

Regional Trade Stratagem Influencing Kenya's Diplomatic Engagements Within the East African Community Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

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. While many studies explore Kenya's economic growth, few interrogate its efficiency as a tool for economic diplomacy in the EA. This study examined how regional trade stratagems influence Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. The objective of this study was to investigate how regional trade stratagems influence Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC framework the literature was reviewed thematically guided by Interdependence theory and reinforced by Neoliberal theory. This study used a descriptive research design and its target population included Kenya's Ministry of Trade and Industrialization. The study used purposive, stratified and random sampling methods to sample its respondents. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires and coded using SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and presented in tables. Qualitative data was collected by interviewing Key Informants (KIIs), analyzed using content and thematic analysis and presented in narrative and verbatim format. The study found that trade policies ($b=0.245$, $p<0.001$), economic partnerships ($b=0.278$, $p<0.001$), and strategic approaches ($b=0.289$, $p<0.001$) played a significant role in promoting Kenya in the EAC, whereas the persistent challenges ($b=0.236$, $p=0.001$) like tariffs and logistical barriers acted as a limit to progress. The study concludes that Kenya has its regional influence based on good policy alignment, economic integration, and strategic partnerships. 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.

Keywords: Regional Trade Stratagem, Diplomacy and Diplomatic Engagements, East African Community Paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

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 & Samaraturunge, 2002). Economic diplomacy 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).

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. 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). Key trade goods within the EAC include agricultural products, petroleum, textiles, and manufactured goods (AfDB, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The Government of Kenya employs economic diplomacy as a key instrument for strengthening bilateral and regional relations within East Africa. Kenya and Uganda, for instance, share a long-standing trade relationship anchored by critical infrastructure such as the Port of Mombasa and the historic Kenya–Uganda railway, which continue to facilitate cross-border commerce and connectivity. Although Kenya remains one of the leading economic hubs in the East African region, it faces growing competition from neighboring states such as Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, which are actively diversifying their economies and expanding their diplomatic and trade networks. While existing studies have examined Kenya's economic growth trajectory (World Bank, 2023), limited attention has been given to how regional trade is strategically employed as a tool of diplomatic engagement within the East African Community (EAC) framework. This raises important questions: How does Kenya leverage its strategic trade position to advance regional influence and national interests? What factors constrain the effectiveness of Kenya's economic diplomacy in East Africa? Which mechanisms can be adopted to strengthen trade as a vehicle for diplomatic leverage? This study therefore seeks to examine how Kenya, as a key regional actor, can harness regional trade stratagems to enhance its diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm. By addressing this gap, the study justifies the need to interrogate the nexus between trade strategy and diplomatic practice in the East African context.

Objective of the Study

This study examined how regional trade stratagems influence Kenya's diplomatic engagements within the EAC paradigm.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kenya's trade policy framework is designed to transform the economy into a globally competitive, export-led, and efficient market system while strengthening domestic production and participation in international trade. The policy prioritizes improvement of the business environment, promotion of investment, and reinforcement of trade-support institutions, while deepening Kenya's integration into the global trading system (Republic of Kenya, Sessional Paper on Foreign Policy, 2025). Specific measures include support for exporters through initiatives such as export development funds, credit guarantee schemes, and the establishment of commercial offices in strategic foreign markets (Republic of Kenya, Sessional Paper on Foreign Policy, 2025). Kenya maintains key economic partnerships through trade agreements with the East African Community (EAC), the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and other states, aimed at enhancing trade flows, attracting investment, and strengthening economic cooperation (Kenya Secures Markets Representing 46 % of Global GDP, 2025). A notable example is the EU–Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which grants Kenyan exports duty-free, quota-free access to the EU market as soon as it enters into force (EU–Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement, 2023/2024). Kenya is also a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Free Trade Area, which broadens trade and investment opportunities within the region (Republic of Kenya, Sessional Paper on Foreign Policy, 2025).

