

A possible African accounting harmonization based on IFRS standards and European example – case of the ACFTA

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Abstract:

This study explores the potential for accounting harmonization within ACFTA (the African Continental Free Trade Area), as was the case of the European Union which made IFRS mandatory for the consolidated accounts of listed companies. To this end, a literature review was conducted using a descriptive approach, along with the use of standard deviation as quantitative analysis tool. The study concluded that accounting harmonization within the area is feasible, provided that alignment with the OHABL (Organization for the Harmonization in Africa of Business Law) is pursued, given its appropriate institutional structure and recommends intensifying research around the evolution of the accounting scene within the area, and particular monitoring of the contribution of the accounting profession in said evolution. However, it was limited by insufficient data as it's relatively a new phenomenon.

Keywords: Accounting harmonization, Africa, ACFTA, OHABL, Institutional structure.

Jel Classification Codes : K40; M41; M42; M48.

Résumé:

La présente étude explore d'éventuelle harmonisation comptable au sein de la ZLECAF (Zone de Libre Echange Continentale Africaine) à l'instar de l'exemple de l'Union Européenne qui a rendu obligatoire l'application des normes IFRS pour les comptes consolidés des sociétés cotées. Pour ce faire, un scan bibliographique descriptif a été mené, appuyé par l'utilisation de l'écart type comme outil de recherche quantitative. L'étude a conclu une possible harmonisation comptable au sein de la zone, à condition d'un rapprochement avec l'OHADA (Organisation pour l'Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires) compte tenu d'une structure institutionnelle appropriée, elle recommande l'intensification des recherches autour de l'évolution de la scène comptable au sein de la zone, notamment la contribution de la profession comptable dans cette évolution. Elle est toutefois limitée par l'insuffisance de données s'agissant d'un phénomène relativement nouveau.

Mots clés: Harmonisation comptable, Afrique, ZLECAF, OHADA, Structure institutionnelle.

Jel Classification Codes : K40; M41; M42; M48.

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I. Introduction

Accounting development retains the characteristic of being linked to economic development; it means that economic circumstances affect, voluntarily or involuntarily, the accounting scene of any geographical area, whether developed or developing (*Najaf, Atayah, & Devi, 2022*). To name but a few, steps are currently (2021-2025) being accelerated towards strengthening intra-African trade in order to revive it as a distinctive global economic hub in the medium term (*Larguet & Bouakkaz, 2023*).

And since addressing Africa implies addressing Europe because of the historical and cultural links between them, in addition to the economic links where Europe remains its preferred supplier (*Brito, 2024*), the accounting issue must also be addressed in view of the European experience in adopting IFRS in 2005 and the possibility of linking it in the ACFTA. As part of the launch of the ACFTA, the accounting landscape resulting from the adoption of IFRS by member states has been highlighted, particularly their adoption by 17 OHABL countries all at once (Organization for Harmonization in Africa of Business Law), in addition to the increase in the number of ratifiers from 23 to 47 in five years, following the increase in the number of EU (European Union) members from 15 to 25 in ten years adopting IFRS for entities listed on a regular market.

I.1 Objective, hypothesis and method

This paper attempts to explore the possibility of accounting harmonization within the ACFTA, particularly given that the IFRS adoption rate by the end of 2025 exceeds 80%. Therefore, the following fundamental question can be posed: can the African Free Trade Area achieve an account harmonization similar to the European example?

The basic hypothesis adopted as an answer to the study's problem is expressed as follows: a possible accounting harmonization within the ACFTA is contingent upon alignment with OHABL; for examination of its validity, our research used a bibliographic scan of works published in famous journals, statistics communicated by international auditing and accounting organizations such as IFRSF, IFAC..., as well as reports from official bodies related to this work such as the ACFTA secretariat and national committees, the EU, the IMF..., etc. To enable our research to take advantage of the data collected, we implemented a quantitative analysis approach, using mathematical techniques of sum and mean, and especially the statistical technique of standard deviation.

