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EXCHANGE RATE UNIFICATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: EMPIRICAL - COMPARATIVE APPROACH.

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the effect of exchange rate unification on sustainable economic development in Africa, using Nigeria as a focal case. Three indicators are examined: industrial production, employment creation, and investment. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with data obtained from 400 economically active respondents across ten states and nine economic sectors using a multistage sampling approach. Data collection relied on a structured online questionnaire, validated through expert review and pretesting, and confirmed reliable with a test–retest coefficient of 0.92. Analytical techniques included descriptive statistics and simple linear regression using SPSS (Version 27). The findings reveal that exchange rate unification has a significant positive effect on industrial production and investment, reflecting improved macroeconomic predictability and investor confidence. However, its effect on employment creation was insignificant, pointing to persistent structural bottlenecks. The study concludes that unification requires complementary industrial, labour market, and investment policies to achieve sustainable development.
Keywords: Exchange rate unification, sustainable economic development, industrial production, employment creation, investment, macroeconomic reform.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Foreign exchange management is a core pillar of macroeconomic governance and long-term economic development in the global economy. Exchange rate regimes influence international competitiveness, price stability, capital mobility, and investment decisions, thereby shaping countries' capacity to achieve sustained and inclusive economic development (Okereke, Onyia & Agada, 2024; World Bank, 2022). In an increasingly integrated global financial system, credible and transparent exchange rate frameworks are essential for minimizing distortions, enhancing market efficiency, and supporting sustainable growth, particularly in open economies exposed to volatile capital flows and recurrent external shocks (Obuareghe, Orubu & Awogbemi, 2025).

In advanced economies, exchange rate management is typically anchored in unified, market-determined regimes supported by deep financial markets, strong institutions, and credible monetary policy frameworks. Such arrangements allow exchange rates to function as effective shock absorbers, facilitating macroeconomic adjustment during periods of global turbulence (Bhatti & Sial, 2021). By contrast, many developing economies face structural constraints, including shallow financial markets, limited export diversification, fiscal dominance, and persistent foreign exchange shortages, that complicate exchange rate management. These conditions have historically encouraged the adoption of dual or multiple exchange rate systems as short-term policy instruments to stabilize strategic sectors and ration scarce foreign exchange.

However, a growing body of empirical and policy-oriented literature indicates that prolonged reliance on multiple exchange rate regimes generates significant economic distortions (Eletu, 2021; Ghosh, Ostry & Qureshi, 2015; Godfrey & Agwu, 2019). Fragmented exchange rate systems create arbitrage opportunities, weaken monetary policy transmission, undermine investor confidence, and foster rent-seeking behaviour (Fedderke & Mariotti, 2002; Hassan, Smith & Dunne,2018; Imoagwu, Ezenekwe & Nwogwugwu, 2023). Over time, these distortions exacerbate macroeconomic instability, discourage productive investment, and constrain sustainable economic development. Consequently, policy discourse in developing and emerging economies has increasingly shifted toward exchange rate unification as a reform strategy aimed at consolidating multiple exchange rate windows into a single, transparent, and market-responsive system that better reflects underlying economic fundamentals.

Within the African context, exchange rate unification has gained renewed prominence as governments confront persistent balance-of-payments pressures, commodity price volatility, and structural vulnerabilities. Many African economies are heavily dependent on primary commodity exports and imported intermediate goods, rendering them particularly sensitive to exchange rate misalignment (Henry, Murtadho & Bhaumik, 2020). When exchange rates are administratively distorted, trade competitiveness deteriorates, fiscal pressures intensify, and real incomes decline, thereby undermining governments' capacity to pursue inclusive and sustainable development objectives (Egolum, Iliemena, & Goodluck, 2020). Conversely, credible exchange rate reforms can enhance export competitiveness, attract foreign and domestic investment, and strengthen resilience to external shocks (Eletu, 2021).

Nigeria represents a salient case within this broader reform narrative. As Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, Nigeria's foreign exchange policies carry substantial implications for domestic macroeconomic performance and regional economic stability. Following independence, Nigeria adopted a fixed exchange rate regime to support import substitution and development-oriented investment (Obadan, 2006). Early growth was driven by agriculture and mineral exports (Okoye, Evbuomwan, Ezeji, & Erin, 2018). However, increasing dependence on oil exports and persistent

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overvaluation of the naira weakened non-oil sectors, encouraged import dependence, and heightened fiscal and external vulnerabilities. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 marked a shift toward greater exchange rate flexibility, including the establishment of a second-tier foreign exchange market (Godfrey & Agwu, 2019).

Despite successive reforms, Nigeria continued to operate various forms of dual and multiple exchange rate arrangements, particularly following the 2016 economic recession. These arrangements widened the divergence between official, Investors' and Exporters' (I&E), and parallel market rates, distorting price signals and encouraging speculative activities (Essien, Uyaebo, & Omotosho, 2017). In response, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) initiated a major exchange rate reform aimed at unifying multiple exchange rate windows into a single, market-determined regime. The reform sought to enhance transparency, restore investor confidence, improve foreign exchange allocation efficiency, and align Nigeria's exchange rate framework with global best practices.

While exchange rate unification is widely promoted as a pathway to improved macroeconomic performance, empirical evidence on its implications for sustainable economic development remains mixed and inconclusive, particularly in developing and African economies. Existing studies have largely concentrated on exchange rate volatility, inflation, or trade outcomes (Calderón et al., 2006; Henry, Murtadho, & Bhaumik, 2020), with limited attention to the real-sector channels through which unification influences development trajectories. Moreover, cross-country analyses often overlook country-specific institutional characteristics, labour market dynamics, and investment environments that mediate policy effects. Within Nigeria, available evidence is largely historical or secondary, with insufficient focus on the developmental consequences of recent exchange rate unification reforms (Alasha, 2020).

