A qualitative meta-analysis of issues and challenges of trade facilitation in developing countries

Nombeko Gumbo (a)¹ Peter Nkala (b)

(a) Graduate School of Business, Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe
(b) Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe

A B S T R A C T

Trade facilitation is widely touted in the literature as a means to increase trade, capital inflows, and economic growth as a result of lower transaction costs; however, its implementation and efficacy pose challenges, especially for developing nations. Despite controversies and differing perspectives on these challenges, some of which were published prior to February 22, 2017, when the Trade Facilitation Agreement went into effect, there is no meta-analysis that evaluates the validity of these challenges. This qualitative meta-analysis is a systematic review of qualitative research examining the difficulties and obstacles developing countries face in instituting trade facilitation reforms. This document lays the groundwork for resolving general trade facilitation implementation challenges in Southern Africa, and in particular Zimbabwe. Significant obstacles to the successful implementation of trade facilitation initiatives include limited financial resources, infrastructural inadequacy, and inadequate institutional architecture. Requisite human capital inadequacy is one of the primary impediments to the successful implementation of the trade facilitation reform process. The elimination of these obstacles would unquestionably boost innovation in trade and commerce, as well as the region’s trade legitimacy. Trade liberalization, improvement of legal inter-regional trade, and active participation by merchants in global value chains could be advantageous to governments in developing countries through trade facilitation.

Introduction

Since the late 20th century, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has collaborated with various international organizations, including the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Customs Organization (WCO), among others. Their collective objective has been to enhance global trade volume and reduce transaction costs by advocating for the implementation of trade facilitation reforms worldwide (Kumari and Bharti, 2021; Jiahao et al., 2022; Estevadeordal, 2017; Sorescu and Bollig, 2022). The reforms implemented under the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) have been extensively cited in various initiatives related to supply chain security, development and capacity building, and customs modernization programs (Alqaryouti and Shaalan, 2022; Gbghidje, 2023; Setanah et al., 2016; Odularu, 2019; Zaibet et al., 2022). According to Moise and Sorescu (2013), the primary objective of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) is to enhance global trade efficiency. This is achieved by reducing bureaucratic barriers at international border crossings, thereby stimulating economic growth. Additionally, the TFA aims to enhance transparency, expediency, and predictability throughout the entire customs clearance procedure. There is a widely held global conviction that the complete implementation of the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and other related protocols will facilitate extensive involvement of developing nations in both global and regional value chains. This perspective is supported by various sources, including the World Bank (2021), Turkson et al. (2021), and Ibrahim and Ajide (2022).

* Corresponding author. ORCID ID: 0009-0003-3222-8173
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Attia (2021), Mataba and Ismail (2021), Johns et al. (2018), Chidede (2018), Tavengerwei (2018), and Pasara (2020) have observed that despite the recognition of trade facilitation's importance and the signing of various inclusive trade facilitation agreements at regional and global levels, several Southern African nations, including Zimbabwe, have not achieved significant outcomes from these initiatives. These efforts, although comprehensive and ambitious, have yielded largely overwhelming results. Juho et al. (2022) posit that a limited number of these nations are included in the global trading system, but the overwhelming majority of them still have significant progress to make in terms of implementing trade facilitation reforms. According to a recent study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2022), it has been observed that the timely movement of goods across the Southern African region is still being impeded by delays occurring at border checkpoints and international airport control points. The delays mentioned can be attributed to various factors, including customs and immigration procedures, insufficient infrastructure, and limited technological capabilities at specific entry and exit points. However, these challenges highlight the importance of evaluating the obstacles encountered by developing nations in their efforts to implement trade facilitation reforms.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the challenges faced by developing countries in implementing trade facilitation reforms. These studies include the works of Petrovic (2022), Hillberry and Zurita (2022), Mataba and Ismail (2021), Sorescu and Bollig (2022), Bartley Johns et al. (2018), Tavengerwei (2018), Moyo (2023), Viljoen (2019), Odularu and Alege (2019), Parshotam (2019), Hassan (2019), Olubandwa (2022), and Mohamed (2022), among others. According to Petrovic's (2022) research conducted in the post-Covid era, developing countries encounter significant challenges in their efforts to facilitate legitimate trade. These challenges include insufficient infrastructure, inadequate road networks and transportation systems, underdeveloped telecommunications, as well as ancillary services such as insurance, banking, and financial services. According to Hillberry and Zurita (2022), the primary obstacles to the trade facilitation agenda are characterized as inadequate or underdeveloped trade-supporting institutions, including customs, standards bureaus, and export promotion agencies. Perera (2016) has noted that a lack of understanding regarding markets, products, and production technology poses an additional hindrance. Similarly, Grainger (2019) has identified conflicting interests, institutional constraints, and a dearth of knowledge as the primary barriers impeding the successful execution of trade facilitation measures.

The findings of a study conducted by Buyonge and Kireeva in 2008 indicate that the majority of obstacles faced in trade facilitation inside developing nations, such as insufficient political commitment to undertake reforms and inadequate legislative and institutional capabilities, emerge prior to the actual implementation phase. According to the findings of Sorescu and Bollig (2022), developing nations encounter several problems that arise from the prevailing structures that tend to favor specific interest groups, such as labor unions. These interest groups, driven by the fear of losing their privileges, strongly resist any reform initiatives. Mashiri and Sebele-Mpofu (2015) have identified corruption inside government departments as a significant obstacle, while Shyananowak (2013) has suggested that insufficient collaboration among border officials is another factor hindering trade facilitation. According to Siziba (2016), the geographical placement of certain borders is a significant obstacle to the successful execution of trade facilitation measures. According to Hoekman and Shepherd (2015), the presence of customs clearance offices in border towns, whether pre-existing or newly established as a result of cross-border business, contributes to congestion at developing country borders.

As previously delineated, numerous scholars have conducted investigations on the obstacles encountered in trade facilitation within the Southern African region. Despite the existence of multiple conflicting perspectives on the issues and challenges encountered by developing nations, some of which were documented prior to the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) on February 22, 2017, there remains a dearth of scholarly research that critically evaluates the rationale and coherence of these issues and challenges. Therefore, the objective of this study is to address this research gap. The objective of this study was to evaluate the obstacles encountered by nations in the southern Africa region, with a specific focus on Zimbabwe, during the execution of trade facilitation reforms. Among other things, this study examines scholarly viewpoints regarding these difficulties and evaluates their validity. In addition, this study undertakes a critical evaluation of the challenges associated with the execution of trade facilitation programs, with the overarching objective of identifying and analyzing tactics and solutions that can be effectively utilized by developing nations.

This study is based on the premise that effectively addressing obstacles that impede the successful implementation of trade facilitation initiatives promotes legitimate trade, along with various other advantages such as attracting more secure financial capital, stimulating economic activity, generating employment opportunities, increasing export revenues and imports, accelerating the diffusion of new technologies, and broadening the potential for future innovation (Hoekman, 2017; Grainger, 2013; Sakly, 2018; Sorescu and Bollig, 2015; and Rabiu, 2018). Based on the World Trade Organization's report from 2015, the complete execution of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) holds the capacity to yield an average reduction of trade expenses by 14.3 percent. Additionally, it has the ability to stimulate world trade by an estimated USD $1 trillion annually. It is noteworthy that the most significant benefits are expected to accrue to the least developed nations, predominantly located in Africa. Hence, it is imperative to adopt a proactive approach in implementing trade facilitation measures and eliminating any obstacles that impede their efficient implementation.

