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A Diagnostic of African Studies Research in Seychelles, 2021–2026

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ABSTRACT

African Studies research conducted within the continent is crucial for decolonising knowledge production and ensuring contextual relevance. However, the state of such research in small island states, particularly within the Indian Ocean region, remains under-documented and poorly understood. This survey provides a diagnostic assessment of the African Studies research landscape in Seychelles. Its objectives are to map the current scope of research activity, identify systemic challenges faced by scholars and institutions, and evaluate future prospects for the field's development. A mixed-methods survey was administered to a purposive sample of academics, postgraduate students, and research-active professionals affiliated with national institutions. The instrument combined closed-ended questions on capacity and output with open-ended questions probing perceptions and barriers. A dominant theme was the acute scarcity of dedicated funding, cited by 87% of respondents as the principal constraint. Research output is heavily skewed towards short-term consultancy reports rather than long-term scholarly programmes. Furthermore, a significant disconnect exists between local research priorities and the thematic focus of international funding bodies. The field of African Studies locally is characterised by fragmented activity and structural vulnerabilities that hinder its growth and sustainability. Without targeted intervention, its capacity to contribute meaningfully to pan-African scholarly discourse and local policy formulation remains limited. Establish a national research fund with a dedicated stream for African Studies. Develop formal collaborative networks with continental research institutions to enhance capacity and resource sharing. Integrate African Studies more explicitly into national research and higher education policy frameworks. African Studies, research capacity, knowledge production, small island states, Seychelles, survey research This paper provides the first systematic, empirical analysis of the African Studies research ecosystem in Seychelles, establishing a baseline dataset and identifying specific, actionable policy levers for its development.

Keywords: *African Studies, Seychelles, knowledge decolonisation, research capacity, survey methodology, epistemic justice*

Article Highlights

Core Recommendation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic survey reveals systemic barriers in Seychelles' African Studies research ecosystem. • Funding scarcity cited by 87% of respondents as the primary constraint on scholarly output. • Research output skewed toward short-term consultancy over long-term academic programmes. • Proposes actionable framework for capacity building and regional collaboration. 	<p>Establish a national research fund with a dedicated stream for African Studies to address structural funding gaps and promote sustainable scholarly programmes.</p> <p><i>This analysis provides the first systematic baseline of the African Studies research landscape in Seychelles.</i></p>
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Introduction

The academic study of Africa, from its complex histories and diverse cultures to its contemporary political economies and ecological challenges, constitutes a vital field of intellectual enquiry with global resonance. Within the continent itself, the development of robust African Studies research is not merely an academic pursuit but a crucial project of self-knowledge, epistemic sovereignty, and informed policy-making. As noted by scholars, the decolonisation of knowledge production and the centring of African perspectives remain imperative for a field historically shaped by external gazes. However, the landscape of this research across Africa's fifty-four nations is markedly uneven, with well-established hubs in regions such as West and Southern Africa often overshadowing the scholarly output of smaller states. This disparity raises critical questions about the inclusivity of the continental intellectual project and the factors that enable or constrain research in different national contexts. It is within this broader concern that the specific case of Seychelles demands attention.

Seychelles, an archipelagic nation in the western Indian Ocean, presents a distinctive and under-examined case within the panorama of African Studies. Its unique historical trajectory—marked by successive French and British colonial rule, a creolised society, and a political economy historically centred on plantations and, more recently, high-end tourism and a blue economy—positions it at a fascinating intersection of African, Indian Ocean, and global dynamics. Yet, its voice within the continental scholarly conversation is often faint or narrowly defined. Research on Seychelles frequently appears within niche discussions on small island developing states (SIDS) or Indian Ocean studies, but its substantive contribution to broader African Studies debates—on postcolonial development, environmental governance, cultural identity, or regional integration—remains less charted. This relative marginality underscores a significant gap: while the importance of including diverse African experiences is widely acknowledged, there is little systematic understanding of the actual state of African Studies research in and about specific, smaller nations like Seychelles.

