

Competitive Intelligence and the Shaping of AfCFTA Policy Integration and Industrialisation

Alexander Maune¹

Abstract: The African Continental Free Trade Area presents a unique opportunity for Zimbabwe to accelerate industrialisation and strengthen regional economic integration. While competitive intelligence has been widely acknowledged as a strategic tool in business, its role in informing national policy and industrial strategy in the context of AfCFTA remains underexplored. This study fills this gap by conducting a systematic literature review using the PRISMA framework to examine how CI can shape AfCFTA policy integration and industrialisation in Zimbabwe. Peer-reviewed articles, policy reports, and relevant documents were systematically identified, screened, and analyzed to ensure methodological rigor. Findings reveal that CI supports evidence-based policymaking, enhances industrial planning, reduces information asymmetries, and strengthens Zimbabwe's competitiveness under AfCFTA. The study's novelty lies in synthesizing insights specifically for Zimbabwe, highlighting practical recommendations for policymakers and industry stakeholders to leverage CI for sustainable industrial growth and regional integration.

Keywords: Strategic Intelligence; SLR; PRISMA; Business Intelligence; Trade Policy

JEL Classification: F15, O14, O30

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe's industrial development narrative is characterised by profound transformations, punctuated by periods of growth, structural reorientation, and deep retrenchment (Mahuni et al., 2025). Under colonial rule, the economy was structured principally to serve external demand: the extraction of natural resources and the production of agricultural commodities for export to metropolitan markets (Cheru, 1992). At the same time, value-adding activities were limited and often captive to settler interests. The post-independence era ushered in ambitious development strategies premised on import substitution industrialisation (ISI), state-led investment in manufacturing capacities, and protectionist trade policies designed to foster domestic industry and employment (Duma, 2021; Ansari, 2021). In

¹ Ph.D., Research Associate, College of Economic & Management Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, Lecturer, Department of Banking & Finance, Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6704-8733>, Corresponding author: alexandermaune6@gmail.com.



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the early post-independence decades, manufacturing contributed substantially to GDP and employment, with value chains developing around agro-processing, textiles, and light engineering.

However, by the 1990s, the combination of macroeconomic imbalances, policy drift, and external pressures culminated in the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (Robinson, 2002; Kawewe & Dibie, 2000). While ESAP aimed to liberalise the economy and improve efficiency, the sudden exposure of the underprepared domestic industry to international competition precipitated industrial decline. The 2000s compounded these challenges: hyperinflation, fiscal instability, policy uncertainty, and international sanctions reduced investment, disrupted supply chains, and accelerated deindustrialisation. Consequently, industrial capacity utilisation contracted, and the composition of exports became more concentrated in primary commodities rather than processed or higher-value manufactured goods.

The launch and operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in the early 2020s present Zimbabwe with an unprecedented opportunity to rethink and rebuild its industrial base (Gapa, 2024; Africa, 2025). AfCFTA promises preferential access to a continental market of over one billion people and the possibility of participation in pan-African value chains (Nshimbi, 2019; Fofack, 2020; Tröster & Janechová, 2021; Wapmuk & Ali, 2022). However, the realisation of these opportunities depends on far more than tariff schedules: it requires institutions, data systems, and strategic intelligence to identify comparative advantage, negotiate rules of origin, and adapt to intensifying intra-African competition.

Zimbabwe's capacity to capitalise on AfCFTA remains constrained by multiple, interlocking problems: fragmented policymaking across ministries and agencies; insufficient, outdated, or inaccessible trade and industrial data; weak analytical capacity within public institutions and many firms; limited SME export readiness; and inadequate mechanisms for public-private knowledge exchange (Mabeza, 2019). In the absence of an institutionalised intelligence function, the country risks passive or sub-optimal participation in AfCFTA, exposing domestic producers to competitive displacement and missed opportunities for value addition.

Despite clear policy initiatives, including the Zimbabwe National Industrial Development Policy (ZNIDP) 2019–2023 and assorted local content strategies, there is insufficient operational integration of evidence, foresight, and continuous market monitoring into policymaking. This creates a gap between high-level objectives and implementable strategies that respond dynamically to regional market signals, competitor behaviour, and non-tariff regulatory developments.

Competitive Intelligence (CI) is the ethical and systematic process of collecting, analysing, and disseminating information about markets, competitors, technologies, and the broader external environment for strategic decision-making (Bose, 2008; Pellissier & Nenzhelele, 2013; Du Plessis & Gulwa, 2016; Maluleka & Chummun, 2023; Fadhlurrahman et al., 2024; Zaidi et al., 2024). Historically deployed within firms for market positioning and competitor tracking, CI's principles and tools are equally applicable at the public policy level: governments can use CI to anticipate trade shifts, identify sectors with export potential, manage regulatory risks, and craft adaptive industrial strategies (Johns & Van Doren, 2010).

In the African policy context, where information asymmetries, institutional fragmentation, and rapid regulatory change are common, CI provides a structured way to turn dispersed data into actionable insights (Usigbe, 2024). Core CI techniques and tools relevant for national industrial strategy include: PESTEL and SWOT scanning for macro-environmental understanding; Porter's Five Forces for

industry structure analysis; benchmarking and sector masterplans for comparative positioning; trade data analytics (including tariff and non-tariff barrier mapping) for market entry and rules-of-origin optimisation; and social listening/media monitoring for reputational and policy discourse tracking (Seow et al., 2014).

Applied systematically, CI enables three mutually reinforcing functions essential for AfCFTA readiness: (1) anticipatory analysis that reveals future risks and opportunities, (2) evidence-based prioritisation that allocates scarce resources to high-potential sectors, and (3) operational guidance that helps exporters comply with rules of origin, quality standards, and logistics requirements.

