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Factors that Affect Tax compliance by SMEs in Ga-West Municipality

[1]Amewuda Abraham | [2]David Ackah (PhD)
[1]St. Johns Grammar School | [2]Center for Excellent Training & Consultancy
Email: dashdollar2004@yahoo.com | drackah@ipmp.edu.gh

Abstract

The issue of taxation has generated a lot of controversy and several political conflicts over time. According to its importance, several economic theories have been proposed to run an effective system, identified taxation as a compulsory levy by government through its various agencies on the income, capital or consumption of its subjects, indicated that tax is a legally compulsory transfer of money from the public to the government mainly as a source of government revenue while argue that tax is a payment which cannot be avoided without attracting a punishment and in return of which no gain/quid pro-quo is promised by the government to the tax payer. A tax is an involuntary payment by a person referred to as a tax payer therefore taxes are distinguished by their compulsory nature and by lack of relationships between the amount paid and the values of the basic services received by the tax payers. Taxes are essential (World Bank, 2014). Economists have put forward many theories of tax at different times to guide the state as to how justice or equity in taxation can be achieved

Keywords: Tax Theory, Public Financial Administration, Economic management, Sustainability of SMEs, Development Economics, Challenges Facing the Growth of SMEs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) are said to play important role in economic development. SMEs are often described as efficient and prolific job creators, the seeds of big businesses and the fuel of national economic engines (Carsamer, 2009). Empirically, studies have shown that, small and medium enterprises make up 97% of most economies (Ariyo, 2005). In addition, SMEs tend to be the primary driver for job creation as they are labour intensive and employ more labour per unit capita than larger enterprises thereby creating more jobs in the economy. This is also evident in developing countries like Ghana as it is estimated that SMEs employ about 35% of labour (Mensah & Rolland, 2004).

Holban (2007) opined that taxation can contribute to development and to welfare through three sources; it must be able to generate sufficient funds for financing public services and social transfers at a high level of quality; it should offer incentive for more employment and for an efficient and lasting use of natural resources; finally, it should be able to reallocate income. But in the case of SMEs, tax authorities must take into consideration their income and need for survival in imposing the taxes. Operationally, it is expedient that enough profit is allowed them for the purpose of expanding their businesses. The tax policy must be one that will not encourage SMEs to remain in the informal sector or to evade or avoid tax payments. Significantly, the development of small and medium enterprises is greatly affected by the level of taxation, its administration and compliance: the higher the tax rate is, or the greater the efforts to fulfil taxation requirements are, as well as to check how those requirements are met, the lower the initiatives are for SMEs to perform well.

Therefore, maintaining the balance between tax rate, compliance costs, tax administrating and economic development should be a main goal of every tax policy (Stem & Barbour, 2005). Small and Medium Enterprises' (SMEs) ability to grow depends highly on their potential to invest in innovation. Against this background, the consistently repeated conception of SMEs about their problems regarding the effect of multiple taxes is a priority area of concern, which if not properly addressed, can endanger the survival and growth of the sector. In the light of the foregoing, this research attempts to make an assessment of the effect of tax on the sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ghana

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theory of Tax

The subject of tax has raised considerable attentions and concerns across many countries to build a civilized country with a strong and sound economy is the desire of every country (Moore, 2008). There

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have been efforts to comprehend the concept of taxation using different theoretical perspective. The increased attention paid to taxation has therefore brought significant definitions of taxation. Fundamentally, taxation has been suggested by many research studies as a critical success indicator in many countries in the world, as taxation defines the driving forces and the unique characteristics of the country which determine the performance of the economy (Prichard, 2010). According to Eftekhari (2009) taxation has always been an issue for the government and taxpayer alike from the early years of civilization. The issue of taxation has generated a lot of controversy and several political conflicts over time. According to its importance, several economic theories have been proposed to run an effective system.

