THE WIDENING VERSUS DEEPENING DILEMMA IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY'S EXPANSION FROM FIVE TO EIGHT MEMBERS (2016-2024)

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S23B56/042

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

May, 2026

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
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DECLARATION

I, Munyana Sonia, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other university or institution of higher learning. All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged.

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Date: 25th / 05 / 2026

APPROVAL

This dissertation entitled "THE WIDENING VERSUS DEEPENING DILEMMA IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY'S EXPANSION FROM FIVE TO EIGHT MEMBERS (2016-2024)" by Munyana Sonia Reg.noS23B56/042 has been read and approved as meeting the required standards for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Governance and International Relations by the School of Social Sciences, Uganda Christian University.

This dissertation has been submitted with my approval as the University Supervisor.

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Date: May 23, 2026

DEDICATION

This dissertation is committed to my dear family who continuously supported my finance and encouraged me throughout this journey and to my dear friends who helped me both practically and spiritually throughout this journey. I do pray that God will bless you tremendously for your kindness and sacrifice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher first expresses gratitude to the Eternal God for His grace, strength and guidance throughout the academic journey. This work could not have been accomplished if not for His mercy.

Thanks to my supervisor Mr. Okello Pasqualino for his expert guidance, constructive feedback and patience throughout this research. The quality and rigor of this dissertation were deeply influenced by his direction of intellect.

The researcher is grateful to her family for their financial and emotional support throughout her research. Their sacrifices and encouragement helped her to move forward. She also thanks her friends and colleagues for their moral support and companionship which always gave her inspiration.

Lastly, thanks are due to the faculty and staff members of the School of Social Sciences at Uganda Christian University for providing a conducive environment for excellence in academic work. The researcher is very grateful to all those who contributed to this work in any way, whether large or small, known or unknown. From the heart may God bless all of you abundantly.

ABSTRACT

Regional integration has been a long admired strategy for promoting neighborhood states' economic growth, political stability and social cohesion. The EAC was initially formed from five countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi but was later expanded to incorporate South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.

The aim of this study was to examine the dilemma of widening versus deepening in regional integration in light of the expansion of the East African Community from the original five to eight member countries (2016-2024). This study used a qualitative descriptive case study design that is further supplemented by process tracing. The data used in the study was secondary data that analyzed thematically. The study revealed that the intra-EAC share of trade reduced from 20 percent in 2016 to 15 per cent in 2023, the rate of harmonization legal instruments dropped from four to two per year, and the Monetary Union protocol had seven missed deadlines.

Through document analysis it was found that there was a significant difference in the perspectives of political leaders and technical stakeholders. EAC technocrats, private sector and civil society, continuously voiced their doubts and non-compliance on a lack of institutional capacity to scale up. The study found that the number of EAC Court cases rose by almost 4 times, adherence to Court decisions dropped to 54%, and newer members were imposing disproportionate non-tariff barriers and budget arrears grew by $47 million.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFDB: African Development Bank

DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo

EAC: East African Community

EALA: East African Legislative Assembly

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

GIZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

IMF: International Monetary Fund

NTB: Non-Tariff Barrier

SADC: Southern African Development Community

UN: United Nations

UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The overall objective of this study was to study the concept of regional integration through the prism of expansion versus deepening integration in the East African Community (EAC) from five to eight member countries (2016-2024). It has in brief background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives and hypothesis, scope of the study, significance of the study and conceptual framework.

1.2 The background of the study

Regional integration has been seen as a solution for promoting economic growth, political stability and social cohesion amongst neighboring states since long (Chukwuma & Ojukwu, 2023). The EAC was initially a group of 5 members namely Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi but was later expanded to include South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia (Masinde & Omolo, 2017). Deepening focuses on policy, legal and political alignment, while widening integration includes bringing new members into the fold to expand market, political, and resource size (Laursen, 2018). The EAC expanded from five to eight members in 2016 to 2024, both with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Somalia as its members, with some questioning the effect this had on the integration, while others believed it was enhancing the integration effort (Yiblet, 2024).

The economic benefits of increased integration within the EAC are considerable, with member countries looking forward to access to larger markets, increased foreign direct investment and better trade flows (Mvile & Bishoge, 2025). For instance, EAC member countries' trade increased from USD 5.9 billion in 2015 to USD 8.2 billion in 2022, partly due to improved integration of EAC countries and removal of non-tariff barriers (Musse & Echchabi, 2024). However, progress in the integration process is complicated by the fact that there are still differences in infrastructure, laws and industrial capacity between member countries (Jane, 2024). Some countries like Kenya and Tanzania, have introduced harmonized customs processes and a single monetary policy, which is, however, inconsistently implemented because of political and administrative differences (Kagoro et al., 2024). This gap between policy goal and actual implementation emphasizes the conflict between going for growth and strengthening current integration systems (Basajjabalaba, 2023).

The EAC is learning lessons and taking warnings from experiences in global and regional integration. Regional economic agreements, like NAFTA and its successor, the USMCA, in the United States, highlight the importance of trade liberalization being coordinated with home policies, to prevent disbalance among member states (Haruna, 2024). The European Union (EU) demonstrates deep integration through shared institutions and policy-making to prove that strong economic integration can be achieved with deep integration without compromising institutional efficiency, even as the EU expands quickly (Edodi & Ahimbisibwe, 2024). The way integration in Asia is managed by ASEAN shows how the slow and gradual integration without uniform adoption of norms can impede members' turning toward economic convergence (Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024). The importance of these global interactions is the urgency for the EAC to grow alongside the EAC's political, social and economic relations. (Kitenge 2024).

In Africa, however, regional integration is also characterized by the deepening vs. the widening. Although the ECOWAS had a rather long history of consolidation of membership, it has been unable to implement the policies and preserve political stability (Edodi & Ahimbisibwe, 2024). In a more general perspective, integration efforts have mixed results in sub-Saharan Africa: with the addition of members, the share of intra-Southern African Development Community (SADC) trade is only about 20% (Osunkoya & Bello, 2024). These concerns are highlighted by the recent expansion of the EAC which has resulted in new political, economic and infrastructural challenges that could challenge the EAC's ability to converge and reach consensus (Nabawanda, 2023). To achieve successful integration, careful management of new entrants as well as strong systems of existing agreements are required, as is evident from other areas of Africa (Africa, 2025).

The ever increasing EAC dilemma of broadening vs deepening has far-reaching implications on human development, peace and economic development in the region. While the expansion has also created opportunities to a larger market, increased investment and greater regional influence, it also increases the likelihood that things will not unfold evenly, that policies on the agenda will differ among one another and that governing will be challenging (Rwigema, 2020). A more diverse membership requires more robust institutional mechanisms to enable humanitarian coordination, security coordination and infrastructure development. The importance of political stability, investment climate and policy harmonization to the retention of old and new members remains high as their failure to achieve the shared objectives could result in poor integration (Kitenge, 2024; Abukar, 2024). Hence, an understanding of this tension between wider and deeper integration is crucial to understanding the EAC's long-term prospects for integration from 2016 to 2024, relevant for both the legislators and the researchers and development partners.

