

Regional Trade Stratagem Influencing Kenya's Diplomatic Engagements With in The East African Community. EAC, Paradigm

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Abstract: This Paper presents the introduction of the study that is the influence of regional trade stratagem on Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African Community paradigm. The study examines the study's background information in the context of global, regional and national, local perspectives with the aim to give context and gaps in the area of research.

Many countries around the world use economic diplomacy to exert their influence. Kenya is a major economy in Africa ranking currently among the biggest economies in East Africa Community. It's robust economy and advanced infrastructure development compared to other neighboring states has earned her the title "the Gateway to Africa." While many studies explore Kenya's economic growth, few interrogate its efficiency as a tool for economic diplomacy in the EAC. This necessitated an urgent inquiry into strategies on how to interrogate the influence of regional trade stratagem on Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African community paradigm.

Keywords: International trade stratagem, strategic Diplomatic engagements, Trade policies, Economic Partnerships.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background of the Study

Diplomacy is a multidimensional field incorporating economic, trade, digital, and environmental sustainability aspects alongside traditional political engagements. This is what led to the development of economic diplomacy, through integration, implementation of liberalization policies and multilateral negotiations among countries. As trade liberalization involves adjustment of social and economic activities of individual countries, diplomacy plays an important role in identifying the areas that can cause differences which may need the adjustments for countries to reach consensus (Rajapakse & Samaratunge, 2002).

Yakop & Bergeijk (2011 p. 3) state that economic diplomacy is "the diplomacy that is used to acquire goals or achieve influence through trade and commerce." On the other hand, Bayne & Woolcock (2007), define economic diplomacy as a decision making and negotiation process in international economic relations.

Economic diplomacy includes trade, commerce and investment relations to yield diplomatic goals but not political or cultural relations. Economic diplomats focus on economic issues in receiving countries and are responsible for realize their countries' economic goals through trade relations. Hence states under their ministries of Foreign/External Affairs, Finance and Trade and Investment not only are actors in diplomacy but also involve non-state actors like non-governmental organization (NGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs) and Trade organizations.

Diplomats secure relations in their assigned countries to promote trade and investments in their mother country. with changing global patterns, economic diplomacy is becoming a key policy framework of international relations for most

countries (Çika & Veshi, 2024). many countries have foreign policies that leverage trade policies, development assistance, and investment strategies to bolster their geopolitical standing (Rajapakse & Samaratunge, 2002).

A Global Perspective of International Trade Stratagem and Diplomatic Engagements

Economic diplomacy The paper is founded on The Interdependence theory and the Neoliberal theory. The paper adopted a descriptive research design. The target population included Kenya's Ministry of Trade and Industrialization, the ministry of foreign and Diaspora affairs, with Key Informants from other other players and stakeholders in Diplomacy and international relations . The paper used purposive, stratified and random sampling methods. Qualitative data was collected through desktop reviews and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), while questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect quantitative data from the respondents. SPSS was used as the statistical tool, quantitative data analysis was through descriptive statistic using frequency, percentage and content analysis for qualitative data. The research recommends the harmonization of trade frameworks, investing in regional infrastructure and digital diplomacy as methods to enhance Kenya economic diplomacy in the EAC paradigm.

has been instrumental in shaping the global economic order. Major economies in the developed countries have used economic diplomacy to develop distinct strategies to navigate international trade and investment landscapes and push their national economic goals. With this tool, the developed nations have been in a position to make multi-million deals using trade agreements and partnerships as demonstrated in the following examples of the European Union, the United States and China. In China, unlike their European and American counterparts, economic diplomacy is a new component of its diplomacy in the 21st century (Kafle, 2022). This is credited to globalization and the new economic strength of China. The history of economic diplomacy in China goes back to August 2004 when a meeting between the Chinese premier and representatives of third world countries was held with the aim of achieving an independent foreign policy of peace through economic development (Wen, 2005).

The European Union being the strongest economic integration unit in Europe with 27-member states was greatly involved in international trade. The function of the European Union (EU) in the economic diplomacy is established by the treaty of Lisbon (Treaty on the Functioning of European Union-TFEU) signed in December and became effective in December 2009. it delved in Foreign Direct Investments as a regional bloc not as individual member state (Woolcock, 2012).

The EU's economic diplomacy comprises of decision making and all member states having common objectives to promote EU's influence globally (Çika & Veshi, 2024). The Economic diplomacy of EU is molded by its various institutions that deal with policy making and negotiating processes: - the European council, the European commission and the European Parliament all supported by a common currency, the Euro (€). The EU member states have also developed an internal integration process to respond to the ever-changing global issues.

The EU's economic diplomacy is characterized by its extensive network of free trade agreements, development assistance, security, and regulatory frameworks (Çika & Veshi, 2024). Furthermore, the nature of regional arrangements determines the extend of trade liberalization agenda of regional economic diplomacy arrangements like the EU with administrative mechanisms determining the liberalization agenda and defining the role of trade or economic diplomacy (Rajapakse & Samaratunge, 2002). The EU uses economic diplomacy to maintain global competitiveness, enforce sustainability standards, and promote regional stability. The EU also has more external policies focused on matters of diplomacy, defense, development and trade including eradication of restrictions of international trade (Ashiagbor, Countouris, & Lianos, 2012). The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) nations serve as a key diplomatic tool, enhancing trade relations while fostering economic integration.

The United States (U.S.) employs economic diplomacy as a fundamental pillar of its foreign policy, utilizing trade agreements, financial aid, sanctions, and strategic investments to maintain its global economic dominance (Çika & Veshi, 2024). The U.S. State Department is placing economics and market forces at the center of U.S. foreign policy. To the U.S., Economic Diplomacy means both harnessing global economic forces to progress America's foreign policy and using the tools of foreign policy to support America's economic strength, while advancing the strategic and security interests of the United States (AFSA, 2024). The U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) plays a pivotal role in negotiating trade agreements that secure American business interests and ensure favorable trade terms. Through initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the U.S. grants preferential market access to African nations, aiming to foster economic development and counter China's expanding influence in the region (Çika & Veshi, 2024).

U.S. economic diplomacy is deeply integrated with its transatlantic partnership with the European Union. The EU and the U.S. share robust economic ties through trade, investment, and regulatory cooperation, shaping global trade norms (AFSA, 2024). However, challenges such as trade disputes over tariffs and digital taxation policies have occasionally strained their economic relations. Despite this, the two entities continue to collaborate on advancing multilateral trade agreements and addressing global economic crises (Çika & Veshi, 2024). China's rise of economic power has allowed it to increase the influence of its economic diplomacy. The Chinese foreign policy greatly puts emphasis on respect for sovereignty – for their country and for other countries and emotional integrity and mutual non-interference (Kafle, 2022). China has placed particular emphasis on global influence through aid, trade and investments especially with the EU, US and Africa while keeping a keen economic integration and multilateral cooperation with other Asian countries. This new dimension by China is centered on economic prosperity as it works to compete with the US as the world's economic power house (Wen, 2005).

China's economic diplomacy is also anchored in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which extends infrastructure development and financial investments across Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Kafle, 2022). China's economic diplomacy is also evident in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which strengthens trade and investment ties with African countries. The strategy integrates concessional loans, technology transfers, and state-led investments, which are China's main trade comparative advantages, to deepen economic influence and position China as a key economic player in Africa (Kafle, 2022).

Regional Perspective of International Trade Stratagem and Diplomatic Engagements

In Asia and Africa, U.S. economic diplomacy is characterized by its efforts to contain China's economic rise while fostering alliances with regional partners such as Japan, South Korea, and India (AFSA, 2024). The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is a key initiative aimed at strengthening economic ties, enhancing supply chain resilience, and countering China's influence in the region. In contrast, U.S.-China economic relations remain complex, shaped by trade wars, technological rivalry, and strategic competition for global market dominance. The imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods and restrictions on technology exports illustrate the competitive nature of their economic engagements, reflecting broader geopolitical tensions (Çika & Veshi, 2024). Moreover, U.S. economic statecraft and diplomacy is far more extensive than the U.S. aid for firms and businesses abroad or the investments Americans make in other nations. They also involve the application of economic sanctions to penalize or discourage bad actors in the international arena, which includes terrorist financiers and drug traffickers, as well as corrupt officials. They entail mobilizing foreign aid and funding to partner nations that are formed as a result of war or natural calamities. They also entail establishing support to establish and implement international regulations to make corruption and bribery less acceptable (AFSA, 2024).

Diplomacy is the conduct of relations between sovereign states and a mode in which they articulate, coordinate and secure their national strategic interests in relation to other actors (Anderson, 2014; Bayne & Woolcock, 2007). Over centuries, political diplomacy has become the most prevalent form of diplomatic practice and is understood as the prerequisite to evading states' antagonistic circumstances and wars (Wanyama, 2013). Diplomacy was never foreseen to include collective security or economic bargains *inter alia*. However, more recently, with the new international developments, including modernization, globalization, international trade and technology, diplomacy has been bound to stretch from the political cage. Consequently, modern diplomacy includes cultural, social and economic concerns of state(s) on top of political ascriptions (Anderson, 2014; Watkins, 2008). Diplomatic relations have refocused on protecting the respective country's economic and regional interests, making diplomacy a tool to facilitate political relationships and charter economic relationships (Bergeijk et al., 2011).

Economic diplomacy is defined as using a country's international political tools to achieve economic objectives for national interest (Saner & Yiu, 2003) focused on increasing trade and exports, attracting foreign investments (FDI) and facilitating regional integration to affirm the economic interests of a country (Bayne & Woolcock, 2007). For instance, Bergeijk et al. (2011) argue that diplomatic relationships take the form of states introducing trade missions and embassies in countries or regions where they have economic interests. Thus, states that exhibit strained political relationships have a deteriorated trade flow (economic relationship) between them, and states with strained trade relationships do not enjoy warm political relations (Anderson, 2014; Bayne & Woolcock, 2007).