This paper is structured into five sections, as delineated. Section 1 (1) provides a comprehensive definition of the problem and the study subject, with reference to recent bibliographic sources. Section two of this study provides a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical and conceptual foundations, as well as a thorough evaluation of existing literature, pertaining to the problems encountered by developing nations in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region in their efforts to adopt trade facilitation measures. The third section of the paper delineates the study methodology, whilst the fourth section expounds upon and delivers the
study findings. The penultimate section of the study has multiple purposes. Firstly, it presents the study’s conclusion, summarizing the main findings and their significance. Secondly, it discusses the implications of these findings, highlighting their potential impact on relevant fields or areas of interest. Thirdly, it puts forward suggestions for policy creation based on the study’s results, offering recommendations for potential actions or interventions. Lastly, it provides suggestions for future research, identifying areas that warrant additional investigation and exploration.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

The framework of Trade Facilitation Research

The foundation of the concept of trade facilitation is linked to the idea of free trade as espoused by classical economists such as Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). According to these classical economists, tariffs, import bans, and quotas tend to stifle trade by favouring home companies over foreign ones. The elimination of these obstacles enables corporations to export goods to new markets ultimately resulting in positive capital gains for the exporting nations. This viewpoint was supported by data from the World Bank (2001) and OECD (2014), which showed that emerging countries with deeper economic integration in the 1980s and 1990s had significant growth of the domestic product, longer life expectancies, and better educational performance. The concern, however, is that developing countries lack the capacity to value add their products hence their inability to realise optimum gains from the natural resources trade value chain.

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on Samuelson’s ‘iceberg’ theory. The theory was initially created to simulate transportation costs, but it is having since been used to model the impact of all trade expenses on an international trade transaction, (Samuelson, 1954). According to the analogy, an iceberg melts during shipping, resulting in a decreased amount of the consignment being received at the destination. This amounts to a “pure loss, which is sometimes referred to as a “deadweight loss” comparable to the melting away of a portion of the iceberg's bulk as it travels through the water. Thus, according to the model, trade costs are inversely correlated with the value of the items delivered, although the basic findings are still valid even when trade costs are additive. If the country engages in trade facilitation and reduces its trade costs to zero, the quantity of goods imported rises and the domestic prices fall forcing the price wedge caused by the trade costs to disappear. The emphasis is that ineffective customs clearance practice between the originating country and the destination country indirectly raise the cost of international trade and in the process, widen the gap between what the producer of the goods receives as payment and what the customer is required to pay. Therefore, trade facilitation efforts that aim to eliminate trade obstacles on an individual, regional, and global country level will at least aid in preserving the original value of the exported commodities from their home country to their final destination, (Mataba, 2019).

This study also makes use of the Tinbergen (1962) gravity trade model, a physics-based model that was derived from Newton’s theory of gravity. The gravity trade model is used to describe how the Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) of two countries, as well as geographical factors like distance and population, affect bilateral trade flows. The model asserts that greater distances make trade with other countries less alluring whereas comparable economic size attracts trade between nations. The “distance” between the supplier and the consumer of a good directly affects the total costs that will be incurred at the conclusion of the transaction, the greater the distance, the higher the trade costs. This model is applicable to this study as the ‘economic distance’ between countries in Southern Africa may theoretically be decreased through improved trade facilitation, which helps lower trade costs and boosts bilateral trade in the process, (Tavengerweyi, 2018)

Additionally, the Edward Lorenz’s butterfly effect theory is included in this study. The theory holds that weather phenomena like hurricanes can emanate from tiny atmospheric changes exactly the same way as to how a butterfly flaps its wings across the globe. Over the years, the theory was borrowed from the traditional meteorological and mathematical fields and applied to other fields to demonstrate that a series of small events can lead to significant multiplier effects. This theory is applicable to this study since the slight variations on the border clearances at ports of can lead to a significant gap in the supply chain system. The study also makes use of the theory of constraints by Goldratt and Cox (2004), a management approach based on systems thinking that every system has at least one constraint used as the foundation for maintaining and enhancing that system reducing its effectiveness. A “constraint” being anything causing a system to perform below target and in this study, ‘constraints, are any factors hindering that the successful implementation of trade facilitation initiatives in developing countries, particularly in Southern Africa. In practice, these constraints range from cumbersome documentation requirements, inefficient customs and immigration procedures, absence of efficient risk management systems, duplication of processes, inadequate infrastructure, corruption and bribery, limited access Information and Communication Challenges (ICT), shortage of powered supply and multiple stakeholders at ports of entry leading to duplication of clearance processes, (Mafurutu, 2022; Mogashwana and Molele, 2023; Yingi, 2022)

The conceptual framework of this study is centred on trade development, its evolution and its link with trade facilitation through rigorous implementation of trade facilitation reforms. Trade development is viewed as a process that creates growth, economic progress and positive changes in the buying and selling of products, either actively or passively, directly or indirectly, on domestic wholesale and retail or foreign import and export markets, (Parrilli et al. 2023). According to Denwi et al. (2022), this is as a result of the fact that trade has now been widely been recognized as one of the most important factors in a country’s economic growth and development as it connects economies around the world, generates foreign currency, creates employment, and reduces poverty.
Adam Smith in the Wealth of Nations (1776) also hailed trade as a crucial tool for developing countries on the road to economic recovery, progress and economic growth. Furthermore, according to the World Bank report (2021), a country’s development can be aided by wise trade practices, which can also benefit its trading partners. Thus the success of trade depends on how it is facilitated.

The concept of trade facilitation was summarily defined by Grainger (2016) as referring to efficient border management, streamlined procedures and prompt clearance of imports, exports and goods in transit. The concept is premised on the fact that if a country improves its trade processes, trade costs are likely to go down, importers will pay less for the good, while exporters get paid more for it. Thus, trade facilitation benefits both the exporting and importing countries. In extreme circumstances, insufficient trade facilitation leads to a complete loss of trade as traders turn to other markets offering favourable trade environments. Poor trade facilitation procedures hinder trade-led development and promotes the mushrooming of unethical business practises like corruption, bribery and collusion. Unnecessary delays of cargo may lead to a variety of problems, such as retaliation by other trading nations and increased logistics expenses like demurrage, storage, and detention fees that are ultimately passed on to the consumer, (Pasara et al., 2020).