AfCFTA significantly alters the strategic landscape for the Zimbabwean industry by expanding market access while simultaneously increasing competition. This duality means policy responses must be targeted and nimble: blanket protectionist measures will fail to create sustainable competitiveness, and laissez-faire approaches will expose nascent sectors to predatory competition. A structured CI capability provides the necessary intelligence inputs to navigate this terrain (Vedder et al., 1999).

CI can: (a) identify sectors where Zimbabwe has latent comparative advantage and can scale within continental value chains (for example, agro-processing, select mineral beneficiation such as lithium batteries, leather goods, and niche pharmaceuticals); (b) uncover regulatory and logistical barriers that would undermine preferential market access (for example, specific non-tariff measures and rules-of-origin constraints); (c) inform industrial park and SEZ planning by mapping regional demand and logistics corridors; and (d) enhance SME export readiness by offering targeted market intelligence and compliance roadmaps. The rationale is thus both defensive and offensive: CI helps defend existing industries from sudden competitive shocks while enabling proactive positioning that captures new market niches.

This article aims to produce a systematic, PRISMA-literature review that examines the role of Competitive Intelligence in shaping AfCFTA policy integration and re-energising Zimbabwe's industrial trajectory. The specific objectives are:

- To provide a detailed historical and contemporary account of Zimbabwe's industrialisation, identifying structural constraints and recent policy responses.
- To conceptualise Competitive Intelligence in the African policymaking context and map relevant CI tools to industrial strategy needs.
- To assess Zimbabwe's institutional and data readiness for AfCFTA integration and identify specific policy and operational gaps.
- To propose an evidence-based roadmap for institutionalising CI that includes a National Competitive Intelligence System (NCIS), capacity building, data infrastructure, and public-private mechanisms and to outline areas for future research.

This review focuses on literature and policy documents (1980–2025) that address CI, industrial policy, trade integration, and AfCFTA implementation within Africa, with a particular emphasis on Zimbabwe. While empirical studies and case reports from other continents are occasionally informative, the article prioritises African contexts to ensure policy relevance. The synthesis emphasises conceptual clarity, policy levers, and institutional designs over micro-firm level empirical case studies, though implications for SMEs and firms are drawn throughout. The article does not provide primary empirical fieldwork within Zimbabwean firms; instead, it analyses and synthesises

existing literature, policy documents, and regional case studies to develop actionable recommendations.

This article contributes to both scholarship and policy in three ways. First, it reframes CI as a public good and a necessary governance capability for countries engaging with AfCFTA, moving beyond the conventional firm-level framing in CI literature. Second, it provides an integrated, PRISMA-guided synthesis that links historical industrial dynamics to contemporary regional trade architecture, thereby offering a coherent narrative for policy reform. Third, it proposes concrete institutional mechanisms (for example, NCIS, sector intelligence councils, AfCFTA monitoring dashboards) and capacity-building pathways that are directly implementable by policymakers, development partners, and industry stakeholders.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 details the materials and methods, describing the PRISMA-based search, inclusion criteria, screening, and thematic synthesis procedures. Section 3 presents the results and analysis, covering Zimbabwe's industrial history, the CI conceptual framework, AfCFTA policy alignment issues, institutional barriers, and comparative country lessons. Section 4 discusses strategic recommendations for institutionalising CI and integrating it into national industrial policy. Section 5 concludes with implications for practice and proposals for future research.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a systematic review design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021; O'Dea et al., 2021; Arya et al., 2021). PRISMA is widely used to improve the transparency, reproducibility, and analytical rigour of literature-based research (Castro-Gil & Correa, 2021; Ed-Dafali et al., 2025; Polo et al., 2025; Carter-Templeton et al., 2025). While it originated in health sciences, its logic of structured identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and synthesis is equally applicable to social science and policy-oriented reviews.

In the context of this study, PRISMA was used to organise, evaluate, and synthesise the diverse body of evidence on CI, industrial policy, and AfCFTA integration in Africa — with a special focus on Zimbabwe. The approach ensures that all included literature meets explicit inclusion criteria, that methodological steps are documented, and that the final synthesis rests on systematically derived themes rather than anecdotal selection.

The review's methodological orientation is qualitative and interpretivist. It seeks to understand how and why CI can act as an enabler of industrial competitiveness and trade readiness, not merely to quantify relationships. The process integrates desk-based document analysis, thematic coding, and comparative synthesis.

2.2. Data Sources and Search Strategy

A multi-source search strategy was implemented between January 1980 and June 2025 to ensure comprehensive coverage of academic and policy literature. The following major databases and repositories were consulted:

- Academic databases: Scopus, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar.
- Policy and institutional repositories: African Union (AU), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), World Bank Open Knowledge Repository, African Development Bank (AfDB), Afreximbank, and the Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit (ZEPARU).
- Government sources: Ministry of Industry and Commerce, ZIMSTAT, ZIMTRADE, and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ).
- Supplementary sources: working papers, conference proceedings, and AfCFTA Secretariat policy briefs.

The following search terms were applied in varying Boolean combinations:

(“Competitive Intelligence” OR “Trade Intelligence”) AND (“AfCFTA” OR “African Continental Free Trade Area”) AND (“Industrial Policy” OR “Industrialisation”) AND (“Zimbabwe” OR “Southern Africa”).

Additional searches used related keywords to capture regional comparative material:

(“Industrial Competitiveness” AND “Regional Integration” AND “Africa”)

(“Trade Strategy” AND “Intelligence Systems” AND “Policy Implementation”)

Manual snowballing, that is, the process of reviewing citations and reference lists from key papers, was also used to identify additional relevant works.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion process followed PRISMA’s staged filtering logic to ensure relevance and quality, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria items

<i>Inclusion Criteria</i>	
<i>Item</i>	<i>Description</i>
Temporal scope	Publications between 1980 and 2025 to capture Zimbabwe’s whole industrial policy trajectory.
Thematic relevance	Studies addressing CI, industrial policy, AfCFTA readiness, or trade competitiveness.
Geographic focus	Primarily Zimbabwe, with comparative African case studies for contextual benchmarking.
Type of material	Peer-reviewed articles, official reports, and policy briefs from credible institutions.
Language	English-language publications
<i>Exclusion Criteria</i>	
<i>Item</i>	<i>Description</i>
Publications	Publications lacking clear methodological transparency or theoretical grounding.
Geographical focus	Non-African case studies with minimal contextual transferability.