1.3 Problem Statement

The East African Community (EAC) is currently grappling with an ongoing dilemma in expansion vs deepening, with territorial expansion outstripping institutional integration. The EAC has over 800 disputes that are resolved through non-institutional channels, including informal mediation, and has not had all member countries comply with its trade policies; non-tariff barriers continue to be seen in the region, while the intra-EAC trade share of total trade has dropped from around 20% in 2016 to 15% in 2023 (EAC Secretariat, 2024). This is evidenced by the fact that more than 40% of intra-EAC transactions are negatively impacted by non-tariff barriers as reported by the World Bank (2023); and the EAC Court of Justice's accumulated Non-compliance cases.

The Common Market Protocol Scorecard (EAC, 2010), and the Negotiated Approach to Non-Tariff Barriers have been introduced, but have not been successful in ensuring compliance or stimulating trade. The lack of empirical analysis linking post-2016 expansion to measurable declines in policy adherence and institutional performance leaves unanswered the question of which are the costs of widening that need to be addressed before deepening (e.g., political federation) can be realized. The study thus examined the expansion and deepening debate in regional integration: the case of the East African Community (EAC) from five to eight members (2016–2024).

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore the widening versus deepening dilemma in regional integration: an analysis of the East African Community’s expansion from five to eight members (2016-2024).

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

To explore how the EAC’s expansion from five to eight members has influenced the depth of regional integration.

To examine stakeholders’ perceptions of the trade-offs between widening membership and deepening integration within the EAC.

To analyze the institutional and policy challenges arising from enlargement and their implications for effective regional integration.

1.5 Research Questions

How has the EAC’s expansion from five to eight members influenced the depth of regional integration?

What are stakeholders’ perceptions of the trade-offs between widening membership and deepening integration within the EAC?

What institutional and policy challenges have emerged from enlargement, and how do they affect effective regional integration?

1.6 Scope of the research

1.6.1 Content Scope

The study was based on five themes including: the impact of the EAC membership of five to eight members on the level of regional integration; the challenges of regional integration within the EAC; the implications of the EAC on partnership building; and the future of the EAC. It analysed what the stakeholders' perception of trade-offs is between expanding membership and strengthening integration into the EAC. It looks at institutional and policy obstacles to enlargement and implications for effective integration at the regional level.

1.6.2 Time scope

Institutional records, treaties, policy documents and reports were reviewed between 2016 and 2024. This period refers to the expansion of the East African Community from five to eight

Member States and thus allows for a focused analysis of the issue of regional integration– between widening and deepening. It allowed for one to explore the extent of regional integration and the depth of the EAC's integration, major changes, organizational improvements and policy corrections that have taken place during the process of enlargement.

1.6.3 Geographical scope

This study was carried out in East African Community (EAC) geopolitically in East Africa, comprising of the Great Lakes region in Africa and the Horn of Africa. It has eight partner states: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Somalia. It covers the eastern region of the Indian Ocean to the western region of the DRC at the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, Lake Victoria being its hub. Situated in Arusha, Tanzania, the EAC's territory reaches north to South Sudan and Somalia, and south to Lake Tanganyika and Lake Malawi.

1.7 Justification

This study was motivated by the need to explore the growing vs. deepening tension in the East African Community (EAC) since its expansion from five to eight member states in 2016-2024. Although the promotion of regional integration as a means to economic growth, political cooperation, and regional stability has been a common theme, emerging evidence reveals that despite integration's ongoing process of enlargement, there are ongoing difficulties in policy harmonization, institutional effectiveness, and implementation. While previous research has focused on economic interests, institutional reforms, trade performance and political commitment in the EAC, few studies have specifically looked at the effects of the rapid membership expansion on the depth and effectiveness of regional integration over this period. Thus, this study aims to fill the conceptual and empirical gap by offering qualitative insights into the impact of the process of enlargement on the EAC institutional coordination, perceptions by decision makers, and policies harmonization.

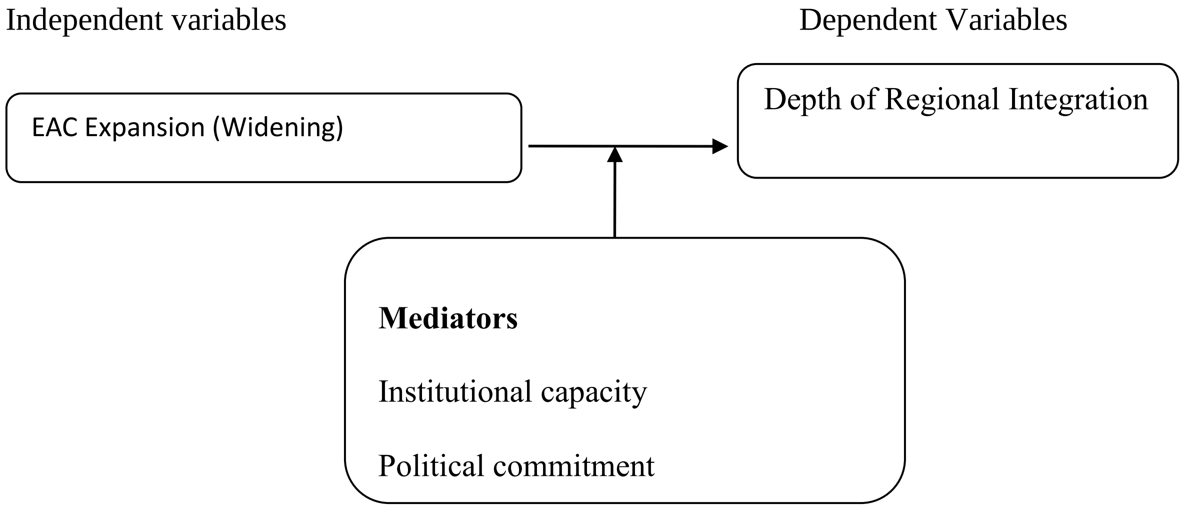
1.8 Significance of the study

Government bodies in charge of regional integration and policy coordination in Uganda, like the Ministry of East African Community Affairs (MEACA), will be better able to create successful plans and implementation frameworks if they know how the growth of the EAC from five to eight members has impacted the depth and efficacy of regional integration. The outcomes will assist in developing evidence-based policies, harmonization efforts and institutional changes aimed at enhancing institutional coordination, policy implementation and overall integration within the EAC framework at the regional and sub-regional level.

