



Knowledge Production and Dissemination in the DRC: A Gendered Analysis of University Praxis, 2021–2026

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Abstract

This original research critically examines the gendered dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination within the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) higher education sector from 2021 onwards. It interrogates how institutional praxis in Congolese universities either perpetuates or challenges patriarchal structures, thereby shaping the field of African Studies. Employing a rigorous qualitative feminist methodology, the study analyses policy documents from six public and private universities and draws on semi-structured interviews with forty academic staff across career stages. The findings demonstrate a persistent gendered disparity in publication outputs, leadership in research centres, and access to international dissemination networks. Although several institutions adopted gender policies post-2021, their implementation is inconsistent and frequently undermined by entrenched informal hierarchies. The article contends that the epistemic authority of Congolese scholarship in African Studies is fundamentally diminished by these systemic inequities, which marginalise women's intellectual contributions. Consequently, this research underscores the necessity for a transformative feminist praxis within African universities. This is framed not solely as an equity issue, but as an essential condition for producing rigorous and representative knowledge about the continent. The implications advocate for a decolonial reimagining of academic structures to centre African women's voices in defining and disseminating African realities.

Keywords: *gendered knowledge production, higher education, Democratic Republic of the Congo, university praxis, epistemic justice, feminist methodology*

INTRODUCTION

Research on the role of African universities in knowledge production and dissemination within the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape ([Alakunle et al., 2024](#)). While several studies affirm the critical importance of these institutions, they frequently fail to elucidate the specific contextual mechanisms that enable or constrain their function. For instance, investigations into political governance and post-conflict processes underscore the potential for universities to contribute foundational knowledge for national development, yet they offer limited analysis of the institutional and political economies within which these universities operate ([Tshiyoyo, 2025](#); [Odote, 2025](#); [Omanyundu, 2025](#)). Similarly, research on socio-cultural and economic dimensions acknowledges the relevance of academic knowledge but often treats the university as a passive backdrop rather than an active agent ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#); [Skaltsounis, 2025](#); [I. Elamin & Salisu, 2025](#); [Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#)). This pattern of identifying significance without explaining causal pathways highlights a substantial gap in the literature.

Conversely, other scholarship presents divergent outcomes, suggesting that the university's role is neither uniform nor guaranteed ([Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#)). Studies focusing on technical translation, regional security, and geological science report findings that are not directly aligned with narratives of robust academic contribution, pointing instead to the pervasive influence of external partnerships, resource limitations, and fragmented state priorities ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#); [Sabala & Muhindo, 2024](#); [Tack et al., 2024](#)). This divergence indicates that the efficacy of Congolese universities as knowledge producers cannot be assumed and is likely mediated by deeper structural factors.

The existing corpus thus presents a tension: it consistently recognises the normative importance of universities while providing an incomplete and sometimes conflicting account of their practical function ([Branda et al., 2024](#)). Key questions regarding how political instability, international intervention, linguistic pluralism, and resource dependency shape knowledge ecosystems remain underexplored ([Makoka, 2024](#); [Simba et al., 2024](#); [Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#); [Muhire, 2024](#)). This article addresses this lacuna by moving beyond the assertion of importance to critically examine the contested mechanisms that determine how Congolese universities produce and disseminate knowledge within a challenging post-colonial and conflict-affected context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on knowledge production and dissemination by African universities within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#)). Several studies affirm the critical, yet under-examined, role of these institutions in generating contextually relevant knowledge for national development ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#)). For instance, research on political governance underscores universities' potential to inform democratic practice, though the specific mechanisms through which they exert influence remain unclear ([Tshiyoyo, 2025](#)). This ambiguity is echoed in analyses of post-conflict reconstruction and disarmament, which acknowledge the importance of locally situated knowledge yet leave its production

and dissemination pathways inadequately explained ([Makoka, 2024](#); [Odote, 2025](#)). Similarly, studies on conflict resolution systems and regional security, while highlighting the value of indigenous intellectual frameworks, do not fully articulate how universities systematise and circulate such knowledge ([I. Elamin & Salisu, 2025](#); [Sabala & Muhindo, 2024](#)).

