Why SMEs Comply: An Empirical Investigation of Tax Knowledge, Trust, System Perception and Penalties in the Self-Assessment Environment in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Tax non-compliance remains a persistent challenge for tax authorities to promote voluntary tax compliance, particularly among Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in developing economies. Key concerns include limited tax knowledge, weak trust in the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRBM), perceptions of the tax system, and the effectiveness of tax penalties. This study aimed to examine the determinants of voluntary tax compliance among Malaysian SMEs operating under the Self-Assessment System (SAS). Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this research examined the influence of tax knowledge, trust in tax authorities, perceived fairness of the tax system, and perceived severity of tax penalties on compliance behaviour. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to SME owners and managers across the Klang Valley region, yielding 220 responses. The data were analysed using correlation and multiple regression analyses to test the hypothesised relationships. The results revealed that all four factors were statistically significant and positively influenced voluntary tax compliance. Tax knowledge, trust in the IRBM, perceptions of the tax system, and implementing effective penalties were key to enhancing compliance. The study contributes to the growing body of tax compliance literature by offering empirical evidence from the Malaysian SME context and provides practical insights for policymakers seeking to strengthen tax compliance.

Keywords: Tax Compliance, Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, Tax Penalties, SMEs

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INTRODUCTION

Tax non-compliance remains a critical issue for governments globally, particularly in developing economies, where revenue mobilisation is often hindered by various administrative and behavioural challenges. Despite the critical role taxes play in nation-building and financing public services, many countries struggle with collecting sufficient revenue (Loo et al., 2010). In Malaysia, tax revenue is a major source of national income, yet ensuring compliance, especially among Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), remains a persistent challenge (Kiow et al., 2017). Malaysia's tax system has evolved significantly, transitioning from the Official Assessment System (OAS) to the Self-Assessment System (SAS), implemented for corporations in 2001 and for individuals in 2004.

Under the SAS, taxpayers bear full responsibility for computing, declaring, and paying their taxes, with the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRBM) conducting post-submission audits to ensure compliance. Despite this shift to SAS, voluntary tax compliance among Malaysian taxpayers remains suboptimal, particularly among SMEs. Official IRBM records indicated that nearly 30% of SMEs fail to submit their tax returns annually (IRBM Annual Report, 2022). This situation poses significant concerns, given the dominance of SMEs in the Malaysian economy. SMEs account for 99% of total business establishments, contributing 38.2% to national GDP and 48% to total business employment (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022).

Research in tax compliance has identified both deterrence and facilitation approaches as crucial in encouraging voluntary compliance. The deterrence model focuses on the impact of audits, fines, and penalties in discouraging evasion (Fisher et al., 1992). Meanwhile, the facilitation model emphasises the importance of taxpayer services, transparency, and trust in tax authorities (Kirchler, 2007b; Kirchler & Wahl, 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that enforcement alone is insufficient; fostering trust and providing adequate knowledge are equally vital. Tax knowledge is a foundational factor in compliance. Taxpayers who understand their obligations are more likely to comply voluntarily (Kasipillai, 2004; Kasipillai, 2002; Eluro, 2018).

In the context of Malaysian SMEs, tax literacy is often lacking, leading to administrative errors, underreporting, or unintentional non-compliance.

They often face greater difficulties in navigating tax requirements compared to larger corporations. Issues such as lack of tax knowledge, mistrust of tax authorities, perceptions of system complexity, and perceived ineffectiveness of penalties contribute to widespread non-compliance among SMEs (Mohd Yusof et al., 2014; Mehrotra & Kalra, 2020). A study by Kiow et al. (2017) found that over 40% of SME taxpayers in Malaysia admitted to having a poor understanding of income tax requirements. Compounded by changes in tax legislation and evolving digital systems, many SME operators struggle to stay informed, increasing their risk of non-compliance (Mustafa et al., 2001).

Trust in the tax authority also plays a significant role in voluntary tax compliance. Studies have shown that higher levels of trust correlate with greater compliance (Kirchler & Wahl, 2010; Kastlunger et al., 2013). When taxpayers perceive the IRBM as fair, competent, and transparent, they are more likely to meet their tax obligations without coercion. However, the IRBM (2020) annual report highlighted public dissatisfaction related to perceived inconsistency in enforcement and a lack of proactive communication with SMEs. This undermines the development of cooperative relationships between tax authorities and taxpayers. In addition, survey data from SME Corp (2022) indicated that only 41% of SME respondents believed that the IRBM treats taxpayers fairly, citing concerns about bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of transparency. This may foster scepticism towards the tax system and encourage evasion, particularly when combined with low perceptions of audit probability.

Another critical determinant is the perception of the tax system. Complexity, ambiguity, and frequent changes in tax laws can discourage compliance, especially for SMEs lacking the resources to manage their tax affairs professionally. The SAS requires SMEs to not only understand the law but also interpret and apply it correctly. A challenge exacerbated by limited internal expertise and reliance on external tax consultants (Loo et al., 2009). According to a recent study by the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (2023) revealed that over 45% of SMEs rely on unlicensed or informal tax preparers, further increasing the risks of non-compliance.

Finally, tax penalties are traditionally used to deter non-compliance. While penalties are designed to increase the perceived cost of evasion, their effectiveness is mixed. Excessively harsh penalties may alienate

honest taxpayers, while lenient enforcement may encourage evasion. Prior studies (Loo, Evans & McKerchar, 2010; Mohd Yusof et al., 2014) have suggested that penalties must be proportionate, consistently applied, and well-communicated to be effective. In the SME context, the perceived fairness and risk of enforcement are more influential than the actual penalty amount. Despite IRBM increasing audit activity, many SMEs perceive the risk of being audited as low, contributing to continued non-compliance.

Despite the importance of SMEs to the Malaysian economy, limited research has focused specifically on their tax compliance behaviour under the SAS. Most prior studies emphasised individual taxpayers or large corporations, overlooking the unique challenges faced by SMEs, such as resource constraints, informal practices, and regulatory burdens. Moreover, few studies have simultaneously examined the combined effects of tax knowledge, trust, system perception, and penalties within an integrated model specific to SMEs in Malaysia. Since limited research has focused on SMEs, this research will provide further insights into understanding the factors influencing tax non-compliance among SMEs.