Types of material	Journalistic or opinion-based sources without empirical or conceptual depth.
Database appearance	Duplicates across repositories.

Source: Author's compilation

2.4. Screening and Selection Process

The PRISMA four-stage screening process, that is, identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, was rigorously applied. A total of 87 records were initially identified across all databases, and after removing duplicates, 76 unique documents remained. During the screening stage, abstracts were assessed for relevance to competitive intelligence (CI), the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and industrial development, resulting in the exclusion of 35 studies due to thematic irrelevance. In the eligibility stage, 41 full-text articles were reviewed for methodological quality and contextual alignment, with 16 excluded for lacking policy depth or empirical support. Ultimately, 25 sources were retained for the final synthesis and analysis. This process is illustrated below in the PRISMA flow summary.

2.5. PRISMA Flow Description

The PRISMA framework emphasises transparency in the literature inclusion process. As shown in Figure 1, a total of 87 publications were identified through database and manual searches, and after removing 11 duplicates, 76 unique records remained. Screening of titles and abstracts resulted in the elimination of 35 papers. The remaining 41 full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility, of which 16 were excluded—7 due to a lack of clear conceptual linkage to competitive intelligence (CI), 5 for being overly descriptive policy notes, and 4 for poor methodological grounding. Ultimately, 25 studies met the inclusion criteria and formed the core of the synthesis.

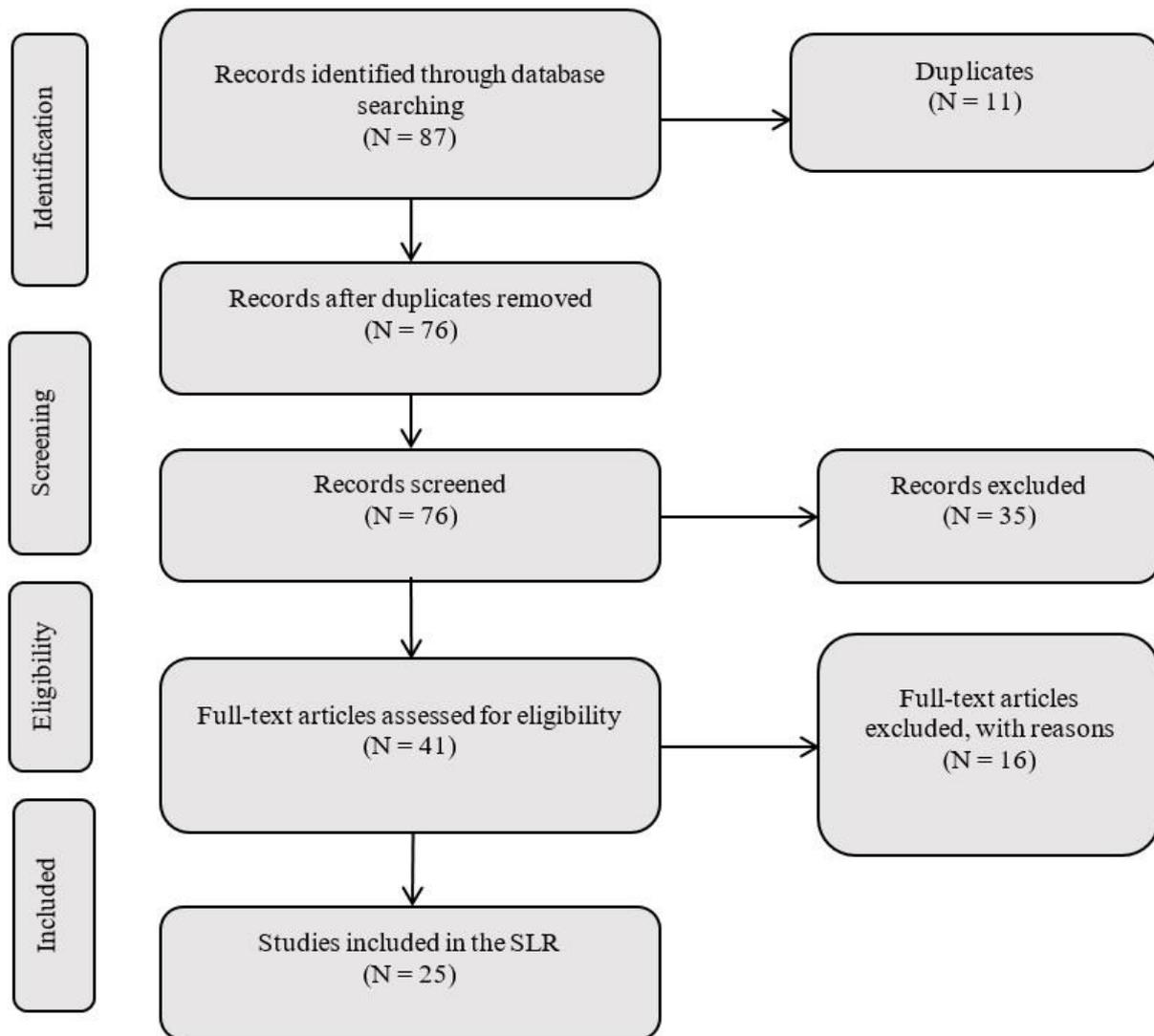


Figure 1. The PRISMA Diagram summarising literature identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion

2.6. Data Extraction and Coding Process

A structured data extraction template was developed to ensure comparability across all sources. For each included document, key variables such as author(s) and year, geographic or institutional focus, study type (empirical, conceptual, or policy analysis), key findings and implications for CI and industrial policy, relevance to AfCFTA integration, and methodological strengths and limitations were recorded. Data were then coded inductively using NVivo-style thematic coding logic, though the actual process was conducted manually (Bull, 2025). The resulting codes were grouped into higher-order categories, including historical context and industrial evolution, conceptual foundations of CI, policy integration and institutional alignment, comparative case experiences, and strategic and policy implications. Patterns and relationships among these categories were subsequently identified and refined through iterative synthesis.

