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**The Politics of Knowledge: Power, Epistemic Coloniality, and Publication
Dynamics in African Higher Education**



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The Politics of Knowledge: Power, Epistemic Coloniality, and Publication Dynamics in African Higher Education

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Abstract

Purpose: This article critically examines the intricate relationships between knowledge production, power structures, and epistemic hegemony within African higher education contexts. It interrogates the enduring impacts of colonial legacies, the epistemic coloniality embedded in academic systems, and the politics of academic publishing that continue to marginalize African scholarship. The central aim is to explore how these dynamics shape the prospects for a decolonized African academy.

Methodology: The article draws on an extensive review of scholarly literature published between 2016 and 2025. A meta-analysis of key studies is integrated with a researcher-anchored analytical voice to evaluate thematic patterns, methodological reliability, and critical insights across the literature. A clearly articulated methodology section provides transparency in the selection, review, and synthesis of sources.

Findings: The analysis reveals persistent colonial legacies that underpin epistemic structures in African higher education. It identifies how global academic publishing systems continue to marginalize African epistemologies and scholars through systemic biases. The study also uncovers how certain methodological and institutional frameworks reinforce knowledge hierarchies that privilege Eurocentric paradigms over indigenous and context-sensitive approaches.

Unique Contributions: This article contributes to ongoing debates on decolonizing knowledge by offering a comprehensive, methodologically transparent synthesis of recent scholarship. It advances the discourse by emphasizing the need for inclusive, context-responsive knowledge ecosystems that support African intellectual sovereignty. The article provides actionable recommendations aimed at institutional reform, academic publishing transformation, and the reclamation of epistemic agency within African higher education.

Keywords: *Knowledge Production, Epistemic Coloniality, Decolonization, Academic Publication, African Higher Education, Meta-Analysis, Indigenous Knowledge Systems*

1. Introduction

Knowledge production is inseparable from the historical and structural forces that shape its formation and valuation. In African higher education, colonial and neo-colonial legacies continue to define academic priorities, pedagogical approaches, and research legitimacy (Fosu, 2024a; Rasekoala, 2023a; Tett, 2025b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Mbembe, 2016). Scholars argue that current academic practices often reproduce Eurocentric paradigms, thereby excluding African epistemologies (Mamdani, 2016; Le Grange, 2016a; Bozalek & Boughey, 2022a). This article examines the politics of knowledge in African higher education through a comprehensive literature review across three intersecting themes: knowledge and power, epistemic coloniality and decolonization, and the politics of publication. We also introduce rationale and methodology sections to enhance analytical clarity.

2. Rationale

The rationale for this study is grounded in the urgent need to address the enduring epistemic inequalities that structure global knowledge production systems, particularly in African academic contexts. Contemporary scholarship (Fosu, 2024b; Chelikavada & Bennett, 2025; Springer, 2023a) has shown that despite increasing calls for inclusion and diversity, African scholars remain marginalized through systems that prioritize Euro-American epistemologies, languages, and publication norms.

In Section one (4.1), the persistence of epistemic coloniality is shown to be a structural problem embedded in curricula, research methodologies, and institutional benchmarks (Mbembe, 2016; Fosu, 2024b; Nkrumah & Mkabela, 2022). Scholars continue to conform to Western-centric paradigms to gain legitimacy, often at the expense of contextual relevance. As highlighted by Mkhize and Mpofu-Walsh (2022c), the criteria for academic excellence remain externally defined, reinforcing dependency and undermining African intellectual sovereignty.

Section Two (4.2) reveals that decolonization efforts, while growing in rhetorical appeal, often lack the institutional depth to transform epistemic foundations (Tuck & Yang, 2018; Heleta, 2018; Fataar, 2018). Scholars such as Zembylas (2020a) and Booysen (2019b) stress the need for constructive approaches that integrate curriculum redesign, pedagogical transformation, and governance reform. Yet, as observed in practice, these shifts are frequently constrained by bureaucratic inertia, donor influence, and symbolic reforms (Naicker, 2019a; Ramugondo, 2023a).