I.2 Previous studies

Selected previous studies are approached as follows:

□ A latest study which examined the effects of accounting harmonization on the market over the last 20 years using 181 Scopus articles, yielded mixed results regarding quality and comparability, obtained through multivariate regression and structural equation modeling. Indeed, the accounting dimensions exhibited weak direct effects and negative indirect effects. This led the authors to question the common assumption that IFRS improves the market; (*Pirveli & Jochen, 2026*); in other words, accounting harmonization can be achieved even in the absence of a capital market;

□ Another study has examined, through a comparative critical analysis focused on comparability, the consequences of exercising control on the adoption of IFRS in Europe. The results indicate, in particular: the consequences are more pronounced if control is rigorous (as in the United Kingdom and Germany), and less so if control is weak (as in Spain and Italy). To benefit from the adoption of IFRS, it is not enough to simply adopt them; they must be accompanied by rigorous control (*Cualain & Vincent, 2023*). In other words, the involvement of the accounting profession is crucial for exemplary harmonization;

□ The African context is different. Accounting harmonization in Africa has not attracted the interest of researchers given the specificities of accounting environment, marked in particular by: a weak representation in international accounting and auditing organizations as was the comment of (*Nzorubara, 2023*) on the presence of IFAC in Africa, where it was raised that it has 31 member organizations spread across 29 countries, describing it as insufficient and that Africa is underrepresented in terms of the profession, and a limited production of publications dealing with the accounting situation, that the first of kind was indexed and reported in Scopus from 2005 onwards (*Ezenwoke & Tion, 2020*);

□ Another study has focused on accounting harmonization and FPI (Foreign Portfolio Investment) in Africa, others have included the institutional structure, given its moderating effect. In this regard, a panel data analysis highlighted the importance of institutional variables in the impact of IFRS adoption on FPI, particularly in cases of full convergence. The results underscored the need to move beyond simple convergence to the adoption of an institutional structure capable of ensuring rigorous application of IFRS (*Oyerinde, 2019*). In other words, the emphasis is placed on legal and judicial legislation.

□ An earlier study aimed to shed light, through a questionnaire, on the contributions, prospects, and difficulties of introducing IFRS in Africa. The 102 results collected show that adoption is beneficial for cross-border subsidiaries

and access to capital markets. Its success depends on quality training and a strong qualified accounting organization. Its challenges revolve around institutional weaknesses and a struggling ethical environment (*Owolabi & Francis, 2012*). In other words, the adoption of IFRS in Africa requires awareness, training and professional qualifications; factors which in turn require rigorous regulation of accounting, audit and control.

From the above, literature focusing on the European example examines through a retrospective approach the effects of deepening accounting harmonization in listed companies; Literature focusing on the African experience is dedicated to foundations of successful harmonization given the previously unfavorable environmental factors, without referring to the ACFTA as a distinct economic bloc. Our study represents an initial forward-looking contribution comparing the African experience, represented by the ACFTA, with the European example, represented by the EU. It uses standard deviation as a potentially more appropriate research tool, given the lack of previous studies of this kind.

II. Harmonizing accounting practices

II.1 IFRS in the EU

II.1.1 Progress of joining EU

Since its creation, the EU has always registered a growing number of members (*European Union, 2025*), given the advantages offered by the organization of states under an economic bloc form, while the largest enlargement took place in 2004 with the accession of 10 countries in one fell swoop (*Lee & Dominique , 2004*), the majority of which came from Eastern Europe as shown in table n°01 below:

