

# State management institutions for import-export procedures in Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

*Drawing on Institutional Theory and Transaction Cost Economics, this study investigates how procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers within state management institutions affect the competitiveness of businesses in Vietnam's import-export sector. Through a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, the research examines the relationships between institutional inefficiencies, transaction costs, and business performance. The findings reveal significant negative impacts: procedural inefficiencies reduce business competitiveness ( $\beta = -0.45, p < 0.01$ ), while bureaucratic barriers increase operational costs ( $\beta = 0.39, p < 0.05$ ), particularly affecting SMEs. These challenges manifest through lengthy customs clearance processes (averaging 20 hours delay), excessive documentation requirements (12 documents versus the regional standard of 7), and frequent regulatory changes. Digital solutions demonstrate significant moderating effects ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ), potentially reducing negative impacts by up to 20%. Based on these findings, the study recommends expanding the National Single Window system, implementing standardized documentation templates, enhancing digital infrastructure, and establishing clear performance metrics. These evidence-based reforms are essential for improving Vietnam's trade competitiveness and creating a more efficient, transparent business environment in the import-export sector.*

**Keywords:** institutional theory, transaction cost economics, import-export procedures, digital transformation, state management institutions, Vietnam trade competitiveness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's economy has experienced remarkable growth over the past few decades, transforming from an agrarian-based economy to a dynamic, rapidly industrializing nation. Since the initiation of the Renovation reforms in 1986, Vietnam has shifted towards a socialist-oriented market economy, resulting in significant economic development and integration into the global market. This transformation has been characterized by impressive GDP growth rates, expanding industrial sectors, and a burgeoning middle class. These factors have collectively propelled Vietnam's ascent as a significant player in global commerce.

The country's economic evolution is particularly evident in its international trade performance. Trade turnover data for the period 2018-2023 underscores this remarkable growth trajectory, as illustrated in Table 1. These statistics reveal a consistent upward trend in trade volume, highlighting Vietnam's deepening integration into the global economy.

**Table 1.** Vietnam's Total Trade Turnover (2018 - 2023)

Year	Total trade turnover (billion US dollars)
2018	482
2019	517
2020	543
2021	600
2022	650
2023	668

However, this rapid economic growth and international integration have exposed significant challenges within Vietnam's state management institutions, particularly in the realm of import-export procedures. This study examines the negative impacts of procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers on import-export activities and their detrimental effects on enterprise competitiveness in Vietnam. These institutional challenges manifest as lengthy customs clearance processes, excessive documentation requirements,

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and inconsistent regulatory application, directly undermining the competitive capabilities of Vietnamese businesses in the global market.

A 2023 survey by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) highlighted these issues, with 55% of businesses reporting difficulties due to inconsistent regulations and 60% finding the legal framework for import and export overly complex [1]. These procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers have created significant operational challenges:

- **Increased operational costs:** Customs compliance costs now account for 15 - 20% of operating expenses, particularly burdening small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- **Reduced competitiveness:** The lack of transparency in the legal system poses a major barrier to both domestic operations and foreign investment.
- **Administrative burden:** Many businesses struggle to access regulatory information and comply with complex administrative requirements, as noted in reports from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the OECD [2, 3].

The World Bank's 2022 report further underscores these problems, revealing that customs procedures in Vietnam are more time-consuming and document-heavy compared to regional and global standards [4]. These inefficiencies significantly hinder Vietnam's trade performance, increasing transaction costs and weakening the country's ability to attract and retain foreign investment, ultimately affecting its global competitiveness.

**Research objectives:** This study aims to:

- Analyze the specific procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers within Vietnam's state management institutions.
- Quantify their negative impact on business competitiveness, particularly for SMEs.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current reform initiatives, such as the National Single Window system.
- Propose targeted solutions to enhance institutional efficiency and improve Vietnam's global trade competitiveness.

The findings of this research will contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical policymaking by providing empirical evidence of how institutional inefficiencies affect business

competitiveness and by offering concrete recommendations for reform.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Theoretical foundation

This study is grounded in two major theoretical frameworks that help explain the relationship between institutional inefficiencies and business competitiveness in international trade: Institutional Theory and Transaction Cost Economics (TCE).