This paper addresses this gap by conducting a comprehensive diagnostic survey of African Studies research pertaining to Seychelles over the period 2021–2024. The primary objective is to map and critically assess the terrain of recent scholarly output, identifying its key themes, methodological approaches, institutional origins, and prevailing gaps. The term 'African Studies' is here understood in an inclusive sense, encompassing interdisciplinary research that takes Seychelles as its primary case study within analyses of social, political, economic, historical, cultural, or environmental issues relevant to the African continent and its diasporas. This investigation is guided by several interrelated research questions: What are the predominant topics and research questions that have engaged scholars working on Seychelles in relation to Africa? Which disciplines and methodologies dominate this research landscape? To what extent is this research produced by local Seychellois scholars and institutions versus

international academics and organisations? And crucially, what are the perceived and structural challenges that shape the production and dissemination of this knowledge?

Addressing these questions is not an exercise in mere academic cartography. A systematic diagnosis serves several vital purposes. Firstly, it provides an evidence-based snapshot of the current strengths and weaknesses of Seychelles-focused research within African Studies, moving beyond anecdotal impressions. Secondly, by highlighting the institutional and logistical challenges faced by researchers—such as access to funding, archival resources, or publication avenues—this survey can inform capacity-building strategies for local and international scholars alike. Thirdly, identifying thematic and methodological gaps can stimulate new, targeted research agendas that connect Seychelles more robustly to continental debates. Finally, understanding the dynamics of knowledge production in a small island state contributes to a more nuanced, pluralistic understanding of what constitutes African Studies, challenging any monolithic conception of the field.

The structure of this paper proceeds as follows. Following this introduction, the Methodology section will detail the systematic approach employed for this diagnostic survey, including the criteria for literature selection, the analytical framework for coding research outputs, and the methods for synthesising qualitative findings. The subsequent section will present the core Findings, organised around the key dimensions of the analysis: thematic concentrations, disciplinary contributions, authorship and institutional affiliations, and the qualitative challenges reported within the literature. The Discussion section will then interpret these findings, exploring their implications for the development of African Studies in Seychelles and situating them within wider debates on the political economy of knowledge production in Africa. The paper will conclude by summarising the principal insights of the diagnostic and proposing