Table (01): progress of joining EU

Year	States concerned	Department	Total
1958	France, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, Italy	Western Europe	06
1973	United Kingdom, Ireland	" " "	09
	Denmark	Eastern Europe	
1981	Greece	Central Europe	10
1986	Spain, Portugal	Western Europe	12
1995	Austria	" " "	15
	Finlad, Sweden	Eastern Europe	
2004	Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech republic, Slovakia	" " "	25
	Cyprus	South Europe	
	Malta	" " "	
	Slovenia	Central Europe	
2007	Bulgaria, Romania	Eastern Europe	27
2013	Croatia	" " "	28
2020	Exit of the United Kingdom	Western Europe	27
2038	Ukraine, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Turkey, Western Balkan countries	Several	33

Source: Author's work

The results show massive support from the Eastern countries, estimated at 48%, followed by the Western countries at 37%, then a balance between central and southern countries, estimated at 7,5% respectively, despite the formation of the Community space having started in Western Europe.

II.1.2 Progress of accounting harmonization

II.1.2.1 Period of (1968-2005)

The process of accounting harmonization began in 1968, that's 10 years after the implementation of the common market, through the coordination of corporate law within the EEC&E (European Economic Community and Euratom); it spanned almost 20 years and affected several fields, the most substantial of which are: the 4th directive of 1978 on individual companies, and the 7th one of 1983 on consolidated accounts (*Bensadon, 2016*). Regarding the period (1986-1991), the EC (European Council) published other guidelines on the annual and consolidated accounts of banks, financial institutions and insurance companies

Since 2000, accounting harmonization changed form; it will be based on adoption of regulations that the first of which, under the number 1606, dates back to 19/07/2002. This regulation was the fruit of the European Union's strategy on financial reporting, adopted at the European Commission meeting of 13/06/2000 in order to constrain member states on adoption of IAS/IFRS standards for publication of their consolidated accounts from 2005 onwards (*European Union Law, 2002*).

Also, the harmonization process post adoption of regulation n°1606 is divided in two levels: a technical level entrusted to the EFRAG (European Financial Reporting Advisory Group), and a political level entrusted to the ARC (Accounting Regulatory Committee). In this regard, EFRAG's missions are focused on:

- advise the European Commission on adoption and interpretation of IFRS;
- participate in the IASB standardization process;
- coordinate European views on accounting standards (*EFRAG, 2025*);

While the ARC provides opinion over the adoption of IFRS in order to allow the European legislator (Parliament and Council), through the European Commission, to exercise prior control over the adoption of measures to implement decisions (*European Commission, 2025*).

II.1.2.2 Period of (2006-2025)

From 2006 onwards, financial accounting, and many other related fields such as: tax, auditing and non-financial information, have benefited from particular regulatory attention (*eu-regulations.com, 2025*), the peak of which was observed in the period (2014-2019) (*Labro & Pierk, 2025*) as shown in table below n°02:

Table (02): Guidelines (2014-2016)

Guideline		Content
N°	Year	
2014/56	2014	Amending directive 2006/43/EC
2014/95	" " "	Disclosure of non-financial and diversity-related information by some large companies and groups
2014/537	" " "	Selected requirements applicable to the legal audit of the accounts of public interest entities
2016/1164	2016	Rules against tax avoidance practices that affect the internal market

Source: Author's work

II.2 IFRS in Africa

II.2.1 OHABL conception

OHABL is the product of the treaty relating to the harmonization of business law; signed in 1993 by 17 sub-Saharan African states, members of the franc zone, in order to promote the legal and judicial security of economic activities in their territories (*OHADA, 2026*). Since its creation, OHABL has established five institutions namely: the conference of heads of states and governments, the council of ministers, the permanent secretariat, the common court of justice and arbitration, and the regional higher school of magistrates. It exercises its prerogatives through the adoption of uniform acts, the most relevant to our study of which concerns the organization and harmonization of company accounting of March 24, 2000; replaced by the act of January 26, 2017 relating to accounting law and financial information, one of whose major innovations is the mandatory adoption of IFRS standards for listed companies and those making a public offering of savings from January 1st, 2019 (*Joachim & al, 2021*).