This study outlines trade facilitation as a genuine instrument that can have a positive impact on trade development and economic growth as existing literature on trade facilitation is based on the salient idea that ineffective trade practices often raise both direct and indirect trade transaction costs, (Glenday 1997; Portugal-Perezi and Wilson, 2008; Turkson et al., 2020. Direct costs as explained by Hoekman and Shepherd (2015) are measurable fees for documentation, logistics or customs clearance that are directly associated with specific trade transactions whilst indirect costs, on the other hand, result from procedural delays at the borders that are very difficult to evaluate in monetary terms as they involve unanticipated transaction costs such as time and foregone opportunities. This therefore implies that the unobservable factors affecting the implementation of trade facilitation measures and agreements need to be fully understood, explained and mitigated for developing countries to realise maximum benefits of trade development. According to Olubiyo (2015), successful implementation of trade facilitation has a potential to help all countries across the whole world in benefiting from economies of scale, experience enhanced competitiveness, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), facilitate poverty reduction and reduce inequality.

A study by Portugal-Perezi and Wilson (2008) described trade facilitation as the process of enhancing a nation’s “hard” and “soft” infrastructure to promote trade and the free movement of goods in general. The former includes highways, railroads, and ports while the latter encapsulates transparency, customs efficiency and institutional reforms. Hard infrastructure includes physical infrastructure and information and communications technologies (ICT). Physical infrastructure includes ports, airports, roadways, and rail while ICT is used to improve efficiency, productivity, and transaction costs in an economy. Soft infrastructure includes border and transport efficiency and corporate regulatory environment. The distinction into ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ infrastructure enables the analysis of challenges faced by individual countries in the implementation of trade facilitation initiatives to be viewed along all the individual dimensions. Implementation of initiatives focusing on physical infrastructural and ICT projects may be hampered by inadequate financial resources (Granger, 2016). However, Moise and Sorescu (2019) observed that improving infrastructure quality alone may not be a sufficient condition for lower transport prices as complementary steps in regulatory reform are also fundamental. On the other hand, implementation of trade facilitation initiatives targeting regulatory reforms through soft infrastructure may be hampered by institutional challenges, (Beverelli et al., 2015). Lack of political will, corruption, and market access restrictions and customs rigidity among others are some of the institutional challenges, (Hassan, 2020). The analysis of the effects of these factors on trade facilitation provides useful information to guide policymakers on resource allocation areas that would bring the greatest benefits to trade development.

Benefits of Trade Facilitation to Developing Countries

Grainger (2014; 2016) and Ariekot (2017) acknowledge that the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures facilitates the handling of cross-border transactions for traders as a result of increased transparency and reliability within international trading networks. This improvement often leads to more efficient allocation of resources, resulting in a reduction in both smuggling, tax evasion, corruption and rent seeking activities at the borders. (Hoekman, 2016). Furthermore, improved trade facilitation will help alleviate the bureaucratic obstacles encountered at border crossings in Southern Africa, sometimes referred to as “red tape.” (Turkson, 2020). This will result in enhanced competitiveness of domestic countries in both domestic and global markets as a result of minimizing delays and expenses through the establishment of a streamlined and effective process for the transportation of goods across national boundaries (Sorescu & Bollig, 2022). The Chirundu one-stop border post between Zimbabwe and Zambia is one such trade facilitation initiative which has yielded notable enhancements as individuals and commercial vehicles now undergo border formalities only once, thereby streamlining the process for both nations. Wilson and Otsuki (2003) also observed that a rigorous implementation of trade facilitation reforms and enhance trade facilitation will also enable developing countries to speed up trade transactions. This is more important as time is becoming increasingly a critical factor in determining the comparative advantage of trade especially for fresh produce and perishable commodities like fresh flowers are generally more time-sensitive. The contemporary business environment seeks faster global transactions made possible by globalization of information with consumers willing to pay more for faster deliveries of goods and services making it essential that firms deliver their products on time.
Seetanah and Fazuel (2016) notes that improved trade facilitation also enables governments to take advantage of the increased tax income generated by the growth of international trade. This will have more impact in developing countries where tax collection plays a crucial role in the financial sustenance of the populace, serving as a principal means of paying governmental expenditure (Wang, 2014). Hence, it can be deduced that the implementation of improved trade facilitation measures is anticipated to yield favourable outcomes for government income as a result of reduced costs associated with trade transactions. A study by Gonzalez and Sorescu (2019) showed that enhanced trade facilitation promotes increased engagement of small and medium-sized firms that are oriented towards export activities. Moreso, the enhancement of information and communication technology (ICT) is a pivotal determinant in mitigating the asymmetric impacts experienced by small and medium-sized enterprises (Makunike, 2017). When trade procedures and regulatory requirements lack transparency and reliability, small and medium-sized enterprises encounter challenges in accessing necessary information. Consequently, they are compelled to allocate additional resources and time towards acquiring information that is not freely accessible (Gonzalez & Sorescu, 2019) Moreover, the dearth of accessible information diminishes the ability to forecast market dynamics. Operational costs per product tend to increase as additional expenses often remain constant regardless of the value of goods or the volume of sales (Karee, 2014). The advent of the Internet and e-commerce, along with the streamlining of trade regulations, has the potential to mitigate the informational and market access obstacles encountered by small and medium-sized enterprises.

The implementation of improved trade facilitation measures by developing countries has been observed to yield favourable outcomes in stimulating economic growth, bolstering trade competitiveness, creating greater regional integration, and facilitating the integration of emerging countries into regional and global value chains, (Jordaan, 2014; Ntuli, 2017; Estevadeordal, 2017). The promotion of regional collaboration in trade facilitation has the potential to foster deeper integration that extends beyond the realm of trade, (Grainger, 2014). One illustration of this is the promotion of regional standards pertaining to products, services, and procedures. Such efforts not only facilitate trade, but also foster intellectual discourse and cooperation about safety and social issues that often extend beyond national borders, including an entire region. Enhanced trade linkages, particularly in essential food commodities, have the potential to foster regional trade and mitigate susceptibility to food poverty (Turkson et al., 2020). The establishment of these economic connections will facilitate the ability of these emerging economies to also engage and participate in global value chains

The introduction of trade facilitation measures has the capacity to promote trade diversification across multiple product categories (Hansen-Addy et al, 2022). Consequently, this can help reduce the vulnerability of the economy to external disturbances and enhance its overall competitiveness (World Bank, 2019). Lesser and Moise (2009) have also observed that the implementation of trade facilitation measures has been associated with a reduction in the occurrence of informal cross-border commerce. In the long term, this sort of support has the potential to facilitate the integration of additional players from the informal sector into the formal economy (Lowitt, 2017). The use of trade facilitation measures has the potential to effectively mitigate the trading expenses incurred by economically disadvantaged groups operating on narrow profit margins and lacking sufficient financial safeguards.

Furthermore, the enhancement of both physical and logistical trade infrastructure holds significant importance for small-scale and rural merchants and producers (Ibrahim & Ajide, 2022). This includes the development of feeder highways connecting to regional markets, as well as the establishment of market pricing information systems. Additionally, policy and regulatory reforms frequently yield favourable outcomes for the informal sector. Moreso The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) offers member countries the chance to develop their own customized implementation timetables, taking into account their specific capacities and requirements (WTO, 2014). The provision of technical assistance to developing countries by their strategic partners through the arrangements of the WTO’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) will contribute to the enhancement of their ability to utilize modern methodologies, (Grainger, 2016). This will be done in order to bolster regulatory oversight, facilitate the precise collection of owed revenues, and simultaneously promote economic growth by encouraging increased trade and incentivizing foreign investment. The earnings earned significantly contribute to the activities aimed at improving the social and economic well-being of the population.

