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## **An Insight into Southern Africa Development Community Protocol on Education and Training's Article 8: A Systematic Review**

**Chikuvadze Pinias\***

*Phd, Research Fellow, Office for International Affairs, University of the Free State, South Africa,  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8569-0009>*

**Maguya Susan**

*BScEd, Teacher, Department of Humanities, Mt Matedzi Secondary School, Zimbabwe,  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1418-532X>*

**Mutseekwa Christopher**

*PhD, Lecturer, Teachers' Training Centre, Rwanda, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2070-9952>*

**\*Corresponding author:** [chikuvadzepinias@gmail.com](mailto:chikuvadzepinias@gmail.com).

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**Abstract:** Though the Southern African member states' institutions of higher learning share communal historical circumstances, they have profound discrepancies in their structures and operations. This has brought many questions to the Southern Africa Development Community's (SADC) pursuit to address these variations. In this context, this discussion centres on gaining insights into the SADC's Education and Training protocol with specific reference to Article 8. The literature scoping was grounded in a systematic review of sources covering issues with SADC's Education and Training protocol from 1997–2024. Based on keywords, 250 articles written in English were selected from Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, Google Scholar, and Science Direct. PRISMA guidelines were used to reduce the number to 57, focusing on topics, abstracts, and issues. We analysed the selected articles independently for reliability and transferability. In addition, content analysis was used to construe the rationale of the

protocol on education and training, as well as cooperation in education and training policy and procedures within the SADC bloc. It was also acknowledged that the member states' higher education systems had different structures and operations. In this context, the protocol on education and training, through article 8, has come up with instruments and mechanisms to facilitate the harmonisation of the bloc's diverse systems (i.e., higher education). This can potentially enhance the cooperation between institutions of higher learning within the bloc and beyond. The researchers recommend adopting good practices from the different models to foster cooperation between institutions of higher learning regionally and beyond.

**Keywords:** Article 8; Education and Training; Insight; Protocol; Southern Africa Development Community.

## **Introduction**

The world over, an institution of higher learning is anticipated to arm students with the pertinent competencies essential for different spheres (Asaju, 2023). Thus, it has the potential to yield new knowledge through teaching, community service, research, and innovation that can be transferred and disseminated to diverse facets of the globalised society (Chikuvadze & Mugijima, 2024). In this context, an institution of higher learning is considered a dynamic component of modern society that fosters the 'public good' by playing significant protagonists in a global village (African Union Commission, 2018). This requires the institution to embrace the concept of harmonisation and advance policies that enable it to become observable globally. However, this harmonisation process occurs at different strides and with diverse impetuses in higher education systems worldwide (Hudzik, 2023).

Therefore, SADC countries signed and agreed upon education and training policies and practices were seen as a platform that provides a new direction in education in its thrust to increase the socio-political and economic salience of harmonisation in institutions of higher learning (Jingura & Kamusoko, 2018). This includes academic programmes and standard operations procedures taken on board by an institution of higher learning in response to the prevailing forces in the global academic environment (Altbach, 2015). Thus, this protocol could advance intercultural competence and responsible citizenship under the decolonisation framework. In addition, it subsidises the increasing competence base through harmonising higher education within the bloc (Proctor & Rumbley, 2018).

## **Research Problem**

The introduction of the SADC bloc's Education and Training protocol - Article 8 was seen as a conduit to facilitate the free movement of the students, lecturers, etc., across borders within the bloc in areas concerning education and training. In this context, students from member states, as per the nature of the article, were not expected to be international students (McLellan, 2009). However, policies of some host member states define these students as international or foreign, which tends to contradict the expectations of the SADC bloc's Education and Training protocol - Article 8 (Luckett & Shay, 2020). In addition, some aspects of this article were considered impossible to implement efficiently in regional higher education as they had diverse post-secondary education profiles (Neema-Abooki, 2022). Hence, the SADC bloc faces challenges in creating binding networks which enable it to pursue the ideals of the harmonisation agenda of institutions of higher learning (Gwakwa, 2016). Against this background, this article sought insight into the outlook of the SADC bloc's Education and Training - Article 8, signed and agreed upon by member states with specific reference to rationalisation and harmonisation.

## ***Research Focus***

This paper sought insight into this aperture from the selected literature sources to add value to the documented evidence. Its objective was to provide an outlook on the rationalisation and harmonisation of the SADC bloc's Education and Training protocol—Article 8—signed and agreed upon by states within the bloc.