In summary, applying PRISMA methodology to a policy-focused study adds methodological rigour to a domain often dominated by narrative reviews. It structures the review into a traceable process of

identification, screening, and synthesis, thereby enhancing reliability and scholarly credibility (Dickson, 2019; Neta et al., 2024; Tiwari et al., 2025). The resulting dataset provides a solid empirical and conceptual foundation for the next section, the Analysis and Results, which will operationalise these findings to demonstrate how Competitive Intelligence can practically enable AfCFTA policy integration and industrial renewal in Zimbabwe.

3. Findings

3.1. Overview of Analytical Approach

This section synthesises data drawn from the systematically identified studies and policy sources, organised into five core analytical dimensions: (1) Zimbabwe’s historical industrialisation trajectory; (2) the conceptual foundations and tools of CI; (3) the role of CI in AfCFTA policy integration; (4) comparative lessons from selected African countries; and (5) the implications of institutional barriers and policy incoherence.

Each theme was analysed within the analytical framework established in Section 2, linking institutional capacity, intelligence systems, and industrial competitiveness. The resulting narrative shows how CI functions as a mediating variable that translates policy intent into actionable, evidence-driven industrial development.

3.2. Zimbabwe’s Industrialisation in Historical Perspective

3.2.1. Colonial Industrial Foundations

Zimbabwe’s industrial roots were established under a colonial economy designed for resource extraction and export dependency. Industrialisation during this period was highly selective, centred on settler-driven commercial agriculture, mining, and limited processing activities to support domestic consumption within the settler economy. The industrial base was vertically disarticulated from indigenous participation, creating structural inequalities that persisted beyond independence.

The colonial industrial model prioritised extraction over value addition. Industries such as food processing, textiles, and metal fabrication were small and dependent on imported inputs and technologies (Roemer, 1979; Morris & Fessehaie, 2014). This foundation produced a dual economy, one highly productive enclave sector serving external markets and another largely informal and underdeveloped indigenous sector.

3.2.2. Post-Independence Industrial Expansion (1980–1989)

Following independence in 1980, Zimbabwe adopted an import substitution industrialisation (ISI) model as part of a broader socialist-inspired development vision. State intervention, protectionist tariffs, and domestic capacity building guided industrial policy. The manufacturing sector experienced robust growth, contributing over 25% to GDP by the mid-1980s, driven by agro-processing, textiles, chemicals, and metals.

Public enterprises such as the Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company (ZISCO) and Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (COTTCO) were central to the strategy. However, ISI soon revealed weaknesses — inefficiency, over-reliance on state subsidies, and limited competitiveness. The absence of export-oriented strategies meant the sector became inward-looking, unprepared for future liberalisation.

3.2.3. Structural Adjustment and Deindustrialisation (1990–2000s)

The early 1990s marked a decisive policy shift under the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP): the programme liberalised trade, deregulated prices, and privatised state-owned enterprises (Kawewe & Dibe, 2000). In theory, this was expected to enhance efficiency and attract investment. In practice, it devastated the domestic industry.

Without sufficient preparation, local firms collapsed under the pressure of cheap imports and reduced government support. Employment declined sharply, industrial output contracted, and income inequalities widened (Wade, 2010). The 2000s further deepened the decline due to political instability, hyperinflation, and international sanctions, resulting in capital flight and technology obsolescence. The manufacturing sector's share of GDP fell below 10% by the late 2000s. This deindustrialisation trajectory entrenched dependency on primary exports, particularly minerals and agriculture, and weakened the linkages necessary for structural transformation (Atolia et al., 2020).

3.2.4. Contemporary Industrial Policy and AfCFTA Opportunities

Recent years have witnessed renewed industrial revitalisation efforts, notably the Zimbabwe National Industrial Development Policy (ZNIDP, 2019–2023), Local Content Strategy (2017–2025), and National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1, 2021–2025). These frameworks seek to boost domestic value addition, foster innovation, and enhance regional competitiveness.

However, persistent constraints that include infrastructural decay, energy deficits, limited access to finance, and poor policy coordination continue to stifle progress. Within this context, AfCFTA represents both an opportunity and a challenge. Access to a single continental market offers prospects for scale, but competition will intensify. Strategic adaptation and intelligence-led policy become critical to avoid marginalisation.

3.3. Conceptualising Competitive Intelligence

3.3.1. Definitional Context

CI refers to the systematic and ethical process of gathering, analysing, and disseminating information to support strategic decision-making (Bose, 2008; Pellissier & Nenzhelele, 2013; Du Plessis & Gulwa, 2016; Maluleka & Chummun, 2023; Fadhlurrahman et al., 2024; Zaidi et al., 2024). In business, CI provides insights into competitor strategy, market trends, and technological developments (Bouthillier & Shearer, 2003; Lee & Lee, 2017). In the context of national policy, CI supports the government in identifying opportunities for sectoral upgrading, forecasting market changes, and aligning domestic policies with external dynamics (Zhan, 2021). In Africa, where uncertainty and information asymmetries are prevalent, CI can fill critical knowledge gaps between public institutions, private enterprises, and international markets.

