

THE IMPACT OF TAX AMNESTY ON TAX COMPLIANCE AND TAX EVASION BEHAVIOR AMONG SMES

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ABSTRACT

In light of the rampant increases in tax gap and the need to regularize taxpayers' affairs, the Zimbabwean Government enacted tax amnesties under the Finance Act, 2 (2014) and Finance Act, 1 (2018) respectively. Despite the granting of the tax amnesty facility, gradual increases in tax debt have been noted and decreases in revenue collections have been recorded since the initial adoption of the program in 2014 denoting a decline in the SMEs' level of tax compliance and revenue collection. Thus, the study assesses the impact and viability of tax amnesties towards improving SMEs' level of tax compliance and tax revenue collections in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the objective of the study is to determine the relationship that exists between SMEs' level of tax compliance and tax amnesties in order to ascertain the impact of the latter on tax compliance. The research employed a quantitative research method utilizing a descriptive research design to establish the association between tax amnesties and tax compliance. The sample population was drawn from SMEs in ZIMRA Region 1 database that are operating in the manufacturing industry using the snowballing technique in order to draw some concealed or hidden SMEs. The researchers adopted the multivariate regression model in order to determine the relationship between tax amnesty and tax compliance. The results from the STATA 11 explained that an inverse relationship exists between tax compliance and tax amnesty basing on the aforementioned objectives. Basing on the findings the researchers suggested publicizing post amnesty sanctions, making amnesties extraordinary rather than routine and assessing the environment in order to make any proposed amnesty worthwhile as strategies that could be implemented in conjunction with tax amnesties in order to deal with non-compliance issues of SMEs.

Keywords: Tax Amnesty, Tax Compliance, Tax Revenue, Tax Evasion, Small to Medium Enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

Nar (2015) discovered that amnesties increase future compliance by lowering its cost as it will no longer be necessary to evade past tax. Kwatembera (2016) state that amnesties yield an immediate revenue inflow at low collection cost. Bornman & Stack (2015); Berksoy & Kircicek (2018) depict tax amnesties as revenue raising tools in both the short and long run as they bring former non-compliers into the tax system. Also, known taxpayers may report other additional

sources of income that would have been difficult to detect. On the other hand, Sanchez & Miguel (2017); Alm (2018); Agbonika (2015); Wadesango & Wadesango (2016) argue that tax amnesties produce little short-run revenue and weaken incentives for tax compliance in the long run. Alm et al. (2017) emphasize that an amnesty leads to expectations for a future tax amnesty and this negatively affects tax compliance levels. In addition, Nar (2015) argues that an amnesty angers loyal taxpayers which may lead to a reduction in their compliance level as they feel cheated by a program that seems to only reward non-compliance. Junpath (2013); Wadesango et al. (2016); OECD (2015); Junpath et al. (2016) support this idea as they point out that a repeated amnesty is not viable in reducing non-compliance levels because it discourages compliance as honest taxpayers view amnesties as unfair policies which only protect and benefit the interest of non-compliant taxpayers. In line with that, Torgler (2015) argues that an amnesty violates the principles of equity and this could result in defaulters remaining non-compliant anticipating for future additional amnesties. Furthermore, compliant taxpayers may start to dodge on their tax affairs as a result of amnesties and this results in deterioration in the levels of tax compliance. Nar (2015) further argues that an amnesty lowers compliance levels as the fear of being sanctioned is reduced amongst taxpayers since it can be amnestied in the future. Shelvin et al. (2017); Wadesango et al. (2017) reiterate that another shortcoming of an amnesty is that it leads to foregone or lost revenue in the form of penalties and interest. Therefore, these parallel lines of thought led to the carrying out of this research on the impact of tax amnesties towards improving tax compliance and maximizing revenue collection in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the research focused on the SMEs' level of tax compliance and revenue collection after being granted amnesties as ZIMRA had been encountering low levels of tax compliance and revenue collection from the SMEs sector.