There has only been a very small number of empirical studies undertaken to determine the factors that influence the tax compliance behaviour of SMEs. This research has the potential to shed light on the factors that contribute to non-compliance among the SME taxpayers, thereby contributing to the body of tax literature on compliance behaviour in Klang Valley. This research sought to fill that gap by empirically examining the determinants of voluntary tax compliance among Malaysian SMEs, focusing on four (4) key factors: tax knowledge, trust in tax authorities, perception of the tax system, and perception of tax penalties.

The specific objectives of this study were to examine the following relationships: (1) the relationship between tax knowledge and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs; (2) the relationship between trust and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia; (3) the relationship between the tax system and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia; and (4) the relationship between tax penalties and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. The paper is structured into several sections. The following section provides a review of the literature relevant to the focus of the research, the development of the research framework, and the

hypotheses. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology, a discussion of data analysis results, and finally, a discussion, limitations and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Prior research has compared the effects of many variables on taxpayer compliance behaviour, but few of them have examined the elements within the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework. This study focused on tax compliance among SMEs and provides evidence that the factors that influence tax compliance behaviour are not generic to all taxpayers. This could give the tax authority the ability to personalise its services to the specific types of taxpayers involved, rather than just the qualities of the generic taxpayer. The main objective of this research was to examine the relationship between tax knowledge, tax system, tax penalties & trust factors on voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. The research also measured and assessed the level of tax knowledge on their capability and response to voluntary tax compliance. Therefore, it helps us to understand morale and ethics. Figure 1 below depicts the conceptual framework of this study.
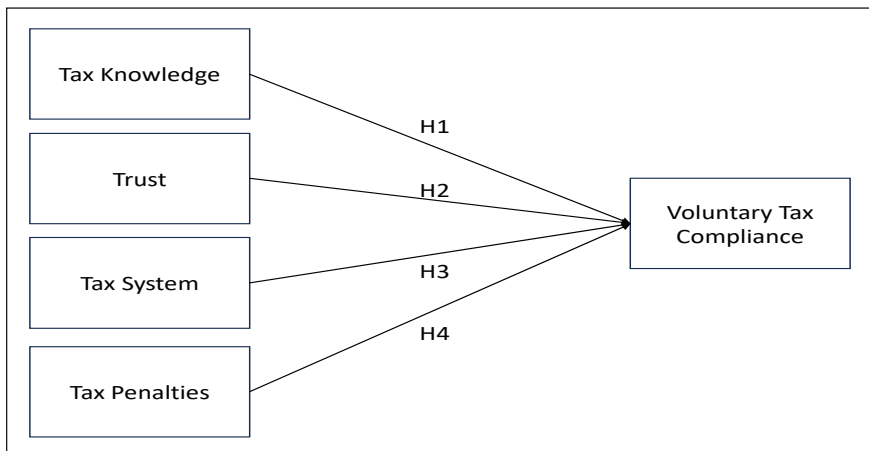
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Relationship between Tax Knowledge, Complexity of Tax System, and Tax Penalty with Voluntary Tax Compliance Behaviour

This study applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour to identify the various elements that influenced tax compliance behaviour, offering the notion of planned behaviour as an extension of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1981) Theory of Reasoned Action. According to the idea of reasoned action, people are more likely to engage in a certain behaviour if they perceive it to have favourable results (attitude) and if they believe that their other key relationships would encourage them to engage in it. In a similar line, the theory of planned behaviour says that no individual's behaviour is a spontaneous response to any situation.

Rather, each behaviour is influenced by multiple circumstances. Behaviour reflects intentions and expectations because of the influence of voluntary tax compliance in addition to tax knowledge, trust, the tax system, and tax penalties. The perception of behavioural control is determined by the idea that effective behaviour requires access to resources and opportunity. The idea of Planned Conduct has been questioned by Achmad (2010) for having a large gap between intentions and behaviour. Ajzen (2018) also found that an individual's goal is consistent with their action, provided the surrounding environment provides appropriate motivation and opportunities.

Previous academics have emphasised the relevance of tax fines and punishments in managing tax compliance concerns (Loo, Evans, and McKerchar, 2010; Palil, 2010; Mohd Yusof et al., 2014; Sapiei et al., 2014; Obid, 2004; Mohdali, Isa, and Yusoff, 2014a; Swistak, 2016). Most previous research has often focused on problems relating to the rate of tax fines and the harshness of punishment that impact tax compliance behaviour. Meanwhile, Mahmood (2012) discussed tax penalty education in his research from an IRBM standpoint. Palil (2010), on the other hand, investigated knowledge and the impact of penalties in deciding tax compliance from the standpoint of individual taxpayers. Mohdali, Isa, and Yusoff (2014a) also examined the influence of threat punishment on tax compliance and noncompliance attitudes in Malaysia.

From the perspective of Responsive Regulation Theory, individual actions are motivated by a variety of factors, and for responsive regulation to be effective, the regulatory agency must have a variety of enforcement options available to deal with those who are subject to these various motivational factors (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992). For instance, businesses

motivated by a sense of social responsibility could be effectively regulated by a system based on persuasion or self-regulation. A regime based on punishment, on the other hand, would only be required to regulate those who are solely influenced by economic considerations. A key objective of this strategy is to reduce the 'psychology of resentment,' which is the likelihood that organisations and individuals confronted with inflexible commands and severe punishments will adopt a critical, uncooperative stance toward compliance goals and enforcement personnel.

The Theory utilised the compliance pyramid to select an enforcement strategy reflective of taxpayer behaviour. According to the theory, effective regulation is possible when regulators employ an appropriate strategy, have access to a hierarchical range of sanctions, and the severity of the most severe sanctions is sufficiently high. According to Ayres and Braithwaite (1995), the general principle of the theory is to tailor the intervention style of the regulator to the propensity and capacity of the regulated to comply. This implies that any new regulation created by the regulators must consider the public interest. This study reflects the emphasis of the theory on the importance of persuasive and punitive elements for enhancing compliance behaviour.

