

Effect of the Common External Tariff on Trade Facilitation at Namanga Border Station in Kenya

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Accepted: 30 September 2025 || Published: 10 November 2025

Abstract

Trade facilitation reforms have been a key component of the overall tax reform package, for widening of facilitation base. Despite these reforms, traders crossing our borders encounter a range of obstacles. The general objective will be to determine the effect of the common external tariff on trade facilitation at the Namanga border station in Kenya. The study was anchored on the New Trade Theory and the Customs Union Theory. This study used an explanatory research design. The target population was 204 managers of clearing and forwarding agents and KRA customs officers in the Namanga border station in Kenya. Following data collection and analysis, 167 respondents correctly completed and submitted their questionnaires, representing an 81.9% response rate. The study found that common external tariff has a positive and significant effect on trade facilitation ($\beta = 0.218$, $p = 0.019$). Based on the findings, policymakers should strengthen tariff harmonization within the East African Community (EAC) by ensuring consistent implementation and minimizing exemptions that create discrepancies. Future studies could examine how artificial intelligence and blockchain could further enhance trade facilitation.

Keywords: *Namanga Border, Common External Tariff, Trade Facilitation*

How to Cite: Bwahyi, S., Ogaga, B., & Soi, N. (2025). Effect of the Common External Tariff on Trade Facilitation at Namanga Border Station in Kenya. *Journal of Finance and Accounting*, 5(11), 12-22.

1. Introduction

Income taxes are the major source of revenue for the government in any developing country. However, the revenue amounts the relevant authorities generate for government expenditures by far does depend on numerous factors, especially on the readiness of taxpayers to comply with the laws of a country. It can be generally termed as an act of being non-compliant if a taxpayer fails to abide by stipulated provisions (Kirchler, 2021).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), more than half of the total world trade occurs through regional trade agreements. World trade under regional trade arrangements grew from 43 percent to 60 percent between 2011 and 2015 (OECD, 2016). World Bank (2014) points out that most countries in the world are members of at least one regional trade arrangement and at least one third of world trade is covered by

regional trade arrangements provisions. As of June 2014, the cumulative number of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) as reported by the General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and World Trade Organization (WTO) was 595. The common feature of all the Regional Trade Agreements is that they are reciprocal trade agreements between two or more partners (World Trade Organization, 2014).

Trade facilitation refers to a set of policies that expedite and simplify the technical and legal processes for goods entering or departing a country for international trade. As a result, trade facilitation encompasses the entire range of border operations, from the electronic interchange of cargo data to the simplicity and standardization of trade documentation to the ability to appeal border agency administrative decisions (WTO, 2022).

A common external tariff means an identical rate of tariff imposed on goods imported from foreign countries (Knobel & Pyzhikov, 2023). A common external tariff (CET) must be introduced when a group of countries forms a customs union. The same customs duties, import quotas, preferences, or other non-tariff barriers to trade apply to all goods entering the area, regardless of which country within the area they are entering (Diop, 2019). The main goal of the Custom Unions is to limit external influence, liberalize intra-regional trade, promote economic development, and diversification in industrialization in the Community. It is designed to end re-exportation, but it may also inhibit imports from countries outside the customs union and thereby diminish consumer choice and support protectionism of industries based within the customs union (Malick, 2020).

The Namanga border crossing is the main land checkpoint for goods and travelers passing between Kenya and Tanzania. The facilities were upgraded in recent years to make it a one-stop border crossing between Namanga, Kenya, and Namanga, Tanzania. The Namanga border crossing between Southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania is located about 160 km southeast of Nairobi and 100 km north of Arusha. The Kenyan side of the border is in Kajiado County, while the Tanzanian side is in Longido District. Namanga is one of the major border crossings between the two countries due to its proximity to the two major cities.

1.1 Problem Statement

Trade facilitation at the Namanga border post is currently facing a number of challenges that result in delays in the clearance of goods across the Kenya-Tanzania border. The situation often encourages increased smuggling of goods as traders try to use shortcuts to avoid government agencies' bureaucracies, which always cause losses to several businesses due to the delayed movement of commodities across the border. All these challenges are associated with the disjointed coordination of trading by different agencies involved.