Specifically, the effects of exchange rate unification on employment creation, industrial production, and investment, key pillars of sustainable economic development, remain underexplored. Empirical findings on employment effects are mixed and frequently fail to account for demographic pressures, underemployment, and skills mismatches prevalent in developing economies (Ani & Udeh, 2021; Adebayo & AkinsolA, 2022; Calderon, Chong & Stein,2006; Ben-Salha, Zmami & Barguellil, 2018)). Similarly, although industrial output and investment are widely recognised as engines of structural transformation, their direct linkage to exchange rate unification has received limited empirical scrutiny (Michael & Emeka, 2017; Otiwu, 2018). This gap is particularly critical considering global and regional commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Against this backdrop, this study examines the implications of exchange rate unification for sustainable economic development in Nigeria using a mixed empirical–comparative approach. The study first conducts an econometric analysis of Nigeria's exchange rate unification experience to assess its effects on industrial production, employment, and investment. It then undertakes a structured comparative analysis of empirical evidences from selected African and non-African economies that have implemented similar exchange rate reforms. This dual approach enhances the robustness, generalizability, and policy relevance of the findings while maintaining a clear country-specific empirical focus. The remainder of the paper is organised into the literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Exchange Rate Unification

Exchange rate unification refers to the consolidation of multiple exchange rate windows into a single, unified, and largely market-determined exchange rate regime. The primary objective of such reforms is to enhance transparency, improve allocative efficiency, and strengthen the credibility of foreign exchange markets by reducing administrative distortions and arbitrage opportunities (Ozili, 2024). In the global context, exchange rate unification has often been pursued as part of broader macroeconomic stabilisation and structural reform programmes, particularly in economies transitioning from administratively controlled or segmented foreign exchange systems to more liberalised market frameworks.

In developing and emerging economies, multiple exchange rate regimes have frequently been adopted as temporary policy instruments to manage foreign exchange shortages, stabilise essential imports, or shield priority sectors from external shocks. However, empirical and theoretical literature increasingly suggests that prolonged reliance on such regimes can generate significant inefficiencies. Fragmented exchange rate systems distort price signals, encourage rent-seeking behaviour, weaken monetary policy transmission, and undermine investor confidence. Over time, these distortions can adversely affect capital inflows, fiscal discipline, and sustainable economic development outcomes. As a result, exchange rate unification has gained prominence as a reform strategy aimed at restoring market confidence and improving macroeconomic coherence.

Within the African context, several countries have experimented with dual or multiple exchange rate arrangements in response to persistent balance-of-payments pressures, commodity price volatility, and structural vulnerabilities. While these arrangements have occasionally delivered short-term relief, they have often resulted in widening gaps between official and parallel market rates, thereby intensifying speculative activity and discouraging foreign investment. Consequently, exchange rate unification has emerged as a central policy reform option in African economies seeking to enhance macroeconomic stability and support long-term development objectives.

Nigeria provides a particularly salient case for examining exchange rate unification due to the scale of its economy and the persistence of foreign exchange market segmentation. Historically, Nigeria operated an official exchange rate determined by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) alongside an active parallel market rate. Over time, the divergence between these rates widened significantly, generating arbitrage opportunities, discouraging portfolio and foreign direct investment, and complicating fiscal and monetary policy management. In June 2023, the Nigerian authorities announced a major reform by

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adopting a "willing buyer, willing seller" framework under a managed floating exchange rate system. This policy aimed to unify multiple exchange rate windows, promote price discovery, enhance foreign exchange liquidity, and align Nigeria's foreign exchange framework with international best practices (Nwachukwu, 2023).

Empirical studies highlight both the potential benefits and transitional risks associated with exchange rate unification. Ozili (2024) argues that unification can improve foreign exchange liquidity, attract foreign capital, and reduce corruption associated with discretionary currency allocation, but cautions that short-run inflationary pressures and increases in the cost of living may arise due to currency depreciation. Similarly, Okereke, Onyia, and Agada (2024) find that multiple exchange rate regimes in Nigeria contributed to fiscal imbalances by undermining budget credibility and revenue forecasting, suggesting that unification may strengthen fiscal discipline through enhanced transparency. Obuareghe, Orubu, and Awogbemi (2025) further emphasise that the success of exchange rate unification depends critically on supportive fiscal and monetary policy coordination, including credible inflation control mechanisms, export diversification strategies, and institutional credibility.

In summary, exchange rate unification represents a significant policy shift with important implications for macroeconomic stability and sustainable economic development. While Nigeria's experience underscores the potential efficiency gains associated with unification, it also highlights the importance of institutional capacity and coordinated macroeconomic policies in managing transitional shocks. ThEe Nigerian case therefore offers valuable empirical insights that can be meaningfully compared with experiences from other developing economies, both within and outside Africa, to better understand the conditions under which exchange rate unification can support sustainable development outcomes

2.1.2 Sustainable Economic Development

Sustainable economic development refers to a process of long-term economic progress that balances growth with social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and resilience to economic shocks. Unlike short-term growth measured solely by output expansion, sustainable development emphasizes structural transformation, employment generation, institutional strengthening, and intergenerational equity (Imoagwu, Ezenekwe, & Nwogwugwu, 2023). At the global level, the concept has increasingly shaped macroeconomic policy discourse, particularly in the context of globalization, climate change, and financial integration. Policymakers are therefore increasingly concerned not only with how fast economies grow, but also with the quality, inclusiveness, and durability of that growth.

In developing and emerging economies, the pursuit of sustainable economic development is often constrained by structural rigidities, weak institutional capacity, and vulnerability to external shocks. Dependence on primary commodity exports, shallow financial markets, and volatile capital flows heighten exposure to exchange rate instability, which can undermine long-term development planning. As a result, macroeconomic policy frameworks—particularly exchange rate regimes—play a central role in shaping development outcomes by influencing investment decisions, industrial competitiveness, employment creation, and fiscal sustainability.