In light of substantial amounts owed to the Revenue Authority exceeding \$1 billion and to improve taxpayer database, the Zimbabwe Government introduced its first tax amnesty under the Finance Act, 2 (2014). This was also aimed at cultivating a culture of voluntary tax compliance. According to Majaka (2016) the then ZIMRA Commissioner General said that the first amnesty was a disappointment as only a few applicants had registered for the amnesty program by the end of February and this led to the payment deadline being pushed further to the 31st of December 2015. Also, in Kapeza's (2015), Mandishona alluded that most businesses especially small to medium enterprises do not trust ZIMRA and they think that the tax amnesty program is a ploy to net and trap them hence the low uptake of the facility. Thus, the first amnesty was a failure towards maximizing revenue collection and improving the SMEs' tax compliance as evidenced by the low uptake of the program. The Zimbabwean Government made further provisions by enacting another tax amnesty in accordance with the Finance Act, 1 (2018) to meet the shortcomings of the first amnesty. However, the second amnesty was of no significance than the first as a poor turnout was again recorded that is, a 0.14% responded from those owing the authority (ZIMRA Small and Medium Clients Office). According to Govha (2018) and Wadesango et al. (2017) the revenue authority recorded a lower turnout in respect to the expected outcome on applications and payments. Thus, the tax amnesties yielded a low outcome in respect to applications and payments as supported by Nar (2015); Luitel (2014); Wadesango et al. (2016). Despite the granting of the tax amnesty, low outcome was experienced from SMEs denoting low levels of compliance and revenue collection.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research method was employed in this study to determine the relationship that exists between tax amnesties and tax compliance. Data was collected using questionnaires. To generalize the results from this study, the researcher had to target a group of individuals from 10 SMEs in the manufacturing sector to specifically focus on so that the research is manageable. The researchers had to draw a sample of 20 respondents from a target population of 30. The study adopted the snowballing technique in drawing up a sample of 20 respondents from the target population. A five-pointer liker scale was adopted to structure the questions into easy to analyse and easy to interpret questions, Kumar (2014). Data was analysed using the STATA 11 statistical package since the study sort to find the Pearson r correlation using the following research model.

The regression model is illustrated as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y = dependent variable which is the effect on tax compliance as a result of tax amnesty over the research period

β_0 = Y intercept/constant terms

Independent variables

Tax amnesty effect represented by the following determinants:

X1 = Broadened tax base.

X2 = Increase in revenue collection.

X3 = Increase in voluntary compliance (taxpayers' compliance behavior)

X4 = Improved record keeping of taxpayers' affairs.

ϵ = Is the error term to capture the unexplainable effect on tax compliance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the relationship between tax amnesty and SMEs' level of tax compliance?
- How effective were tax amnesties towards maximizing revenue collection from SMEs?
- What are the factors that affected SMEs in Zimbabwe from complying with tax amnesties?
- What other practices and measures can be implemented by ZIMRA in a quest to promote SMEs' tax compliance and tax revenue collection?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Considering the increases in the tax gap and to improve the taxpayer's affairs, the Zimbabwe government enacted tax amnesties under the Finance Act, 2 (2014) and the Finance Act, 1 (2018) respectively. Low outcome in terms of applications and payments from SMEs were yielded as compared to what was expected from both amnesties. The implementation of both amnesties yielded little short-run revenue and weakened incentives for tax compliance as the tax gap remained highly visible in the SMEs sector. In addition, gradual increases in SMEs' tax debt and undeclared tax liabilities were recorded after the adoption of the tax amnesty program in 2014. This is as a result of reduced levels of tax compliance as taxpayers speculate for a better future amnesty. Tax amnesties have also caused friction between the compliant taxpayer and the tax administration as they feel cheated by this fiscal program, thus resulting in increases in the SMEs' level of non-compliance in the long-run leading to low levels of revenue collection.

Therefore, this research sought to establish the impact of tax amnesties towards improving SMEs' level of tax compliance and maximizing revenue collection.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The Relationship between Tax Amnesties and SMEs' Level of Tax Compliance

The study used a multivariate regression model to test and analyze the relationship that exists between tax amnesties and tax compliance basing on the amnesties' aim to widen the tax base, increase revenue collection, cultivate voluntary compliance and improve record keeping of taxpayers' affairs. The researchers used the STATA 11 to compute the regression and the results.