## ***Research Aim***

This study aimed to understand the outlook for rationalising and harmonising the SADC bloc's Education and Training protocol—Article 8—through a lens comprised of selected literature sources.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The institutions of higher learning in SADC are involved in multidisciplinary approaches to inculcating knowledge, skills and attitudes into students (Baikakedi, 2023; Woldegiorgis, 2013). This process involves state-state relationships, integration and harmonisation of policies. Against this background, this discussion was grounded in a regional integration lens comprised of neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism theories. This lens was crucial in articulating harmonisation trends under the SADC's Education and Training Protocol — Article 8.

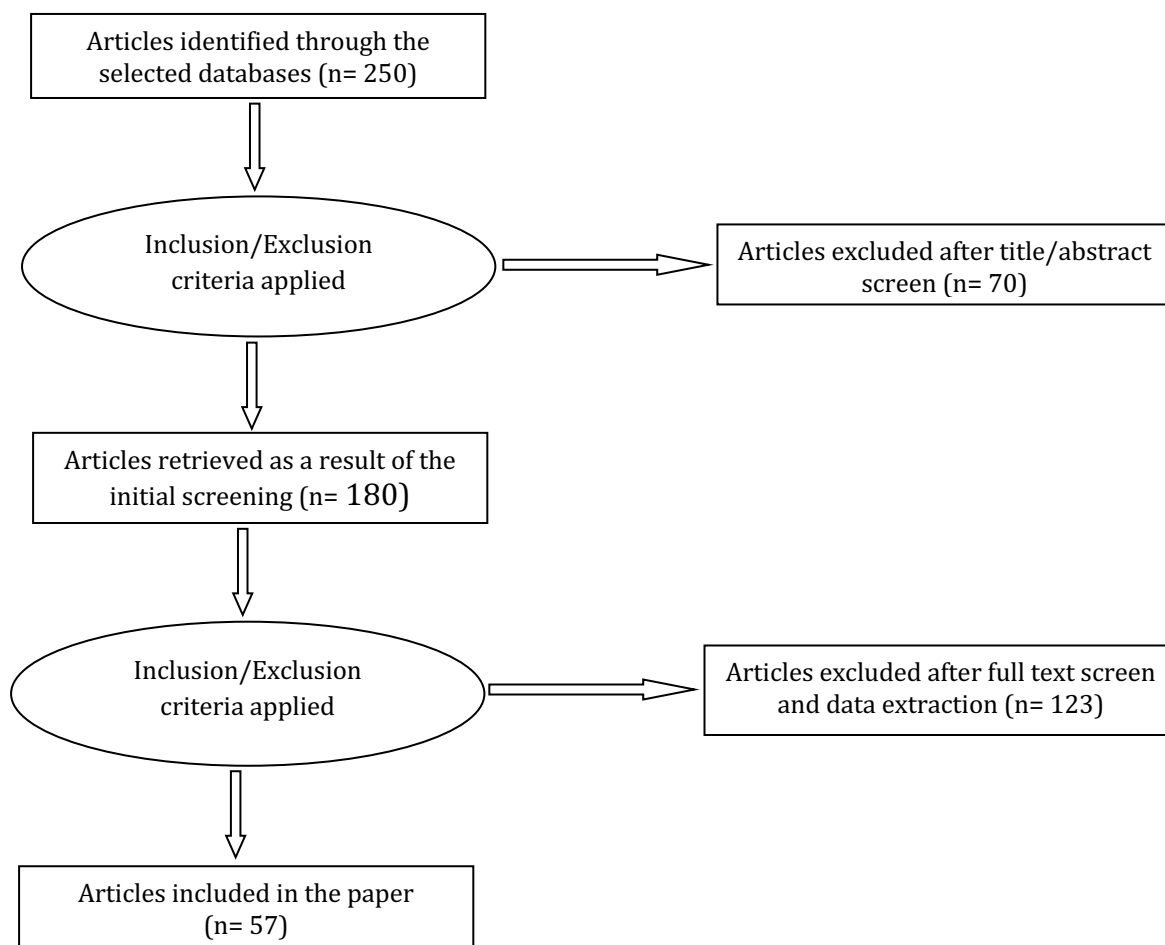
The neo-functionalism theory advances the necessity for collaboration in institutions of higher learning through research projects, student exchange programmes, joint degree offerings, and shared resources across borders (Leustean, 2009). The spillover facilitates and promotes deeper integration, enhancing the overall quality and accessibility of higher education. This process fosters economic interdependence and helps build a more cohesive and collaborative international academic community (Sabbaghian & Singh, 2022). Intergovernmentalism theory emphasises sovereign states' role in decision-making processes in institutions of higher learning (Leuffen et al., 2022). Thus, as SADC member states collaborate on policies to advance their cooperation in higher education, they retain their national sovereignty and maintain their systems.

