

The Impact of Kenya's Aviation Diplomacy on Multilateral Trade Relations in the Eastern Africa Region

Mnyolmo Kiprop Nahashon., Otieno Isaiah Oduor

Department of Security, Diplomacy and Peace Studies, Kenyatta University

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100021>

Received: 28 December 2025; Accepted: 02 January 2026; Published: 19 January 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of Kenya's aviation diplomacy on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region. This study was anchored on two complementary theories namely; realism and neo-liberal institutionalism. Realist theory explains aviation diplomacy and multilateral trade relations in the East African Community (EAC) by emphasizing state-centered interests, power competition, and sovereignty. Neo-liberal institutionalism theory emphasizes the role of international institutions, norms, and cooperation in fostering peaceful and mutually beneficial relations among states within the EAC, even in an anarchic international system. This study took the form of an exploratory research design. Both secondary and primary sources of data collection were employed by this study. This study relied on simple probability and purposive sampling techniques to select a total of 140 respondents for field interviews. Simple probability sampling was used to select 50 respondents working in the aviation sector and 50 business persons operating in the Eastern African region. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 officers of the Ministry of Transport involved in aviation policy making in Kenya, 10 officers of the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, 10 officials of the EAC and 10 Commercial Attachés in the Embassies of EAC member countries. The instruments of data collection included structured questionnaires and interview guides. Data collected was analyzed and interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study noted that EAC member states' aviation policies are shaped by political, strategic, and economic interests, with influences from political regimes, economic power, and commercial goals. The study observed that air transport liberalization in the EAC lowers fares, improves services, boosts trade, and creates jobs by enhancing connectivity and economic freedom. Kenya's aviation diplomacy has supported regional trade growth, but protectionist policies have had negative effects.

Key Words: Aviation Policy, Aviation Diplomacy, Multilateral Trade Relations

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The scholarly works on aviation diplomacy and international relations can be categorized into three trends. The first view point focuses on the evolution of aviation diplomacy regimes in the international system. Jonsson (2011) examines aviation diplomacy into the wider discourse of interdependence and global integration identifying three phases in its evolution: the period of total state sovereignty, the Chicago–Bermuda regulatory regime, and the period of movement away from controlled governance regimes. The author argues that changes in the governing structures of international relations are the central factors that have determined the governing of aviation at the global level.

Nayar (2015) pursues the same line and examines the global aviation system from the perspective of realist theory. The author acknowledges the existence of ICAO and IATA as mechanisms for international collaboration, although host states still control the aviation sector for strategic and economic objectives. In a similar fashion, Dobson (2017) examines the evolution and development of aviation regimes such as the European Single Aviation Market highlighting the challenges these trends pose to civil aviation. Von den Steinen (2016) argues that the persistent tension between economic liberalization and state sovereignty is motivated by national interests in aviation policy making.

The second viewpoint considers the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as a political organization with political interests (Sochor, 2021). In this case academic discussions are dominated by contemporary issues affecting international aviation, notably international conflicts, terrorism concerns, and flight safety. The third view point introduces the political perspective in aviation with emphasis political forces that influence state aviation policies. This perspective deals with issues such as the use of airlines as government tools, civil aviation laws and regulations, air travel and domestic aircraft production (Gidwitz, 2010).

Traditionally, diplomacy has been seen as a process of developing and preserving a country's interests, in a peaceful manner, and is state-centered (Morgenthau, 2021; Bull, 2021). This kind of thinking, however, has been proven to be of little use in states and international systems that are growing and globalizing in complexity. Cornago (2022) emphasizes that diplomacy is now more versatile, and, as a result of more sophisticated communication systems, involves a plethora of civil society actors, like NGOs, international corporations, and media, as well as the scientific community and intergovernmental organizations.

In this context, the growing practice of using diplomacy in the aviation sector is important. It includes the use of institutions, policies, and practices of both public and private diplomacy actors in the field of civil aviation, and combines traditional and public diplomacy. Considering the fact that in a globalized world international travel is more accessible than ever, the role of diplomatic aviation institutions and airline companies is becoming increasingly important.

On the surface, while it is true that a country has control over its own airspace and aviation, the aviation policy of that country is a result of most of the following factors: national interest, international cooperation, and a given regional collaboration (Hocking, 2006). Despite the noteworthy and growing interest in civil aviation and international relations, the field of aviation diplomacy is still in its infancy. This, therefore, justifies the current research, which seeks to analyze the aviation diplomacy of Kenya and its role in international trade relations in the East African region.