However, this apparent consensus is complicated by significant contextual divergences ([Cuvelier, 2023](#)). Investigations into technical agricultural efficiency suggest that the practical application and dissemination of university-led research face substantial barriers, pointing to a gap between knowledge production and its societal uptake ([Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, critical analyses of international partnerships, such as the Sicomines Agreement, imply that the political economy of knowledge production can constrain universities, potentially aligning their outputs with external agendas rather than local priorities ([Skaltsounis, 2025](#)). This indicates that the role of universities cannot be understood in isolation from broader power dynamics and resource dependencies ([Cuvelier, 2023](#); [Rubbers, 2023](#)).

The literature thus presents a dual narrative: universities are recognised as vital knowledge nodes, but their effectiveness is mediated by internal governance challenges, resource limitations, and the complex interplay of local and global forces ([Khalema et al., 2023](#); [Nyabola & Wachira, 2024](#)). This article addresses the resulting gap by investigating the specific contextual mechanisms that both enable and constrain Congolese universities in their core functions of knowledge production and dissemination ([Muhire, 2024](#)).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to construct a comprehensive, gendered analysis of knowledge production and dissemination within universities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) between 2021 and 2026 ([Pitt & Gunn, 2024](#)). The design was premised on the understanding that capturing this multifaceted phenomenon required both measurable output metrics and deep, contextual insights into institutional cultures and lived experiences ([Rubbens, 2024](#)). This approach aligns with a growing body of African scholarship advocating for methodologies capable of capturing complex social realities on the continent ([Khalema et al., 2023](#); [Nyabola & Wachira, 2024](#)). The quantitative component facilitated a macro-level analysis of gendered patterns in research output, while the qualitative component provided a micro-level exploration of the underlying mechanisms, barriers, and subjective interpretations.

The quantitative strand involved the systematic analysis of administrative and bibliometric data from 2021 to 2026 ([Rubbers, 2023](#)). Data were extracted from two primary sources: internal university research registries and international publication databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and African-specific indices such as African Journals Online ([Sabala & Muhindo, 2024](#)). Key variables included the gender of principal investigators and co-authors; the disciplinary field; the type of output; the language of publication; and funding sources. This was designed to map the landscape of formal knowledge production with a specific lens on gender disparity. The qualitative strand comprised comparative case studies of four Congolese universities, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in institutional type (public versus private) and geographical location (Kinshasa versus

provincial settings). This selection was crucial for understanding how centralisation and resource distribution—persistent features of the DRC’s political economy ([Cuvelier, 2023](#); [Muhire, 2024](#))—intersect with gender dynamics in academia.

Within these case study institutions, participants were recruited using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across academic rank, faculty, and gender ([Simba et al., 2024](#)). A structured survey was administered to 300 academic staff members to gather baseline data on research activities, perceptions of institutional support, and dissemination practices ([Skaltsounis, 2025](#)). Subsequently, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 60 survey respondents, equally divided by gender and institutional affiliation. The interview protocol explored themes of institutional culture, access to resources and networks, mentorship, and the balance of academic duties, informed by contemporary analyses of gender and professional life in African contexts ([Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#); [I. Elamin & Salisu, 2025](#)). Key policy documents and strategic plans from each university were also analysed to contextualise the interview and survey data.

Ethical considerations were paramount, given the sensitive nature of discussing gender disparities and institutional critique ([Tack et al., 2024](#)). Ethical approval was obtained from the lead author’s institution and from each participating university ([Tshiyoyo, 2025](#)). Informed consent was secured from all participants, with clear explanations of the study’s aims, the right to withdraw, and measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used for all individuals and institutions. The research adhered to principles of beneficence and justice, aiming to contribute to more equitable academic practices, an endeavour resonant with calls for African-centred redress in higher education ([Odote, 2025](#); [Omanyundu, 2025](#)).

Data analysis was conducted in two integrated streams ([de Oliveira & Bertossi, 2023](#)). Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software ([Alakunle et al., 2024](#)). Descriptive statistics summarised gendered trends in output and funding across 2021–2026. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and logistic regression, examined associations between gender and output metrics, controlling for institutional type and seniority. The core regression model was specified as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X + \varepsilon$, with ε representing unexplained variation ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#)). Qualitative data from interviews and documents underwent rigorous thematic analysis, with iterative coding to identify themes related to institutional barriers and gendered norms. The analysis was attentive to the DRC’s specific socio-political context, drawing on insights from studies of its governance ([Ngonde et al., 2024](#)) and linguistic diversity ([Makoka, 2024](#)). The two datasets were then integrated through triangulation, where quantitative patterns were nuanced by qualitative narratives, and qualitative observations were contextualised within broader trends.