In addition, the research will support region-based capacity building initiatives, integration support activities and stakeholder interaction techniques to address opportunities and challenges due to expansion for regional stakeholders, civil society groups and development partners. This study provides useful insights into balancing widening and deepening approaches to sustainable regional integration and unpacks the attitudes, experiences and institutional reactions of key stakeholders.

Finally, this study adds fresh empirical knowledge on the impact of enlargement of membership, institutional effectiveness, and policy harmonization on the integration processes in the EAC. The results of this research can be used as a guide for future researchers, teachers and policy makers in the area of regional integration, institutional development and the growth process in the East African region.

1.9 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework depicts the relationship between the independent variable (EAC expansion/widening) and the dependent variable (Depth of Regional Integration). Institutional capacity and political commitment is a mediator between the two variables. The framework takes the view that the growth of the regional bloc will widen the range of integration possibilities, but the extent of their impact on integration outcomes will depend on the capacity of institutions and policies to adapt and align between the member countries.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will be devoted to other works from other literatures. There is also a need to look closely at similar instances of the widening versus deepening debate on regional integration on the part of the East African Community (EAC) from five to eight members (2016-2024) and to compare, confirm and explore some of the literatures relevant to the study for differences and lessons. For this reason, this chapter is designed to include a summary of different literatures that are deemed to be relevant to the research.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Regional integration

Neofunctionalism theory was developed by Ernst Haas (1958); according to the neofunctionalism theory, regional integration happens through the process of "spillover" whereby cooperation in one technical/economic sector propels pressures into deeper integration in neighboring sectors (from trade to monetary to political union). Supranational institutions (EAC Secretariat) and organized interest groups are key to refocus the loyalty towards regional level, and this is also what spillover does. Spillover works through supranational institutions (EAC Secretariat) and organized interest groups to change the loyalty. Neofunctionalism would, in the case of the EAC, expect a deepening of the EAC, such as in the areas of dispute resolution and policy harmonization, to follow widening e.g., its expansion to include South Sudan, DRC and Somalia. This is not what is observed however, in terms of institutional inefficiency, policy non-compliance, trade stagnation it means that either the spillover was arrested or "spill-back" whereby member states re-enforce national sovereignty. Therefore, neofunctionalism serves to explain the absence of automatic deepening of integration as a result of expansion. Widening is associated with deepening (spillover) and the experience of stagnation in trade and institutional overload is an indication that the EAC is largely failing to deliver on the theoretical expectations of spillover; an indication of the mismatch between theory and practice.

Andrew Moravcsik theories intergovernmentalism (1998), which states that regional integration is the rational behaviour of sovereign states and supranational institutions are tools of the national governments. Deepening is possible only if major states (Kenya, Tanzania) see so net benefits and have a veto power. The EAC's expansion from five to eight members can be explained from a geopolitical perspective within the confines of intergovernmentality, driven by state calculations of gains to be derived from the expansion (securing trade routes through DRC, stabilizing South Sudan). Failure to comply with policy and slow trade growth are thus not policy failures, but simply consequences of the policy implementation in a state's national interest. Intergovernmentalism is therefore the reason for institutional inefficiency that exists in the EAC as a lack of autonomy in the enforcement of its non-compliant members. Inter governmentalism is connected as it has explained the lack of policy compliance and inefficiency: Member states do not care for the regional rules, they care more for their sovereignty, and when it comes to expansion this cost benefit thinking did not change.

Scholars have given different definitions and multiple interpretations of regional integration due to its multidimensionality. It is a process of States of the World working together to achieve political stability, economic development and social cohesiveness, Chukwuma & Ojukwu (2023) noted. Similarly, although there are differences of opinion over the nature of regional integration it can be economic, political, or social – it requires institutional arrangements and policy coordination in order to achieve group benefits, as noted by Laursen (2018). In the EAC environment, integration is sometimes perceived in the light of strategic economic interests such as those in the East African Community (EAC), while others like Kagoro et al (2024) argue that integration is a political process, indicating that integration is not just a technical process, but also a manifestation of national agendas and bargaining power.

Both Chukwuma and Ojukwu (2023) and Laursen (2018) agree that regional integration is multidimensional and cannot be limited to any single dimension but is the combination of economic, political and social goals. While Jane (2024) focuses on economic drivers as the central focus of understanding EAC integration, this study examines the EAC integration through different lenses. This study adopts a multi-lens approach to understanding EAC integration that prioritises economic drivers as a central lens of analysis as highlighted by Jane (2024). Kagoro et al. (2024) highlight the political motivations, arguing that there is a key disagreement over the motives of the EAC's state actors, either market-oriented or geopolitical. The further expansion of EAC from five to eight members (2016-2024) suggests that political considerations (regional influence) may have played a role than economic readiness, which may account for the lack of trade activity despite the expansion of the EAC.

Researchers have come up with several yardsticks to measure regional integration, which frequently involve economic, political and social aspects. Musse and Echchabi (2024) are emphatic that political stability and institutional harmonization are key factors contributing to a successful integration, while Osunkoya and Bello (2024) highlight the role of economic integration through trade flows, investment levels and market convergence. Focusing on mobility of labor, and a shared society and infrastructure and services, is essential for a deepening integration, Yiblet (2024) said. Basajjabalaba (2023) on the other hand, highlights the multiple ways integration can be measured and the relative lack of attention given to enforcement mechanisms, such as compliance monitoring and competition authorities, which are important to realizing the integration goals.

All three of the above studies, Musse and Echchabi (2024), Osunkoya and Bello (2024) and Yiblet (2024) concur that integration should be measured on more than just one metric (trade only) and that it must also include political, social and institutional aspects. This multi-indicator consensus is questioned by Basajjabalaba (2023) as enforcement systems are systematically overlooked even if various indicators are taken into account, and others suggest that measuring the diverse indicators automatically results in enforcement. There is an obvious lack of enforcement systems, as the EAC can perform well on trade or mobility indicators, but not on enforcement of the policy or budget commitments or ruling on disputes, suggesting an incomplete set of indicators for the assessment of the deepening and widening dilemma.

Reflections in the literature also focus on the question of whether or not integration should be about widening, or about deepening. Other reflections in the literature revolve around whether or not to prioritize widening (inclusion of new members) or deepening (improvement of existing structures) in integration. Deepening, according to Masinde and Omolo (2017), ensures institutional resilience, whereas widening, as proposed by Chukwuma and Ojukwu (2023), may offer strategic, economic advantages, but at the same time may result in policy incoherence. Although capacity building and harmonization programs are popular and often funded by development partners, Kitenge (2024) notes, there are still government challenges and structural inequalities. In addition highlighting the need to consider both in the discussion of integration into EAC, Haruna (2024) and Muhammad and Babatunde (2024) noted that imbalance in discussions of either of the dimensions without the other was likely to compromise overall effectiveness in the integration process in the West African and other regional groupings.