3.3.2. CI Tools and Techniques

The literature identifies a range of CI tools applicable to national industrial strategy, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. CI Tools Applicable to Industrial Strategy

<i>Tool / Technique</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Application in Industrial Policy</i>
PESTEL Analysis	Scanning political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors.	Policy impact forecasting and investment risk assessment.
SWOT Analysis	Evaluating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.	Sector competitiveness profiling.
Porter's Five Forces	Assessing industry rivalry and market structure.	Understanding domestic and regional competitiveness.
Benchmarking	Comparing performance metrics.	Identifying best practices among regional peers.
Scenario Planning	Forecasting alternative futures.	Long-term industrial planning and innovation pathways.
Trade Data Analytics	Tracking import/export patterns and tariffs.	Identifying regional value chain opportunities.
Social Listening and Policy Monitoring	Tracking public discourse and regulatory changes.	Early warning for reputational or compliance risks.

Source: Author's compilation

Zimbabwe's adoption of such tools remains limited, mainly due to weak institutional capacity and the absence of integrated data systems. Nonetheless, building CI competencies across ministries, academia, and the private sector can significantly enhance the quality of industrial and trade policy formulation.

3.3.3. CI in Public Sector Governance

While traditionally a private-sector practice, CI is increasingly being adopted by governments to enhance policy responsiveness and economic resilience. In the public sector, CI enables policymakers to anticipate regional and global trade shifts, identify high-growth and strategic industrial sectors, monitor compliance with trade agreements, align education and vocational training with emerging sectoral demands, and formulate adaptive, evidence-based industrial policies. In this regard, Zimbabwe's integration of CI into its policy structures is not a luxury but a strategic imperative for effectively aligning with AfCFTA's competitive environment.

3.4. The AfCFTA Framework and the Role of Competitive Intelligence

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seeks to eliminate tariffs on 90% of goods and liberalise trade in services across Africa (Ajambo & Emebinah, 2021). With a market size exceeding 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of USD 3.4 trillion, it offers transformative potential for participating economies. For Zimbabwe, AfCFTA presents opportunities for expanded export markets, industrial diversification, and economies of scale. However, without an effective intelligence system to monitor market shifts and regulatory developments, Zimbabwe risks remaining a marginal participant (Gapa, 2024). CI can significantly enhance Zimbabwe's competitiveness under AfCFTA by identifying market opportunities through the analysis of demand patterns across African markets, that is, allowing firms to tailor products and strategies in sectors such as agro-processing, textiles, and lithium-based manufacturing. It also supports risk mitigation by tracking competitor subsidies, currency fluctuations, and regulatory changes, enabling proactive policy and business responses. Furthermore, CI strengthens industrial policy design through data-driven targeting of high-potential sectors, helps firms navigate non-tariff barriers by providing insights into customs procedures and technical standards, and drives innovation by monitoring technological and competitive trends (Alokpo & Kilika, 2023). Collectively, these functions position CI as a critical enabler of Zimbabwe's

effective participation and sustained competitiveness within the AfCFTA framework. Figure 2 shows the relationship between CI and competitiveness.