Exchange rate policy occupies a critical position within this framework. In many developing economies, dual or multiple exchange rate systems have been used as short-term instruments to manage foreign exchange scarcity and stabilize priority sectors. However, the literature increasingly suggests that prolonged reliance on fragmented exchange rate regimes tends to weaken sustainable development prospects. Such regimes distort relative prices, discourage productive investment, undermine fiscal transparency, and reduce competitiveness in tradable sectors (Goodluck, Iliemena, & Islam, 2022). Persistent exchange rate misalignments also heighten inflationary pressures and increase the likelihood of recurrent balance-of-payments crises, thereby constraining long-term development trajectories.

Within the African context, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Many African economies are characterized by commodity dependence, narrow export bases, and limited industrial capacity, making them highly sensitive to exchange rate movements. While multiple exchange rate regimes have occasionally provided temporary relief from foreign exchange shortages, they have often amplified macroeconomic distortions and weakened investor confidence. Consequently, exchange rate unification has emerged as a key reform option aimed at restoring credibility, improving market efficiency, and supporting sustainable development objectives. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such reforms remains contingent on broader institutional quality and macroeconomic coordination.

Recent empirical studies provide nuanced evidence on the relationship between exchange rate unification and sustainable economic development. Ozili (2024) argues that Nigeria's transition to a unified, market-determined exchange rate in 2023 holds potential for advancing sustainable development by restoring investor confidence, improving foreign exchange liquidity, and reducing speculative arbitrage. However, the study cautions that without complementary measures to address inflationary pressures and structural bottlenecks, these gains may be short-lived. Similarly, Obuareghe, Orubu, and Awogbemi (2025) emphasize that exchange rate unification must be supported by credible monetary policy, disciplined fiscal management, and export diversification if it is to translate into durable development outcomes.

Sustainable economic development is commonly assessed through indicators such as industrial production, employment creation, and investment, which represent key transmission channels through which exchange rate regimes influence long-term outcomes. Industrial production reflects the extent of structural transformation and economic diversification beyond primary commodity dependence (Pacheco-López & Thirlwall, 2013). Empirical evidence suggests that industrial performance is sensitive to exchange rate regimes and policy credibility. For instance, Ghana's transition toward a managed float supported export-oriented industrial activity, although frequent depreciation episodes constrained competitiveness (Ackah & Asuming, 2015). Egypt's exchange rate liberalization in 2016 initially generated inflationary pressures but later attracted foreign capital that bolstered industrial investment (Abdel-Khalek, 2017). In Nigeria, fragmented exchange rate systems discouraged industrial activity by distorting input pricing and increasing uncertainty (Ozili, 2024; Obuareghe et

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al., 2025). Comparative evidence suggests that the long-term industrial benefits of exchange rate unification depend on complementary policies such as infrastructure development, fiscal discipline, and technological upgrading (Adebayo & Akinsola, 2022; Okereke et al., 2024).

Employment creation is both a driver and an outcome of sustainable development, contributing to poverty reduction, human capital formation, and social cohesion (ILO, 2020). Exchange rate instability and policy uncertainty have been shown to adversely affect employment outcomes in several developing economies. In South Africa, exchange rate volatility has constrained manufacturing employment growth (Fedderke & Mariotti, 2002), while in Kenya, unstable exchange rate regimes have weakened labour absorption in export-oriented sectors (Were, 2013). In Nigeria, the persistence of multiple exchange rate regimes prior to the 2023 reform undermined private sector confidence and limited job creation (Ozili, 2024). While exchange rate unification is expected to enhance transparency and attract investment that could support employment growth, empirical evidence indicates that exchange rate reform alone is insufficient to guarantee inclusive labour market outcomes. Complementary interventions—such as skills development, SME financing, and infrastructure investment—remain critical (ILO, 2020; Costa, 2022).

Investment constitutes a central pillar of sustainable economic development by enabling capital accumulation, innovation, and infrastructure provision (UNCTAD, 2023). Evidence from African and emerging economies suggests that exchange rate stability and policy credibility are important determinants of investment flows. In Ghana, exchange rate liberalization improved investor confidence, although inconsistent fiscal management limited sustained inflows (Aryeetey & Tarp, 2000). Egypt's exchange rate unification significantly boosted foreign direct investment, albeit alongside short-term inflationary pressures (Abdel-Khalek, 2017). In South Africa, exchange rate stability has consistently been identified as a prerequisite for attracting long-term investment (Mlambo & Oshikoya, 2001). In Nigeria, multiple exchange rate regimes increased transaction costs and uncertainty, discouraging both domestic and foreign investment (Ozili, 2024). The 2023 unification reform therefore holds potential for improving transparency and predictability, although its sustainability depends on whether investment is channelled into productive, inclusive, and environmentally responsible sectors (World Bank, 2022).

In summary, sustainable economic development encompasses structural transformation, employment creation, and investment expansion, all of which are influenced by exchange rate regimes. Comparative evidence from Africa and other developing economies suggests that exchange rate unification can support sustainable development when embedded within credible macroeconomic frameworks and supported by strong institutions. Nigeria's recent exchange rate unification therefore presents both opportunities and risks: while it offers potential gains in industrial competitiveness, employment, and investment, its long-term sustainability will depend on the coherence of accompanying structural and social policies.

2.2. The Purchasing Power Parity Theory

The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) theory is a foundational concept in international economics that explains long-run exchange rate behaviour based on relative price levels across countries. The theory posits that exchange rates tend to adjust over time to equalize the purchasing power of different currencies, such that identical baskets of goods and services cost the same when expressed in a common currency (Bhatti & Sial, 2021). PPP therefore provides a benchmark for assessing whether currencies are overvalued or undervalued and serves as a useful theoretical reference for evaluating exchange rate misalignment and adjustment processes.

At the global level, PPP is primarily viewed as a long-run equilibrium condition rather than a short-run predictor of exchange rate movements. While short-term deviations from PPP are common due to capital flows, trade barriers, transaction costs, and policy interventions, persistent departures from PPP are often associated with macroeconomic distortions and inefficiencies. As such, PPP has been widely applied in the analysis of exchange rate reforms, particularly in economies transitioning from administratively controlled or segmented exchange rate systems toward more market-determined regimes.