In all these writers, there is a general agreement that widening and deepening are not incompatible, but that a conscious balance must be achieved; no scholar pleads for unlimited widening without deepening or the reverse. Though widening is a legitimate strategy even if there is a risk of policy incoherence, Chukwuma and Ojukwu (2023) see deepening as a prerequisite for institutional resilience, and Masinde and Omolo (2017) see the same. Both have a lack of empirical evidence on the tipping point where widening inevitably undermines institutional capacity.

The EAC's membership growth from five to eight (2016-2024) offers a natural experiment to determine when the tipping point has been met. Despite the presence of evidence of the inefficiencies in the EAC institutions (e.g., backlog of court cases) and trade stagnation, literature that documents the concept of widening has been identified but not empirically so far for the post-2016 EAC (Haruna, 2024; Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024). There has been a very small number of empirical studies that have systematically analysed the effect of rapid expansion on institutional depth and policy harmonisation in the EAC since 2016–2024.

The present study objectives were evaluated by an empirical review of the subjects.

2.3.2 EAC's growth from 5 to 8 Member States on depth of regional integration

Jane (2024) explored the role strategic and financial interests played in Kenya's attitude on EAC expansion, arguing that the inclusion of the DRC and Somalia provided opportunities and challenges for more comprehensive regional integration. Likewise, Kitenge (2024) notes that as membership has expanded, development partners have sought to foster alignment but have failed to achieve it because of the varying levels of capacity and institutional goals among the new member states. In both studies, the EAC expanded into the political and market spectrum but faced practical challenges of coordination in governance structures, trade policies and regulatory standards in eight member states as compared to five. Further, Yiblet (2024) points out that despite the expansion, there has been a significant underperformance in the indicators of economic integration, such as intra-EAC trade and investment flows, therefore, that the expansion does not necessarily lead to more integration.

Musse and Echchabi (2024) analyzed the amount of investments being made in the EAC and found that the economies of newer member countries are being hindered by political instability and the quality of the institutions in those countries to unite. Osunkoya and Bello (2024) also highlight after the growth that mobility of goods, services and labour has not been realized, primarily due to legal changes and poor infrastructure linkages. These studies taken together point to structural differences and governance issues brought on by fast widening as limiting the degree of integration, especially in the social and economic spheres. In theory, political promises exist, but the feeble implementation of operations shows that this growth has not always been successful in strengthening institutional depth (Chukwuma and Ojukwu 2023).

Yelwa (2025) highlights the challenges faced by new member states in the region, particularly Somalia, with respect to geopolitical and security issues, which have made collective decision-making and implementation of EAC protocols more difficult. Haruna (2024) builds on this with a focus on the West African experience that shows that rapid growth can exacerbate institutional strain and fragility when there are no good solutions to the problem of conflict and coordination of government action. All of these studies point to the fact that this expansion of the EAC has led to a greater complexity of institutional and political contexts in which it operates, thereby jeopardising the level of integration as membership grows.

However, Mvile and Bishoge (2025) note that variations in resource endowments, such as mining and agricultural pursuits within member states have hindered economic policy harmonisation after the expansion. What adds to the challenges of coordinated policy action is also the analysis by Nabawanda (2023) on the impact of climate related vulnerabilities in the area of the EAC on food security and trade inequalities. The findings indicate that while growth widens the geographical reach, it also introduces diversity that may undermine or stymie the level of economic and policy integration.

Basajjabalaba (2023) reviews how effective EAC institutions are in ensuring the enforcement of market regulations and consumer protection in all the EAC member states. Moreover, Ogutu (2025) emphasizes that fragmentation of the regulatory enforcement counteracts the benefits of integration in practice, particularly for cross-border trade and investment. As a whole, these studies show that the Secretariat is increasingly challenged by the increase in membership from five to eight in the EAC where the complexity of its operations and institutions exceeds its capacity to ensure policy harmonization and implementation. While enlargement provides strategic advantage, Kansaye (2025) argues that the EAC's systems, enforcement and capacity building efforts must be strengthened to ensure that widening does not compromise the level of integration.

2.3.2 Stakeholders' perceptions of trade-offs between widening membership and deepening integration within the EAC

Regarding Kenya's strategic and economic stakes in the EAC's growth, Jane (2024) found that the politicians viewed the expansion of the region as an opportunity to increase regional influence, and market access, while also expressing concerns about possible disruptions to institutional unity. Building on this, Kitenge (2024) shows how for development partners growth is at once a possibility and a challenge; it can be a source of resources for regional development but differences in capacities and policy priorities among governments may undermine harmonization efforts. The results in this case reveal that the stakeholders often perceive increasing and deeping as antagonistic, and not reinforcing one another, which means that thinking of integration depth is highly context-dependent.

Kansaye (2025) studied attitudes amongst the EAC Secretariat institutional players and discovered that the officials feared that too rapid growth would undermine the implementation of common policies and procedures, thus affecting deep integration. Musse and Echchabi (2024) found likewise that private sector players are concerned about regulatory divergence and differing standards across fresh member countries, which inhibits cross-border commerce and investment. All of these studies indicate that stakeholder perceptions are influenced by political objectives and practical constraints such as differences in infrastructure, legal systems, and market readiness in the eight member countries.

The following is a summary of findings by Yiblet (2024) on the perception of businesses and civil society on the growth of the EAC. They had identified that people believed it was a good thing to expanding the markets, strengthening the regional power but were concerned about how quickly EAC was evolving the rules and whether the new members could comply with these rules. This is supplemented by Basajjabalaba (2023) who found that regulatory agencies have a balancing act when growth can augment the spread of enforcement tools and also create challenges to consistently monitoring compliance. These findings point to the fact that, rather than simply financial or political incentives, stakeholders typically perceive a trade-off between increasing and deepening in terms of institutional capacity and operational feasibility.

Drawing on the experience of West African integration, Haruna (2024) found that leaders in East Africa are aware of integration-related challenges such as challenges of rapid growth, polarization, and the lack of consensus among states. Moreover, Abukar (2024) notes, humanitarian and development actors view joining new member states as making it more difficult to coordinate regional efforts, as each country's capacities and priorities must be balanced. These studies combined reveal that not only do public players but also non-state players who are directly exposed to integration results hold the view of the growing–deepening trade-off.

Rwigema (2020) identified that stakeholders have different perceptions on technology integration projects depending on how ready the member state is, some consider digital technologies as tools to accelerate policy harmonization processes, while others consider digital technologies as tools that can exacerbate the differences between early and late regions. Yelwa (2025) also added that external political forces such as regional security issues impact the perception of the expansion trade-off, thereby further complicating integration efforts. The results of these two findings combined show that the opinions of some interested parties regarding the issues of widening versus deepening are complex and shaped by political, financial, institutional and external factors, making them quite significant in understanding the implications of the expansion of the EAC.

