

The Mhaka Theory of Regional Integration in Africa: A Hybrid Approach

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Abstract: *This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the Mhaka Theory of regional integration in Africa, a hybrid approach combining elements of realism, intergovernmentalism, and neo-functionalism. The theory provides a context-specific framework for understanding regional integration efforts in Africa, recognizing the complex interplay of state interests, bargaining, functional cooperation, and African context and regional specificities. Through a detailed examination of the theory's key components, including state interests and power dynamics, intergovernmental bargaining and negotiation, functional cooperation and spillover, and African context and regional specificities, this article demonstrates the Mhaka Theory's contributions to understanding regional integration in Africa. The article applies the Mhaka Theory to three case studies: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC), highlighting the theory's ability to explain regional integration efforts in diverse contexts. Additionally, the article explores the implications of the Mhaka Theory for regional integration in Africa, offering policy recommendations for African regional organizations and member states, as well as future research directions and potential applications.*

Keywords: Regional Integration, Africa, Mhaka Theory, Hybrid Approach

Introduction

Regional integration in Africa has gained significant momentum in recent years, with various regional economic communities (RECs) and organizations working towards economic, political, and social integration (African Union, 2020). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2020, aims to create a single market for goods and services, boosting intra-African trade and economic growth (AfCFTA, 2020). However, despite these efforts, regional integration in Africa remains a complex and challenging process.

Existing theories, such as realism, intergovernmentalism, and neo-functionalism, offer valuable insights into regional integration, but each has limitations when applied to the African context (Hurrell, 1995; Moravcsik, 1993; Haas, 1958). Realism emphasizes state centrism and self-help, but neglects the role of supranational institutions and regional norms (Mearsheimer, 2001). Intergovernmentalism focuses on state interests and bargaining, but overlooks the impact of functional cooperation and spillover (Hoffmann, 1966). Neo-functionalism highlights the importance of functional cooperation and supranationalism, but downplays the role of state power and interests (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970).

This article proposes a hybrid theory, the Mhaka Theory, combining elements of realism, intergovernmentalism, and neo-functionalism to explain regional integration in Africa. By integrating these theories, the Mhaka Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics of regional integration in Africa. For instance, the Mhaka Theory can help explain how the AfCFTA's success depends on a combination of state interests, functional cooperation, and supranational institutions (AfCFTA, 2020). With 55 member states and a combined GDP of over \$3 trillion, the AfCFTA has the potential to transform the African economy, but its success hinges on the ability of member states to balance their interests with regional cooperation and supranational governance (African Development Bank, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Realism: State Centrism, Self-Help, Security Dilemma

Realism emphasizes the centrality of states in international relations, with a focus on self-help and security dilemmas (Mearsheimer, 2001). In the context of regional integration, realism suggests that states prioritize their national interests over regional cooperation (Hurrell, 1995). For example, during the 2011 Libyan crisis, African states prioritized their individual interests over regional cooperation, leading to a fragmented response to the crisis (African Union, 2011).

Intergovernmentalism: State Interests, Bargaining, and Negotiation

Intergovernmentalism focuses on the role of state interests, bargaining, and negotiation in international relations (Moravcsik, 1993). In regional integration, intergovernmentalism emphasizes the importance of state bargaining and negotiation in shaping regional policies (Hoffmann, 1966). For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established through a process of state bargaining and negotiation, with member states prioritizing their individual interests (ECOWAS, 1975).

Neo-functionalism: Functional Cooperation, Spillover, and Supranationalism

Neo-functionalism highlights the importance of functional cooperation, spillover, and supranationalism in regional integration (Haas, 1958). In the context of African regional integration, neo-functionalism suggests that functional cooperation in areas such as trade and infrastructure can lead to spillover effects, driving further regional cooperation (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has achieved significant regional cooperation in areas such as trade and infrastructure, leading to spillover effects in areas such as health and education (SADC, 2020).