II.2.2 ACFTA conception

ACFTA is an economic area covering 54 African states; it was established on March 21, 2018 to constitute the second worldwide trade agreement since the creation of the WTO (World Trade Organization). As a reminder, the African Union launched negotiations on the constitution of a free trade zone in 2015. The

agreement was ratified in 2018 and entered into force in 2019, while effective free trade began in 2021.

At the time of its entry into force, the ACFTA had 24 ratifying states out of a total of 54 signatory states (*cn-ZLECAf, 2024*), the majority of which came from west Africa; it means 11 countries representing a rate of 46% as shown in the table n°03 below:

Table (03): Origin of the first 24 ratifiers

North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa	Total
Egypt, Republic Democratic Sahrawi	Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Gambia	Congo, Chad	Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda	South Africa Eswatini Amibia Zimbabwe	24
02	11	02	05	04	

Source: Author's work

Five years later, in 2024, the number of ratifiers had almost doubled following the accession of 23 states (*cn-ZLECAf, 2024*) ; (*UE-OMD, 2024*) the majority of which came from central and southern Africa, with numbers of 06 and 08 respectively, and rates of 26% and 35% as shown in the table n°4 below:

Table (04): Origin of the last 23 ratifiers

North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa	Total
Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia	Cape Verde, Equatorial- Guinea, Guinea- Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria	Angola, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, São Tomé	Tanzania	Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Zambia, Lesotho	23
03	05	06	01	08	

Source: Author's work

In the same context, the ACFTA is awaiting the deposit of instruments of ratification from 07 states which are: Benin, Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan; on the other hand, Eritrea has expressed its disapproval regarding the signing or even the ratification.

III. Data analysis

III.1 ACFTA IFRS Landscape before 2019

given the specificities of African accounting environment, and within the context of the implementation of the ACFTA which coincides with the adoption of IFRS by the 17 OHABL states, the African accounting scene (*Tawiah, 2019*) has undergone a major transformation, particularly in the west and the central

African territories, as illustrated in the figure n°1 below, where key colors were chosen as follows:

Yellow	Required for all entities
Green	Required for some entities
Cyan	Permitted
Pink	Not permitted
Grey	Other

Figure (01): IFRS before 2019

North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa
1ST SUBGROUP				
Egypt, Republic, Democratic, Sahrawi	Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Gambia	Congo, Chad	Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda	South Africa, Eswatini, Namibia, Zimbabwe
2ND SUBGROUP				
Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia	Cape Verde, Equatorial-Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria	Angola, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, São Tomé	Tanzania	Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Zambia, Lesotho
05	16	08	06	12

Source: Author's work

The figure shows that it is possible to classify results concerning the 1st subgroup as follows: IFRS are not permitted in 09 countries representing 37,5% of the territory, they are mandatory in 8 countries (7&1) representing 33% of the space, while they are recommended in only 03 countries representing 12,5% of the whole. Also, it's possible to classify results concerning the 2nd subgroup as follows: IFRS are not permitted in 11 countries representing 48% of the territory, they are mandatory in 10 countries (7&3) representing 43% of the space, while they recommended in only 02 countries representing 9% of the whole. From the above, results justify the convergence of the accounting characteristics of member subgroups, or even a similar influence on the accounting characteristics of the zone as a whole.

III .2 Landscape after 2019

The IFRS landscape in ACFTA after 2019 can be presented in figure n°02. The figure shows that it is possible to classify results concerning the 1st subgroup as follows: IFRS are not permitted in 02 countries representing 8,25% of the territory, they are mandatory in 18 countries (8&10) representing 75,25% of the space, while they are recommended in 02 countries representing 8,25% of the whole. Also, it's possible to classify results concerning the 2nd subgroup as follows: IFRS are not permitted in 05 countries representing 22% of the territory,

they are mandatory in 17 countries (7&10) representing 74% of the space, while they recommended in one country representing 4% of the whole. From the above, previous results are maintained.