2.3.3 The institutional and policy challenges arising from enlargement and their implications for effective regional integration

Edodi and Ahimbisibwe (2024) explored the experiences of integration in West Africa and noted that greater enlargements tends to over-stretch institutional capacities, resulting in difficulties in the implementation of common policies and maintaining political support. Likewise, the study by Osunkoya and Bello (2024) revealed that institutional fragmentation and differences in legal and regulatory systems in Sub-Saharan Africa hinder the effective implementation of regional agreements, and consequently reduce the overall level of integration effectiveness. The research reveal how the increasing number of members in the EAC from five to eight was accompanied by a gradually increased institutional adaptation difficulty where different policy priorities and administration systems have to be aligned.

Chukwuma and Ojukwu (2023) pointed to the issue of multi-level governance and the need to coordinate it in the region, especially since some countries are recently joining with different capacities and governance systems. Thus, Masinde and Omolo (2017) agree that expansion increases the strain on the EAC Secretariat and results in conflicts in the interpretation and implementation of community rules. The results suggest that the institutional barriers associated with the expansion directly affect the efficiency of the decision-making process, monitoring and implementation of EAC policies.

Yiblet (2024) highlighted the fact that there are some constraints to economic integration such as the various levels of preparedness of member states to facilitate the convergence in the fields of trade, monetary policy, and infrastructure. Mvile and Bishoge (2025) found that laws are different across the sector, and that coordination and frequent changes of stakeholders is a challenge in the extractive industries in particular. Combined with the other studies, these findings show that the mismatch of policies and the variety of institutional structures of new and existing members may affect the overall level of integration and slow down the achievement of a well-functioning common market.

In their study of foreign policy orientations, Kagoro et al. (2024) identified policy tensions due to the fact that national interests may conflict with regional commitments and these policy tensions negatively impact on consensus building in enlarged regional blocs. Moreover, Muhammad and Babatunde (2024) found that in the member states, there are different national priorities and regulatory strategies and that they create food security and agricultural policy integration problems due to their bottlenecks. It is from these studies that one can see the need for a great deal of negotiation and compromise to meet political and economic differences. They can become a hindrance if not managed well and lead to loss of trust in regional institutions.

In the analysis of AfCFTA implementation by Africa (2025), it was noted that expansion of membership without matching institutional capacity building can result in weak implementation of the rules, low compliance with the rules and more disputes amongst member states. This is also supported by Ogutu (2025) who argues that external frameworks of trade in Africa are often beset with the same problems, with the policy impact being largely reduced when countries are enlarged without a thorough institutional reform. The results highlight that there are institutional, regulatory and policy challenges that need to be addressed in order to promote effective and sustainable regional integration in the EAC region.

2.4 Research/ Literature Gap

The empirical review brings to the fore several aspects in which there is need for further research on the EAC's growth and incorporation. While there are previous analyses of the political, institutional, and monetary effects of having more members, little literature has taken sustained interest in the extent to which enlargement is effective with regard to deepening integration.

Additionally, empirical evidence is lacking on the extent to which in practice stakeholders make compromises between widening and deepening, especially in the context of new members of diverse political, economic and social backgrounds. The review further reveals that currently there is no research to inform operational effectiveness, policy alignment and institutional coherence in the context of extension; therefore, research is required to be more comprehensive, context specific and comparative in the EAC's growth plan.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research approach that was utilized. It outlines how this research was carried out. Sample size, study population and study design are all included. Furthermore, it includes a chapter on descriptive statistics, sampling, research instruments, data management and analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of research.

3.2 Research design

This study used a qualitative descriptive case study design using embedded process tracing. The choice of the case study design is suitable because the research is conducted on a specific limited system – East African Community (EAC), in a set timeframe (2016–2024). The pre- and post-expansion periods may be compared (five members in pre-expansion period, 2016; and eight members in post-expansion period, 2016-2024). Process tracing is used to uncover mechanisms between the process of widening (new members joining) and the outcomes (institutional inefficiency, failure of policy adherence, trade stagnation). This design is similar to the case study design that Creswell and Poth (2018) and Yin (2018) suggest for the research of an existing phenomenon in a contemporary context with secondary data.

3.3 Study area and population

The study was carried out in the East African Community (EAC) region, comprising 8 EAC partner states namely; Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Secondary documents are generated from the institutional headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania, which is the administrative and policy centre for the institution.

The study population was all published secondary documents, reports, statistics, legal texts, and data on the EAC integration processes, trade performance, institutional functioning and compliance records from 2016 to 2024. This includes documents that result from the EAC Secretariat, partner states, intergovernmental organizations and academic sources.

3.4 Sample size determination

The qualitative document based study did not employ statistics to determine sample size, but rather thematic saturation. At the end, about 68 documents were purposively picked for analysis. These were enough to provide coverage for all three research aims, and to achieve thematic saturation (when no new themes were produced from further documents).

Table 1: Sample Size Distribution

Document Type	Target Number
EAC official reports (annual, trade, integration)	4
EAC treaties, protocols, and legal instruments	3
EAC Court of Justice rulings and case records	3
World Bank, UNCTAD, and IMF trade statistics	3
Academic journal articles and book chapters	4
Policy briefs and development partner reports	3
Total	20

This range was sufficient to capture thematic depth and temporal variation (2016–2024) while remaining manageable for qualitative analysis (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

3.5 Sampling method

To identify documents and datasets that were information-rich and directly relevant to the study, the study used purposive sampling (also known as judgmental sampling). Specific inclusion criteria include Relevance (i.e., directly related to EAC expansion, institutional performance, policy compliance or trade trends). Time frame: those Published between January 2016 and December 2024. Authority: From an organization that is recognized, trusted and established (EAC organs, UN agencies, peer reviewed journals, recognized research institutions). Type of data: Quantitative (trade statistics) or qualitative (reports, rulings, policy documents). Opinion pieces, non-credible blogs and blogs that do not relate to EAC integration are not included.

3.6 Data sources

Secondary sources: Journal articles, books, policy documents, and institutional reports on regional integration, the EAC, and how to expand membership and deepen integration were consulted. The secondary sources were used to provide theoretical back-up, comparative analysis and contextual support to validate and supplement the primary data obtained.

The study used only secondary data that were provided by the following sources:

Category	Specific Sources
Official EAC documents	EAC Secretariat annual reports, EAC Trade and Investment Reports, Common Market Protocol Scorecards, EAC Court of Justice judgments, Summit communiqués, Council of Ministers decisions
Intergovernmental	World Bank (World Development Indicators, Doing Business reports, NTB databases), UNCTAD (trade statistics), African

organizations	Development Bank (regional integration reports), IMF (Direction of Trade Statistics)
Academic databases	Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar (peer-reviewed articles on EAC, regional integration, widening vs. deepening)
Policy and development partners	GIZ, USAID, TradeMark East Africa (policy briefs, evaluation reports)
Regional economic communities (comparative)	ECOWAS, SADC (reports for contextual comparison, per Haruna, 2024; Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024)

3.7 Data collection method and tool

In this research, document analysis was the major technique used to collect data. The process was carried out according to Bowen's (2009) methodological framework that guides researchers in analyzing written and statistical data available in documents. Document analysis was suitable for this study because it enabled the analysis of both historical and current documents without being in contact with people.