Statement of the Problem

The aviation industry is a vital enabler of trade, investment, and economic integration within regional groupings such as the East African Community (EAC). Nevertheless, despite ongoing regional integration efforts, the role of aviation diplomacy in strengthening multilateral trade relations in the EAC has not been sufficiently examined. While global initiatives on air transport liberalization and open skies seek to enhance competition, lower costs, and expand connectivity, the EAC continues to face persistent obstacles. These include restrictive bilateral air service agreements (BASAs), inconsistent implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision, and limited harmonization of aviation policies across member states.

As a consequence, the region is characterized by high operating costs, inadequate intra-regional air connectivity, and diminished competitiveness of EAC airlines compared to international carriers. Although the contemporary aviation sector functions within a liberalized global environment, states maintain substantial control over key components such as airports, air navigation services, and aviation taxation due to strategic economic, security, political, and social considerations. This continued state dominance often results in national interest–driven policies that favor protectionism over regional collaboration, thereby undermining the effective use of aviation diplomacy to advance multilateral trade objectives.

Moreover, insufficient coordination in diplomatic engagement and the absence of unified policy frameworks further limit the alignment between air transport and the EAC's broader trade integration agenda. These gaps adversely affect cargo transportation, tourism development, and trade in services. Against this background, this study explores the role of aviation diplomacy in shaping multilateral trade relations within the EAC, with the aim of addressing these structural and policy challenges.

Specific Objective of the Study

To evaluate the impact of Kenya's aviation diplomacy on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region.

Justification and Significance of the Study

Considering the importance of economic growth and global integration, the field of international relations includes international air transport as one of its critical components. Domestic, regional, and international air transport facilitate trade, tourism, and employment in the global market. International air transport provides the market with sufficient commercial and tourism demand through its global network of air travel. Therefore, international air transport is of great importance to the world economy. The provision of international air transport services creates a need for both international and national legislation and policies in order to promote and protect competition and provide for economic growth. Because of the importance of commercial policies, security, and global politics, the legislation concerning the fields of air transport and international travel must be studied.

In the Post-Cold War era, traditional state-centric diplomacy has evolved to include non-state actors such as international organizations, multinational corporations, and airline companies. All these groups have a seat at the table, so to speak. This is also the case in the field of Aviation Diplomacy, which is now a sub-discipline of International Relations. This research will support Kenyan decision makers in Aviation Diplomacy policy formulation, helping to balance Kenya's strategic priorities, economic growth, and the enhancement of diplomatic relations within the Eastern African region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ahmed (2020) notes that, in the current system of world politics, no state can exist in isolation, as there is interdependence of state actors in the political, economic and secretariat domains. Therefore, the state actors pursue positive inter-state relations as a result of foreign policy formulation. This is not the case for several African countries, who, in the absence of clearly defined national interests, and in the case of considerable dependence upon the world political economy, fail to address issues of aviation, one of the most underdeveloped sectors in African foreign policy.

Scholarship on the foreign policy and regional integration use of aviation diplomacy, is sparse in the East African Community (EAC). While aviation is important for regional economic integration, there is little scholarship on the intersection of aviation diplomacy and international trade within the EAC. Additionally, there has not been enough focus on bilateral air service agreements (BASAs) for regional cooperation, or the effectiveness and implementation of the liberalization of the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) and the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) (Spies, 2018).

Decision-making in foreign policy appreciates the internal/domestic needs and external demands while factoring in the existing frameworks, materials, and tools available (Muller, 2017). This highlights the need to assess what a state can do against what it aims to achieve through foreign policy, particularly in the field of aviation, which touches on key issues of state control, trade, and regional collaboration. Aviation diplomacy, on the one hand, is a straightforward tool and, on the other, a complex field in the East African Community (EAC) as it raises questions of control and state sovereignty in the pursuit of economic integration (Lentner, 2015; Kagwanja, 1995). The impact of EAC liberalization on the region's policy cohesion, intra-community trade, and overall competitiveness is yet to be determined.

Aviation diplomacy builds relationships with other foreign policy domains due to the intertwining of foreign and domestic policies. Omolo (2020) considers national security the most important factor; thus, diplomacy of aviation must address domestic security, national airline infrastructure and protectionism, and externally, the trade and global obligations. This is little documented, in the case of the EAC.

The factors defining foreign policy such as natural endowments, economic and technological advancement, social formations, and political and ecological situations explain the differences in aviation infrastructure, regulatory framework, and bargaining power among the member states (Habib & Selinyane, 2018). However, most studies do not investigate these differences in aviation diplomacy for landlocked states, private sector, and global level Open Skies and WTO participation and engagement.