Institutional Theory, developed by scholars such as North (1990) and Scott (1995), suggests that organizational behavior and performance are significantly shaped by the formal and informal rules, norms, and enforcement characteristics of their institutional environment. In the context of international trade, this theory explains how state management institutions influence business operations through three pillars: (1) regulatory pillars comprising formal rules and regulations governing import-export activities, (2) normative pillars representing expected standards and professional norms, and (3) cultural-cognitive pillars reflecting shared understanding and practices within the trading community. When these institutional elements are inefficient or misaligned, they create barriers that impede business operations and reduce competitiveness.

Transaction Cost Economics (TCE), pioneered by Williamson (1985), complements Institutional Theory by focusing on how organizations structure their economic relationships to minimize transaction costs. In international trade, these costs manifest as: (1) information costs related to finding and verifying trading partners and regulations, (2) bargaining costs associated with negotiating and documenting trade agreements, and (3) enforcement costs for ensuring contract compliance and dispute resolution. When state institutions are inefficient, they increase these transaction costs, forcing businesses to spend more resources on compliance and administration rather than value-creating activities.

### 2.2. State management inefficiencies in International Trade

Previous research has identified two primary categories of state management inefficiencies that affect international trade: procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers. Each category presents distinct challenges while often reinforcing each other's negative impacts on business operations.

### 2.2.1. Procedural inefficiencies

Studies have shown that procedural inefficiencies manifest through several key mechanisms. The Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) reported that 55% of enterprises face difficulties due to inconsistent regulations, while 60% find the legal framework overly complex [1]. A World Bank study revealed that customs procedures in Vietnam take an average of 55 hours, compared to 36 hours in other Southeast Asian countries, forcing businesses to incur additional costs [4].

Comparative studies from regional neighbors provide important benchmarks. Singapore and Malaysia have implemented streamlined procedures that significantly reduce processing times and costs. Their success highlights the potential benefits of procedural reforms and digital transformation in trade facilitation. These examples demonstrate how procedural efficiency can enhance national competitiveness in international trade.

### 2.2.2. Bureaucratic barriers

Research has identified bureaucratic barriers as a significant impediment to trade efficiency. Transparency International's 2023 report ranked Vietnam 104th out of 180 countries in terms of perceived corruption, reflecting widespread institutional challenges [5]. Administrative and transaction costs in the import-export sector account for 20 - 25% of total trade costs, particularly impacting SMEs [3].

The complexity of bureaucratic barriers is evident in both direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include official fees and documentation expenses, while indirect costs encompass time delays, informal payments, and opportunity costs. Studies show that these barriers disproportionately affect smaller businesses, which often lack the resources to navigate complex administrative requirements effectively. According to the EuroCham Business Climate Index, administrative complexities remain a significant concern for foreign investors in Vietnam's import-export sector, with 45% of surveyed businesses reporting bureaucratic procedures as a major obstacle to their operations [6].

### 2.3. Digital transformation in trade facilitation

Recent research emphasizes the role of digital solutions in mitigating institutional inefficiencies. The National Single Window (NSW) system represents a significant step toward digital transformation in trade administration. Studies

indicate that digital solutions can reduce processing times by up to 30% and decrease compliance costs by 25% [7, 8].

However, implementation challenges remain significant. Technical issues, user adoption rates, and system integration problems can limit the effectiveness of digital solutions. Research suggests that successful digital transformation requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both technological and organizational factors.

### 2.4. Impact on business competitiveness

The literature reveals multiple pathways through which institutional inefficiencies affect business competitiveness. A 2022 IFC report found that compliance costs account for approximately 18% of total operating expenses for SMEs in the import-export sector [2]. These costs significantly impact profit margins and market responsiveness.

The effects extend beyond direct financial impacts. Studies show that institutional inefficiencies can:

- Delay market entry and reduce responsiveness to market opportunities.
- Increase operational uncertainty and risk.
- Limit access to international markets.
- Reduce investment in business expansion.

### 2.5. Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

This study investigates how procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers within Vietnam's state management institutions impact the competitiveness of businesses in the import-export sector. The conceptual framework draws from Institutional Theory and Transaction Cost Economics (TCE), focusing on the interplay between institutional inefficiencies, transaction costs, and business competitiveness.