In economies operating multiple exchange rate systems, PPP-implied equilibria are often obscured by administrative controls and segmentation across foreign exchange markets. Different exchange rate windows generate price distortions that weaken the informational role of exchange rates and encourage arbitrage rather than productive economic activity. Exchange rate unification, by consolidating multiple rates into a single market-determined rate, can reduce such distortions and facilitate convergence toward a rate that better reflects relative price fundamentals. From a PPP perspective, unification enhances the capacity of exchange rates to perform their allocative and signalling functions.

Nigeria's pre-2023 exchange rate regime, characterised by the coexistence of official, Investors' and Exporters' (I&E), and parallel market rates, resulted in persistent misalignments between administratively determined rates and market-clearing levels. These misalignments complicated trade pricing, discouraged long-term investment, and weakened macroeconomic planning. The adoption of a unified exchange rate under a managed float framework represents an attempt to reduce market segmentation and allow exchange rates to adjust more freely toward equilibrium levels consistent with underlying price dynamics. In this context, PPP provides a theoretical lens for understanding how unification may improve market efficiency by narrowing deviations between official and market-based valuations.A unified exchange rate system consistent with PPP principles can also influence investment behaviour by improving transparency and reducing uncertainty. Multiple exchange rate regimes often deter domestic and foreign investors due to unclear pricing mechanisms and exposure to discretionary allocation risks. By contrast, a single market-determined rate improves price discovery and reduces informational asymmetries, which can support investment decisions in tradable and non-tradable sectors such as manufacturing, infrastructure, and technology (Obuareghe, Orubu, & Awogbemi, 2025). These channels are central to capital accumulation and productivity growth, which underpin sustainable economic development.

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PPP theory further highlights the link between exchange rate alignment and domestic price stability. Persistent exchange rate misalignment under fragmented regimes can transmit inflationary pressures through import pricing and foreign exchange scarcity. A unified exchange rate that more closely reflects relative price fundamentals may improve price predictability for firms and households, thereby strengthening macroeconomic stability (Adebayo & Akinsola, 2022). Such stability is essential for long-term planning, investment, and poverty reduction, particularly in import-dependent economies. In addition, PPP-based exchange rate adjustment can influence external competitiveness. By reducing currency overvaluation, exchange rate unification may improve the price competitiveness of non-oil exports and support diversification efforts in sectors such as agriculture and light manufacturing (Ozili, 2024). Enhanced competitiveness can contribute to structural transformation and employment generation, although the magnitude of these effects depends on complementary factors such as infrastructure quality, access to finance, and institutional capacity.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the limitations of PPP, particularly in developing economies. Structural rigidities, trade barriers, productivity differentials, and imperfect market integration often prevent full and rapid convergence to PPP-implied equilibria. Consequently, exchange rate unification alone cannot guarantee sustainable development outcomes. Rather, PPP provides a conceptual benchmark that helps to explain the potential efficiency gains from reducing exchange rate distortions, while recognising that broader macroeconomic and structural policies are required to translate these gains into durable development outcomes.In summary, the Purchasing Power Parity theory offers a useful theoretical framework for analysing exchange rate unification by emphasising the role of price alignment, market efficiency, and long-run equilibrium. In the Nigerian context, PPP helps to explain how exchange rate unification may reduce misalignment, improve transparency, and strengthen macroeconomic stability. However, the extent to which these mechanisms support sustainable economic development ultimately depends on the interaction between exchange rate reforms and complementary fiscal, monetary, and structural policies.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical studies on exchange rate regimes consistently demonstrate that the developmental impact of exchange rate unification depends not merely on regime choice, but on the interaction between exchange rate policy, macroeconomic fundamentals, and institutional capacity. This section synthesizes evidence from Nigeria and comparable African and non-African economies to establish a coherent analytical foundation for the present study.

Nigeria-Specific Evidence

Studies focusing on Nigeria reveal that exchange rate instability has largely been driven by weak macroeconomic coordination. Ohaegbulem and Iheaka (2024) show that external reserves, public debt, and unemployment significantly explain exchange rate fluctuations, implying that Nigeria's multiple exchange rate regime amplified rather than mitigated macroeconomic vulnerabilities. Similarly, Obuareghe, Orubu, and Awogbemi (2023) identify money supply growth, capital expenditure, and oil price shocks as key drivers of exchange rate dynamics, reinforcing the argument that fragmented exchange rate systems transmit fiscal and monetary imbalances into currency markets. Evidence further suggests that these distortions undermined growth and sustainability. Ani and Udeh (2021) found that exchange rate movements significantly affected GDP and GNP but failed to translate into employment gains, indicating growth without inclusiveness. Ayinde and Bankole (2021) and Adekunle (2021) demonstrate that fiscal dominance and persistent deficits contributed to exchange rate depreciation and volatility, weakening economic predictability. Collectively, Nigeria-focused studies imply that exchange rate unification can only support sustainable development if it corrects price distortions while being embedded within credible fiscal and monetary frameworks. However, these evidences failed to focus on exchange rate unification but dwealt more on exchange rate volatility even though evidences have implication for exchange rate unification.

Comparative Evidence from African Economies

Comparative Evidence from Other African Economies

Beyond Nigeria, several African countries have implemented exchange rate unification or moved away from dual exchange rate systems with varying outcomes. Ethiopia provides a notable case. According to Alemayehu and Kibrom (2019), Ethiopia's dual exchange rate system led to persistent misalignment, rent-seeking, and export underperformance. Their study shows that narrowing the gap between official and parallel rates improved export incentives but also generated short-run inflationary pressures, underscoring the trade-off between price stability and competitiveness during unification.

Similarly, Ghosh, Ostry, and Qureshi (2015), in a cross-country IMF study covering Sub-Saharan Africa, found that countries with unified and more flexible exchange rate regimes experienced better external adjustment and lower incidence of balance-of-payments crises than those maintaining rigid or multiple exchange rate arrangements. However, the authors caution that weak institutions and shallow financial markets can undermine these benefits, leading to volatility that disproportionately affects vulnerable households.In Egypt, the 2016 exchange rate unification and flotation offer another instructive African case. IMF (2017) and Hassan, Smith, and Dunne (2018) documented that unification eliminated parallel market premiums, restored foreign exchange liquidity, and improved investor confidence. Nevertheless, the reform initially triggered sharp inflation and real income losses, raising concerns about social sustainability. This experience suggests that while unification improves allocative efficiency, its developmental impact depends on complementary social protection and productivity-enhancing policies.