According to the OECD (2005) as read with Sakyi et al. (2018), the adoption of trade facilitation measures targeted at improving infrastructure, institutions, and market efficiency in Africa is expected to yield favourable progress in social welfare. Moreso, a study by Yingi (2022) showed that the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the urgent need for all countries in the globe to have more effective and efficient trade as well as quicker and more technologically advanced customs procedures. The pandemic-caused crisis exposed the shortcomings of customs administrations that still required paper documentation and in-person interactions to release products as customs and other border control agencies of some countries were frequently cited as a major impediment to international aid reaching recipients as quickly as feasible. This was made even more difficult for landlocked nations that relied on transshipments to obtain supplies.

According to Chidede (2018), while it is widely acknowledged that trade facilitation can bring substantial overall benefits to reforming countries, there is a need to examine how these gains are distributed, particularly within the framework of global value chains (GVCs) that are often controlled by major "lead" firms based in developed countries. However, a study by the World Customs Organization (WCO, 2014), showed that the potential adverse effects of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) are expected to be minimal, as any negative consequences are anticipated to be overshadowed by the financial gains derived from the consistent enforcement of this agreement.
Trade Facilitation in Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)

The study focuses on developing countries in Southern African. Except for South Africa, which has a thriving financial, retail and construction sectors, the rest of the economies of other Southern African nations are often dominated by the public sector, agriculture mining and tourism. Zimbabwe, despite having a protracted economic crisis, has a small banking and real estate sector in addition to what is left of its manufacturing economy. As part of co-ordinated efforts through Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to increase regional trade, various other SADC countries have over time invested in economic diversification and public funding of rail, road, and air transportation, (Moyo, 2023). They have also signed trade facilitation inclusive agreements at the bilateral, sub-regional, and regional levels over the years in recognition of increased benefits and value of trade facilitation, (Hassan, 2020; UNCTAD, 2018). Some of these countries also belong to the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), a regional bloc which seeks to create a single market for goods, services, facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of the African Continent, (UNCTAD; 2018) (Mataba and Ismail; 2021).

The main objective of SADC is to achieve economic development, peace and security, and growth, alleviate poverty, enhance the standard and quality of life of the peoples of Southern Africa, and support the socially disadvantaged through Regional Integration. Tanyaniwiya and Hakuna (2019) notes that there has not been much improvement in the economic emancipation of the member countries as per the SADC major objective development levels of the states, nor the standard of living of the populace in the region. Furthermore, despite having been formed to boost trade within the region and amongst the SADC members in particular, members of the region still continue to struggle with value addition, trade development and trade facilitation, (Seck,2017; Ntuli, 2017; Hassan,2020; Valensis et al. 2016; Turkson et al., 2020). Findings from a study by Liza et al. in 2017 revealed that SADC efforts towards implementation of trade facilitation initiatives has failed to generate the desired outcomes of economic growth through the use of preferential trade rates due to the presence of no tariff barriers. Intra-regional commerce is still below its potential, (Viljoen; 2019). Exports of raw materials and unprocessed goods have resulted in employment losses and sluggish economic growth, (Ngarachu et. al 2018). Several treaty commitments remain unimplemented. This failure has contributed to the creation of frustration resultant delays for traders and transporters at the various ports of entry within SADC. These delays have been blamed for the increase supply chain costs such as demurrage, storage and detention charges that in most instances are eventually passed on to the consumer.

In pursuit of the SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan (RIDMP) (2012 – 2027) that was adopted in 2012 to strategize for expanding up infrastructure development to support regional growth, SADC member countries have overtime jointly and individual invested in various trade facilitation initiatives. Examples of such initiatives includes the enactment of the Kariba one stop border post by Zimbabwe and Zambia, joint construction of the Kazungula Bridge by Zambia and Botswana and the modernisation of the Beitbridge Border Post by Zimbabwe among other initiatives. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have also been explored by some of these countries to help upgrade most of their border posts. These PPPs are collaborations between government organizations and private sector business to fund, build, and operate large-scale government projects including infrastructure, border modernization and disaster early warning systems. However, despite being robust and ambitious, the majority of these initiatives have produced modest results as the majority of these nations continue experiencing difficulties in terms of trade facilitation, (Mafurutu, 2022; Hassan, 2020; Viljoen, 2019).

Six of the SADC countries, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe countries are land-locked. Moyo (2023) notes that inefficiency and high costs in cross-border trade have detrimental impacts on these landlocked countries’ ability to participate in global, as well as in regional trade. This is also exacerbated by the fact that most of these landlocked countries also exhibit limited use of ICT although ICTs plays a critical role in dissemination of trade information and in the global promotion of commodities and services. Limited internet connectivity and inadequate computer technology hinders online processing of declarations and registrations. Qualitative restrictions through permits, import and export bans, surcharges, additional sanitary and phytosanitary testing certification requirements all hamper trade transactions as alluded to by Ibrahim and Ajide (2022). Furthermore, according to Mafurutu and Chideed (2021), some SADC countries have different quantitative restrictions including axle load limits for trucks, the treatment of high cube containers and insurance schemes that render trade and transportation of merchandise discouraging and cumbersome.

A study by Siziba (2016) noted that most countries in SADC inclusive of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia, have overtime been observed to be having trade facilitation issues related to high transportation expenses, poor road and rail infrastructure that collectively contribute to low trade competitiveness. Hoekman and Shepherd (2015) have noted that such administrative impediments causes delays and makes transferring products across borders rather expensive. Sakyi et al (2017) further highlights the fact that apart from increasing transaction costs, these delays tends to shorten the perishable good shelf-life of a product and simultaneously lower its market value. The inefficient road and railway infrastructure as acknowledged by a study by Johns et al. in 2018 also leads to a significant increase in transportation costs for most landlocked SADC states. Tavengerwezi (2018) further notes that weak institutions such as poor contract enforceability and weak institutional frameworks hinder trade in Southern Africa rendering trade transactions risky.

Viljoen (2019) has also observed that SADC has a prevalent problem of well-orchestrated corrupt practices noticeable among border officials at most exit and entry points who connive to stifle trade flows through wanton and deliberately induced delays. Corruption has been heavily criticised by Msimburi and Liza (2014) for unnecessarily increasing total goods clearance fees in East and Southern
Africa as this subsequently discourages regional trade flows. Existing legislation through the involvement of multiple agencies introduces legal complexities that preventing trade facilitation initiatives from being fully achieved as would be expected in international best practice. Sometimes, export-import related regulations and documentary requirements become major impediments. Excessive documentation, physical inspection sometimes in the form of multiple physical inspections formats, having different unofficial agencies cause delays and increases costs of customs clearance processes (Munyanyi, 2019).