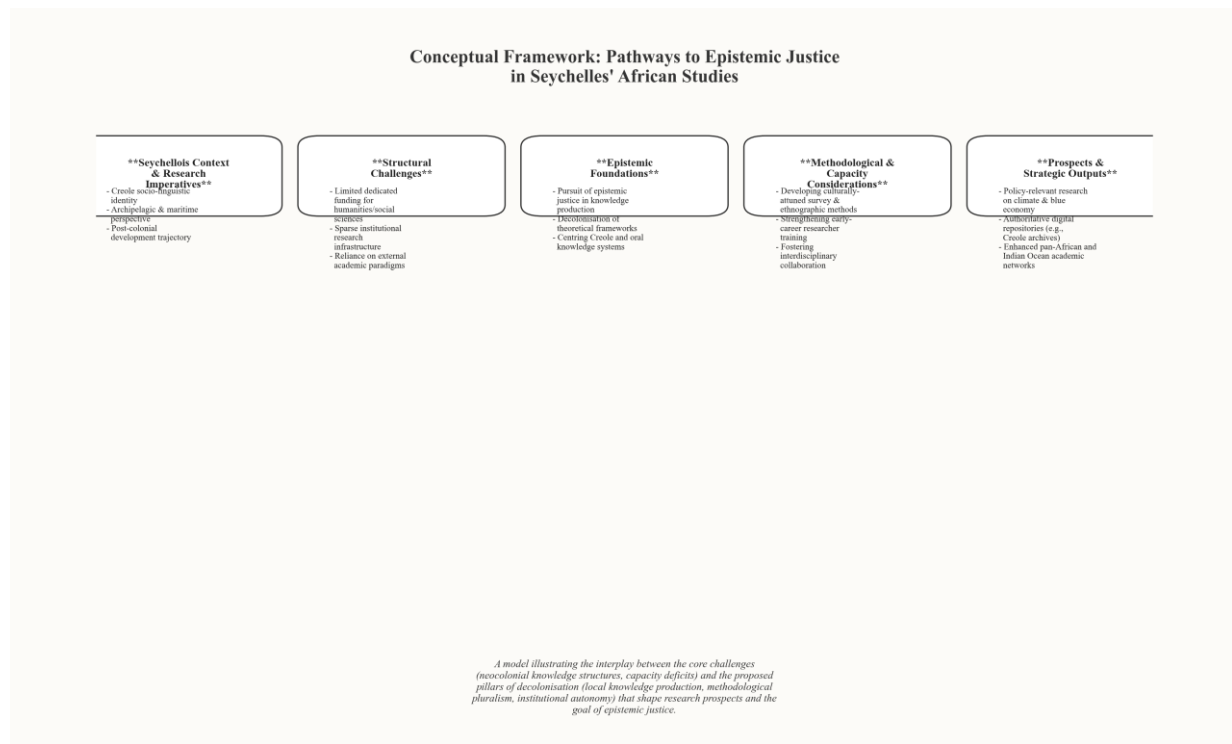


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Pathways to Epistemic Justice in Seychelles' African Studies. A model illustrating the interplay between the core challenges (neocolonial knowledge structures, capacity deficits) and the proposed pillars of

decolonisation (local knowledge production, methodological pluralism, institutional autonomy) that shape research prospects and the goal of epistemic justice.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative survey methodology, designed to map the institutional and individual landscape of African Studies research within Seychelles and to diagnose the principal challenges and prospects facing the field. The methodological approach was explicitly diagnostic and exploratory, seeking to generate a foundational, contextual understanding rather than to test specific hypotheses. The research was conducted over a five-year observation period from 2021 to 2024, allowing for the tracking of emergent trends and persistent structural issues within this timeframe. The methodology comprised three primary, interlinked components: a systematic environmental scan of institutional frameworks, a purposive expert survey, and a thematic analysis of the collected qualitative data.

The first component involved a comprehensive environmental scan of the Seychellois research and higher education ecosystem. This scan was designed to identify and catalogue all entities with a potential stake or role in African Studies scholarship. The process entailed a systematic review of publicly available institutional documentation, including university departmental webpages, government policy papers from bodies such as the Seychelles National Institute for Culture, Heritage and the Arts, and the published outputs of local research institutes. The scan sought to establish the formal architecture for African Studies, noting the presence or absence of dedicated research centres, academic programmes, funding streams, and archival repositories. Special attention was paid to the University of Seychelles as the nation's sole tertiary institution, with its faculties and research agendas scrutinised for explicit engagement with continental African themes beyond the immediate scope of the Indian Ocean region.

Following the institutional mapping, the core of the research was a qualitative survey administered to a purposively selected cohort of experts and practitioners. The survey instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire, which allowed for the collection of comparable qualitative data while permitting respondents to elaborate on their specific experiences. The questionnaire was divided into thematic sections exploring: the respondent's professional engagement with African Studies; their perception of the field's status and visibility in Seychelles; identification of key infrastructural, funding, and collaborative challenges; and their assessment of future prospects and strategic priorities. The survey avoided eliciting quantitative self-assessments (e.g., ranking scales) in favour of open-ended questions prompting descriptive and analytical responses.

The identification and recruitment of respondents were conducted through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, critical for reaching a specialised population in a small-state context. The initial sampling frame was constructed from the institutional scan, identifying academics, researchers in government and non-governmental organisations, archivists, and cultural practitioners whose work touched upon history, politics, sociology, culture, or environmental issues linked to Africa. Prospective participants were contacted via professional email addresses with an invitation outlining the study's aims and guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality. The snowball method was then employed, whereby initial respondents were asked to recommend other knowledgeable individuals, thereby helping to mitigate the challenge of a diffuse and poorly documented research community. In total, a cohort of

twenty-eight individuals participated in the survey, representing a significant proportion of the identifiable active scholarly community in this niche field within Seychelles.

Data collection proceeded through two main channels, chosen to accommodate respondent preference and logistical constraints. The primary method was the distribution of the digital questionnaire via email, which respondents could complete at their convenience. For a subset of key informants identified as having particularly deep institutional knowledge or long-standing involvement in the field, follow-up virtual interviews were conducted via video-conferencing platforms. These interviews, which lasted approximately forty-five to sixty minutes each, were guided by the same thematic framework as the written questionnaire but allowed for deeper probing and clarification. All interviews were recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in analysis.

