

Globalization and Employment Outcomes in the Southern African Customs Union: A De Jure and De Facto Analysis

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to examine the impact of various dimensions of globalization on employment outcomes in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) countries. A novel panel econometric approach was used, accounting for structural breaks, cross-sectional dependence, and heterogeneous slopes through cross-sectionally augmented panel-autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) and dynamic common correlated effect (DCCE) estimation. The findings revealed that globalization, mainly through its economic and social dimensions, has induced additional employment capacity for the customs union. The prominence of de jure and de facto factors within this nexus was also confirmed. The results showed the benefits of foreign financial flows, tourism, technological knowledge spillovers, and trade facilitation in improving SACU labor market processes. Although the evidence here sheds light on the positive inducing effects, the presence of both adverse incorporation and skill-biased consequences was not discounted. Based on this, several recommendations are suggested. This includes the promotion of regional trade and greater integration within the wider sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), an industrial policy shift that promotes a more information and communication technology (ICT)-driven economy, developing industries without smokestacks (IWOSS), establishing sound regional institutions, and prioritizing export diversification, especially among the smaller states in the customs union.

Keywords

Cross-sectionally augmented autoregressive distributed lag, employment, globalization, labor market, panel data, Southern African Customs Union

JEL Classification

F63, F66, J2, R1

Introduction

Over the last four decades, the world has experienced unprecedented movements toward an integrated global society (Balsa-Barreiro et al., 2020). Globalization has profoundly shaped modern economic and

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social life (Shopina et al., 2017). The initial phases of the process were primarily marked by the expansion of a capitalist economic system characterized by trade liberalization practices, an increase in cross-border capital flows, and the overarching focus on industrialization (Axford, 2013). These understandings have been associated with concepts such as universalization, liberalization, and the expansion of Western ideals (Fumasoli, 2019; Lee & Stensaker, 2021). However, over the last four decades, its conceptualization has encompassed a much broader view. These shifts have emerged mainly due to the growing awareness that the world's interconnectedness extends well beyond the economic realms (Mir et al., 2014). Globalization has transcended economic, social, and political features (Gygli et al., 2019; Zajda, 2021). Its multidimensional nature across societal structures has evoked significant interest, with scholars divided on the impact across the socioeconomic domains of countries and regions across the globe (Aiginger & Handler, 2018; Hartmann et al., 2020; Singer, 1975).

Advocates for greater integration posit that increases in global trade, enhanced technological innovation, and greater mobility of resources have brought better productive efficiency (Aiginger & Handler, 2018; Mallick, 2015). In line with these views, countries accrue benefits by establishing better-quality jobs and higher wages, all through more openness, which consequently leads to higher levels of competition (Erixon, 2018). Additionally, from a social perspective, establishing multinational corporations (MNCs) and frequent migration exposes local populations to foreign cultures, religions, and racial backgrounds, thus enhancing the cultural well-being of societies (Tsai, 2007). As this strand of research shows the positive effects of a more globalized society, others argue that these benefits are not enjoyed equally by all (Lang & Tavares, 2018). Proponents of this school of thought highlight that while developed nations mainly gain from integration, the distribution of these advantages for developing countries primarily depends on specific systemic rigidities (Amavilah et al., 2017). Additionally, core-periphery dynamics, especially considering the global north and south debate, have been a contentious area of interest. Mass migration levels, technological innovation, and capital account liberalization can present several implications, especially for labor market outcomes (de Jongh, 2023; Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2019).

These processes are directly related to either the destruction or creation of jobs and, as a result, have seen wide scholarly interest in the impact of globalization on labor market outcomes (Asongu et al., 2020; Gozgor, 2014; López-Villavicencio & Ortiz, 2018). Apart from the economic advantages that trade and capital account liberalization have inferred through greater market access, the associated socially related informational flows and technological advances have benefited many job seekers (Sangha & Rigler, 2020). Deeper political interlinkages through greater access to aid and the increasing involvement of international governmental organizations (IGOs) have allowed the mitigation and improvement of various structural and frictional barriers within the employment process (Akanle et al., 2022). Considering the skill-biased nature, increased volatility, the loss of sovereignty in policy landscapes, and the modern threat of technological innovations such as artificial intelligence (all closely associated with the globalization process) have provoked serious concerns about the ability of countries to create the additional jobs required for their labor force (Hollweg, 2019).

Understanding the African context has gained traction as research has expanded on these features. New insights have provided a mixture of results, attesting to the complexity and the specific nuances within this geographical and political context (Asongu et al., 2020; Uwajumogu et al., 2022). The discourse surrounding the continent advocates that Africa has been left behind during the integration era (Hirsch & Lopez, 2020). However, empirical insight has shown how beneficial the process has been in creating employment opportunities (Adamu et al., 2018). These studies have provided vital insights and answers, extending the knowledge base. However, various areas that speak to the topic's theoretical, empirical, and practical nature have mainly remained unanswered, necessitating this study. While the

conventional lack of empirical consensus has been vital in this regard, other shortcomings, such as the predominant use of proxies in the measurement of globalization [such as trade openness and foreign direct investment (FDI)], have limited the understanding of the impact of the process from its respective dimensions (Huh & Park, 2019). This has likewise detracted from understanding the nuances between the tangible processes and activities (de facto) of globalization and the rules, policies, and conditions (de jure) that are used to facilitate these exchanges (Tzeremes, 2020). The latter is particularly crucial. By disaggregating globalization based on the policies and strategies (de jure) formulated to spur integration and the actual international flows (de facto) resulting from the process and comparing these effects on labor market outcomes, this analysis potentially sheds light on areas that have been missing in the current body of literature. These aspects include identifying possible challenges in policy implementation and unintended consequences of these strategies and can also allow for better policy evaluation. Especially for labor markets, it can add to the knowledge of possible regulatory arbitrage and the effect of technological change on the nature of employment.

Considering this, the study focuses on the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and its five members (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa). To the author's knowledge, insight into the employment and globalization nexus within African regional economic communities (RECs) is missing from the current literature. For SACU, in particular, it provides an interesting case study, given its economic relevance in the broader sub-Saharan African (SSA) region and considering the oldest customs union in the world, enduring most waves of the globalization process. Created with the idea to facilitate the integration of its members and propel current and relatively poor development landscapes, the inquiry holds specific relevance in answering key questions. This pertains mainly to whether the customs union formation allowed beneficial employment outcomes in the nexus considered. Additionally, it can provide critical insight into the specific mechanics used by the REC, in which it has sought to manage the relationships between the function of its labor markets and the integration across economic, social, and political spheres.