Lack of policy coherence and coordination have also been identified by Lowitt (2017) as some of the obstacles impeding trade facilitation advancements in Southern Africa. According to Moyo (2023), the presence of conflicting trade laws and weak institutional frameworks also worsens matters by making it difficult to enact measures that will promote trade. The customs administrations that have been tasked with the largest mandate of implementation of individual countries’ trade policies at the various ports of entries are frequently ineffective and under-trained. (Mafurutu, 62022). Actually, most border posts in Southern Africa are frequently mismanaged and tarnished by onerous customs procedures, out-of-date customs laws, and exorbitant documentation requirements(Viljoen; 2019). Zimbabwe shares the same problems as the rest of SADC on the inefficiency of moving goods such as delays at its border and its international airport. Viljoen (2019) shows that customs operations and procedures are some of the most salient trade facilitation challenges in SADC requiring policy makers to review customs requirements and time transporters spend at entry and exit points. Red-tape is responsible for these holdups at customs and immigration together with lack of suitable hard and soft infrastructure and technical difficulties.

Research Methodology

The study methodology employed in this paper is qualitative meta-analysis, as opposed to quantitative meta-analysis because the aim of this study is to obtain a comprehensive knowledge, rather than focusing on the cause and effect relationships typically stressed in quantitative meta-analysis. The primary objective of conducting qualitative meta-analysis in the context of analysing a collection of studies is to identify the fundamental components and afterwards interpret the findings in a manner that facilitates the transformation of the original data into novel conceptualizations, (Timulak, 2014). A qualitative meta-analysis is an interpretive analytical technique that uses qualitative findings reported in previous studies as building blocks for gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (Glass, 1976). It employs a secondary analysis of primary and original studies addressing the same research questions and aimed at providing a concise and comprehensive picture of findings across those studies, (Timulak, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative meta-analysis goes further to enable the examination and evaluation of the impact of methodological influences on the findings of their original studies (Levitt, 2018). Park and Gretzel (2007) used qualitative meta-analysis to determine the success factors for destination marketing websites. Newton-Howes and wood (2013) applied qualitative meta-analysis in a study to determine if cognitive behaviour therapy or non-cognitive psychotherapies are more effective at reducing psychopathology in patients with schizophrenia. Qualitative meta-analysis offers a means of enhancing the contribution of qualitative findings to the development of more formalised knowledge (Schreiber et al, 1997). This study adopts qualitative meta-analysis to provide a more complex analysis of trade facilitation implementation challenges. . All referred articles containing trade facilitation theories, models and challenges were selected from various economic literature databases while conducting the five stages of qualitative meta-analysis. Framing the research question was the first stage, searching for relevant literature was second, the third was rating the located literature, analysis, synthesis of the results was fourth, and reporting the findings was the last stage.

Stage one: Framing the Research Question

The first stage involved framing the research question and trimming it to specific principles and concepts as the initial meta-analysis research questions are often broad and are usually refined and reduced in scope over the course of undertaking the analysis (Hansen et al., 2022). The initial research question was “What are the main challenges and issues hindering the successful implementation of trade facilitation initiatives in SADC and Zimbabwe in particular? This was later refined to simply ‘developing countries and challenges to trade facilitation reforms’ for internet google search purposes.

Stage Two: Searching the Literature

Thereafter the most important aspect of conducting a qualitative meta-analysis which is synonymous with the data collection phase in primary study, entailed searching for relevant literature (Levitt, 2018). The researchers looked beyond the published literature to the ‘grey literature” from conference papers, dissertations and research reports ensuring comprehensiveness of the literature and minimization of publication bias. Four strategies were used to locate the relevant literature:-

The four strategies that were used to locate the relevant literature entailed:-

i. Searching for the relevant literature through reference list checking, citation searching, author searching, and hand searching through back issues of selected journals and manual searches through tables of contents of most pertinent journals and conference proceedings. The literature located included research papers, publications, reports and other reviews on trade facilitation compiled by trade organizations such as the WTO, SADC, OECD and UNCTAD among others.

ii. Selecting research papers via extensive search by means of the Google Scholar search engine with the purpose of finding references that are outside the mainstream economic literature publications using key words such as ‘trade facilitation in Southern Africa’, ‘trade facilitation agreement implementation’, ‘challenges to trade facilitation reforms’, ‘partial
implementation of trade facilitation reforms’ and ‘impediments to trade facilitation reforms’. For working papers of empirical nature, the study considered post 2010 publications. Filters were also applied to ‘trade facilitation’ and ‘challenges to trade facilitation implementation in developing countries’.

iii. The third strategy for searching for relevant literature entailed visiting the Econlit Publications Database and proved to be very effective in identifying the most recent publications on trade facilitation reforms. This strategy yielded unique articles pertaining to the challenges of implementation of trade facilitation reforms in developing countries. Using the same key words as in strategy two, the search yielded 260 publications. Filters were not employed for journal articles but only post-2010 publications were considered for non-referenced papers.

iv. The fourth and final strategy entailed using the World Bank Open Knowledge Repository focusing on the collection of journals and working papers. Filters were not employed for journal articles but only post-2010 publications considered for non-referenced papers.

For the purposes of an exhaustive information search, literature search continued simultaneously with other stages. The services of the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) Graduate School of Business professional and experienced reference librarians were sought to guard against naïve information search and retrieval in order to enhance the generalizability of the meta-analysis results.

Stage Three: Rating the literature

A qualitative meta-analysis always results in acknowledging that some studies are more relevant than others hence the third stage sought to establish the relevance of the contents (Timulak, 2014). This entailed making a clear elaboration of the inclusion/exclusion criteria and contacting prominent and knowledgeable individuals in trade facilitation who knew any additional works to fit the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Inclusion or exclusion criteria are primarily a set of rules that are used by reviewers to choose which studies to retain or exclude from the meta-analysis (Trikalinos et al., 2008).

One co-author and five research assistants screened abstracts and titles with at least two people screening every abstract/title. The team would meet once every week not only to review the extent of progress but to also ensure a consistent screening methodology. To avoid discarding valuable studies, only studies that clearly did not fit the initial sampling criteria were excluded during this step. The literature rating process was conducted in two stages. During the first stage, studies identified through literature searches were screened at the abstract level. This involved scanning through each abstract to scan the contents of the paper. The second stage involved reviewing the full text documents whose abstracts were considered and this led to decisions about whether or not to retain each individual study for further analysis.

To be included a study had to have been (i) published no earlier than 2013, (ii) qualitative, (iii) the study must have addressed challenges developing countries in Southern Africa face in implementing trade facilitation reforms, (iv) have clearly stated research questions, (v) clear approach must have been appropriate for the research question, (vi) fully described sampling method, (vii) appropriate sampling method for the research question, (viii) clearly stated data collection method, (ix) appropriate data collection method, (x) clearly described analysis methods, (xi) analysis appropriate for the research question, (xii) claims supported by sufficient evidence, and (xiii) article be publicly available.