Kenya's regional trade strategy therefore emphasizes maximizing the benefits derived from frameworks such as the EAC and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This involves harmonization of policies, reduction of trade barriers, and promotion of intra-regional trade. Kenya has also played a leading role in advancing the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) that brings together COMESA, EAC, and SADC, significantly enhancing its trade prospects in both exports and essential imports. This study is anchored on Interdependence Theory as advanced by Keohane and Nye (1987), which explains the evolving nature of the global political economy in an era characterized by globalization, technological change, and cross-border challenges. The theory posits that states are increasingly interconnected and rely on economic and institutional cooperation rather than military confrontation. Power, therefore, shifts from coercive capability to economic interdependence and

institutional collaboration (Romaine, 2001). Kenya's diplomatic conduct within the EAC reflects this logic, where trade relations are often prioritized over political disputes. For instance, Kenya's restrained approach to the Migingo Island dispute with Uganda and its continued economic cooperation with Tanzania demonstrate a preference for preserving trade interdependence and regional stability. Neoliberal institutionalism complements Interdependence Theory by emphasizing the role of international institutions and regimes in fostering cooperation among states. While sharing some assumptions with neorealism regarding the anarchic nature of the international system, neoliberalism argues that sustained cooperation is achievable through repeated interactions, transparency, monitoring mechanisms, and institutional frameworks. In *After Hegemony*, Keohane (1984) contends that international cooperation can persist even in the absence of a dominant hegemon, as institutions reduce uncertainty and transaction costs among states. Within the EAC context, institutions, agreements, and trade protocols serve as mechanisms that facilitate collaboration, minimize conflict, and promote mutual economic gains among member states.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design, a method which combined qualitative and quantitative techniques to enhance the validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population comprised senior officers from the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Industry, and the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, as well as trade policy experts, business leaders, regional trade organizations, and academicians. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents with specialized knowledge in trade and diplomacy (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Stratified sampling ensured proportional representation of groups based on institutional affiliation (Kothari, 2014), while simple random sampling within each stratum reduced selection bias (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013). The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula determined the sample size, ensuring reliability and generalizability of the results.

The formula is as follows:

$$s = X^2 * N * P * (1-P) / (d^2 * (N-1) + X^2 * P * (1-P))$$

Where:

s = required sample size

X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)

N = the population size

P = 0.50 as a provision of the sample size.

d = 0.05 as the degree of accuracy.

Using the population of 149 from Table 3.1, the calculation is as follows:

$$s = 3.841 * 149 * 0.5 * (1-0.5) / ((0.05^2 * 148) + (3.841 * 0.5 * (1-0.5)))$$

$$s = 143.1623 / 1.3304$$

$$s = 107.6 \text{ (rounded up to 108)}$$

Structured questionnaires and likert-scale questionnaire presented respondents with statement and asked them to indicate their level of agreement on a scale typically ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (SD) to "Strongly Agree". The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 served as the main statistical tool. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics through frequencies, percentages and presented in tables (Mishra et al., 2019). Correlation analysis was performed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to examine the relationships between variables. The strength and direction of the correlations were interpreted, and statistical significance was assessed at the 0.05 level. Qualitative data was collected from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and analyzed using thematic and the content analysis methods. The emerging data were grouped and coded

according to the emerging themes. These qualitative data were presented using the descriptive narrations and verbatim.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A sample size of 108 respondents was used in the study but this was arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan formula. Of the 108 questionnaires sent out, 84 were filled out and returned, which is a response rate of 85.1%. and 8 key informants were interviewed. This is more than 80 percent which is the recommended response rate in social science research (Gordon, 2023).

Demographic Characteristics

Age Distribution of Respondent's

Table 1 below presents the age distribution of respondents.

Age Category	Frequency	Percent
18- 25 years	5	5.4
26 - 35 years	18	19.7
36 - 50 years	45	48.9
Above 50 years	24	27.0
Total	92	100.0

Source: Researcher (2025)

Most of the respondents age bracket was constituted with respondents aged 36-50 years (48.9%), then with respective proportions respondents Above 50 years (27.0%), respondents 26 to 35 years (19.7%), and respondents 18-25 years with minimal proportions (5.4%). The age distribution of the respondents is essential in establishing the level of professional experience and generational variety that may influence Kenya in its foreign relations in the East African Community (EAC). The 36-50 years and 50 years and above make up a significant proportion of the high-ranking officers and policymakers with much experience in the regional trade negotiations and diplomacy.