Figure (02): IFRS after 2019

North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa
1ST SUBGROUP				
Egypt, Republic Democratic Sahrawi	Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Gambia	Congo, Chad	Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda	South Africa, Eswatini, Namibia, Zimbabwe
2ND SUBGROUP				
Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia	Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria	Angola, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, São Tomé	Tanzania	Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Zambia, Lesotho

Source: Author's work

III .3 Standard deviation results

Results of using standard deviation technique (*cashbee.fr, 2025*) to describe accounting scene of the ACFTA unit before 2019 are shown in table n°05 below:

Table (05): Standard deviation before 2019

Element	ACFTA		1 st subgroup		2 nd subgroup	
Mean of %	(32+8,5+11+40+8,5)/5	20	(29+4+12,5+37,5+17)/5	20	(30+13+9+48+0)/5	20
Deviation	(32-20) (8,5-20) (11-20) (40-20) (8,5-20)	12 -11,5 -9 20 -11,5	(29-20) (4-20) (12,5-20) (37,5-20) (17-20)	9 -16 -7,5 17,5 -3	(30-20) (13-20) (9-20) (48-20) (0-20)	10 -7 -11 28 -20
(Deviation) ²	(12) ² (-11,5) ² (-9) ² (20) ² (-11,5) ²	144 132,25 81 400 132,25	(9) ² (-16) ² (-7,5) ² (17,5) ² (-3) ²	81 256 56,25 306,25 9	(10) ² (-7) ² (-11) ² (28) ² (-20) ²	100 49 121 784 400
ΣDeviation ²	144+132,25+81+400 +132,25	889,50	81+256+56,25 +306,25+9	708,50	100+49+121+784 +400	1454
Mean of Σ	889,50/(5-1)	222,375	708,50/(5-1)	177,125	1454/(5-1)	363,5
√mean	√222,375	14,912	√177,125	13,308	√363,5	19,065

Source: Author's work

Results show a concentration of the overall standard deviation around 14,912; compared to the partial results, it's closer to the standard deviation of the 1st subgroup, estimated at 13,308. However, results obtained from using standard deviation to describe accounting landscape of the ACFTA unit after 2019 are shown in table n°06 below:

Table (06): Standard deviation after 2019

Element	ACFTA		1 st subgroup		2 nd subgroup	
Mean of %	(32+43+6+15+4)/5	20	(33,25+42+8,25+8,25+8,25)/5	20	(30+44+4+22+0)/5	20
Deviation	(32-20) (43-20) (6-20) (15-20) (4-20)	12 23 -14 5 -16	(33,25-20) (42-20) (8,25-20) (8,25-20) (8,25-20)	13,25 22 -11,75 -11,75 -11,75	(30-20) (44-20) (4-20) (22-20) (0-20)	10 24 -16 2 -20
(Deviation) ²	(12) ² (23) ² (-14) ² (5) ² (-16) ²	144 529 196 25 256	(13,25) ² (22) ² (-11,75) ² (11,75) ² (-11,75) ²	175,56 484 138,06 138,06 138,06	(10) ² (24) ² (-16) ² (2) ² (-20) ²	100 576 256 4 400
ΣDeviation ²	144+529+196 +25+256	1150	175,56+484+138,06 +138,06+138,06	1073,75	100+576+256+4 +400	1336
Mean of Σ	1150/(5-1)	287,5	1073,75/(5-1)	268,43	1336/(5-1)	334
√mean	√287,5	16,955	√268,4375	16,384	√334	18,275

Source: Author's work

Results show a concentration of the overall standard deviation around 16,955; compared to the partial results, it's closer to the standard deviation of the 1st subgroup, estimated at 16,384.