As per the accepted principles of international relations, a state's regulation of air transport is a function of its sovereignty, and states are free to regulate their own airspace, except to the extent that they have voluntarily restricted their sovereignty through international treaties (Caves et al., 2022). Aviation diplomacy, therefore, strikes a balance between sovereignty and collaboration. While Johnson (2011) attempts to trace this through the chronology of the various phases of unregulated sovereignty, the Chicago-Bermuda paradox, and liberalization, Nayar (2015) emphasizes the use and appropriation of 'Chicago' ICAO and IATA model. Most global studies focus on the dichotomy between the economic liberalization of the air transport industry and, paradoxically, its sovereignty. National carriers have, for example, been used as instruments of identity, soft power, and public diplomacy (Von den Steinen, 2016; Gidwitz, 2010; Raguraman, 2021; Bilkay & Kemal, 2017), and have also been used to justify the exercise of sovereignty by a state over its own created or designated airspace.

Although this abundance of literature is insightful, the empirical studies on the Member States of the East African Community (EAC) and the use of aviation diplomacy to foster regional integration, multilateralism, and collective policies are scarce. Most of the literature focuses on countries or global examples, which creates a vacuum in understanding the potential of the use of aviation diplomacy within the East African Community.

According to Wassenbergh (2022), there is an increase in international passenger and cargo flights as a result of Open Skies Agreements which have now become more common. Open Skies Agreements have liberalized government control over the capacity, routes, and prices of the airlines which fosters liberalization of air transport. This also leads to more cross-border trade which ultimately leads to economic growth and the development of meaningful employment opportunities.

Nevertheless, there is a lack of studies on how these frameworks function within the Eastern African Community (EAC), particularly on the integration of aviation diplomacy with the foreign and regional integration policy framework. The impacts of both bilateral and multilateral air service agreements (ASAs) on intra-regional trade and connectivity remain under-examined, as does the degree to which these agreements lessen governmental control, promote more competition, or endorse the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) initiatives. The Economic effects and implementation challenges of the liberalized aviation policies in the EAC are also insufficiently examined (Wassenbergh, 2022).

The 1944 ICAO operational guidelines have set the standard for bi-lateral ASA agreements for Hedlung (2022) and Kraśnicka (2021), as they describe the parameters of flight frequency agreements and route and carrier (usually national) approval. These guidelines have historically been focused on governing control over the aviation markets. These frameworks have been defined with strong government control over the markets. Very few studies have focused on EAC on the respective scale of the frameworks of the markets. Very few have studied the mechanisms which member states employ to balance bilateral and multilateral agreements, the use of aviation diplomacy for regional integration, and the reconciling of national trade and connectivity with regional integration (Hedlung, 2022; Kraśnicka, 2021) Most studies cite these authors on the role of frameworks on aviation diplomacy on regional integration.

Dobson (2022) observe that in 1992 the United States became the first country to operate Open skies agreements with other countries. The same pattern has been observed in the EU, with the establishment of the single Aviation market and the signing of treaties with the cooperation of the member states of the EU (Gaudry, and Mayes (2021). These examples have shown optimism in liberalized aviation EAC. However, there is scant literature on the use of such an approach in the EAC and the integration of the adaptation of the liberalized model. Liu and Lynk (2021) discuss the scant literature on the EAC and the lack of evidence on intra-regional trade and EAC level liberalization.

Kasper (2020) underlines a paradox in emergent markets dealing with the liberalization of the air transport sector: whilst liberalization per se favors market entry for new competitors, the phenomenon lacks a necessary protective framework for domestic air service providers, and therefore, creates a paradox for Open Skies Agreements and subsidization of market entry for threatened carriers. In the context of the EAC, there is a dearth of literature pertaining to liberalization and emergent markets, the role of the State, and the economic impacts of multilateral aviation agreements vis-à-vis intra-EAC trade (Kasper, 2020).

According to Milton (2021) and Harbison (2021), the Andean Pact and the Australia–New Zealand single aviation market serve as models for other regional integrations as they enhanced connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation. Still, the EAC is understudied in similar areas, especially concerning the political and regulatory frameworks, barriers, negotiating prowess, and the (dis)economies of regional aviation integration.

Abate and Kincaid (2018) analyze the effects of EAC liberalization on air transport and note a decrease in air transport costs, an increase in service frequency, and a corresponding rise in demand for air transport services. Complete liberalization of services resulted in a 9% decrease in air transport costs and a 41% increase in service frequency, while partial liberalization resulted in weaker outcomes. Still, the (dis)economies of regional liberalization, trade, and the socio-economic outcomes of liberalization of services remain largely unexplored (Abate & Kincaid, 2018).

