

ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and Nigeria's Economic Development

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Abstract

ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) opens up grounds for the abolition of customs duties levied on imports, exports and on non-tariff barriers to realize a free trade Area within the West African sub-region. It is against this background that this study examines ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and Nigeria's economic development. The key objective of the study is to analyse the effect of implementing ECOWAS trade liberalization Scheme on Nigeria economic development. The study was anchored on New Trade Theory. Mixed research design which entails both qualitative and quantitative method were adopted. The findings revealed that ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme has positive impact on Nigeria's economic development. Also the strategy adopted in achieving ETLS on Nigeria's economic development has contributed in achieving the set objective. The study recommends that Nigeria government need to pay relative interest in the issue of trade liberalization to stand a chance of benefiting from the potentials of the larger West African market for sales of its finished products as market for the raw materials is already saturated within the ECOWAS sub-region. Exchange rate liberalization is also critical in facilitating trade in any economy; policy makers should ensure that exchange rate is determined by the forces of demand and supply. Nigerian government should include the building of trade-related institutional and technical capacity at national and regional levels and involve the participation of all major stakeholders such as Member States, ECOWAS Commission, Private Sector, and Development Partners. These strategies will refine the ETLS and address the various implementation constraints that limit the impact of the scheme to the Nigerian Economy.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Trade Liberalization Scheme, Effect & Economic Development.

Introduction

Trade has long been identified as a veritable way through which the quest by nations for improved well-being of their citizens could be achieved. Adam Smith recommended division of labour, specialization and pursuit of foreign trade as a way of increasing the wealth of nations (Obadan, 2014) and (Ajayi, 2015). Adam Smith went further to state that division of labour was limited by size of the domestic market (Bakare, 2014).

The ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) came into existence first in 1979 and only covered agricultural goods, mineral products and artisan handcrafted goods. However, in 1990, it was expanded to also include industrial goods. This expansion created the need for rules defining the notion of ECOWAS "originating products" in which "rules of origin" were clearly spelt out. An industrial good which complies with these rules of origin is eligible to benefit from the scheme and these include: agricultural and livestock products, fishery products from the sea, rivers or lakes, mining products, artisanal handicrafts and industrial/manufactured goods (ECOWAS Commission, 2015). Nigeria had participated in the ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme for almost forty years (40 years). The expectation when she joined the scheme was that through the scheme, she would achieve increased productivity in her manufacturing industry which would act as catalyst that would accelerate the pace

of structural transformation and diversification of the economy through the export of products that are lacking in other countries. But up to date, Nigeria is dominantly a mono-cultural economy. According to Chete, Adeoji, Adeyinka and Ogundele (2015), the structure of the Nigerian economy is typical of an underdeveloped country. Between 2011 and 2015, the primary sector in particular, oil and gas dominated her gross domestic product (GDP) accounting for over 95 percent of export earnings and about 85 percent of government revenue.

Nigeria aspires to take full advantage of the opportunities and concessions available in international trade relations at bilateral, multilateral, regional, or continental levels. This is noticeable in Nigeria's active participation in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the Cotonou Agreement, the European Union (EU) – African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Agreement, and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of the United States of America. Nigeria's trade policy has always acknowledged the role of international trade in the nation's economy. It therefore always makes a strong reference to vibrant engagement in bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade negotiations, as a way of boosting trade and achieving full integration into the global economy. Thus, the World Trade Organization (2005) stated that "the government of Nigeria has at every opportune occasion reiterated its continued commitment to the principles and objectives of the multilateral trading system". Given the phenomenal pace of globalization with the multilateral trading system acting as a major catalyst, it has become imperative for Nigeria to critically recognize the role of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the need to actively participate in trade negotiation processes to take advantage of the benefits they offer.

Nigeria became a member of ECOWAS with the signing of the ECOWAS treaty on the 28th of May 1975 in Lagos, comprising sixteen countries of the West African sub-region. These countries were: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Following the withdrawal of Mauritania in December 2000, the membership dropped to fifteen (15). The primary purpose for establishing ECOWAS is to integrate the fifteen West African markets to aid the free movement of goods, capital and labor so that the community can advance harmoniously as one region in its search for sustained economic growth and development (ECOWAS, 2004). Since the community became operational in 1977, trade development has been central to the cooperation programs adopted by the decision-making organs of ECOWAS. As early as 1976, the first protocol relating to the concept of products originating from member states of the community was signed by the Authority of Heads of State and Government. Three years later, in 1979, the decision on the liberalization of unprocessed products was signed by the council of ministers followed by the decision of the Authority of Heads of State and Government relating to trade liberalization in respect of traditional handicrafts in 1981. Another decision relating to the adoption and implementation of a single Trade Liberalization Scheme for industrial products originating from member states of the community dated 30th May 1983 was signed by the Authority completing the scope of products covered by the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ECOWAS, 2004).