## **Material and Methods**

In this paper, the search for articles was considered a qualitative approach, which called for using a systematic approach to their analysis and assessment (Kutsyuruba, 2023). The articles were taken through the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (San & Aypay, 2024). Against this background, this paper grounded this process in the PRISMA guidelines.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA Flow Diagram*



From the above Figure 1, it was noted that the through a search on the selected databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, Google Scholar, and Science Direct, 250 articles were identified. It is significant to acknowledge that the selection of the Articles involved all three authors, with the view to preserve the validity and quality of the search (Pasara & Mhlanga, 2022). After going through the targeted articles, 70 were excluded, and 180 were taken to the next level of consideration. At this level, the results were analysed by the content of issues around SADC, Article 8; SADC Education and Training protocol; or higher education harmonisation in SADC (that is, Eswatini, Botswana, Angola, Namibia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Madagascar and South Africa) and 123 articles were excluded. However, the synthesis of selected articles or manuscripts was complex as each was assessed based on its etic and emic dimensions. This enabled co-authorship analysis to establish emergent trends and incongruities shared and discussed between the authors through online meetings and e-mails. In this paper, to enhance reliability and transferability, we conducted independent analyses of the issues under consideration (Mohseni et al., 2022). After that, we compared the results to reveal if disparities exist on the results of the analyses.

## **Results**

The results in this section address the literature on SADC's Protocol on Education and Training. These literature sources were selected within the constraints of the focus of this paper. Hence, this section efforts are made to contribute towards the closure of the gap identified in the problem section through the analysis of:

## ***The Rationale of the SADC's Education and Training Protocol—Article 8***

Based on trust and confidence, most countries worldwide have established cooperation-based interactions across national borders (Mbembe, 2016). This aims to achieve the concerned SADC countries' common sociocultural, economic, and educational goals. Hence, there is a need for these countries to converge as a bloc on the impression of regional development with the understanding to participate in regional activities around the issues to do with education and training, among others (Eyo & Essien, 2021). It is against this background that the SADC's Education and Training Protocol - Article 8 was adopted in 1997 to acknowledge that education can equip citizens from member states with competencies relevant to the 21st century and beyond.

In this sense, the bloc recognised institutions of higher learning as being at the epi-centre of facilitating the member states' socio-economic and political sustainability (Apple, 2019). Hence, these institutions are expected to transform students' behaviour, enabling them to create an environment that fosters economic feasibility and social justice across member states (UNESCO, 2017). This creates the students' practice of using available resources without compromising future generations (Majee, 2020). In this regard, we advanced the notion that SADC shares with the African Union and other blocs (i.e., the Economic Commission of West African States) the goals of regional cooperation and integration with specific reference to education and training (Chasi, 2021). This accelerates the coming together of the bloc's member states to tackle some of the socio-economic and educational contests (Keevy, 2005). Therefore, this integration can be acknowledged as a vital development that enhanced the free movement of human capital and students across one another's borders (SADC, 2017). In this context, harmonisation of higher education was at the core of the SADC's Education and Training protocol. Article 8 and institutions of higher learning were expected to establish collaborations in:

- policy for education and training,
- higher education and training,
- research and development,
- life-long education and training (SADC, 2006).

For instance, these partnerships between institutions of higher learning within the bloc can potentially foster economic growth (McLellan, 2009). However, this demands that national education and training systems be competitive and the labour force be incentivised. In this case, the income to fund education and training is acknowledged as one of the drivers of regional integration. This is so since the education systems with the SADC bloc can no longer rely on local funding for their operations. Recently, institutions of higher learning within the bloc have experienced increased student enrollment, brain drain, and reduced financial support from the fiscus (SADC, 2019). Against this background, the SADC bloc articulated the need for a typical human capital market to entice members of academia and students from within the bloc and beyond. Hence, institutions of higher learning within this bloc are expected to inculcate in students the relevant knowledge, skills, and values to be functional in the regional and international arena.

Thus, through the harmonisation, qualifications awarded by institutions of higher learning in different member states can be compared to the set quality assurance frameworks and standards. This can significantly contribute to maintaining instruction and products from the institutions of higher learning within the bloc (African Union Commission, 2006; Altbach, 2015). This implies the need to broaden institutions of higher learning programmes to incorporate operational strategies that empower members of the academia. In addition, students must be taken through teaching and learning processes

geared towards developing a sense of critical thinking (Bourn, 2011). This calls for benchmarking programmes and a standardised qualifications framework to enhance the movement of potential human capital from one member state to another in search of employment opportunities (Asmelash & Kassahun, 2022).