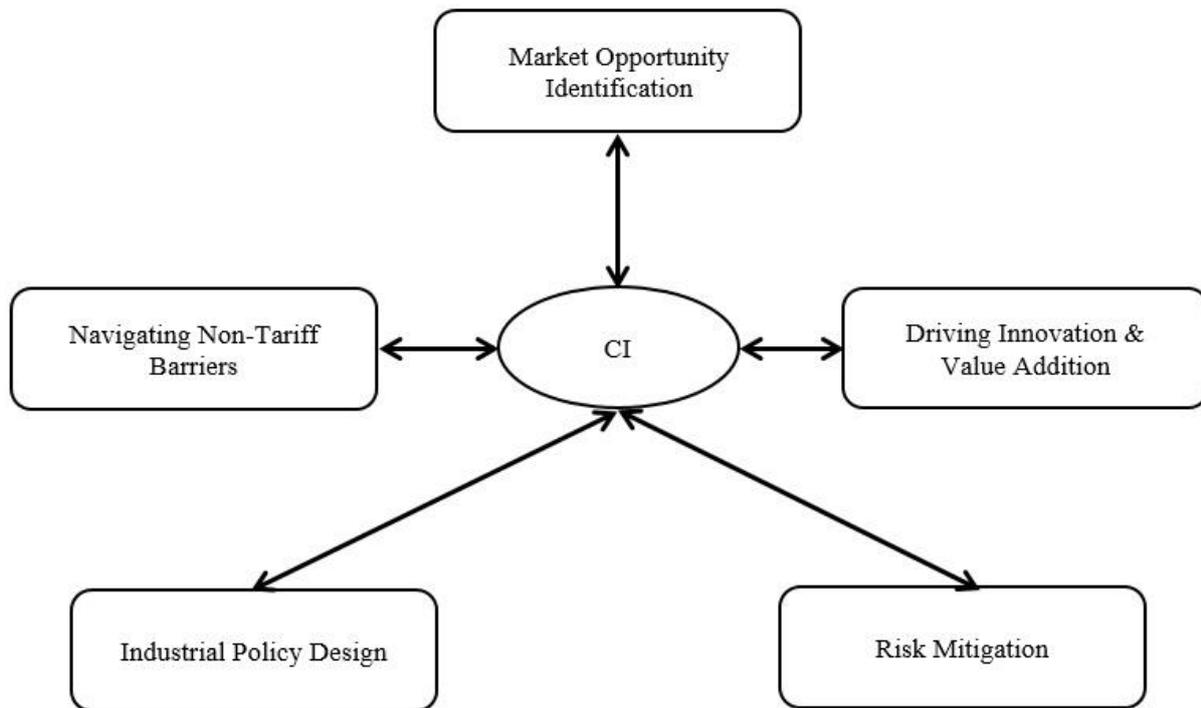


Figure 2. Relationship between CI and Competitiveness

3.4.1. Institutionalising CI for AfCFTA Readiness

Zimbabwe requires an integrated national CI system that seamlessly connects ministries, research institutions, and the private sector to enhance policy coherence and strategic readiness for AfCFTA implementation (Ismail, 2020). Such a system should not only aggregate trade and production data from key agencies such as ZIMSTAT, ZIMRA, and ZIMTRADE but also synthesise insights from academic research, industry associations, and regional trade observatories. Establishing a central analytical hub within the Ministry of Industry and Commerce would facilitate real-time monitoring of trade flows, competitor strategies, and regulatory developments across African markets (Anwasedo et al., 2024). This hub could generate periodic intelligence briefs, sectoral outlook reports, and early-warning indicators to guide export promotion, industrial policy adjustments, and investment prioritisation. Moreover, the system should integrate digital dashboards and AI-assisted analytics to ensure continuous situational awareness and evidence-based decision-making. Capacity-building initiatives, such as training policymakers and industry leaders in intelligence interpretation and data-driven strategy, would further strengthen institutional uptake (Yesufu & Alajlani, 2025). Without such coordination and systemic intelligence sharing, Zimbabwe's national response to AfCFTA risks remaining fragmented, reactive, and unable to capitalise on emerging opportunities within the continental market fully (Kilburg, 2025).

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. Overview of the Discussion

The results presented in Section 3 underscore the central proposition of this article: that CI serves as a transformative enabler for industrial policy renewal and AfCFTA integration in Zimbabwe. The analysis revealed that Zimbabwe’s industrial decline is not simply a consequence of external shocks or resource constraints, but a reflection of systemic informational and institutional failures — where decisions are made reactively, without adequate intelligence or coordination.

This discussion elaborates on five interrelated policy domains necessary to institutionalise CI and embed it as an operational component of Zimbabwe’s industrial development framework:

- Establishing a National Competitive Intelligence System (NCIS).
- Building institutional and human capacity for CI and AfCFTA monitoring.
- Enhancing public–private collaboration and knowledge-sharing ecosystems.
- Mainstreaming CI in education, training, and research institutions.
- Aligning industrial policy and AfCFTA implementation under a shared intelligence-driven strategy.

These domains are interconnected; that is, each strengthens the feedback loops between information, decision-making, and industrial performance.

4.2. Establishing a National Competitive Intelligence System (NCIS)

4.2.1. Rationale and Objectives

A National Competitive Intelligence System (NCIS) would act as the “nervous system” of Zimbabwe’s industrial policy — coordinating the collection, analysis, and dissemination of trade and industrial intelligence across government, business, and research institutions. Its objectives would include:

- Consolidating fragmented economic and trade data.
- Generating periodic analytical briefs on sector performance and regional market trends.
- Supporting industrial and export strategy formulation through data-driven insights.
- Monitoring AfCFTA implementation impacts in real time.

The NCIS would serve as both a policy coordination mechanism and a knowledge platform, improving the state’s ability to respond to regional economic signals and coordinate interventions across ministries.

4.2.2. Institutional Architecture

The NCIS could be anchored within the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, but structured as a multi-stakeholder consortium linking:

- ZIMSTAT (for data collection and analytics).
- ZEPARU (for economic modelling and policy research).

- ZIMTRADE (for market intelligence and export promotion).
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (for diplomatic intelligence and AfCFTA coordination).
- Private Sector Federations such as the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) and the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC).

To ensure sustainability, the system should be underpinned by a legal framework mandating inter-agency data sharing, data confidentiality protocols, and regular publication of industrial intelligence reports.

4.2.3. Digital Infrastructure and Data Integration

A critical element of the NCIS is digital integration. A unified platform linking customs data, trade flows, production statistics, and market forecasts would allow decision-makers to visualise industrial performance through interactive dashboards. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning could be employed to detect emerging trade patterns, forecast demand fluctuations, and identify early warning signals for supply chain disruptions.

4.3. Building Institutional Capacity for AfCFTA Monitoring and Alignment

4.3.1. Strengthening Governance and Coordination

Institutional fragmentation has long undermined industrial policy coherence in Zimbabwe. To address this, the government should establish an AfCFTA Intelligence Coordination Taskforce (AICT) — a high-level body bringing together key ministries, parastatals, business representatives, and academia. The AICT’s functions would include:

- Overseeing implementation of AfCFTA-related commitments.
- Conducting sectoral competitiveness audits.
- Coordinating inter-ministerial intelligence sharing.
- Providing quarterly reports to the Cabinet on regional trade performance.

This taskforce should be supported by technical working groups on industrial data, trade facilitation, and SME development, ensuring that intelligence flows from operational to strategic levels of governance.

4.3.2. Analytical and Human Capacity Development

Sustainable CI integration requires skills and expertise across government and industry. Training programs should cover: data analytics and business intelligence, foresight analysis and scenario planning, trade law and rules-of-origin management, and industrial policy design and monitoring. Partnerships with universities, technical colleges, and regional institutions such as UNECA, Afreximbank, and the African Trade Observatory can support this capacity-building agenda. Exchange programs and professional certifications in trade intelligence should be introduced to create a cadre of “intelligence economists” and policy analysts.

4.4. Strengthening Public–Private Collaboration in CI

4.4.1. Building Trust and Information Flows

Competitive intelligence thrives in environments where trust and collaboration exist between the government and the private sector. In Zimbabwe, historical mistrust and regulatory opacity have hindered such collaboration. A deliberate effort must be made to institutionalise public–private dialogue platforms dedicated to intelligence sharing.

4.4.2. Sector Intelligence Councils

To operationalise this collaboration, Sector Intelligence Councils (SICs) should be established in key industries — such as agro-processing, mining and beneficiation, pharmaceuticals, ICT, and textiles. Each council would convene quarterly, bringing together: government policymakers, industry associations and leading firms, research institutions and think tanks, and financial sector and trade promotion agencies. Their mandate would include reviewing market intelligence, identifying bottlenecks, and co-developing adaptive sector strategies. These councils could feed insights into the NCIS and inform both policy formulation and private investment decisions.

4.4.3. Incentivising Knowledge Contributions

The government could introduce tax or recognition incentives for firms that contribute verified market data, innovation metrics, or foresight analyses to national intelligence platforms. Over time, this would create a culture where firms perceive intelligence sharing not as a risk, but as a collective investment in national competitiveness.