Despite achieving a huge integration milestone, trade facilitation remained low at 15 percent in 2022 due to, among others, the imposition of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) by partner states. A 2021 study by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (2022) on regional integration noted that African countries continue to trade more with the outside world than among themselves. The report also showed that intra-African trade as a share of global trade declined from 14.5 per cent in 2021 to 13.7 per cent in 2022.

Over the same period, intra-African exports declined as a percentage of total exports from 18.22 per cent to 17.89 per cent, and intra-African imports declined from 12.81 per cent to 12.09 per cent (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2022). The Intra-EAC Trade Brief Analysis report

by the East African Business Council (EABC) also showed that the value of trade among the EAC member states fell by more than 33 percent (\$1.8 billion) to \$3.6 billion in 2024, from \$5.4 billion in 2023 (East African Business Council (EABC, 2024). Therefore, it is against this background that this study will determine the effect of the common external tariff on trade facilitation at the Namanga border station in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 New Trade Theory

New trade theory is a collection of economic models in international trade theory developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s that focuses on the role of increasing returns to scale and network effects. The basic argument is that there is a trade-off between the extent to which firms can achieve economies of scale and the intensity of competition in the market. For a given size market, larger firms imply fewer firms and hence more monopolistic and oligopolistic outcomes. A relatively fewer producers who specialize in identical products and dominate the global market characterize these imperfect competition market structures.

In contrast to the classical theories, the new trade theory (Krugman, 1979; 1980) explains why countries engage in intra-industry trade and firms' heterogeneity. This theory originated in the work of Bernard *et al.* (2003) and Melitz (2003). This is a valuable result because the great bulk of global trade is intra-industry rather than inter-industry in nature. The ability of the theory to explain this feature of global trade is made possible by several assumptions: consumers prefer variety in consumption, the market is populated by firms selling different varieties of a good, and there are increasing internal returns to scale in production, meaning that a firm's average cost of production falls as its volume of production increases.

Although most jobs in NTT assume that income increases are intrafirm, income increases are extra-firm (Krugman 1991). Krugman's (1991) model also illustrates that trade leads to a regional concentration of major industries in the presence of external economies of scale. Krugman also points out that the long-term regional consequences of trade are typically cumulative and self-reinforcing. The emergence of globalization is also explained by the new trade theory. As a result, poorer developing countries may struggle to grow some industries in the future because they are too far off from the economies of scale that industrialized countries enjoy. This is due to the economies of scale that mature enterprises already have, rather than a fundamental comparative advantage. The theory can be applied to this research because it explains the role of trade facilitation in helping developing countries compete in the global market.

2.1.2 The Customs Union Theory

The customs union theory was developed in the 1950s by Viner (1950), Meade (1955), and Lipsey (1957) and is the most developed part of the neoclassical theory of integration. According to the theory, a customs union is based on the elimination of internal tariffs and other trade restrictions, but in contrast to a pure free trade zone, the member states execute a common tariff towards third countries (Rose, 2016). Customs union, which eliminates customs tariffs, lead to a decrease in cost of goods which reduces the price of the goods and increase in efficiency, thus contributing to economic growth. Trade diversion occurs when a partner country's production displaces lower-cost imports from outside the regional trade area, thanks

to the high level of protection enjoyed by producers within the regional trade area. Obviously, the level of protection erected against outside competition is a key determinant of the extent of trade dispersion (Yang & Gupta, 2012).

If the external tariff is set in such a way that a more expensive internal source of an input or a consumer good replaces the cheaper source from outside the regional trade area, consumers are penalized because they pay higher prices after integration. That is referred to as trade diversion (Venables, 2016). The creation of a customs union, with common external tariffs, would further alter the existing pattern of trade flows. The assumption is that before the union, partner states imposed differential tariffs on different countries to protect their own industries. Therefore, we can see that the whole customs union issue can be disentangled in the free trade-protection argument. As Duponchel (2016). points out that the main purpose of any customs union is to shift sources of supply. On the relevance of this theory in this study, a customs union is the integration or integration of customs territories into one big customs territory, consolidating the free and open movement of goods, irrespective of origin, as long as the goods are cleared in any of the member states.