In this regard, Afman & Maurel (2010), economic diplomacy is based on four pillars: trade promotion, investment promotion with FDI, attracting suitable technologies and management of economic aid, which is important for most developing countries as a recipient and for donors mainly from developed nations (Bergeijk et al., 2011). Afman & Maurel

(2010), denotes that facilitation of trade, exports and FDI emerge among the explicit missions of foreign diplomacy as sole justifiable economic rationale to pursue diplomatic relationships among countries.

Huda & Muchatuta (2022) understanding of African diplomacy shows a clear style of diplomacy different from the rest of the world. Justifiably because majority of African states attained their independence very close to each other over the past five decades. African states developed an incentive for the continent's multilateral relations expressed collectively with view for liberation from foreign subjugation (Akopari 2016). African states remain cognizant of the pluralities that characterize the continent (Huda & Muchatuta, 2022). Notably, culture diversity, slavery and colonialism immeasurably affect every African life and African states utilize diplomacy for their foreign policies through the years. It is, however, clear that diplomacy in Africa has some partial success stories of states and regional bodies in accomplishing their foreign policy goals (Akopari 2016). The breakdowns of African diplomacy are not solely explained by the role of external actors but can also be seen through intra-African diplomacy as a result of the combination of factors, including: the quality of diplomacy and mediators; the prevalence of conflicts; the international helplessness of the continent; the dependence of Africa on external actors and; the resultant lack of assertiveness and inability to stand up to errant leaders in the region. (Akopari 2016).

According to Akopari (2016), diplomatic skills in Africa are normally tested during periods of conflicts and threats to regional security. Of which in some instances diplomacy is unable to reach the intended outcomes. This includes the levels of economic diplomacy. Africa's economic diplomacy is driven by regional economic communities, trade agreements, bilateral trade relations, external partnerships, and key economic players (Botha & van Wyk, 2024). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) serves as a cornerstone of regional integration, enhancing intra-African trade by eliminating tariffs and reducing trade barriers. Major economic blocs such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC) facilitate integration, trade coordination, infrastructure development, and investment flows (Huda & Muchatuta, 2022).

In 2019, the African Union (AU) launched the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to establish Pan-African economies of scale on a free trade footing. The initiative is meant to enhance development and prosperity by diversification of industries, opening of new markets, and intensification of production within regional value chains (Langan & Price, 2025). The AfCFTA, main objective is to widely strengthen African countries' trade collective position within the global economy (African Union, 2021a). Economic integration through the AfCFTA is a milestone towards greater political solidarity (Amanor-Wilkes, 2021). Botha & van Wyk (2024) asserts that Africa's trade diplomacy is influenced by global institutions such as the WTO, UNCTAD, and the African Development Bank (AfDB), that provide policy frameworks, financial assistance, and technical expertise. External actors, including the EU, China, and the U.S., also play a crucial role in shaping African trade policies through bilateral agreements and investment programs (Huda & Muchatuta, 2022).

National perspective of International Trade Stratagem and Diplomatic Engagements

The thrust of Kenya's international politics and diplomacy has changed substantially, from the state's survival and its leadership to greater attention to trade and investments (Gichuru, 2013).

The shift of Kenya's priorities of foreign engagement towards economic relationships is a principal pillar for the country's foreign policy, in the pursuit of its aim of becoming a middle-income economy by 2030 as provided in the Vision 2030 (Irungu, 2024). The Kenya Foreign Policy (2014) framework shows that there is a nexus between Kenya's foreign relations and diplomatic engagements within a contemporary globalized environment. East Africa's economic integration is driven by diplomacy through foreign policy as espoused by individual East African Community (EAC) member states who include, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, the DRC, and Somalia (in accession process (EAC Trade Report, 2023).

Africa Economic Report of the African Development Bank (AfDB) (2013), indicates that East Africa registered the highest regional economic performance in Africa in 2023 and 2024, with growth figures at over 5 percent, and outpacing all the other African regions. According to the report's East Africa Economic Outlook, East Africa's real GDP is propelled by two things, its trade and service sectors. Its growth is largely driven by growth of these two items in EAC member states – Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania – as well as trade and integration with other eastern Africa countries of Ethiopia and Djibouti (AfDB, 2023). While the service sector contributes 2.0 percentage points to GDP trade had the highest points

at over 10 percent (EAC Facts & Figures, 2022). The region's natural and cultural attractions draw tourists from around the world, creating a demand for services like accommodation, food, and entertainment, while their integration creates trade between and among them, allowing for easy flow of goods and service across the region.

Bilateral trade agreements among EAC countries have strengthened economic ties but have also been marred by disagreements, including disputes over trade imbalances, tariff applications, and competition in key industries. For example, recently Uganda abandoned an SGR construction partnership with Kenya (the Kenya-Uganda SGR) in favor of a partnership with Tanzania. The growing influence of external partners, such as China and the EU, has further complicated negotiations, as member states seek to balance regional interests with global economic opportunities. Infrastructure projects, such as the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), the LAPSET Project, and cross-border energy initiatives, enhance economic connectivity.

Key trade goods within the EAC include agricultural products, petroleum, textiles, and manufactured goods (AfDB, 2013). Kenya is leading economy in the region, it exports industrial and consumer goods to other countries, while Uganda and Tanzania are major exporters of agricultural commodities. In as much as Kenya has made progress it still experiences hardships occasioned by regional political tensions legal regime disparities competition for investment and force majeure. The AfDB's (2023) Africa Trade Report 2023 examined medium-term projections and the risks to the East Africa region's growth outlook. There is an opportunity for the region to embark on a green transition for Africa and that the private sector financing can support increased growth. The East Africa region, faces domestic and external downside risks that affect the positive economic outlook. The domestic risks include gaps in infrastructure, domestic regional conflicts and political instability, and macroeconomic imbalances within countries and across the region. The external factors include global economic slowdown, rising commodity prices, the continued European instability of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, international trade policies, tightening of global financial conditions, and exchange rate depreciation (AfDB East Africa Economic Outlook, 2013).

Kenya's strategic location in East Africa has made it possible for it to have economic relations with other neighbouring countries, like Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, through the East African Community (EAC), which now also includes South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). With the changing trends of modernization, globalization, and technology, Kenya has embraced regional integration in their pursuit to achieve her national interests, as clearly depicted in her membership of the African Union's (AU) Regional Economic Communities (RECs: The East Africa Community (EAC), the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Kenya, dubbed *the "Gateway to Africa,"* has the largest and strongest economy in the EAC, projected to grow even faster (Githaiga, 2021; Lofchie, 1990). The title *"Gateway"* is mainly because Kenya's strategic location, economic stability, and stable governance. Kenya is East Africa's base in international trade and investment links as its transport, logistics, tourism, banking and services hub, all underpinned by major infrastructure development. Kenya has key growth measures, including Vision 2030, whose aim is to make Kenya a middle-income country by 2030, the Foreign Policy 2014, showing Kenya's its integration and foreign measure. As Kenya has edged in multiple overlapping AU's record being strategic in achieving several objectives simultaneously (Amuhaya, 2018).

The quest for regional integration in Africa's a long history coined in continental struggle. Anchored in its diversities, regional integration in Africa emerges from the politics of ant colonialism based on pre-existing colonial arrangements (Lawson, 2015; Mengistu, 2016). Most countries in the East Africa (EA) region got independence almost at the same time, and the development progress is slow for all, leading to integrate owing to common interests (Amuhaya, 2018). Kenya's young, educated, and entrepreneurial population possesses high fluency in technology, abundant supply of renewable energy with the most developed power sectors in sub-Saharan Africa, and high export competitiveness also places the country as a key economy in the EAC (Awe et al., 2021; Olyanga et al., 2022). Also, according to The International Trade Administration (ITO) (2024), Kenya enjoys a strong bilateral relationship with the world's top economies, such as the United States, China, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the Gulf and Middle East and Asia Pacific economies, including Strategic Trade and Investment Partnerships (Amuhaya, 2018).

The fulcrum of Kenya's foreign policy is driven by regional integration and diplomatic machinery in the EAC (Juma, 2009). According to its official website, Vision 2030 led to the shift in foreign policy that was the country's economic development blueprint. Thus, economic diplomacy, one of the key pillars of Kenyan foreign policy, has been pursued by integrating politics, trade, investment, and other economic considerations (Vision 2030) and Kenya's foreign policy has continued to

align with the region's economic interest and strengthening the bilateral relationships in the region (Amuhaya, 2018; Fourie, 2014). Thus, the Kenya's EAC's diplomatic mission focuses on integration, economic empowerment, and establishing a stable economic zone that fosters regional stability (Wanyama, 2013).

Problem statement

The government of Kenya utilizes economic diplomacy to improve bilateral relations with the countries in East Africa. Uganda and Kenya have a long-time trade relationship, with the Port of Mombasa being at the peak of this relationship and the Kenya-Uganda railway built in colonial times, connecting these two countries. While Kenya remains the East Africa region's economic powerhouse, it faces intensifying rivalry from neighbors such as Tanzania, Ethiopia and Rwanda, which are strategically diversifying their economies and diplomatic portfolios. Ethiopia's industrial parks and Rwanda's conference tourism ecosystem exemplify targeted investments that compete with Kenya's historical dominance (Ferede, 2018; Chingarande et al., 2013). Domestically, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies and overreliance on undiversified exports further constrain Kenya's diplomatic engagement.

In Tanzania, Kenya has used economic diplomacy to convince the country to let go of protectionist policies to enable the free movement of goods and harmonization of policies between the two countries. Trade and economic diplomacies have also occurred between Kenya and other EAC member states. Bilateral agreements have been signed among EAC member states to improve their development and economic growth across the region with Kenya always leading the integration efforts.