According to Walala and Mutinda (2021), there is increasing recognition of the role of air transport in economic development, and in the case of Kenya, the growth of regional air transport and its ability to transform trade, create employment, and enhance mobility, are undeniable. Still, empirical studies are yet to demonstrate the influence of aviation connectivity on intra-regional trade, investment, and market integration in the EAC. The impact of the regional cooperation mechanisms, particularly the liberalization of cooperation frameworks and the cooperation in construction of regional infrastructure, on the attainment of economic prosperity and integration, is yet to be established (Walala & Mutinda, 2021).

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that while there is proven economic value that comes with greater liberalization of the aviation sector, the literature is quite limited regarding the EAC membership in terms of operationalizing aviation diplomacy for the attainment of multilateral trade, connectivity, and regional integration. Closing the literature gaps would demonstrate how national aspirations can be aligned with regional and fundamental economic objectives.

Theoretical Framework

Realism Theory

Key tenets of realist theory include state-centered interests, dominance and competition of power and state sovereignty. In the realm of international relations, realism broadly decides in the favor of the state as being the primary policy actor, and thus state survival and self-interests of the state are of prime importance in the international system and in the global order, which is viewed as anarchic (Waltz, 1979). The acquisition of power, whether it be military, economic or political, guarantees influence and order/stability (Morgenthau, 1948). The behavior of states is quantitatively competitive and self-interested (Carr, 1946), and the undertaking of security measures by one state is likely to instigate tension (Jervis, 1978) between that state and others. In the policy of realism, strategic primary goal and practicality overshadows idealistic theories. This is the case for the axiom which explains why Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan try to achieve strategic and economic ends. The theory states that power asymmetries determine the outcomes of negotiations which is why multilateral liberalization is absent and why countries keep protectionist measures in place for domestic carriers. The theory states that despite competing for hubs, air routes and fees, the dominance of control over air traffic does affect it and that trade, investment and connectivity sustain bilateral trade.

Neo-Liberal Institutionalism

Neo-liberal institutionalism theory states that it is possible to achieve global cooperation and lower the levels of global conflict in the world. This theory contradicts realism which states the world is centered on self-interest and power struggles (Dunne, 2005). This theory states that the world can achieve inter-state cooperation through global governance and international institutions (Keohane & Nye, 1977). In the case of the EAC states (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan) and institutions like the EAC Secretariat and the EAC multilateral air service agreements, the EAC can foster cooperation. Policies combined with coordination regarding routes, frequency of flights, and safety (risk) are likely to lower the costs of transactions to be made, improve operational transparency, and collaboration (information sharing). These elements increase trust, cooperation, and inter-regional air traffic; the extension of trade; and, the access to markets of the weaker states.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study took the form of an exploratory research design. Both secondary and primary sources of data collection were employed by this study. This study relied on simple probability and purposive sampling techniques to select a total of 140 respondents for field interviews. Simple probability sampling was used to select 50 respondents working in the aviation sector and 50 business persons operating in the Eastern African region. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 officers of the Ministry of Transport involved in aviation policy making in Kenya, 10 officers of the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, 10 officials of the EAC and 10 Commercial Attaches in the Embassies of EAC member countries. The actual sample size was 140 respondents as distributed in table 1.1 below:

	Category of Respondent	No
1	Workers in the aviation sector	50
2.	Business persons in the Eastern African region.	50
3	Officers of the Ministry of Transport	10
4.	Officers of the Ministry of Trade and Commerce	10
5	Officials of the EAC	10
6	Commercial Attaches in EAC member countries	10
	TOTAL	140

The instruments of data collection included structured questionnaires and interview guides. The study ensured validity and reliability by carefully developing research tools to effectively measure the intended components, thereby ensuring that the interview questions and survey instruments accurately represented the objectives of the study. Data collected was analyzed and interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics presented through tables and bar graphs. Qualitative data analysis was undertaken through transcribing the audio-recorded interviews verbatim to create textual dataset and identify recurring themes and patterns and codes related to the impact of Kenya's aviation diplomacy on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region.

Analysis, Interpretation and Presentation of Findings

Response Rate

This study selected 140 respondents for field interviews. Questionnaires that generated quantitative data were administered to 100 respondents who included Workers in the aviation sector and business people in the Eastern African region. In depth interviews were conducted among 40 respondents who included Officers of the Ministries of Transport, Trade and Commerce, Officials of the EAC and Commercial Attaches in EAC member countries. Out of the 140 respondents targeted, 120 responded. This represented a response rate of 85.7% which the researcher considered adequate.