2.2. Empirical Review

2.2.1 Common External Tariff

Batra (2022) analyzed India's global trade potential using the gravity model. The augmented gravity model was first used to analyze the world trade flows and the coefficients thus obtained are then used to predict trade potential for India. The gravity model was estimated using the OLS techniques with cross-sectional data for the year 2020. The results indicated that all three of the traditional gravity effects (Gross Domestic Product, Population, and Distance) were intuitively reasonable, with statistically significant t-statistics. It further revealed that the magnitude of India's trade potential is highest with the Asia-Pacific region, followed by Western Europe and North America.

Agbodji (2021) carried out an empirical study on the impact of sub-regional integration on bilateral trade. The study used a descriptive survey research design and was carried out among 400 stakeholders in the economic union. The results show that membership in a common monetary zone, UEMOA, and the implementation of the Common External Tariff aimed at economic integration had significant effects on bilateral trade within the zone, mainly in terms of diversion of imports and exports.

Nduguye (2021) investigated the trade effects of the East African Community Customs Union (EAC CU) on agricultural trade, focusing on four of a number of products classified as sensitive by the EAC CU, namely, maize, rice, sugar, and wheat. Secondary data on EAC member countries' imports, gross domestic product (GDP), population, and purchasing power parity (PPP) of both importing and exporting countries, as well as data on the distance between major cities in trading countries and borders between countries, were obtained from different sources. The study found that EAC CU had a trade diversion effect for rice and wheat, while at the same time increasing the extra-EAC imports of sugar over the study period.

2.2.2 Trade Facilitation

Trade facilitation refers to the simplification, modernization, and harmonization of international trade procedures with the aim of reducing transaction costs and improving efficiency in the movement of goods across borders. The World Trade Organization (WTO, 2015) defines trade facilitation as the simplification and streamlining of customs and other border procedures to expedite the release and clearance of goods. According to Grainger (2014), trade facilitation encompasses measures such as documentation standardization, the use of information technology, and risk management to reduce delays and enhance predictability in global trade.

International trade is now an embodiment of the new order of the global economy, as it ensures the movement of goods and the factors involved in the production of these goods from one country to the other. However, several authors (Wilson et al., 2019; Portugal-Perez and Wilson, 2020; Mbekeani, 2020; Portugal-Perez and Wilson, 2012; Hoekman et al., 2021) have shown that the effectiveness of this movement depends largely on how trade is facilitated among the countries involved.

Especially for developing countries, such as those in Africa, trade facilitation is an important trade strategy because of the systematic market and coordination failures emanating from information asymmetry (Yakop & van Bergeijk, 2021). This market failure is more likely to affect South–South trade adversely, such that without trade facilitation by governments, market opportunities may be created even through trade agreements, but they cannot be utilized effectively (Afesorgbor, 2019). This is the case because complex trade arrangements dissuade firms and countries from engaging in international production and trade.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework may be defined as an end result of bringing together of related concepts to explain or predict a given event, or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest, or simply, of a research problem (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013). The study had independent variables, which included be common external tariff measured by import quotas and preferences. The dependent variable was trade facilitation, which was measured by duty collection, transaction cost, and volume of cargo. As indicated in Figure 1.