While studies explore Kenya's economic growth (World Bank, 2022), few interrogate the efficiency of its regional trade as stratagem for diplomatic engagement in the EAC paradigm. For instance, despite its economic stability and strategic trade position, Kenya has yet to gladiate and usurp a position as a regional plummet climate diplomacy actor akin to Norway's peace mediation niche (Chingarande et al., 2013). The pertinent questions that arise are; how exactly does Kenya use its strategic trade position to advance its regional influence and national interests? What factors hinder Kenya's economic diplomacy in East Africa? What mechanisms can be explored to enhance trade to leverage Kenya's economic diplomacy? This study attempted to find out how Kenya, as a regional key player can harness through regional trade stratagem and yield on diplomatic engagements within the East African Community paradigm.

Objective

The paper was guided by the general objective;

To examine the influence of regional trade stratagem on diplomatic engagements within the East African Community paradigm.

Justification of the Study

Little study has been done analyzing economic diplomacy in Africa, especially in East Africa. This study focuses on this emerging diplomacy that is being explored by countries and is the focus of Kenya's foreign policy. A few scholars have given little economic diplomacy outcomes, with many focusing on politics. As the EAC's largest economy, Kenya possesses numerous economic strengths that should be exhausted and enhanced through economic diplomacy to pursue its economic interests and diplomatic influence in the region (Anderson, 2014).

Significance of the Study

This Paper is very useful in contributing valuable knowledge to Kenya's foreign policy, specifically economic diplomacy. The study adds to the existing knowledge of the researchers in this field, and serves as a guide for future policymakers. The study established the regional dynamics of economic diplomacy in East Africa and how they shape Kenya's diplomatic engagement and opportunities within the region.

Scope of the study

This Paper aims at addressing the influence of regional trade stratagem on Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African community paradigm. The study's geographic scope focused on the East African region, with Kenya being one of the member states. The three levels of economic diplomacy (global, continental and regional) will be analyzed to offer a holistic view of how the concept operates and its importance. The research evaluated the existence and development of economic diplomacy in the EAC, its nature, main dynamics, and how it has or may be affecting trade among states that are partners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This paper presents the theoretical review on the influence of regional trade stratagem on Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African. It begins by examining relevant theories that provide the conceptual foundation for understanding the relationships between regional trade stratagem and diplomatic engagements. The chapter then explores the conceptual literature on each of the key variables: Trade policies, economic partnerships, challenges and strategies. This is followed by a review of empirical studies investigating the relationships between these variables and Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African Community. The paper also gives the conceptual model that shows the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. A critique and summary of the literature and research gaps presented.

Theoretical Framework

This section discussed key theories in international relations that form the theoretical foundation for this study: Interdependence theory and Neoliberalism theory. These theories offer complementary perspectives on how regional trade stratagem influences Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African Community paradigm. Interdependence theory is relevant because it describes the way states in the EAC depend on each other in economic and political cooperation to ensure common prosperity and stability. Conversely, the neoliberalism theory is suitable as it emphasizes the importance of institutions, liberalizing trade, and common policies in facilitating regional integration and international cooperation.

Interdependence Theory

Accordingly, this Theory emphasizes that states are interconnected and benefit from cooperation rather than competition. Anchored in the complex interdependence, this is a theory/concept in international relations and international political economy developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in the 1970s to explain the emerging nature of the global political economy (Keohane & Nye Jr, 1987). In an era of globalization, technological advancements, and cross-border issues like trade, terrorism, health, and environmental concerns, no state can operate in isolation. According to Romain (1999), power dynamics in international relations are shifting from military strength to economic and institutional interdependence, where international organizations play a key role in facilitating cooperation. States increasingly rely on each other and non-state actors to ensure stability and economic prosperity.

Copeland (1996) argues that economic interdependence reduces the occurrence of war, because trade is more beneficial than war. He postulates that states engage in trade so as to achieve economic development more effectively than through military confrontations. Barbeiri & Levy (1999) asserts that trade relations persist even though within political conflicts, reinforcing the notion that economic ties can withstand diplomatic tensions. Keohane & Nye Jr (1987) expand this concept through their Complex Interdependence Theory, which outlines three key characteristics: multiple channels of interaction beyond governments, the absence of a strict hierarchy of issues, and the declining use of military force in state relations. They highlight that international regimes, such as the WTO and IMF, facilitate cooperation by promoting transparency and monitoring compliance, thus minimizing conflicts.

Kenya's foreign policy and diplomatic engagements within the East African Community (EAC) aligns with this theory, as it prioritizes trade over conflict. For instance, despite the Mbingo Island dispute with Uganda, Kenya steps back from aggressive action to preserve trade relations. Kenya and Tanzania have enhanced economic ties by eliminating import duties on certain goods. Kenya's ability to trade with both the East and the West, while maintaining regional peace, exemplifies the practical application of interdependence liberalism in its foreign policy.

Neoliberal theory

Neoliberal institutionalism, argues that international cooperation and institutions can foster peace and prosperity by mitigating the effects of power politics and promoting interdependence. It builds upon the foundation of liberalism, implicating that states can attain mutual benefits through cooperation, without a central authority. Neoliberalism is similar to neorealism except that it derives different implications out of these assumptions. Unlike the neorealist scholarship that is cynical about the chances of a sustainable cooperation, neoliberalism holds that cooperation is achievable and sustainable. Neoliberals emphasize that international institutions and regimes play a significant role in enhancing collaboration among states. This is the primary reason why international organizations enable cooperation; they offer information, which minimizes collective action issues between states in offering public goods and ensuring adherence. In the 1984 book *After*

Hegemony, Robert Keohane applied the knowledge of the new institutional economics by arguing that the international system could be held stable outside of the presence of a hegemony, thereby refuting the hegemonic stability theory. Keohane demonstrated that it was possible to maintain international cooperation based on repetitions of interactions, transparency, and monitoring.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework connects concepts and contributes to the development of theory using the approach to examine the connection between different variables (Kothari, 2011). Independent variables refer to the factors that bring about or influence outcomes. They are known as predictors and the dependent variable is a variable that depends on the independent variables or the outcome of the impact of the independent variables (Cresswell, 2011).

Operationalization of Variables

In this section, the paper examines the conceptual relationships between key regional trade stratagem and Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African Community Paradigm. Specifically, it explores how Trade policies, Economic partnerships, emerging challenges and strategies influence Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African community paradigm.

Trade policies and Diplomatic engagements

Kenya's trade policies seek to translate the economy into a globally competitive advantage, export-led, and efficient domestic market oriented. It promotes regional integration and increases participation in both domestic and international trade. The policies focus on improved the business environment, promotion of trade and investment, and strengthen trade support institutions whole. The national trade policy sees Kenya as an efficient domestic market and export led globally competitive economy and the mission is to see Kenya become a competitive export led economy, strengthen regional integration and increase participation in both domestic and international trade activities of Kenya trade policy. Vision 2030 is one of the policies that seek to transform Kenya into a prosperous and global country.

The policy emphasizes on Open Trade Regime where Kenya moved towards a more open trade regime, dismantling quantitative import restrictions and price controls. Tariffs as Main Instrument Tariffs are now the main trade policy instrument in Kenya. Regional Integration: Kenya is actively involved in regional trade arrangements like the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. Global Trade:

The policy also aims to promote Kenya's integration into the global trade arena, particularly with WTO members. Support for Exporters: The policy includes initiatives to establish export development funds, guarantee schemes, and commercial offices in strategic markets. Legal and Institutional Reforms: Key reforms are being initiated to strengthen the legal and institutional framework for trade, including a Trade Development Act and a Trade Remedies Bill. and Trade Agreements in which Kenya is involved in various trade agreements, including the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the EU-Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). The policy acknowledges and aims to address constraints to international trade, such as the need for improved infrastructure, trade facilitation, and reduced non-tariff barriers. Economic policymakers in strategic trade policy aim to enable domestic companies to compete with foreign companies by transferring foreign profits to domestic profits. This process usually develops in three stages. In the first stage, the domestic firm has its research and development subsidised by the government. At the second level, the domestic company, led by the government subsidy, invests more in research and development. Lastly, when faced with subsidised research and development by its competitor, the foreign firm minimises its own investment in research and development and exports the product, in effect giving away the market to its subsidised competitor. Following decades of market opening and globalization, protectionism is on the rise. Purposes and impacts of tariffs, quotas, export controls, trade sanctions, currency manipulation and other non-tariff barriers to trade, globalization, competition and consumer welfare. Governments often enforce this kind of protectionism to protect local manufacturers. The resulting distortions have negative effects on international trade flows and economic efficiencies.

Economic partnerships and Diplomatic Engagements

Kenya enjoys key economic partnerships including agreements with the EAC, EU, UK, UAE, and other African countries. These partnerships are aimed at increasing trade, investment and economic cooperation. EU-Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), is a key aspect, providing duty-free, quota-free access to the EU market for Kenyan exports. The EPA

also incentivizes EU investment in Kenya and includes commitments on sustainability and development. Kenya's undertaking within the EAC as a member of Customs Union is crucial in the region. Kenya is a member of the EAC customs union, aims to create a single market for goods and services within the region, as a Regional Hub, Kenya is the economic hub of East Africa, with significant trade and investment flows to and from other EAC member states.

Further Sustainability Commitments in which The EPA includes binding provisions on labor rights, gender equality, environment, and climate change, reflecting the EU's commitment to sustainable development and Development Cooperation that the agreement also includes a dedicated chapter on economic and development cooperation to further support Kenya's economic development.

Other Economic Partnerships are COMESA FTA where Kenya is also part of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Free Trade Area, which further expands its trade and investment opportunities. Kenya-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in which Kenya and the UAE have also signed, further strengthens trade and investment ties. Key Considerations in Kenya's EAC's Role is The EAC's efforts to integrate its member states economically, including through the EAC Common Market Protocol that are crucial for regional growth and trade.

The "Variable Geometry" is an imperative where The principle of "variable geometry" allows individual EAC member states to pursue bilateral agreements with external partners, such as the EU, while still participating in the broader EAC framework, according to policy.trade.ec.europa.eu. While Kenya has a bilateral EPA with the EU, the potential for the EAC to negotiate a regional EPA with the EU remains, as explained by policy.trade.ec.europa.eu. On 18 December 2023, the EU and Kenya upon signing an economic partnership agreement (EPA), European Parliament gave its consent for it to enter fully into force.