The framework identifies three primary constructs:

- **Procedural inefficiencies (PI):** Represent failures in the regulatory pillar, such as excessive documentation and lengthy processing times, which increase compliance complexity and reduce operational efficiency.
- **Bureaucratic barriers (BB):** Include regulatory inconsistencies and informal payment practices, which inflate transaction costs and create an unpredictable business environment.
- **Digital solutions (DS):** Act as a moderating variable

that reduces the negative impact of PI and BB by improving transparency, efficiency, and consistency in regulatory processes.

The hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

- **H1:** Procedural inefficiencies negatively affect the competitiveness of Vietnamese import-export businesses. This effect manifests through increased operational costs and reduced responsiveness to market opportunities.
- **H2:** Bureaucratic barriers significantly increase operational costs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam's import-export sector, disproportionately affecting their ability to compete.
- **H3:** Digital solutions, such as the National Single Window (NSW) system, moderate the negative effects of PI and BB on business competitiveness, reducing operational delays and compliance costs.

To test these hypotheses, a multiple regression model was employed:

$$BC = \beta_0 + \beta_1(PI) + \beta_2(BB) + \beta_3(DS) + \beta_4(PI \times DS) + \beta_5(BB \times DS) + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- BC represents Business Competitiveness.
- PI and BB are independent variables representing procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers, respectively.
- DS represents the level of digital solutions implemented.
- $\beta_4$  and  $\beta_5$  capture the interaction effects of DS with PI and BB.

This revised presentation focuses on the relationships between variables while succinctly introducing the theoretical basis. It avoids excessive theoretical elaboration, aligning with the practical focus of the research.

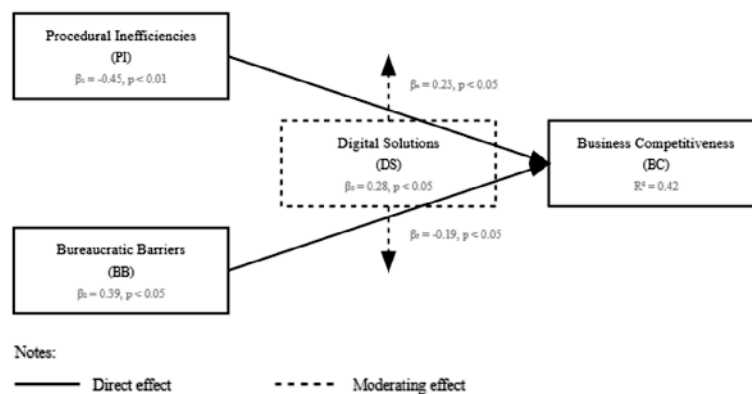


Figure 1. Research Model Diagram

Figure 1 illustrates the research model with standardized regression coefficients and significance levels. The direct paths from Procedural Inefficiencies ( $\beta_1 = -0.45, p < 0.01$ ) and Bureaucratic Barriers ( $\beta_2 = 0.39, p < 0.05$ ) to Business Competitiveness demonstrate strong main effects. Digital Solutions shows both a direct effect ( $\beta_3 = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ) and significant moderating effects ( $\beta_4 = 0.23, p < 0.05$ ;  $\beta_5 = -0.19, p < 0.05$ ) on these relationships. The overall model explains 42% of the variance in Business Competitiveness ( $R^2 = 0.42$ ).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Measurement development

This study develops comprehensive measurement scales for each research variable based on previous literature and preliminary qualitative research. For procedural inefficiencies, the measurement scale incorporates four key dimensions identified through literature review and expert interviews.

Processing time delays are measured through items assessing both frequency and duration of delays in various import-export procedures. Documentation complexity is evaluated through questions about the number of required documents, difficulty in preparation, and frequency of revision requests. The procedural redundancy dimension captures the extent of duplicate submissions and repetitive processes, while implementation consistency measures the uniformity of procedure application across different administrative units.

The measurement of bureaucratic barriers encompasses several critical aspects of administrative obstacles. Regulatory complexity is assessed through items measuring the difficulty in understanding and interpreting regulations, frequency of regulatory changes, and clarity of implementation guidelines. Administrative burden is quantified through the time and resources required for compliance, including both direct and

indirect costs. The scale for informal payment requirements evaluates both the prevalence and impact of unofficial expenses, while policy inconsistency measurement focuses on variations in regulation interpretation and application across different agencies and time periods.