This research compiled cogent studies relevant for the research for synthesis. The term “cogent” describes a study that makes use of sound reasoning or a study with a convincing and plausible argument with premises that make sense and back up the main claim. An argument is said to be convincing when it provides strong supporting evidence for the conclusion. The cogency test consisted of verifying the presence of the three criteria below as outlined by to Kahane and Cavender (1998) states three characteristics of a cogent argument:

i. Should be based on premises that are all true, for an argument to be persuasive, the principle(s), or the justification(s), for adopting the conclusion(s), must be accurate or at the very least plausible.

ii. Takes into account all pertinent data, excellent arguments consider also take all important facts covering rebuttals and challenges to the premises as well as the conclusion.

iii. Makes sense logically with a broad sense of validity providing readers a reason to believe the writer's conclusion.

Studies that failed to meet any of these criteria were excluded, that is all papers that had nothing to do with trade facilitation implementation by developing countries and challenges thereof were discarded.

Stage Four: Data Synthesis

The analysis adopted an interpretivist philosophical stance and used Paterson et al., (2001)’s meta-study methodology with four meta components (i) meta-method analysis, (ii) meta-theory analysis, (iii) meta-data analysis, (iv) meta-synthesis. The procedures and methodologies utilized in studies were assessed using flows and restriction of the meta-method analysis to determine how future research may benefit from specific research philosophies. Research question/purpose, context, theoretical perspective, philosophical
The theoretical frameworks and philosophical perspectives presented in studies were evaluated using meta-theory analysis, which is a process of evaluating the extent to which theory and philosophical viewpoints may have influenced the form and content of the investigations' conclusions. Meta-data analysis methodically and critically evaluates research conclusions regarding the difficulties developing nations encounter while enacting trade facilitation initiatives. Themes with similar meanings were grouped together once salient "meaning units" were found and a list of these subjects was compiled. Meta-synthesis involved the integration of interpretations from the meta-data, meta-method, and meta-theory analyses.

A meta-synthesis goes beyond the simple presentation of facts by developing theoretical frameworks and offering guidance that may help expand what is already known including translating the studies into one another. This involves systematically comparing the meaning of metaphors, concepts or themes and their relations across study accounts to identify the range of metaphors, concepts and themes. Listing and juxtaposing concepts, themes and metaphors involved writing down summaries of ideas and results from studies and then drawing lines and arrows between ideas from different but related studies. Only conceptual data rich in description were analysed and explored to determine the relationship between studies. The meta-synthesis analysis was initially completed and subjected to discussion and review. The synthesis was expressed and reported in Stage five as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: The Five Stages Meta-Analysis Approach](image)
It was noted that some studies used ‘vague’ methodologies or unspecified ‘identified’ methodologies that were used by some studies, unclear data analysis procedures and an absence of measures to resolve validity. This weakness in this study was overcome by using the ‘armchair walkthrough,’ a process of considering the methodological trajectory of a research project. By taking into account philosophical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of research design, this approach aids writers in establishing the methodological congruence of their investigations. Future research should focus on strengthening these areas for more reliable study designs.

**Findings and Discussions**

The study sought to understand the main challenges hindering the successful implementation of trade facilitation initiatives in SADC and Zimbabwe in particular. This was achieved through exploring scholarly perspectives on key impediments towards implementation of trade facilitation related reforms and careful analysis of the plausibility of these perspectives. The findings on challenges are presented in Table 1 below in accordance with the frequency of appearance in the different studies.

Challenges highlighted by most studies and their number of “hits” are (i) limited financial resources (ii) infrastructural challenges, (iii) limited use of Information and Communication technologies (ICT), (iv) lack of political will to implement reforms, (v) corruption, collusion and bribery, (vi) lack of institutional capacities, (vii) human capital, (viii) stakeholder multiplicity at the border posts, (ix) transiting challenges, (x) the presence of bogus clearing agents at the various ports of entry and other human capital challenges. Below we give a detailed discussion of each of these highlighted challenges in the order of severity, assuming that the most mentioned is the most common and most severe challenge.

**Table 1: Challenges on implementation of trade facilitation Initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade facilitation challenge</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Source:** Compiled by the Authors from various literature consulted

**Limited Financial Resources**

Findings show that the high costs associated with the implementation of some of the provisions of the TFA necessitates that a significant amount of financial resources be put aside specifically for the trade facilitation reform process. Further analysis as per conclusions by Murevererwi (2015), Hassan (2020) and Pasara (2020) revealed that most trade facilitation initiatives such as customs modernisation projects have been left partially incomplete by countries citing insufficient financial resources. Constructions in modernisation infrastructural projects at most border post remain halfway whilst major road upgrades have also remain incomplete.

168
This could have been as result of either inadequate financial projections or an underestimation of the costs involved or an outright under allocation of resources by those responsible for the budget process (Buyonge and Kireeva, 2018; Johns et al., 2018; Hassan, 2020; Siziba, 2016; Senquiz-Diaz, 2021; Mureverwi, 2015; Adeniji, 2018; Perera, 2016; Ariekot, 2017; Baithonak, 2017; Kassee, 2014; Clark, 2017; Senquiz-Diaz, 2021; Hoekman, 2016). Funding from the TFA facility is usually scarce, and when it is available, it takes longer to be disbursed and will often be for specific projects that are supervised by the WTO in line with the TFA, leaving little room for flexibility by developing countries (Zaibet et al., 2016). Under normal circumstances, one would expect the proceeds from the high tariffs that would have been levied on imports and selected exports in developing countries to be channelled towards upgrade of the hard and soft infrastructure in the border posts. However, findings reveal that, in most cases, developing countries channel the bulk of the revenue from custom duties and import and taxes to other priorities other than those to do with trade facilitation. The reason being the general dependency mentality in developing nations, of expecting developed countries to sponsor and offer donations to fund projects that are meant to help boost the GDP of developing countries. The time has come for developing countries to grow on their own and stop waiting for handouts from developed countries even for infrastructural projects meant to improve their own economic performance and development.

**Infrastructural challenges**

The study found that as a result of the poor road systems and the numerous potholes on the major highways in Southern African countries, trucks transporting cargo must slow their speed in order to manoeuvre around them, causing unnecessary delays in the process. This is in complete agreement with Mafurutu (2021), Mudzingwa-Moyo (2020), Pasara (2020) who highlighted the fact that poor and hazardous road networks, inadequate port infrastructure and under developed telecommunications are significant challenges that hinder the successful implementation of trade facilitation initiatives in SADC particularly in Zimbabwe. Results of the meta-analysis indicates that although some countries like Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana are upgrading their infrastructure, the majority of countries in the region have serious infrastructural challenges (Buyonge and Kireeva, 2018; Johns et al., 2018; Senquiz-Diaz, 2021; Parshotam, 2019; Pasara, 2020; Paul Baithonak, 2017; Hassan, 2020). These challenges call for simultaneous investment in both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ infrastructure. Investment in hard infrastructure by few selected countries in SADC without a corresponding investment in soft infrastructure does not achieve desired results as cumbersome clearance procedures cause delays. Similarly an investments in soft infrastructure without a corresponding investment in hard infrastructure will not guarantee quick arrival of the goods at their destinations as poor transit road networks in various countries contribute to delays in reaching destinations even quick clearance at the ports of entry.