Tax Knowledge and Voluntary Tax Compliance

Voluntary tax compliance is significantly influenced by taxpayers' understanding of tax laws and obligations. Tax knowledge refers to the degree to which taxpayers are aware of tax regulations, filing procedures, allowable deductions, and compliance responsibilities (Eriksen & Fallan, 1996). Within the SME context, this knowledge is critical, as these entities often operate without formal financial departments and may lack access to licensed tax professionals.

Several studies underscore the role of tax knowledge in enhancing compliance. Alm et al. (1990) argued that tax compliance involves not only the accurate reporting of income but also the timely and correct submission of returns and payment of taxes, all of which are contingent upon sufficient tax understanding. Roth (1989) added that taxpayers are expected to prepare and submit accurate information based on prevailing tax laws, and any deviation, deliberate or not, constitutes non-compliance.

In the Malaysian context, limited tax literacy among SME owners has been repeatedly identified as a barrier to full compliance. Many entrepreneurs lack formal education in taxation and rely on informal sources for guidance, which can lead to errors or omissions (Yahaya & Ahmad, 2021). A study by Alias, Mustafa, and Ali (2023) found that SMEs with higher tax literacy were significantly more likely to file timely and accurate tax returns. Similarly, Utami and Setiawan (2022), in a comparative ASEAN study, emphasized the critical role of tax education in fostering compliance among SMEs, including in Malaysia. Yahaya and Ahmad (2021) also highlighted that tax knowledge moderated the relationship between awareness campaigns and SME compliance behaviour, suggesting its foundational role in facilitating voluntary compliance.

Tax knowledge enhances perceived behavioural control, an important component of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), by increasing taxpayers' confidence in their ability to comply correctly. SMEs that understand tax obligations are more likely to perceive the filing process as manageable, thereby reducing psychological and operational barriers to compliance. Despite government efforts to provide taxpayer education and digital filing tools, the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (2023) reported that over 45% of SMEs still rely on unlicensed or informal preparers, increasing their risk of unintentional non-compliance. This supports the argument that without proper tax literacy, even well-intentioned SME owners may default. Based on the theory and the literature of this study, the following hypothesis was derived:

H1: There is a positive relationship between tax knowledge and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Trust and Voluntary Tax Compliance

The relationship between the government and the citizen can be explained by procedural justice and public confidence (Cremer & Yler, 2007). If the individual perceives that the authority has followed fair procedures, he or she will have a higher level of confidence in the authority (Murphy, 2004). Tax compliance is dependent on the existence of trust and cooperation between taxpayers and the taxing authority. Fair treatment of taxpayers will increase their confidence and trust in the tax authority, thereby

facilitating high tax compliance. Due to the unjust treatment of taxpayers, there is little trust in the Australian tax authority (Murphy, 2004). There is a clear correlation between the treatment taxpayers receive and their confidence in the tax authority.

Saad and Hanefah (2022) found that perceived fairness and transparency in tax procedures significantly influenced Malaysian SMEs' willingness to comply voluntarily. Likewise, Kasipillai and Noor (2021) demonstrated that trust in the IRBM improved compliance intentions among individual and small business taxpayers. Furthermore, a study by Gangl et al. (2022) confirmed that trust-based compliance is more sustainable than deterrence-based strategies, especially in contexts where procedural justice is evident. These findings reaffirmed that trust built through fair treatment is a critical factor in ensuring tax compliance. Based on exposure to theory and literature, the above was used to derive the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between trust and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Tax System and Voluntary Tax Compliance

The sophistication of tax law leads to the complexities of the tax system. Tax systems include computed complexity, shape complexity, compliance complexity, rule complexity, procedural complexity, and a lack of readability (Saad, 2014). The tax system influences taxpayer compliance decisions in two ways, according to Budak & James (2018). For starters, complicated legislation makes it difficult for taxpayers to make decisions and meet their obligations. Second, unclear legislation leads to different interpretations among taxpayers.

In the taxation system, the same sentence can be interpreted differently by different taxpayers. To summarise, the tax system has a negative impact on economic development, including inconsistencies, non-compliance, compliance costs, and legal complexity. As the tax system becomes more complicated, so does the cost of compliance. To comply with evolving tax systems, taxpayers must receive additional training and seek outside expert advice (Palil, 2010). As a result, the tax system has an impact on tax compliance both directly and indirectly, using compliance costs.

Recent studies have reaffirmed the significance of tax system complexity on compliance behaviour. Lee and Alm (2022) found that increased procedural and legal complexity in the tax system reduces voluntary compliance by overwhelming taxpayers' cognitive capacities. Similarly, Isa and Zakaria (2021) demonstrated that Malaysian SMEs often misinterpret tax obligations due to complex and ambiguous tax language, leading to errors and unintentional non-compliance. These findings suggest that simplifying tax procedures and enhancing communication clarity can play a key role in improving taxpayer behaviour. Based on the exposure to the theory and literature of the above, the following hypothesis was derived:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between the tax system and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Tax Penalty and Voluntary Tax Compliance

Tax authorities often rely on deterrence mechanisms, such as penalties and audits, to encourage compliance. This approach is grounded in the economics-of-crime model introduced by Becker (1968), which posited that taxpayers are rational decision-makers who assess the costs and benefits of tax evasion. A taxpayer will comply when the perceived risk of detection and the severity of punishment outweigh the potential gains from evasion (Mohdali et al., 2014b). According to deterrence theory, individuals are more likely to comply voluntarily when there is a clear threat of enforcement, including tax audits and penalties (Alm & McKee, 1998).

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that the probability of audits and the severity of penalties influence compliance behaviour. Fischer et al. (1992) found a significant relationship between audit probability and compliance, though the effect is not uniform across taxpayer categories. For example, Witte and Woodbury (1985) showed that audit threats are more effective for sole proprietors compared to salaried individuals, while Hasseldine (1993) suggested that targeted audits are more impactful than random ones. Hanno and Violette (1996) and Trivedi et al. (2003) further emphasized that deterrent effects are stronger among those with a predisposition toward evasion. Spicer and Thomas (1982) asserted that a taxpayer's belief in the likelihood of being audited is a key determinant of compliance.

