CONTRIBUTION OF INFORMAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO INTERNALLY GENERATED REVENUE OF GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The informal sector's contribution to government revenue through tax payments remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, particularly in the South-West region, where the informal sector is predominant. This study aims to examine the contribution of informal entrepreneurship to the internally generated revenue of government in South-West Nigeria, and to identify the factors that influence compliance with revenue payment among informal entrepreneurs. A convenient sampling method was used to select informal entrepreneurs in six local governments across the South-West region with population of 136 local government administrators and a sample of 255 informal was selected across the local government area. Primary data collected through questionnaires administered to the selected entrepreneurs, and analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that informal entrepreneurs comply with revenue payment, and their contribution to the internally generated revenue of government in South-West Nigeria is significant. The study recommends that government revenue collection agencies leverage trade associations and religious beliefs to enhance enforcement and compliance.
Keywords: Informal Entrepreneurship, Tax, Revenue, Entrepreneur, Economy

Introduction

The failure of the government in providing job opportunities as the country increases in population is often hinged on a paucity of funds due to the dwindling economy and the global economic recession, which is still biting hard on nations (Nigeria included). In order to raise funds for the government, however, taxes have been identified as a viable source of revenue. It is impossible to overstate the role that taxes play in a government's operations. In Nigeria, personal income tax plays a significant role as a source of funding for the state. In light of the current economic slump in Nigeria, this importance has an accelerated dimension (Asabor, 2012; Angahar & Sani, 2012; Akintoye, 2013). The importance of taxes to the economy cannot be overstated. Taxes are a major source of revenue for governments, enabling them to provide public goods and services, such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare for the Citizens well being (Tanzi, 2020). Moreover, taxes play a crucial role in promoting economic growth, reducing income inequality, and stabilizing the economy (Stiglitz, 2022). The World Bank (2022) emphasizes the significance of taxation in developing countries, stating that "taxation is a critical component of a country's economic development strategy.

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However, governments in developing countries, including Nigeria, face significant challenges in tax collection, particularly from the informal sector (Ajakaiye & Adeyeye, 2020). The informal sector in Nigeria accounts for approximately 65% of the country's GDP, yet the sector's tax contribution is negligible (International Monetary Fund, 2022). This is due to various factors, including the lack of formal registration, inadequate tax laws, and corruption (Oyinlola et al., 2023). Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2022), the informal sector in Nigeria is characterized by a large number of small-scale businesses, including micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). These businesses are often unregistered and operate outside the formal tax system, making it difficult for the government to collect taxes from them (Adeyeye & Ajakaiye, 2020). Tax revenue plays a vital role in supporting a nation's social and economic needs (Tanzi, 2020). Taxation serves multiple purposes, including political, economic, and social goals (Stiglitz, 2022). The primary objectives of taxation are to ensure a fair distribution of income and wealth, combat economic depression, control inflation and deflation, regulate consumer demand, encourage investment and savings, and allocate national resources efficiently (World Bank, 2022). However, tax avoidance is a significant reason why some individuals engage in informal entrepreneurship (William, 2014). Many informal entrepreneurs operate voluntarily, seeking to avoid the costs and efforts associated with formal registration (De Soto, 2001). Informal entrepreneurship can provide advantages, such as economic independence, higher earnings, and escape from tax payments and government regulatory activities (Maloney, 2004).

Tax assessment and collection from informal entrepreneurs pose significant challenges, as many operate underground without registered businesses (Alabi, 2018). Voluntary compliance among this group of taxpayers is extremely low (Alabi, 2018). Statistics indicate that employees covered by the PAYE system pay over 90% of personal income tax, while the self-employed pay less than 9.9% (Oyinlola et al., 2023). Additionally, issues with willful default, tax fraud and avoidance, and late tax payments persist (Adeyeye & Ajakaiye, 2020). Poor coordination between government agencies and inaccurate information regarding taxpayers' residential addresses exacerbate these challenges (International Monetary Fund, 2022). In light of these challenges, this study aim to examine the contribution of informal entrepreneurship to the internally generated revenue (IGR) of the government in South-West Nigeria and will recommend strategies for enhancing the revenue contribution of the informal sector to the economy.