Education Level of Respondent's

Table 2 below presents the distribution of respondents by education level.

Education Level	Frequency	Percent
High School	8	9.0
Diploma	17	30.3
Bachelor's Degree	54	46.1
Master's Degree	13	14.6
Total	92	100.0

Source: Researcher (2025)

Majority of the respondents (46.1%) had bachelors degrees which provides a strong base of theoretical knowledge and professional experience. This was then trailed by diploma graduates (30.3%), who inject specialized technical competencies into their jobs, and the master graduates (14.6%), who offer advanced knowledge and research skills. The highest qualification of 9.0% was high school education, either in the field of support or specialized technical background. This distribution shows that the respondents had a good academic background.

Respondents Distribution by Years of Service

Table 3 shows how the respondents were distributed regarding the years of service.

Service Period	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 year	8	8.7
1 - 5 years	31	33.7
6 - 10 years	35	38.0
Over 10 years	18	19.6
Total	92	100.0

Source: Researcher (2025)

A significant portion of the respondents (38 %) indicated they had served at the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry, Diplomatic Missions for between 6 and 10 years. 33.7% of respondents had between one and five years of service, while 19.6 % had served for over a decade. The substantial proportion of respondents with over six years of service suggests a high level of institutional knowledge retention, which is crucial for maintaining consistency and ensuring that new members receive instruction from experienced professionals. The presence of newer personnel (33.7% with less than five years of service) reflects an ongoing process of workforce renewal, allowing for the infusion of fresh perspectives and updated diplomatic engagement methodologies.

Trade Policies and Kenya's Diplomatic Engagement within EACs paradigm

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for Trade policies indicators.

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

Source: Researcher (2025)

The findings in Table 4 examined respondents' perceptions of how Kenya's trade dynamics position the country within the East African Community (EAC). The overall mean score of 3.41 (SD = 1.107) indicates a general tendency toward agreement that Kenya's trade environment supports its leading regional position. On the statement that Kenya's trade policies are favorable to a leading position in the EAC, a combined 53.25% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with a mean of 3.31 (SD = 1.124). This suggests moderate agreement,

though the variation in responses indicates that some stakeholders question the effectiveness of policy implementation. This quantitative finding is reinforced by views from key informant (KII 009) who noted that:

“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.” (KII 008)

This perspective highlights Kenya’s proactive role in supporting EAC trade frameworks as part of its economic diplomacy. The indicator “Currency fluctuations influence the regional trade in Kenya” attracted significant attention among respondents (M = 3.46, SD = 1.088), with 59.77% expressing agreement. This confirms that exchange rate volatility is perceived as a major factor affecting trade performance, pricing, and competitiveness within the region. A key informant from Uganda corroborated this view, stating:

“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 04)

This response links currency instability with practical trade barriers experienced by regional partners, suggesting that macroeconomic factors and administrative practices jointly influence trade outcomes. Regarding the statement that Kenya’s export earnings supersede import earnings within the EAC, 53.25% of respondents agreed (M = 3.33, SD = 1.148). While this indicates belief in Kenya’s favorable trade balance, the dispersion of responses suggests uncertainty about the consistency of this advantage across sectors and trading partners. The strongest consensus emerged on the statement that Kenya has a strong domestic market for the region’s goods and services, where 64.12% agreed or strongly agreed, yielding the highest mean score (3.55) and lowest standard deviation (1.067). This underscores Kenya’s role as a key consumption and distribution hub within the EAC, reinforcing its structural trade advantage. From the findings herein, the integration of quantitative findings and qualitative insights demonstrates that Kenya’s trade policies and domestic market strength are widely perceived as pillars of its regional influence. However, concerns related to currency fluctuations, tariff and non-tariff barriers, and uneven trade experiences highlight challenges that may limit the full realization of Kenya’s economic diplomacy objectives within the EAC.