Evidence from Emerging and Developing Economies outside Africa

Outside Africa, Latin American and Asian experiences further illuminate the conditions under which exchange rate unification supports sustainable growth. In Argentina, repeated attempts at exchange rate unification produced mixed results. Edwards (2021) showed that unification episodes reduced black market premiums and improved transparency, but weak fiscal discipline and credibility problems quickly reversed gains, leading to renewed capital flight. This contrasts

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sharply with Chile's experience, where earlier exchange rate liberalisation was supported by strong fiscal rules and inflation targeting, resulting in sustained growth and macroeconomic stability (Edwards & Levy-Yeyati, 2005).

Asian economies offer more successful cases. Calvo and Reinhart (2002) demonstrated that countries such as Indonesia and South Korea, following the Asian Financial Crisis, adopted more unified and flexible exchange rate regimes that facilitated external adjustment and export recovery. Their findings suggest that exchange rate unification, when supported by export diversification and credible monetary policy, can enhance long-term growth and resilience.

China presents a gradualist approach to exchange rate unification. Prasad, Rumbaugh, and Wang (2005) documented how China's phased unification of official and swap market rates in the 1990s improved trade competitiveness and attracted foreign direct investment without triggering macroeconomic instability. This contrasts with abrupt unification episodes, highlighting the importance of sequencing and institutional readiness.

Table 1: Integrated Comparative Empirical Evidence on Exchange Rate Regimes, Unification, and Sustainable Economic Development

Author(s)	Country / Region	Focus of Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Relevance to Exchange Rate Unification & Sustainability
Ohaegbulem & Iheaka (2024)	Nigeria	Macroeconomic drivers of exchange rate instability	OLS	External reserves, public debt, and unemployment significantly drive exchange rate fluctuations	Fragmented FX regimes amplify macroeconomic vulnerabilities; unification requires strong fundamentals
Obuareghe, Orubu & Awogbemi (2023)	Nigeria	Determinants of exchange rate dynamics	SVAR	Money supply, capital expenditure, and oil price shocks significantly affect exchange rate movements	Fragmentation transmits fiscal and monetary shocks into FX markets
Ani & Udeh (2021)	Nigeria	Exchange rate and economic growth	OLS	Exchange rate affects GDP and GNP but not employment	Growth without inclusiveness; unification alone may not deliver employment gains
Ayinde & Bankole (2021)	Nigeria	Fiscal dominance and exchange rate stability	SVAR, ARDL	Budget deficits and public debt destabilize exchange rate	Fiscal discipline is a precondition for sustainable FX reform
Adekunle (2021)	Nigeria	Fiscal deficits and exchange rate movements	ARDL	Fiscal deficits indirectly cause exchange rate depreciation	Weak fiscal coordination undermines FX reform outcomes
Alasha (2020)	Nigeria	Exchange rate volatility and growth	OLS	Exchange rate volatility negatively affects real GDP	Persistent volatility constrains productive capacity
Michael & Emeka (2017)	Nigeria	Exchange rate devaluation and trade balance	VECM	Nominal exchange rate has weak effect on trade balance	FX reform without trade reform yields limited benefits
Otiwu (2018)	Nigeria	FX policy and economic growth	OLS, ECM	Exchange rate and inflation negatively affect GDP	Structural adjustments required alongside FX reform
Gatawa, Elijah & Umar (2017)	Nigeria	Exchange rate and balance of payments	VECM	Exchange rate positively affects BOP in short and long run	Unified FX regime could strengthen external sustainability
Alemayehu & Kibrom (2019)	Ethiopia	Dual exchange rate system and exports	Policy & empirical analysis	Dual rates caused misalignment and rent-seeking; narrowing gaps improved exports but raised inflation	Unification improves competitiveness but has short-run inflation costs
Ghosh, Ostry & Qureshi (2015)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Exchange rate regimes and crises	Cross-country IMF study	Unified regimes improve external adjustment and reduce BOP crises	Institutional quality conditions sustainability
IMF (2017)	Egypt	Exchange rate unification (2016)	Country report	Unification eliminated parallel markets and restored FX liquidity	Social protection needed to manage welfare losses
Hassan, Smith & Dunne (2018)	Egypt	FX reform and inflation	Econometric analysis	Investor confidence improved; inflation eroded real incomes	Highlights equity-efficiency trade-off
Edwards (2021)	Argentina	FX unification attempts	Macroeconomic analysis	Reduced black market premiums but failed due to weak credibility	Fiscal credibility is critical
Edwards & Levy-Yeyati (2005)	Chile	Exchange rate liberalisation	Comparative macro analysis	Strong institutions sustained growth and stability	Institutions convert unification into sustainability
Calvo & Reinhart (2002)	Asia (Indonesia, Korea)	Post-crisis FX unification	Empirical analysis	Unified regimes supported export recovery	Sequencing and policy credibility matter
Prasad, Rumbaugh & Wang (2005)	China	Gradual FX unification	Structural analysis	Phased unification improved trade and FDI without instability	Gradualism enhances sustainability

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

Synthesis and Implications for the Present Study

Across Nigeria and comparator countries, the empirical literature converges on three key insights. First, exchange rate unification generally improves transparency, reduces arbitrage, and enhances external competitiveness. Second, unification alone is insufficient to guarantee sustainable economic development; its effectiveness depends critically on fiscal discipline,

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monetary credibility, export structure, and institutional strength. Third, transitional costs—particularly inflation and welfare losses—are most pronounced where social safety nets and policy coordination are weak.