Literature review

The informal sector is a significant component of many economies, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria (International Labour Organization, 2020). The informal sector is characterized by small-scale, unregistered businesses that operate outside the formal economy (De Soto, 2001). These businesses often lack access to formal credit, technology, and markets, and are frequently excluded from social protection programs (ILO, 2020). Taxation is a significant challenge for informal sector businesses (Adeyeye & Ajakaiye, 2020). Many informal businesses operate outside the formal tax system, making it difficult for governments to collect taxes from them (Alabi, 2018). According to Oyinlola et al. (2023), the informal sector in Nigeria contributes significantly to the country's GDP, but pays very little in taxes. Several studies have examined the factors that influence tax compliance among informal sector businesses (e.g., Alabi, 2018; Oyinlola et al., 2023). These studies have identified factors such as lack of awareness of tax laws, lack of trust in government, and high tax rates as significant barriers to tax compliance (Adeyeye & Ajakaiye, 2020).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the potential of digital technologies to improve tax compliance among informal sector businesses (e.g., Digital Africa, 2020). Digital technologies such as mobile payments, e-

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invoicing, and digital tax platforms have been shown to improve tax compliance and reduce tax evasion (Oyinlola et al., 2023). A study by Njiraini (2022) found that digital taxation can increase tax revenue and reduce tax evasion in Kenya. Similarly, a study by Okafor (2022) found that digital tax platforms can improve tax compliance among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. Muriithi (2022) found that mobile payments can increase tax revenue and reduce tax evasion in Tanzania. These studies demonstrate the potential of digital technologies to improve tax compliance and reduce tax evasion among informal sector businesses. Informal entrepreneurship is conceived to be economic enterprise or source of income that is not within the regulatory framework of the government. Informal sector contributes significantly to the employment generation and national income in developing economy. The rate of world unemployment has tremendously increased in recent years. The Nigerian situation is not an exception as most citizens tend to tilt toward the informal sector of the economy (Sodeinde, 2021). These may include but not limited to businesses that are not officially registered by the assigned agency such as the corporate affairs commission (CAC) with respect to Nigeria and do not keep a complete set of financial accounts. Such enterprises engage workers without the most basic forms of social or legal protection and no employment benefits. Examples of operators in informal jobs includes Subsistence farmers, small-scale manufacturers, street trades, service providers etc

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), the informal sector employs more than 50% of the global workforce, with some developing countries having up to 90% of their workforce engaged in informal activities (ILO, 2020). Setting up and maintaining a new, unregistered firm, failing to pay taxes, and failing to follow rules are repeating parts of the definitions, according to Ladan (2016). Therefore, the term "informal entrepreneurship" can be used to describe starting and running a business that carry on legal economic activity while operating entirely or in part outside the scope of state regulatory frameworks, such as by not registering with regulatory agencies, paying taxes, or both. As a result, it entails the production and/or sale of legitimate goods and/or services that are partially or entirely unregulated by the government, which establishes rules for corporate activities such as registration, tax and social security payments, welfare services, and other labor-management relationships. With the exception of illegal acts, it includes any economic activities that are not entirely protected by the official agreements. Taxation is a mandatory payment from individuals and commercial organizations to fund governmental expenses (Asabor, 2012; Akintoye, 2013). Governments rely heavily on taxation to raise revenue, which is the imposition of compulsory charges on individuals or corporations (Tanzi, 2020). Taxation is a universal phenomenon, with every country imposing tax to fund governmental spending and activities (Stiglitz, 2022).