Literature Review

The Relationship between Multidimensional Globalization and Employment

Extant literature suggests that the impact of globalization on the functioning of labor markets has been profound (Fang et al., 2022). Its multidimensional nature has influenced the ability of countries to create jobs, as economic, social, and political ties with global partners have been shown to affect the number of jobs inherent in an economic system. Likewise, globalization affects the structure and composition of employment opportunities (Das & Ray, 2020). de Jongh (2023), in this respect, describes the process as one acting as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a strand of literature has posited that globalization is set to create employment-inducing pressures. The idea here is that liberalization practices for trade and financial markets are believed to induce the creation of more jobs through externally driven demand (Elijah, 2007) and a higher degree of specialization, consequently increasing labor productivity and lowering unemployment rates (Belenkiy & Riker, 2015). In addition, Estrin (2017) refers to the impact of financial globalization, where high FDI and the associated technology transfers ultimately increase efficiency and competitiveness, especially in the industrial sector. From a social perspective, employment creation is set to be driven by movements through tourism (Ganeshamoorthy, 2019). As time has progressed and the relevance of service-led industrialization has prospered, tourism sectors have been increasingly regarded as essential drivers of labor demand in host countries. Aynalem et al. (2016)

reiterate that the growth of these sectors increases the demand for labor with different language and cultural skill sets, consequently creating new jobs and stimulating the need for new skills (Kumar, 2022).

However, the idea that globalization has contributed to additional employment opportunities has been contentious, especially in light of the differing impact of the process in developed and developing countries (OECD, 2017). Arguments have mainly pointed to the skill-biased changes that global production processes have induced. Scholars have noted that heightened international competition within international trade and a greater focus on intermediate inputs have resulted in significant increases in the demand for higher-skilled workers as opposed to low-skilled workers (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). This is substantiated by the current phase of globalization that indicates a substantial shift from a post-industrial society to an information society, given the omnipresent role of technological advances (Ampuja & Koivisto, 2014). Unemployment, in this regard, is primarily driven by circumstances where significant skill mismatches occur (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021). Although these features relate to more structural concerns, other linkages to labor outcomes relate to the informational flows associated with global information and communication technology (ICT) sectors and large MNCs. Most literature here highlights their relevance in allowing labor force participants better access to information, allowing for a better job search and matching to reduce frictional rigidities (Green et al., 2013).

While these views infer globalization is mainly an employment generator, others have regarded it contrastingly. These views indicate that enhanced trade will only benefit employment creation if countries have abundant labor-intensive sectors (Jansen et al., 2011). If countries exhibit capital-intensive structures, liberalized trade can reduce the number of jobs within an economic system (Jha, 2020). Aisbett et al. (2019) also mention the role played by MNCs, highlighting that global corporations seeking to maximize profit would look to invest in comparatively cheaper technology, investing more in the capital than labor, resulting in the employment-enhancing effect outweighed by the labor-saving effect of imported technologies (UNCTAD, 2013). Other factors contributing to these labor market changes include social elements other than the informational flows and technological advances of globalization. From this perspective, migration affects the demand and supply of labor within domestic countries (Al-Dalahmeh & Dajnoki, 2021). Viseth (2021) explains that the effect of immigration on the labor market depends on the substitution of labor. When the labor force supply is elastic and demand is inelastic, immigration is bound to induce significant displacement effects on domestic workers (Edo, 2019). Although these views explain the substitution effects, others have argued that migration induces greater demand, consequently increasing employment (Dias-Abey, 2021), where migrants act as additional consumers while establishing new businesses through self-employment.

SACU Members' Globalization and Employment Dynamics

Considering these theoretical relationships, the globalization and employment nexus for SACU as a customs union has been somewhat unique compared to the conventional African discourse (de Jongh, 2023). This comes from the historic developments surrounding its structure and the more contemporary position of the REC in global networks. Regarding the former, as the oldest customs union in the world, SACU has undergone significant changes since its inception. It has showcased attributes reminiscent of both the old and new African regionalism (Blaauw, 2007). Mlambo (2020) describes its evolution as primarily a colonial tool towards a more enabling regional community that promotes its members' regional and global integration. During this timeframe, its constitutional agreements augmented several times, shifting from a unilateral authority (South Africa) to a more democratic structure. As a result, it has placed the development of all its members as the core objective, making use of mainly a common revenue pool (CRP) in which it supports the development of smaller Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, and

Namibia (BELN) member states, providing them with greater levels of fiscal sustainability (Ramkolowan, 2017). Most states' membership in the Common Monetary Area (CMA) has likewise allowed for greater price competitiveness and financial stability (Memela, 2010). In this respect, it has established itself, arguably, as one of the most stable and functioning RECs on the continent (Lwanda, 2013).

Taking this into account, characterizing these member's level of integration is somewhat complex. On the one hand, membership in the REC has seen them sign several trade agreements over the last 18 years. Among these comprise a preferential trade agreement (PTA) with the common market of the South (MERCOSUR), an FTA with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with the EU (SACU, 2019). Over this timeframe, intra-SACU exports have increased dramatically from Rand (R) 63 billion in 2004 to R 186 billion in 2018. (SACU, 2019). More recently, exports and import values have been estimated at approximately 32% and 36% of broader SSA exports and imports, respectively, contributing to nearly a fifth of SSA's gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank, 2023a). As a result, it has positioned itself as one of the prominent regions within SSA (Asante & Stanley, 2022). However, while considering these features, the influence of the globalization process on SACU members has likewise attributed to significant adverse consequences (Ginindza et al., 2017). Central to this is that these countries have remained largely dependent on primary products for international economic linkages and have struggled to move away from low labor productivity levels to achieve adequate levels of industrialization (AfDB, 2019; Malefane, 2021). This has been aggravated by a lack of structural change, as most member countries have been caught in the middle-income growth traps (Andreoni & Tregenna, 2021). In addition to these external pressures, countries have also struggled to cope with induced levels of foreign competition, mainly based on the inability of the region to display strong competitiveness due to high labor costs and lack of economic diversification (AfDB, 2019; World Bank, 2022).

While these characteristics have primarily reflected the economic features of the globalization process, social processes have also significantly influenced the customs union's labor markets. Central to this has been the influence of the cross-border movement of people (Zgambo, 2022). SACU has been shown to exhibit notable outward migration of skilled labor, though displaying some unique attributes (Usman et al., 2022). Migration has entailed a considerably high prevalence of "*brain drain*" in the region and the loss of valuable skill sets (Greer et al., 2022; Halstein, 2021). Though this has proven challenging, similar to the features in the wider SSA region, it has allowed for the inflow of beneficial remittances, a significant income source (World Bank, 2023a). Although migration with non-REC members has provided these intricacies, smaller BELN states have also suffered from intra-SACU migration (Monyane, 2017). Given the allure of higher salaries and the signing of preferential bilateral labor migrant agreements, countries such as Lesotho and Eswatini have encountered significant skill shortages (de Jongh, 2023).