Recent studies have reinforced the prior findings. Batrancea et al. (2021) found that audit frequency and penalty severity significantly influence compliance among small businesses in developing economies. Andoh-Baidoo et al. (2022) showed that SMEs with higher audit expectations exhibit greater accuracy in tax reporting. In Malaysia, Rahman et al. (2023) observed that awareness of penalties, particularly when perceived as fair yet strict, positively affected voluntary tax compliance. Based on this body of literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between tax penalties and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

A research design is a strategy for gathering, measuring, and analysing data to answer specific research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This research adopted the quantitative research approach. Data were collected in December 2022 through the distribution of questionnaires using Google Forms, as it provides the most convenient platform to reach wider target respondents. The survey link was distributed to the respondents using several methods, including email and personal WhatsApp messages. Reminders to the potential respondents were sent three days after sending the questionnaires. The researcher's email address and contact number were provided in the survey for any inquiries from the potential respondents. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their company and feedback. The total number of responses identified was 220. However, all the respondents of the survey must meet the definition of a high position or top management level of the company (manager and above).

For the type of industry, usable responses were from the manufacturing, construction, and service industries in the Klang Valley. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) created a table to determine the sampling size from a given target population. According to the statistics from SME Corporation Malaysia (SME Corp), 1,226,494 SMEs were established in 2021, which was 83.8% (1,028,403) services, 8% (98,274) construction, 5.8% (71,612)

manufacturing, 1.9% (23,633) agriculture, and 0.4% (4,572) was mining and quarrying. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan Table, this study delivered 400 questionnaires to SMEs in Klang Valley. Based on the official website of Smart Selangor SME Directory, which is a representative body of the industry in Klang Valley, there were 30,113 members, which were categorised into thirteen (13) types of service industries, including food & beverage, hospitality, cleaning, repair, and maintenance, automotive, healthcare, and information technology services. It was indicated that there were 30113 SMEs incorporated in the Klang Valley. This study focused on all industry companies in the Smart Selangor SME Directory.

Sample Selection

The targeted respondents for this research were SMEs in Malaysia who were registered with the Companies Commission of Malaysia. SMEs are believed to have extensive knowledge and exposure to taxation and are involved directly in tax-related matters due to yearly declarations on tax returns. According to the rule-of-thumb formula proposed by Green (1991), for the significance level of 0.05, power of 0.80, and medium effect size, the minimum sample size required for this study was 89.1.

This sample size was prudent given that the effect size of taxpayers' tax knowledge, tax compliance, trust in IRBM, tax system, and tax penalties control on tax compliance behaviour is arguably large, as these variables are proposed by an established theory. In the case of a large effect size and holding alpha value and power constant, the minimum number of respondents required for this study will only be 38 (Green, 1991). Furthermore, this sample size of 89 aligns with Roscoe (1975), who suggested that sample sizes greater than 30 and smaller than 500 are appropriate for most studies.

Sampling Technique

Ideally, the sample is selected randomly from the population of SMEs in Klang Valley. Simple random sampling is expected to increase the extent to which the sample represents the population, as each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. However, inaccessibility to the complete data set of the population from a reliable source resulted in the use of convenience sampling. Particularly, sample SMEs were chosen

from the author's circle of connections, who were easy to contact or reach. Some subjects were also identified from the internet through the search for the SME companies' profiles in the Klang Valley.

This was a quantitative study, which used questionnaires to gather responses from randomly selected respondents. The original questions were modified to suit the institutional setting of this study. The setting of this study was non-contrived as it was conducted in a natural environment where events took place under normal circumstances. The extent of researcher interference was minimal as the respondents were only asked to answer the questionnaire.

The Measurements of Variables

Tax Compliance

Tax compliance was the dependent variable in this study. Kirchler (2007b) and Kirchler et al. (2008) classified tax compliance motives as either imposed tax compliance or voluntary tax compliance, drawing on the work of Braithwaite (2003) on motivational postures. Taxpayers' readiness to comply with tax rules to avoid the negative consequences of noncompliance, such as audits and fines, is referred to as enforced tax compliance. Voluntary tax compliance was not defined by SSF. A more exact definition of voluntary tax compliance is provided by Kirchler and Wahl (2010), who explained that it means taxpayers are prepared to follow based on their own will, out of a feeling of duty and habit, as a part of society. There is a distinction between voluntary collaboration and committed cooperation when it comes to tax compliance (Kirchler et al., 2010; Gangl et al., 2015).

Braithwaite's (2003) work provides a useful framework for making this distinction; he defined tax deferential attitude as including two positive stances, the "capitulation" and "commitment" stances. Although both forms of compliance are voluntary, the distinction is made because the incentive or purpose for compliance varies greatly between voluntary collaboration and committed cooperation. Corresponding to the surrender stance, voluntary collaboration describes taxpayers' eagerness to cooperate because of their recognition and acceptance of tax administrators due to favourable contacts with these authorities (Kirchler et al., 2012). Committed collaboration, on the other hand, is defined as taxpayers' readiness to cooperate based

on the commitment towards moral, national duty, and values shared by society (Gangl et al., 2015). This is because the measurement is more precise, considering many aspects, including compliance with tax authority requirements.

Tax Knowledge

Tax knowledge was an independent variable of this study. Research by Roshidi et al. (2007) showed that knowing the rules makes people more likely to follow them. Harris (1989) distinguished between two types of tax knowledge: that which is acquired ordinarily, such as via schooling, and that which is sought out in search of ways to avoid paying taxes. In the first scenario, taxpayers' familiarity with tax law and procedure is influenced by the extent to which they have completed formal schooling. Research shows that taxpayers' understanding of and adherence to tax rules and regulations are strongly correlated with their level of general tax knowledge (Singh, 2003).

Singh (2003) had already posed the logical follow-up question of whether improving taxpayers' tax knowledge would boost tax compliance, given that there is evidence that taxpayers' tax knowledge influences their grasp of tax law. Multiple studies have shown that if people are more knowledgeable about taxes, they are more likely to comply with the law (Kasipillai & Jabbar, 2003; Kirchler et al., 2007b). In a similar vein, taxpayers may knowingly or unknowingly engage in noncompliance activity due to a lack of tax awareness. Thus, the taxpayers' understanding of tax knowledge is measured based on the 10 items.