Hence, this harmonisation will benefit SADC as a bloc since it allows the free movement of students and qualified personnel from one member state to another, thereby bolstering the chances of exchanging knowledge, intellectual resources and research (Ayoubi & Massoud, 2007). In addition, this increases the human capital base, thereby increasing the chances of relying on regionally available skills rather than importing them from elsewhere. All this is expected to occur in institutions of higher learning within the SADC bloc that operate in diversified cultural systems with related anxieties on education and training approaches. Hence, institutions within the bloc need to promote intercultural knowledge, skills, and social interconnection (De Wit, 2006). This can only be attained through interconnecting the diverse intercultural scopes in the core pillars of higher education (i.e., teaching and learning, research, community service, innovation and industrialisation). There was also a need to keep an eye on regional and international policies and agreements geared towards advancing the agenda of cooperation as they affect an institution of higher learning's sustainability domestically (Hartzenberg & Malungisa, 2011). Thus, it can result in institutions being grossly under-resourced, not matching the expected standards for knowledge creation, quality of service and products (Gwakwa, 2016).

### ***SADC Bloc's Cooperation through the Education and Training Protocol—Article 8***

The ever-increasing demands of the global community petitions for a multi-pronged approach to institutions of higher learning's operations grounded in cooperation amongst the diverse member states (i.e., SADC) (Makwembere, 2023). Thus, this cooperation within higher education in the SADC bloc must be a multidimensional process involving various crucial policies since they spell out the procedure(s). These serve as pathways to facilitate teaching and learning in institutions. Below are some of the determining factors of the quality of operations in institutions of higher learning in SADC member states from Education and Training Protocol - Article 8:

- Universities and other tertiary institutions in each member state reserve 5% of admissions for students from other SADC member states other than their own.
- Institutions of higher learning to work towards harmonisation, equivalence, and eventual standardisation of entrance requirements.
- Institutions of higher learning to prevent the costly repetition of courses taken at universities within the bloc.
- Institutions of higher learning to contribute towards the mutual recognition of qualifications throughout the bloc, the institutions are encouraged to come up with strategies that facilitate credit transfer from one institution to another within the bloc.
- Institutions of higher learning should work towards harmonising the academic calendar to facilitate staff and student mobility.
- Institutions of higher learning to facilitate the movement of students and staff from the bloc for purposes of study, research, teaching, and other pursuits relating to education and training (Heleta & Chasi, 2023).

Though the above contexts are premised on the advancement of the agenda on harmonisation of education courses or programmes, there were indications that the curriculum was confined to the local

context of each member state. This raises questions on whether the local content, riddled with some elements of colonial bias, provided enough flavour for global competitiveness. Hence, there is a need for a decolonisation curriculum to enable academics to be engaged with the plurality of knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). This requires a critical engagement with the curriculum, and knowledge, including the ideological frames that inform the choices of texts in the curriculum, is critical in the process of epistemic decolonisation (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Therefore, the SADC's Education and Training Protocol - Article 8 reflects the education and training texts selected, the courses or programmes they create, and the perspectives they propagate (Hlatshwayo, 2022). These critical engagements around cooperation issues in higher education should be facilitated from institutional levels through policy frameworks and engagements with academics and students (Mwila et al., 2022). However, due to the complex nature of the societies that make up the SADC bloc, questioning academics and students' choices of materials included in the curriculum is of significant importance. This is so as courses and programme development are most times influenced by, among other things, the agency academics use in their modules, programmes or courses to select what is taught, how it is taught when it is taught and how the assessment is carried out (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). In this, the determining factors bring to light the need to transform structures and procedures to re-arrange learning outcomes, content, approaches and assessment to create diverse modes of knowledge (Saunders, 2011).

This cooperation within institutions of higher learning in SADC is acknowledged as having the capacity to propel an innovation agenda in line with society's expectations (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020). This can also make complexity standards formulation and implementation challenging due to multi-layer and multi-actor systems. Therefore, there is a need for powerful actors who can put in place coordination structures and mechanisms to drive the new system of policy in the bloc's institutions of higher learning (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This proffers the ongoing denationalisation of policies that enhance transformation regarding curricula relevance (competencies), its harmonisation (Makuku, 2016), and the inclusion of the 'Ubuntu ethos.