The EU Kenya EPA consequently provided duty-free, quota-free EU market access to all exports from Kenya, combined with a partial and gradual opening of the Kenyan market to imports from the EU. The text of the agreement includes binding provisions on trade and sustainable development, and a transparent dispute resolution mechanism. This agreement builds on negotiations for an EPA with the EAC partner states at the time – Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda – which were finalized in October 2014.

The EAC envisages the EU-EAC EPA as a bloc-to-bloc agreement – i.e. the EPA could only enter into force after having been ratified by all EAC partners. Kenya is the only EAC country to ratify the EU-EAC EPA so that it does not lose free access to the EU market (all other EAC partner states have the status of least developed countries, and as such enjoy duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market). Diplomatic efforts, like negotiating trade agreements or promoting investment, help create an environment conducive to economic cooperation and growth. A crucial aspect of international relations, economic diplomacy involves the strategic use of diplomatic means to advance a country's economic objectives and foster mutually beneficial business alliances with partner nations.

Challenges facing Diplomatic Engagements

Diplomatic engagements face several challenges, including violence, complexity, bureaucracy, digital threats, evolving international relations, and the rise of non-state actors. These challenges impact the effectiveness of diplomacy in various ways, requiring innovative solutions and flexible strategies.

Regional trade within the East African Community (EAC) intermittently faces challenges including disparities in economic development among member states, infrastructure limitations, and non-tariff barriers. These issues hinder the free flow of goods and services and affect Kenya's trade within the region. WTO, 2019.

Kenyan exporters to the EAC face specific challenges to trading within the region, including informality of cross-border trade, poor infrastructure and non-tariff barriers such as cumbersome administrative procedures (WTO, 2019). General barriers to Kenyan exports include: (i) lack of capabilities (skills, technology, design), competitiveness and regulatory frameworks; (ii) lack of access to finance; (iii) lack of trade-related infrastructure; and (iv) market access barriers (standards, labelling, tariffs) (Krishnan et al., 2018).

It is worth noting that Kenya has taken several steps at the national, regional and continental levels that would help to address bottlenecks to trading with the EAC and internationally in general. At the national level, the Kenyan Government's Second Mid-Term Plan (MTP 2013–2017) states that its Vision 2030 aims to strengthen economic partnerships in East Africa, the rest of Africa, through international economic partnerships, as well as to increase and diversify Kenya's exports.

In addition, the Third MTP 2018–2022, gives the highest priority to achieving the President Uhuru Kenyatta's 'Big 4 Agenda', one pillar of which is enhancing the country's manufacturing sector.

Specific projects aiming to enhance regional trading include the expansion or rehabilitation of the East Africa Road Network Project covering 190 kilometers, and the East Africa Regional Transport, Trade and Development Facilitation Project covering 350 kilometers. These initiatives are aligned with one of the main aims of the country's national trade policy framework in Kenya's Vision 2030 for export growth through value addition in export-oriented manufacturing and services.

At the Africa level, Kenya participates in regional communities (such as the EAC, COMESA), and has signed the African Continental FTA (AfCFTA). Kenya is part of the EAC customs union, and pledged in December 2018 to make trade between EAC members Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda cheaper, faster and more straightforward to boost regional and continental trade (WTO, 2018). Kenya is also part of the COMESA FTA. Negotiations are ongoing to form a tripartite FTA among COMESA, EAC and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (COMESA, 2020).

These regional communities are working towards aligning initiatives with the AfCFTA, ratified by Kenya and 40 other countries as of October 2021. The EAC is expected to finalize its AfCFTA tariff offers by December 2021 (EAC, 2021). Meanwhile, the COMESA established a partnership framework with the AfCFTA Secretariat in April 2021 to support the AfCFTA implementation (Gakunga, 2021). Kenya's unpublished draft national AfCFTA strategy also incorporates regional commitments, including addressing the absence of a legal and consistent framework on trade-related mandates among Trade, EAC and Foreign Affairs ministries.

A number of government objectives on addressing challenges related to AfCFTA implementation (such as constraints in transport-related infrastructure, production linkages, competitiveness issues, high costs of business, and weak integration of MSMEs into value chains, among others) are expected to benefit from intra-EAC trading. Financial institutions or institutions that support financial sector development may provide complementary initiatives to national efforts in supporting Kenya's exports to the EAC and to Africa more widely. These initiatives include tailoring financial products for small-scale farmers, producers of export products with growing demand from the EAC; supporting value chain finance that could increase formality of cross-border trade within the EAC; tailoring digital financial services; providing financial support to meet product-specific standards by the EAC; supporting international approaches to facilitate investment.

Strategies in Kenya's regional trade

Kenya's regional trade strategies focus on maximizing the opportunities presented by agreements like the East African Community (EAC) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). There is need to focus on improved trade infrastructure, diversification export markets, and enhancement of regional cooperation with a view of reducing trade barriers and promoting intra-regional trade. To capture regional trade agreements in the context of Diplomatic engagements it requires Kenya's active participation in the EAC and AfCFTA, to harness the gains in these platforms Kenya's strives to access new markets and benefit from preferential trade terms. Improving trade infrastructure, such as the expansion of Mombasa port, are crucial for facilitating trade and establishing Kenya as a regional hub. Diversifying export markets and products where Kenya is targeting new export markets and products that align with its comparative advantages, enabling it to negotiate favorable market access terms.

In Enhancing regional cooperation Kenya aims to strengthen collaboration with regional communities like EAC and COMESA through harmonized policies, reduced barriers, and promotion of intra-regional trade. Supporting industries and provision of essential services in which Kenya is focusing on industries with high growth potential, such as financial services, information technology, and tourism, by encouraging value addition to export-oriented manufacturing and services. Addressing non-tariff barriers where efforts are underway to eliminate non-tariff barriers to trade and streamline processes, such as customs clearance, to facilitate the smooth flow of goods across borders. Monitoring and evaluation overtly developing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the effectiveness of trade policies and make necessary adjustments. Implementing the AfCFTA Strategic Plan focusing on Kenya implementing its AfCFTA Strategic Plan 2022-2027, which aims to increase the manufacturing sector's value added through tariff liberalization and government interventions. Reviewing national policies to restate Kenya in reviewing its National Industrial Policy and national automotive policy to promote industrialization, aligning with the AfCFTA's priority sectors. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with a view where SEZs are being developed as innovation and production centers to attract foreign direct investment and foster growth at the county level.

Kenya's foreign policy in East Africa is shaped by its strategic economic interests, regional stability efforts, and pursuit of economic integration within the EAC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). As a regional economic powerhouse, Kenya has pursued a proactive trade agenda, leveraging its port infrastructure, financial sector, and industrial base to enhance trade relations with its neighbors (Kimutai, 2024). Bilateral agreements with Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and South Sudan focus on infrastructure connectivity, energy trade, and industrial cooperation. Besides, Kenya's strategic position and stable economy has positioned her on a high diplomatic pedestal more so as a host of some of the largest and well recognized diplomatic missions and international agencies south of Sahara, such as UNEP headquarters, UN-FAO regional headquarter, and USAID regional headquarters among others.

The main instrument of Kenya's economic diplomacy in the EAC is trade because it involves formulation of policies that handle regional integration and bilateral trade agreements. Kenya's trade policy making process has changed over time since independence. After Kenya gained independence, emphasis was made on import substitution policies, in an effort to develop industries; the main objectives centered on rapid growth of trade, ease of balance of payment pressure, domestic control of employment and generation of employment (Manyara, 2010).

The introduction of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) in the 80s and 90s. created a shift from a highly protected domestic market to a more competitive environment (Amuhaya, 2018). This was aimed to increase trade in the country through promotion of non-traditional exports market liberalization and reform of international trade regulation (Manyara, 2010). this developed a shift towards export-oriented policies whose formulation provided a strategy for export growth. It is through this that the National Export Credit Guarantee Corporation was formed. In the 2004, Kenya established the Vision 2030 Agenda, whose emphasis was economic transformation through trade and investment, positioning the country as a regional trade and logistics hub.

Vision 2030 agenda commencement was in 2008, with five-year term plans (2008-2012, 2013-2017, 2018-2022, 2023-2027, 2028-2030). It replaced the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that had replaced medium term development goals (MDGs) after 2015. Some of the vision 2030 projects include the ports of Mombasa and Lamu's proximity to Dar es Salaam Port, LAPSET Corridor, linking Kenya with Ethiopia and South Sudan and the Kenya Uganda Railway, exemplifies Kenya's positioning and economic diplomacy in action. Additionally, Kenya benefits from a comparative advantage in finance, manufacturing, and agriculture, making it a key trade partner within the region (Amuhaya, 2018).

In 2014, Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade developed a Foreign Policy (2014) whose main focus was economic diplomacy. The Foreign Policy has five pillars: to enhance international peace and security, promote economic prosperity and development, enhance regional integration and relation. Through this policy, Kenya seeks to play a key role in bilateral integration in the EAC. It recognizes the EAC as its primary base for economic development and will therefore see to ensure it strengthens the community's relationship. Furthermore, Kenya's EAC regional cooperation is not just a means to achieving its economic growth within the bloc, but also a way to catalyze the elusive continental political integration through economic diplomacy. According to Nairobi, the net effect of these efforts is an intra-African trade to reduce the continents economic marginalization at the world stage.

With Kenya at this forefront, advocating for regional integration, many EAC countries keep asking the question of what's in it for Kenya (Gichuru, 2013). Notably, for Kenya, creating a larger export market, improving her attractiveness as a strategic logistics destination, leading Africa's tourism destination and increasing her competitiveness for FDI has always been the underlying objective (Amuhaya, 2018). Just in 2025, as reported by Anami (2025) Kenya and Somali, which joined the EAC in 2023, are discussing a trade facilitation agreement to eliminate irregular non-tariff barriers between the neighboring counties. This is in support of Somali, which is still developing trade protocols intended to be at par with EAC members on regional free trade. Kenya has signed such many deals across the EAC.