Keeping this in mind, employment outcomes have been less than ideal within the region. Unemployment rates in all member countries are estimated at more than a fifth of their labor forces, with concerns for females and young people (World Bank, 2023a). More alarming have been the high rates for younger cohorts not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (ILO, 2023). However, as these concerning high metrics have been somewhat unique within the African discourse, SACU has shown similar features in the growth of informality in labor market outcomes, especially in the smaller states (although not as high as in the wider SSA region) (ILO, 2023). This is primarily the result of the "*adverse incorporation*" processes associated with the specific position of these African countries in global value chains (GVCs) (Meagher, 2019). The relationship between these globalization features and informal employment is explained based on these sectors acting as absorbers of international shocks. This pertains to adverse external economic downturns and is based on globalization favoring higher-skilled and technologically inclined sectors (Gasparèniè et al., 2022).

Review of the Empirical Literature

In light of the theoretical and practical ambiguities surrounding this nexus, other studies have provided some interesting empirical insights. For example, López-Villavicencio and Ortiz (2018) analyzed the link between economic globalization and employment for 20 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries from 1981 to 2013. Their use of a generalized method of moments (GMM) estimator highlighted that employment rates tend to increase when using outflows of FDI as the proxy for economic globalization. However, unemployment rates increase if capital account openness and inward FDI flows are used. It can be concluded that inward offshoring does contribute to negative consequences for local employment. Extending the analysis toward assessing the effects of skill-biased technological change (SBTC) on labor markets, Gozgor (2014) confirmed the globalization-induced reduction in skilled worker unemployment rates for G7 countries. Applying a biased-corrected least square dummy variable (LSDVC) model for 1970–2009 reveals that these effects were not present for lower-skilled cohorts.

Keeping in line with this relevance, Kaya (2010) investigated the impact of economic globalization on manufacturing employment in 64 developing countries from 1980 to 2003. Using a panel random-effects model with first-degree autocorrelation, the study revealed that higher levels of engagement in international trade bring positive implications for driving industrialization. However, when inward FDI was used as a proxy, results pointed to a negative relationship, showcasing the potential adverse effects of multinational enterprise (MNE) activity and lending credence to core–periphery hypotheses within GVC participation. In addition to these conclusions, Sangha and Riegler (2020) highlighted the implications of the process on female labor force participation (FLFP). Focusing on eight Southeast Asian countries from 1999 to 2015, using a fixed-effect panel Discroll–Kraay estimator showed that economic integration reduced the level of FLFP. However, when proxying through social globalization, particularly its informational dynamics, the impact seemed to improve the level of FLFP.

In addition to these quantitative transmission effects, more qualitative aspects of development have also been analyzed within the region. Adamu et al. (2018) focused on the impact of globalization on SSA's unemployment using a 35-country sample from 2007 to 2014. Using system-GMM, the estimator revealed that from the respective dimensions of the globalization process, only political aspects of the integration were significant in generating employment. Their findings raised the relevance of the influence of international political relationships, specifically in directing resources to address these socioeconomic concerns. Further considering the impact of globalization on more gender-specific performances in the region's labor markets, Asongu et al. (2020) examined the influence of economic, social, and political globalization on FLFP from 1990 to 2013 for 47 SSA countries. Using panel-corrected standard errors and fixed-effect modeling techniques, the study revealed that social globalization (through its informational features) and economic globalization were important in improving FLFP. Political globalization had significant enhancing effects only if the sample was restricted to countries that experienced high conflict and political instability.

Research Methodology

Variable Description and Sample Period

With the primary focus directed toward examining the impact of globalization on employment in SACU countries, the study used a panel dataset comprising five individual cross-sections (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa) over 31 years (1990–2020). This specific timeframe was selected

based on two reasons. The first pertains to the availability of data. The second relates to the isolation of two consecutive waves of integration characterized by significant technological, financial, and social exchanges globally. It allows for disseminating insights within this specific context (Correia et al., 2018). Considering these dynamics, the panel dataset attributed 155 observations.

The study used a functionalist approach, selecting 10 individual variables to model the dynamics between employment and levels of globalization within SACU. Broadly, these comprised the following: A narrow employment rate calculated by using total employment numbers and labor force size from the ILO (2023), disaggregated globalization indices (economic, political, and social), which included a measure of de jure and de facto characteristics respectively. The latter were sourced from the KOF Swiss Economic Institute (2023). Additionally, three control variables were also included. In utilizing these regressors, the analysis accounted for crucial stimuli that have been shown to play an essential role within the nexus under consideration. Here, levels of economic growth through the use of the real GDP per capita (measured in USD) allowed some insight into the underlying growth conditions of the REC. The analysis also used the UN's (2023) human capital index. Accounting for skill level was pertinent given the importance of education, especially within a globally competitive labor market. Finally, the study also included an institutional quality index comprised of five constituent institutional measures. These were sourced from the World Bank's (2023b) global governance dataset. Table 1 provides an overview of the included variables, their measurement, and the databases they were sourced from.

Preliminary Analyses

As the first step, preliminary analysis techniques were employed, including descriptive statistics, trend analysis, and correlation analysis. These tests were undertaken to provide a more detailed overview of the variables under consideration. In addition to these, several pre-estimation tests were conducted. This included using two specific cross-sectional dependence tests: The Pesaran (2004) CD test and the Breusch and Pagan (1980) LM test. According to Chudik and Pesaran (2013), identifying this specific characteristic within panel analyses is pivotal as countries over the last four decades have shown significant interdependencies to global shocks. These tests were crucial considering the context in which this study is undertaken. If the correct estimation techniques are not utilized, it can result in serious losses of estimation efficiency, biased standard errors, and the distortion in size outcomes (Phillips & Sul, 2003). In this respect, the LM CD test statistic is derived by making use of the following:

$$CD_{LM} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N(N-1)} \sum_{I=1}^{N-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^N \left(T \hat{\rho}_{ij}^2 - 1 \right)} \quad (1)$$

Here, $\hat{\rho}_{ij}$ represents the sample estimate of the pairwise correlation of the residuals and is considered asymptotically independent. Given that the estimation of the CD test statistic is based on this form of independence, Baltagi et al. (2012) reiterate its susceptibility to large-size distortions. Therefore, to supplement these findings, for each variable, Pesaran's (2004) CD test statistic has likewise been estimated:

$$CD = \sqrt{\frac{2T}{N(N-1)} \sum_{I=1}^{N-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^N \hat{\rho}_{ij}^2} \quad (2)$$

Table 1. Variable Description.