4.5. Mainstreaming CI in Education and Research

4.5.1. Academic Integration

The sustainability of a national CI ecosystem depends on human capital development. Zimbabwe’s universities and technical colleges should integrate Competitive Intelligence, trade analytics, and foresight studies into curricula at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Programs could include:

- BSc/MSc in Competitive Intelligence and Trade Policy.
- Professional certifications in Business and Industrial Analytics.
- Joint research programs between academia, government, and industry.

Such institutionalisation will cultivate a new generation of analytical thinkers equipped to drive data-driven industrial transformation.

4.5.2. Research and Innovation Linkages

Universities and research institutions should act as knowledge brokers between data producers (for example, ministries, firms) and policy consumers such as the government and business. Innovation hubs and think tanks can develop sector-specific intelligence tools — such as export readiness indices, value chain mapping tools, or trade compliance simulators. Embedding research within policy cycles ensures that academic knowledge directly informs real-time decision-making and supports adaptive learning within institutions.

4.6. Aligning Industrial Policy with AfCFTA's Transformative Agenda

4.6.1. Policy Coherence and Integration

For CI to be effective, Zimbabwe's industrial policy, trade policy, investment strategy, and innovation frameworks must be harmonised. The Zimbabwe National Industrial Development Policy (ZNIDP) should be revised to integrate AfCFTA objectives and CI mechanisms explicitly. This alignment requires: shared performance indicators across ministries, harmonised policy instruments (such as incentives, tariffs, standards), and integrated planning and budgeting processes supported by intelligence data.

4.6.2. Value Chain Development and Regional Partnerships

Zimbabwe's comparative advantages in minerals, agriculture, and human capital must be leveraged within regional value chains. Using CI to map regional production networks allows the country to identify entry points for upstream and downstream linkages, such as:

- *Agro-processing*: Linking Zimbabwean producers with West African distributors.
- *Lithium beneficiation*: Developing supply contracts for regional electric vehicle value chains.
- *Textiles and leather*: Revitalising Bulawayo's manufacturing base for continental exports.

CI facilitates these linkages by providing granular data on partner countries' capacities, logistical routes, and demand trends.

4.6.3. Leveraging Digital Trade Platforms

Digitalisation is central to AfCFTA's implementation. Zimbabwe should prioritise participation in the African Trade Observatory, which aggregates continent-wide data on tariffs, logistics, and demand. Integration with digital customs systems, e-certification platforms, and online marketplaces can dramatically reduce transaction costs and improve export efficiency. CI systems can serve as decision-support engines within these platforms, providing predictive analytics for exporters and policy planners alike.

4.7. From Reactive Governance to Foresight Governance

At a theoretical level, institutionalising CI represents a shift from reactive governance, where policy responds to crises and short-term pressures, to foresight governance, where decisions are based on anticipation and systemic learning. This aligns with concepts from strategic management theory and institutional economics, which emphasise the role of information flows, feedback loops, and adaptive capacity in sustaining competitiveness. In the AfCFTA era, states must evolve from regulatory administrators to intelligence-driven facilitators of innovation and integration. Zimbabwe's transformation will depend not only on policy reforms but on this epistemic reorientation — viewing information as infrastructure, and intelligence as a public good.

4.8. Implementation Roadmap

The proposed reforms collectively aim to transform Zimbabwe's industrial ecosystem into an intelligence-led, adaptive, and regionally integrated economy. CI is not merely a technical tool; it is a governance paradigm that redefines how the state, firms, and research institutions interact. By

adopting this model, Zimbabwe can enhance competitiveness, increase value addition, and actively shape its destiny within AfCFTA rather than reacting passively to external trends. Table 3 shows the implementation roadmap of the strategic actions that are critical in enhancing CI in AfCFTA.

Table 3. Implementation Roadmap of Strategic Actions to enhance CI in AfCFTA

<i>Strategic Action</i>	<i>Lead Institutions</i>	<i>Time Frame</i>	<i>Expected Outcome</i>
Establish National Competitive Intelligence System (NCIS)	Ministry of Industry and Commerce, ZIMSTAT, ZEPARU, ZIDA.	Short term (1–2 years)	Centralised trade and industrial intelligence platform.
Launch AfCFTA Intelligence Coordination Taskforce (AICT)	Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC)	Short term (1 year)	Enhanced policy coherence and monitoring.
Introduce CI curricula and certification programs	Universities, Ministry of Higher Education	Medium term (2–4 years)	Skilled workforce in intelligence and foresight.
Create Sector Intelligence Councils	Ministry of Industry, CZI, ZNCC	Medium term (2–4 years)	Public–private knowledge exchange.
Digitise trade and customs data	ZIMRA, AfCFTA Secretariat, Afreximbank	Long term (3–5 years)	Real-time data analytics and reduced trade barriers.
Align ZNIDP with AfCFTA frameworks	Ministry of Industry and Commerce	Ongoing	Intelligence-led industrial policy.