The success of West African integration efforts will certainly be judged by the volume of intra-community trade and by the degree of interaction between the citizenry and also between the business communities. This is why in 1987; the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government directed that both the member states and the institutions of the community accord, the topmost priority to the promotion and development of intra-community trade. As a result, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) came into effect in January 1990 to eliminate customs duties and levies of equivalent

effect, remove non-tariff barriers, and establish a Common External Tariff (CET) to protect goods produced in member states.

According to Nwabueze (2009), the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme did not in any way favour the textile industry in Nigeria because the scheme opened the flood gate for the dumping of all sorts of manufactures good thus bringing about not just the shutting down of many sectors but also the job losses that came with it. This trend is also not only experienced in manufacturing industry, but also applicable to other sectors in the country. It can be rightly argued that the ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme (ETLS) have not make much significance to the Nigeria's trade growth and employment opportunities after over forty years of Nigeria's participation in the scheme. It against this background that this study therefore examines ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme on the Nigerian Economic Development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's signature to the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme for almost fifty (50) years, so far, it has not helped the country to expand or grow her economy to become more competitive in global trade. Instead, Nigeria has become a dumping ground for all sorts of cheap and sometimes sub-standard foreign products causing more de-industrialisation in the economy. For example, between 2000 and 2008, Nigeria experienced her worst situation in manufacturing as 820 companies shut down or suspended production due to impossible business environment. Worst hit was the textile and garment sub-sector. At its peak, the textile industry alone employed nearly 700,000 people (making it the second largest employer of labour in Nigeria after the government) and had a turnover of about \$9 billion US dollars. However, the industry witnessed a catastrophic collapse from 175 firms in the mid-1980s to ten factories in 2004 (Ekundayo, 2018, Adebayo, 2013). Moreso, in 2016 alone, about 272 firms were shut while some reduced their production, staff strength and remuneration of their workers (Sotinwa; 2017). According to Nwabueze, (2009), the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme did not in any way favour the textile industry in Nigeria because the scheme opened the flood gate for the dumping of all sorts of textile manufactures thus bringing about not just the shutting down of industries in this sector but also the job losses that came with it. This trend is also not only experienced in the textile sector but in other sectors of the manufacturing industry.

The major aim of trade liberalization is to open up economies so that countries can learn from themselves and improve production and output. However, most countries are not truly willing to expose their methods of production and technologies simply because of fear of domination. Also, majority of the countries engaging in trade hold important commodities which are needed in Nigeria; yet they get every single thing they need from Nigeria. This therefore results in a situation where trade is liberalized only in words but not in action. This deplorable situation obviously appears to have an adverse effect on the economic development of Nigeria. This study, therefore investigates the impact of ECOWAS TLS on Nigeria's economic development.

Research Questions

- i. How does ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme affect Nigeria's economic development?
- ii. What are the strategies employed by the government through ECOWAS liberalization scheme to achieve economic development in Nigeria?

Research Objectives

- i. To examine how ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme affects Nigeria's economic development;
- ii. To examine the strategy adopted by the government through ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme to achieve economic development in Nigeria;

Research Propositions

- i. ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme affects Nigeria's economic development positively.
- ii. The strategy adopted by the government through ECOWAS Liberalization Scheme has significantly impacted on Nigeria's economic development.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Trade liberalization

According to DeRosa (2020), Trade Liberalization refers to as the increasing integration of international market for goods, trade able services and financial assets. In the real sense it refers to as the increasing integration of markets for major inputs to production (not only mobile physical capital) but also labour in its various forms: basic labour, skilled labour and other professional services. Trade liberalization is thus a multidimensional concept and may be viewed as the forging of multiplicity of linkages and interconnectedness between States and the societies which make up the modern World called the global village. It is also a process by which occurrences, decision and activities in one part of the World come to have significant consequence on individual and communities in quite distant part of the globe (DeRosa, 2020).