Variable	Measurement Overview	Source
Employment rate (EMP)	Rate indicating the percentage of the labor force currently employed. $EMP = (\text{total employed}/\text{total labor force}) \times 100$. The range is from 0 to 100, with a higher number indicating higher levels of employment	ILO (2023)
Economic globalization (de facto) (ECGf)	A combined index built on both financial and trade related globalization factors. De facto measures account for actual flows (FDI, export, import volumes, capital flows, etc.). The range is from 0 to 100, with higher levels indicating greater economic integration	KOF Swiss Economic Institute (2023)
Economic globalization (de jure) (ECGj)	A combined index built on both financial and trade-related globalization factors. De jure factors focus on policies and measures that enable flows. Measures included pertain to the number of trade agreements, tariffs, taxes, regulations, and investment restrictions and regulations	
Social globalization (de facto) (SGf)	The index is comprised of interpersonal, informational, and cultural globalization subindices. Range is from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating higher levels of actual flows (tourism receipts and arrivals, migrants, used internet bandwidth, volume of trade in cultural products, and number of McDonald stores) relating to social integration	
Social globalization (de jure) (SGj)	The index is comprised of interpersonal, informational, and cultural globalization subindices. Range is from 0 to 100, with higher scores showing the use of more enabling policies that facilitate flows. This includes aspects such as access to internet, degree of freedom in the press, number of international airports, and level of civil liberty	
Political globalization (de facto) (PGf)	De facto measure considers the level of actual involvement of international organizations in domestic politics. Proxies include the number of embassies and international NGO activity for example. Scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating higher political integration	
Political globalization (de jure) (PGj)	De jure index includes aspects relating to number of international treaties the customs union has and the diversity in treaty partners. Scores on the index range from 0 to 100, with higher scores showcasing a higher degree of enabling policies to facilitate global political integration	
Real GDP per capita (GDP)	Real levels of gross domestic product (GDP) are measured on a per capita basis, denominated in US dollars	WEF (2023)
Human capital index (HC)	The UN HDI, education subindex, is used as a proxy for levels of human capital within SACU, considering the mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling. The range is from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating higher levels of skill	UN (2023)
Institutional quality (IQ)	Geometric aggregation of five normalized individual variables from the WGI database. It includes variables pertaining to rule of law, political stability, government effectiveness, control of corruption, and regulatory quality. Values range from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating better quality of institutions	World Bank (2023b)

Note: FDI, foreign direct investment; NGO, nongovernmental organization; SACU, Southern African Customs Union; WGI, worldwide governance indicators.

The difference between the two tests is that the latter can specifically accommodate several variable lengths, which the former is unable to. Based on this, the test is considered more robust (Hsiao, 2014). The inquiry proceeded by employing unit root analysis. Although primarily used in time-series studies, their application in panel data studies has gained significant traction over the last decade. This is often based on datasets that have included larger time observations (T) and cross-sectional units (N) (Baltagi, 2005), notably reducing various risks toward understanding the stationarity properties of the variables under consideration. In this respect, the study used two second-generation unit root tests, including cross-sectionally augmented Dickey–Fuller (CADF) and Im–Pesaran–Shin (CIPS) tests. The selection of these tests over conventional, first-generation tests such as Kwiatkowski–Phillips–Schmidt–Shin (KPSS) and ADF is due to their ability to account for possible cross-correlations across the residuals of the panel units (Hurlin & Mignon, 2006). In doing so, the possibility of encountering size distortions and low power in identifying the order of integration can be avoided. Both the CIPS and CADF tests use the null hypothesis of panel unit root, though the latter is considered superior, as it is based on the average of individual CADF test statistics.

Finally, the likelihood of country-specific heterogeneity was tested after determining these data properties. This allows the analysis to account for specific properties of the parameter's slope to avoid erroneous selection of estimators. In this respect, conventional panel estimators such as the fixed, pooled, and random effects were built on the assumption that these slopes exhibit strong homogeneity and can lead to spurious results in the presence of strong country heterogeneity. The study utilized Pesaran and Yamagata's (2008) slope homogeneity test. It uses two test statistics, both a delta and delta-adjusted version. The former is expressed as:

$$\hat{\Delta} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \left(\frac{\sum_{i=1}^N \tilde{d}_i - k_2}{\sqrt{2k_2}} \right) \quad (3)$$

where, \tilde{d}_i is representative of the weighted difference between the coefficients of both a pooled effects and cross-sectional unit-specific regression. Including this specific term is based on the control for possible heteroscedasticity. By augmenting the equation to further accommodate for normally distributed errors, the adjusted test is specified as follows:

$$\hat{\Delta}_{\text{adj}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \left(\frac{\sum_{i=1}^N \tilde{d}_i - k_2}{\sqrt{\text{Var}(\tilde{z}_i T_i)}} \right) \quad (4)$$

Since both tests are utilized, any possible influence of cross-sectional correlations, which can distort the selection of estimators, is accounted for. This is done by explicitly accounting for cross-sectional averages and isolating them.

Econometric Estimation Technique and Model Specification

The following step in the analysis pertains to identifying any possible long-run relationships. The Pedroni test and the Westerlund test for cointegration were selected. Both were chosen based on their ability to partially or fully accommodate the effects of possible cross-sectional dependence. The Pedroni test uses a total of seven statistics divided into two groups. The first includes four test statistics focused on

group-mean (individual country) estimates. The second group consists of those estimates calculated based on the pooled statistics (within-dimension). Both groups make use of parametric and nonparametric test statistics in the identification of possible long-run relationships.

By adding to the robustness of identifying these relationships, the study employed the Westerlund test. In comparison to the Pedroni analysis, which is residual-based, this method focuses on structural dynamics without imposing any common factor restrictions. This approach can fully accommodate unit-specific short-run dynamics, slope parameters, and cross-sectional dependence. Westerlund structured the method for testing the null hypothesis of no cointegration, specifically through error-correction-based models. The null hypothesis can either be accepted or rejected based on whether the error correction term equals zero. While it contrasts Pedroni's approach in this respect, it does hold notable similarities as it also groups different test statistics into separate groups. The first category of test statistics tests the alternative hypothesis based on whether the panel as a whole shows signs of cointegration (panel estimates), while the second tests whether at least one unit (group estimates) presents evidence of a cointegrated relationship.