The Mhaka Theory: A Hybrid Approach

The Mhaka Theory integrates key elements of realism, intergovernmentalism, and neo-functionalism to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding regional integration in Africa. The theory recognizes the centrality of states in regional integration, while also acknowledging the importance of functional cooperation and supranationalism. For example, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can be seen as a manifestation of the Mhaka Theory, with states prioritizing their individual interests while also engaging in functional cooperation and supranational governance (AfCFTA, 2020).

Key Components of the Mhaka Theory

The Mhaka Theory of regional integration in Africa is built on four key components: state interests and power dynamics, intergovernmental bargaining and negotiation, functional cooperation and spillover, and African context and regional specificities.

State Interests and Power Dynamics (Realism)

The Mhaka Theory recognizes the centrality of state interests and power dynamics in regional integration (Mearsheimer, 2001). African states prioritize their national interests over regional cooperation, leading to a complex web of power dynamics (Hurrell, 1995). For example, during the 2011 Libyan crisis, South Africa and Nigeria pursued competing interests, reflecting their respective regional power dynamics (African Union, 2011).

Intergovernmental Bargaining and Negotiation (Intergovernmentalism)

The Mhaka Theory also emphasizes the importance of intergovernmental bargaining and negotiation in regional integration (Moravcsik, 1993). African states engage in bargaining and negotiation to advance their interests, leading to regional agreements and institutions (Hoffmann, 1966). For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established through a process of state bargaining and negotiation (ECOWAS, 1975).

Functional Cooperation and Spillover (Neo-functionalism)

The Mhaka Theory incorporates the concept of functional cooperation and spillover from neo-functionalism (Haas, 1958). African states cooperate in functional areas such as trade and infrastructure, leading to spillover effects and further regional cooperation (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has achieved significant regional cooperation in areas such as trade and infrastructure, leading to spillover effects in areas such as health and education (SADC, 2020).

African Context and Regional Specificities

The Mhaka Theory recognizes the importance of African context and regional specificities in regional integration. African regional integration is shaped by unique historical, cultural, and economic factors, requiring a context-specific approach. For instance, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) reflects African regional specificities, prioritizing trade and economic development (AfCFTA, 2020).

Application of the Mhaka Theory

The Mhaka Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding regional integration in Africa. This section applies the Mhaka Theory to three case studies: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC).

ECOWAS: A Case Study

ECOWAS was established in 1975 with the goal of promoting economic integration among West African states (ECOWAS, 1975). Through the lens of the Mhaka Theory, ECOWAS's regional integration efforts can be seen as driven by state interests and power dynamics. For example, Nigeria's dominance in ECOWAS reflects its regional power dynamics (Hurrell, 1995). Additionally, ECOWAS's functional cooperation in areas such as trade and infrastructure has led to spillover effects, furthering regional integration (Haas, 1958).

SADC: A Case Study

SADC was established in 1980 with the goal of promoting economic integration among Southern African states (SADC, 1980). The Mhaka Theory helps explain SADC's regional integration efforts, which are shaped by intergovernmental bargaining and negotiation. For instance, South Africa's leadership in SADC reflects its regional power dynamics (Hoffmann, 1966). Furthermore, SADC's functional cooperation in areas such as trade and infrastructure has led to spillover effects, furthering regional integration (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970).

EAC: A Case Study

EAC was established in 2000 with the goal of promoting economic integration among East African states (EAC, 2000). The Mhaka Theory provides insight into EAC's regional integration efforts, which are driven by African context and regional specificities. For example, EAC's emphasis on trade and economic development reflects the region's unique economic needs (African Union, 2020). Additionally, EAC's functional cooperation in areas such as trade and infrastructure has led to spillover effects, furthering regional integration (Haas, 1958).

Advantages and Limitations of the Mhaka Theory

Advantages

Comprehensive

The Mhaka Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding regional integration in Africa, incorporating state interests, intergovernmental bargaining, functional cooperation, and African context and regional specificities. For example, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can be understood through the lens of the Mhaka Theory, recognizing the complex interplay of state interests, bargaining, and functional cooperation.