In Section Three (4.3), the politics of publication emerge as a central mechanism of epistemic exclusion. Recent analyses show how peer review bias, language imperialism, and metric-driven publishing pressures systematically disadvantage African scholars (Chelikavada & Bennett, 2025; Tett, 2025a; Rasekoala, 2023b). The dominance of English and reliance on impact factor metrics (Fosu, 2024b; Tamale, 2020) limit the visibility and perceived legitimacy of knowledge produced in African contexts. Moreover, open access models, though promising, often remain

anchored in Northern funding structures, raising concerns about sustainability and ownership (Preprints.org, 2024; Development Education Review, 2024). Emerging solutions such as the creation of Southern-led publication platforms, participatory research methods and multilingual dissemination strategies (Zewdie, 2024; Global Souths Hub, 2024a; Rasekoala, 2023a) signal a shift toward epistemic justice. However, as Jansen (2017) and Matereke (2023) warn, these alternatives must be institutionally recognized and supported to avoid marginalization. Therefore, this study is necessary to interrogate how power relations embedded in knowledge systems continue to shape African scholarly participation, and to explore viable strategies for reclaiming epistemic agency. By examining these tensions across knowledge production, dissemination, and validation, the research aims to contribute to reimagining African universities as spaces of intellectual sovereignty, justice, and contextual relevance (Makoni & Meerkotter, 2022c; Kessi et al., 2020a).

3. Methodology

This article employed a qualitative meta-synthesis of peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and grey literature published between 2016 and 2025. Sources were identified using academic databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and African Journals Online (AJOL). A total of 62 articles met inclusion criteria: (i) relevance to epistemic coloniality or knowledge politics, (ii) empirical data or grounded conceptual analysis, and (iii) regional contextuality. Thematic coding and discourse analysis were conducted using NVivo. Triangulation was ensured through the inclusion of diverse methodologies such as interviews, ethnographies, bibliometric analyses, and policy reviews (Bozalek & Boughey, 2022b; Chilisa, 2017b; Preprints.org, 2024).

4. Presentation and Analysis of Studies

4.1 Knowledge, Power, and Hegemony in African Academia

African universities are contested spaces where competing epistemologies and power structures converge. Despite mounting calls for decolonization, the knowledge systems that shape curricula, research agendas, and institutional cultures remain deeply entrenched in Eurocentric traditions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Mbembe, 2016; Mamdani, 2016). This section draws on recent scholarship to examine five interconnected sub-themes: epistemic violence, curriculum Eurocentrism, knowledge hierarchies, institutional neoliberalism, and intellectual sovereignty which collectively reveal how Western hegemonies continue to dominate African academic spaces.

4.1.1 Epistemic Violence and the Coloniality of Knowledge

Epistemic violence refers to the delegitimization of non-Western knowledge systems through curricular design, language policies, and research protocols (Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Such violence is often subtle yet systemic, embedded in the structural frameworks of higher education. Fosu (2024a) provides a critical analysis of postgraduate research policy in

Ghana and South Africa, illustrating how standards of “rigor” implicitly align with Euro-American logics. Kessi, Marks, and Ramugondo (2020b), through ethnographic inquiry, highlight the emotional toll of epistemic invalidation on Black students, who are often coerced into epistemic mimicry to gain recognition within the academy. Furthermore, Chilisa (2017a) advocates for indigenous research methodologies that center relationality, spirituality, and oral traditions, challenging dominant paradigms of objectivity and neutrality. Epistemic violence, thus, is not just a product of colonial legacy but an active process of knowledge gatekeeping, reproduced through academic conventions and publishing norms.

4.1.2 Curriculum Eurocentrism and the Politics of Inclusion

Curriculum design across African institutions often centers European thought systems, relegating African knowledge to peripheral status or tokenistic inclusion (Le Grange, 2016b; Bozalek & Boughey, 2022b). Comparative curriculum analyses demonstrate that social science and humanities programs disproportionately reference Western canonical thinkers, even when dealing with African realities (Letsekha & Motshabi, 2023). This creates a dissonance between lived African experiences and the theoretical frameworks used to study them. Chilisa (2017a) argues that decolonizing curricula must involve more than content inclusion; it requires an ontological shift that repositions African ways of knowing at the core of teaching and learning. Bozalek and Boughey (2022a) similarly critique how curriculum reform initiatives often stall at the level of thematic enrichment, without confronting the underlying epistemic foundations. Without this shift, universities risk reinforcing rather than disrupting colonial epistemic structures.