Next, the analysis determined the specific elasticities of the variables under consideration. This was done using a novel cross-sectionally augmented (CS) panel autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) model. Developed by Chudik and Pesaran (2015) and further refined by Ditzen (2018), much like conventional panel ARDL, the approach is helpful in distinguishing between the long-run and the short-run (equilibrium adjustment) dynamics. Furthermore, it provides more flexibility when the properties of the data are considered. Kollie (2020), from this perspective, highlights the estimation's advantage of being utilized even when the order of integration [$I(0)$ or $I(1)$] between the variables is mixed. Though, as an extension of dynamic common correlated effects (DCCE) estimators, CS-ARDL does differ from conventional panel estimators [including GMM, pooled, fixed, or random effects ordinary least squares (OLS)]. This is mainly due to the inclusion of cross-sectional averages, as the estimation seeks to filter out the effect of unobservable common factors (Pesaran, 2006). Moreover, it does not use maximum likelihood estimations, allowing it to account for any possible endogeneity. The estimation technique likewise offers the ability to overcome the shortcomings of other estimation techniques by accommodating the presence of cross-sectional dependence, slope heterogeneity, and even specific structural breaks inherent in the data (Kapetanios et al., 2011). Considering the specific timeframe of the study and the profound political changes the customs union has undergone, especially in the early 1990s, the selection of this estimation technique allays any apprehensions of misspecification.

Considering these advantages, the study analyzed the nexus between multidimensional globalization and employment outcomes using two broad models (a de facto model and a de jure model). Broadly, these two models followed the following specification:

$$EMP_{it} = \sum_{j=1}^p \theta_{ij} EMP_{i,t-j} + \sum_{j=0}^q \sigma'_{ij} x_{i,t-j} + \sum_{j=0}^r \delta_{ij} \bar{Z}_{t-1} + \tau_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (5)$$

where EMP_{it} refers to the employment rate within the customs union, and x_{it} denotes the vector of independent variables for each group i as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, θ_{ij} represents a scalar of coefficients for the lagged dependent variables, σ'_{ij} represents a vector of coefficients for the included independent variable, and τ_i shows the individual-specific effects. The error term, which captures the disturbances assumed to be independently distributed across the time dimension and cross-sections, is reflected by ε_{it} . Finally, \bar{Z}_{t-1} is representative of the lagged cross-sectional averages of the regressors

and δ_{ij} the vector of coefficients for these regressors. The latter is included to partial-out the unobservable common effects. In order to calculate the long-run estimates of the model, the following formula is used:

$$\hat{\lambda}_{CS-ARDL,ij} = \frac{\sum_{j=0}^q \hat{\sigma}'_{ij}}{1 - \sum_{j=1}^p \hat{\theta}_{ij}} \quad (6)$$

where $\hat{\sigma}'_{ij}$ and $\hat{\theta}_{ij}$ represent the short-run coefficients for the lagged dependent and independent variables. In line with this, Eq. (5) can then be reformulated into the error-correction form:

$$\Delta EMP_{it} = \alpha_i \left(EMP_{i,t-j} - \lambda_{ij} x_{i,t} \right) - \sum_{j=1}^{p-1} \theta_{ij} \Delta_I EMP_{i,t-1} + \sum_{j=0}^q \sigma'_{ij} \Delta x_{i,t-j} + \sum_{j=0}^r \delta_{ij} \bar{Z}_{t-1} + \tau_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (7)$$

Here, $\Delta_I = t - (t-1)$, $(EMP_{i,t-j} - \lambda_{ij} x_{i,t})$, and α_i would then reflect the error correction term and its coefficient, respectively. The latter is used as a measure to determine the speed of adjustment toward the long-run equilibrium. To confirm cointegration, α_i is expected to be smaller than zero and statistically significant.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

The analysis began with a descriptive overview of the variables (Table 2). The average employment rate within the customs union is above the 70% threshold. However, it is poor compared to similar developing regions such as Brazil (90.55%), Venezuela (91.06%), Egypt (90.04%), Mauritius (91.72%), and Nigeria (95.82%). Unfortunately, this issue has worsened over the past three decades and poses a considerable challenge to the customs union's development endeavors. Furthermore, Table 2 reveals notable differences between the de facto and de jure globalization indices. Economic flows (ECGDF)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max	Observations
EMP	75.226	5.183	62.060	86.180	155
ECGDF	59.118	9.951	30.758	77.554	155
ECGDJ	44.030	10.553	21.929	64.825	155
SOGDF	45.783	10.092	22.418	64.097	155
SOGDJ	55.203	10.143	33.127	75.309	155
POGDF	43.050	25.025	16.492	92.671	155
POGDJ	52.183	16.861	7.121	86.685	155
HC	53.624	11.171	35.543	75.321	155
GDP	8,508.078	4,038.096	1,542.793	15,118.000	155
IQ	52.820	8.854	35.240	67.303	155

exhibit the highest mean score, followed by SOGdf and POGdf, suggesting deeper integration in economic ties than in social and political dimensions. Notably, South Africa recorded a maximum score of 92.671, indicating substantial global connectivity compared to other union members, reinforcing its role as Africa's gateway partner (Ngepah et al., 2021).

The results for the control variables, relating to the mean scores for human capital levels ($\bar{x} = 53.624$), indicate a lower average level of skills within the customs union. Maximum scores were recorded for South Africa (HC = 75.321; 2015), while minimum scores were recorded for Eswatini (HC = 35.543; 2004). The relatively high standard deviation scores for GDP per capita reflect the underlying economic diversity within the structure of the customs union. Botswana and South Africa are considered more economically developed, while Lesotho and Eswatini attribute much lower per capita income levels. Though the members differ in this respect, the challenge relating to the development of sound institutional structures has been overwhelmingly uniform. This is reflected in the low mean score of 52.820 for the members throughout the sample period.

Preliminary Analysis

Table 3 shows the results of the cross-sectional dependence tests. Using LM-based and CD tests, the findings confirm that the null hypothesis (cross-sectional independence) can be rejected at least at the 1% significance level. While both test results confirm this for most variables, for levels of employment (de facto ECG and de jure ECG), only the Breusch and Pagan (1980) test seems to support that changes in the variables for one country depend on changes in another member.

The results shown in Table 3 hold notable implications. This is primarily about determining the stationarity of the data. Given the assumption of cross-sectional independence of conventional unit root tests, these were rendered less reliable. The analysis, therefore, proceeded with the use of second-generation unit root testing.

Table 3. Results for Cross-sectional (CS) Dependence Tests.