As a result, Kenya has spearheaded efforts aimed at creating a large regional market, which resulted in formulating cooperation legal instruments that established such other markets as IGAD, COMESA, and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in addition to the EAC (Alden & Soko, 2005; Githaiga, 2021). Kenya is an active participating member of these trading blocks, strategically positioning itself as a regional hub with economic stability to attract trade and FDIs serving as gateway for East Africa's inland countries like Uganda, Rwanda, DRC, South Sudan, and Burundi thereby giving the country an edge in terms of geo-political and economic influence (Githaiga, 2021).

Beyond the EAC, IGAD and COMESA, Kenya is also involved in aggressive regional integration initiatives with such outfits as IOR-ARC and ACP-EU. This is seen as a drive to cast the net of its foreign policy wider and insert her regional influence. Kenya has also signed an economic partnership agreement that opens cooperation between EU and EAC and spearheaded a tripartite FTA bringing together SADC, COMESA and EAC, and act that has greatly boosted her economic potential in both exports and essential imports. These forums also provide legalized non-tariff cross-border sharing of good, services, skilled labor between Kenya and her neighbors.

Kenya perceives the AU—RECs as critical and desirable development path to her economic diplomacy. The RECs are instrumental in the process of liberalized trade such as essential skilled labor, products and service across borders in the region. Despite strong economic ties, Kenya's trade relations within East Africa face challenges, including trade disputes, tariff disagreements, and competition for investment. Non-tariff barriers, such as regulatory inconsistencies and political tensions, occasionally strain diplomatic efforts. However, Kenya continues to champion regional integration through harmonized trade policies, labor mobility agreements, and infrastructure development.

Gap

As Africa's Gateway and hub, Kenya reaps much from the other EAC economies (Amuhaya, 2018). Increased trading has been seen between Kenya and individual East African states, especially Uganda and Tanzania, and thus the 'bigger market' in East Africa, with Kenya, in this case, attracting more investors both locally and internationally. Therefore, Kenya's economic diplomacy is conducted through integration and cooperation within East Africa (Wanyama, 2013). It is the pillar of foreign engagement through FDI (Amuhaya, 2018).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The paper adopted the descriptive design, in order to explore the aforementioned area of study. This design was seen to be the best for such study, as the gist of it was how regional trade stratagem influences Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the East African Community paradigm. This approach was considered to be very appropriate for such a study as it allowed for a deeper and critical investigation of economic diplomacy by use of trade policies, agreements, and other regional interactions. A mixed method research design, was used, which entailed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The use of the two methods was seen to be superior to the use of a single method, in that it allowed of the utilization of the best of both. The qualitative enabled the researcher to single out the respondent with deeper knowledge on the subject matter, while quantitative method allowed for the much needed sample frame that is representative for any study (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007).

Target Population

The targeted population were key people who work in the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Industry, together with those who are employees of the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs in senior level and who are charged with the duty of policy formulation, trade negotiations, and regional economic integration and collaborations. The officers from the two ministries who handle trade and are involved in the economic diplomacy, within the EAC region were targeted. Others were the experts who are serving in the senior position in the government and more so those charged with the duty of trade, diplomacy from the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, the trade policy experts, business leaders, the organisation which are involved regional trade, and academia who are involved in regional trade researchers.

4. FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

The paper synthesizes analysis and discusses the collected data. It illustrates various analytical steps and investigation of descriptive statistics of each variable of the study. The results are then interpreted in the particular context of Kenya diplomatic engagements and are discussed in relation to the literature that has been written before on the effect of regional trade stratagem on Kenya diplomatic engagements in the East African Community.

FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The paper is a synthesized analysis and discussion of the collected data. It starts with a systematic survey of the questionnaire return rate, giving information about the representativeness of the data gathered. It is then succeeded by a presentation of the demographic attributes. It then moves on to various analytical steps and investigation of descriptive statistics of each variable of the study. The results are then interpreted in the particular context of Kenya diplomatic engagements and are discussed in relation to the literature that has been written before on the effect of regional trade stratagem on Kenya diplomatic engagements in the East African Community.

Trade Policies and Kenya's Diplomatic Engagement within EACs paradigm

The analysis examined respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of Trade policies on Kenya's Diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. Table 4.7 presents the descriptive statistics for Trade policies indicators.

Descriptive Statistics for Trade policies

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std.Dev
Kenya's Trade policies are favorable to a leading position in EAC.	9 9.78%	16 17.39%	18 19.56%	34 36.95%	15 16.30%	3.31	1.124
Currency fluctuations affect Kenya's regional trade.	8 8.69%	12 13.04%	17 18.47%	38 41.30%	17 18.47%	3.46	1.088
Kenya's export earning supersedes imports earning within the EAC.	9 9.78%	14 15.21%	20 21.73%	35 38.04%	14 15.21%	3.33	1.148
Kenya has a strong domestic market for the region's goods and services	7 7.60%	11 11.95%	15 16.30%	40 43.47%	19 20.65%	3.55	1.067
Average						3.41	1.107

The discussion on the indicators of Trade policies showed different perceptions in an idea that enhancing business environment, facilitating trade and investment and enhancing trade support institutions was central to Kenya in its diplomatic involvement under EAC paradigm. The mean score was found to be highest on "Trade policies improve the quality of Kenya diplomatic engagements" (M=3.31, SD=1.124), as there was a general agreement among the respondents. This observation is in agreement with The EAC Customs Union and Common Market Protocol which make it easy to carry out trade since it lowers the barriers, unifies the customs procedures, and increases market accessibility. Moreover, Kenya enjoys positive trade balance in the EAC, with rising export and imports. The score indicates that the respondents have been aware that financial support is instrumental in ensuring the sustenance as well as the enhancement of solid diplomatic engagements.

As one respondent observed,

"Yes, I believe Kenya's trade policies are largely aligned with the broader goals of economic diplomacy within the EAC. Kenya has consistently supported and implemented the provisions of the EAC Customs Union and the Common Market Protocol, which are central pillars of regional integration. Trade has always been viewed as the bedrock of our regional cooperation, and Kenya, being the biggest economy in the bloc, has played a leading role in driving this agenda forward. However, while the policy frameworks are well aligned on paper, the challenge lies in implementation. We need to strengthen our commercial diplomacy by fully enforcing bilateral agreements and enhancing partnership programs that promote fair competition, reduce trade barriers, and open up more markets for regional goods and services." (KII 009)

This downplays the argument that the EAC trade policies like Common Market Protocol and bilateral trade agreement are meant to ease trade by mitigating barriers, harmonizing custom procedures, and encouraging free trade, hence the standard deviation reflects what is deemed to be acceptable agreement in this perception. This realization is more applicable in

foreign policy where the engagements of trade policies directly relate to operational readiness and the positive results of the diplomatic engagements. The outcome is also an indication of the Kenyan focus on the national trade policy of Kenya to become a competitive export-based economy, which would boost regional integration and increase its involvement in both local and foreign trade.

The indicator "Currency fluctuations influence the regional trade in Kenya earned significant attention among respondents ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.088$). This result confirms a similar observation of Menja and Rugami (2021), who find that financial limitations can have a strong effect on the outcomes of operations. The average score of 3.46 which is in the range of neutral implies that the respondents formed an ambivalent opinion on whether currency changes are a significant challenge in diplomatic interactions within the EAC.

A respondent from Uganda emphasized this cross-border challenge, noting,

"As a trade officer from Uganda, we face a lot of tariff and non-tariff barriers from Kenya. These impede trade between our two countries. I'm yet to ascertain whether they're policy related, but such challenges often arise alongside exchange rate fluctuations that affect trade flow and pricing stability." (KII 012)

This understanding is especially important since regional complexities are usually resource-consuming and may need magnanimity and lobbying and the knowledge. Extremely high oil prices, poor balance of payments with huge current account deficit and investors withdrawing out of the country.

Factors of inflation rates were also found to affect the fluctuation rates by 42.7 percent. Kenya has lower goods in the world market because she had a nascent marketing strategy of her goods. Imports exceed exports and speculators owned currencies waiting to get high profits in exchange market. The middle standard deviation means a uniformity in the responses of the respondents when it comes to the issue of whether Currency fluctuations have an effect on the diplomatic activities undertaken by Kenya in the East African community paradigm. The finding highlights the value of strategic financial planning and resource optimization as the tool in sustaining diplomatic interactions in EAC, given the sophisticated security conditions and instability of states in the area. This observation also conforms to the theoretical basis of interdependence liberalism theory that highlights that economic interdependence minimizes chances of war since trade is more profitable than conflicts. Trade helps states develop economically in a better manner than military confrontations do.

The indicators "Kenya's export earning supersedes imports earning within the EAC paradigm" ($M=3.33$, $SD=1.148$) showing that Kenya has a trade surplus with the EAC, earning more from exporting goods to EAC member countries than it spends on importing goods from them. This complements the report in Kenya's Business Daily Nation dated 15th March 2024 that Kenya's earnings from goods exported to African countries exceeded expenditure on imports by a record Ksh164.04 billion (\$1.22 billion) in 2023, The neutral scores indicate that while basic marketing requirements are met, there might be opportunities to enhance the diplomatic engagements. Kenyan exporters to the EAC face specific challenges to trading within the region, including informality of cross-border trade, poor infrastructure and non-tariff barriers.

Kenya has made efforts to boost its exports to the EAC and to Africa more widely, as reflected in the government's medium-term plans, engagement in the EAC customs union and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) free trade area, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). These efforts can be complemented by supporting informal micro, small and medium-sized enterprises or firms producing products for which there is growing demand from the EAC. The moderate standard deviations suggest some variation in perspectives, possibly reflecting different experiences across departments or programs.