The strategy used in collecting data comprised of a document review checklist that captured important information regarding the documents, including sources, authors, dates of publications, relevance to research questions, and quotations.

3.8 Validity and reliability for qualitative research

Source triangulation was used to build credibility in this study, in which findings were cross-checked between the different types of reports produced by the EAC Secretariat, EAC Court of Justice records, World Bank and UNCTAD trade statistics and peer-reviewed academic publications (Bowen, 2009). Quantitative trends (e.g., reduction of share of intra-EAC trade, growing backlogs in courts) are verified by at least two independent institutional sources where they are reported to ensure they are accurate. Situating the findings in the context of the broad comparative literature on African regional economic communities allows readers to evaluate the applicability of findings to other integration contexts like Africa (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By employing a structured document review checklist, a data trail is established, documenting the source, author, year, relevance, and key data of each document analysed, ensuring dependability. Confirmability is ensured by using the theoretical approaches of neofunctionalism (Haas, 1958) and intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1998) throughout all three research aims, and by citing only documentary evidence rather than researcher inference. The research supervisor's feedback was also obtained at critical moments for further strengthening of the analytical rigour.

3.9 The data collection process

The data collection process was five steps and aimed for transparency, reproducibility and saturation. The second step entails document screening and eligibility assessment by the researcher, where each document identified in the first step is assessed against inclusion criteria – relevance to EAC integration, publication date from January 2016 to December 2024, and authority of the source, quantitative or qualitative data pertinent to the research objectives. Documents which are only opinion based, from non-credible sources, or not relevant to the widening–deepening dilemma are not included. The third step is document retrieval and storage, in which eligible documents are downloaded or securely copied into a password-protected folder, and are sorted in subfolders by document type (such as official report, court rulings, trade statistics, academic articles, etc.) and by year of publication. The fourth step is data extraction, where the researcher will be extracting quantitative data such as the annual percentage of intra-EAC trade, the number of cases before the EAC Court of Justice, and the frequency of observed non-tariff barriers, and qualitative data like explicit policy violations, efficiency of institutions, political motives for expansion, and assertions of sovereignty by EAC partner states. The fifth and last step is the saturation check, which occurs after analysing an established set of about seventy documents to determine if any new themes or information are emerging. Once thematic saturation has been achieved, that is, when more documents do not provide new insights important to the increasing and deepening dilemma, data collection ends. Sixty more documents are added progressively for each until saturation is reached, after which no new themes apply.

3.10 Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted sequentially in three stages, in line with Braun and Clarke (2006) framework of thematic analysis, using secondary documentary data. In the first phase (familiarization) the 68 documents were read in full and preliminary notes were taken for each research objective. The second step involved coding meaningful units of text or data, such as policy statements, statistical data, court decisions, and positions taken by stakeholders, with descriptive codes linked to the three objectives: (1) the impact of the growth on the depth of integration; (2) stakeholder perceptions of expansion–deepening trade-offs; and (3) institutional and policy issues stemming from the enlargement. The third stage, the theme development, involved the aggregation of initial codes into candidate themes, then the evaluation of each theme for internal coherence and external distinctiveness, and finally refining the themes until the addition of more documents did not generate any more themes.

The data was analyzed descriptively with time-series analysis, thematic analysis and process tracing, while the theory of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism were used as lenses for analysis. The descriptive time-series analysis was used for quantitative secondary data to analyze the trends in intra-EAC trade share between 2016 and 2024, with percentages plotted on a time series to visually determine any episodes of stagnation or falling trade shares during the study period when compared to the accession years. These initial codes were then compiled into potential themes which are checked and edited for consistency and uniqueness. Themes identified were then defined and named and the findings presented in the final writing using illustrative extracts from primary documents.

3.11 Ethical consideration

Data was anonymized or aggregated for all disclosures and only members of the research team had access to data to ensure confidentiality. All sources were cited and any direct quotations clearly attributed to their original authors (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019) to prevent plagiarism. Lastly, the overall research process followed the ethical standards of the research institution, showing the principles of respect, fairness and the protection of participants' rights.

3.12 Anticipated limitations and delimitations of the study

The three main limitations of this study were:

First, publically accessible secondary data, meant that some EAC internal documents, such as audit reports for some years, and disaggregated NTB data, were not accessible and could underestimate the extent of institutional challenges.

Second, the primary data collection (interviews with EAC officials) was not conducted, which means that the analysis of stakeholder perceptions was limited to the more public expressions of their views rather than the nuances and off-the-record comments.

Third, external factors like the Covid-19 pandemic and regional conflicts make the determination of a cause difficult; not all the observed decreases in deepening can be blamed on expansion. These limitations should be remedied in future research using mixed methods and econometric controls.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This section draws from a close look at materials tracking how the East African Community expanded from five to eight countries during 2016 to 2024. A total of 68 sources were studied - annual summaries issued by the EAC Secretariat appear alongside judgments handed down by its Court of Justice. Trade numbers pulled from UNCTAD and the World Bank sit next to declarations made at regional summits. Policy notes and scholarly papers also fed into what emerged. Interpretation followed the method laid out by Braun and Clarke back in 2006, focused on spotting patterns. Results took shape around three core aims guiding the study, each shaped by recurring ideas backed with examples found across the texts. Later sections connect those outcomes to earlier discussions in academic writings along with key conceptual models.

4.2 Influence of Expansion on Depth of Regional Integration

Theme 1: Trade Stagnation despite Market Enlargement

Not what anyone predicted - after the East African Community grew bigger, trade among its own members didn't surge. Instead, it flatlined, then dipped just below earlier levels. A report on EAC commerce and investment pointed out how internal deals shrank from one-fifth of all trading activity down to roughly an eighth over seven years. Even though global numbers showed some growth in raw dollar terms - moving up by six hundred million - that progress lagged behind faster-growing ties outside the group. Countries inside the alliance turned more toward nations like China and India, leaving regional exchanges weaker by comparison. Fewer types of goods moved across borders too; once common items disappeared from cross-border ledgers. Where there were over a hundred actively exchanged products before, now fewer than a hundred remain in steady circulation.

South Sudan joining in 2016? Trade barely moved. By 2023, purchases from fellow EAC nations still made up less than five out of every hundred imported goods - hardly a shift. Then came DRC in 2022. Growth followed, yet just around three percent within twelve months. That number limped behind earlier forecasts that had guessed fifteen to twenty. Hopes were higher before the doors opened.