Impact of Kenya's Aviation Diplomacy on Its Multilateral Trade Relations in the Eastern Africa Region

The researcher posed five questions to respondents in an attempt to assess the impact of Kenya's Aviation diplomacy on its multilateral trade relations in the EAC region. Responses for the above questions were based on a Likert scale chosen from four fixed options; Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. The following were the responses.

Impact of Kenya's Aviation Diplomacy on Its Multilateral Trade Relations in the Eastern Africa Region

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total	Cumulative Total
Liberalization has impacted positively on air fares and the quality of services by airlines in the EAC region	84%	10%	2%	4%	100%	100%
States that have embraced liberal air transport laws benefited economically from the liberalization of air transport in the EAC region	65%	22%	3%	10%	100%	100%
Kenya's aviation policies have encouraged more travel and trade, improved productivity, and stimulated the creation of jobs and economic growth in the EAC region	80%	12%	2%	6%	100%	100%
Protectionism by the Kenya government to shield domestic airlines from competition from foreign airlines has negatively impacted on multi-lateral trade	62%	8%	22%	8%	100%	100%
Kenya's aviation diplomacy has positively impacted on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region	65%	23%	2%	10%	100%	100%

The first question was to examine if liberalization has impacted positively on air fares and the quality of services by airlines in the EAC region. The following were the findings; 84% of those interviewed strongly agreed that liberalization has impacted positively on air fares and the quality of services by airlines while 10% agreed. 2% strongly disagreed while 4% disagreed. Cumulatively 94% of those interviewed were of the agreement that liberalization has impacted positively on air fares and the quality of services by airlines while 6% were of contrary opinion.

This study that in the 21st Century, the global aviation sector has continued to liberalize and deregulate, as governments appreciate the efficacy of market driven growth in aviation within a global economy. Kenya has aligned with this global trend by integrating liberalization and deregulation in its aviation policy framework. The study explores the EAC region and identifies that liberalization of the region's airspace is likely to reduce airfare, stimulate demand, increase the number of flights, and subsequently, promote trade and commerce in the region.

The study also observes that the region's aviation infrastructure and the overall aviation security within the bloc would improve with open skies, standardization of passenger fees and air transport service charges. The region would also benefit from increased investment in aviation, especially in infrastructure and more liberal policies to encourage foreign investment in airlines. These findings align with the EAC secretariat and East African Business Council study which noted that liberalization of the airspace is likely to create jobs, improve the GDP, increase air transport traffic, improve connection, and make air transport more affordable (EAC 2021).

The second question posed was whether states that have embraced liberal air transport laws benefited economically from the liberalization of air transport in the EAC region. The following were the results. 65% of those interviewed strongly agreed that states that have embraced liberal air transport laws benefited economically from the liberalization of air transport in the EAC region while 22% agreed. 2% strongly disagreed while 10%

disagreed. Cumulatively 94% of those interviewed were of the agreement that states that have embraced liberal air transport laws benefited economically from the liberalization of air transport in the EAC region while 6% were of contrary opinion.

The findings of the study confirm Lumbroso (2019) findings, who describes aviation liberalization with development as a positive relationship, with rationale as well as evidence of both sides. The economic rationale surrounding the removal of any barriers of trade is synonymous with the economic growth, while in the aviation, the liberalization leads to the introduction of new routes, new flights, as well as cheaper air travel. In fact, many economies attest to the fact that the liberalization and/or deregulation of air transport is a positive contributor to the economic development of a region (Abate, 2016; Burghouwt & De Wit, 2015). Moreover, the strong relationship that exists between economic freedom and economic development cannot be overemphasized (Hall & Lawson, 2013; Wang & Heinonen, 2015). In the same way, Piermartini and Rousová (2013) explain that aviation liberalization improves foreign market accessibility and enhances competition, thus amplifying the positive effects of economic freedom on development.

The findings also affirms that economic growth is a product of increased economic freedom, coupled with the fact that nations with liberal policies in both business and trade are most likely to have liberal policies in their aviation market. There is a striking correlation between liberalization in air transport and economic development as they both increase travel and trade, thus stimulating development. Despite liberalizing reforms made by Kenya in its aviation sector, anticipated growth in both the economy and aviation industry has yet to be realized. This growth deficit begs the questions, in the economic and aviation industry, just how sufficient, in economic freedom promotion, are partial liberalizations and selective market reforms, and, do the economic gains from liberalizing aviation increase the extent of multilateral trade within the East Africa Community (EAC)?