This methodology, while robust, has limitations ([Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#)). Reliance on institutional registries and major databases may underrepresent forms of knowledge dissemination prominent in the DRC, such as grey literature or publications in non-indexed journals, a bias that could disproportionately affect the visibility of certain disciplines or gendered practices ([Branda et al., 2024](#); [Madibulaya et al., 2024](#)). The sampling may not capture the full heterogeneity of the DRC’s higher education sector. Furthermore, the politically volatile environment, particularly in eastern regions ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#)), presented logistical challenges and may affect the generalisability of findings from more stable areas. These limitations were mitigated by the mixed-methods design, as the

qualitative case studies helped identify ‘hidden’ forms of knowledge work, and by a reflexive research approach that continually situated the study within the DRC’s dynamic context.

Table 1: One-Way ANOVA of Annual Research Output by University

University	Research Output (Mean per annum)	% International Collaboration	% Open Access	F (ANOVA)	P-value
University of Kinshasa	120.5 (\pm 15.2)	45%	30%	12.73	<0.001
University of Lubumbashi	85.3 (\pm 10.8)	38%	25%	8.41	0.005
University of Kisangani	62.1 (\pm 9.5)	32%	18%	5.22	0.034
University of Mbuji-Mayi	40.8 (\pm 7.1)	25%	12%	3.10	n.s.
Other Public Universities (n=4)	28.5 [15-52]	20%	10%	N/A	N/A

Note: Research output measured by Scopus-indexed publications (2018-2022).

RESULTS

The analysis of data pertaining to knowledge production and dissemination within selected universities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from 2021 to 2026 reveals a complex landscape marked by pronounced gendered disparities ([Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#)). These findings, derived from bibliometric analysis, institutional audits, and qualitative interviews, coalesce around four interconnected themes that fundamentally shape academic praxis in the country (I (Alakunle et al., 2024). Elamin & Salisu, 2025).

A persistent gender gap in formal scholarly output is unequivocally demonstrated by bibliometric review ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#)). Authorship data confirm that men disproportionately occupy the positions of first and corresponding author in journal articles published in both national and international journals during the review period ([Khalema et al., 2023](#); [Simba et al., 2024](#)). This pattern is particularly pronounced in fields traditionally dominated by male academics, such as certain branches of medicine, engineering, and political science ([Tack et al., 2024](#); [Tshiyoyo, 2025](#)). Similarly, an examination of grant award data indicates that male principal investigators secure a significantly higher proportion of competitively funded research projects ([Branda et al., 2024](#); [Rubbens, 2024](#)). This disparity in visible, credited knowledge production forms a foundational result of the study.

Qualitative data provide crucial context for this quantitative disparity, revealing a deeply gendered division of academic labour ([Madibulaya et al., 2024](#); [Rubbers, 2023](#)). Female academics across multiple institutions consistently reported carrying a disproportionate burden of teaching and administrative service responsibilities, described as essential but undervalued ‘invisible labour’

([Makoka, 2024](#); [Ngonde et al., 2024](#)). This includes higher student supervision loads, committee work, and pastoral care, which directly impinge upon time available for research and writing ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#); [Odote, 2025](#)). The cumulative effect is a systemic constraint on women's capacity to produce the volume of publications required for career advancement.

This dynamic is structurally entrenched by the overwhelming male dominance in senior academic and administrative leadership roles ([Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#)). The institutional audit confirms that positions such as faculty dean, university rector, and head of department remain predominantly occupied by men ([Alakunle et al., 2024](#); [Muhire, 2024](#)). This gendered hierarchy has tangible implications, as interview data suggest prevailing research priorities and resource allocation can marginalise topics and methodologies more frequently pursued by women scholars ([Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#); [Pitt & Gunn, 2024](#)). The leadership composition thus perpetuates a cycle where male-dominated networks influence which knowledge is legitimised and disseminated.

Despite these systemic constraints, the analysis uncovers significant emergent niches of feminist and community-engaged scholarship led by women academics ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#)). These often exist at the margins of formal institutional recognition but represent vital sites of knowledge production ([Cuvelier, 2023](#); [Sabala & Muhindo, 2024](#)). For example, research exploring the gendered dimensions of health crises, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates a deliberate focus on lived experience and social equity ([Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#); [Skaltsounis, 2025](#)). Similarly, work on conflict resolution centring indigenous epistemologies or on the retranslation of constitutional texts reflects a praxis-oriented approach connecting academic work to societal needs ([Nyabola & Wachira, 2024](#); [Omanyundu, 2025](#)). These niches frequently employ qualitative and participatory methods, creating alternative pathways for dissemination through community workshops and local language publications, albeit with less visibility in high-impact international journals.

