

Epistemological Sovereignty and Institutional Constraints

A Comparative Analysis of African Studies Research in Nigeria, 2000–2026

Ifeoma Nwachukwu¹, Chinwe Okonkwo², Adebayo Adeyemi^{1,2}

Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS) | Department of Advanced Studies, Agricultural Research
Council of Nigeria (ARCN)

Correspondence: inwachukwu@aol.com

Received: 31 May 2003 | Accepted: 12 August 2003 | Published: 06 September 2003 | DOI:

[10.5281/zenodo.18944433](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18944433)

ABSTRACT

The decolonisation of knowledge production, particularly within African Studies, remains a critical intellectual project. Within this context, the capacity for African scholars to exercise epistemological sovereignty—the authority to define frameworks and priorities—is often mediated by institutional structures. This comparative study analyses the interplay between the pursuit of epistemological sovereignty and the institutional constraints faced by researchers in the field of African Studies within Nigeria. It aims to identify key structural challenges and to assess prospects for a more autonomous research ecosystem. The research employs a comparative institutional analysis, drawing on documentary analysis of funding bodies, university policies, and research outputs, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with a purposively sampled cohort of senior and early-career academics across multiple universities. A dominant theme was the constraining influence of external funding agendas, with approximately 70% of interviewees reporting that their research questions were significantly shaped by donor priorities. This was compounded by a perceived marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems within mainstream departmental curricula and promotion criteria. The aspiration for epistemological sovereignty is substantially circumscribed by entrenched institutional and financial dependencies, which collectively orient research towards externally validated paradigms and marginalise locally grounded epistemologies. Universities should develop internal research grants specifically for projects employing indigenous frameworks. Professional associations must advocate for the revision of academic promotion criteria to value community-engaged scholarship and publications in African-led journals. This paper provides a novel comparative framework for analysing the structural determinants of research autonomy, demonstrating how funding mechanisms and promotion policies collectively constrain epistemic agency in African Studies.

Keywords: *Decolonisation of knowledge, Epistemological sovereignty, African Studies, Research capacity, Nigeria, Comparative analysis, Institutional constraints*

Article Highlights

- 70% of scholars report research questions shaped by external donor priorities.
- Institutional structures marginalize indigenous knowledge systems in curricula and promotion.
- Financial dependencies constrain epistemic agency and locally grounded research.
- A call for internal grants and revised promotion criteria to support autonomous scholarship.

Core Argument

Epistemological sovereignty in Nigerian African Studies is systematically constrained by institutional frameworks that prioritise external funding agendas and marginalize indigenous epistemologies.

This analysis reveals the structural tensions between decolonial ambition and institutional reality.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

REQUEST FULL PAPER

 **Email:** info@parj.africa

Request your copy of the full paper today!

SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH

Are you a researcher in Africa? We welcome your submissions!

Join our community of African scholars and share your groundbreaking work.

 **Submit at:** app.parj.africa



Scan to visit app.parj.africa

Open Access Scholarship from PARJ

Empowering African Research | Advancing Global Knowledge