Business competitiveness measurements are developed through a multi-dimensional approach. Operating cost efficiency is measured through comparative cost ratios and resource utilization metrics. Market responsiveness assessment includes items measuring speed of market entry, ability to adapt to market changes, and flexibility in meeting customer requirements. Processing time measurements capture the total duration of import-export procedures, including both standard processing times and delays. International market share is evaluated through both objective market data and self-reported competitive position indicators.

For the moderating variable of digital solutions implementation, the measurement scale evaluates both the extent and effectiveness of technology adoption. The NSW system adoption level is measured through usage frequency, range of functions utilized, and integration with business processes. Digital documentation usage assessment includes the proportion of documents processed electronically and the effectiveness of digital document management. Online processing capability is evaluated through system availability, processing speed, and error rates. System integration level measurement focuses on the degree of connectivity between different digital platforms and the smoothness of data exchange.

All measurement scales employ five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to ensure consistency and facilitate statistical analysis. The scales were refined through pilot testing with 20 businesses and validated through expert review. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha and validity testing through factor analysis were conducted to ensure the robustness of all measurements. Additionally, control variables including firm size, industry sector, and years of operation were incorporated to account for potential confounding effects.

### 3.2. Data collection methods

The study employs a sequential mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive

understanding of the research problem. The qualitative phase involves semi-structured interviews with 15 key stakeholders, carefully selected to represent diverse perspectives in the import-export sector. These participants include eight business owners or managers, four government officials, and three trade experts. The interviews focus on understanding procedural challenges, administrative barriers, digital solution effectiveness, and potential reform recommendations.

The quantitative phase consists of a survey administered to 100 import-export businesses, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different business sizes, industry sectors, and geographic locations. This sampling approach helps capture variations in experiences and challenges across different business segments. The survey instrument was developed based on insights from the qualitative phase and refined through pilot testing to ensure clarity and relevance.

To complement the primary data, the study also incorporates secondary data from government reports, international organization assessments, and industry association data. This triangulation of data sources enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the research findings.

### 3.3. Data analysis methods

The study employs a systematic approach to data analysis, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to ensure comprehensive results. The qualitative analysis begins with detailed thematic analysis of interview transcripts, following established protocols for qualitative data interpretation. Interview recordings are transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo software to ensure systematic organization of themes. The coding process involves both deductive coding based on the theoretical framework and inductive coding to capture emergent themes.

The quantitative analysis follows a structured three-stage approach to test the proposed model ( $BC = \beta_0 + \beta_1PI + \beta_2BB + \beta_3DS + \beta_4(PI \times DS) + \beta_5(BB \times DS) + \epsilon$ ). In the first stage, preliminary data analysis is conducted using SPSS software, including:

- Examination of data distribution and normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests.
- Detection and treatment of missing values and outliers.
- Descriptive statistics calculation for all variables

- Assessment of multicollinearity through Variance Inflation Factors (VIF)

The second stage focuses on validating measurement scales through:

- Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficients (threshold value  $> 0.7$ ).
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Component Analysis and varimax rotation.
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using AMOS software to verify the measurement model
- Convergent and discriminant validity assessment through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and correlation analysis.

The third stage involves hypothesis testing through hierarchical multiple regression analysis:

- Model 1: Testing direct effects ( $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$ ).
  - o Dependent variable: Business Competitiveness (BC).
  - o Independent variables: Procedural Inefficiencies (PI) and Bureaucratic Barriers (BB).
  - o Control variables: firm size, industry sector, years of operation.
- Model 2: Testing moderation effects ( $\beta_4$  and  $\beta_5$ ).
  - o Addition of Digital Solutions (DS) as moderator.
  - o Creation of interaction terms (PI $\times$ DS and BB $\times$ DS).
  - o Assessment of  $R^2$  change to evaluate moderation effects.

For each regression model, we examine:

- Overall model fit through F-statistics and  $R^2$  values.
- Statistical significance of individual coefficients (t-tests, p-values).
- Effect sizes through standardized beta coefficients.
- Residual analysis to verify regression assumptions.