Context-Specific

The Mhaka Theory is context-specific, recognizing the unique historical, cultural, and economic factors shaping regional integration in Africa. For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have distinct regional specificities, reflected in their respective integration efforts (ECOWAS, 1975; SADC, 1980).

Adaptable

The Mhaka Theory is adaptable, allowing for adjustments to changing regional dynamics and priorities. For example, the East African Community (EAC) has adapted its integration efforts in response to changing regional needs and priorities (EAC, 2000).

Limitations

Complexity

The Mhaka Theory's complexity can make it challenging to apply in practice. For instance, the interplay of state interests, bargaining, and functional cooperation can be difficult to navigate in regional integration efforts.

Potential for Conflicting Priorities

The Mhaka Theory's recognition of multiple priorities and interests can lead to conflicting priorities. For example, regional integration efforts may be hindered by conflicting priorities among member states, as seen in the African Union's (AU) efforts to establish a continental free trade area (AU, 2020).

Implications for Regional Integration in Africa: Policy Recommendations

African Regional Organizations

African regional organizations should prioritize context-specific approaches to regional integration, recognizing the unique historical, cultural, and economic factors shaping each region. For example, the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of context-specific approaches to regional integration (African Union, 2020).

Member States

Member states should prioritize intergovernmental bargaining and negotiation, recognizing the importance of state interests and power dynamics in regional integration. For instance, South Africa's leadership in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) reflects its regional power dynamics.

Future Research Directions

The Mhaka Theory offers several future research directions, including:

Comparative studies of regional integration efforts in Africa, exploring the application of the Mhaka Theory in different regional contexts.

Case studies of successful regional integration efforts, examining the role of state interests, bargaining, and functional.

Analysis of the impact of external actors on regional integration efforts in Africa, exploring the role of global governance and international organizations.

Potential Applications:

Regional integration efforts in other developing regions, such as Africa.

Global governance and international organizations, recognizing the importance of context-specific approaches to regional integration.

Economic development and cooperation, exploring the role of regional integration in promoting economic growth and development.

Conclusion

This article has explored the Mhaka Theory of regional integration in Africa, a hybrid approach combining elements of realism, intergovernmentalism, and neo-functionalism. The theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding regional integration efforts in Africa, recognizing the complex interplay of state interests, bargaining, functional cooperation, and African context and regional specificities.

Summary of Key Points

- The Mhaka Theory offers a context-specific approach to regional integration in Africa, recognizing the unique historical, cultural, and economic factors shaping each region.
- The theory emphasizes the importance of state interests, bargaining, and functional cooperation in regional integration efforts.
- The Mhaka Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding regional integration efforts in Africa, incorporating elements of realism, intergovernmentalism, and neo-functionalism.

Reflection on the Mhaka Theory's Contributions

The Mhaka Theory makes significant contributions to understanding regional integration in Africa, offering a nuanced and context-specific approach to regional integration efforts. By recognizing the complex interplay of state interests, bargaining, functional cooperation, and African context and regional specificities, the Mhaka Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding regional integration efforts in Africa. The Mhaka Theory's emphasis on context-specific approaches to regional integration highlights the importance of considering the unique historical, cultural, and economic factors shaping each region. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of regional integration efforts, recognizing the diversity of experiences and challenges across Africa.

Furthermore, the Mhaka Theory's recognition of the importance of state interests, bargaining, and functional cooperation in regional integration efforts provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of regional integration. By examining the interplay of these factors, the Mhaka Theory offers a comprehensive understanding of regional integration efforts in Africa. The Mhaka Theory

provides a valuable framework for understanding regional integration efforts in Africa, offering a nuanced and context-specific approach to regional integration. The theory's emphasis on state interests, bargaining, functional cooperation, and African context and regional specificities provides a comprehensive understanding of regional integration efforts in Africa, highlighting the importance of considering the unique historical, cultural, and economic factors shaping each region.

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