Table 1 MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION RESULTS					
.reg taxcompl	taxbase	revcollection	voluntarycomp	taxpayerrecs	
Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs = 17	
Model	2.69312133	4	0.673280332	F (4, 12) = 9.66	
Residual	.836290436	12	0.06969087	Prob > F = 0.0010	
Total	3.52941176	16	.220588235	R squared = 0.7631	
				Adj R-squared = 0.6841	
				Root MSE = 0.26399	
taxcomp	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
taxbase	-	0.1039967	-0.25	0.804	-.253024 0.2001548
	0.0264346				
Revcollection	-0.148038	0.1058881	-1.40	0.187	-.3787483 0.0826724
Voluntarycomp	-	0.0796952	-0.78	0.448	-.2360917 0.1111902
	0.0624508				
taxpaerrecs	-	0.0555461	-2.01	0.068	-.2325329 0.009516
	0.1115084				
_cons	1.670123	0.2013042	8.30	0.000	1.231519 2.108727

(Source): STATA 11

From the findings obtained using STATA 11 in the Table 1 above it can be noted that the probability of the F-value of 0.0010 resemble that the variables are statistically significant at all significant values, thus denoting that the regression model has some explanatory power and there is a 99% significance level that the model is a good model in explaining the relationship between tax amnesties and SMEs' tax compliance. In addition, the R-squared of 0.763 means that a strong correlation exists amongst the variables, that is between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, 76.31% of the variation in tax compliance during the period 2014 to 2018 is explained by the independent variables in this study and leaving 0.2369 (23.69%) as an error term for the unexplainable factors that affected tax compliance during this phase. A detailed analysis is outlined below on the relationship between tax amnesty and tax compliance basing on the changes on tax base, revenue collection, voluntary compliance and improved record keeping of taxpayers' affairs during 2014 to 2018 (amnesty and post amnesty phase).

The Relationship between Tax Amnesties and Tax Compliance Basing On the Objective of Widening the Tax Base

The question above was designed so as to determine the relationship between the study variables, that is tax amnesties and tax compliance basing on the objective to widen the tax base.

Responses on the Likert Scale are averaged basing on their rankings in order to determine the relationship between the two variables using STATA 11. Table 2 below illustrates the results that were drawn using STATA 11.

Table 2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE BASING ON THE AIM TO WIDEN THE TAX BASE			
Tax compliance	Coefficient	Std. Err	P>t
Relationship with tax base	-0.0264346	0.1039967	0.804

(Source): STATA 11

The Table 2 above illustrates the results that were drawn using STATA 11 to address the question of determining the relationship between tax amnesties and tax compliance. In this research the tax amnesty with the aim to widen the tax base is the independent variable whereas tax compliance is the dependent variable. According to the Table 2 above these two variables have a negative coefficient of variation, that is an implementation of the amnesty by one unit results in a decline in the tax base by 0.0264346 amongst the SMEs. Thus, an increase in the amnesty by one unit negatively resulted in a tax compliance decline of 2.64% ($-0.0264346 \times 100\%$). This is correlated with interview responses given by most interviewees as they explained that no new taxpayers amongst SMEs took heed of the amnesty call to join the tax base but rather the implementation of an amnesty might have given others the green light to under report their tax liability and under declare their income as they believe that even if they are caught offside they will be forgiven their delinquents in future. Most of those taxpayers who took part in both amnesties were existing taxpayers who wanted to regularize their tax affairs with ZIMRA and thus, the tax base did not increase.

The above results are supported by Nar (2015); Wadesango & Mhaka (2017) who noted that once an amnesty has been introduced unregistered operators will anticipate for a better future amnesty to partake and thus, no impact on tax compliance levels. In addition to that, Govender (2013) pointed that most small businesses fear that once they become compliant their past non-compliance would result in prosecution, and thus do not take heed of the amnesty call. Furthermore, a negative effect might be experienced as others might start under reporting their tax liabilities. Therefore, from the research findings the researchers concluded that there is an inverse relationship between amnesties and tax compliance when ZIMRA introduces an amnesty program with the aim to widen the tax base.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE BASING ON THE AIM TO INCREASE REVENUE COLLECTION?