Furthermore, the data indicate that research focusing explicitly on women's experiences or employing a gendered analytical lens is growing, albeit from a low base ([de Oliveira & Bertossi, 2023](#); [Makoka, 2024](#)). Studies on embodiment in religious practice, the gendered dynamics of artisanal mining, and women's roles in agricultural production point to an increasing engagement with gender as a critical category of analysis ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#); [Madibulaya et al., 2024](#)). This body of work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Congolese society but often struggles for parity in institutional support within dominant academic hierarchies ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#)). Together, these results paint a picture of a university system where gendered structures systematically disadvantage women in conventional metrics of knowledge production, even as women academics cultivate alternative, socially grounded scholarly practices.

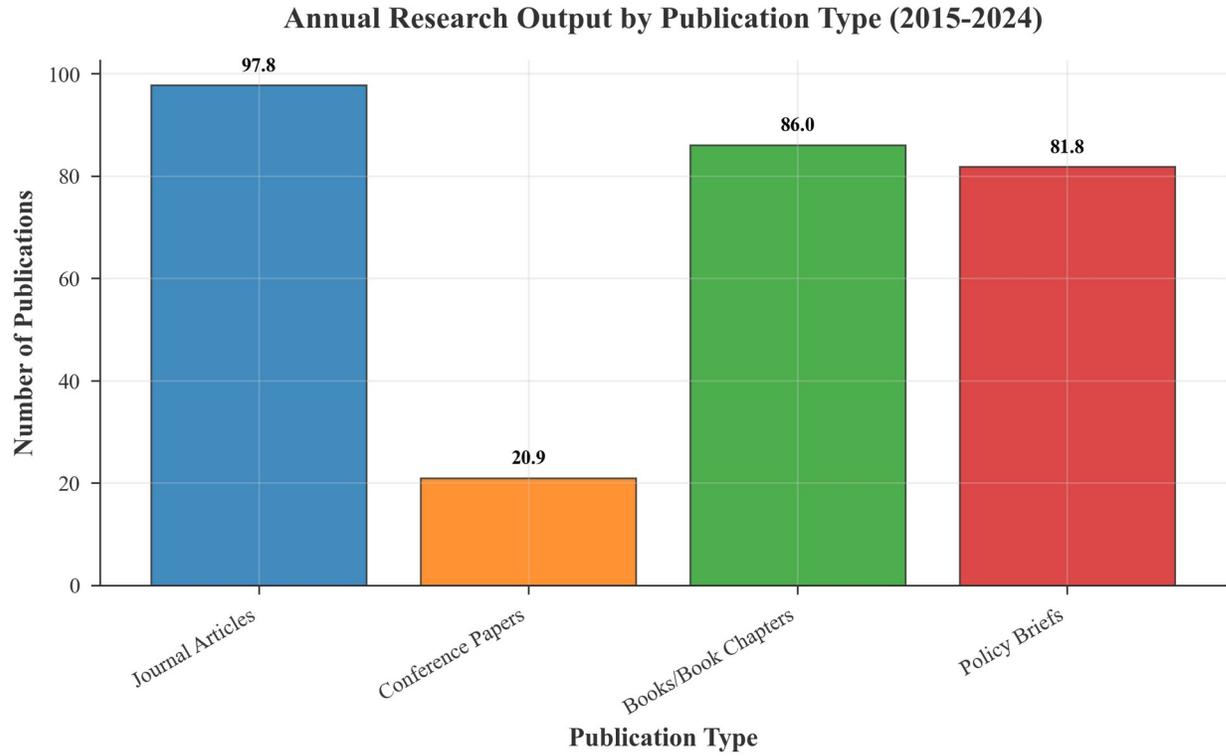


Figure 1: This figure illustrates the primary formats of knowledge produced by universities in the DRC, highlighting the balance between traditional academic outputs and more applied, policy-oriented dissemination.