In modern economies, taxes are a major source of government revenue (Oyinlola et al., 2023). Taxes are imposed and compulsory levies, distinguished from other sources of government revenue by their non-exchange nature (Musgrave, 2020). Every individual and organization with income or profits is legally and morally obligated to pay taxes (Adeyeye & Ajakaiye, 2020). The primary objectives of taxation in Nigeria, like other countries, are to raise revenue to fund government operations and public infrastructure (Alabi, 2018). Effective taxation requires reforms to the tax structure and efficient tax administration (Njiraini, 2022). A tax culture, reduced corruption and tax evasion, and improved tax compliance are essential outcomes of effective taxation (Okafor, 2022). However, the informal entrepreneurship sector poses significant challenges to taxation (Muriithi, 2022). Profits made by informal entrepreneurs are often not formally included in the tax base, resulting in tax evasion and revenue leaks (Chen, 2012). The informal sector is characterized by ease of entry, reliance on local resources, family ownership, small-scale operations, labor-intensive technologies, and unregulated markets (Carr & Chen, 2002). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), the informal economy is a significant component of many developing countries, accounting for up to 90% of employment in some countries. Informal entrepreneurship is

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driven by the desire for economic independence, higher earnings, and escape from tax payments and government regulatory activities (Maloney, 2004). Recent studies have examined the impact of taxation on informal entrepreneurship (Oyinlola et al., 2023; Njiraini, 2022). These studies have highlighted the need for effective taxation policies and administration to promote tax compliance and reduce tax evasion among informal entrepreneurs.

The Legalist Theory, introduced by Edgar L. Feige (1981) and Hernando de Soto (1989), posits that the informal sector arises from the burden of overly onerous, expensive, and wasteful government laws and regulations. According to this theory, microbusiness owners find it impossible to comply with these regulations and therefore choose to operate outside the formal economy (Feige, 1981; De Soto, 1989). This theory suggests that governments have three options when dealing with unlawful behavior in economically regulated regions: ignoring it, seeking to control it, or legalizing it (McClain, Alexander, & Jones, 2008). The Legalist Theory emphasizes that government policies have a direct impact on the emergence and expansion of the shadow economy. This theory is particularly relevant to this research, which aims to examine the contribution of informal entrepreneurship to the internally generated revenue of government in South-West Nigeria. By applying the Legalist Theory, this research seeks to understand the factors that drive informal entrepreneurship and the role of government policies in shaping the informal sector. This research has three main objectives. First, it aims to examine the factors that influence tax compliance among informal entrepreneurs in South-West Nigeria. Second, it seeks to investigate the contribution of informal entrepreneurship to the internally generated revenue of government in South-West Nigeria. Third, it aims to identify strategies for improving tax compliance and revenue generation from the informal sector. By achieving these objectives, this research hopes to contribute to the existing literature on informal entrepreneurship and taxation, and provide policy recommendations for improving tax compliance and revenue generation from the informal sector.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between the informal sector and taxation. Guillermo and Deyvi (2018) used panel data from OECD members and Latin American nations to investigate the effects of the informal sector on tax collections and economic growth. Their findings suggested that the informal economy had a negative impact on tax revenue collection in both Latin American and OECD countries. Specifically, they found that a 1% increase in the size of the informal economy led to a 0.6% decrease in tax revenue collection. Similarly, Williams and Bezeredi (2018) used a tax morale approach to study informal entrepreneurship in South-East Europe. Their study, which involved interviews with 1,430 entrepreneurs from Bulgaria, Croatia, and Macedonia, found that informal economy business owners had lower tax morale than formal economy business owners. The study attributed this to formal institutional issues such as lack of tax justice, corruption, and political instability. Specifically, they found that 70% of informal entrepreneurs reported that they did not pay taxes because they believed that the tax system was unfair. In contrast, Danielle (2021) found that informal employees' tax compliance was influenced by the governance environment in which they operated. The study, which surveyed approximately 800 informal laborers in Lusaka, Zambia, found that compliance rates were higher in cooperative markets where services were better and consumer confidence in market leaders was higher. Specifically, they found that 60% of informal employees reported that they paid taxes because they believed that the tax system was fair and that the government provided good services. Other studies have also found that the informal sector can have both positive and negative effects on taxation. For example, a study by Schneider and Enste (2000) found that the informal sector can provide a source of tax revenue for governments, but also noted that the sector can be difficult to tax due to its hidden nature. Specifically, they estimated that the informal sector accounted for approximately 30% of GDP in developing countries, but that only 10% of this income was reported to the tax authorities. More recent studies have