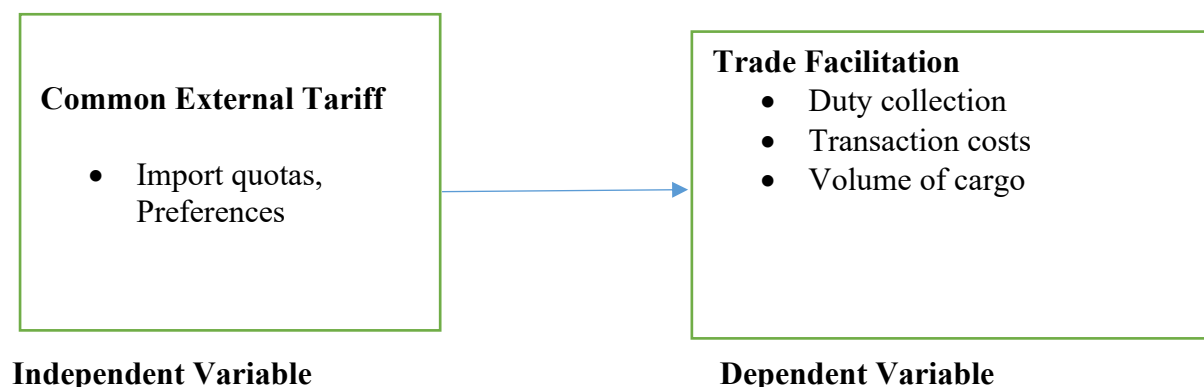


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

A research design is the plan and structure of an investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2012). Maylor and Blackmon (2019) state that a research design is a plan or structured framework of how one intends to solve the research problem and to expand knowledge and understanding. This study adopted the explanatory research design. The target population represents the entire population the study intends to examine, which could be used to make inferences (Asiamah *et al.*, 2017). The target population was 204 Accountant managers of clearing and forwarding agents and KRA customs officers in the Namanga border station in Kenya. A census survey was used in this study. Following data collection and analysis, 167 respondents correctly completed and submitted their questionnaires, representing an 81.9% response rate. The 18.1% non-response rate can be ascribed to a number of factors, including but not limited to a lack of time to complete the questionnaire and disinterest in the topic.

Table 1: Response Rate

	Numbers	%
Response rate	167	81.9%
Non-Response Rate	37	18.1%
Study Target Sample size	204	100%

Reliability Test

Reliability is the degree to which an instrument yields the same results each time it is put into measurement under constant conditions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Cronbach's Alpha was used. According to Bain (2017), values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.7 show that the instrument is reliable. In Table 1, all five latent constructs demonstrate high internal consistency. Trade facilitation exhibits the highest reliability ($\alpha = .970$), suggesting that its items are highly interrelated and effectively measure the intended construct. Common external tariff ($\alpha = .930$) also shows excellent reliability, indicating minimal measurement error and strong construct coherence.

Table 2: Test of Reliability of Questionnaire

Factor	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha score	Conclusion
Trade facilitation	5	0.970	Reliable
Common external tariff	5	0.930	Reliable

Cooper and Schindler (2010) argue that data analysis is the concept of data edition and also the process of reducing the data size to a manageable size, then coming up with summaries, as well as getting patterns and application of statistical techniques. Data collected was edited, cleaned, and coded for completeness. Since the study adopted a descriptive research design, both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics was used to analyze the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics for Common External Tariff

Table 3: For the statement Common External Tariff at EAC is aimed at economic integration and will have a huge impact on bilateral trade within the zone, the mean was 4.09 (SD = 0.629). a common external tariff at EAC will create a Customs union, which will eliminate the need for some regulations and customs checks at the border, had a mean of 3.95 (SD = 0.666). For the Common External Tariff at EAC will be an important step towards closer economic integration and a single market, the mean was 4.00, indicating agreement with the statement (SD = 0.631). The statement Through EAC, domestic producers will be able to compete fairly and equally on the internal market with manufacturers exporting from other countries had a mean of 3.91, indicating agreement with the statement (SD = 0.629). Lastly, Countries in the EAC will not be able to negotiate separate deals because there is a common external tariff. This reduces economic and national sovereignty, had a mean of 4.05, indicating agreement with the statement (SD = 0.735). The aggregate mean of 4.00 across all statements suggests strong overall agreement regarding the perceived benefits and implications of the Common External Tariff in the EAC.

Table 3: Common External Tariff

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
The Common External Tariff at is aimed at economic integration and will have a huge impact on bilateral trade within the zone	167	4.09	.629
A common external tariff at EAC will create a Customs union, which will eliminate the need for some regulations and customs checks at the border.		3.95	.666
The Common External Tariff at EAC will be an important step towards closer to economic integration and a single market.		4.00	.631
Through EAC, domestic producers will be able to compete fairly and equally on the internal market with manufacturers exporting from other countries.		3.91	.629
Countries in the EAC will not be able to negotiate separate deals because there is a common external tariff. This reduces economic and national sovereignty.		4.05	.735
Aggregate Mean		4.00	

4.1.2 Descriptive statistics for Trade Facilitation

Table 4 shows that the volume of imports and exports has increased considerably, the mean was 4.00 (SD = 1.256), indicating overall agreement. Technology has increased the speed of processing and exchanging of information between border agencies, had a mean of 3.96 (SD = 1.026). The direct and indirect costs of import and export transactions have significantly

reduced, the mean was 3.91 (SD = 1.134), reflecting moderate agreement. The volume of cargo clearance has increased significantly, had a mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.968), suggesting strong agreement. Lastly, the time taken in carrying out checks and clearance has greatly reduced, had a mean of 4.04 (SD = 1.014), indicating strong agreement. The aggregate mean of 3.99 across all statements suggests overall agreement that trade facilitation measures have been effective.