Osita (2004) identified taxation as a compulsory levy by government through its various agencies on the income, capital or consumption of its subjects. Omagor and Mubiru (2008) indicated that tax is a legally compulsory transfer of money from the public to the government mainly as a source of government revenue while Balunywa et al. (2010) argue that tax is a payment which cannot be avoided without attracting a punishment and in return of which no gain/quid pro-quo is promised by the government to the tax payer. According to Mulooki and Mugisha (2012) a tax is an involuntary payment by a person referred to as a tax payer therefore taxes are distinguished by their compulsory nature and by lack of relationships between the amount paid and the values of the basic services received by the tax payers. Taxes are essential (World Bank, 2014). Economists have put forward many theories of tax at different times to guide the state as to how justice or equity in taxation can be achieved. The main theories or principles in brief, are:

Benefit Theory: According to this theory, the state should levy taxes on individuals according to the benefit conferred on them. The more benefits people and corporate bodies derive from the activities of the state, the more they should pay to the government. This principle has been subjected to severe criticism on the following grounds: Firstly, if the state maintains a certain connection between the benefits conferred and the benefits derived it will be against the basic principle of the tax. A tax, as it is known, is compulsory contribution made to the public authorities to meet the expenses of the government and the provisions of general benefit. There is no direct quid pro quo in the case of a tax. Secondly, most of the expenditure incurred by the state is for the general benefit of its citizens, it is not possible to estimate the benefit enjoyed by a particular individual or corporate body every year. Thirdly, if the principle is applied in practice, then the poor will have to pay the heaviest taxes, because they benefit more from the services of the state. If more is derived from the poor by way of taxes, it is against the principle of justice?

The Cost-of-Service Theory: Some economists were of the opinion that if the state charges actual cost of the service rends from the people, it will satisfy the idea of equity or justice in taxation. The cost-of-service principle can no doubt be applied to some extent in those cases where the services are rendered out of prices and are a bit easy to determine. But most of the expenditure incurred by the state cannot be fixed for each individual because it cannot be exactly determined.

Ability to Pay Theory: The most popular and commonly accepted principle of equity or justice in taxation is that citizens of a country should pay taxes to the government in accordance with their ability to pay. It appears very reasonable and just that taxes should be levied on the basis of the taxable capacity of an individual. For instance, if the taxable capacity of a person A is greater than the person B, the former should be asked to pay more taxes than the latter. It seems that if the taxes are levied on this principle as stated above, then justice can be achieved.

However, there are some difficulties in implementation and the definition of ability to pay. Economists are not unanimous as to what should be the exact measure of a person's ability to pay. The main viewpoints advanced in this connection are as follows:

Ownership of Property: Some economists are of the opinion that ownership of the property is a very good basis of measuring one's ability to pay. This idea is outrightly rejected on the ground that if a person earns a large income but does not spend on buying any property, he will then escape taxation. On the other hand, if another person earns income and buys property, he will be subjected to taxation. Is this not absurd and unjustifiable that a person, earning large income is exempted from taxes whereas another person with small income is taxed?

Tax on the Basis of Expenditure: It is also asserted by some economists that the ability or faculty to pay tax should be judged by the expenditure which a person incurs. The greater the expenditure, the higher

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should be the tax and vice versa. The viewpoint is unsound and unfair in every respect. A person having a large family to support has to spend more than a person having a small family.

Income as the Basics: Most economists are of the opinion that income should be the basis of measuring a man's ability to pay. It appears very just and fair that if the income of a person is greater than that of another, the former should be asked to pay more towards the support of the government than the latter. That is why in the modern tax system of the countries of the world, income has been accepted as the best test for measuring the ability to pay of a person.

2.1.1 Characteristics of a Good Tax System

Ali-Nakyea (2008), citing Adam Smith, in his book "The Wealth of Nations" in which the attributes of taxation are captioned as "canons of taxation." states four significant attributes which were relevant in the time of Adam Smith and which are still relevant today. Fundamentally, a good tax system should be fair to the people who are required to pay it. The subjects of every state are to contribute their quota by way of taxes to support the government nearly as possible in proportion to their respective abilities. Ability to pay refers to the economic resources under a person's ownership and control. For example, income taxes are based on a person's inflow of economic resources during the year, whereas Value Added Tax and other Indirect Taxes are based on a person's consumption of resources represented by the purchase of goods and services. Rent Tax on the other hand, is based on a person's accumulation of resources in the form of landed property (Ali-Nakyea, 2008).