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

Table 5 below presents the 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

Source: Researcher (2025)

Table 5 presents respondents' perceptions regarding the role of trade in advancing Kenya's economic diplomacy within the East African Community (EAC). The overall mean score of 3.40 (SD = 1.126) indicates a general inclination toward agreement that trade is central to Kenya's diplomatic engagement in the region.

For the statement "Trade as a tool for Kenya's economic diplomacy in the EAC," 58.68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 23.90% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The mean score of 3.41 (SD = 1.133) reflects moderate agreement, suggesting that a majority perceive trade as a deliberate diplomatic instrument, though some respondents question how effectively this tool is translated into diplomatic influence.

The statement "Kenya's economic diplomacy within the EAC is integrated and policy driven" recorded the highest level of agreement, with 64.12% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, reflected in the highest mean score of 3.52 (SD = 1.107).

This implies recognition of structured policies guiding Kenya's economic diplomacy, anchored in frameworks such as the EAC Customs Union and the Common Market Protocol.

This quantitative finding is supported by qualitative insights from key informants. As interviewee (KII 005) observed:

"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." (KII 005)

This perspective reinforces the view that Kenya's economic diplomacy is not incidental but institutionally grounded within regional integration mechanisms.

On whether "Kenya's economic diplomacy is driven by bilateral and multilateral agreements," 51.08% of respondents expressed agreement, producing a mean of 3.29 (SD = 1.140).

This comparatively lower mean suggests that while formal agreements are acknowledged as important, respondents may perceive additional political, economic, or administrative factors shaping Kenya's diplomatic engagement. Regarding the statement "Trade has strengthened Kenya's position in the EAC," 55.42% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (M = 3.37, SD = 1.125).

This indicates that more than half of the respondents perceive a positive relationship between Kenya's trade performance and its regional standing, though the spread of responses suggests that this impact may vary across sectors and partner states. From the findings, the moderate mean scores and variability in responses point to

perceived gaps between policy intentions, formal agreements, and the practical realization of diplomatic gains through trade.

Challenges facing Diplomatic Engagements

Table 6 presents respondents’ views on the key challenges affecting Kenya’s trade performance and, by extension, the effectiveness of its economic diplomacy within the EAC.

The overall mean score of 3.58 (SD = 1.076) indicates strong agreement that structural and operational barriers significantly constrain regional trade.

On tariffs and tax complexities, 66.29% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that these pose serious challenges (M = 3.58, SD = 1.076). This suggests that despite the existence of the EAC Customs Union, taxation regimes and tariff structures are still perceived as complicated and at times inconsistent with the objectives of regional integration, thereby limiting smooth cross-border trade. Regarding compliance hurdles, 63.04% of respondents expressed agreement (M = 3.51, SD = 1.107). This indicates that documentation requirements, regulatory standards, and administrative procedures continue to present obstacles to traders

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

operating within the region.

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for challenges facing diplomatic engagements indicators.

Source: Researcher (2025)

Logistical issues recorded the highest mean score (3.66) and the lowest standard deviation (1.046), with 69.56% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This demonstrates a strong consensus that infrastructure limitations, transport delays, port inefficiencies, and border clearance processes remain critical impediments to trade.

The prominence of this challenge underscores the importance of efficient infrastructure in enabling Kenya to maximize its regional trade potential. Similarly, currency fluctuations were identified as a major challenge, with 65.20% agreement (M = 3.57, SD = 1.077).

Exchange rate volatility is perceived to affect pricing stability, competitiveness, and predictability in cross-border transactions, complicating trade relations within the EAC.

Qualitative insights further enrich these findings by linking trade challenges with broader diplomatic realities in the region. As interviewee (KII 006) 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)

This perspective suggests that while operational trade barriers exist, Kenya’s strategic response to regional political and economic challenges can enhance its diplomatic influence and leadership role within the EAC.

The findings herein reveal that although Kenya possesses favorable trade policies and strong diplomatic intent within the EAC framework, practical barriers—ranging from tax complexities and regulatory compliance to logistical inefficiencies, currency instability, and political dynamics—significantly hinder the seamless flow of regional trade. These challenges limit the extent to which Kenya can fully leverage trade as an effective instrument of economic diplomacy.