Table 4: Trade Facilitation

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
The volume of imports and exports has increased considerably.	167	4.00	1.256
Technology has increased the speed of processing and exchanging of information between border agencies.		3.96	1.026
The direct and indirect costs of import and export transactions have significantly reduced.		3.91	1.134
The volume of cargo clearance has increased significantly.		4.05	.968
The time taken to carry out checks and clearance has greatly reduced.		4.04	1.014
Aggregate Mean		3.99	

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients among the predictor variables and the outcome variable, Common External Tariff, along with their respective significance levels. The results indicate that the Common External Tariff has a positive and significant correlation with Trade Facilitation, $r = 0.629$. This suggests that a higher level of Common External Tariff is associated with increased Trade Facilitation.

Table 5: Correlation Statistics

	Trade Facilitation	Common External Tariff
Trade Facilitation	1	0.629**
	0.03	
Common External Tariff	0.629**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.3 Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was used to determine the effects of the predictor variables of the study on the outcome variable. Table 6 showed that the Common External Tariff had a positive correlation with Trade Facilitation up to 62.9% (R 0.629). The results reveal that the Common External Tariff caused a variation of 39.5% ($R^2=0.395$ and adjusted $R^2 =0.389$) on Trade Facilitation.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.629 ^a	0.395	.389	.31783

a. Predictors: (Constant), Common External Tariff_mean

Table 7 showed that there was an F statistic of 296.423 and a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, which indicates that the model was significant in explaining the variance caused by Trade Facilitation.

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	56.024	1	56.024	296.423	.000 ^b
	Residual	31.291	165	.189		
	Total	87.315	166			

a. Dependent Variable: Trade Facilitation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Common External Tariff

Table 8 showed that unit change in Common External Tariff caused a 0.218 increase in Trade Facilitation. The study found that Common External Tariff had a positive and significant effect on Trade Facilitation, $\beta = 0.218$, $p\text{-value} = 0.019 < 0.05$. The hypothesis was rejected.

Table 8: Regression Coefficient analysis

Variable	Standardized β	Std. Error	Unstandardized β	t-statistic	Prob.
constant	3.366	0.816		4.124	0.000
Common External Tariff	0.218	0.092	211	2.370	0.019

4.4 Discussion of the Findings

The study objective was to establish the effect of the common external tariff on trade facilitation at the Namanga border station in Kenya. The correlation analysis found that a common external tariff had a strong positive and significant correlation with trade facilitation ($r = .629$, $p = .003$), suggesting that harmonized tariff structures within regional blocs enhance cross-border efficiency and reduce regulatory fragmentation. Empirical evidence from Sakyi et al. (2019) supports this, indicating that tariff harmonization within African trade agreements significantly boosts intra-regional trade flows. Further, the regression found that, common external tariff has a positive and significant effect on trade facilitation ($\beta = 0.218$, $p = 0.019$). This positive effect suggests that harmonized tariff structures within regional blocs like the East African Community (EAC) enhance cross-border efficiency by reducing regulatory fragmentation and simplifying customs procedures. Empirical evidence by Sakyi et al. (2019) confirms that tariff harmonization significantly boosts intra-regional trade flows by lowering transaction costs and fostering economic integration. Several empirical studies support the finding that the Common External Tariff (CET) enhances trade facilitation.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that the Common External Tariff (CET) has a strong positive and significant effect on trade facilitation at the Namanga border station, demonstrating that harmonized tariff structures within regional blocs like the East African Community (EAC) enhance cross-border efficiency. This finding contributes to the literature on regional trade integration by empirically validating how CET reduces regulatory fragmentation and simplifies customs procedures. By highlighting the role of tariff harmonization in facilitating trade, the study provides policymakers with evidence-based insights for strengthening regional trade agreements and improving customs efficiency in Kenya and similar developing economies.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the positive effect of the Common External Tariff (CET) on trade facilitation, policymakers should strengthen tariff harmonization within the East African Community (EAC) by ensuring consistent implementation and minimizing exemptions that create discrepancies. Future studies could examine how artificial intelligence and blockchain could further enhance trade facilitation.

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