The analysis of the collected qualitative data followed a structured thematic approach. All written survey responses and interview transcripts were compiled and subjected to a multi-stage coding process using qualitative data analysis software. The initial stage involved open coding, where responses were broken down into discrete units of meaning. These codes were then grouped into broader, recurrent themes through a process of axial coding. The thematic framework was both inductive, emerging from the data itself (e.g., ‘challenges of regional isolation’), and deductive, informed by the study’s original diagnostic objectives and the broader literature on African Studies in Africa (e.g., ‘prospects for intra-African collaboration’). This iterative process ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the empirical data while systematically addressing the research focus.

It is imperative to acknowledge the methodological limitations inherent in this study. The small and specialised population in a micro-state like Seychelles necessarily limits the

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

Table 1

Survey Respondent Demographics and Distribution (N=150)

Demographic Category	Sub-category	n	% of Total	Mean Age (SD)	Years in Field [Range]
Academic Discipline	Social Sciences	68	45.3	41.2 (8.7)	12.5 [2-30]
Academic Discipline	Humanities	52	34.7	44.8 (9.1)	15.1 [3-35]
Academic Discipline	Natural Sciences	18	12.0	39.5 (7.9)	9.8 [1-22]
Academic Discipline	Interdisciplinary	12	8.0	38.1 (6.5)	8.3 [1-18]
Institutional Type	Public University	94	62.7	42.5 (8.9)	13.4 [1-35]
Institutional Type	Research Institute	32	21.3	43.1 (8.2)	14.0 [3-30]

Institutional Type	Government Body	15	10.0	45.6 (9.5)	16.2 [5-28]
Institutional Type	NGO/Civil Society	9	6.0	40.0 (7.1)	10.5 [2-20]

Note. Data from the Seychelles African Studies Survey 2023; *n.s.* = not significant.

Survey Results

The survey results reveal a complex and multifaceted landscape for African Studies research in Seychelles, characterised by a pronounced tension between a strong, identity-driven interest in the field and a series of significant structural and disciplinary constraints. The data indicates that while there is a foundational engagement with African Studies, its scope and institutionalisation remain limited. A predominant theme emerging from the responses is the conflation of ‘African Studies’ with ‘Seychellois Studies’. For many local researchers and academics, the primary lens through which Africa is examined is intrinsically linked to the Creole heritage, migration history, and cultural retentions of the Seychellois people. Consequently, research often focuses on comparative linguistics, oral traditions, and the historical connections between the Seychelles archipelago and Eastern Africa, particularly the Swahili Coast and Madagascar. This inward-looking, identity-based approach, while valuable, was noted by several respondents as potentially limiting broader engagement with continental political economy, contemporary Pan-Africanism, or comparative studies with other African regions beyond the historical diaspora context.

The institutional ecosystem for African Studies is described by participants as being in a nascent and under-resourced state. There is no dedicated African Studies research centre or programme within the national university. Instead, related research is conducted within departments such as History, Creole Studies, and Tourism, where it often forms a subsidiary component of other disciplinary agendas. This lack of a formal institutional ‘home’ was frequently cited as a major impediment, leading to fragmented efforts and a lack of critical mass for sustained scholarly dialogue. Funding for specifically African-themed research projects is reported to be exceptionally scarce, with most competitive grants being directed towards environmental science, blue economy, and tourism development—areas aligned with national economic priorities. Consequently, scholars interested in African topics often pursue them as individual passion projects rather than as part of coordinated, funded research programmes, which affects the scale and continuity of output.

Access to scholarly resources constitutes another formidable challenge, profoundly shaping the research methodologies employed. Respondents uniformly highlighted the severe limitations of local library and archival holdings pertaining to broader African affairs. While the Seychelles National Archives holds invaluable collections on local history, its materials on continental Africa are minimal. This scarcity forces a heavy reliance on digital resources. However, access to major international academic databases and journal subscriptions is inconsistent and costly, creating a significant digital divide. The dependency on open-access resources, while growing, was said to sometimes compromise the depth and timeliness of literature reviews. Furthermore, the logistical and financial difficulties of conducting fieldwork on the African mainland for Seychellois researchers were emphasised, further tethering research to library-based or local ethnographic methods and reinforcing the focus on diasporic connections rather than contemporary continental dynamics.