Source: Author's compilation

5. Conclusion

This study has argued that CI, when systematically integrated into national policy frameworks, constitutes a transformative capability for Zimbabwe's industrial renewal and effective participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Drawing on a PRISMA-guided systematic review, the analysis revealed that Zimbabwe's protracted industrial decline stems not only from macroeconomic instability or external constraints but from a chronic deficit of intelligence capacity and institutional coordination. The findings show that sustainable industrialisation under AfCFTA requires more than policy rhetoric; it demands a national intelligence infrastructure that allows for continuous learning, evidence-based decision-making, and anticipatory governance. By embedding CI within Zimbabwe's industrial policy, the government can shift from reactive policymaking to foresight-driven strategy formulation, positioning the country to identify, capture, and sustain emerging continental market opportunities.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The systematic review and thematic analysis revealed several interrelated findings. First, Zimbabwe's industrial structure, rooted in a colonial extractive model, has remained shallow and dependent, with limited technological upgrading and export diversification—a condition reflecting deep historical path dependency. Second, persistent policy and institutional fragmentation, resulting from inconsistent shifts between protectionism, liberalisation, and selective interventionism, has undermined policy implementation and stakeholder coordination. Third, the country's intelligence systems remain underdeveloped due to data fragmentation, weak analytical capacity, and inadequate inter-agency communication, impeding the creation of a coherent national trade intelligence ecosystem. Finally, the determinants of CI success include institutional coordination, robust data infrastructure, skilled human

capital, effective public–private collaboration, and policy coherence. Collectively, these findings underscore that Zimbabwe’s successful participation in the AfCFTA will depend not only on tariff reductions but also on the strength of its intelligence architecture guiding production, investment, and trade decisions.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the evolving literature on intelligence-led development and foresight governance. It extends strategic management theory into the public policy domain by conceptualising CI as a state-level capability rather than a firm-level function. It also aligns with institutional economics, which emphasises the role of information and learning in reducing transaction costs and enhancing coordination across complex economic systems. In this view, CI becomes a public good—a shared infrastructure of data, analytics, and knowledge that underpins the efficiency of markets and the effectiveness of government interventions. The institutionalisation of CI thus represents a paradigm shift from bureaucratic policymaking to adaptive governance, where learning, feedback, and intelligence guide long-term competitiveness.

5.3. Implications for Practice

The practical implications of this study are extensive for policymakers, industry leaders, and development practitioners seeking to position Zimbabwe for effective participation in the AfCFTA. Institutional and governance reforms are essential, beginning with the establishment of a National Competitive Intelligence System (NCIS) to coordinate data collection, analysis, and dissemination across ministries, agencies, and the private sector. Complementing this should be an AfCFTA Intelligence Coordination Taskforce (AICT) under the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) to harmonise industrial, trade, and investment policies, supported by sectoral competitiveness audits and performance dashboards to track industrial progress and AfCFTA outcomes in real time. Human capital and skills development must be prioritised through the mainstreaming of CI, trade analytics, and foresight planning in university and technical curricula, alongside the creation of professional certification programmes in CI and industrial intelligence, in collaboration with regional institutions such as UNECA, Afreximbank, and the African Trade Observatory. Knowledge transfer should be facilitated through exchange programmes with countries possessing advanced CI systems. Strengthened public–private collaboration is also critical, particularly through the institutionalisation of Sector Intelligence Councils (SICs) in key industries such as agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, mining, and ICT to encourage data sharing and joint strategic planning. Firms contributing intelligence data to national databases could be incentivised through recognition schemes or tax credits. At the same time, agencies like ZIMTRADE and CZI should be empowered to act as vital conduits between firms and the state on AfCFTA-related intelligence matters. Finally, investment in digital infrastructure and data systems is indispensable, involving the development of AI-enabled trade intelligence platforms and interconnected data warehouses linking ZIMSTAT, ZIMRA, and regional databases. Integration with the African Trade Observatory would enhance access to continental market analytics and forecasting. At the same time, national dashboards visualising industrial performance indicators, export trends, and sectoral competitiveness metrics would enable evidence-based decision-making and continuous policy learning.

5.4. Implications for Future Research

While this study provides a conceptual and policy blueprint for integrating competitive intelligence (CI) into Zimbabwe's industrialisation and AfCFTA readiness framework, several avenues remain open for future research. Empirical impact studies are needed to quantitatively assess how CI adoption influences export performance, industrial productivity, and innovation outcomes within Zimbabwe's evolving economic landscape. Comparative case studies across African economies could provide valuable insights into the differential effects of CI institutionalisation under AfCFTA, identifying best practices and contextual enablers of success. Further research into digital intelligence systems is also crucial, particularly exploring how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and blockchain can enhance the precision, timeliness, and scalability of CI in developing economies. At the micro level, firm-based investigations should examine how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) interpret and utilise CI for market entry, product diversification, and supply chain optimisation. In addition, longitudinal studies focused on policy learning and foresight models would deepen understanding of how intelligence-led policy frameworks evolve and shape governance effectiveness over time. Collectively, such research would help translate the conceptual foundations outlined in this study into measurable indicators of competitiveness, institutional maturity, and industrial performance, thereby advancing both scholarly inquiry and policy practice.

5.5. Conclusion

Zimbabwe stands at a pivotal strategic crossroads, where the dual imperatives of industrial revitalisation and effective AfCFTA participation demand a profound transformation from reactive, ad hoc policymaking to proactive, intelligence-driven governance. Institutionalising competitive intelligence (CI) offers the pathway to this transformation, enabling the country to transition from a fragmented, data-poor economic landscape to a cohesive, intelligence-rich ecosystem capable of anticipating and strategically responding to dynamic regional and global trade patterns. Far from being a peripheral managerial tool, CI functions as the strategic nervous system of contemporary industrial policy, integrating foresight, rigorous analysis, and cross-sectoral coordination to inform evidence-based decision-making at both macroeconomic and sectoral levels. Through the systematic application of CI, Zimbabwe can identify emerging high-growth sectors, target investment, optimise resource allocation, and enhance value addition across manufacturing, agro-processing, mining, and technology-driven industries. Moreover, intelligence-led governance facilitates the monitoring of non-tariff barriers, competitor strategies, and regulatory shifts across AfCFTA member states, ensuring that domestic industries remain competitive and adaptive. The challenge extends beyond information collection; it involves cultivating the institutional capacity to convert raw data into actionable insights, embedding intelligence into policy frameworks, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and strategic agility. Successfully harnessed, CI can underpin sustainable industrial transformation, rebuild Zimbabwe's manufacturing base, stimulate innovation, and secure a resilient and influential position within Africa's emerging continental economy, ultimately enabling the nation to not just participate in but actively shape the trajectory of regional trade and industrial development.

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