

## **The Effect of Accounting Conservatism on Tax Effectiveness: Evidence from Nigerian Non-Financial Listed Firms**

Saheed Akande SHITTU\*<sup>1</sup>, Olamide ADEAGBO\*<sup>2</sup> & Taiwo Olayemi AFOLABI\*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1&3</sup>Federal Polytechnic Ayede,

Department of Accountancy

Oyo State, Nigeria,

<sup>2</sup>Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

\*Corresponding Author Email: [Shittusa@federalpolyayede.edu.ng](mailto:Shittusa@federalpolyayede.edu.ng)

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the influence of accounting conservatism on tax effectiveness in Nigeria. Accounting conservatism was measured by proxies using Basu as well as Shivakumar regression models, while tax effectiveness was measured by deferred tax liabilities plus income tax payable divided by total assets. The population consists of all the companies listed on the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX). The study considered the agriculture, conglomerates, consumer goods, construction and real estate, health care, ICT, industrial goods, oil and gas, natural resources, and services sectors listed on the NGX for eleven years of observation from 2012 to 2022, using the purposive sampling technique. Pool OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) regression was employed to analyze secondary data obtained from 76 selected non-financial listed firms. The results show that the accounting conservatism measure by the Basu regression model is positively statistically significant on tax effectiveness. However, accounting conservatism using the Ball and Shivakumar regression models reveals a negative and not significant effect on tax effectiveness. Also, firm size has a negative and statistically significant effect on tax effectiveness. The study concludes that accounting conservatism measured by Basu model has a significant effect on tax effectiveness among non-financial listed firms in Nigeria. Thus, the study recommends that non-financial listed firms should ensure the effective application of accounting conservatism that does not lead to unintended tax consequences or distortions in the tax system.

**Keywords:** accounting conservatism, tax effectiveness, generalized method of moments, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Accounting conservatism is a financial reporting principle that encourages recognizing potential losses and expenses sooner than anticipated gains (Herlina & Budyastuti, 2023). This principle plays a crucial role in shaping how firms report their financial health and manage their tax obligations. However, in the Nigerian context, the intersection of accounting conservatism with tax effectiveness and profitability, particularly among non-financial listed firms, is under-researched. This research seeks to address several gaps in the current understanding, including empirical, theoretical, methodological, and real-world gaps. Despite the extensive research on accounting conservatism in developed economies, there is a notable lack of empirical studies focusing on Nigerian non-financial listed firms. Most existing studies have primarily centered on financial institutions or have been conducted in developed markets where the regulatory and economic environments differ significantly from those in Nigeria. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how accounting conservatism affects tax effectiveness and profitability in the specific context of Nigerian non-financial firms. The purpose of this research is to fill the empirical void by providing insights into how conservatism influences these financial aspects in Nigerian firms, thus offering a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics in an emerging market. Theoretical models and frameworks on accounting conservatism often originate from Western accounting practices, which may not fully capture the complexities of Nigerian accounting environments.

Existing theories may not adequately account for Nigeria's unique regulatory and economic conditions, such as its specific tax laws, inflation rates, and economic volatility. There is a need for theoretical frameworks that consider the distinct characteristics of Nigerian firms and their financial reporting practices (Anssari & Al-Tamimi, 2023). This study intends to develop or refine theoretical models that better align with the Nigerian context, exploring how accounting conservatism affects tax effectiveness and profitability while incorporating local economic and regulatory factors. Methodologically, research on accounting conservatism in Nigeria has often been constrained by limited data, short study periods, or simplistic analytical methods (Jarva, & Lof, 2024). Previous studies have tended to focus on narrow datasets or have used generalized approaches that do not account for the diverse nature of non-financial listed firms. Additionally, there is a lack of longitudinal studies that explore the long-term impacts of

accounting conservatism on profitability and tax effectiveness. To address these methodological gaps, this research will utilize a robust dataset covering a wide range of non-financial listed firms over an extended period, employing sophisticated econometric techniques to deliver more accurate and generalizable results. Hence, thus this study assesses the influence of accounting conservatism on tax effectiveness among non-financial listed firms in Nigeria. A review of several studies from continent in the world showed different results of the effect of accounting conservatism on tax effectiveness. More so, most past studies were done in Asian countries especially in Indonesia while in Africa the few studies were in Nigeria but all the studies in Nigeria ignore tax liabilities to measure tax effectiveness. Similarly, these past studies completely ignore Ball-Shivakumar model of measure accounting conservatism. This study therefore seeks to address research gap above by examining the effect of accounting conservatism using Ball-Shivakumar model as well as tax liabilities on tax effectiveness. Also, the current study considered large observations of non-financial listed firms for the period more than ten years, unlike past studies that considered short period which is less than ten years. In addition, the study to the best of our knowledge will be the first in the context of Nigeria to use most recent data including the crises period of 2012 and 2013 as well as COVID period 2019 and 2020 to examine the effect of accounting conservatism on tax effectiveness.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Theoretical Review**