Trust

Wahl et al. (2010) verified that citizens are more likely to voluntarily comply with tax regulations in a situation where authorities can be trusted. Tax evasion has a significant inverse connection with voluntary tax compliance, which was shown to increase as confidence in authorities increased (Muehlbacher et al., 2011). This result was also validated in Italy (Kastlunger, et al., 2013). Empirical data from the test of the framework showed that trust was a major predictor of voluntary tax compliance in Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Russia (Kogler, et al., 2013); Pellizzari and Rizzi's (2014) research also provided more confirmation of this effect. Trust in authority has been shown to have a direct impact on tax compliance

in a recent study of taxpayers who are self-employed in Austria (Kogler et al., 2015).

Recent studies have proposed and confirmed the effect of trust in authority on tax compliance in a variety of countries, including Malaysia (Faizal et al., 2017), the Netherlands (Siglé et al., 2022), Indonesia (Damayanti and Martono, 2018), Nigeria (Mas'ud et al., 2015), and Brazil (da Silva et al., 2019). Trust in authority, on the other hand, was shown to relate to tax compliance but to have no significant causal influence (Mas'ud et al., 2015) based on data from 37 African countries. Similar results were found when analysing data from 29 African nations (Kogler et al., 2013): faith in authority alone does not affect tax compliance, but its interplay with authority power does. Therefore, the aspects of measurement related to trust in IRBM for this study consider the perception of trust in IRBM, including integrity, threatening taxpayers, and trustworthiness.

Tax System

Hanefah (1996) discovered a level of the tax system for individual Malaysian taxpayers. Also, Mustafa et al. (2001) had stated that the Malaysian company tax system looks to be growing more complicated, either because of large revisions to current legislation or the introduction of new assessment methods. Outsourcing to tax specialists is the most trouble-free option to reduce such SME tax compliance concerns; however, this often raises tax compliance expenses. Chittenden et al. (2003) noted in their review of tax compliance cost studies conducted within small businesses in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand that small businesses' inability to deal with complex tax regulations has harmed them more than large corporations.

Tax compliance costs may be the best way to estimate the tax system (James, Sawyer, & Wallschutzky, 1998). A complicated tax system results in high compliance costs, and vice versa, Pope (1993b). A variety of business taxes may further raise tax system and compliance costs (Dijke et al., 2019). They proposed a small number of larger base taxes with few exclusions and reliefs to reduce compliance costs. In measuring voluntary tax compliance, this study focused on certain areas, which were tax knowledge, trust tax system, and tax penalty, which are suitable for the scope of this study.

Tax Penalty

Tax penalty was the independent variable in this study. Results on the effectiveness of tax penalty punishment are inconclusive. Higher penalties have been shown to increase tax compliance in some studies (Beck et al., 1991; Park & Hyun, 2003), while lower penalties have been shown to have the opposite effect in others (Alm, Bahl, & Murray, 1990; Alm, Jackson, & McKee, 1992). Since the potential for gain outweighs the potential for loss, the harshness of the penalty may only deter taxpayers from disclosing their real earnings (Slemrod, 2004).

Furthermore, the penalty's effect varies widely between taxpayer subgroups. For instance, research has indicated that high-income, self-employed people's conduct is correlated with the severity of criminal fraud penalties (Alm et al., 1990). When compared to criminal punishments, however, civil penalties proved to have unfavourable correlations with the actions of small business owners and middle-class people (Witte & Woodbury, 1985). Hence, this study was conducted to measure taxpayer responsibility for non-compliant tax returns.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Analysis

The demographic profile of the 220 surveyed respondents who were employed as managers or owners of the business is presented in Table 1, and the profile of the organisations is in Table 2.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Information	Categories	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	127	57.7
	Male	93	42.3
Nationality	Foreign	10	4.5
	Malaysia	193	87.7
	Permanent Residence	17	7.7

Demographic Information	Categories	Frequency	Percent (%)
	30 to 40 years	96	43.6
	41 to 50 years	63	28.6
Age Group	51 to 60 years	8	3.6
	Above 60 years	4	1.8
	Below 30 years	49	22.3
Highest Level of Education	Professional Certificate	20	9.1
	SPM/STPM	5	2.3
	5 to 10 years	109	49.5
Working Period	Above 10 years	55	25.0
	Below 5 years	56	25.5
Current Position	Manager	117	53.2
	Owner	103	46.8

Table 2, on the other hand, shows the organization's demographics. In terms of business operation, 35.5% of companies had been in operation for 6 to 10 years, 34.1% had been in operation for 11 to 20 years, 16.8% had been in operation for 1 to 5 years, and 13.6% had been in operation for more than 20 years. Most responses came from companies that had been operating for six to ten years. Also, Table 2 shows that most of the respondents were from the Klang Valley, which is Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, with 58.2% and 41.8%, respectively. This demonstrated that the sample size requirement was met by this study. Table 2, on the other hand, shows that 31.8% of respondents worked for private limited companies. Approximately 29.4% and 21.4% of the respondents were from individual proprietorship and partnership groups, respectively. In addition, 17.3% of respondents were from family businesses. This showed that most of the respondents were from private limited companies, also known as Sdn Bhd companies.