Increased flight and fare liberalization within the study area have positive effects on consumer demand and air travel economic freedom and, therefore, on economic development more broadly. Additionally, increased air travel liberation economic access and competition has a positive effect on the economic development liberalization to cross member EAC countries. Finally, the study shows that liberalizing aviation trade is one of Africa's most urgent and important policy challenges and the need for increasing air travel economic freedom.

Thirdly the researcher posed the question as to whether Kenya's aviation policies have encouraged more travel and trade, improved productivity, and stimulated the creation of jobs and economic growth in the EAC region. The following were the results; Out of the respondents interviewed 80% strongly agreed that Kenya's aviation policies have encouraged more travel and trade, improved productivity, and stimulated the creation of jobs and economic growth in the EAC region while 12 agreed. 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed while 6% disagreed. Cumulatively 92% were in agreement that Kenya's aviation policies have encouraged more travel and trade, improved productivity, and stimulated the creation of jobs and economic growth in the EAC region while only 8% were of contrary opinion.

This study observed that air transport is a critical driver of development and economic prosperity, providing essential national, regional, and global connectivity. It facilitates economic integration by supporting commerce, tourism, and job creation across multiple sectors. As the global economy becomes increasingly interconnected, air travel remains one of the fastest-growing modes of transport, sustaining millions of jobs worldwide. Employment is generated directly through airlines, airports, and air navigation services, and indirectly through extensive supply chains that enable the movement of goods and services. Beyond tourism, air transport plays a particularly important role in boosting economies in developing countries. The growth of e-commerce and technological advancement within the aviation industry has further reinforced the importance of air transport, as online trade between businesses and consumers increasingly relies on efficient air connectivity. As economies expand, aviation has evolved into a modern service sector that anticipates and responds to customer needs.

Consistent with views expressed by a commercial attaché from an EAC member state, the study supports the conventional wisdom that liberalization of international air services generates significant benefits for shippers, consumers, and related industries. Restrictive bilateral air service agreements were found to hinder business, tourism, air travel, and consequently economic growth and employment. Conversely, liberalization encourages traffic growth, stimulates non-aviation sectors, enhances competitiveness, promotes regional integration within

the EAC, facilitates tourism and labor mobility, and contributes to employment creation across the wider economy.

The researcher posed the fourth question to respondents as to whether protectionism by the Government of Kenya to shield domestic airlines from competition from foreign airlines has negatively impacted on multi-lateral trade. The following were the results; Out of the total number of respondents interviewed 62% strongly agreed that protectionism by the Kenya government to shield domestic airlines from competition from foreign airlines has negatively impacted on multi-lateral trade while 8% agreed. 22% strongly disagreed while 8% disagreed. Cumulatively 70% of those interviewed were of the opinion that protectionism by the Kenya government to shield domestic airlines from competition from foreign airlines has negatively impacted on multi-lateral trade while 30% were of contrary opinion.

This study noted that despite the global trend toward liberalization of air transport, protectionism remains prevalent within the East African Community (EAC). Member states continue to engage directly and actively in emerging aviation markets in order to shield domestic airlines from increasingly competitive foreign carriers. Although regional air transport in the EAC has experienced notable growth, the aviation sector remains highly regulated, fragmented, restrictive, and costly. This situation is largely attributed to the persistence of bilateral Air Service Agreements (ASAs), which limit market access and hinder the development of a competitive regional aviation market.

Protectionism of domestic air services was found to be the norm rather than the exception. The principal justification advanced by EAC governments is the need to protect nascent markets and weaker economies from liberal aviation policies perceived to favor established foreign airlines. While air transport is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of Africa's economic integration, stringent regulatory frameworks continue to restrict airlines' access to international and regional markets. These non-physical barriers, particularly restrictive regulations governing market entry, pricing, frequency, and capacity, have significantly impeded the growth of air transport services across the region.

Despite the existence of national carriers in most EAC countries, airfares between regional capitals remain relatively high. This has created opportunities for foreign airlines to undercut regional carriers, thereby undermining their competitiveness and making aviation an expensive venture for domestic operators. The high cost of air travel was attributed to protectionist policies that, while intended to support local airlines, have ultimately constrained the expansion of the aviation industry. Consequently, EAC member states face a difficult policy choice between maintaining protectionist aviation regimes and opening their skies to competition.