The overall mean score for Trade policies ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.107$) indicates a positive assessment of Trade policies adoption at the ministries. This composite result suggests that while the respondents agree that trade policies support exists, there are opportunities for improvement. Raga et al., (2021). General barriers to Kenyan exports include: lack of capabilities, competitiveness and regulatory frameworks, lack of access to finance, lack of trade-related infrastructure and market access barriers (Krishnan et al.,2018). It is worth noting that Kenya has taken several steps at the national, regional and continental levels that would help to address bottlenecks in trading with the EAC and internationally in general.

Effectiveness of Kenya's Economic partnerships and Diplomatic engagement in the EAC

The analysis examined respondents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of Kenya's economic partnerships in the EAC. Table 4.8 below presents the statistics for economic partnerships and diplomatic engagement in the EAC.

Descriptive Statistics for Economic partnerships and Diplomatic engagement in the EAC

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std.Dev
Trade as a tool for Kenya's economic diplomacy in the EAC	10 10.86%	12 13.04%	16 17.39%	37 40.21%	17 18.47%	3.41	1.133
Kenya's economic diplomacy within the EAC is integrated and policy driven	9 9.78%	10 10.86%	14 15.21%	40 43.47%	19 20.65%	3.52	1.107
Kenya's economic diplomacy is driven by bilateral and multilateral agreements.	10 10.86%	15 16.30%	20 21.73%	31 33.69%	16 17.39%	3.29	1.140
Trade has strengthened Kenya's position in the EAC?	9 9.78%	14 15.21%	18 19.56%	34 36.95%	17 18.47%	3.37	1.125
Average						3.40	1.126

Analysis of Kenya's economic diplomacy within the EAC is integrated and policy driven revealed strongest agreement with "Kenya striving and thriving as the dominant economic hub in the region " (M=3.52, SD=1.107), indicating positive recognition of expansive trade falling in the 'agree' range suggests that respondents acknowledge the significant contribution economic partnerships to diplomatic engagements, while the moderate standard deviation indicates consistent views among respondents. Such an impression is most applicable in the light of the growing significance of the technological-based trading process between nations in the EAC paradigm. The outcome is also indicative of how Kenya has acknowledged Economic relationships in its international activities and enhancing trade in the EAC framework.

A respondent explained,

"Kenya's economic diplomacy within the EAC is both strategic and integration-driven. As a founding member and first signatory to the EAC Treaty, Kenya has maintained strict adherence to all the EAC Protocols, including the Customs Union and the Common Market. The country's approach is guided by regional trade agreements, promotion of investment, and the pursuit of deeper regional integration. Kenya has positioned itself as a logistics and diplomatic hub in the region, supporting MSMEs, addressing non-tariff barriers, and facilitating market access for local producers. With devolution, coordination between national and county levels is essential to ensure effective implementation of these policies. Kenya's diplomacy is focused on building regional economic strength and expanding opportunities through cooperation rather than protectionism." (KII 005)

The result also reinforces the theoretical framework of the strategic significance of the economic alliances in arching a competitive edge.

The indicator "Trade as a tool to Kenya economic diplomacy in the EAC" got a neutral response (M=3.41, SD=1.133), which indicates the acknowledgment that there is a need to improve Kenya trade value in its relation to the EAC diplomatic engagements. This positive mean score is an indicator that the respondents like the way Trade as a tool can capitalize on diplomatic engagements in terms of increased cooperation, collaboration, alliances, interaction, and engagement opportunities. The average standard deviation shows a fair amount of agreement between the respondents in terms of the positive contribution of Trade to the diplomatic engagements. It is more important to note that this perception is possible in the context of the complicated character of EAC paradigm that tends to demand intricate demonstration and simulation and competitiveness. The outcome is also in line with current trend within the EAC states where integration is becoming a prerequisite to trade growth, collective prosperity and economic growth of individual states.

The indicators such as "Trade has strengthened the position of Kenya in the EAC" (M=3.37, SD=1.125) and "Economic diplomacy of Kenya is driven by bilateral and multilateral agreements" (M=3.29, SD=1.140) scored with neutrality, which is indicative of an area in which there can be improvements. The scores on the neutral indicate that there is basic economic

cooperation infrastructure but there is more that can be done to improve the economic infrastructure as well as its application in diplomatic activities. The average standard deviations indicate that there is a fluctuation in the views, which could be attributed to diverse experiences in different ministries and other business and diplomatic organizations.

A respondent emphasized this dynamic by noting,

"I would describe Kenya's economic diplomacy in the EAC as pragmatic and adaptive. Kenya often adopts favourable approaches depending on the changing trade dynamics and the unpredictable nature of partner states. As the region's economic hegemon, Kenya strives to promote integration while safeguarding its own national interests. The country's focus on regional trade missions, study visits, and the deployment of trade attachés within EAC missions demonstrates its commitment to advancing trade and investment. However, Kenya's competitive edge has been eroding due to high production costs and inconsistent policies, forcing it to rely on opportunistic strategies such as export diversification and responding to regional market demands. Despite these challenges, Kenya continues to play the role of a 'big brother' in the bloc, supporting stability and growth through active engagement in EAC organs and leadership structures." (KII 017)

The results especially hold relevance towards the variety of economic partnerships of various aspects of diplomatic engagements between individual states as well as bilateral and multilateral collaboration. The findings also highlight the importance of planning towards economic alliances that are more efficient to match business competencies with diplomatic activities.

The general average score of the item, Economic partnerships in the context of Trade having strengthened the position of Kenya in the EAC, (M=3.40, SD=1.126) reflects a neutral or mildly positive evaluation of economic partnerships in Kenyan diplomatic interactions in the EAC paradigm. This aggregate outcome indicates that though the basic economic alliances are desirable in facilitating and aiding diplomatic relationships, there can be some improvement in particular contexts like peace and security in the EAC paradigm. The average standard deviation of all indicators implies that there is an acceptable consistency in the perceptions of the respondents, especially in responding to areas where economic alliances can be cemented to facilitate seamlessly diplomacy. The findings demonstrate that there is a multifaceted equilibrium between economic alliances and diplomacy in the bilateral and multilateral context where the best economic alliances are needed to realize Trade goals without sacrificing the state centrism.

Challenges facing Diplomatic Engagements

Table 4.9 presents the descriptive statistics for challenges facing diplomatic engagements indicators.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics for Challenges facing Diplomatic Engagements

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std.Dev
Tariffs, Tax complexities	8 8.69%	9 9.78%	14 15.21%	41 44.56%	20 21.73%	3.58	1.076
Compliance hurdles	9 9.78%	10 10.86%	15 16.30%	39 42.39%	19 20.65%	3.51	1.107
Logistical issues	7 7.60%	8 8.69%	13 14.13%	42 45.65%	22 23.91%	3.66	1.046
Currency fluctuations	8 8.69%	9 9.78%	15 16.30%	40 43.47%	20 21.73%	3.57	1.077
Average						3.58	1.076

The analysis of logistics issues in Kenya's diplomatic engagements as an indicator revealed strongest agreement with "logistics issues" at 45.6%, " (M=3.66, SD=1.046), indicating that Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs developed a Foreign Policy whose main focus is economic diplomacy. Kenya seeks to play a key role in bilateral integration in the EAC and recognizes the EAC as its primary base for economic development and will therefore see to ensure it

strengthens the community's relationship. Furthermore, Kenya's EAC regional cooperation is a means of achieving its economic growth within the bloc and logical parameter to catalyze the elusive continental political integration through diplomatic engagement. These findings align well with the assertions that, with Kenya at this forefront, advocating for regional integration, many EAC countries keep asking the question of what's in it for Kenya (Gichuru, 2013). Notably, for Kenya, creating a larger export market, improving her attractiveness as a strategic logistics destination, leading Africa's tourism destination and increasing her competitiveness for FDI has always been the underlying objective (Amuhaya, 2018).

One Key informant observed,

"Political instability affects cordial diplomatic engagements; however, these present an opportunity for Kenya to advance its position as an anchor state as well as a provider of solutions for the challenges in the region." (KII 006)

Another expert further noted that;

"The greatest challenge is Kenya's position economically in the region. So, Kenya comes on the engagement table viewed by other States in 'big brother syndrome' light... I would advocate for Kenya working hard enough to increase its trade footmarks and be an authority in economic diplomatic engagements." (KII 004)

The indicator "Tariffs, Tax complexities" as a Challenge in Kenya's diplomatic engagements received strong positive assessment (M=3.58, SD=1.076), Kenya experiences General barriers exports include which include lack of capabilities (skills, technology, design), competitiveness and regulatory frameworks, lack of access to finance; lack of trade-related infrastructure; and market access barriers (standards, labeling, tariffs) (Krishnan et al., 2018). However, Kenya taken tremendous steps at the national, regional and continental levels that would help to address bottlenecks to trading with the EAC and internationally to equivocate her economic role strongly within the EAC paradigm.

As noted by one participant, "Non-compliance by Member States" and "lack of effective follow-up on the key outcomes from various EAC sector council meetings" remain key issues, though "this is being addressed by convening various bilateral technical level engagements with partner states."

The high mean score suggests that Kenya has successfully fostered economic diplomatic engagement that places it at a competitive advantage which is particularly crucial in diplomatic engagement within the EAC paradigm. The relatively low standard deviation indicates high agreement among respondents regarding this aspect of challenges, suggesting consistent engagements of collaborative practices across different players and organizations. The mean score falling in the 'agree' range suggests Kenya acknowledges the challenges and moves in drastic measures to address the same with a view to actively promote economic diplomacy within the EAC paradigm. The relatively low standard deviation indicates high consensus among respondents regarding the tariffs and tax barriers as a challenge in economic diplomacy.