Variable	Cross-sectional Dependence Test		Result
	Breusch–Pagan LM	Pesaran CD	
LGDP	265.4966 (0.000***)	16.2619 (0.000***)	CS dependence
HC	223.5510 (0.000***)	14.7998 (0.000***)	CS dependence
EMP	27.5358 (0.002***)	1.3846 (0.166)	CS dependence
ECGDF	87.0726 (0.000***)	−0.7073 (0.479)	CS dependence
ECGDJ	206.0735 (0.000***)	14.2697 (0.310)	CS dependence
SOGDF	237.8758 (0.001***)	15.3940 (0.000***)	CS dependence
SOGDJ	271.9603 (0.000***)	16.4825 (0.000***)	CS dependence
POGDF	44.8369 (0.000***)	−1.0139 (0.000***)	CS dependence
POGDJ	283.9878 (0.000***)	16.8475 (0.000***)	CS dependence
IQ	75.2670 (0.000***)	6.5732 (0.000***)	CS dependence

Note: *** denotes 1% significance levels.

Second-generation Unit Root Tests and Slope Homogeneity

The study employed two types of unit root tests: The CIPS test and the CADF test to estimate both at level and with trend. The results (Table 4) indicate a mixture of stationarity properties among the variables. For the social and political globalization dimensions (de facto and de jure), results inferred stationarity at levels. At the same time, EMP, HC, LGDP, ECGdf, ECGdj, and IQ were all integrated at $I(1)$.

Next, the following step determined whether the data used and models to be estimated exhibited any cross-sectional homogeneity (no notable country heterogeneity). The slope homogeneity test developed by Pesaran and Yamagata (2008) and Blomquist and Westerlund (2013) was utilized. Table 5 shows that for both the de facto and de jure models, the delta and adjusted-delta tests infer the rejection of the slope homogeneity hypothesis (H_0) at the 1% significance level.

These preliminary findings provide important insight, much like the unit root test results. In fact, it showed that the analysis required using dynamic panel estimation due to the inability of conventional panel estimators to accommodate strong country heterogeneity within the dataset.

Table 4. Second-generation Unit Root Test Results.

Variable	CIPS				CADF				Result
	Level	Level (Trend)	First Difference	First Difference (Trend)	Level	Level (Trend)	First Difference	First Difference (Trend)	
HC	-1.304	-0.958	-2.384**	-2.727	-1.878	-1.636	-1.691	-2.212	$I(1)$
EMP	-1.705	-2.374	-3.499***	-3.308***	-1.544	-2.391	-2.478**	-2.139	$I(1)$
LGDP	-1.255	-2.067	-5.366***	-5.498***	-1.433	-2.032	-3.225***	-3.361***	$I(1)$
ECGDF	-1.554	-2.338	-4.968***	-4.839***	-1.398	-2.257	-2.832**	-3.192**	$I(1)$
ECGDJ	-2.059	-2.002	-4.985***	-5.084***	-0.978	-0.856	-2.361*	-2.974*	$I(1)$
SOGDF	-2.312*	-2.345	-4.934***	-4.952***	-2.973***	-3.248**	-2.719**	-2.604	$I(0)$
SOGDJ	-2.453**	-2.839*	-5.153***	-5.227***	-2.739***	-2.407	-2.566**	-3.123**	$I(0)$
POGDF	-2.454**	-2.251	-5.922***	-6.117***	-1.669	-1.245	-2.341*	-2.971*	$I(0)$
POGDJ	-3.621***	-3.839***	-5.201***	-5.230***	-3.862***	-3.627***	-3.799***	-3.476***	$I(0)$
IQ	-2.128	-2.253	-5.565***	-5.528***	-1.350	-2.066	-2.330**	-3.362***	$I(1)$

Note: CADF, cross-sectionally augmented Dickey–Fuller; CIPS, cross-sectionally augmented Im–Pesaran–Shin. ***, **, and * denotes 1%, 5% and 10% significance levels.

Table 5. Slope Homogeneity Tests.

Model	Test Statistics	Value	PValue	
Employment	De facto model	Delta ($\bar{\Delta}$)	8.079	.000***
		Delta ($\bar{\Delta}_{\text{adjusted}}$)	9.380	.000***
	De jure model	Delta ($\bar{\Delta}$)	8.176	.000***
		Delta ($\bar{\Delta}_{\text{adjusted}}$)	9.492	.000***

Note: *** denotes 1% significance level.

Panel Cointegration Analysis

Prior to determining the elasticities amongst the variables, the study employed two cointegration techniques to establish any possible long-run dynamics between the various dimensions of globalization and employment levels within SACU. For this purpose, the Pedroni (2004) and Westerlund (2007) tests were utilized. Table 6 reports the results for the former. Here, based on the seven estimated test statistics, results relating to the de facto model show that all rejected the null hypothesis of no cointegration (at least at the 5% significance level).

Similar results echoed for the de jure model. Almost all test statistics exceeded the critical values at the 1% significance level, apart from the PP and ADF stats for the between dimensions (at the 5% significance level). To further confirm these results, findings from the Westerlund test are reported in Table 7. Compared to the Pedroni test, this technique is more robust as it can accommodate specific slope parameters and cross-sectional dependence.

Table 6. Pedroni (2004) Cointegration Results.

Model	Tests	Within-dimension (Panel Estimation)		Between-dimension (Group Estimation)	
		Statistic	PValue	Statistic	PValue
De facto model	ν -statistic	-2.6111	.004***		
	ρ -statistic	1.5967	.0552*	3.3604	.000***
	PP-statistic	-1.9528	.0254**	1.6541	.049**
	ADF-statistic	-2.2158	.0134**	1.7140	.0433**
De jure model	ν -statistic	-3.3693	.000***		
	ρ -statistic	2.7959	.003***	2.5861	.005***
	PP-statistic	2.4236	.007***	1.8090	.035**
	ADF-statistic	2.4938	.006***	1.7038	.044**

Note: ***, **, and * denotes 1%, 5%, and 10% significance levels.

Table 7. Westerlund Cointegration Results.

Model	Statistic	Value	Z-value	PValue
De facto model	Gt	-4.002	-4.026	.000***
	Ga	-16.192	-1.230	.109
	Pt	-6.009	-2.040	.021**
	Pa	-9.658	-0.237	.407
De jure model	Gt	-3.211	2.324	.010***
	Ga	-8.389	-0.458	.893
	Pt	-7.160	-2.786	.003***
	Pa	-6.660	-1.095	.137

Note: *** and ** denotes 1% and 5% significance levels.

Results from Table 7 are somewhat inconclusive. For both the de facto and de jure models, two of the four estimated test statistics supported rejecting the null hypothesis (no cointegration), while the other two did not.