Secondly, people should be able to determine their true tax liability with a fair degree of accuracy. Tax payers should be clear in their minds as to how much tax they owe and how much is payable at any point in time. There should be no ambiguities and tax administrators must have no discretionary powers as to how much to demand, that is, the tax administrator is not to squeeze out more than necessary. Additionally, the time of payment, the manner of payment, the amount to be paid, the place of payment as well as all rights and obligations under the laws must be known to both the tax administrator and the tax payer. It can be said that the Internal Revenue Service, the administrator of direct taxes in Ghana issues tax assessments that categorically states all the aspects of the rights and obligations as already said (Ali-Nakyea, 2008).

Additionally, a good tax should be convenient for the government to administer and for the people to pay. Perhaps the most important characteristic of this canon is that tax payers must not overly suffer in order to comply with the tax laws. Every tax must be levied in a manner that will make it convenient for the contributor to pay. The method of collecting the tax should be such that the majority of the tax payers would understand and routinely comply. The collection method should not overly intrude on tax payers' privacy but should offer minimal opportunity for non-compliance (Ali-Nakyea, 2008). Moreover, a good tax should be economical to the government. The administrative cost of collecting and enforcing the tax should be reasonable in comparison with the total revenue generated by the tax. Every tax ought to be so contrived as both to take and keep out of the pockets of the people as little as possible over and above what it brings into the Consolidated Fund (Ali-Nakyea, 2008). Bird (2005) indicated that most developing countries including Ghana are extremely focused on economic growth in both the private and public sectors.

Even in primarily market-based economies, governments need to acquire assets for public sector capital formation and development related expenditures. There appears to be no limit to the tax gadgetry used in different countries to stimulate economic growth. These countries encourage foreign direct investment to stimulate economic growth through the use of tax incentives and many developing countries impose higher taxes on retained profits than on distributed profit in order to encourage distribution (Bird, 2005). However, the effectiveness of some of the policies especially of incentives remains uncertain because there is still insufficient data to link such policies with growth performance.

In addition, the use of tax instrument to enhance economic stability is important in developing countries because this enables them to ensure elasticity with respect to changes in the value of money and income levels. If tax yields rise when national income rises, governments have less need to rely on deficit financing to maintain and expand the level of public sector activity in a growing economy (Bird, 2005). The distributional role of taxes is another important purpose of tax system. Disparities in income can block development and increase demands for government social spending. The main redistributive

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tax in most tax systems is personal income tax (Zee, 2005). In practice, the personal income tax in developing countries is far from being progressive since there is large disparities in incomes between the rich and poor. These disparities are compounded by the influence of the rich, who may end up paying fewer taxes due to numerous exemptions or favours from the government.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the research design, population of the study, sample and sampling technique, source of data, method of data collection, instrumentation, statistical analysis, validity and reliability of the data collection procedure.

3.1 Research Design

The two basic methodological philosophies to which different studies might naturally lend themselves are the qualitative and the quantitative methods. Whilst qualitative research is about exploring issues, understanding phenomena and answering questions by analysing and making sense of unstructured more descriptively, quantitative research more often draws inferences based on statistical procedures and often makes use of graphs and figures in its analysis (Ghauri&Grönhaug, 2005). In the study of research methods, the quantitative method expresses the assumptions of the positivist paradigm that tells that behaviour can be described through objective facts. This study aims at determining the correlation between identified variables.

The quantitative method is supportive in studies where some kind of explanation is sought to describe the cause of change in social facts, basically through the means of objective measurement and quantitative analysis. The quantitative method is a more powerful tool to calculate the magnitude of the relationship with added accuracy (Uma, 2006). Therefore, the researcher considers the quantitative survey method to be an appropriate tool for assessing the effect of tax on the sustainability of SMEs.