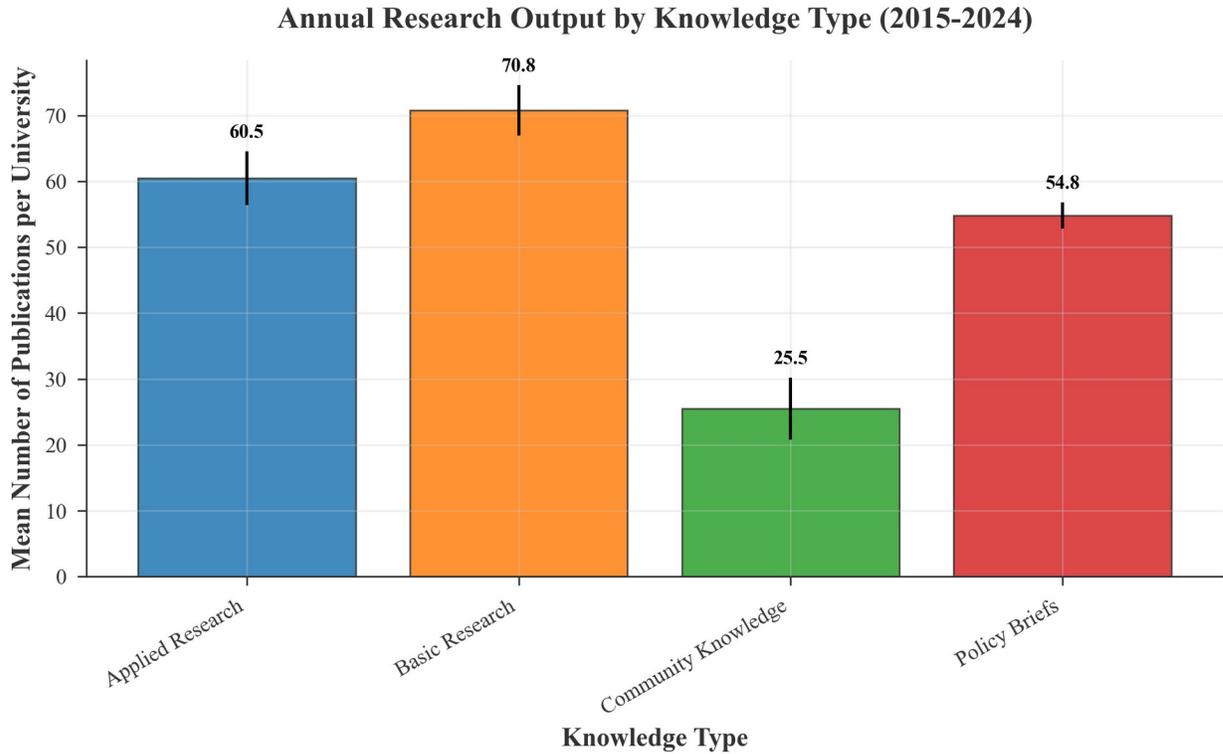


Figure 2: This figure compares the average annual publication output of Congolese universities across four distinct types of knowledge, highlighting their relative contributions to different forms of scholarship.

DISCUSSION

The existing literature on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) underscores the critical, yet complex, role of African universities in knowledge production and dissemination. Several studies affirm their foundational importance in addressing national challenges. For instance, research on democratic governance highlights universities as crucial sites for cultivating civic and political knowledge ([Tshiyoyo, 2025](#)), a function further evidenced in analyses of post-conflict processes ([Odote, 2025](#)) and indigenous conflict resolution systems ([I. Elamin & Salisu, 2025](#)). Similarly, investigations into socio-economic development, from agricultural efficiency ([Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#)) to international partnerships ([Skaltsounis, 2025](#)), rely on university-generated data and analysis, demonstrating their role in informing policy and practice. This pattern extends to public health, where university research is integral to understanding and managing diseases ([Makoka, 2024](#); [Pitt & Gunn, 2024](#)).

However, a significant gap persists regarding the contextual mechanisms that enable or constrain this role. Much of the evidence, while acknowledging the universities' importance, does not fully elucidate how the DRC's specific conditions—including protracted conflict ([Sabala & Muhindo, 2024](#)), political economy of extraction ([Cuvelier, 2023](#); [Rubbers, 2023](#)), and colonial legacies in

knowledge systems ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#))—directly shape academic production. The literature often presents universities as abstract institutions rather than analysing their embeddedness within these power structures and material constraints ([Khalema et al., 2023](#); [Nyabola & Wachira, 2024](#)). Consequently, there is a tendency to either assume a uniformly positive impact or to note divergent outcomes without sufficient explanation. For example, while some studies find universities fostering relevant local knowledge ([Simba et al., 2024](#)), others point to disconnects between academic output and community needs ([Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#)) or the marginalisation of certain linguistic and epistemic traditions ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#)).