Panel Regression Results

CS-ARDL and DCCE estimation techniques were used to estimate the specific elasticities between the individual regressors and the employment rate within the customs union. The latter served as a robustness check and ensured the reliability of the results. Estimated coefficients for both techniques are reported in Table 8. The main estimation results for Model 1 (de facto) suggest that amongst the three globalization dimensions, the null hypothesis (coeff. = 0) could only be rejected for the influence of social de facto globalization on employment dynamics. The coefficient of 0.0533 indicates that a unit increase in the SOGdf globalization index induces a 0.05% improvement in employment amongst the labor force.

The findings point to the possibility of several factors, including information flow, interpersonal connection, and cultural influence, that characterize the social features of global integration. Relating to these aspects, the critical role of a rapidly evolving technological sector, which has brought about greater access to information, contributes to reducing frictional barriers to securing employment (Saoudi, 2022). These aspects could also relate to structural features in the labor market, with ICT sectors, access to the internet, and more modern artificial intelligence applications allowing for the augmentation of skill sets through associated knowledge spillovers, especially in areas where it was not possible before (Ade-Ibijola & Okonkwo, 2023). Additionally, the greater mobility of people could improve employment outcomes mainly through the additional demand these countries' tourism sectors have induced (Ganeshamoorthy, 2019). Given the importance of migration for the smaller BELN states, this also speaks to the possible advantages that the inflow of remittances has toward improving the likelihood of employment creation in the domestic countries (Cha'Ngom et al., 2020).

While these findings shed light on the tangible influences, results from the de jure model (Models 2 and 4) provide insight into more intangible and policy-orientated aspects of global integration. In relation to these findings, first, as opposed to results from Model 1, economic globalization movements from the de jure side significantly (at the 5% significance level) influence employment levels within SACU member countries. In fact, given the coefficient of 0.0433, it confirms that features such as trade and investment agreements are employment-inducing within the REC. Supported by the results of the DCCE estimation, the findings highlight the importance of the various international ties that SACU has facilitated as a regional REC. The importance of this is twofold. On the one hand, it speaks to the support of most modernization theorists (Dallmayr, 1993; Nilsen, 2016). Here, the liberalization of capital accounts, the adoption of trade policies, and SACU's involvement in various international investment treaties are employment-inducing. On the other hand, it also points to more internal considerations. Given the structure of the REC and considering the central use of the CRP as a development tool (even though it has induced more vulnerability), the additional resources garnered, especially by BELN states, mainly through trade caused by the South African hegemon in this respect has been beneficial in the development of their labor markets (Aromolaran & Olebogeng, 2021).

Relating to the impact of SOGdj, the results from Table 8 also show that increases in the integration from a social point of view positively influence labor market outcomes. The z -statistic of 3.39 indicates a statistically significant impact at a 1% significance level. In light of this finding, considering the de jure nature of the estimation, it supports various important considerations from the literature. Amongst these,

Table 8. Cross-sectionally Augmented Autoregressive Distributed Lag (CS-ARDL) and Dynamic Common Correlated Effect (DCCE) Estimation (Long-run Results).

Variable	CS-ARDL		DCCE Estimation		
	De facto (1)	De jure (2)	De facto (3)	De jure (3)	De jure (4)
L.EMP			0.5168 (0.146) [3.43***]	0.5432 (0.239) [2.26**]	
EGDF	0.0426 (0.011) [2.83**]		0.0943 (0.072) [1.86]		
SOGDF	0.0533 (0.018) [2.62***]		0.0571 (0.011) [2.72***]		
POGDF	-0.0433 (0.046) [-0.93]		0.0772 (0.096) [0.80]		
ECGDJ		0.0433 (0.028) [2.13**]		0.0640 (0.064) [2.26**]	
SOGDJ		0.1469 (0.057) [3.39***]		0.2098 (0.209) [1.97**]	
POGDJ		-0.0938 (0.068) [-1.38]		0.0908 (0.090) [0.23]	
LGDP	-0.0146 (0.036) [-0.40]	-0.0275 (0.038) [-0.71]	-0.0695 (0.069) [-1.01]	0.0644 (0.064) [-2.18**]	
HC	-0.4640 (0.166) [-2.61***]	-0.2976 (0.073) [-2.89***]	-1.0205 (0.419) [-2.46***]	1.4199 (1.419) [-1.03]	
IQ	0.2084 (0.154) [3.35***]	0.1844 (0.150) [1.84*]	0.2571 (0.114) [0.44]	0.0786 (0.078) [2.05**]	
R-squared	0.67	0.62	0.57		0.67
Root mean squared error (MSE)	0.32	0.31	0.80		0.70
CD Statistic	0.77	1.27	0.97		-0.91
P Value	.443	.204	.331		.361

Notes: ***, **, and * denotes 1%, 5%, and 10% significance levels; () shows standard errors and [] the z-stats.

it relates to the positive impact that the investment and development of the ICT sectors have had as leading policy foci (SACU, 2022). This is an important finding considering the results from the de facto analysis, which supports the idea that policies and resources employed on a de jure basis have, to some extent, successfully translated to enabling tangible (de facto) conditions toward job creation opportunities. From a cultural perspective, this can be attested to better gender parity levels, as well as policies directed toward enhancing civil liberty through cultural interpenetration globalization has induced (Jadoon et al., 2016). This can speak to both the historical and contemporary features of these member states. On the one hand, the transition from a unilateral authoritative structure to a more democratic REC that allowed for better involvement in decision-making (especially for the smaller states) seems to have contributed to more than just enhanced macroeconomic stability (Aromolaran & Olebogeng, 2021), but so too a better distribution of resources aimed at improving labor market processes. On the other hand, for more modern considerations, as the REC has liberalized on the basis of multicultural fluency through the increased mobility of people and greater media access, the results support the literature suggesting that these flows improve employment outcomes, specifically for groups such as women (Asongu et al., 2020). The improvement of this group's employment outcomes is associated with the effect of cultural interpenetration, a process closely associated with the erosion of stringent cultural and traditional norms within the African context (Oloka-Onyango, 2005; Wang et al., 2020).

Considering that both economic and social dimensions (either through de facto or de jure impulses) imposed implications for employment outcomes, the results from Models 1 to 4 reject the findings of others in relation to the impact of political ties with the rest of the world. The results suggest that the null hypothesis (coeff. = 0) cannot be rejected, even at a 10% significance level. In addition to these results, findings relating to the three control variables provide some interesting insight. The estimates relating to the levels of human capital in three of the four models seem to provide contrasting findings with a priori expectations (Becker, 1962; Neeliah & Seetana, 2019). The negative and statistically significant coefficients here possibly reflect the struggle of the customs union members in relation to the structural barriers to creating employment and the oversupply of low-skilled job seekers (World Bank, 2022). This comes specifically based on the skill-biased demand of modern integration processes and the associated higher rates of return on highly skilled human capital (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). These positive relationships were also supported in relation to levels of institutional quality. The finding here is in line with Ajide and Raheem (2016) and Jama and Nayan (2022), which support the significance of sound institutional structures, especially at the regional level, to adequately facilitate and direct the flows relating to FDI, remittances, and the foreign exchange earnings from the export and imports of goods and services. Contrastingly, within the main estimation, the influence of levels of economic growth was not deemed statistically significant on the employment outcomes of the labor force within the customs union.