III .4 IFRS in 10 largest economic powers

With reference to the International Monetary Fund report on the top ten African economies at the end of 2025 (IMF, 2025) ; (ROBERTO TIENCHEU, 2025), and data concerning the ranking of countries by status of IFRS application, results in the following table n°07 are obtained:

Table (07): Top 10 African economies

State	Territory	IFRS Status	State	Territory	IFRS Status
South Africa	Southern Africa		Kenya	East Africa	
Egypt	North Africa		Ethiopia	“ “ “	
Algeria	“ “ “		Angola	Central Africa	
Nigeria	West Africa		Ivory Coast	West Africa	
Morocco	North Africa		Ghana	“ “ “	

Source: Author's work

The table above displays the results as follows:

- In terms of territory, the 10 concerned countries are thus classified by their belonging: 30% from the north, 30% from the west, 20% from the east, 10% from the center and 10% from the south;
- In terms of IFRS status, they are required for all companies in 40% of the ten concerned countries, required for some companies in 30%, permitted in only 10% and not permitted in 20% of them;

In view of the above, and in order to understand the accounting profession's degree of joining globalization, we will examine the membership of the sample members in the IFAC (international federation of accountants), including the year of their membership (IFAC, 2026).

Table (08): Top 10 IFAC status

N°	State	IFAC Status	Year	N°	State	IFAC Status	Year
01	South Africa	Member	1995	06	Kenya	Member	1980
02	Egypt	“ “ “	1980	07	Ethiopia	No status	-
03	Algeria	Associate	1991	08	Angola	“ “ “	-
04	Nigeria	Member	2014	09	Ivory Coast	Member	1997
05	Morocco	“ “ “	2004	10	Ghana	“ “ “	1982

Source: Author's work

The results above lead to the following distribution: 07 states have member status, one state has associate status namely Algeria, despite its old membership which dates from 1991, Ethiopia and Angola have no status with respect to the organization.

VI. Discussion

Firstly, creation of free trade zones adheres to common standards: it begins with liberalization of trade, and ends with an accounting harmonization for listed companies. In this regard, and following the example of the EU which created on March 25, 1957 as a common market based on elimination of customs barriers and ensure sustainable economic and social progress (*European Union, 2026*), ACFTA was established as an economic area based on establishment of a liberalized regional market that facilitates investment and promotes continental economic integration in the global market (*IGUERGAZIZ & BOULIFA-MAHOUR, 2023*). Unlike this example, where the free movement of capital was discussed in 1986 and implemented from 1993, some countries in the ACFTA lack a capital market, in this case: Angola, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho and Liberia (*IFRS Foundation, 2025*), while others, like Algeria, are known for their inactive market since its creation in 1995; this could call into question, if not rule out, any potential harmonization of African accounting.

Secondly, Accounting reform through legislation is often considered slow but decisive, synonymous with irreversibility; it is in this sense that European directives 04 and 07 were criticized as follows: adoption and transposition were carried out with difficulty, an abundance of options were included, and negative consequences for comparability resulted from divergent interpretations between member states (*Bensadon, 2016*). Compared to the African model, the OAHBL accounting standard, adopted in 2000 (*Idi, 2025*), took 19 years to converge with IFRS. In Algeria, (*CNC, 2021*) accounting convergence took more than a decade (1996-2010) and has remained in force since then without significant updates. In Tunisia, the situation appears better; the accounting convergence undertaken in 1997 has seen intermittent updates in line with IFRS (*Faker, 2012*) ; (*OECD, 2026*). Consequently, the EU's reliance on IFRS stemmed from a strong conviction that they are capable of achieving better results; an observation noted by (*Geoffrey, 2005*)

and renewed by (Guermazi, 2022) stipulating that in the absence of common standards, there could be 27 local accounting practices, in addition to the use of IFRS standards and US-GAAP authorized by some EU countries. Furthermore, African countries immediately deduced that it was reasonable to shorten the path to convergence by adopting the international solution.