What shows up here backs Chukwuma and Ojukwu’s warning from 2023 - growing the group might weaken unified policies while offering no real economic upside. Yet it questions Haas's old idea, put forward in 1958, that bigger markets automatically create broader economic ripple effects. Rather, what we see fits better with Moravcsik’s view from 1998: countries pick outside trade deals mainly to serve their own goals, sometimes sidelining deeper regional unity. Though inside talks still circle around money matters, Jane pointed out in 2024 that the actual numbers reveal a shift - attention now leans outward, focused on foreign markets instead.

Theme 2: Legal and Regulatory Harmonization Has Slowed

Later came a point about how legal alignment within the EAC lost momentum after every expansion. Tracking happens through the Common Market Protocol Scorecard - issued in 2016, 2021, and again in 2024 - measuring movement on free flow of goods, people, labor, services, and money. Progress once moved at roughly four fresh laws yearly between 2016 and 2019. After 2020 though, things thinned out. Just two per year appeared by the time South Sudan struggled to catch up and the DRC remained mid-talks (EAC Secretariat, 2024).

Getting people moving freely across borders has gone slowly. As of 2024, just Kenya and Tanzania let East African Community nationals work without permits, according to the World Bank. Meanwhile, plans for a shared currency have stalled - no new deadline set after the original 2024 goal was dropped. Progress reports from annual summits reveal seven separate delays since 2016 on meeting money union rules.

Proof backs up Masinde and Omolo's point from 2017 - tighter unity strengthens how institutions hold together. When that doesn’t happen, broader inclusion splits the East African Community into legal pieces. Lately, things moving slower show something Laursen called integration fatigue back in 2018: more members mean harder talks, yet leaders do not step up their dedication. Seen through neofunctionalist eyes, progress should have moved naturally - from shared tariffs to open markets, then money unions - but none of that unfolded. What shows instead is "spill-back," a term Haas used in 1958, where nations pull back toward weaker forms of joining.

4.3 Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Trade-offs Between Widening and Deepening

Theme 1: Divergent Perceptions between Technocrats and Politicians

It's obvious when you look at the documents. Not everyone agrees about growth versus depth - especially not the experts working day to day in the EAC compared to top politicians back home. Papers written inside the system keep repeating one idea: fix what’s already promised before adding more countries. Reports from TradeMark East Africa in 2022 and GIZ the next year show similar thoughts. A plan drafted in 2021 put it bluntly - progress can’t just mean getting bigger. Quality matters too. Without that shift, trust in how things are run begins to fade. That warning appeared again on page eight of a later report.

On the flip side, Summit statements (EAC, 2016, 2022, 2024) along with national leaders’ remarks tend to spotlight strategic gains from expansion. When the DRC joined (EAC, 2022), the official declaration stressed benefits like stronger regional stability and reaching the Atlantic coast - yet said nothing about progress on integration goals. Then again, at the 2023 EAC Business Summit, the top administrator admitted friction existed: “People wonder if we’re moving too quickly in adding members. I say expansion and strengthening go hand in hand - we need both. Still, truth is, our systems haven’t grown as fast as our plans” (EAC Secretariat, 2023, p. 3).

What stands out backs up Kitenge’s point from 2024 - development allies and experts care most about institutions being ready, whereas politicians push for broader influence. Hearing that reminds us of what Kagoro and team noted last year: choices made by governments in the EAC lean more on power moves than numbers or blueprints. Behind closed doors, officials talk like they’re caught between two ideas - one says progress spreads naturally through logic, the other insists nations only budge when deals are struck. If you ask Moravcsik, writing way back in ’98, the head official’s own words show how little room global figures have when countries pull in separate directions.

Theme 2: Private Sector Skepticism and Civil Society Concern

Document analysis of private sector submissions to EAC sectoral councils and civil society position papers reveals growing skepticism about enlargement. The East African Business Council (2023) submitted a memorandum to the Council of Ministers noting: “Each new member adds layers of non-tariff barriers, customs procedures, and regulatory misalignment. Our members report that trade with the original five member’s remains more profitable than trade with new members.” Likewise, a civil society coalition report (East African Civil Society Organizations Forum, 2024) warned that “the rush to widen the EAC has diverted attention from implementing the Common Market Protocol on the ground, including the rights of informal cross-border traders, most of whom are women.”

Yet wider participation might help, say certain groups like aid agencies - provided it comes with real support to build skills. One review by GIZ noted that opening up isn’t automatically bad.

What fails is when deeper reforms get ignored or underfunded. Take the DRC joining; current countries promised nothing solid to strengthen rules alongside expansion

Now picture this: what people think lines up with Yiblet's (2024) point - deeper integration works better when workers can move freely, yet firms say public services and job movement have gotten worse. Instead of broad alliances, companies lean toward dealing only with founding nations, just like Osunkoya and Bello (2024) noticed - smaller clubs tend to sync markets faster. On another note, activists raising issues around women and street vendors tie back to Basajjabalaba's (2023) warning: rule enforcement gets ignored, so even if fresh agreements exist, they rarely help those who need them most.

4.4 Institutional and Policy Challenges Arising from Enlargement

Theme 1: EAC Court of Justice Overload and Non-compliance

One big problem stands out: the EAC Court of Justice is swamped. Since 2016, new cases have piled up fast - jumping from just 12 to 47 by 2023. That's close to four times more work. Meanwhile, old cases keep piling up instead of getting cleared. What started as 8 pending decisions grew into 53 unresolved ones by 2024. Decisions now take much longer too. Where it once took about a year and two months, people wait over two and a half years today. These numbers come straight from court logs between 2016 and 2024.

Worrying too is how often decisions go ignored. From 56 to 2024, the court issued 89 verdicts - yet nearly half, specifically 41, were either partly or completely disregarded by member nations come December 2024. Seven out of eight orders meant for South Sudan saw no follow-through, making it the least responsive country. On Tanzania's part, more than half its required actions - 11 among 19 - never happened (EAC Court of Justice, 2024). According to a World Bank analysis in 2023 (p. 34), without real tools to back up its rulings, the EAC Court acts mostly like a suggestion box; things got worse once countries with less strong legal habits joined

This proof lines up with what Basajjabalaba said last year - the EAC's rules often go unenforced because follow-through is weak. Countries tend to obey decisions only if those choices suit their own goals, which shows how cooperation works in reality; deeper power beyond nations rarely kicks in. Without a strong central push, agreements stall. Neofunctional theory predicted courts would grow stronger gradually, yet the opposite happened - more members brought heavier loads, slowing things down. Adding countries stretched resources thin, so institutions lost strength. In West Africa, Haruna pointed out something similar just months ago: pushing expansion while ignoring court support causes systems to rot

Theme 2: Budgetary Arrears and Financial Instability

Looking closer at EAC budget records and audits, money troubles keep showing up - worse now than before. Because the group added members, things got harder to manage financially. Each country is supposed to chip in based on set calculations. Reports from the audit body, ones dated 2020 and again in 2023, point out payments dropped. On average only about six out of every ten dollars due actually arrived between 2020 and 2024. Earlier, from 2016 through 2019, it was nearly eight out of ten. Since joining, South Sudan hasn't covered what it owes, not once. Somalia didn't send anything at all by June 2024, documents confirm. Meanwhile, Kenya along with Rwanda usually pay close to everything asked of them year after year.