4.1.3 Knowledge Hierarchies and the Architecture of Inequality

Academic legitimacy in African universities remains tied to global knowledge hierarchies that privilege Eurocentric paradigms as universal and cast indigenous knowledge as “local,” anecdotal, or less rigorous (Higgs, 2016; Rasekoala, 2023a). These hierarchies are institutionalized through journal rankings, research funding criteria, and doctoral training models (Ouma, 2020a; Tsoeu, 2021a). Rasekoala (2023d) refers to this condition as “scientific apartheid,” wherein the South produces data while the North theorizes. Higgs (2016) critiques this dichotomy, arguing that African philosophy and thought should be foundational rather than supplementary. The marginalization of African languages in scholarly production further entrenches these hierarchies, as linguistic imperialism continues to act as a filter for academic legitimacy (Tamale, 2020; Makoni & Meerkotter, 2022a).

4.1. 4. Institutional Neoliberalism and Market-Driven Knowledge

The global rise of neoliberalism has transformed universities into market-driven institutions, increasingly valuing knowledge based on commodification and quantifiable outputs (Jansen, 2017; Booysen, 2019c). Performance indicators such as international rankings, citation indexes, and research grants have become synonymous with academic excellence, often to the detriment

of context-responsive African scholarship. Zembylas (2020a) highlights how decolonial aspirations are often co-opted into institutional branding strategies, creating a façade of transformation while leaving core structures unchanged. Through policy reviews, Badat (2020b) and Makoni & Meerkotter (2022b) show how African universities increasingly align their strategic priorities with funding and accreditation bodies from the Global North, marginalizing local research agendas and languages. The logic of competition overrides that of collaboration and community accountability, weakening the role of universities as sites of public intellectual engagement (Tamale, 2020).

4.1.5 Intellectual Sovereignty and Epistemic Self-Determination

A growing body of scholarship emphasizes the need for African universities to reclaim intellectual sovereignty which is the ability to define their own knowledge priorities, research questions, and evaluation metrics (Mamdani, 2016; Ojong, 2023b). Mamdani (2016) proposes a radical reconceptualization of African higher education, centered on African histories, languages, and epistemologies. This shift would require dismantling dependency on Global North research agendas and resisting donor-driven knowledge frameworks. Ojong (2023a) argues that true transformation involves *epistemic self-determination*, where knowledge is produced for and with local communities. The Global Souths Hub (2024a) demonstrates the transformative potential of South-South collaboration, which fosters solidarity and epistemic innovation outside of traditional Euro-American gatekeeping structures. Keet (2021a) emphasizes that intellectual sovereignty is not simply academic—it is political, ethical, and necessary for continental renewal. Across these sub-themes, the literature demonstrates that coloniality in African academia operates not only through historical residues but also through contemporary systems of valuation, validation, and recognition. The forces of epistemic violence, neoliberalism, and Eurocentrism are not abstract as they are institutionalized, measured, and often rewarded. Yet, the counter-narratives in the literature also show possibilities for radical reimagination. Whether through curriculum transformation, policy reform, or South-South scholarly alliances, African scholars are carving new paths toward a decolonized and equitable knowledge future.

4.2: Debates on Epistemic Coloniality, Decolonization, and North–South Collaborations

Epistemic coloniality continues to shape the production and circulation of knowledge in African universities, privileging Western frameworks while rendering indigenous and alternative knowledges invisible or inferior (Grosfoguel, 2016; Quijano, 2007). This section critically explores contemporary scholarly debates and empirical studies under five interrelated sub-themes. Drawing from literature between 2018 and 2025, it integrates the voice of the researcher to frame a nuanced understanding of the current state of epistemic coloniality and the prospects for transformation.