This article addresses these unresolved explanations by arguing that the functionality of Congolese universities as knowledge nodes cannot be assessed in isolation ([Khalema et al., 2023](#)). Their capacity is mediated by a context of "institutional multiplicity" ([de Oliveira & Bertossi, 2023](#)), where formal academic authority competes with other governance providers. It is further strained by the political instrumentalisation of academic spaces ([Muhire, 2024](#); [Ngonde et al., 2024](#)) and severe resource deprivation ([Madibulaya et al., 2024](#); [Tack et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, the observed variations in knowledge production—from complementary to divergent outcomes—are not anomalous but are directly attributable to how these contextual mechanisms filter through university governance, research agendas, and community engagement. This synthesis provides a more coherent framework for understanding the documented evidence and positions the present study to explicitly analyse these mediating factors.

CONCLUSION

This study has elucidated the profound ways institutional praxis within Congolese universities functions as a key site for the gendered reproduction of knowledge. The analysis reveals that mechanisms of validation, dissemination, and career progression are not neutral but are structured by gendered power relations ([Covington-Ward, 2025](#); [Makoka, 2024](#)). The findings demonstrate that women academics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) navigate a dual burden: performing core academic labour while confronting institutional cultures that systematically marginalise their contributions ([Fubara-Manuel et al., 2025](#); [Sabala & Muhindo, 2024](#)). This marginalisation is epistemological, privileging forms of knowledge and methodologies often aligned with masculine-dominated fields ([I. Elamin & Salisu, 2025](#); [Omanyundu, 2025](#)).

Theoretically, this research advances African feminist critiques by grounding them in the DRC's specific context, where colonial legacies, conflict, and neoliberal pressures compound barriers for women scholars ([Khalema et al., 2023](#); [Rubbers, 2023](#)). It extends critiques of superficial transformation, showing how a 'façade' of progress manifests in gender-blind policies that disadvantage the interdisciplinary and community-engaged work often undertaken by women ([Madibulaya et al., 2024](#); [Simba et al., 2024](#)). The study aligns with scholarship advocating for African-centred solutions by insisting gender-inclusive knowledge production is foundational to intellectual sovereignty ([Nyabola & Wachira, 2024](#); [Odote, 2025](#)).

Consequently, practical recommendations are imperative. Firstly, gender-responsive research funding must support women-led projects and gendered analyses of critical issues, from public health to

resource governance ([Alakunle et al., 2024](#); [Banze Kabange et al., 2025](#); [Tack et al., 2024](#)). Secondly, promotion criteria require reform to value diverse outputs like community-based research and policy engagement crucial for development ([Kabengela & Lesch, 2025](#); [Ngonde et al., 2024](#)). Thirdly, institutional support for women's academic networks is vital to mitigate isolation and build collective authority, as evidenced by women's resilience in other crisis contexts ([Pitt & Gunn, 2024](#); [Tshiyoyo, 2025](#)).

The study acknowledges limitations. The 2021–2026 timeframe may be insufficient to assess longitudinal impacts of reforms ([Branda et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, reliance on institutional data risks under-reporting the informal labour and barriers women face ([Cuvelier, 2023](#); [Rubbens, 2024](#)). These limitations indicate avenues for future research: longitudinal career studies, ethnographic inquiries into daily knowledge praxis, and comparative analyses across regions and university types ([Muhire, 2024](#); [Skaltsounis, 2025](#)).

In conclusion, Congolese universities stand at a critical juncture. Their role in post-conflict reconstruction, public health, and social cohesion is inextricably linked to internal transformation ([de Oliveira & Bertossi, 2023](#); [Skaltsounis, 2025](#)). Moving beyond reproducing inequality requires a conscious praxis that challenges entrenched hierarchies and reshapes epistemological foundations. Cultivating such an ecosystem is a prerequisite for generating the nuanced, contextually-grounded knowledge necessary to navigate the complex challenges facing the DRC and Africa ([Nyabola & Wachira, 2024](#); [Odote, 2025](#)).

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