Also, it indicated that the highest company type of business was from the services sector, with 79.1% being subsidiary companies. followed by 12.3% of respondents from manufacturing companies, and lastly, 79.1% of the respondents were from the construction industry. In terms of average total revenue, 51.4% of companies had an average total revenue of RM300,000 to RM3,000,000, and 29.5% of companies had an average total revenue of RM3,000,000 to RM20,000,000. Nevertheless, 19.1% of companies had an average total revenue below RM300,000. From the responses to the number of employees, 44.1% of companies had employees between 6 and

30; 26.8% of companies had between 31 and 75 employees; and more than 7.3% of companies had 0 to 5 employees, 76 to 100 employees, 1010 to 150 employees, and more than 150 employees.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Organisation

Demographic Information	Categories	Frequency	Percent (%)
Business Operations	1 to 5 years	37	16.8
	11 to 20 years	75	34.1
	6 to 10 years	78	35.5
	More than 20 years	30	13.6
	Total	220	100.0
Business location	Selangor	128	58.2
	Wilayah Persekutuan	92	41.8
	Total	220	100.0
Type of business	Family business	38	17.3
	Individual Proprietorship	65	29.5
	Partnership	47	21.4
	Private limited companies	70	31.8
	Total	220	100.0
Company Type of Business	Construction	19	8.6
	Manufacturing	27	12.3
	Services	174	79.1
	Total	220	100.0
Average Total Revenue	< RM300 000	42	19.1
	RM 300 000 < RM3 000 000	65	29.5
	RM 3000 000 < RM20 000 000	113	51.4
	Total	220	100.0
Number of Employees	0 – 5 employees	11	5.0
	101 – 150 employees	29	13.2
	31 – 75 employees	59	26.8
	6 – 30 employees	97	44.1
	76 – 100 employees	18	8.2
	Above 150 employees	6	2.7
	Total	220	100.0

The mean and standard deviation for all variables in this study, which were Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, Tax Penalty, and Voluntary Tax Compliance, were analysed and are tabulated below.

Table 3: Results of Descriptive Analysis for the Main Variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Measure
Tax Knowledge	4.036	0.623	High
Trust	4.116	0.606	High
Tax System	3.714	0.790	High
Tax Penalty	3.916	0.536	High
Voluntary Tax Compliance	3.927	0.703	High

Table 3 above shows that the mean and standard deviation values generated from the SPSS software for Tax Knowledge were 4.036 and 0.623, respectively mean and standard deviation values generated from SPSS software for Trust were 4.116 and 0.606, respectively. Next, the mean and standard deviation values generated from SPSS software for the Tax System were 3.714 and 0.790, respectively.

The mean and standard deviation values generated from SPSS software for Tax Penalty were 3.916 and 0.536, respectively. Lastly, the mean and standard deviation values generated from SPSS software for Voluntary Tax Compliance were 3.927 and 0.703, respectively. In short, Trust had the highest mean score (4.116), while the lowest score for standard deviation was Tax Penalty (0.536). Thus, we assumed that most of the respondents agreed with all the questions in the instrument.

Table 4: Results of Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis

Construct	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Tax Knowledge	10	0.862	Good
Trust	10	0.894	Good
Tax System	7	0.885	Good
Tax Penalty	7	0.780	Acceptable
Voluntary Tax Compliance	10	0.919	Excellent

As in Table 4, the result of the reliability test showed a high consistency with an overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.955. The Cronbach's Alpha value for Tax Knowledge was 0.862. The Cronbach's Alpha value for Trust was 0.894. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the Tax System was 0.885. The Cronbach's Alpha value for Tax Penalty was 0.780.

Lastly, the Cronbach's Alpha value for Voluntary Tax Compliance was 0.919. In short, all the Cronbach's Alpha values were good and acceptable since the alpha values were higher than 0.7. The factor range had a strong level of internal consistency. As a result, the questionnaires used in this study were reliable and relevant. The result indicated that the values for skewness and kurtosis generated from SPSS software lay within the acceptable range of normality. The skewness and kurtosis values for all variables used in this study ranged from −2 to +2, suggesting that all data for Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, Tax Penalty, and the dependent variable Voluntary Tax Compliance are normally distributed.

Correlation Analysis

According to Pallant (2011), the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables are defined by correlation. The rank correlation coefficients are a useful tool for determining how similar group priorities are based on different value functions. A Pearson Correlation test is used in this analysis to see whether there are any issues with multicollinearity. When the value of the coefficients is 0.8 and above, the two highly correlated variables will have problems with collinearity. The intervals given by Hinkle et al. (1998) are defined in Table 5 to ensure that the analysis of the strength of the correlation is objective rather than subjective. The correlation coefficient results between the independent variables (Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, and Tax Penalty) and the dependent variable (Voluntary Tax Compliance) are shown in the Table below.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Analysis between Independent Variable and Dependent Variable

Variables	Tax Knowledge	Trust	Tax System	Tax Penalties	Voluntary Tax Compliance
Tax Knowledge **(IV1)**	1	0.666**	0.505**	0.380**	0.705**
Trust **(IV2)**	0.666**	1	0.503**	0.475**	0.653**
Tax System **(IV3)**	0.505**	0.503**	1	0.609**	0.594**
Tax Penalty **(IV4)**	0.380**	0.475**	0.609**	1	0.545**
Voluntary Tax Compliance **(DV)**	0.705**	0.653**	0.594**	0.545**	1

Based on the results, Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, and Tax Penalty had a significant relationship with Voluntary Tax Compliance since all *p-values* were lower than the significance value.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 6: Model Summary
(Dependent Variable: Voluntary Tax Compliance)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.792a	0.627	0.620	0.433

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tax Penalty, Tax Knowledge, Tax System, Trust

The coefficient of determination, R-square, is the proportion of the total variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the variation in the independent variables. As in the Table above, the R-square value for this study was 0.627, indicating that 62.7% of the variance in all independent variables (Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, and Tax Penalty) explained the dependent variable (Voluntary Tax Compliance). Another 37.3% was explained by other variables.

Table 8: Result of Analysis of the Variance *ANOVA*[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	67.925	4	16.981	90.301	0.000[b]
	Residual	40.431	215	0.188		
	Total	108.356	219			

a. Dependent Variable: Voluntary Tax Compliance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Tax Penalty, Tax Knowledge, Tax System, Trust

As in the Table above, a significant regression equation was found, $F (4, 219) = 90.301$ and *p-value* = 0.000, indicating that there is at least one independent variable that significantly influenced the dependent variable.