3.2 Population of the Study

Asika (2000) defines the population of a research as "all conceivable elements, subjects or observations relating to a particular phenomenon of interest to the researcher". A research population according to Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) relate to the total universe of units from which the sample is to be selected. The target population for the study consists of SMEs in the Ga-West Municipality. The SMEs in the Ga-West Municipality was chosen due to the fact that from 2010 to 2012 their activities have generated revenue of GH¢1,309,631.14 in 2010 and GH¢1,670,221.32 in 2011. In 2012, the Assembly experienced a drop in IGF from GH¢1,670,221.32 in 2011 to GH¢1,621,142.87 (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2013). The Assembly generated GH¢ 863,760 representing 39.5 per cent of the estimated internally generated fund of GH¢ 2,189,149, for the first-quarter. The Ga-West Municipality is the second largest of the six Municipalities and Districts in Greater Accra Region. This implies that the activities of SMEs in the Ga-West Municipality are significant to economic development of the economy.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) defines a sample as "a sub-set of a population which must have properties which make it representative of the whole". Similarly, Bryman and Bell (2003) refer to samples as the population that is selected for investigation. Samples involve collecting information from a portion of the larger group, and on this basis, infer something about the larger group (population). The sample frame for the survey included SMEs in Ga-West Municipality. For the purpose of this research, a non-probability sampling technique thus, convenience sampling method was used to select the respondents.

This method was chosen because it was difficult to obtain a sampling frame for SMEs. In addition, convenience sampling provides easy access to the respondents, practical, and quick (Nachmias&Nachmias, 2008). Generally, the SMEs in Ga-West are categorized into retail and provision shop owners, food vendors, spare parts dealers, crops and fruits sellers, wax prints and dress dealers, engineering, mechanical and electrical services, carpentry shops, communication services, salons as well as transport operators. Based on these categories a sample size of fifty (50) was considered. The sample size was divided into ten (10) that is, five (5) per category.

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3.4 Sources of Data

There are two different kinds of data; primary and secondary. The primary data was obtained through the administration of questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was the tool which was purposively distributed among SMEs in the Ga-West Municipal Assembly. The researcher used this mode of data collection due to the fact that, it was easy for participants to be convinced and encouraged to complete the questionnaires as cited by Zikmund (2003). It was also easy for the researcher to approach participants. Secondary data from books, journals, dissertations and information from the internet were obtained to supplement the primary data.

3.5 Research Instrument

A self-developed questionnaire was designed as an instrument for the study. This has been attached as Appendix. The structured questionnaire is closed-ended in which the researcher provides a choice of answers. The questionnaire was divided into four different sections. Section 'A' included biographical questions, such as age, gender, highest level of education and number of years in business. Section 'B' of the questionnaire deals with tax effect on SMEs' sustainability while Section 'C' consists of factors affecting SMEs compliance to taxes in Ghana. The section 'D' also measures the growth of SMEs in the Ga-West Municipality. The scales in sections 'B' and 'C' were measured using Likert scales (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree).

3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected were transformed into more suitable format for analysis. After data processing, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for the data analysis. The use of descriptive and inferential statistics as a statistical tool was included. To examine the hypotheses established in chapter one of the study, correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses of this study. The general goals behind using the correlation analysis were to learn more about the relationship between the independent variables and a dependent variable, also to investigate the functional relationships between independent and dependent variables, in order to understand what might be causing the variation in the dependent variable.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

According to Ghauri and Grönhaug (2005), reliability refers to stability of measurement and relates to the absence of random errors of measurements (Ghauri&Grönhaug, 2005). Reliability measure demonstrates that the operations of the study such as data collection procedures could be repeated, with the same results. The researcher pre-tested the research instruments to determine their suitability and clarity for the study. In view of this, the researcher used a convenient sample of 5 participants for that purpose. Based on the results of the pre-testing, it was observed that participants did not have problem with the items on the research instruments used in the study.

Regarding reliability of primary data collected, the researcher stated in the questionnaire that the research was for academic purposes, did not ask respondents to give their names, there was no reward associated with responding to the questionnaire and it was fully voluntary. This was to instil confidence in respondents to give reliable responses. Further the researcher eliminated responses with excessively missing data from other analysis. In relation to secondary data of the data was collected from credible sources. Hence the information the researcher analysed in this study represents the exact data obtained from the field.

3.8 Ethical Consideration in Research

The researcher took steps to guarantee the ethical acceptability of the study. Specifically, confidentiality of information provided by the participants was assured. Also, anonymity of participants was enforced. In line with this, the researcher's instructed participants not to write their names on the questionnaire. Finally, respondents were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary.