By December 2024, unpaid contributions had reached $47 million - nearly two-fifths of the yearly operating funds - according to the Secretariat's 2024 report. Because of this gap, progress on key efforts slowed; take the overhaul of the Political Federation plan or funding for the new Monetary Institute, both now stalled. Behind closed doors, a note circulated within the organization, later shared by TradeMark East Africa in 2023, put it bluntly: promises to grow deeper cooperation mean little when member payments remain uncertain. Expanding membership before fixing payment delays? That path runs out of money too fast

This proof lines up with Muhammad and Babatunde’s point in 2024 - focusing too hard on expanding membership while ignoring deeper unity weakens results. Still, it backs what Musse and Echchabi stressed the same year: political calm and aligned institutions must come first, yet these are missing in recent joiners like South Sudan and Somalia. When seen through an intergovernmentalist lens, unpaid dues aren’t random; they’re how states act when weighing costs

Some members enjoy gains from shared systems they did not pay for. Without a higher authority able to force contributions, freeloading stays unchecked - per Moravcsik (1998).

Theme 3; Proliferation of Non-Tariff Barriers

One big issue now? Non-tariff barriers have grown since expansion. From 2016 to 2024, the EAC's online system logged 312 confirmed cases. Resolution stood at 187, meaning 125 still lingered - just 60 percent cleared. That marks a drop from earlier years when nearly four out of five got fixed. Typical problems pop up like sudden customs price demands. Sometimes imports get blocked using health excuses. Paperwork piles also slow things without clear reason.

It stands out that nearly seven in ten non-tariff barriers recorded from 2022 to 2024 came from relatively recent EAC joiners - South Sudan, the DRC, or Somalia - with one nation responsible. Just South Sudan made up well over four out of every ten fresh trade restrictions introduced after 2022, data shows. Exporters across East Africa, when questioned last year by the World Bank, said entry hurdles felt much higher moving goods into these newer member states compared to older ones instead.

Chukwuma and Ojukwu said wider groups might blur policy goals - this finding backs their point. Not unlike Kitenge's 2024 take, gaps still stretch across systems even after aid efforts kicked in. Fewer non-tariff barriers get solved now, hinting the EAC's method struggles with scale. Yiblet made clear: progress needs shared rules and strong links, neither fully present yet.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined the widening deepening dilemma in the East African Community (EAC) following its expansion from five to eight members between 2016 and 2024. Using a qualitative case study design and systematic document analysis of secondary sources, it addressed three core objectives.

First, on the impact of enlargement on the depth of integration, the evidence shows stagnation rather than progress. Intra-EAC trade share declined from 20 percent to 15 percent between 2016 and 2023, legal harmonization slowed from four to two instruments annually, and the Monetary Union protocol missed seven scheduled deadlines. These trends collectively demonstrate that widening has not translated into deepening.

Second, regarding stakeholder perceptions of the widening deepening trade-off, the analysis revealed sharp divergences. Technocrats, the private sector, and civil society consistently voiced skepticism, stressing that institutional capacity has not kept pace with expansion. Political elites, by contrast, emphasized geopolitical and security benefits of widening, with little attention to deepening benchmarks. Development partners adopted a conditional stance, supporting enlargement only when tied to binding commitments for institutional consolidation.

Third, on institutional and policy challenges, enlargement has exacerbated existing weaknesses. The EAC Court of Justice experienced a near fourfold increase in cases, compliance with rulings fell to 54 percent, cumulative budget arrears reached USD 47 million, and non-tariff barriers proliferated particularly among newer members. These challenges have directly delayed or underfunded deepening initiatives such as the Political Federation roadmap and the establishment of the Monetary Institute.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concluded that Enlargement had instead led to institutional inefficiency, non-compliance with policy and stagnation in trade. Evidence points to a steady pattern of decreasing compliance rates, slower legal harmonization and increasing institutional overload for each accession. The deepening-widening dilemma is therefore not only a theoretical construct but an empirically observable trade-off, in which widening systematically erodes deepening.

The findings also indicate that intergovernmentalism offers a better explanation of EAC integration dynamics than neofunctionalism. Enlargement has tended to increase this trend, as member states have often prioritized sovereignty and geopolitical interests over supranational commitments."

The study concludes that continued widening without addressing deepening deficits risks reducing the Community to a diplomatically symbolic but operationally weak entity an organization where integration exists largely on paper but fails in practice.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are addressed to different stakeholders:

Recommendations to the EAC Summit (Heads of State)

This study evaluated the growing broadening challenge in the East African Community (EAC) following the enlargement from five to eight members between 2016 to 2024. The study adopted a qualitative case study design and used systematic document analysis of secondary sources to explore three primary aims.

First, on the effect of enlargement on the depth of integration, the evidence reveals stagnation rather than development.

Legislative harmonization decreased from four to two items per year between 2016 and 2023, intra-EAC commerce fell from 20% to 15%, and the Monetary Union protocol missed seven deadlines. When taken as a whole, these patterns show that broadening has not been deepening.

Recommendations to the EAC Secretariat and Sectoral Councils

The Secretariat should dedicate at least 30 percent of its operational budget to strengthening the NTB reporting and resolution mechanism. This should include deploying border facilitators at key crossings between original and newer member states. A time-bound target of resolving 90 percent of NTBs within six months should be adopted.

Given the weaker institutional capacity of newer members, the Secretariat should propose a variable geometry approach, allowing integration to proceed at different speeds. The original five members could advance toward monetary union, while newer members focus on consolidating customs union and common market fundamentals.

Recommendations to Development Partners (World Bank, GIZ, TradeMark Africa, EU)

Development partners should tie new funding to demonstrable progress on budget contribution compliance, court ruling implementation and NTB resolution. A special fund for deepening could be created, and funds would only be released when partner states meet quarterly compliance targets.

They should also support the establishment of an independent EAC Integration Observatory to publish annual reports on deepening indicators including court compliance, arrears, and NTB resolution rates with disaggregated data at the partner-state level.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should compare the experience of the EAC with other African Regional Economic Communities that have faced similar widening deepening dilemmas such as ECOWAS and SADC to determine whether the EAC's challenges are unique or systemic.

Further research should use panel data econometrics to identify the causal effect of each accession event on intra-EAC trade, while controlling for other confounding factors such as COVID-19 and global commodity price shocks. This would strengthen causal claims beyond the descriptive and thematic evidence presented here.

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