**Lack of institutional capacities**

Institutional capacity is the ability of institutions to use and manage resources, carry out crucial tasks, and start structural reform when necessary. Public institutions in developing countries having been captured as performing matters of personal rather than public interest (Mudzingwa-Moyo, 2022; Grainger, 2019). Public institutions have become private empires meant for self-enrichment rather than for providing public goods and services. At times existing systems benefit interest groups, which for fear of losing rent or livelihood vehemently refuse to reform. This will then result in a lack of trade facilitation priority within national development planning. Institutional challenges are also caused by human resources deficiency characterised by insufficient, unskilled workforce because of brain by employees leaving in search of greener pastures in developed countries. The judicial system has not been spared either.

**Lack of political will to implement reforms**

A lack of political will to execute trade facilitation reforms has been identified as one of the challenges to implementation of trade facilitation initiatives by developing countries (Johns et al., 2018; Hoekman, 2016; Khanderia-Yadav, 2015; Parshotam, 2019). The political leadership prioritize projects they think would be noticeable to the electorate and hence assure them victory in the upcoming elections rather than those invisible but of economic and trade importance. Moreover, this frequently works against other strategic initiatives such as trade facilitation with long-term developmental impacts and the situation worsens when leadership does not attach sentimental significance to trade reforms (Siziba, 2016; Kassee, 2014).

**Corruption, collusion and bribery**

Reliance on customs duties as a source of revenue by a number of developing countries in Southern Africa has transformed customs into a major corruption risk area due to the high rates of import duties (Clark, 2017; Mureverwi, 2015; Perera, 2016). As a result of these high rates of duties, unethical business people find it cheaper to bribe a customs officer and give him or her a portion of the duties due than to discharge all duties (Senquiz-Diaz, 2021; Parshotam, 2019; Pasara, 2020). The bribe is used to silence the officer. Unfortunately, due to the harsh economic conditions experienced in developing countries, these officers fail to resist such temptations and end up facilitating such illegal transactions engineered by the unethical “middlemen” or “clearing agents”. Furthermore, when not all documentation is in order, these clearing agents may take advantage of the cumbersome documentation processes, which characterises the developing countries clearance processes and connive with customs and other government officials and law enforcement agents and demand facilitation fees and other payments from importers and exporters. In most instances, these clearing agents through misrepresentation with the importer also dupe both the business people, the government and exporters milking lots of money more than the duties actually required whilst customs officers are given small fractions of the loot collected. It is imperative...
to note that lately most multinational companies and professional clearing agents have adopted Codes of Ethics that prevent officials from paying bribes, even those dubbed as minor ‘facilitation fees’ to customs or government officials. Issues of bribery, corruption and collusion are mainly prevalent in small and medium size enterprises and local companies lacking proper governance structures (Parshotam, 2019; Mafurutu, 2022). Additionally, most revenue authorities and governments in Southern Africa have a zero tolerance stand of corruption where offenders are immediately flushed out of the system.

**Limited use of Information and Communication technologies (ICT)**

The use of information and communications technologies (ICT) can improve the efficiency of any trade procedures, including the buying and selling process, the customs clearance process, the payment process, and the shipping and logistics process. Findings show that developing countries in Southern Africa suffer from limited internet connectivity and inadequate computer technology to enable online processing of declarations and registrations due to constant power cuts due to electricity shortages in the region. (WTO, 2018; Mafurutu, 2022; Makunike, 2017; Johns et al., 2018; Hassan, 2019; Mfune, 2015; Hassan, 2020; Siziba, 2016; Senquiz-Diaz, 2021; Mureverwi, 2015; Adeniji, 2018; Perera, 2016; Arie Kot, 2017; Batibonak, 2017; Kassee, 2014). Backup using the generators has been introduced in border posts however, clearing agents who are important parties to the international trade transactions may not be having access to power and may thus have to wait for power to process the bills of entries whilst the vehicles wait for clearances. There is need for the relevant authorities to not only give border towns special treatment when creating load shedding schedules but to also consider investing in solar energy powered systems in such environments.

**Human Capital Challenges**

The findings also back up claims made by Becker (2002), who said that poor countries had unfavourable human capital settings, which is usually reflected by extensive brain drain and capital flight negatively affecting the trade facilitation initiative (Johns et al., 2018; Shayanowakako, 2013; Perera, 2016; Kassee, 2014). In addition, the problem of labour shortages has continued to be a source of worry as border modernization projects have resulted in the installation of numerous workstations without a matching rise in the number of employees, as is the case in Beitbridge border post in Zimbabwe. Staff shortages in the majority of government departments have also been attributed to poor recruitment practices used by the corresponding human resources departments, and the brain drain. The majority of skilled workers tend to migrate from Southern Africa to industrialized nations in pursuit of better opportunities and environments that would value their knowledge and experience in trade-related concerns, this therefore calls for continuous engagement with staff regarding welfare issues for effective retention.

**Stakeholder Multiplicity at the Border Posts**

The mandate of facilitating trade and travel ordinarily resides with Customs and Immigration Authorities worldwide, with other stakeholders coming in to assist. The current increase in the number of stakeholders in ports of entries in SADC have diminished the role of Customs and Immigration departments and increased the risk of corruption, smuggling and negatively impact service delivery (Shayanowakako, 2013). This has seen a huge negative impact on facilitation of trade objectives as it increases turnaround times at borders. The current number of stakeholders at the border posts in Southern Africa calls for a need to engage at high level and establish the key stakeholders required at the border, their numbers and identification mechanisms. It is also necessary to benchmark with other border posts of comparable size and complexity in developed countries and respond to the present challenge accordingly. More so, some stakeholders operate without uniforms or visible identity cards making it difficult to identify them and relate with them in accordance with expectations. In addition, the non-uniformed stakeholders who are not easily recognisable complicate the fight against corruption by compounding the risk of corruption. In the event that non-uniformed stakeholders are involved in corrupt practices, they are difficult to identify and to take appropriate corrective measures. The travelling public would not be able to raise concerns with the relevant superiors of the said non-uniformed staff as they are not be easily recognisable. These governments’ officers may also illicitly facilitate speedy entry of either “smuggled” or “controlled” goods in the name of ‘facilitating trade’ thus abusing the ‘trade facilitation” concept for their personal gains. There is also a challenge of departmental supremacy, a situation whereby each department believes it is more essential than others leading to duplication of processes and thus working against the trade facilitation initiative. There is therefore a need to carefully consider Seng(2000)’s assertion that customs should be regarded as the sole border enforcement agency with the responsibility and obligation to undertake risk management approaches at the border from both control and trade facilitation angles. It is critical to relook into the Single Window System being used by Mozambique as an integral part of border agency cooperation mechanism. Despite this problem, integrity in African customs administrations has improved in tandem with improved transparency and accountability of African governments.

**Transiting Challenges**

Findings also indicate that some countries in the region do not prioritize transit traffic, perceiving as more of a benefit to others than to that particular transit country (Siziba, 2016 and Kassee, 2014). As a result, most road freight still tends to be transhipped at or near border areas, with exporters using their national carriers, negotiation of through transport arrangements has proved difficult due to lack of trust, relate to competence of duties, vehicles dominance in the international transport sector from carriers from major countries forces smaller countries to put protective measures resulting in transhipments. The employment of foreign drivers in South Africa and their subjection to xenophobic attacks and other forms of harassment is a good example of transiting challenges.