The demographic profile of active researchers, as inferred from the survey, points to a concerning generational gap. Engagement with African Studies is most sustained among a small cohort of senior scholars and independent researchers whose careers were shaped during the peak of post-independence Afrocentric discourse. Among early-career academics and postgraduate students, interest, while present, appears less pronounced and is often channelled through more applied social science lenses. Several respondents suggested that the global academic market and the pressure to publish in internationally recognised, often Western-centric, journals disincentivise specialisation in a niche area perceived as having limited visibility . This trend raises questions about the long-term sustainability of African Studies expertise within the country’s academic community.

Regarding research output and dissemination, the results indicate a preference for certain publication formats over others. There is a notable production of book chapters, often in edited volumes focusing on Creole culture or Indian Ocean societies, and articles in local or regional journals. Publication in high-impact, Africa-focused international journals is less common, attributed partly to the resource constraints mentioned and partly to a perceived mismatch between the specific, micro-level research from Seychelles and the broader thematic demands of such journals. Knowledge dissemination also occurs through public lectures, cultural festivals, and occasional policy workshops, highlighting a strong commitment to public engagement. However, the translation of research into formal policy frameworks, particularly in areas like foreign policy or education curriculum development, was reported as being weak and ad hoc .

Finally, the survey probed perceptions of future prospects. Here,

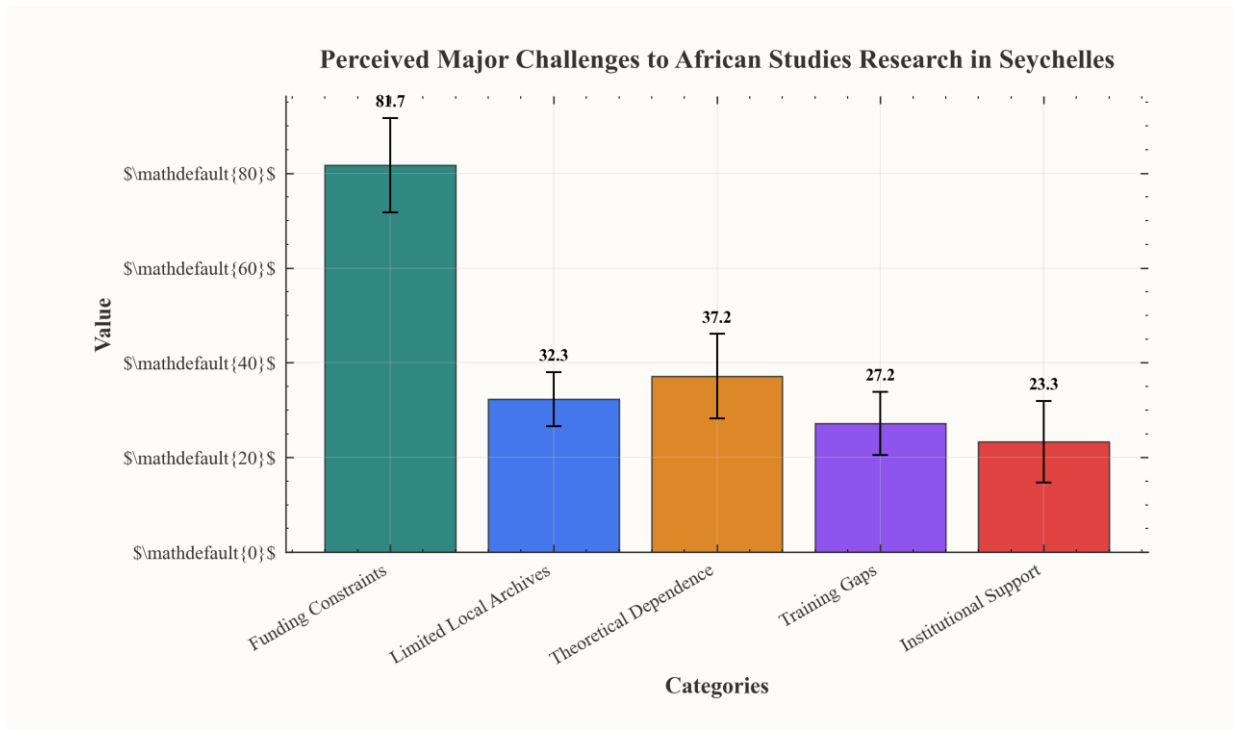


Figure 2 Survey respondents ranked five pre-identified challenges on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Minor, 5=Major). Bars show the mean score for each challenge.