Table 9: Coefficients table of Regression Analysis
(Dependent Variable: Voluntary Tax Compliance)

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Summary of Hypotheses
1	(Constant)	-0.449	0.254		-1.764	0.079	
	H1: Tax Knowledge	0.464	0.065	0.411	7.101	0.000	Accepted
	H2: Trust	0.238	0.069	0.205	3.454	0.001	Accepted
	H3: Tax System	0.151	0.051	0.169	2.974	0.003	Accepted
	H4: Tax Penalty	0.246	0.071	0.188	3.469	0.001	Accepted

a. Dependent Variable: Voluntary Tax Compliance

As in the coefficient Table above, all independent variables (Tax Knowledge, Trust, Tax System, and Tax Penalty) were significant towards Voluntary Tax Compliance. The Standardised Beta Coefficient column was used to see the percentage of influence on the dependent variable. The greater the beta coefficient, the stronger the impact on the dependent variable. Referring to the beta value, the largest beta coefficient was Tax Knowledge (β=0.411, *p*-value=0.000<0.05), which explained 41.1% of the variation in Voluntary Tax Compliance, followed by Trust (β=0.205, *p*-value=0.001<0.05), which explained 20.5% of the variation in Voluntary Tax Compliance. Next was Tax Penalty (β=0.188, *p*-value=0.003<0.05), which was equal to 18.8% and lastly, Tax System (β=0.169, *p*-value=0.001<0.05), equal to 16.9% contribution towards Voluntary Tax Compliance.

The final regression equation:

Voluntary Tax Compliance $= -0.449 + 0.464$ Tax Knowledge $+ 0.238$ Trust $+ 0.151$ Tax System $+ 0.246$ Tax Penalty

Multicollinearity Test
Evaluation of the individual regression coefficient may be compromised by multicollinearity (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The likelihood of this coefficient being statistically insignificant is increased because multicollinearity decreases the statistical significance of an independent variable, as noted by Allen (2004). Tolerance value and variance inflation factor are two ways to detect multicollinearity (VIF). Table 10 displays

the results of a test performed to eliminate multicollinearity issues using the collinearity statistic. Field (2018) states that multicollinearity among independent variables is likely to exist if the tolerance value is less than 0.1 or the biggest VIF is more than 10.

Table 10: Collinearity Statistics

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	**VIF**
Tax Knowledge	0.517	1.933
Tax Compliance	0.493	2.029
Tax System	0.535	1.868
Tax Penalty	0.591	1.693

The Table above shows the results of the coefficients. This table shows that the VIF values for all independent variables were less than 10 and the tolerance value was greater than 0.2. Therefore, the assumption of independence was met.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hypothesis (*H***1) testing is a formal technique for deciding between two interpretations of a statistical relationship in a sample (Price et al., 2015). The p-value represents this probability. The alternative hypothesis refers to the other interpretation (known as *H*α). According to Pallant (2011), the following criteria are used to make decisions: (i) H1 to H4 are accepted when the results are significant if the Sig.is < 0.05, and (ii) Ha is rejected when the results are not significant if the Sig. is > 0.05.

Tax Knowledge

H1 proposed that there is a significant relationship between tax knowledge and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. However, based on the analysis, the regression output showed a negative and statistically insignificant relationship between tax knowledge and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. The p-value for the relationship between tax knowledge and voluntary tax compliance was 0.000, which was less than 0.05 (p-value 0.05, r = 0.705). Thus, H1 was accepted. Hence, there was a significant and strong positive relationship between tax knowledge and voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

This result is parallel to the findings from previous proven in various research (Ali et al., 2007). Harris (1989) divided tax knowledge into two aspects, namely, knowledge through common or formal education received as a matter of course and knowledge specifically directed at possible opportunities to evade tax. In the first case, the level of education received by taxpayers is an important factor that contributes to the general understanding of taxation, especially regarding the laws and regulations of taxation (Eriksen and Fallan, 1996). Previous studies have evidenced that general tax knowledge has a very close relationship with taxpayers' ability to understand the laws and regulations of taxation, and their ability to comply with them (Singh, 2003). This result is in line with previous studies by Lewis (1978), where low tax knowledge correlates with a negative attitude toward taxation. 'Tax attitudes can be improved through better tax knowledge' (Eriksen and Fallan, 1996), and thus, this will, in turn, increase compliance and reduce the inclination to evade taxes. Also, a previous study by Salawati et al. (2021) confirmed that tax knowledge refers to one's perception of the ability to comply with tax laws, which includes technical tax knowledge and general tax knowledge about the tax system and tax compliance.

Given the evidence that tax knowledge affected the understanding of taxpayers, an obvious next step that has been raised by previous researchers, Singh (2003), Eriksen and Fallan (1996), and Harris (1989), is whether the enhancement of tax knowledge increases tax compliance. Thus, the remainder of this section describes the relationship between tax knowledge and tax compliance. The study revealed that there was a positive relationship between tax knowledge towards voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Trust in IRBM

*H*2 proposed that there is a significant relationship between trust in voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. Based on the analysis, the regression output depicted that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between trust and tax compliance behavior. The p-value for the relationship between trust in voluntary tax compliance equaled 0.000, which was less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05, r $= 0.653$). Thus, H2 was accepted. Hence, there was a significant, strong positive relationship between trust in voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

This finding was also consistent with findings by Kastlunger et al. (2013) in Italy. In Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Russia, empirical evidence from the test of the framework revealed that trust is a significant predictor of voluntary tax compliance Kogler et al., 2013). Findings by Pellizzari and Rizzi (2014) also confirmed such influence. Recent empirical evidence using self-employed taxpayers in Austria has also confirmed the direct influence of trust in authority on tax compliance (Kogler et al., 2015). More recently, Faizal et al. (2017) proposed and confirmed the effect of trust in authority on tax compliance in Malaysia, as well as Siglé et al. (2022) among corporate taxpayers in the Netherlands; Damayanti and Martono (2018) among individual taxpayers in Indonesia; Ayuba et al (2018) among SMEs in Nigeria, and da Silva et al (2019). They also mentioned that there is a trust in the tax authority to encourage taxpayers to comply with taxation. Therefore, trust in IRBM is also important in influencing voluntary taxpayer compliance.