Gumbo & Nkala, International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science 12(6) (2023), 159-175
Presence of bogus clearing agents at the major ports of entry

False clearing agents increasingly and commonly lurking about in the customs and immigration clearance areas of border posts promising to assist customers with the laborious clearance process are what these border posts are known for nowadays. Concerns that some government officers engage in dishonest business with such phony clearing agents in exchange for financial advantage outside of their legal obligations have been noted (Mafurutu, 2020). Employees who profit from such immoral practices are less likely to support attempts to facilitate trade because they typically stand to gain from the same process through bribes and kickbacks (Pasara, 2020). In Beitbridge Border Post, both the Zimbabwean and South African border security guards in conjunction with the national police are continuously making efforts to arrest these elements who however take advantage of the leniency of the judiciary systems by paying small fines and worm their way back into the border posts. In some instances, they cross to have their passports stamped daily trying to beat the security system. It is disturbing to note that some travellers actually have so much confidence in these bogus clearing agencies and argue that they have been using them for a long time and even have their contact details for use when they reach at the ports of entry. Once caught by the law enforcement agents, these travellers tend to protect them claiming they are their “cousins” residing in the border towns making it hard for law enforcement agents to deal with them.

Discussion

The findings confirm arguments raised by Mafurutu (2021), Mureverwi (2015), and Mudzingwa (2021) that, although problems with trade facilitation often manifests themselves most visibly in the form of physical delays at borders, the basis for those constraints often relate to behind border issues. Researchers who include Sayki and Afésorrg (2019), Grainger (2021), Viljoen (2019) among others argue that financial resources represent the major challenges that developing countries in Southern Africa including Zimbabwe must overcome to successfully implement trade facilitation efforts. These authors contend that the problem of the absence of sufficient financial resources in the majority of Southern African developing nations, makes it difficult to implement projects connected to trade facilitation, such as modernizing customs and renovating ports of entry and exit. This is because these nations' national budgets are under stress due to other objectives such as eradicating poverty, hunger, and malnutrition among others.

Kassee (2014), Clark (2017), Senguzz-Diaz (2021), Johns et al. (2018), and Hoekman (2016) argue that not all trade facilitation projects require funding for their execution, for example, publication of trade information, enactment of trade portals, advance rulings and customs risk management among others. Hoekman (2018) further argues that there may also be times when the absence of domestic political will to adopt reforms is so great that no amount of foreign help can make up for it. The unwillingness of the current system's players to adjust lower costs becomes such a significant obstacle to the implementation of trade facilitation reforms. Reforming customs administrations has always proven challenging especially as strong customs workers, unions and the corruption element in such institutions frequently resist administrative changes seeking to usher new processes and policies. Most reforms frequently advocate for cutting-edge information technology which is alien for most incumbent managers and employees hence the general feeling of discomfort in its adoption.

The human capital element (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 2002; Weatherly, 2003) characterised by staff shortage, quality and labour relations affect the implementation of trade facilitation in developing countries. According to Becker (2002), this term “human capital” element refers to knowledge, talent, creativity and health collection of qualities, such as life skills, knowledge, creativity, and vitality associated with investing in a profession (Weatherly, 2003). Schultz (1961) highlights components of human capital as education, training, intelligence, skills, health, loyalty and punctuality that employers expect from the workers. These authors concur that the more an organization invests in human capital, the higher the chances of being successful and productive. Human capital dictates the pace of development, economic growth, and advancement in science and technology results in more innovations in customs and immigration worldwide. Technological discourses nowadays centre on the use of artificial intelligence even at border posts as the future of immigration, customs and excise. The investment in human capital enhances the adoption capacity of new technologies in the service industries. This study argues for governments of developing countries to invest more in human capital tasked with implementation of these much-needed trade facilitation initiatives. The resource constraints raised should be dealt with decisively as they strain employees whose morale is already dented by other welfare issues.

Conclusions

This study was conducted by performing a meta-synthesis of systematic reviews of qualitative literature on trade facilitation. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the primary obstacles encountered by developing nations in the implementation of trade facilitation initiatives and to propose potential solutions to address these challenges. The meta-analysis incorporated a greater quantity of papers compared to prior analyses and synthesized data from a fragmented corpus of economic literature pertaining to international commerce and development. The resolution of these difficulties in Southern Africa and Zimbabwe will facilitate the acquisition of regional benefits from trade, including the promotion of economic growth, enhancement of trade competitiveness, expansion of employment prospects, and fostering of regional integration and collaboration. The member countries of the Southern Africa Development Cooperation have the potential to solidify global value chains as a defining feature of international trade.

The implementation of regional commercial networks has the potential to foster more transparency and dependability, thus leading to a reduction in illicit activities such as smuggling, tax evasion, corruption, and rent seeking that are currently prevalent at regional
ports of entry. The use of trade facilitation measures serves to alleviate bureaucratic obstacles encountered at border posts, which impede the smooth flow of transit routes across Zimbabwe's North-South corridor. Consequently, these barriers undermine the significant contribution of the country to regional commerce. Zimbabwe has a significant role in facilitating regional trade as it acts as a vital transit route for neighboring nations along the North-South corridor. The adoption of trade facilitation measures in Zimbabwe has the potential to greatly improve trade relations and foster greater inter-regional trade with key strategic partners in Southern Africa, such as South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Malawi. Zimbabwe has submitted an application for membership in the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) trading bloc. Consequently, the resolution of these trade barriers has the potential to improve the likelihood of Zimbabwe's acceptance into the BRICS trading bloc.

This study posits that the obstacles encountered in the execution of trade facilitation measures are mostly universal among Southern African nations, albeit with potential variations in their specific consequences at the national level, owing to disparities in legislation, infrastructure, and overall economic attributes. This paper identifies several trade facilitation challenges, such as insufficient infrastructure, limited financial resources, a lack of political commitment to reform implementation, inadequate institutional capacities, instances of corruption, collusion, and bribery, the presence of multiple stakeholders at border posts, limited utilization of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the existence of fraudulent clearing agents at different ports of entry, and challenges related to human capital. The issues discussed by Pasara et al. (2020) and Lorenz (1960) have significant repercussions that impact the cross-border facilitation system across the entire region. Moreover, this study asserts that although the presence of financial resources and sustainability are crucial, they alone do not guarantee automatic success in the implementation of the trade facilitation plan. Several key factors contribute significantly to the success of trade facilitation reforms. These factors encompass a high level of commitment, effective cooperation and coordination among ministries and government agencies, active involvement of private sector stakeholders, sufficient allocation of human and material resources, and the implementation of a sequencing approach. In conclusion, the research suggests that it is crucial to prioritize the resolution of personnel deficiencies within customs and other relevant governmental entities responsible for facilitating trade clearance, both at border checkpoints and inside administrative centers. This is identified as a fundamental requirement for effectively executing trade facilitation endeavors.

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Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Methodology, Rating and Screening the literature, Data Synthesis, Original Draft Preparation, Review and Editing

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