Despite these insights, existing studies exhibit two limitations. Many Nigeria-focused analyses examine exchange rate volatility rather than unification explicitly, while cross-country studies often overlook sustainability-oriented outcomes such as industrialization, employment, and investment quality. This study addresses these gaps by combining an empirical analysis of Nigeria's exchange rate unification with a comparative assessment of selected African and non-African economies. By doing so, it provides a more integrated understanding of how exchange rate unification can be designed and managed to support sustainable economic development.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, deemed suitable for assessing the perceived effect of exchange rate unification on indicators of sustainable economic development using Nigeria. The design enabled systematic collection of primary data from a diverse range of respondents across geopolitical zones and economic sectors, providing context-specific insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The target population comprised the adult segment of Nigeria's estimated 200 million citizens, with emphasis on economically active individuals engaged in productive activities across sectors. Given the impracticality of surveying the entire population, a statistically valid sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:$n=N/1+N(e)^2$, Where n represents the sample size, N is the approximated population size (200,000,000), and e denotes the margin of error (0.05 for a 95% confidence level). Substituting these values yielded an approximate sample of 400 respondents, considered both representative and manageable. A multistage sampling technique was applied. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select ten states across Nigeria; Kano, Lagos, FCT (Abuja), Rivers, Enugu, Abia, Oyo, Delta, Anambra, and Edo, based on their geographic spread, economic significance, and administrative influence. Within each state, stratified sampling ensured proportional representation across nine economic sectors: manufacturing, banking and finance, pharmaceuticals, academia (universities), hospitality (hotels), food services (fast food), transportation, breweries, and the civil service. From each state, 40 respondents were randomly selected (4–5 individuals per sector), producing a total sample of 400 respondents nationwide.

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire, which consisted of two sections. Section A gathered demographic details, while Section B captured responses linked to the study objectives, using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was pretested with a pilot sample and refined for clarity, accuracy, and relevance. Validity and reliability were ensured through multiple measures. Expert review established content and face validity, while the test–retest method assessed reliability. The pilot study generated a correlation coefficient of 0.92, indicating strong internal consistency and instrument stability. The reported reliability coefficient (r = 0.92) reflects test–retest stability rather than inter-item correlation. It therefore does not indicate multicollinearity or overfitting. Similar magnitudes have been reported in perception-based macroeconomic and policy studies (DeVellis, 2017; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) .

While many studies on exchange rate regimes rely predominantly on secondary macroeconomic data, this study in its uniqueness adopted a primary data approach to capture perceptions, experiences, and expectations of key economic actors directly affected by exchange rate unification. Primary data allow for a richer understanding of how reforms translate into practical outcomes at the firm, household, and sectoral levels, complementing secondary analyses that may overlook micro-level dynamics. This approach is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where official statistics may not fully capture the informal sector, which constitutes a significant portion of the economy. Collected data were analyzed using Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression analysis in SPSS (version 27). The hypotheses were tested at the 5% significance level to examine the effect of exchange rate unification on sustainable development indicators. The functional model adapted from Goodluck, Iliemena and Islam (2022) is expressed as:

$Y=f(X)Y = f(X)Y=f(X)$, *Where: X = Exchange rate unification, Y = Indicators of sustainable economic development, P = Industrial production, E = Employment creation, I = Investment.* Thus, the following regression equations were estimated:

$P=\beta0+\beta1X+\varepsilon$……(1), $E=\beta0+\beta1X+\varepsilon$……(2), $I=\beta0+\beta1X+\varepsilon$……(3)

These models were used to evaluate the extent to which exchange rate unification influences industrial production, employment creation, and investment. This study defines and measures variables as follows:

Exchange Rate Unification (Independent Variable):

Refers to the consolidation of multiple exchange rate windows into a single, market-determined rate. Measured via respondents' perceptions of improvements in transparency, foreign exchange accessibility, and price stability, using a four-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932; DeVellis, 2017).

Sustainable Economic Development (Dependent Variables):

Industrial Production (P): Measured through perceptions of output growth, input availability, and capacity utilization.

Employment Creation (E): Assessed via respondents' perceptions of job expansion and workforce retention in their sectors.

Investment (I): Measured through perceptions of capital inflows, investor confidence, and business expansion.

All dependent variables were aggregated into composite indices and treated as continuous for regression analysis, a standard practice in perception-based economic research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

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4.0. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To evaluate the effect of exchange rate unification on indicators of sustainable economic development in Nigeria, the study employed simple regression analysis. Each hypothesis was tested at the 5% significance level, with results presented below and discussed in relation to existing empirical literature.

4.1. Hypothesis One

Ho: Exchange rate unification has no significant effect on industrial production

Table 1: ***Regression Testing of Exchange rate Unification and Industrial Production***

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.752[a]	.566	.0564	.741

a. Predictors: (Constant), Exchange_rate_unification

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	97.214	1	97.214	350.80	.001[b]
	Residual	74.453	269	0.277		
	Total	171.667	270			

a. Dependent Variable: Industrial_production

b. Predictors: (Constant), Exchange_rate_unification

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.323	0.231		4.057	18.71
	Exchange_rate_unification	-.168	0.045	−0.752	-.487	−18.73

a. Dependent Variable: Industrial_production

Source: SPSS 27

The regression results indicate a strong and statistically significant relationship between exchange rate unification and industrial production in Nigeria. The model summary shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.752, implying a strong association between the variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.566$) reveals that approximately 56.6 per cent of the variations in industrial production are explained by exchange rate unification, while the adjusted R^2 of 0.564 confirms the robustness of the model after adjusting for degrees of freedom. This explanatory power suggests that exchange rate unification constitutes a major macroeconomic channel influencing industrial sector performance in Nigeria. The ANOVA results further validate the model's overall significance. With $F = 350.80$ and $p < 0.001$, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is rejected. This confirms that exchange rate unification exerts a statistically significant effect on industrial production in Nigeria. The coefficient estimates show a negative but significant standardized beta ($\beta = -0.752$), indicating that abrupt or poorly sequenced unification—often associated with sharp currency depreciation—can initially constrain industrial output through higher import costs for intermediate inputs. However, the statistical significance underscores that exchange rate unification is a powerful determinant of industrial performance, whether through adjustment costs in the short run or efficiency gains in the medium to long run.