Tax System

*H*3 proposed that there is a significant relationship between the tax system on voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. However, based on the analysis, the p-value for the relationship between the tax system on voluntary tax compliance equalled to 0.000, which was less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05, r $= 0.594$). Thus, H3 was accepted. Hence, there is a significant moderate positive relationship between the tax system on voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

Previous studies, Slemrod (1990), believed that a simple tax return and simpler tax regulations would increase tax compliance, especially in a self-assessment system, because taxpayers do not have to spend much time ascertaining the accuracy of the returns and calculating their tax liabilities. Interestingly, Richardson (2008), in his study extending studies by Riahi-Belkaoui (2004) and Jackson and Milliron (1986), found that out of seventeen variables tested across countries (including age, gender, education, fairness, culture, and religion), complexity was found to be the most important determinant of tax evasion. Therefore, concluded that a simpler tax system and administration can reduce tax evasion. Therefore, the tax system is also important in influencing voluntary taxpayer compliance.

Tax Penalties

*H*4 proposed that there is a relationship between tax penalties on voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia. The p-value for the relationship between tax penalties on voluntary tax compliance equaled 0.000, which was less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05, r = 0.545). Thus, H1 was accepted. Hence, there was a significant moderate positive relationship between tax penalties on voluntary tax compliance among SMEs in Malaysia.

A theoretical economic model introduced by Allingham and Sandmo (1972) had indicated that penalties as well as audit probability have an impact on tax compliance. The higher the penalty and the potential audit probability, the greater the discouragement for potential tax evasion. However, the more complex models like the Principal-agent Theory and the Game Theory suggested that penalties and audit probability are difficult to portray in compliance models, as the results are determined endogenously with tax cheating (Andreoni et al., 1998). Researchers have also suggested that to overcome endogeneity, it is necessary to control the enforcement environment artificially by using laboratory experiment methods. Therefore, tax penalties are also important in influencing voluntary taxpayer compliance.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study is anticipated to be advantageous for all taxpayers, including tax authorities. Additionally, SMEs are playing a vital role in tax compliance. The findings and literature could assist tax authorities in becoming more cognizant of the escalating problems associated with tax compliance behaviour. By understanding what motivates taxpayers to comply with tax laws, it is possible to avoid and combat low compliance rates. This analysis aimed to determine whether there is a correlation between the three variables and the likelihood of tax compliance. These findings are useful for comprehending and subsequently implementing measures to improve taxpayer compliance.

Most past studies on tax compliance have focused on taxpayers. This appears to be one of the few studies that employed accountants. The findings provide unique insights into the similarities and differences between selected tax compliance behaviour factors among this group. Prior research has compared the effects of numerous variables on taxpayer compliance behaviour, but few of these studies have examined the components of a framework based on the theory of planned behaviour. Consequently, this study's findings can make a substantial contribution to the accounting literature. This study examined companies and provided evidence that the factors that influence taxpayers' tax compliance are not universal. This could enable the tax authority to tailor its services to the unique characteristics of individual taxpayers, as opposed to the characteristics of the generic taxpayer.

The underlying theory was Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which describes the factors that could potentially influence tax compliance behaviour. The Theory aided in elucidating why taxpayers are unable to comply with tax laws comprehensively. This Theory is popular among researchers and academics, who argued that if an individual evaluates the behaviour as having positive outcomes (attitude) and believes that their other important relationships would encourage them to perform the behaviour, they are more likely to engage in that behaviour. To increase tax compliance among taxpayers, tax authorities must comprehend its underlying causes and motivations. This study discovered that tax knowledge, trust, the tax system, and tax penalties significantly influence the tax compliance behaviour of Malaysian taxpayers.

Lastly, the findings contribute to the accounting education literature in Malaysia by expanding on previous academic and research studies. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by presenting the perspectives of numerous academic researchers on the Theory of Planned Behavior, and it can also be used as a source of empirical literature. The review of relevant literature could help tax authorities, accountants, and other policymakers fully comprehend and comprehend the Theory. They could use this information to determine why taxpayer compliance is so low. This study can serve as a foundation and context for future researchers and students to learn about tax compliance, including its causes and prevention mechanisms.

This study focused solely on taxpayers in Klang Valley, as the population sample size was 220. Therefore, it is suggested that future research consider a larger sample size and distinct sample groups. The first limitation of the study was that the sample of SMEs in Klang Valley was not representative of the population. There was also a sample size restriction. Due to a lack of time, the current research survey was conducted through Google Forms because it could reach many respondents and is inexpensive. The findings may differ from those of other Malaysian districts. The key findings cannot be used to generalize tax compliance behaviour because the respondents may not have been confronted with the issue. Therefore, future researchers should increase the sample size, the duration of data collection, and the number of locations from which they collect samples to ensure that their findings accurately reflect tax compliance behaviour in Malaysia.

Social desirability bias is the second limitation of the study. This type of response bias occurs when individuals provide socially acceptable rather than truthful responses to critical questions. The purpose of the bias is to construct a favourable image of oneself and prevent unfavorable decisions. There is a strong correlation between the social desirability ratings of personality trait descriptions and the likelihood that these signature self-descriptions will be recognized by a subsequent group. To eliminate this discrimination, future researchers should develop a questionnaire with simple and neutral language, avoiding words that elicit an emotional response. As a result, all information provided by respondents will be kept strictly confidential and secret. It will be used solely for academic purposes, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential.

For the research survey, the respondent's honest opinion is of great value. The uneven distribution of questionnaires among respondents was the next limitation of the study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence voluntary tax compliance among Malaysian SMBs. Since Klang Valley is one of the most developed regions in Malaysia, the study scope was limited to that region. The objective of survey research was to evaluate structures within a representative sample of the target population. Bias can occur when certain segments of the population of interest are excluded from the pool of prospective survey participants from which the sample is drawn. The results may differ from those of other districts or states in Malaysia. To accurately represent the interests of the entire population,

future studies should expand the coverage sample and distribute additional questionnaires.

In conclusion, an effort was made to mitigate some of the above-mentioned drawbacks, thereby increasing the generalizability of the statistical findings. However, most of the limitations were inevitable and were present in most of the related research. However, the limitations should not diminish the significance of the findings or the advancements made by this study, if caution is exercised when extrapolating the findings to other situations.

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