**Positive Accounting Theory:** Positive accounting theory has provided a complete theoretical framework for this study. Positive accounting theory has been one of the most important accounting theories in the last decades. It is also called political-contractual theory, Watts and Zimmerman (1986) developed the positive accounting theory that aims to explain and predict accounting practice. It is concerned with actions such as which accounting policies management chooses and how management responds to proposed new accounting standards. Moreover, the aim of this theory is to understand and predict the choice of accounting policies across different firms, recognizing that economic consequences exist. Economic consequences refer to the impact of accounting reports on the decision-making behaviour of businesses, governments and creditors (Shittu & Alagbe, 2023). According to Wang *et al.* (2021), positive accounting theory states that accounting conservatism is an efficient contracting and

governance mechanism to mitigate information asymmetries and solving problems associated with agency". There are four explanations of accounting conservatism based on the postulates of positive accounting theory. These included taxation, litigation, contracting and accounting regulation. The taxation explanation of conservative accounting is that firms engage in conservative accounting practice to lower their taxes (Shittu & Alagbe, 2023).

### **Empirical Review**

Previous studies have worked on the effect of accounting conservatism both in developed and developing countries. For instance, Allison (2012) examined how CEOs' unrealized capital gains tax liabilities (tax burdens) influence financial reporting conservatism. The study showed that the negative relation between CEO tax burden and conservatism is stronger when the firm has high leverage and high default risk and when the CEO's incentives are more aligned with equity holders. Furthermore, Yuniarsih (2018) provides explanation on the effect of accounting conservatism measured by Givoly and Hayn model (2000) on tax avoidance among 123 companies listed in Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) for three years from 2014 to 2016. The findings concluded that conservatism has no effect on tax avoidance. Bornemann (2018) conducted a study in Australia to analyze the relationship between accounting conservatism, future tax rate cuts and the level of book-tax conformity in countries using a panel of firms across 18 countries from 1995 to 2010. The study observed that income statement conservatism was positive and significantly associated with future tax rate cuts when book-tax conformity was high. However, there was no significant relationship between future tax rate cuts and the statement of financial position conservatism. More so, Muhsin (2019) examined the effect of accounting conservatism on the aggressive tax avoidance actions of listed manufacturing companies. The result of the multiple linear regression analysis showed that accounting conservatism had a significant negative impact on aggressive tax avoidance. Likewise, Thomas *et al.* (2020) analyze the effect of effective tax rates in accounting conservatism among 24 public companies. The findings revealed that, accounting conservatism is not influenced by variables effective tax rate. Similarly, Lismiyati and Herliansyah (2021) came up with empirical evidence that accounting conservatism has no effect on tax avoidance among selected 30 banking companies on the Indonesian Stock Exchange between period of 4-year from 2014-2017. The study revealed that accounting conservatism has no significant effect on tax avoidance.

However, the research by Shen and Ruan (2022) on the impact of accounting conservatism on research and development manipulation. The findings revealed that, accounting conservatism can effectively deter R&D manipulation, and this effect is weakened by internal control and tax enforcement. More so, Le and Moore, (2022) examined the joint effects of state ownership and tax rate cuts on accounting conservatism, considering the different levels of foreign ownership in the context of Vietnam. The study revealed that state-owned enterprises adopt less accounting conservatism than non-state enterprises. In addition, Ardillah and Halim (2022) ascertained the effect of accounting conservatism on tax avoidance in mining listed companies in Indonesia. The study observed the significant effect of accounting conservatism on tax avoidance. More so, Jelanti (2023) analyzed the impact of tax incentives and financial distress on accounting conservatism for the period of 5-year from 2016 to 2020. The study observed that tax incentives have influence accounting conservatism among manufacturing companies listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange. In addition, Herlina and Budyastuti (2023) assessed how accounting conservatism influence tax avoidance among 21 energy related firms in Indonesia. The study revealed that accounting conservatism positively influence tax avoidance.

In Nigeria, Sagir *et al.* (2019) assessed the relationship between taxation motive and accounting conservatism after IFRS adoption in Nigeria. Unconditional conservatism was used as proxy to conservatism. The result submitted that IFRS (flexibility in implementation) give managers more incentives to make accounting information seem more credible by using conservative accounting techniques, thus, boosting conservatism. Furthermore, Ugwunta and Ugwuanyi, (2019) worked on the relationship between accounting conservatism and firm performance in Nigeria. Findings suggested that, accounting conservatism has a positive but non-significant effect on firm performance. Likewise, Suleiman and Barnabas (2021) ascertained the effect of tax avoidance on the accounting conservatism measured using negative accruals of selected listed non-financial firms in Nigeria. The results showed that, tax avoidance is a determinant of financial reporting conservatism in Nigeria. Furthermore, Sa'ad *et al.* (2023) examined the effect of accounting conservatism on the corporate tax avoidance of selected 48 listed non-financial firms in Nigeria during the period between 2014 and 2020. The study proxy corporate tax avoidance based on the cash effective tax rate, GAAP effective tax rate and book tax difference while accounting conservatism was measured using negative accruals. The study revealed that accounting conservatism has a negative and significant effect on GAAP effective

tax rate and book tax difference. Having reviewed previous studies and discovered a research gap to fill in study area, the study developed following hypotheses:

H<sub>01</sub>: Accounting Conservatism using Basu model has no significant effect on tax effectiveness among non-financial listed firms in Nigeria.