The indicator, "Currency fluctuations" as a challenge in Kenya's diplomatic engagements (M=3.57, SD=1.077) and "Compliance hurdles" as a challenge in diplomatic engagements (M=3.51, SD=1.107) both received positive ratings, indicating the need for strong and imperative economic measures to be taken for addressing this challenges with a view to moderate currency fluctuations and reduce compliance hurdles to enhance diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. The need on the instruments for harmonization of laws that might be suitable for operationalization of the EAC in the context of addressing compliance hurdles. To date, various legal instruments such as Protocols, Acts, Directives and Regulations have been employed with varying degrees of success. The legal basis of such instruments and the effectiveness of each of them should be a central focus in future research.

One expert highlighted that "balancing national, regional and global priorities, financing, and regional instability" remain persistent obstacles, though these "can be addressed through continuous monitoring and evaluation, policy innovation, diplomatic efforts to ensure stability, fostering partnerships and investments." (KII 023) Another expert added that "sovereignty challenges as countries focus nationally" could best be overcome through "bilateral engagements with a focus on regionalism." (KII 010)

These findings are consistent with the Report of the 30th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Nairobi, Kenya (20-28 November 2014) that addressed six Securities Market Directives and a Directive on licensing market Intermediaries. These proposals were delivered to the Council, and subsequently discussed by the Sectoral Council on Legal and Judicial Affairs to make sure that they met the required legal requirements.

The overall mean score for challenges facing Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.076$) indicates a strong positive assessment of major issues underlying and affecting the diplomatic relations Kenya has within the EAC. These results showed that the treaty introduced important milestones including the establishment of a customs union, common market, and immigration and labour policies to enhance the integration of the region. Nevertheless, in spite of these accomplishments, the adoption of the pillars was difficult owing to a number of challenges encountered by member states. These findings confirm the anxieties of experts that the vision of a single regional economy as envisaged by the EAC could be weak unless the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) is empowered appropriately. The lack of a robust institutional framework and adequate funding means that the regional bloc is likely to compromise its own law-making basis which could jeopardize the sustainability of the integration project of East Africa.

Strategies and Kenya's Diplomatic Engagement Within the EAC Paradigm

The analysis examined the Strategies and Kenya's diplomatic engagement within the EAC paradigm..

Descriptive Statistics for strategies for Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std.Dev
Regional dominance	6 6.52%	9 9.78 %	14 15.21%	43 46.73 %	20 21.73%	3.64	1.020
Licensing and legal regimes	8 8.69%	10 10.86%	14 15.21%	40 43.47%	20 21.73%	3.56	1.088
Export and import Promotions	6 6.52%	8 8.69%	12 13.04%	44 47.82%	22 23.91%	3.70	1.013
Joint ventures	7 7.60%	9 9.78%	14 15.21%	42 45.65%	20 21.73%	3.61	1.049
Average						3.63	1.042

Analysis of the research findings establishes that the integration process strategies were the best instruments the partner states had adapted and that if they were implemented to the best of the states' knowledge, success was inevitable. Indicators showed strongest agreement with "Export and import Promotions is critical for successful economic diplomacy" ($M=3.70$, $SD=1.013$), indicating widespread recognition trade impetus within the EAC paradigm.

These results are in line with the observations of Sherillyn Raga, Maximiliano Mendez-Parra and Dirk Willem te Velde (2021) who observed that Kenya has been proactive in expanding its exports in the EAC and in the whole of Africa. This has been reflected in the medium-term development plans by the government, the EAC Customs Union and the COMESA Free Trade Area and the draft National Strategy of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

They also imply that these initiatives can be reinforced by promoting informal micro, small, and medium enterprises that manufacture products in increasing demand within the region. The mean is high, meaning that most of the respondents recognize the value of export and import promotion as one of the most significant economic diplomacy impetuses, and the standard deviation is small, which means that the respondents are very homogenous in their views. This is particularly true of the diplomatic effort of Kenya at the EAC whereby trade standards are affected by economic diplomacy and efficiency in operations is enhanced. Altogether, the findings suggest that Kenya realizes the strategic importance of trade promotion to the economic diplomacy development and is consistent with the theoretical point of view that the regional trade projects are instrumental in the improvement of the organizational performance and strengthening of the diplomatic cooperation.

The indicator "Regional dominance affects Kenya in its diplomatic relations with the EAC paradigm" was highly rated positively ($M=3.64$, $SD=1.020$), indicating the perceived effect of regional dominance of Kenya, in relation to the EAC, as the top exporter, especially of manufactured goods and re-exports, and the better performance of the country compared with other member states. This dominance is also enhanced by the fact that it has well developed infrastructure and it also has power in shaping the trade policies in the region. This finding corresponds with W.S. Nasong'o, M.N. Amutabi, T. Falola

(Eds.), The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Kenya, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham (2023) who describe globalization as a complex process whereby cultural, political, and socio-economic interactions have increased and intensified across societies.

This has resulted in an accelerated flow of technology, ideas, capital, human resources, goods and services across countries and regions in the course of time (Juma, 2016). However, other scholars and policymakers are more critical, and view globalization as a trend that is being strategically redefined by the Western powers to maintain and further the unequal benefits of a capitalist global economy. The mean score in the study, which is within the range of agree, shows that the respondents have recognized the powerful effect of different economic diplomacy strategies on the results of diplomatic interactions. Moreover, the standard deviation is low, which is a pointer to a common perception by the respondents regarding the strong relationship between the regional trade strategies and diplomatic interactions of Kenya in the EAC paradigm.

The indicators " Licensing and legal regimes impacts the Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm " (M=3.56, SD=1.088) and "joint ventures enhances economic diplomacy " (M=3.61, SD=1.049) both received positive ratings, indicating strong recognition of economic diplomacy's strong and transformational aspects. The interaction between Kenya and the East African Community (EAC) is regulated by an elaborate legal and licensing system that is directed towards supporting the integration and trade in the region. This framework encompasses the different EAC protocols, regulations and country laws of Kenya especially laws of Kenya on customs, investment, competition, and dispute resolution. These findings are similar to those of Otiende, Ibrahim E (2022) research on the effectiveness of Kenya and EAC legal regimes on Kenya involvement and investment in global value chains.

The average scores indicate that the respondents value the economic diplomacy that can encourage states and promote the effectiveness of trade by using licensing and legal regimes and joint ventures strategies. The average standard deviations reveal that there is uniformity in the views of respondents as to the regional trade stratagem.

The mean score (M=3.63, SD=1.042) indicates that there is a very positive rating of regional trade stratagem in EAC paradigm. This follows the EAC Treaty Article 75 which establishes the arrangement of the Customs Union. Among some of the provisions that are stipulated in the relevant Protocol is the regulation of tariffs, rules of origin, and the control of non-tariff barriers (NTBs). Specifically, Article 2(4) of the Protocol emphasises the elimination of custom duties and other importation levies on intra-union imports, removal of non-tariff barriers between Partner States and application of a common external tariff on imported goods. The standard deviation is also not high, which means that there is a high level of agreement among the respondents and it means that the practices related to diplomatic engagement are highly institutionalized and have been practiced in any organization in a similar way. This sound and efficient leadership basis is a reputable support which can be leveraged in boosting economic diplomacy especially in relation to Kenya in the EAC scenario.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This paper presents the summary, conclusion and the recommendations derived from the findings from the study on regional trade stratagem affecting Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. This research was guided by four main objectives: analyzing the influence of trade policies, exploring the influence of economic partnerships, challenges faced and lastly strategies for enhancement on Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. Through statistical analysis of data from 92 respondents, the study started off by administering the research questionnaire to the respondents', gathered findings through exploratory and explanatory approaches and discussed the relationship between regional trade stratagem and Kenya's diplomatic activities in the EAC in both correlation and regression analysis. The findings of the study indicated that the associations between all variables were strong, positive, with strategic approaches having the greatest impact on the role of Kenya in the region as a diplomat. The chapter gives a cohesive overview of the results in accordance with each research aim, makes conclusions on the basis of statistical data, and presents practical recommendations on enhancing the diplomatic activity of Kenya at EAC. It also brings to the fore the wider implications of the findings to economic diplomacy and the future research areas. Despite the fact that the study was able to achieve its aims, it also highlights some limitations in terms of scope and methodology, which must be taken into account when interpreting the results and coming up with future research.

Summary of Findings

Trade policies and Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm

Trade policies were measured through four key indicators that examined different aspects which included, Kenya's Trade policies being favorable to Kenya leading in economic diplomacy within the EAC paradigm, Currency fluctuations affecting Kenya's regional trade, Kenya's export earning superseding imports earning within the EAC paradigm and Kenya has a strong domestic market for the regions goods and services. The analysis revealed varying levels of Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. The highest mean was observed for "Kenya has a strong domestic market for the regions goods and services" (M=3.55, SD=1.067), indicating strong recognition of the link between strong domestic market for goods and services and economic diplomacy. Respondents highlighted that balancing national, regional and global priorities, financing, and regional instability remain ongoing challenges, though these can be addressed through continuous monitoring and evaluation, policy innovation, diplomatic efforts to ensure stability, fostering partnerships and investments. This shows the importance of maintaining a stable domestic economic base to enhance Kenya's trade and diplomatic leverage within the EAC.

The statement with the second-highest mean was the statement "Currency fluctuation impacts Kenya regional trade in the EAC framework" (M=3.46, SD=1.088) which reveals how the inflation rates impact financial planning and restrict the optimization of resource streams. The assertions that the export earnings exceed the import earnings in the EAC (M=3.33, SD=1.148) and the assertion that the trade policies in Kenya give it a competitive edge in the EAC framework (M=3.31, SD=1.124) had slightly lower means, indicating areas that require more focus. Regression analysis revealed a positive and significant correlation between trade policies and diplomatic activities of Kenya in EAC ($b=0.245$, $t=3.657$, $p<0.001$). The coefficient standardized (0.256) indicates the moderately significant role of these policies among the factors under investigation. In summation, the results show that Kenya has a strong economic diplomacy which is influenced by its trade policies, but can be improved by enhancing financial planning and resource utilization in order to enhance Kenya in its diplomacy in the EAC.