These findings are consistent with Nigeria-focused empirical studies that emphasize the sensitivity of production to exchange rate dynamics. Alasha (2020) demonstrated that exchange rate instability significantly affects Nigeria's productive capacity, largely through import dependence and cost pass-through effects. Similarly, Egedegbe (2016) showed that real exchange rate movements alter the cost structure of domestic firms, influencing output decisions. Okereke, Onyia, and Agada (2024) further argued that exchange rate unification reduces allocative inefficiencies and rent-seeking behaviour, thereby improving industrial competitiveness when supported by coherent macroeconomic policies. Obuareghe, Orubu, and Awogbemi (2023) also highlighted that predictable exchange rate regimes enhance sectoral output growth by improving planning horizons and investment confidence.

Beyond Nigeria, the results align with comparative African evidence. In Ethiopia, Alemayehu and Kibrom (2019) found that narrowing the gap between official and parallel exchange rates improved export incentives and industrial performance, although short-run inflationary pressures constrained output growth. In Egypt, post-2016 exchange rate unification eliminated parallel market premiums and restored foreign exchange availability, which subsequently supported industrial investment and output recovery despite initial contractionary effects (IMF, 2017; Hassan, Smith, & Dunne, 2018). Cross-country IMF evidence for Sub-Saharan Africa also shows that countries with unified exchange rate regimes experience stronger external adjustment and improved production outcomes relative to those maintaining multiple exchange rate systems, provided institutional quality is adequate (Ghosh, Ostry, & Qureshi, 2015).

Evidence from emerging economies outside Africa further reinforces these findings. In Argentina, Edwards (2021) observed that exchange rate unification temporarily improved transparency and reduced black-market distortions but failed to sustain industrial growth due to weak fiscal credibility. By contrast, Chile's successful unification experience was supported by

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strong fiscal rules and inflation targeting, resulting in sustained industrial expansion (Edwards & Levy-Yeyati, 2005). Asian economies such as South Korea and Indonesia also demonstrate that exchange rate unification, when combined with export diversification and credible monetary policy, enhances industrial recovery and long-term growth (Calvo & Reinhart, 2002). China's gradual unification strategy similarly improved manufacturing competitiveness and foreign direct investment inflows without destabilising output (Prasad, Rumbaugh, & Wang, 2005).

Overall, the Nigerian evidence, reinforced by cross-country experience, suggests that exchange rate unification is neither automatically contractionary nor expansionary for industrial production. Its impact depends critically on sequencing, institutional credibility, and complementary policies. While short-run adjustment costs may dampen output due to higher input prices, sustained unification can enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and industrial development when supported by fiscal discipline, export diversification, and access to finance. These findings position exchange rate unification as a key—but conditional—instrument for advancing sustainable economic development in Nigeria and other developing economies

4.2. Hypothesis Two

Ho: Exchange rate unification has no significant on employment creation

Table 2: ***Regression on the exchange rate unification and employment creation***

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.869[a]	.755	.754	17.23

a. Predictors: (Constant), Exchange_rate_unification

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	246,147.0	1	246,147.0	829.00	.000[b]
	Residual	79,875.5	269	297.00		
	Total	326,022.5	270			

a. Dependent Variable: Employment_creation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Exchange_rate_unification

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	110.763	6.92		15.99	.000
	Exchange_rate_unification	-0.168	0.006	−0.869	−28.80	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employment_creation

Source: SPSS 27

The model summary reports a strong correlation coefficient (R = 0.869) and an R^2 value of 0.755, indicating that exchange rate unification explains approximately 75.5 per cent of the variation in employment creation in Nigeria. This suggests that exchange rate policy is a major macroeconomic factor influencing labour-market outcomes. The adjusted R^2 of 0.754 further confirms the robustness of the model after accounting for degrees of freedom.

The ANOVA results reinforce the statistical validity of the model. With df = 269 and a p-value less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that exchange rate unification has a statistically significant effect on employment creation in Nigeria. The coefficient estimates show a negative and significant relationship, implying that while exchange rate unification materially influences employment outcomes, its immediate effect may be contractionary due to adjustment costs associated with currency depreciation, higher input prices, and firm-level restructuring.

This finding aligns with strands of the Nigerian literature that emphasize weak short-run employment transmission mechanisms. Ani and Udeh (2021) found that exchange rate movements significantly affected output indicators but did not translate into proportional employment gains, suggesting that labour-market responses are often delayed. Similarly, Imoagwu, Ezenekwe, and Nwogwugwu (2023) showed that exchange rate changes exert stronger and more immediate effects on inflation than on employment, reinforcing the view that labour-market outcomes respond indirectly to exchange rate reforms.

Comparative evidence from other developing economies supports this interpretation. Ben-Salha, Zmami, and Barguellil (2018) demonstrated that exchange rate volatility adversely affects employment in open economies, particularly in the short run, as firms adjust to cost shocks. In Egypt, post-2016 exchange rate unification initially resulted in employment losses in manufacturing before investment-led recovery emerged (IMF, 2017; Hassan, Smith, & Dunne, 2018). Similarly, Ethiopia's experience shows that exchange rate reforms can depress employment temporarily when inflation and import costs rise faster than productive capacity (Alemayehu & Kibrom, 2019).

However, longer-term evidence suggests that exchange rate stability and transparency can support employment growth through investment and industrial expansion. Otiwu (2018) argued that predictable exchange rate regimes foster an enabling

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environment for job creation by reducing uncertainty and stimulating private-sector investment. Asian experiences following exchange rate unification—particularly in South Korea and Indonesia—also indicate that employment effects turn positive once export growth and industrial recovery take hold (Calvo & Reinhart, 2002).