Trade liberalization is the removal or reduction of restrictions or barriers on the free exchange of goods between nations. This includes the removal or reduction of both tariff (duties and surcharges) and non-tariff obstacles (like licensing rules, quotas and other requirements). The easing or eradication of these restrictions is often referred to as promoting "free trade." It is a policy by which a government does not discriminate against imports or interfere with exports by applying tariffs (to imports) or subsidies (to exports) or quotas. According to the law of comparative advantage, the policy permits trading partner's mutual gains from trade of goods and services (Ikenson, 2006). Under a trade liberalization policy, prices emerge from the equilibration of supply and demand, and are the sole determinant of resource allocation. 'Free' trade differs from other forms of trade policy where the allocation of goods and services among trading countries are determined by price strategies that may differ from those that would emerge under deregulation. These governed prices are the result of government intervention in the market through price adjustments or supply restrictions, including protectionist policies. Such government interventions can increase as well as decrease the cost of goods and services to both consumers and producers (Bhagwati, 2017). Since the mid-20th century, nations have increasingly reduced tariff barriers and currency restrictions on international trade. Other barriers, however, that maybe equally effective in hindering trade include import quotas, taxes, and diverse means of subsidizing domestic industries. Interventions include subsidies, taxes and tariffs, non-tariff barriers, such as regulatory legislation and import quotas, and even inter-government managed trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) (contrary to their formal titles) and any governmental market intervention resulting in artificial prices. Trade liberalization however, is opposed by many anti-globalization groups such as (third world scholars Do-Santos and his associates) based on their assertion that free trade agreements generally do not increase the economic freedom of the poor or the working

class, and frequently makes them poorer. Where the foreign supplier allows de facto exploitation of labor, domestic free-labor is unfairly forced to compete with the foreign exploited labor, and thus the domestic "working class would gradually be forced down to the level of harlotry" (Panagariya, 2016). To this extent, free trade is seen as nothing more than an end-run around laws that protect individual liberty, such as the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (outlawing slavery and indentured servitude).

Concept of Economic Development

Economic development, according to Schumpeter (1961), involves transferring capital from established methods of production to new, innovative, productivity-enhancing methods. Schumpeter's conceptualization was focused on understanding the origins of the business cycle and the conditions that gave rise to new opportunities that propelled the economy forward to a higher economic growth trajectory. Schumpeter discusses the emergence of systems of complementary capabilities that develop around key radical innovations to create economic growth. For example, the industrial revolution was driven in part by changes in the means of production in the textiles industry; these changes generated a variety of social and economic effects that then extended to other complementary sectors, and diffused throughout the economy.

Thus, to add to the definition, Economic Development is the means to achieve sustained increases in prosperity and quality of life realized through innovation, lowered transaction costs, and the utilization of capabilities towards the responsible production and diffusion of goods and services. Economists conclude that the development of high-quality institutions is the major factor behind economic growth (Rodrik et al. 2002). Institutions are the rules of the game, enforcement mechanisms or the accepted standard of behavior in a society (Ostrom 1986). Institutions operate with specific rules and procedures that lower transaction costs and inspire confidence by certifying the range of potential outcomes. High quality institutions support productive activities and encourage capital accumulation, skill acquisition, invention, and technology transfer (North and Thomas 1973).

Empirical Review

George (2007) in his study titled, "The Nature of Trade Liberalization and Economic Expansion: A Sensitivity Analysis," tried to explore the nature of the relationship between trade liberalization and economic development. Multivariate gender tests were used in predicting why exports represent a fundamental determinant of economic performance in Ireland, whereas in the case of Greece, Portugal and Spain exports do not affect economic growth and it was concluded that it was very difficult to analyze the role of trade liberalization in economic performance and to determine the factors which affect the causal links between exports and real GDP, stating that more empirical evidence from developed and developing countries is needed in order to examine the quantitative and qualitative factors which affect the direction of causality between exports and economic growth. The theoretical possibility that trades liberalization might have a negative effect on economic performance has been demonstrated in various endogenous growth studies (dependency scholars e.g Emmanuel Walastern, Do-santos, Samir Amir, Welter Rodney among others).

Sama'ila (2016) discussed in his study titled: "Nigeria and Ecowas Trade Liberalization Scheme." The study critically reviewed the establishment and development of ECOWAS, (especially the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme) and the salient reasons why the so much anticipated economic integration under ECOWAS has not been properly consolidated in the sub-region. The study also argued that

although Nigeria has played a central role in promoting the ETLS scheme, it has not succeeded in consolidating the gains of the scheme due to a number of challenges facing the sub-region. The study identified improper implementation of the scheme; inability to tackle poverty in the subregion; the renewed French interest in the region; a non-diversified economy of member countries; contradictory policies between the Francophone Union Economique et Monetaire Ouest Africaine Zone and the Anglophone west African monetary zone; and above all the problem of poor leadership image of Nigeria, to be responsible for the poor performance of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme. The article therefore, recommended that the future of ECOWAS lies with the ability of Nigeria and other member countries to meaningfully and significantly address the enormous challenges facing the subregion. Accordingly, Sama'ila's work focused on economic integration under ECOWAS but has done little to address the challenges of economic development in the sub-region as Nigeria economic development is the main focus of this research thesis.