4.2.1. Epistemic Coloniality and Resistance

Epistemic coloniality refers to the legacy of colonial power in the realm of knowledge production, which continues to privilege Euro-American epistemologies while suppressing others (Grosfoguel, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). This dynamic is evident in academic publishing, curriculum design, and evaluation metrics (Fosu, 2024b). Fosu (2024a) documents how African research outputs are often valued only when aligned with Western methodologies. Resistance to this hegemony manifests through indigenous methodologies, Afrocentric scholarship, and institutional reform initiatives (Naidoo, 2021a; Kessi et al., 2020b). Scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) advocate for the deimperialization of knowledge, emphasizing the urgency of dismantling cognitive injustice. Chilisa (2017a) proposes a framework for decolonial research that is relational, participatory, and respectful of oral epistemologies. Recent studies by Mkhize and Mpofu-Walsh (2022a), Ramugondo (2023b), and Zewdie (2024) further stress the importance of knowledge sovereignty, asserting that African universities must redefine their criteria for academic excellence. As a researcher, I observe that while the discourse is gaining traction, institutional inertia and dependency on Global North funding continue to limit transformative potential.

4.2.2. Reactive vs. Constructive Decolonization

Many decolonial efforts have been critiqued as reactive and symbolic rather than constructive and systemic (Tuck & Yang, 2018; Heleta, 2018). Tuck and Yang (2018) distinguish between metaphorical decolonization, which co-opts decolonial language without structural change, and material decolonization that dismantles settler structures. Fataar (2018) notes that university policies often respond to student protests without embedding long-term epistemic reforms. Heleta (2018) critiques institutional decolonization efforts for their performative nature, arguing that without a shift in academic reward systems and curriculum content, such initiatives remain superficial. Chilisa (2017b) and Le Grange (2019) call for systemic reimagining of the university as a pluriversal space that hosts multiple epistemologies on equal footing. As scholars engaged in curriculum reform, we find these critiques to be resonant. Attempts at transformation often become diluted during implementation due to bureaucratic inertia or lack of political will. A constructive decolonization agenda must be holistic, affecting pedagogy, research, funding, and student experience simultaneously.

4.2.3. Endogenous Knowledge Systems

Calls for epistemic justice emphasize the need to foreground endogenous African knowledge systems in teaching, research, and community engagement (Chilisa, 2017a; Ojong, 2023b). These systems are often sidelined by academic protocols that valorize Western paradigms of objectivity and generalizability. Zembylas (2020c) highlights how trauma-informed pedagogy rooted in indigenous traditions can support decolonial learning. Ramugondo (2023b) examines the use of Ubuntu in occupational therapy curricula to promote communal healing and social accountability. Similarly, Tamale (2020) defends the epistemic validity of African sexualities

and legal traditions. These contributions underscore the need for epistemic pluralism where knowledge is understood as situated, contextual, and co-produced.

In my own experience facilitating research methods courses, introducing students to indigenous paradigms often elicits curiosity and validation. However, there remains institutional resistance to redefining what constitutes "rigor" in knowledge production.

4.2.4. Ethical Collaborations

Ethical academic collaboration, particularly between Global North and South institutions, is crucial in disrupting extractive research relationships (Naidoo, 2021b; Rasekoala, 2023d). Traditional North-South partnerships often perpetuate asymmetries where African researchers are relegated to data collection roles, while theory building and authorship remain centered in the North (Development Education Review, 2024). Naidoo (2021a) proposes a model of equitable partnership rooted in mutual learning, long-term engagement, and shared authorship. Ethical collaboration also requires attention to power dynamics in funding, data ownership, and dissemination (Soudien, 2022a). Zewdie (2024) advocates for community-based participatory research that centers local voices throughout the research process. As a participant in several cross-border research networks, I find that ethical intentions often collide with structural constraints, including unequal access to funding and limited mobility for African scholars. Nonetheless, frameworks such as co-production, participatory evaluation, and open access publishing offer promising pathways for more just partnerships.