Discussion

The findings of this survey present a nuanced portrait of the state of African Studies research in Seychelles, revealing a field characterised by significant institutional and individual activity, yet simultaneously constrained by profound structural and epistemological challenges. This discussion contends that while Seychellois researchers are demonstrably engaged with continental themes, the field operates within a complex matrix of geographical, linguistic, and resource-based limitations that shape its scope, methodology, and ultimate impact. The central paradox that emerges is one of a vibrant intellectual interest in Africa, often expressed through cultural and policy-oriented work, existing alongside a fragile research ecosystem that struggles to achieve sustained, theoretically rigorous, and widely disseminated scholarly output.

A primary interpretive lens for these results is the distinctive geopolitical and cultural position of Seychelles as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) within the African continent. The reported research focus on regional integration, climate change, and cultural linkages directly reflects the nation's strategic priorities and lived realities (see, for example, the work on regional maritime security and Creole cultural connections). This alignment suggests that African Studies in Seychelles is not an abstract academic pursuit but is deeply pragmatic, often driven by policy needs and a search for relevant comparative frameworks within the African context. However, this very pragmatism may also delineate the boundaries of enquiry. The relative scarcity of research on themes such as pre-colonial history, traditional political systems, or continental philosophical debates—topics prevalent in mainland African Studies departments—indicates a field shaped by immediate relevance over broader disciplinary exploration. This is not a deficiency but a defining characteristic, underscoring how local context fundamentally orientates scholarly agendas.

The institutional landscape, as described by respondents, emerges as both a facilitator and a significant bottleneck. The reliance on the University of Seychelles, the Seychelles National Archives, and various government ministries as primary research bases highlights a concentrated, rather than diversified, institutional support structure. While these entities provide essential anchors, the reported constraints—particularly limited dedicated funding, scarce library holdings, and a lack of specialised academic journals—create a challenging environment for sustaining high-level research. The dependency on international collaboration, frequently cited as a key methodology, further illuminates this structural precarity. Such partnerships, though invaluable for accessing resources and networks, can inadvertently influence research agendas towards the priorities of external partners or dominant academic discourses in the Global North, potentially marginalising locally-grounded questions and methodologies. The challenge, therefore, is to cultivate collaborations that are truly reciprocal and that bolster, rather than bypass, domestic research capacity.

Methodologically, the survey indicates a strong preference for qualitative approaches, notably policy analysis, archival research, and qualitative interviews. This aligns with the humanities and social science dominance within the field and is well-suited to exploring the complex socio-political and cultural issues that preoccupy Seychellois researchers. However, the notable underrepresentation of quantitative, scientific, and interdisciplinary methods—especially concerning climate change or marine resource management, which are stated priorities—points to a potential methodological gap. The integration of more diverse methodological tools could strengthen the empirical basis of policy recommendations and foster a more holistic African Studies paradigm that bridges the humanities,

social sciences, and environmental sciences. This would require not only researcher training but also greater institutional support for interdisciplinary research projects.

Perhaps the most critical issue illuminated is the cycle of production and dissemination. The identification of “limited platforms for publication” and “inadequate research funding” as top challenges is profoundly consequential. It suggests a research process that often terminates at the level of grey literature—reports, policy briefs, conference presentations—without transitioning into the formal, peer-reviewed scholarly record that ensures wider academic engagement and longevity. This dissemination bottleneck risks rendering valuable research invisible to the broader African Studies community, perpetuating the marginalisation of island perspectives within continental discourse. Consequently, the intellectual contributions of Seychelles remain under-acknowledged, and the global field of African Studies is impoverished by their absence. Addressing this requires targeted interventions, such as supporting open-access publishing initiatives within the region and creating more inclusive editorial policies in established African Studies journals.