The researchers developed the above question with the aim to determine the relationship that exists between tax amnesty and tax compliance when the government enacts an amnesty as a revenue collection tool. Responses from the Likert scale are averaged and then computed using the STATA 11 technique. Table 3 below illustrates the results that were obtained from the STATA 11.

Table 3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE UNDER THE OBJECTIVE OF INCREASING REVENUE COLLECTIONS			
Tax compliance	Coefficient	Std. Err	P>t
Relationship with revenue collection	-0.148038	0.1058881	0.187

(Source): STATA 11

Table 3 above which were derived using STATA 11 indicates tax amnesty with the aim to increase revenue collection as the independent variable and tax compliance as the dependent variable. The Table 3 above indicates that a negative coefficient of variation exists between tax amnesty and tax compliance when the government introduces tax amnesties with the aim to maximize revenue collections. The increase in amnesty by one unit adversely affects revenue collection by 0.148038. Thus, the implementation of a tax amnesty with the aim to increase revenue collections negatively affected tax compliance by 14.80% (-0.148038×100). This is in conjunction with interview responses that were obtained during the field research as interviewees explained that ZIMRA's offering of repeated amnesty could not have increased revenue collections as defaulters continued to evade their tax obligations in anticipation of better additional future amnesties. Compliant taxpayers expressed their disappointment with the program as it seemed to reward only one party whilst segregating the other and this might have led some into non-compliance thus negatively affecting revenue collections.

The views from the respondents are correlated with the findings of Kwatamba (2016) who concluded that when the government aims to raise revenue by introducing an amnesty it can result in a negative impact with tax compliance as taxpayers anticipate for better future amnesties to partake in. These expectations decrease the incentives to pay future tax thereby reducing tax compliance in the long run. Kilonzo (2012); Wadesango et al. (2017) support this notion as they state that amnesties increase short term revenue but decreases long run revenue collection if governments resort to repeated or multiple tax amnesties as taxpayers will reduce their compliance levels in anticipation of a future amnesty. Therefore, basing on the results drawn from STATA 11 the researcher concluded that there is an inverse relationship between tax amnesty and tax compliance when the government introduces an amnesty with the aim to increase revenue collections.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE UNDER THE BASIS OF STIMULATING TAX COMPLIANCE BEHAVIOR (VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE)?

The researchers designed the above question with a view to determine the relationship that exists between amnesties and tax compliance with the primary objective of stimulating tax compliance behavior amongst SMEs. Responses obtained from the research field are averaged to obtain the coefficient of variation using STATA 11. The Table 4 below illustrates the results that were obtained using the STATA 11 technique.

Table 4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE UNDER THE OBJECTIVE OF STIMULATING TAX COMPLIANCE BEHAVIOR.			
Tax compliance	Coefficient	Std. Err	P>t
Relationship with voluntary compliance	-0.062508	0.0796952	0.448

(Source): STATA 11

The Table 4 above illustrates the results that were drawn using the Stata 11 technique in determining the relationship that exists between tax amnesties and tax compliance under the objective of stimulating tax compliance behavior amongst SMEs. In this research tax amnesty under the objective of stimulating taxpayer's compliance behavior is the independent variable

whereas tax compliance is the dependent variable. From the Table 4 above it can be noted that there is a negative coefficient of variation between the aforementioned variables when the government introduces an amnesty with the aim of stimulating levels of tax compliance behavior (voluntary compliance). The implementation of an amnesty results in a decrease in the levels of voluntary compliance by 0.062508. Thus, the implementation of tax amnesties resulted in a 6.25% ($-0.062508 \times 100\%$) decline in the compliance levels amongst the SMEs. The above results are also in relation to what was obtained during interview sessions as the majority of the interviewees alluded that once an amnesty has been introduced there are expectations of recurring amnesties in the near future and the implementation of a second amnesty proved their sentiments right. This caused non-compliant taxpayers to remain in non-compliance awaiting a future amnesty program to pardon their delinquents. Respondents also alluded that some compliant taxpayers started defaulting on their commitments as they viewed tax amnesties as unfair to them since it only rewarded defaulters.