Finally, respondents were questioned on whether Kenya's aviation diplomacy has positively impacted on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region. The following were the findings; Out of the total number of respondents interviewed, 55% strongly agreed that Kenya's aviation diplomacy has positively impacted on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region while 13% agreed. 22% of those interviewed strongly disagreed while 10% disagreed. Cumulatively 68% of those interviewed were in agreement that Kenya's aviation diplomacy has positively impacted on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region while 32% were of contrary opinion.

According to Rhoades, (2008) Commercial aviation has been made possible by the quick advancement and use of technology. Aviation and the globalization movement have the potential to completely transform both national and international economies by connecting remote communities through intricate web interaction. The aviation sector of the global economy continues to grow at one of the fastest rates due to its significant involvement in global economic activity. Thus, over the years, airplane transportation has experienced the greatest advancement in technology and organization. Due to a number of variables, the aviation sector has historically been seen as a unique example in international commerce, with distinct regulations and standards applied.

International aviation has been a major issue in international relations, impacting governments' perceptions of one another, citizens' perceptions of their own and other nations, and our daily security arrangements through a number of direct and indirect linkages (Ibid, 2008) As flow increase so does the income, standard of life and

overall wellbeing of the people connected to this huge web. This is the promise of globalization and aviation, but the fact is that there are a lot of countries and places around the world that have yet to collect on the promise.

The aviation sector contributes significantly to broader political, social, and economic activities. in addition to being a significant industry in itself. Like with most forms of transportation, the need and desire to achieve some other ultimate goal drives the demand for its services. For instance, air travel can support the growth of a region's economy or that of a certain industry, like tourism, but there must be a latent market for the products and services that these areas or industries provide. Like any other input into the economy, a lack of air travel can impede efficient growth, while surpluses or improper supply can also be inefficient.

This study note that air transport has improved has significantly improved the quality of life within the EAC region. This has happened through the broadening of different people's leisure and cultural lives and experiences. Air transport has provided a wide choice of holiday destinations in the EAC region In this case air transport has helped to improve living standards and alleviate poverty, for instance, through tourism. Air transport may provide the only transportation means in remote areas, thus promoting social inclusion. Air transport has also contributed to sustainable development within the region by facilitating tourism and trade. It has also generated economic growth, provided jobs and increased revenues from taxes. The air transport network has facilitated the delivery of emergency and humanitarian aid relief in post-conflict areas within the EAC region.

CONCLUSION

This study observed that liberalization has impacted positively on-air fares and the quality of services by airlines in the EAC. This study noted that the air transport industry plays a major role in the EAC regions economic activities and remains one of the fastest growing sectors of in the region. States that have embraced liberal air transport laws, it was observed benefited economically from the liberalization of air transport in the EAC region. This study found that lower air fares would result from member states in the EAC region liberalizing their airspace. This would boost passenger demand and improve flight frequency, all of which would have a favorable effect on regional trade. Improved aviation infrastructure and security it was noted would result from open skies and harmonized air passenger and air service charge taxes within the EAC. This study noted that increased private sector ownership of airlines, removing limits on foreign ownership would improve the aviation sector in the EAC region which would eventually stimulate multi-lateral trade.

This study noted that Kenya's aviation diplomacy has positively impacted on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region. Kenya's aviation policies have encouraged more travel and trade, improved productivity, and stimulated the creation of jobs and economic growth in the EAC region. Protectionism by the Kenya government to shield domestic airlines from competition from foreign airlines was found to have negative implications on multi-lateral trade. It was noted that aviation liberalization promotes economic freedom and improves air connectivity. Economic freedom on the other hand results in visible effects where markets enjoy a large degree of air liberalization. This helped in expanding multi-lateral trade and creating employment opportunities within the region.

REFERENCES

1. Abate, M. (2016). Economic effects of air transport market liberalization in Africa. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 53, 1–10.
2. Abate, M., & Kincaid, I. (2018). Air transport liberalization and economic development in Africa. *Transport Policy*, 69, 98–107.
3. Ahmed, S. (2020). Foreign policy and economic interdependence in Africa. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 14(3), 45–58.
4. Bilkay, A., & Kemal, Y. (2017). Airlines as instruments of soft power: The case of Turkish Airlines. *Journal of International Relations and Diplomacy*, 5(2), 89–103.
5. Bull, H. (2021). *The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics* (4th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Burghouwt, G., & De Wit, J. (2015). Airline network development and deregulation in Europe. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 43, 16–26.
7. Carr, E. H. (1946). *The twenty years' crisis, 1919–1939*. Macmillan.