Okoye and Nwakoby (2015) explained in their work, "Impact of Economic Liberalization on the Growth of the Nigerian Economy." The study examined the nexus between economic liberalization and economic growth in Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which changes in major economic fundamentals like exchange rate, lending rate, inflation rate, financial deepening, trade openness and saving rate affected economic growth in Nigeria. Annual data on the variables, sourced from the publications of the Central Bank of Nigeria and National Bureau of Statistics were analyzed using the econometric technique of the ordinary least square. The study produced mixed results. For instance, there was evidence of significant positive impact of financial liberalization on the growth of the real economy. Exchange rate was however shown to have non-significant effect on economic growth. Trade liberalization had non-significant positive impact on output growth in Nigeria. Finally, the result showed significant negative effect of inflation rate on economic growth. The study concluded that economic liberalization has significant impact on the growth of the Nigerian economy. The work recommended that financial deepening programme should be strengthened through consolidation of the financial liberalization programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria; and that the government should apply substantial amount of government revenue to infrastructural development with a view of reducing the cost of productions and price levels.

Innocent and Bartholomew (2020) focused in their study, "Trade Liberalization and Economic Growth: An Assessment of Nigerian Experience." The association between trade liberalization and economic growth in Nigeria was examined in this study from 1981 to 2018. The study used the Autoregressive Distributed Lag Bounds technique to cointegration. The results showed that trade liberalization does not support economic growth in Nigeria. Hence, the genuineness of the extensive trade liberalization campaign in developing countries through the bright idea of international organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not validated. Furthermore, the results showed the presence of unidirectional causality from real Gross Domestic Product to trade liberalization in Nigeria. The study, therefore, recommended that policymakers of the government should balance its strategies of trade liberalization as a result of the inability of the economy to absorb the adverse shocks from foreign trade, appropriate fiscal and monetary policies should be deployed by the government for the protection of the economy against foreign influences and the diversification of the structure of export is necessary to ensure that manufactured products are exported more. Also, the Central Bank of Nigeria and policymakers of the government should prescribe sound macroeconomic policies that will ensure price stability to reduce the uncertainties associated with investment in the economy to boost economic growth. The government should also provide incentives to investors and a conducive environment for investment. Moreover, the government should initiate policies of growth for the promotion of trade.

Above all, the literature reviewed did not adequately address the effect of ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme on Nigeria's economic development as well as the strategy adopted for the implementation of ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme to achieve economic development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: (Economic Protectionist Theory of International Trade)

The theory applied in this study is the economic protectionist theory of international trade otherwise called the neo-mercantilist or modern economic nationalist theory. This theory actually dates back to the mercantilist writers of the 15th and 16th centuries (AjaAkporu, 2001). Mercantilism cannot be classified as a formal school of thought, but rather as a collection of similar attitudes towards domestic economic activity and the role of international trade that tended to dominate economic thinking and policy during this period (Appleyard and Field; 1998). Mercantilism is often referred to as the political economy of state building mainly because the proponents subscribed to the doctrine that economic activity should be regulated and not left to individual prerogative. Mercantilists also stressed the need to maintain an excess of exports over imports (Appleyard and Field, 1998).

Modern economic nationalism is a weapon that emphasizes economic protectionism, rapid industrialisation, legislation on foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign portfolio investment (FPI) and the activities of multinational corporations (MNCs), enforced quota system, fiscal and monetary policies including value added tax (VAT) and other forms of state intervention to support and protect local industrial growth.