## **Discussion**

In this section, efforts are made to contribute towards the closure of the gap identified in the problem section by discussing the rationale of the SADC's Education and Training Protocol Article 8 and the cooperation of member states through it. In the same vein, SADC member states are confronted with the obstacle of fading prospects to produce necessary networks to enhance the implementation of the harmonisation agenda in institutions of higher learning (Biao & Maruatona, 2018). Designing boundaryless courses and programmes ultimately results in the 'production' of boundaryless alumnae capable of competing globally (Magagula, 2005). Thus, harmonised courses and programmes bring more benefits that enable graduates to be employable outside their borders (Knight, 2012). This portrays the need for the SADC bloc to redefine the agenda for higher education harmonisation. Hence, there is a push to drift away from the narrow-minded understanding of student mobility to an opinion of methodical harmonisation of SADC's courses and programmes (Woldegiorgis, 2023). The above goals for harmonising courses and programmes are a reality and must be fulfilled by institutions of higher learning within the SADC bloc (Knight, 2017). In this context, we articulate that for member states to be silent about the harmonisation agenda was self-defeating. This calls for SADC's institutions of higher learning to review their courses and programmes to position themselves competitively in the market (Mahadew, 2024). So, the bloc, through its Education and Training protocol - Article 8 should tighten its standards and procedures in a bid to translate the ideals of the harmonisation agenda into a reality.

In line with the above context, a qualifications framework for both primary and higher education was introduced by the SADC bloc's technical committee on certification and accreditation (Landa, 2021). In addition, an association of university vice-chancellors was envisaged to contribute towards developing standards for institutions of higher learning's collaboration in research and development (Kadhila & Libebe, 2021). The article advances the need for harmonising programme or modular structure and programme or course duration at different levels (e.g., undergraduate, postgraduate). It further calls for recognising academic programmes and transferring credit points, accreditation, and quality assurance standards within the bloc. This facilitated the creation of the Southern African Quality Assurance Network to enhance the definition of operational standards and procedures in teaching and learning (Hoosen et al., 2017).

The agreed-upon procedures and standards were envisioned to enable the operative comparison of credits and qualifications to enable students and members of the academia to move freely within the bloc (Nyoni, 2021). However, these require supportive planning in agenda setting, the scope of courses or programmes offered by the SADC bloc's institutions of higher learning, research profile, capacity building, and human capital development (Misago, 2017). In addition, it needs to establish an infrastructure that allows coordinated action on an institutional basis (e.g., creating a SADC Vice-Chancellors' Association) and harmonising national regulations and procedures (Ngwira et al., 2005).

### **Limitations**

We acknowledge that this paper relied on a relatively limited number of databases to identify potentially eligible articles. However, we noted that using many databases might have resulted in data loss during the screening and comparative stages. Hence, using these selected databases enabled us to contribute more to the attainment of the set aim of this paper. The use of articles only written in English limited our spectrum in gaining insights from scholars who used other languages to provide a comprehensive articulation of the issue. However, the articles used were considered objective and capable of advancing a perspective on the issue under investigation, providing an optimal chance to attain the set objective.

### **Conclusions**

The embracing of the SADC's Education and Training protocol - Article 8 by the bloc members created the platform for the enunciation of the harmonisation agenda with specific reference to institutions of higher learning. This was seen as having the capacity to enhance member states' cooperation and competitiveness grounded in developing a competent human capital and strengthening the educational export industry. Hence, there is a need to foster an education system that enables the systematic improvement of the quality of instruction and the mobility of students and academics within SADC and beyond. Though this higher education harmonisation agenda has been seen as an intentional process on behalf of SADC, it has limited financial support to enhance the implementation of the ideals of the protocol. In this regard, we concluded that while there were dissimilarities between member states' education systems, Education and Training protocol - Article 8 creates a convergence of policies, strategies, and ethical standards that foster regional cooperation amongst institutions of higher learning within the bloc.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

Though a lot has been documented on theoretical issues underpinning SADC's Education and Training protocol - Article 8, a gap still exists in understanding practical issues underpinning the implementation of these ideas propounded by SADC's Education and Training protocol - Article 8. This can provide an in-depth understanding of how the bloc can best implement the ideals behind the article

to benefit students in institutions of higher learning within the bloc. In this context, researchers need to interrogate the potential of this protocol from a critical policy perspective. This can be an attempt to align member states' policies with SADC's aspiration for institutions of higher learning. Thus, it calls for reassessing the compatibility of the bloc's Educational and Training protocol and member states' educational policies.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

None.

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