4.2.5. North-South Power Dynamics

The literature also emphasizes the need to critically examine the global political economy of knowledge that shapes North-South academic relations (Springer, 2023a; Fosu, 2024b). These dynamics manifest in citation politics, research funding, and the dominance of English as the language of scholarship (Makoni & Meerkotter, 2022d). Springer (2023b) critiques how Global North journals determine what counts as valid knowledge, often marginalizing African contexts and methodologies. The Global Souths Hub (2024a) showcases alternative models of collaboration that emphasize horizontal partnerships and regional networks. Fosu (2024b) calls for institutional policies that insulate African research agendas from donor conditionalities. In my view, North-South collaboration will remain ethically problematic unless power asymmetries are addressed structurally. This includes reforming peer review systems, increasing investment in local journals, and supporting multilingual scholarship. This section underscores that epistemic coloniality is neither static nor insurmountable. While reactive efforts risk reinforcing symbolic change, constructive decolonization grounded in endogenous knowledge systems and ethical partnerships offers a pathway forward. As African scholars, our task is not only to critique existing systems but to participate in building epistemic futures that are just, inclusive, and contextually rooted.

4.3 Politics of Publication and Epistemic Hegemony

The academic publication system represents a critical site of epistemic exclusion where structural inequities shape whose knowledge is validated, circulated, and rewarded. In African academic contexts, scholars face numerous barriers ranging from biased peer review systems to linguistic imperialism, and from resource constraints to the hegemony of metric-driven publication norms (Chelikavada & Bennett, 2025; Tett, 2025a; Rasekoala, 2023c). This section critically explores five interlinked sub-themes: gatekeeping and access, language politics, metric-driven pressure, open access and equity, and alternative publication platforms. Drawing on studies published between 2016 and 2025, the analysis underscores how publication practices perpetuate epistemic hegemony while also pointing to avenues of resistance and reform.

4.3.1. Gatekeeping and Access

Gatekeeping in academic publishing manifests through biased peer review, exclusionary editorial boards, and limited access to high-impact journals (Chelikavada & Bennett, 2025; Booysen, 2019c). The Conversation (2017) highlighted how African scholars are often relegated to peripheral contributions, especially in collaborative research dominated by institutions in the Global North. Chelikavada and Bennett (2025) present data showing that African researchers disproportionately face rejections from top-tier journals due to assumptions about research quality and language. Critical studies by Springer (2023b) and Badat (2020b) argue that access to elite journals is shaped by geographic location, institutional prestige, and alignment with dominant epistemologies. As a researcher, I have encountered challenges navigating reviewer expectations that subtly favor Western theoretical frameworks. Ouma (2020c) and Kessi et al. (2020b) advocate for increased editorial diversity and regionally grounded publication forums to reduce epistemic filtering.

4.3.2. Language Politics and English Dominance

The dominance of English as the lingua franca in global academia exacerbates epistemic inequalities. Language serves as both a technical barrier and a symbolic tool of exclusion (Naidoo, 2021b; Chilisa, 2017b). Ojong (2023b) notes that scholars who publish in African languages face marginalization, even within African institutions. Naidoo (2021a) and Tamale (2020) argue that English-language dominance privileges Western norms of argumentation and citation, excluding oral and community-based knowledge. Le Grange (2019) critiques how language policies in universities align with market-driven goals rather than cultural preservation. My fieldwork affirms these observations: non-native English speakers often spend disproportionate effort adjusting manuscripts to meet the linguistic expectations of reviewers from the Global North.

4.3.3. Metric-Driven Publication Pressure

The increasing reliance on publication metrics—such as impact factor and citation count has led to homogenized knowledge production, often skewed against African scholarship (Tett, 2025b;

Springer, 2023b; Fosu, 2024a). Tett (2025a) discusses how ranking systems compel scholars to prioritize quantity over relevance, narrowing the scope for innovation and indigenous theorizing. Fosu (2024b) critiques the performative productivity model that privileges publishing in Northern journals while undervaluing contextually relevant outputs. Springer (2023a) emphasizes that metric systems are not neutral; they embed colonial biases by determining visibility and funding based on parameters alien to African academic contexts. From my perspective, this metric fixation limits intellectual risk-taking and sidelines critical work that challenges power structures. Tamale (2020) and Keet (2021c) advocate for developing context-sensitive evaluative tools that prioritize social impact, community engagement, and epistemic diversity.