Strategies and Kenya’s Diplomatic Engagement Within the EAC Paradigm

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics for strategies indicators.

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

Source: Researcher (2025)

Table 7 presents respondents’ perceptions of the strategic mechanisms through which Kenya can strengthen its economic diplomacy and trade influence within the East African Community (EAC). The overall mean score of 3.63 (SD = 1.042) indicates strong agreement that these mechanisms are critical in enhancing Kenya’s regional trade position and diplomatic leverage.

On regional dominance, 68.46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (M = 3.64, SD = 1.020). This suggests that a majority of respondents perceive Kenya as having the capacity to assert a leading role in the region through its trade strength, institutional capacity, and economic influence. The relatively low standard deviation indicates consensus that Kenya’s dominance can be strategically harnessed to advance regional cooperation and diplomatic standing. Regarding licensing and legal regimes, 65.20% of respondents expressed agreement (M = 3.56, SD = 1.088). This implies that harmonization and simplification of legal and licensing frameworks are seen as important tools for improving trade efficiency and strengthening Kenya’s economic diplomacy. Streamlined legal procedures can reduce barriers and foster trust among regional trading partners.

The item on export and import promotions recorded the highest mean score (3.70) and one of the lowest standard deviations (1.013), with 71.73% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This indicates strong consensus that active promotion of exports and imports is a key strategy for enhancing Kenya’s trade footprint within the EAC. Trade promotion initiatives are therefore viewed as practical diplomatic tools that translate policy into tangible economic engagement. Similarly, joint ventures attracted 67.38% agreement (M = 3.61, SD = 1.049). Respondents recognize partnerships between Kenyan firms and regional counterparts as effective avenues for strengthening economic ties, knowledge transfer, and mutual investment, which in turn reinforce diplomatic relations. The findings on Kenya’s strategic mechanisms for enhancing regional trade and diplomacy can be closely aligned with the Interdependence Theory advanced by Keohane and Nye (1987). This theory posits that

in an era of globalization and technological advancement, states are increasingly interconnected and rely on economic and institutional cooperation rather than coercive power to achieve national objectives. The strong agreement among respondents on Kenya's regional dominance, joint ventures, and export/import promotions demonstrates practical manifestations of this interdependence. By leveraging trade and economic partnerships, Kenya is able to exercise influence and maintain stability within the East African Community (EAC) without resorting to military or political confrontation. For example, the use of joint ventures and trade promotions illustrates how economic inter-connectivity fosters mutual benefits for Kenya and its regional partners, reinforcing the principle that power in international relations increasingly derives from economic interdependence and collaboration (Romaine, 2001).

Similarly, the findings resonate with Neoliberal Institutionalism, which emphasizes the role of international institutions, regimes, and repeated interactions in facilitating cooperation among states. Kenya's adherence to EAC protocols, licensing and legal reforms, and export promotion frameworks reflects institutional mechanisms that reduce uncertainty, lower transaction costs, and promote transparency among regional actors (Keohane, 1984). The respondents' recognition of harmonized legal regimes and trade facilitation measures indicates that Kenya's economic diplomacy is strengthened by institutionalized practices, consistent with the neoliberal view that robust institutions can sustain cooperation even in the absence of a dominant hegemon. From the findings of this study, Kenya's strategic use of trade through regional dominance, joint ventures, and structured trade promotion is seen to be both a manifestation of economic interdependence and an outcome of institutionalized cooperation within the EAC. This alignment demonstrates that Kenya's trade policies are not only economic tools but also diplomatic instruments that reinforce regional integration, stability, and collective prosperity, consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

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 is also influenced by trade liberalization and it adheres to the market-driven principles and the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Kenya seeks to strengthen its position by fostering peace, security, and regional collaboration as well as enhancing African interests in the international arena. 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 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

Recommendations

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

Kenya should focus on consolidating its trade policies and diplomatic relations in the East African Community (EAC) to promote regional integration and economic development.

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.

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