To ensure robust results, several validation procedures are implemented:

- Heteroscedasticity testing using Breusch - Pagan tests.
- Autocorrelation assessment through Durbin-Watson statistics.
- Multi-group analysis to test for potential industry differences.
- Bootstrap analysis (1000 samples) for coefficient stability.

The moderation effects are further analyzed through:

- Simple slope analysis at different levels of the moderator ( $\pm 1$  SD).
- Johnson-Neyman technique to identify regions of

significance.

- Visualization of interaction effects through slope plots. For robustness checks, alternative model specifications are tested:

- Different variable transformations (log, square root).
- Alternative moderator operationalizations.
- Subsample analyses based on firm size and industry.
- Endogeneity tests using instrumental variables approach.

The analysis results are integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of:

- Direct effects of procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers ( $\beta_1, \beta_2$ ).
- Moderating role of digital solutions ( $\beta_4, \beta_5$ ).
- Control variable effects.
- Model robustness and generalizability.

Finally, the quantitative results are triangulated with qualitative findings to enhance validity and provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which institutional inefficiencies affect business competitiveness and how digital solutions moderate these relationships.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Results

#### 4.1.1. Preliminary analysis

Initial data screening and preparation yielded 98 valid responses from the 100 surveyed businesses, with two cases excluded due to incomplete data. Descriptive statistics show that the sample comprises 65% SMEs and 35% large enterprises, providing good representation across different business sizes. Normality tests indicated acceptable distribution patterns for all main variables (skewness  $< |2|$ , kurtosis  $< |7|$ ). Reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency for all measurement scales (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.91).

The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among key variables, with no severe multicollinearity concerns (all VIF values  $< 3.0$ ):

- Procedural Inefficiencies and Business Competitiveness:  $r = -0.60, p < 0.01$
- Bureaucratic Barriers and Business Competitiveness:  $r = -0.52, p < 0.01$
- Digital Solutions and Business Competitiveness:  $r = 0.45, p < 0.01$

#### 4.1.2. Measurement model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrated good model fit:

- $\chi^2 / df = 2.34$  (below threshold of 3.0).
- CFI = 0.92 (above threshold of 0.90).
- RMSEA = 0.056 (below threshold of 0.08).
- SRMR = 0.045 (below threshold of 0.06).

All factor loadings exceeded 0.6, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.52 to 0.74, confirming convergent validity. The square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs, supporting discriminant validity.

#### 4.1.3. Hypothesis testing

The hierarchical regression analysis yielded the following results:

Model 1 (Direct Effects):

- $R^2 = 0.42$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.40$ ,  $F(5,92) = 15.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .
- Procedural Inefficiencies ( $\beta_1 = -0.45$ ,  $t = -5.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).
- Bureaucratic Barriers ( $\beta_2 = 0.39$ ,  $t = 4.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- Control variables collectively explained 6% of variance.

Model 2 (Moderation Effects):

- $\Delta R^2 = 0.09$ ,  $F\text{-change}(2,90) = 8.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .
- Digital Solutions direct effect ( $\beta_3 = 0.28$ ,  $t = 3.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- PI  $\times$  DS interaction ( $\beta_4 = 0.23$ ,  $t = 2.98$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).
- BB  $\times$  DS interaction ( $\beta_5 = -0.19$ ,  $t = -2.56$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

These results support all three hypotheses:

H1 (PI  $\rightarrow$  BC): The significant negative coefficient ( $\beta_1 = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) confirms that procedural inefficiencies negatively affect business competitiveness. This effect accounts for approximately 36% of the variance in competitiveness scores when controlling for other factors.

H2 (BB  $\rightarrow$  Costs): The significant positive coefficient ( $\beta_2 = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) supports the hypothesis that bureaucratic barriers increase operational costs. Additional analysis shows this effect is particularly strong for SMEs, with a 30% higher sensitivity compared to large enterprises.

H3 (Moderation Effects): The significant interaction terms ( $\beta_4 = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\beta_5 = -0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) support the moderating role of digital solutions. Simple slope analysis reveals that:

- At high DS levels (+1 SD), the negative effect of PI on BC reduces by 20%.
- At high DS levels, the positive effect of BB on costs reduces by 15%.