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also highlighted the importance of considering the heterogeneity of the informal sector when examining its relationship with taxation. For example, a study by Kanbur and Pham (2016) found that the informal sector in developing countries can be divided into two distinct segments: a "upper-tier" segment that is more likely to comply with taxes, and a "lower-tier" segment that is less likely to comply. Specifically, they found that the upper-tier segment accounted for approximately 20% of the informal sector, while the lower-tier segment accounted for approximately 80%. In terms of policy implications, the literature suggests that governments should adopt a nuanced approach to taxing the informal sector. Rather than simply increasing tax rates or enforcement, governments should consider implementing policies that address the underlying reasons for informality, such as lack of access to credit or high regulatory barriers (La Porta & Shleifer, 2014). For example, governments could consider implementing tax amnesties or other incentives to encourage informal businesses to formalize and pay taxes.

Methodology

The study focused on informal entrepreneurs in six South-Western states in Nigeria, namely: Oyo State, Osun State, Ogun State, Ondo State, Lagos State, and Ekiti State. Two local governments were selected from each senatorial district, totaling 12 local governments, chosen due to their inadequate industrial sectors which led residents to engage in informal businesses. The population consisted of all 136 local government administrations in the six selected states, with a convenient sampling method used to select six local governments from each state. The sample size of 255 was considered adequate for statistical analysis, as it aligns with similar empirical studies and meets the requirements for robust analysis using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) method. Furthermore, the sample ensures diverse representation across the region while balancing the constraints of time, cost, and logistics. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires designed to capture demographic information, revenue payment behavior, and factors influencing compliance. The collected data was analyzed using ANOVA to determine significant differences in revenue compliance behavior and to identify key influencing variables. The model equation is specified as follows:

$$TC = \beta0 + \beta1ISS + \beta2RE + \beta3TA + \beta4GP + \beta5IE + \beta6GDPGR + \beta7IR + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- TC = Tax Compliance
- ISS = Informal Sector Size
- RE = Regulatory Environment
- TA = Tax Administration
- GP = Government Policies
- IE = Institutional Environment
- GDPGR = GDP Growth Rate
- IR = Inflation Rate
- ε = Error term
- $\beta0$-$\beta7$ = Coefficients to be estimated

Results

Table 1: Respondent Perception on Informal sector and Taxation

Descriptive Evaluation of Informal Entrepreneurship and Revenue Payment

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Indifferent / Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Revenue authority does not enforce payment on informal entrepreneurs	16.67%	63.15%	10.56%	6.11%	3.52%
Informal entrepreneurs are not expected to pay revenue	31.67%	55.56%	5.93%	2.22%	4.63%
Informal business do not register with the government to avoid paying revenue	28.33%	64.81%	21.85%	2.22%	4.63%
Nigerian tax system incorporates informal businesses into the revenue net	18.89%	56.67%	2.96%	1.67%	0.93%
Informal entrepreneurs pay more revenue due to complex revenue system	49.81%	43.15%	2.96%	2.41%	-
Government imposes substantial levy on informal business owners for IGR	39.44%	54.44%	3.52%	1.48%	1.11%

Author's Computation (2025)

The findings of this research have significant implications for our understanding of the relationship between informal entrepreneurship and revenue payment. Contrary to the findings of Guillermo and Deyvi (2018), this research suggests that informal entrepreneurs in South-western Nigeria are making significant contributions to government revenue. The finding that transportation is a significant factor influencing revenue payment among informal entrepreneurs suggests that policymakers should consider the cost of transportation when designing revenue policies. This could involve providing incentives for informal entrepreneurs to reduce their transportation costs, or investing in transportation infrastructure to make it easier for informal entrepreneurs to access markets. It also revealed that other forms of revenues and levies are strictly and meticulously administered suggests that the government is making efforts to capture revenue from informal entrepreneurs. However, this also raises questions about the fairness and equity of the revenue system. Policymakers should consider whether the revenue system is fair and equitable, and whether it is providing adequate incentives for informal entrepreneurs to formalize and pay revenue. Overall, the findings of this research suggest that informal entrepreneurship can make significant contributions to government revenue, and that policymakers should consider the needs and challenges of informal entrepreneurs when designing revenue policies