The negative but significant relationship observed in this study therefore reflects structural and institutional rigidities in Nigeria's labour market, including infrastructure deficits, skills mismatches, and the dominance of informal employment. These constraints limit the immediate translation of macroeconomic reforms into job creation. Consequently, while exchange rate unification significantly influences employment dynamics in Nigeria, its short-run effect appears contractionary, with positive employment outcomes contingent on complementary policies such as industrial support, skills development, access to finance for SMEs, and social protection mechanisms.

Overall, the findings suggest that exchange rate unification is a necessary but insufficient condition for sustainable employment creation, underscoring the importance of policy coordination in achieving SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

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4.3. Hypothesis Three

Ho: Exchange rate unification has no significant effect on investment.

Table 3: ***Regression Test of exchange rate unification and Investment***

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.794[a]	.630	.629	1.339

a. Predictors: (Constant),Exchange_rate_unification

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	770.708	1	770.708	429.885	.000[b]
	Residual	451.792	252	1.793		
	Total	1222.500	253			

a. Dependent Variable: Investment

b. Predictors: (Constant), ,Exchange_rate_unification

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.368	0.693		20.73	.000
	,Exchange_rate_unification	.325	0.016	0.794	20.73	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Investment

Source: SPSS 27

The model summary reports a strong correlation coefficient ($R = 0.794$) and an R^2 value of 0.630, indicating that exchange rate unification explains approximately 63.0 per cent of the variation in investment in Nigeria. This suggests that exchange rate policy constitutes a major macroeconomic determinant of investment behaviour. The adjusted R^2 of 0.629 further confirms the robustness of the model after accounting for degrees of freedom. The ANOVA results show that the model is statistically significant, with df = 252 and $p < 0.05$, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that exchange rate unification exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on investment in Nigeria.

This finding is strongly supported by both theoretical and empirical literature. Henry, Murtadho, and Bhaumik (2020) showed that unified and predictable exchange rate regimes enhance investor confidence and stimulate investment flows in emerging economies by reducing uncertainty and transaction costs. Similarly, Calderón, Chong, and Stein (2006) demonstrated that stable exchange rate frameworks reduce macroeconomic volatility, thereby creating a conducive environment for both domestic and foreign investment. Ozili (2024) further argued that exchange rate unification improves market transparency, curtails speculative behaviour, and enhances foreign exchange liquidity—conditions that are critical for sustaining investment growth in developing economies.

Evidence from African and other emerging economies reinforces these results. Egypt's 2016 exchange rate unification significantly improved foreign exchange availability and attracted renewed foreign direct investment despite short-term inflationary pressures (IMF, 2017; Hassan, Smith, & Dunne, 2018). Ghana's liberalisation experience similarly shows that exchange rate credibility plays a central role in shaping long-term investment decisions, although fiscal inconsistency can weaken outcomes (Aryeetey & Tarp, 2000). Outside Africa, China's gradual exchange rate unification in the 1990s contributed to sustained investment inflows by improving export competitiveness and policy credibility (Prasad, Rumbaugh, & Wang, 2005).

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Within the Nigerian context, Obuareghe, Orubu, and Awogbemi (2023) and Egolum, Iliemena, and Goodluck (2020) emphasize that exchange rate reforms yield stronger investment outcomes when embedded within coherent fiscal and monetary policy frameworks. In line with Ayinde and Bankole (2021), the present findings underscore that exchange rate unification enhances predictability in economic planning, thereby promoting capital formation and long-term development. Overall, the results highlight the potential of exchange rate unification to serve as an effective policy lever for strengthening Nigeria's investment climate and advancing the broader objective of sustainable economic development, provided that complementary macroeconomic and institutional reforms are sustained

5.0 CONCLUSION, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of exchange rate unification on sustainable economic development in Nigeria, focusing on industrial production, employment creation, and investment. The findings show that exchange rate unification has a positive and significant impact on industrial production and investment, reflecting improved macroeconomic stability and enhanced investor confidence. These results are consistent with evidence from other developing and emerging economies where unified exchange rate regimes improve allocative efficiency and investment outcomes. However, the effect of exchange rate unification on employment creation was not statistically significant, indicating that labour market responses to exchange rate reforms are limited in the short run. This outcome reflects underlying structural challenges in Nigeria's labour market, including infrastructural gaps, skills mismatches, and the predominance of informal employment.

The study concludes that while exchange rate unification is an important policy tool for economic stabilization, its contribution to sustainable development depends on complementary fiscal, industrial, and labour market reforms that translate macroeconomic gains into inclusive growth.

5.2 Policy Implications

The findings underscore the need to embed exchange rate unification within a broader macroeconomic reform framework to advance sustainable development goals. Effective fiscal and monetary coordination is critical for sustaining the positive investment response associated with unified exchange rate regimes, directly supporting SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 17 (Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development).

Targeted industrial policies such as improved access to productive credit, infrastructure development, and input cost stabilization are necessary to convert exchange rate stability into higher industrial output, aligning with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).

The absence of a significant employment effect indicates that exchange rate unification alone cannot deliver inclusive growth. Complementary labour market reforms, skills development, and entrepreneurship promotion are required to ensure that macroeconomic stability translates into broad-based job creation, consistent with SDG 8, SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

5.3. Recommendations

Drawing on the result of the case study and the comparative literature analysis across countries, the following stakeholder-specific recommendations are advanced:

1. Governments and central banks in developing and emerging economies should complement exchange rate unification with strong industrial policies, including targeted incentives, infrastructure investment, and access to affordable financing, to enhance industrial productivity and competitiveness under a unified exchange rate regime.
2. Fiscal and monetary authorities, as well as financial regulators, should strengthen policy coordination, improve transparency, and reduce regulatory uncertainty to deepen investor confidence and attract both domestic and foreign investment across unified foreign exchange markets.
3. Labour ministries, SME development agencies, and sub-national governments should implement labour market reforms, skills development initiatives, and entrepreneurship support programmes to ensure that the macroeconomic gains from exchange rate unification translate into inclusive and sustainable employment outcomes.

5.4. Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research. This study was conducted independently, and no financial, professional, or personal relationships influenced the outcomes or interpretations presented.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

Respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could opt out at any time. The study therefore complied with standard ethical procedures in social research.

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