The theory of neo-mercantilism is very relevant to this study because it is concerned about state building and industrial power. The theory argues that the primary purpose of tariff, monetary and fiscal policies should be to promote and protect certain industrial sectors as a shield against adverse foreign competition. Even among the highly developed countries, the advocacy for free trade Liberalization is strongly mediated by differing forms of economic protectionist measures or policies. No country cherishes any openness that erodes national values and interest. This is why this study relying on the theory of modern economic nationalism argues that the impact of ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme on Nigeria's economic development is not positive considering the contribution of the industrial sector to the gross domestic product (GDP) and therefore makes a case that this ugly trend must be reversed. This could be done when Nigeria takes drastic actions first to support and promote her local industries to become more efficient and competitive and second by reducing the high level of importation and smuggling through her immediate neighbours. It is only when this is done that Nigeria should expect to benefit maximally from this sub regional arrangement.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, a mixed research design which entails both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted. The population of the study is 1,162 people from (ECOWAS Secretariat Abuja, Ministry of Industry Trade and Investment, Nigeria Export Promotion, Standard Organization of Nigeria, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigeria Immigration Service Nigeria Custom Service, Trade promotion department in the Nigeria Export Promotion Council and Nigeria Chamber of Commerce) as seen in the table below.

Table 1: Showing Distribution of Target Population of the Study Area

Selected Department/Units	Target Population
Ecowas secretariat regional trade Department	150
Trade Department Ministry of Industry Trade and Investment	265
Enforcement, investigation and inspection in Nigeria Custom Service	187
Border management in Nigeria immigration service	190
Trade promotion department Nigeria Export Promotion Council	79
Product certification Standard organization of Nigeria	105
Legal and treaties division, Ministry of foreign Affairs	121
Nigeria Chamber of Commerce	65
Total	1,162

Source: Field Survey, June, 2023

The sample size of the study is 400. It was determined using Rakesh formula of (2013). Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 400 respondents and 379 copies were filled and retrieved. Analysis was therefore, done based on the 379 retrieved copies of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data obtained through questionnaire while content analysis was used to analyzed information from interview and secondary sources. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 was used to carry out analysis. Data were analyzed using 5-point Likert scale in descending order of SA, A, D, SD and U to determine the level of responses. Apart from the questionnaire, the study collected data qualitatively through indepth interview from 17 key respondents who were purposively selected from ECOWAS secretariat Abuja (3), Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (2), Standard Organization of Nigeria (1), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (3), Nigeria Immigration Service (2), Nigeria Custom Service (2), Nigerian Export Promotion Council (3) and Nigerian Chambers of Commerce (1).

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Table 2: Responses on the Impact of ETLs on Nigeria Economic Development

Extent of Access	Frequency	Percentage
To a Large Extent	68	17.9
To Some Extent	89	23.5
To a Little Extent	120	31.7
Not at All	102	26.9
Undecided	0	0
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey January, 2023

Table 1 showed that 17.9% of the respondents were of the opinion that ECOWAS Trade Liberalization scheme impacts positively on the economic development of Nigeria, 23.5% of the respondents were of the view that the ETLs has impacted to some extent on economic development of Nigeria, whereas, 31.7% of the respondents argued that the extent to which ETLs impacts on economic development of Nigeria was little. Nevertheless, 26.9% of the respondents believed that ETLs had no impact at all. After considering the entire responses, the researchers observed that approximately 43.7% of the respondents held positive opinions on how ECOWAS Trade Liberalization scheme impacts on economic development of Nigeria. The remaining 56.3%, in majority, held unto the negative views that either ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme does not impact much on the economic development of Nigeria or has no impact at all. There was only a

12.6% gap between these responses- representing a difference of 8 respondents, to this end ECOWAS Trade Liberalization scheme, going by this analysis suggests a relative impact on the economic development of Nigeria. This opens a room for improvements to be made by the Nigerian government on the implementation of the associated policy regimes that would lead to full trade liberalization in Nigeria (Johnson, 2023). Sunny Ugoh in this interview in response to objective one, argues that;

ideally ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme has done a lot for Nigeria in terms of economic development, stating that the trade instrument designed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) offers unhindered market access to the fifteen member Countries including Nigeria and promotes economic relations within the sub-region. Countries covered by the Scheme are; Ghana, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde and Nigeria. Nigeria is one of the largest beneficiaries of the ETLS, some of its benefit to Nigeria includes guaranteeing free movement of goods and persons between member countries, no quantitative restrictions, total exemption from import duties and taxes and non-payment of compensation for loss of revenue for items (ii) and (iii) as a result of their importation. Nigeria more than any other country stands a chance of benefiting in terms of trade and economic development more than any other community member of ECOWAS. For goods to qualify for admission into the ETLS such products must originate from the ECOWAS region, have at least 60% local content of products, have at least 30% value addition for products, and through change of tariff headings (reflected in HS-code). These are all departments where Nigeria has benefited from the ETLS for its economic development. To get approval for the ETLS, and be eligible to do business in Nigeria you must fill an application form showing, Certificate of Incorporation, NAFDAC / SON product registration certificate, NEPC Exporters' certificate, Evidence of registration with MAN and Evidence of registration with NACCIMA. The swelling number of registrants coming into Nigeria to embark on these processes has helped in sanitizing some of the usual registration problems through the ease of doing business policy and in generating registrations fees for government agencies. This is beside the economic benefits of real time access to larger markets across the sub-region (Sunny Ugoh, Spokesman of the ECOWAS Court, Interviewed 9th January, 2023).