Thirdly, two criticisms are made against the ACFTA agreement concerning on one side, uncomfortable legal and judicial legislation when compared to the prototype of almost all African communities, where there are: secretariat or commission, parliament, court of justice, financial institutions, committees and specialized institutions: health, audit, security... (ECCAS, 2023) ; (ECOWAS, 2026) On the other hand, the institutional framework of the ACFTA is limited to a conference, a council of ministers, a committee of senior trade officials and a secretariat (African Union, 2018); a framework devoid of coercive power, relying on consensus for the adoption of resolutions, which could suspend, for the moment, any discussion relating to accounting harmonization until the establishment of an appropriate legislative mechanism.

On the other side, the agreement did not concern the OHABL despite its economic weight in the region; the charter of accreditation declares its recognition of seven regional economic communities, namely (African Union, 2018): COMESA, CEN-SAD, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC. As a reminder, OHABL brings together the states of the WAEMU: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and the states of the EMCCA: Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Chad; these same states are members of ECCAS and ECOWAS, both recognized by the charter, which tends to call into question the exclusion of OHABL, although talks have been underway between the two bodies since 2021 with a view to a possible rapprochement.

Fourthly, results obtained from using standard deviation technique to describe accounting landscape of the ACFTA unit, either before or after 2019: 14,912; 15,955 are closer to the standard deviation of the 1st subgroup; this justifies the massive contribution of the first 24 ratifiers in the making of the accounting scene of the ACFTA. Compared to calculations made on a group of 52 African countries without considering their ACFTA membership, the results of classifying IFRS by status of application into 04 categories (Tawiah, 2019) show a standard deviation of 15,033 considered as very close to the standard deviation of the ACFTA unit, which supports the finding established by this research on the accounting landscape that predominated in the zone.

Fifthly, regarding the distribution of IFRS among the ACFTA member states in figure n°02, results in terms of numbers can be given as follows:

Table (09): Landscape in terms of numbers

Status of IFRS application	North Africa	West Africa	Central Africa	East Africa	Southern Africa	Total	%
Required or permitted	1	15	7	6	9	38	81
Not permitted	3	1	1	0	2	7	15
Other	1	0	0	0	1	2	4
Total	5	16	8	6	12	47	100

Source: Author's work

The table above show that findings are consistent with results of a bibliographic scan conducted on 73 Scopus publications, where the following was mentioned (*Ezenwoke & Tion, 2020*) : no North African country mandates the use of IFRS, all Southern African countries mandate it, all Central African countries, with the exception of Sao Tome and Principe, mandate it; all West African countries, with the exception of Cape Verde and Mauritania, mandate it; half of the East African countries mandate it while the rest do not.

Furthermore, according to an update published by IFRS Foundation on May 2025 on the global adoption of IFRS, 40 African jurisdictions out of a total of 169 apply these standards in the following ways (*IFRS Foundation, 2025*): required for all domestic entities in 37 jurisdictions, or 92,5%, permitted for all or some domestic entities in 02 jurisdictions, or 5%, neither required nor permitted in only one jurisdiction, or 2,5%. In addition, the scan revealed the following information: Morocco permits, rather than require, IFRS application; Egypt uses national standards; Angola, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho and Liberia have no stock exchange but require IFRS for financial institutions.

In light of the above, possible resistance to the initiative for comprehensive harmonization is revealed in the north of the area, while the rest of the territory is very favorable to such an initiative given the premature existence of a suitable environment. Also, IFRS application doesn't dependent on the existence of a financial market, as noted in the example of the last 05 states; which could already call into question the validity of the observation prescribed above in **Firstly** (page n°11).

Sixth, results showed in table n°6 above attest to a strong economic representation of northwest Africa. However, the application of IFRS in all its forms covers an interval of 80% of the sample; results are identical to those observed in 47 countries of the ACFTA, which report an implementation rate of 81%, leading us to reiterate the observation made in the fifth point which states that resistance to the harmonization is revealed in the north of the area, while the rest of the territory is very favorable to such an initiative. This observation could lead us to question the finding made in the third point which states that

uncomfortable legal and judicial legislation could suspend any discussion relating to accounting harmonization.