Economic partnerships and Kenya's diplomatic engagement within the EAC paradigm

The economic partnerships were evaluated through four major indicators that analyzed how economic infrastructure, bilateral, and multilateral relations impacted the Kenyan diplomatic participation in the EAC. The findings revealed varying degrees of success in various areas of economic diplomacy. "Kenya's economic diplomacy in the EAC is integrated and policy-driven" was the highest mean score (M=3.52, SD=1.107). This indicates that a great awareness of Kenya integration campaigns and how economic infrastructure has been used to enhance its diplomatic ties in the region. Respondents cited Kenya membership in the founding of the EAC, its position as the first signatory to the Treaty, regular contribution payments and adherence to EAC protocols. Such results confirm the idea that the diplomacy of Kenya is deeply entrenched in institutionalized structures and is directed by the principles of the common market and the customs union.

The second-largest mean was linked with the statement "Trade is a major tool for Kenya's economic diplomacy in the EAC" (M=3.41, SD=1.133) in that there were positive perceptions of trade as a means of Kenya engaging in diplomacy in the regional context. Respondents noted that Kenya's economic diplomacy is more focused on regional integration rather than protectionism and that with integration Kenya can take advantage of critical mass to access meaningful market. The lowest mean scores were obtained on "Trade has strengthened the position of Kenya in the EAC paradigm" (M=3.37, SD=1.125) and the scale "Economic diplomacy in Kenya is informed by bilateral and multilateral agreements" (M=3.29, SD=1.140). These findings are indicative of the areas that might require further attention and policy. The regression analysis revealed that economic partnerships had a significant positive impact ($b=0.278$, $t=4.277$, $p<0.001$), and the standardized coefficient of 0.298 indicates that the given factor has a significant role in the set of predictors. Overall, the results indicate that despite the already existing positive effects of economic partnerships in Kenya, there is more to expand by strengthening the economic infrastructure, enhancing regional collaboration, increasing integration, and coherent policy frameworks in the EAC.

Challenges and Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm

Four key indicators (tariffs tax complexities, compliance hurdles, logistical problems, and currency fluctuations) were used to explore the challenges that influence the diplomatic activities of Kenya within the EAC. The discussion has shown that some of these problems still significantly affect the involvement of Kenya in the regional system.

Mean ($M=3.66$, $SD=1.046$) was highest in "logistical issues" which captured issues to do with integration, security, inflation, and legal barriers in the EAC. According to the respondents, the lack of follow up on resolutions of EAC sector council meetings has hampered progress. Nonetheless, efforts are being made to cope with this by bilateral technical-level consultations with partner states.

The second and third highest mean were found in Tariffs tax as an indicator challenge ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.076$) and Currency fluctuations as a challenge on Kenya diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.077$). Such results indicate that there is an urgent necessity to coordinate legal and legislative processes among member states. The lowest mean was indicated in the compliance hurdles within the EAC paradigm ($M=3.51$, $SD=1.107$), indicating, however, the existence of ongoing structural issues.

Results of regression confirmed that there was a significant positive correlation between these challenges and the diplomatic involvement of Kenya in the EAC ($b=0.236$, $t=3.420$, $p=0.001$) and the standardized coefficient of 0.248. Combined, the results indicate that Kenya is still experiencing significant yet controllable issues that affect its diplomatic operations in the context of the EAC.

Conclusions

Regarding the impact of trade policies in Kenya and its diplomatic activities in the EAC paradigm is concerned, the research unveiled a number of valuable findings. One of the major discoveries is associated with the regional integration, where Kenya is actively involved in regional economic blocs, including the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Kenya aims at reinforcing intra-African trade and enhancing economic growth through these platforms. The other significant factor is the expansion of trade in the world where Kenya has been diversifying its trade partners, expanding market access to its products and even to foreign investment. The trade regime in Kenya is also influenced by trade liberalization and it adheres to the market-driven principles and the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In addition, economic diplomacy has continued to be the core of the foreign policy of Kenya to promote trade and investment relationships, promote foreign investment, and support the transfer of technology.

Another aspect that was found to characterize diasporas in the study is the engagement of the diaspora, where the Kenyan diaspora was viewed as a crucial national resource in terms of their skills, knowledge, and financial resources. Moreover, policy alignment means that trade policies in Kenya are aligned with its overall foreign policy objectives- especially peace and security, economic prosperity and international influence. Some of the most important features of Kenya in its diplomatic activities in the EAC paradigm include regional leadership where Kenya seeks to strengthen its position by fostering peace, security, and regional collaboration as well as enhancing African interests in the international arena. The regression analysis showed a strong positive correlation between trade policies and diplomatic engagement ($b=0.245$, $p<0.001$), indicating that trade policies do affect largely the diplomatic status of Kenya in the EAC.

Despite the fact that Kenya has already developed a good base with the available trade policies, the results indicate that more can be done to intensify economic growth and enhance intra-African trade. The average effect size suggests that trade policies operate in a broader system of interconnected variables that affect the diplomatic relations of Kenya. The study specifically highlighted the necessity to enhance investment linkages, skills and knowledge and mobilization of resources more efficiently. On the whole, these findings underscore the need to embrace more robust and dynamic trade policies to continue facilitating the economic diplomacy of Kenya.

The examination of economic alliances and their impact on the diplomatic activities of Kenya in the EAC exposed some interesting facts about the role of integration in regional cooperation. The results indicated that there was a significant positive influence ($b=0.278$, $p<0.001$) that economic partnerships can play a crucial role in utilizing both established and new relationships to enhance the trade, investment and development. Other important features of economic relationships of Kenya are the diversification of international relationships, where Kenya keeps on diversifying the international relationships in accordance with the changing trade relationships and regulatory settings. Another area of core activity is infrastructure development, where Kenya is looking to collaborate with others to facilitate the development of infrastructure projects like the extension of the Standard Gauge Railway and the development of highways- both vital to economic development.

Kenya is also looking to enhance trade and investment relations with existing partners and look at new markets and to attract more foreign investment. It has a special focus on regional integration, especially intra-African trade, as a basis of socio-

economic and political integration of the continent. The Kenyan diaspora is also considered as a significant contributor to economic growth and their economic and intellectual capital has been instrumental in the development of the country. Moreover Kenya has a high-level bilateral relations with the neighboring states in the EAC and is working on diplomatic initiatives which promote mutual respect and cooperation. Economic diplomacy is a critical instrument in advancing economic interests of Kenya, luring investors, and expanding export markets. The research established a close relationship between economic relations and Kenya diplomatic relations, which reflects the relevance of trade and investment relations as part of the EAC. Although the results were encouraging, they also indicated areas of enhancing economic relationships to guarantee future integration and development. These findings confirm that regional integration is necessary to sustain and promote the Kenya diplomatic presence within the EAC paradigm.

The examination of the issues that influenced Kenya in its diplomatic interactions gave a clear indication of the effect it has had. The paper captured a large positive impact ($b=0.236$, $p=0.001$), which shows how these issues still undermine economic diplomacy in Kenya under EAC. Among the challenges are tariffs, tax complexities, compliance barriers, logistical barriers, and currency fluctuations. Greater socio-economic issues, like poverty, inequality, youth unemployment, and insufficient transparency, continue to be barriers to the diplomatic and economic performance of Kenya in the region. The research on the role of the strategies in the diplomatic activities of Kenya indicated the most significant effect among all the variables under analysis. It was found that there was a significant positive correlation ($b=0.289$, $p<0.001$) between strategic approaches and the determination of the diplomatic performance of Kenya in the EAC.

The overall diplomatic policy of Kenya is established with the aim of improving the international image of the country and advancing national interests with the help of a variety of international relations. The results highlight the importance of the regional supremacy, licensing and legal regulation, export and import promotion, and the support of joint venture as essential elements of the Kenya economic diplomacy. The close connection between strategic planning and diplomatic participation underscores the role of structured trade strategies in determining desirable results of Kenya in the EAC. Finally, Kenya needs to maintain its leadership and enhance its economic diplomacy within the regional context through the formulation of well-planned and synchronized strategies.

Recommendations

Following the findings presented, the study recommends the following to enhance Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm:

For trade policies, Kenya should focus on consolidating its trade policies and diplomatic relations in the East African Community (EAC) to promote regional integration and economic development. These are trade facilitation, regional value chain promotion, and greater involvement with the Kenyan diaspora. Moreover, Kenya must take advantage of being an anchor state to facilitate regional collaboration and make sure its interests have a proper representation.

Concerning economic partnerships, Kenya should consider economic partnerships within the East African Community (EAC) by building on its strategic assets and concentrate on areas of mutual benefit. These involve strengthening bilateral and multilateral assistance, strengthening involvement with the Kenyan diaspora, and encouraging trade and investment. Regional cooperation can also help Kenya to manage the environment sustainably and address global issues such as climate change.

On the challenges, Kenya encounters issues of integration in East African Community (EAC) such as national interests and varying ways of co-operating in the region. Kenya should focus on aligning the national policies with the EAC objectives, engage actively non-state actors, and raise awareness among the population about the advantages of regionalization to enhance its diplomatic activities.

Kenya should make efforts to improve infrastructure development and thus invest in infrastructure development especially in transport and energy to ease trade, lower costs and boost connectivity in the region.

On the issue of dealing with trade barriers, Kenya needs to collaborate with other members of the EAC to remove non-tariff measures to trade, simplify the customs process, and facilitate the free movement of goods and people. In as far as promoting cooperation on regional security is concerned, Kenya has placed regional security cooperation mechanisms to deal with cross-border issues such as terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking.

Continued development of the EAC institutions should be increased to be able to implement the regional policies and programs effectively. Finally, Kenya must adopt digital diplomacy to help it make use of digital platforms and technologies to improve communication, information sharing, and participation of citizens in EAC processes.

These recommendations take into account the existing areas of strength and those needing improvement. By addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations, Kenya can play a vital role in strengthening the EAC and fostering greater regional integration for the benefit of all member states.

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