Table 2: Responses on the Strategy Adopted in Achieving ETLS on Nigeria Economic Development

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Periodic assessment of ECOWAS programmes	89	23.5
Investigating direct challenges affecting ETLS	61	16.1
Mainstreaming the ETLS into national development	152	40.1
Sensitization and awareness campaigns on ETLS	49	12.1
Elimination of tariffs in the border zones	28	7.4
Total	379	100

Source: Field Survey January, 2023

Table 2 shows that 23.5% of the respondents agreed that periodic assessment of ECOWAS programmes is the best strategy adopted in achieving ETLS on Nigeria's economic development, 16.1% of the respondents said investigating direct challenges affecting ETLS is the best strategy adopted in actualising ETLS on Nigeria's economic development, 40.1% of the respondents were of the view that taking necessary steps to address the above challenge, 12.1% of the respondents believed in sensitization and awareness campaigns on ETLS while 7.4% of the respondents hold that elimination of tariffs in the border zones is the best strategies adopted in achieving ETLS on Nigeria Economic Development.

An interview conducted with Bala Mohammed Isa based on the objective two revealed that;

Mainstreaming of ETLS into national development assist in fast-tracking the implementation and realizing its benefits. There is no Member State of ECOWAS that is too strong or too weak that it cannot benefit from the scheme if appropriate and effective measures are taken to mainstream it into national policy. Every country should have an action plan for boosting intra-community trade. An example of a move in the right direction is that of Ghana which in its quest to position itself as a major trading hub and industrialized nation in West Africa has tasked its Ministry of Trade and Industry to facilitate the growth of the country's intra-regional trade and to develop an integrated mechanism to promote Ghana made products. Part of the mechanisms developed is the introduction of Business French, a policy designed to train policy makers and representatives of the business community in French in order to break the language barrier that impedes business with French speaking counterparts.

On his part, Stanley Okoroy argued that the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, which has been pursued relentlessly for more than a decade, constitutes an essential component of the integration process that the sub-region has been going through since the inception of ECOWAS in 1975. Nations within the West African region, like their counterparts in other regions, have continued to pursue inter-country trade and regional cooperation as key instrument to building a stronger and more sustainable regional and global economy; by promoting freer and more beneficial trade relationships among member states (Stanley Okoroy, Asst. Director Planning Ministry of Finance, interviewed 12th January, 2022).

Findings

- i. The study finds out that ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme has positive impact on Nigeria's economic development.
- ii. The study also revealed that the Strategy Adopted in Achieving ETLs on Nigeria Economic Development and Africa Sub-Region has impacted possibly in achieving the set objective

Conclusion

The importance of Free Trade Area Scheme to the Nigerian economy cannot be over emphasized; a lot of studies and arguments have taken place over the years in order to ascertain the relationship between trade liberalization and Nigeria's economic development. While some have found a positive relationship or effect, others share contradictory views. Degrees of Openness, Net Export, Net Import and Balance of Payment have positive and significant impact on the economic growth and development in Nigeria. Exchange rate has positive relationship but not significant to economic growth in Nigeria. Holistically all the independent variables have positive and significant effect on the growth of Nigeria economy development. Finally, the paper conclude that ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme have positive and significant effect on the Nigeria economic development.

Recommendations

- i. Nigerian government needs to pay attention to the issue of trade liberalization to stand a chance of benefiting from the potentials of the larger West Africa Market for sales of its finished products as the market for raw materials is already saturated within the ECOWAS sub-region. Exchange rate liberalization is also critical in facilitating trade in any economy; policy makers should ensure that exchange rate is determined by the forces of demand and supply.
- ii. Nigerian government should include the building of trade-related institutional and technical capacity at national and regional levels and involve the participation of all major stakeholders which include Member States, ECOWAS Commission, Private Sector, and Development Partners. These strategies will refine the ETLs and address the various implementation constraints that limit the impact of the scheme on the Nigerian Economy.

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