In the same context and taking into account the results of table n°08, we note the following: 06 IFAC members apply IFRS, one member does not apply them: Egypt, 02 states which are not members apply IFRS namely: Angola and Ethiopia, and one associate does not apply them either namely: Algeria; this could help us conclude that 60% of the IFRS application rate is justified by the profession's relationship with IFAC.

Finally, in order to examine the validity of the findings obtained, in-depth research was based on the analysis of the relationship between IFAC membership and the status of IFRS implementation, the results of which appear below (IFAC, 2026); (IFRSF, 2025):

Table (10): IFRS status in African IFAC members

State	Zone	IFAC Status	IFRS Status	State	Zone	IFAC Status	IFRS Status
Egypt	North	Member		Kenya	East	Member	
Algeria		Associate		Uganda			
Morocco		Member		Rwanda			
Tunisia		“ “ “		Tanzania			
Burkina Faso	West	Member		South Africa	South	“ “ “	
Ivory Coast				Eswatini			
Ghana				Namibia			
Mali				Zimbabwe			
Senegal				Botswana			
Sierra Leone				Burundi			
Togo				Malawi			
Liberia				Zambia			
Nigeria				Lesotho			
Cameroon	Central	“ “ “		Gabon	Central	“ “ “	
Total	13 Members + 1 Associate			Total	14 Members		

Source: Author's work

Results indicate an IFRS adoption in 23 jurisdictions out of 28 IFAC members and associates, representing a rate of 82%. The following exceptions are noted: Egypt, Tunisia, and Burundi are members that don't apply IFRS; Algeria is an associate which doesn't apply them. Therefore, we validate the level of IFRS application in the top 10 African economies, estimated at 80%, and consequently, the level of application across the entire region, estimated at 81%. Furthermore, we support the existence of a strong correlation between IFAC membership and IFRS adoption, already estimated at 60%, which could reach 82%. Regarding the exceptions noted, we clarify that they are not exempt from IFRS. Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria adopted national systems compatible with IFRS; we can consider them as applying these standards. Therefore, the 82% rate could be increased in the future.

V. Conclusion

This study explored the potential for accounting harmonization within the ACFTA, mirroring that undertaken by the EU starting in 2005. To this end, a literature review combined with the use of standard deviations revealed a likely harmonization, based on the following results:

- the EU's reliance on IFRS stemmed from a strong conviction that they are capable of achieving better results;
- African countries were convinced that it's reasonable to shorten the path to convergence by adopting the international solution;
- The two spaces share the origin of the composition, while in terms of accounting harmonization the African experience proves to be better in view of the number of ratifiers and the starting point in the adoption of IFRS;
- The question is still being raised regarding the non-recognition of OHABL as a regional economic partner;
- the first 24 ratifiers have massive contribution in the making of the accounting scene of the ACFTA, but possible resistance to the initiative for comprehensive harmonization is revealed in the north of the area;
- the level of IFRS application across the entire region is estimated at 81%, it's estimated at 80% in the top 10 African economies;
- strong correlation exist between IFAC membership and IFRS adoption, it's estimated at 60% and could reach 82%.

This paper constitutes a new forward-looking contribution that highlights the future of the accounting scene within the ACFTA; it supports numerous previous studies conducted on accounting standardization in Africa.

Despite numerous limitations, foremost among them: insufficient data in the field of research because it is a contemporary phenomenon, a contradiction between the data published by the different bodies and organizations consulted, our study supports the fact that possible accounting harmonization within the ACFTA is contingent upon rapprochement with the OHABL, taking into account an appropriate institutional structure, and recommends intensifying research around the evolution of the accounting scene within the area, and particular monitoring of the contribution of the accounting profession in said evolution. It could constitute a platform for future research supported by other theoretical and practical approaches, allowing them to obtain more advanced results.

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