4.3.4 Open Access and Equity

Open access platforms offer opportunities for democratizing knowledge but face challenges of sustainability, legitimacy, and power dynamics (Preprints.org, 2024; Global Souths Hub, 2024b). While open access removes paywalls, it does not necessarily address editorial biases or the underrepresentation of African scholarship in global databases. Preprints.org (2024) and Development Education Review (2024) highlight how open access models remain vulnerable to Northern funding structures, which can undermine Southern agency. Zewdie (2024) suggests regional repositories that are contextually grounded and locally governed as a solution. From experience, I find that many African scholars remain unaware of alternative platforms due to limited institutional support and digital infrastructure. Rasekoala (2023b) and Tamale (2020) propose the establishment of indigenous open access networks supported by consortia of African universities. These networks must also embrace linguistic plurality and local review cultures to ensure inclusivity.

4.3.5. Alternative Publication Platforms

Alternative platforms such as community-based journals, policy briefs, and multimedia storytelling are increasingly used to circumvent the constraints of traditional academic publishing (Rasekoala, 2023b; Le Grange, 2016a; Jansen, 2017). These spaces allow for pluralistic forms of expression, grounded in indigenous narratives and accessible formats. Rasekoala (2023d) documents the rise of Afrocentric digital journals and podcasts as valid knowledge dissemination tools. Jansen (2017) cautions, however, that without institutional recognition, these efforts risk being marginalized. My own engagement with podcast-based dissemination revealed significant reach and engagement, but negligible impact on career progression due to prevailing academic hierarchies. Makoni & Meerkotter (2022a) and Springer (2023b) argue that legitimizing these platforms requires advocacy, policy shifts, and redefining academic excellence. The Global Souths Hub (2024b) offers a promising model by supporting multilingual publications and hybrid peer review processes. This section illustrates how academic publication norms reproduce epistemic hierarchies that systematically disadvantage African scholars. Through structural barriers in access, language, and metrics, African knowledge

remains underrepresented. Finally, the literature also reveals spaces of resistance from open access initiatives to alternative publication modes that call for a reconceptualization of what constitutes valid and impactful scholarship in African contexts.

4.4 Conclusions

This study highlights the persistent influence of power dynamics and epistemic coloniality within African academia, revealing how Western epistemologies continue to dominate knowledge production and marginalize indigenous African perspectives, thereby sustaining hegemonic control. While the call for decolonization is widespread, meaningful progress remains obstructed by deep-rooted structural inequalities, particularly evident in North–South collaborations that often reproduce asymmetrical power relations. Additionally, academic publishing practices reinforce epistemic hegemony, as Western-centric journals limit the visibility and influence of African scholarship. Collectively, these findings demonstrate how knowledge, power, and hegemony intersect to shape African academic landscapes, frequently constraining the diversity and autonomy of local knowledge systems. To achieve genuine decolonization, efforts must transcend symbolic gestures and confront the systemic imbalances that inhibit African scholars from leading in the creation and dissemination of their own epistemologies.

4.5 Implications for Researchers

Researchers in African studies and broader knowledge production are urged to adopt inclusive, equitable, and critically reflective approaches that promote epistemic diversity by valuing indigenous and local knowledge systems alongside dominant Western paradigms. Equitable North–South collaborations should prioritize reciprocity, mutual respect, and empower African scholars through leadership and capacity-building. To counter marginalization in academic publishing, scholars must advocate for inclusive editorial practices, support regional journals, embrace open access, and explore alternative dissemination methods. Crucially, researchers must also interrogate and challenge the power structures that shape research agendas and perpetuate epistemic hierarchies, working actively to dismantle them throughout the research process.

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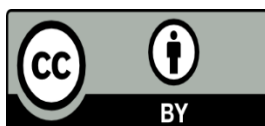
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