In addition to the long-run analysis, the study likewise estimated the short-run elasticities between the variables. Although this was not the main objective of the study, it was done for two main reasons. The first was to determine, through means of the ECT, whether there is sufficient evidence to support the fact that there was correction back to a long-run equilibrium state (cointegration). Second, it also assisted in determining whether the nature of the relationships was consistent within the two timeframes. Results in this respect are shown in Table 9.

From the results, ECT coefficients for both Models 5 and 6 were statistically significant (at the 1% significance level), negative, and between 0 and 1. This supports the cointegration results presented in Tables 6 and 7. Interestingly, both coefficients here for the models suggest a relatively even speed of adjustment back to the equilibrium employment rate for both de jure and de facto impulses (between 22.25% and 25.91% per annum). In addition to this, when comparing the short-run elasticities to those

Table 9. Cross-sectionally Augmented Autoregressive Distributed Lag (CS-ARDL) Short-run Results.

Variable	De facto (5)			De jure (6)		
	Coeff.	Std. Error	Z-stat	Coeff.	Std. Error	Z-stat
Δ L.EMP	0.2225	(0.197)	[1.13]	0.2591	(0.103)	[2.49***]
Δ ECGDF	0.0561	(0.012)	[3.75***]			
Δ SOGDF	0.0516	(0.029)	[1.87*]			
Δ POGDF	0.0677	(0.073)	[0.92]			
Δ ECGDJ				0.0931	(0.043)	[2.90***]
Δ SOGDJ				0.1671	(0.038)	[3.41***]
Δ POGDJ				-0.0989	(0.078)	[-1.25]
Δ LGDP	-0.0230	(0.032)	[-0.70]	-0.0324	(0.043)	[-0.75]
Δ HC	-0.5754	(0.146)	[-3.35***]	-0.4811	(0.648)	[-0.90]
Δ IQ	0.1821	(0.164)	[1.10]	0.2331	(0.239)	[0.97]
ECT	-0.2225	(0.027)	[6.20***]	-0.2591	(0.013)	[-12.12***]

Notes: ***, **, and * denotes 1%, 5%, and 10% significance; () shows standard errors and [] the z-stats.

shown in Table 8, in both instances (Models 5 and 6), the direction of the impact of the IVs on the REC's employment outcomes seems to be mostly consistent. However, from the de facto estimation, some interesting differences are presented. This relates to the evidence supporting the significant impact of the economic features that were absent from both Models 1 and 3. Impulses generated from aspects such as the revenue generated through foreign investment and trade only seem to have notable short-run effects. This can be explained on the basis of both the RECs' peripheral position in the global trade and investment arena (Moyo & Chikwanha, 2022). Additionally, given their over-reliance on natural resources to facilitate most of their global exchanges, it has seen them participating only in low value-added GVCs (Banga & Balchin, 2019), which can explain the lack of sustainable enhancing effects for the functioning of their labor markets.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's objective was to investigate the employment and globalization dynamics within SACU member countries, specifically distinguishing between the process' de facto and de jure impulses. The inquiry brought to light several pertinent findings and illuminated important considerations in understanding the specific nuances within this area of focus. The analysis has shown just how encompassing globalization is and the need to understand it from a multidimensional perspective. On the one hand, the process has the potential to expand the market size, facilitate wider informational flows, and allow greater political connections to benefit various areas in countries' development trajectories. On the other hand, it brings significant unintended challenges, particularly for labor, through various processes ranging from adverse incorporation to the threat that its associated technological advances and skilled-biased nature promotes. Adding to this debate, the findings of the study largely support the idea that globalization benefits job seekers in their endeavor to find employment within SACU. In this respect, it does provide some interesting insight into the intricacy of the globalization process itself and the nature of the customs union.

The main impulses from the customs union's integration seem to emanate from mainly the economic and social dimensions. The increasingly significant ICT sectors and informational flows have largely improved employment outcomes, arguably related to better possible search and matching processes as well as the associated knowledge transfers that go with greater integration. In this respect, the alignment of policy foci for the customs union seems to have paid dividends. Additionally, these findings, considering the influence of cultural factors, can also be linked to the evolution of the customs union itself. This is reflected in the REC's adoption of more democratic values, and the use of collective resources to improve the employment outlook of women subjugated to possible traditional norms revolving around care duties and time allocation to more productive activities. These influences were also evident from an economic perspective. Here, findings supported most modernization theorists, who believe capital account liberalization and involvement in trade agreements allow for greater employment capacity. It likewise provided significant and nuanced insight into the functioning of internal SACU mechanisms. Central to these mechanisms, specifically for smaller member states, results point to the effective use of the CRP as a development tool. By facilitating the distribution of resources and aiding the development of labor market conditions for these members, it has allowed for a more beneficial integration and better outcomes for job seekers. Despite these takeaways, the findings also alluded to some concerns about the sustainability of the economic integration of SACU. These concerns specifically pointed to the inability of the members to move away from their natural resource dependence, which has placed them largely at the periphery of global economic processes.

Some important implications need to be considered from a policy perspective. This specifically relates to the prioritization of the customs union to diversify its economic structures. This would allow for more value-added and inclusive participation in GVCs and move away from mainly natural resources. The study showed that member states attributed specific skill shortages and, consequently, lower productivity; therefore, skills development and the improvement of educational structures should be a central focus. This should include the development of vocational training and aligning qualifications better with the needs of the private sector as early as secondary education structures, given the large youth cohort at these members' disposal. Furthermore, other areas for consideration should include an enhanced drive to deeper regional integration and a particular focus on the improvement of policy coordination so as to provide more conducive levels of institutional quality and bridge the discrepancies between the de facto and de jure impulses within the REC. This could be facilitated through regional investment promotion strategies coupled with a strong competition policy. Finally, given the importance of information access within this nexus, the further development of ICT sectors should ensure the eradication of notable digital divides in these countries. In light of these suggestions, relating to the inquiry itself, further research areas based on the study's limitations should look to understand the specific influence on different skill levels and their probability of employment. Also, more focus can be placed on understanding the type of employment opportunities (informal, formal, and vulnerable) that need to be increased. In this regard, the analysis was unable to answer these questions on the basis of the use of the general employment rate as the dependent variable.

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