8. Caves, R. E., Christensen, L. R., & Tretheway, M. W. (2022). Economies of density versus economies of scale: Why trunk and local service airline costs differ. *RAND Journal of Economics*, 15(4), 471–489.
9. Cornago, N. (2022). Plural diplomacy: Actors and practices in global governance. *International Studies Review*, 24(1), 1–21.
10. Dobson, A. (2017). Aviation regimes and the challenge of liberalization. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(6), 845–862.
11. Dobson, A. (2022). The European single aviation market and external aviation relations. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 60(2), 387–403.
12. Dunne, T. (2005). Liberalism. In J. Baylis & S. Smith (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics* (3rd ed., pp. 185–203). Oxford University Press.
13. East African Community (EAC). (2021). The economic impact of air transport liberalization in East Africa. EAC Secretariat.
14. Gaudry, M., & Mayes, R. (2021). Liberalization and airline competition in Europe. *Transportation Research Part A*, 144, 1–15.
15. Gidwitz, J. (2010). Aviation diplomacy and the political economy of air transport. *International Journal of Aviation Management*, 1(2), 123–138.
16. Habib, A., & Selinyane, N. (2018). Constraints on African foreign policy autonomy. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 25(3), 329–346.
17. Hall, J. C., & Lawson, R. A. (2013). Economic freedom and economic growth. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 32(1), 1–15.
18. Harbison, D. (2021). Regional aviation integration: Lessons from Australia and New Zealand. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 92, 102040.
19. Hedlung, S. (2022). Bilateral air service agreements and state sovereignty. *Air and Space Law*, 47(3), 215–233.
20. Hocking, B. (2006). Multistakeholder diplomacy: Forms, functions, and frustrations. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9(1), 1–30.
21. Hornby, J. (2019). Domestic politics and foreign policy decision-making. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15(4), 512–528.
22. Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation under the security dilemma. *World Politics*, 30(2), 167–214.
23. Johnson, D. (2011). *International aviation law and policy*. Routledge.
24. Jonsson, C. (2011). Interdependence and aviation diplomacy. *International Organization*, 65(4), 595–618.
25. Kagwanja, P. (1995). Regional integration and sovereignty in East Africa. *Africa Development*, 20(4), 35–52.
26. Kasper, W. (2020). Open skies and emerging market airlines. *Journal of Transport Economics and Policy*, 54(2), 173–189.
27. Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1977). *Power and interdependence: World politics in transition*. Little, Brown and Company.
28. Kraśnicka, T. (2021). Evolution of international air transport regulation. *Journal of Air Law and Commerce*, 86(1), 1–28.
29. Lentner, H. (2015). Sovereignty and regional integration in Africa. *African Affairs*, 114(456), 543–562.
30. Lumbroso, D. (2019). Aviation liberalization and economic development. *World Economy*, 42(9), 2603–2622.
31. Milton, J. (2021). Regional air transport agreements and economic integration. *Transport Reviews*, 41(5), 587–606.
32. Morgenthau, H. J. (1948). *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*. Alfred A. Knopf.
33. Morgenthau, H. J. (2021). *Politics among nations* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
34. Muller, H. (2017). Foreign policy analysis: Institutions and decision-making. *International Studies Perspectives*, 18(2), 201–219.
35. Omolo, K. (2020). National security and foreign policy in Kenya. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 14(4), 645–662.
36. Piermartini, R., & Rousová, L. (2013). Liberalization of air transport services and economic growth. *World Trade Review*, 12(1), 59–83.

-
37. Raguraman, K. (2021). National airlines and nation branding in Southeast Asia. *Tourism Geographies*, 23(3), 523–542.
 38. Rhoades, D. (2008). Evolution of international aviation: Phoenix rising. Ashgate.
 39. Sochor, E. (2021). ICAO as a political actor in global aviation governance. *Journal of Transport History*, 42(1), 55–72.
 40. Spies, Y. (2018). African aviation liberalization and the Yamoussoukro Decision. *African Security Review*, 27(3), 241–257.
 41. Von den Steinen, G. (2016). Economic liberalization versus sovereignty in aviation policy. *Journal of International Political Economy*, 23(4), 663–687.
 42. Walala, M., & Mutinda, D. (2021). Aviation and economic development in Kenya. *Journal of African Transport Studies*, 5(2), 87–104.
 43. Waltz, K. N. (1979). Theory of international politics. Addison-Wesley.
 44. Wang, Y., & Heinonen, J. (2015). Economic freedom and air transport development. *Transport Policy*, 41, 26–34.