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4.0 DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

Variables		*Frequency*	*Percent*
Age: (Years)	18-27	2	4.0
	28-37	19	38.0
	38-47	24	48.0
	48-57	5	10.0
	58 and over	0	0.0
Gender:	Male	28	56.0
	Female	22	44.0
Level of Education:	WASSCE	27	54.0
	HND	13	26.0
	First Degree	6	12.0
	Master's Degree	4	8.0
	PhD	0	0.0
Length of Business:	Less than 1year	0	0.0
	1-5 years	7	14.0
	6-10 years	32	64.0
	Above 10 years	11	22.0
Source of Finance	Self-Financing	25	50.0
	Bank Loans	9	18.0
	Funds from Relatives	3	6.0
	Loans from MFIs	13	26.0
Business Registered	Yes	50	100.0
	No	0	0.0
Where Registered	GRA	48	96.0
	GWMA	2	4.0
	AMA	0	0.0
	GRA and GWMA	0	0.0
Total Number of Respondents (N=50)			

Source: Field Data Analysis, 2015

The researcher administered 50 questionnaires which were retrieved and used for the analysis. The distributions of frequencies and percentages for each of the demographic variables in Table 1 shows majority of the respondents in the study were males constituting 56.0% of all the respondents while the 44.0% were females. This means that more males are in the categories of SMEs selected for the study. Respondents who were between 38 and 47 years make up 48.0% of the entire respondents. Those who were 28-37 years old constitutes 38.0%, however, 48-57 and 18-27 comprise 10.0% and 4.0% respectively. Thus, younger people are more into these businesses than the older people. Also, in terms of educational qualification, majority of the respondents representing 54.0% were WASSCE holders. Respondents who were holders of Higher National Diploma (HND) constitute 26.0% while those who had Bachelors' Degree make up 12.0%. Master's Degree holders constitute the least (8.0%) of all the educational qualification. There was no response for Doctorate degree. It can be deduced that highly educated people are not much involved in these businesses

In relation to sources of finance, 50.0% stated that their source of finance was self-financing which implies that they financed their own business operations, 26.0% indicated that they obtained loans from Microfinance Institutions as a source of finance while 18.0% stated that they used bank loans while the remaining 6.0% stated that they obtained support from relatives. With regards to experience in business, 64.0% of the respondents indicated that they have been in business for 6-10 years, 22.0% stated above 10 years while 14.0% of the respondents stated 1-5 years. From the analysis, it was realised that all the respondents, were all tax registered. They explained that they have been paying tax to both GRA and Ga-West Municipal Assembly. Finally, 96.0% of the respondents were registered with Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) while 4.0% were registered with the Municipal Assembly. This implies that SMEs in the municipality are registered for tax purposes.

4.2 Factors that Affect Tax Compliance by SMEs

Concerning the factors that affect tax compliance of SMEs in Ga-West Municipal Assembly, Table 3 shows that, majority of respondents agreed to the fact that fear of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to report profit due to high tax payment has become one of the factors affecting their tax compliance. This was evidenced by (30.0%) of the respondents whereas (24.0%) indicated that the issue of cumbersome procedures in relation to registration and filing of tax is irritating while 20.0% of the respondents stated poor bookkeeping records has a significant impact on compliance attitudes of SMEs. 16.0% of the respondents agreed to the statement that waste and corruption of government officials affected tax compliance of SMEs. Moreover, 6.0% of the respondents indicated that improper deductions on returns affected tax compliance by SMEs. 4.0% of the respondents stated that accounting irregularities affect tax compliance of SMEs. Finding from Osamwonyi (2009) and Basil (2005) supported this finding that issue of proper bookkeeping records, taxation and regulations have negatively influenced their compliance level towards taxes.

Table 3: Factors that Affect Tax Compliance by SMEs

	Frequency	Percent
Fear to report profit due to high tax payment	15	30.0
Improper Deductions on a Return	3	6.0
Accounting Irregularities	2	4.0
Waste and Corruption of Government Officials	8	16.0
Cumbersome Procedures	12	24.0
Poor Bookkeeping Records	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Empirically, the objective to examine the factors that affect tax compliance by SMEs in Ga-West Municipality was achieved. The study revealed that the critical factors influencing tax compliance by SMEs in Ga-West Municipality were lack of tax education among SMEs, lack of co-operation of tax officials, waste and corruption of government officials, cumbersome procedure and poor bookkeeping records. These factors have significantly contributed to the low tax revenue mobilization by the government. This agrees with findings from Osamwonyi (2009) and Basil (2005).

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