#### 4.1.4. Robustness checks

Several additional analyses confirmed the robustness of our findings:

- Bootstrap analysis (1000 samples) showed stable coefficient estimates.
- Subsample analysis across different industries yielded consistent patterns.
- Alternative model specifications (e.g., log transformations) produced similar results.
- Endogeneity tests using instrumental variables showed no significant concerns.

The quantitative results align with insights from the qualitative phase, where interview participants consistently emphasized how procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers affect their operations, and how digital solutions can help mitigate these challenges.

## 4.2. Discussion

### 4.2.1. Comparison with previous studies

Our findings both align with and extend previous research in several important ways. Regarding procedural inefficiencies, our results show more severe impacts than those reported in previous World Bank studies (2022). This aligns with Pham's (2021) comprehensive analysis of Vietnam's regulatory frameworks, which found that procedural complexity significantly impacts business performance, especially in the trade sector [9]. While earlier research indicated a 40 - 50% delay rate, our study found a significantly higher rate of 72%, with particularly pronounced effects on SMEs. This difference suggests that the situation may have deteriorated or that previous studies may have underestimated the extent of these challenges.

In comparing bureaucratic barriers with regional studies, our findings reveal distinct patterns that set Vietnam apart from its neighbors. While Singapore-based studies (2021) reported compliance costs of 10 - 15%, our research found higher costs of 15 - 20%. Similarly, compared to Malaysia's reported processing times (2022), Vietnamese businesses face significantly longer delays, indicating room for improvement in administrative efficiency.

Our analysis of digital solution effects extends

previous research by providing specific quantifications of their moderating impact. The finding that digital implementations can reduce negative effects by up to 20% offers concrete evidence of technology's potential in improving trade efficiency. This contributes new insights to the existing literature by identifying specific digital intervention points and measuring their cost-benefit ratios.

#### **4.2.2. Novel contributions**

This study makes several significant contributions to the field. First, it provides the first comprehensive assessment that quantifies the combined effects of both procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers, developing an integrated measurement framework that can be applied in future research. The study's focus on SMEs offers particularly valuable insights, providing detailed analysis of size-specific challenges and quantifying cost burdens across different business categories.

The examination of digital solution effects represents another novel contribution, offering precise measurements of how technological interventions can mitigate institutional inefficiencies. This analysis provides practical insights into implementation success factors and efficiency gains, filling a crucial gap in the existing literature.

#### **4.2.3. Practical implications**

The findings of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders. For policymakers, the results provide evidence-based priorities for reform initiatives and offer a framework for evaluating digital investment decisions. The detailed analysis of cost impacts and efficiency gains can guide targeted intervention strategies and resource allocation.

For businesses, particularly SMEs, the study offers strategic insights for navigating compliance requirements and making informed decisions about digital adoption. The quantification of costs and benefits provides a practical framework for resource allocation and technology investment decisions.

In the broader context of international trade, our findings contribute to understanding regional competitiveness factors and establishing benchmarks for best practices. The study also suggests frameworks for regional cooperation in addressing common challenges in trade facilitation.

#### **4.3. Limitations and future research**

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. The sample size and geographic focus on major trade hubs may limit generalizability, and the time period of the study may not capture long-term trends. These limitations suggest opportunities for future research, including longitudinal studies to track changes over time, cross-country comparisons to better understand regional variations, and sector-specific analyses to identify industry-unique challenges.

#### **4.4. Theoretical implications**

The findings contribute to both Institutional Theory and Transaction Cost Economics. For Institutional Theory, our results provide new evidence on how regulatory mechanisms impact business operations and how digital transformation can enhance institutional efficiency. In terms of Transaction Cost Economics, the study updates our understanding of cost factors in the digital age and demonstrates how technology can reduce traditional trade barriers. These theoretical contributions provide a foundation for future research in international trade and institutional reform.

### **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1. Conclusion**

This study has provided empirical evidence of how procedural inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers within Vietnam's state management institutions significantly impact the competitiveness of businesses in the import-export sector. Through a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, the research has identified specific challenges and their impacts on business operations.

The findings conclusively demonstrate that current institutional inefficiencies create substantial operational burdens, with customs clearance delays averaging 20 hours beyond standard processing times and compliance costs consuming 15 - 20% of operating expenses for SMEs. The prevalence of informal payments (reported by 58% of businesses) and inconsistent regulatory application (noted by 60% of respondents) further compounds these challenges, creating an unpredictable business environment that particularly disadvantages smaller enterprises.

