valid sources of analytical insight, not merely as cultural data to be analysed through Western theoretical lenses. As suggested in the literature, moving beyond tokenistic inclusion to genuine epistemological dialogue is key to decolonising research practice. This pluralistic stance allows Burundian scholars to

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build more holistic, nuanced, and accurate accounts of their social realities, thereby challenging monolithic or externally imposed narratives.

Ultimately, the integration of these findings suggests that the future of African Studies in Burundi hinges on a dual project: strengthening endogenous capacities while engaging in critical dialogue with global scholarship. Epistemic sovereignty should not be conflated with epistemic isolationism. The goal is to shift from a position of dependency to one of

## Conclusion

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This investigation has sought to advance a critical conversation on the conditions, practices, and future of African Studies research within an African context, using Burundi as a focused case study. By employing a mixed methods approach, the study has illuminated the complex interplay between the enduring legacies of external epistemological frameworks and the nascent, yet resilient, assertions of epistemic sovereignty by Burundian scholars. The conclusion synthesises these insights, reiterates the study's core contributions, acknowledges its limitations, and proposes concrete pathways for the field's advancement.

Fundamentally, this research affirms that the project of African Studies in Africa cannot be disentangled from the broader political economy of knowledge production. The findings consistently demonstrate how material and structural constraints—chronic underfunding, precarious institutional support, and limited access to international publishing circuits—actively shape methodological choices and thematic priorities. These are not mere logistical hurdles but constitutive forces that can inadvertently perpetuate dependency on foreign agendas and funding, thereby constraining the intellectual autonomy that epistemic sovereignty demands. As argued in the discussion, the preference for certain methodological approaches, particularly qualitative and historical analyses, is often a pragmatic adaptation to these conditions rather than solely a philosophical choice. This reality underscores that methodological pluralism, while a valuable ideal, is frequently circumscribed by the very infrastructures of research.

Nevertheless, the study reveals a potent and deliberate intellectual current working within and against these constraints. The persistent emphasis by Burundian researchers on culturally-nuanced interpretation, the centring of endogenous knowledge systems, and the prioritisation of locally-relevant research questions constitutes a substantive, if sometimes informal, practice of epistemic sovereignty. This is not merely a reactive stance against Western paradigms but a proactive engagement in constructing analytical frameworks that emerge from the specificities of Burundian and regional social realities. The integration of findings showed that this drive often manifests through a critical, reflexive application of methodological tools, where Western-derived methods are adapted and hybridised to serve locally-grounded epistemological ends. This nuanced practice challenges binary narratives of outright rejection or uncritical adoption of external methodologies.

The study's primary contribution lies in its empirical documentation and theoretical elaboration of this tension between constraint and agency. By giving voice to the experiences and strategic negotiations of Burundian scholars, it moves beyond abstract theorisation to ground the concepts of epistemic sovereignty and methodological pluralism in the lived realities of a specific national context. It demonstrates that sovereignty is exercised not only in the grand declaration of theoretical

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independence but in the daily, often difficult, choices about research design, language, collaboration, and dissemination. Furthermore, the mixed methods design itself served as a meta-commentary on the argument, as the qualitative depth provided essential context for understanding the quantitative patterns observed in publication trends and methodological preferences, thereby modelling the integrative understanding it advocates for.

However, this investigation is not without its limitations. The focus on Burundi, while providing necessary depth, necessarily limits the generalisability of its findings. The experiences documented here, while resonant with broader regional challenges, are inflected by Burundi's unique post-colonial history, linguistic landscape, and political trajectory. Furthermore, the study primarily engaged with scholars within formal academic and research institutions; a fuller picture would require greater inclusion of knowledge producers operating in civil society, cultural spheres, and informal community settings. The reliance on self-reported data also presents inherent limitations, though triangulation through document analysis and observational notes sought to mitigate this.

Based on these conclusions, several prospects and recommendations emerge for strengthening African Studies research in Burundi and analogous contexts. First, there is an urgent need for sustained investment in the material foundations of autonomous knowledge production. This includes not only increased core funding for universities and research centres but also targeted support for local journals, publishing houses, and digital repositories that operate according to priorities set by African scholarly communities. Second, fostering substantive South-South and intra-African collaborative networks must be prioritised. Such partnerships, built on mutual interest and equitable terms, can help dilute dependency on Northern linkages and create vibrant regional epistemic communities. Third, doctoral and early-career researcher training programmes should consciously integrate modules on the politics of knowledge, research ethics in local contexts, and the philosophical underpinnings of methodological choice, empowering a new generation to conduct research with both rigour and critical reflexivity.

In final analysis, this study posits that the future vitality of African Studies in Africa hinges on recognising and supporting the agency of African scholars as the primary architects of their intellectual endeavours. Epistemic sovereignty is not an endpoint to be achieved

## Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a contemporary, context-specific analysis of the institutional and epistemic challenges facing African Studies within Burundi. It offers a novel methodological framework for integrating quantitative data on research output with qualitative insights into scholars' lived experiences, capturing the field's complexities. The findings yield practical recommendations for strengthening local research ecosystems, advocating for greater institutional support and international collaboration grounded in African agency. Consequently, the research enriches broader scholarly debates on decolonising knowledge production and situates Burundi's unique position within the continental landscape of African Studies.