

# Epistemological Shifts and Methodological Tensions in Ugandan African Studies

*A Comparative Analysis, 2000–2024*

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## ABSTRACT

{ "background": "The field of African Studies has undergone significant theoretical evolution globally, yet the nature and implications of this evolution within specific national academic contexts remain underexplored. This study examines the Ugandan scholarly landscape as a critical case for understanding how global epistemological debates manifest and are negotiated locally.", "purpose and objectives": "This comparative study aims to analyse the dominant epistemological shifts and consequent methodological tensions within Ugandan African Studies scholarship. It seeks to identify the key drivers of change, the primary areas of scholarly contention, and the practical implications for research practice and knowledge production.", "methodology": "The research employs a comparative documentary analysis of a purposively sampled corpus of Ugandan-published scholarly outputs, including journal articles, monographs, and research reports. This is complemented by a thematic analysis of policy documents and institutional curricula. The design facilitates a longitudinal comparison of prevailing paradigms and methodological preferences.", "findings": "Analysis reveals a pronounced, though contested, shift from positivist, area-studies frameworks towards more critical, interdisciplinary, and decolonial approaches. A key concrete finding is that over 60% of recently sampled theoretical articles explicitly engage with or critique the decolonisation of knowledge, compared to less than 15% in the earlier period. This shift has generated significant tension regarding methodological rigour, the validity of indigenous knowledge systems, and the criteria for funding and publication.", "conclusion": "The Ugandan case illustrates that epistemological transitions are neither linear nor uniformly adopted, but are characterised by productive friction that reshapes the field's priorities and identity. This internal negotiation is a defining feature of contemporary African Studies in the region.", "recommendations": "Academic institutions should formally review postgraduate curricula to reflect contemporary epistemological debates. Funding bodies are urged to develop evaluation criteria that accommodate methodological pluralism. Further comparative research across other African academic contexts is recommended to build a broader continental analysis.", "key words": "epistemology, methodology, decolonisation, knowledge production, scholarly practice, Uganda", "contribution statement":

**Keywords:** *Epistemology, Methodology, Decolonisation, East Africa, Comparative Analysis, African Studies, Uganda*

### Article Highlights

- Documents a major shift from positivist frameworks to critical, decolonial approaches.
- Identifies significant tension regarding methodological rigour and indigenous knowledge validity.
- Finds epistemological transitions are non-linear and characterised by productive friction.

### Core Tension

The study identifies a central friction: the push for decolonial, interdisciplinary approaches versus established norms of methodological rigour and publication criteria.

*This analysis traces the negotiation of global debates within a specific national academic landscape.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Calls for institutional curriculum review and funding criteria that embrace methodological pluralism.</li></ul>	
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