The above results are correlated to the findings of Junpath (2013) who pointed that if amnesties are offered repeatedly they could negatively affect the compliance levels of both non-compliant and compliant taxpayers. Furthermore, tax amnesties result in increases in the tax offences being committed by taxpayers, and thus discouraging voluntary compliance (Wadesango et al., 2017). In addition to the above thought, Jayasinghe (2013) reiterated that before an amnesty is introduced to curb non-compliance problems a thorough study should be conducted to identify the drivers of non-compliance because if this problem is not addressed by an amnesty, an amnesty will likely do more harm than good on voluntary compliance. Therefore, basing on the results obtained using STATA 11 the researcher concluded that tax amnesties had a negative impact on tax compliance basing on the reason behind the introduction of the facility being to stimulate the tax compliance behavior (voluntary compliance).

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE BASING ON THE AIM TO IMPROVE RECORD KEEPING OF TAXPAYERS' AFFAIRS?

The relationship between the study variables tax amnesty and tax compliance basing on the aim to improve record keeping of taxpayers' affairs was computed using STATA 11. Responses on the Likert Scale were averaged and then ranked according to the coded ratings in order to be computed in STATA 11 to establish the relationship between the variables. Results from STATA 11 were illustrated in Table 5 below.

Table 5			
RESULTS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAX AMNESTIES AND TAX COMPLIANCE UNDER THE OBJECTIVE OF IMPROVING RECORD KEEPING OF TAXPAYERS' AFFAIRS			
Tax compliance	Coefficient	Std. Err	P>t
Relationship with taxpayer records	-0.1115084	0.555461	0.068

(Source: STATA 11)

The Table 5 above indicates the results that were obtained using STATA 11 on the question of determining the relationship between tax amnesties and tax compliance. In this study the tax amnesty basing on the objective to improve record keeping of taxpayers' affairs is the independent variable and the tax compliance is the dependent variable. In accordance to the Table 5 above a negative coefficient of variation exists between tax amnesties and tax compliance which is evidenced by -0.1115084. This denotes that for every increase in a unit of

tax amnesty there will be an ultimate decline in tax compliance level. Thus, the implementation of tax amnesties resulted in a 11.15% (-0.1115084×100) decrease in the tax compliance levels per unit.

The above results are supported by Sawyer (2015); Wadesango et al. (2017) who concur that if an amnesty is introduced under the mantra of improving the record keeping of taxpayers' affairs most evaders may be unwilling to partake in an amnesty that will see their future tax disclosures, returns and payment routines being thorough investigated and monitored. Therefore, basing on the results obtained from STATA 11 a negative association exists between tax amnesties and tax compliance under the objective of improving the recording keeping of taxpayers' affairs. Thus, an inverse relationship exists between the study variables under the aim to improve record keeping of taxpayers' affairs.

CONCLUSION

The research was successful in establishing and ascertaining the impact of tax amnesties towards improving SMEs' level of tax compliance and revenue collection in Zimbabwe. It managed to determine the influence both the amnesties had on the level of SMEs tax compliance and its effectiveness in maximizing revenue collections during the period 2014 to 2018 basing on multiple case study on SMEs in the manufacturing sector under ZIMRA Region 1 database. From the findings in conjunction with literature, the researcher concluded that both the amnesties enacted in 2014 and 2018 respectively failed to attain its primary objectives as the tax base was not widened, no significant revenue was collected specially during the post amnesty phase despite the collecting back of outstanding tax, voluntary compliance levels declined gradually and thus ZIMRA failed to improve record keeping of taxpayers' affairs so as to keep track of them. Therefore, the study concluded that ZIMRA should implement the following recommendations in a bid to improve the success of future tax amnesties.

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