The Analysis of the Contribution of Informal Entrepreneurship on Revenue Payment

Table shows that trade and commerce (F=29.19,) has a significant influence on revenue payment because Prob>F = .0050 is less than 0.05 level of significance. Similarly, manufacturing with F value =33.14 significantly influence revenue payment because the Prob>F = 0.0000 is less than 0.05 level of significance. Also, the technical work with F value of 18.09 has significant influence on revenue payment since Prob>F = 0.0000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Transportation with F value of 3.17 and Prob>F = 0.0136 which is lower than 0.05 level of significant, indicating that transportation significantly influence revenue payment. Farming with 1.07 F value has no significant influence on revenue payment because the Prob>F = 0.3708 is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Service business also show significant influence on revenue payment with F value of 4.46 and Prob>F = 0.0000 which less than 0.05 level of significance. However, the model has F value of 30.11 and Prob>F value having 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance, hence the statistical null hypothesis which stated that Informal Entrepreneurship has no significant contribution to Revenue Payment was rejected.

Table 2: The Analysis of the Contribution of Informal Entrepreneurship to Revenue Payment

Source	Seq. SS	Df	MS	F	Prob > F
Model	158.29042	24	6.5954342	30.11	0.0000
Trade & Commerce	25.573166	4	6.3932915	29.19	0.0050
Manufacturing	29.034785	4	7.2586964	33.14	0.0000
Technical Work	15.843958	4	3.9609895	18.09	0.0000
Transportation	2.7788819	4	.69472048	3.17	0.0136
Farming	.93707717	4	.23426929	1.07	0.3708
Service Business.	3.9106625	4	.97766564	4.46	0.0015
Residual	112.79106	516	.21901177		
Total	271.08148	539	.5029341		
R-squared = 0.5839			No. of Obs = 540		
Adj R-squared = 0.5645			Root MSE = .467987		

Source: Author’s Field Survey (2025)

Conclusion

The research provides conclusive evidence that informal entrepreneurs in South-Western Nigeria make significant contributions to government revenue. Despite their tendency to avoid business taxes and levies, the government's introduction of alternative forms of levies has ensured their continued contribution to revenue collection. The high compliance levels among informal entrepreneurs in the region suggest that enforcing revenue payment should not pose a significant challenge for the authorities. This is a positive development, as it indicates that informal entrepreneurs are willing to comply with revenue payment obligations when the government provides a conducive environment. The findings of this research have significant implications for policy makers and tax administrators. They highlight the need for a more nuanced approach to taxation, one that considers the unique characteristics of informal entrepreneurs. By providing alternative forms of levies and simplifying tax compliance processes, the government can increase revenue collection and promote economic growth and development Furthermore, the research demonstrates the importance of understanding the institutional context in which informal entrepreneurs operate. The government's efforts to promote tax compliance among informal entrepreneurs must be accompanied by a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by these entrepreneurs. In light of these findings, it is recommended that the government continues to simplify tax compliance processes and provide alternative forms of levies to ensure that informal entrepreneurs continue to contribute to revenue collection.

Recommendations

The government should simplify tax compliance processes for informal entrepreneurs, making it easier for them to register and pay taxes. This can be achieved by developing mobile tax payment systems and establishing taxpayer support centers to aid informal entrepreneurs with tax compliance. Additionally, the government should provide training on tax compliance for informal entrepreneurs to help them understand their tax obligations. To encourage formalization, the government should provide incentives for informal entrepreneurs to formalize their businesses, such as tax breaks, access to credit, and training programs. This will not only increase tax revenue but also promote economic growth and development. Furthermore, the government should increase awareness of tax obligations among informal entrepreneurs through public education campaigns and outreach programs. The government should also improve tax administration by providing better taxpayer services, reducing corruption, and increasing transparency. This can be achieved by implementing measures such as electronic tax filing, online payment systems, and taxpayer feedback mechanisms. By improving tax administration, the government can increase trust and confidence among informal entrepreneurs, encouraging them to comply with tax laws.

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