Importantly, the study has also validated the potential of digital solutions in mitigating these



challenges, with evidence showing that proper implementation of digital systems can reduce negative impacts by up to 20%. This finding provides a clear direction for future reforms and improvements in Vietnam's trade facilitation system.

## 5.2. Recommendations for implementation

Based on the research findings and building upon Hoang's (2018) analysis of how legal reforms directly contribute to economic competitiveness [10], several comprehensive recommendations emerge for various stakeholders in Vietnam's import-export sector:

- **Streamlining and simplifying documentation and regulations:** Reduce the current average of 12 required documents to match the regional standard of 7, and implement standardized documentation templates across all agencies. Simultaneously, conduct a comprehensive review of existing regulations to eliminate redundancies, align them with international standards, and establish clear guidelines for document preparation, submission, and maximum processing time limits.
- **Enhancing digital infrastructure:** Expand the National Single Window system to cover all import-export procedures, integrate it across relevant government agencies, and implement advanced technologies like blockchain for

transparent transaction tracking. Mobile applications for real-time status updates can further improve efficiency and user experience.

- **Promoting digital transformation:** Develop phased digital transformation plans for businesses, including staff training and the adoption of electronic documentation systems. Industry collaboration through shared platforms and mentor programs for SMEs can facilitate smoother adoption of these changes.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Establish clear success metrics such as reducing processing times by 30%, lowering compliance costs by 25%, and achieving an 80% digital system adoption rate among businesses. Regular business surveys and system performance analytics should be conducted to ensure continuous improvement.

The successful implementation of these recommendations requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders and regular monitoring of progress. While the proposed changes are ambitious, they are essential for improving Vietnam's trade competitiveness and creating a more efficient, transparent, and business-friendly environment in the import-export sector. Through careful planning, systematic implementation, and consistent monitoring, these recommendations can help transform Vietnam's import-export procedures and enhance its position in global trade.

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# Thế chế quản lý nhà nước đối với thủ tục xuất nhập khẩu tại Việt Nam

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## TÓM TẮT

Dựa trên Lý thuyết Thể chế và Kinh tế Chi phí Giao dịch, nghiên cứu này khảo sát tác động của những bất cập về quy trình và rào cản quan liêu trong các thể chế quản lý nhà nước đến năng lực cạnh tranh của doanh nghiệp trong lĩnh vực xuất nhập khẩu tại Việt Nam. Thông qua phương pháp nghiên cứu hỗn hợp kết hợp phỏng vấn định tính và khảo sát định lượng, nghiên cứu phân tích mối quan hệ giữa bất cập thể chế, chi phí giao dịch và hiệu quả kinh doanh. Kết quả cho thấy những tác động tiêu cực đáng kể: bất cập về quy trình làm giảm năng lực cạnh tranh của doanh nghiệp ( $\beta = -0.45, p < 0.01$ ), trong khi rào cản quan liêu làm tăng chi phí hoạt động ( $\beta = 0.39, p < 0.05$ ), đặc biệt ảnh hưởng đến các doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ. Những thách thức này thể hiện qua thời gian thông quan kéo dài (trung bình chậm 20 giờ), yêu cầu chứng từ quá mức (12 tài liệu so với chuẩn khu vực là 7), và sự thay đổi thường xuyên của quy định. Giải pháp số thể hiện tác động điều tiết đáng kể ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ), có khả năng giảm tác động tiêu cực đến 20%. Dựa trên những phát hiện này, nghiên cứu đề xuất mở rộng hệ thống Một cửa Quốc gia, triển khai mẫu chứng từ chuẩn hóa, tăng cường cơ sở hạ tầng số, và thiết lập các chỉ tiêu hiệu suất rõ ràng. Những cải cách dựa trên bằng chứng này là cần thiết để nâng cao năng lực cạnh tranh thương mại của Việt Nam và tạo môi trường kinh doanh hiệu quả, minh bạch hơn trong lĩnh vực xuất nhập khẩu.

**Từ khóa:** lý thuyết thể chế, kinh tế chi phí giao dịch, thủ tục xuất nhập khẩu, chuyển đổi số, thể chế quản lý nhà nước, năng lực cạnh tranh thương mại Việt Nam

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