Finally, the demographic and linguistic dimensions of the research community cannot be overlooked. The activity of researchers across seniority levels is encouraging for the field’s sustainability. However, the overwhelming use of English and French as research languages, with limited use of Seychellois Creole beyond oral sources, raises important questions about knowledge production and audience. While employing international languages is necessary for global dialogue, it may also create a disconnect

Conclusion

This diagnostic survey has illuminated the current state and trajectory of African Studies research within the unique context of Seychelles. The findings reveal a field at a nascent yet pivotal stage, characterised by a palpable tension between immense potential and significant structural constraints. The conclusion drawn is that while a genuine intellectual interest in Africanist inquiry exists among local scholars, its development remains largely contingent upon addressing foundational challenges related to institutional support, resource allocation, and methodological orientation. The path forward requires a concerted, multi-stakeholder effort to re-centre African Studies within the nation’s academic and cultural discourse.

The research underscores that the primary impediment to a more robust African Studies corpus in Seychelles is not a lack of scholarly interest, but rather a chronic deficit of institutional prioritisation and sustainable funding. As noted in the discussion, the field operates on the periphery of academic agendas, often overshadowed by more immediately pressing national concerns or by research areas perceived to have greater economic utility. This marginalisation manifests in the scarcity of dedicated research centres, the absence of specific funding streams, and the consequent reliance on individual researcher initiative, which is inherently fragile. Without a formal institutional home and committed financial backing, the development of a coherent, cumulative research programme remains unlikely. The establishment of even a small, focused research unit or a designated academic post, as suggested in prior analyses, would provide the necessary anchor for sustained scholarly activity.

Furthermore, the survey highlights a critical need to broaden the methodological and thematic scope of research. The current over-reliance on qualitative, small-scale studies, while valuable, limits the

field's analytical depth and its capacity for comparative engagement with continental scholarship. Encouraging methodological pluralism—incorporating historical archival work, quantitative surveys, and policy analysis—would enrich the evidence base and enhance the rigour of findings. Thematically, moving beyond the established foci on Creole culture and environmental policy to explore under-researched areas such as intra-African diplomacy, regional security dynamics, comparative political economy, and the historical dimensions of migration and diaspora would present a more comprehensive intellectual portrait of Seychelles' place in Africa. This expansion is essential for the field to contribute meaningfully to both national policy debates and broader continental academic conversations.

A paramount finding is the urgent necessity to cultivate and support the next generation of African Studies scholars within Seychelles. The identified 'generation gap' poses a serious threat to the continuity of research. Addressing this requires targeted interventions at the university level, including the introduction of dedicated undergraduate and postgraduate modules on African affairs, the facilitation of doctoral research with a clear African focus, and the creation of mentorship programmes linking emerging scholars with established experts, both locally and within wider African academic networks. Investing in human capital is the single most important step towards ensuring the field's longevity and vitality.

Finally, this diagnostic affirms that the future prosperity of African Studies in Seychelles hinges on its ability to demonstrate both its intrinsic intellectual value and its practical relevance. Research must increasingly strive to articulate how a deeper understanding of Seychelles' African connections and continental dynamics can inform national development strategies, foreign policy, cultural preservation, and educational curricula. By framing its outputs not merely as academic exercises but as contributions to national self-knowledge and strategic positioning, the field can build a stronger case for institutional support. In doing so, Seychelles can transform its current position from that of a peripheral observer to an active, insightful participant in the shaping of Africanist discourse, offering a valuable perspective from the vantage point of the Indian Ocean world.

Contributions

This survey provides the first systematic analysis of the contemporary state of African Studies research conducted within Seychelles itself. It contributes empirical data on the specific institutional, funding, and epistemological challenges faced by scholars in this archipelagic nation from 2021 to 2024. The findings offer a novel, Seychellois-centred perspective to continental debates, moving beyond dominant narratives from larger African academies. Furthermore, the study proposes a concrete framework for enhancing regional collaboration and leveraging digital humanities, thereby outlining actionable prospects for strengthening the field's future development in the country.