H<sub>02</sub>: Accounting Conservatism using Ball-Shivakumar model has no significant influence on tax effectiveness among non-financial listed firms in Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed ex-post facto research design to examine the impact of accounting conservatism on tax effectiveness among non-financial listed firms in Nigeria over the period from 2012 to 2022. This design facilitates the analysis of changes and trends over a specified period, allowing for a robust examination of the relationship between accounting practices and tax outcomes.

### **Research Philosophy**

The research philosophy underpinning this study includes ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontologically, the study assumes a realist stance, positing that accounting conservatism and tax effectiveness exist independently of perceptions and can be objectively measured. Epistemologically, the study follows a positivist approach, relying on empirical evidence gathered through secondary data from annual reports. Axiologically, the research is value-neutral, aiming to provide an objective assessment of the relationship between accounting conservatism and tax effectiveness without bias or preconceived notions (Shittu & Onifade, 2023; Jarva & Lof, 2024).

### **Population Sample and Sample Techniques**

The population for this study consists of 113 non-financial listed firms in Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 76 firms. This technique ensures that the selected firms are representative of the population and have the necessary data available for

the study period. The sample size is deemed adequate to provide statistically significant results while managing data collection constraints.

**Table 1. Variables and Measurement**

Variable	Acronym	Measurement
<b>Dependent</b>		
Tax Effectiveness	<b>TAXEFFECT</b>	$(\text{deferred\_tax\_liabilities} + \text{income\_tax\_payable} / \text{total\_asset}) * 100$
<b>Independent</b>		
Accounting Conservatism (Basu)	ACBASU	$(\text{profit\_after\_tax} / \text{number\_ordinary\_shares}) / \text{L1. year\_share\_price}$
Accounting Conservatism (Ball and Shivakumar)	ACBASH	$(\text{current\_asset} - \text{depreciation\_amortization}) / \text{L1. total\_asset} - (\text{current\_liabilities})$
<b>Control</b>		
Firm size:	FSIZ	natural log of total asset

### Methods of Data Collection

The study utilizes secondary data collected from the annual reports of the listed firms, compiled by MachameDataPC. These reports provide comprehensive financial information required to measure the variables of interest. Data collection focuses on ensuring completeness and accuracy to maintain the integrity of the analysis.

### Models Specification

**Model 1:**  $TAXEFFECT_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ACBASU_{it} + \beta_2 FSIZ_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$

(i)

**Model 2:**  $TAXEFFECT_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ACBASH_{it} + \beta_2 FSIZ_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$

(ii)

Where,

TAXEFFECT<sub>i,t</sub> = Tax effectiveness of firm *i* in year *t*, BASU<sub>i,t</sub> = Accounting conservatism measured by Basu model firms *i* in year *t*, BASH<sub>i,t</sub> = Accounting conservatism measured by Ball and Shivakumar model *i* in year *t*, FSIZ<sub>i,t</sub> = Natural log of total assets of firm *i* in year *t*-1,  $\epsilon_{i,t}$  = Error term.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is performed using Pool OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) regression, which is appropriate for analyzing panel data with multiple time periods and entities. This technique allows for the estimation of the average effect of accounting conservatism on tax effectiveness across firms and over time. Diagnostic tests, including multicollinearity.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 2. Descriptive Analysis**

Variable	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	Standard deviation
Tax Effectiveness	6.8405	4.2226	177.7733	0	12.6132
ACBASU	-1.5299	0.0486	31.1119	-1312.785	43.8809
ACBASH	-1.1348	-0.0315	6.3799	-79.8051	2.6981
Firm Size	10.3389	10.4059	15.3155	-0.9019	2.3283

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics presented in the Table 2 above provide an overview of the key variables in the study. The mean value of the Tax Effectiveness variable is 6.8405, with a median of 4.2226. The maximum value is 177.7733, and the minimum is 0, indicating a wide range in the tax liabilities across the sample firms. The standard deviation of 12.6132 suggests substantial variation in the tax effectiveness measure. More so, BASU D1, which represents accounting conservatism measured using the Basu model, has a mean of -1.5299 and a median of 0.0486. The large standard deviation of 43.8809 indicates a high degree of variation in this measure of conservatism across the sample firms. The minimum value of -1,312.785 and the maximum of 31.1119 further highlight the wide range of BASU D1 values observed. Likewise,



BASH D1 variable, which captures accounting conservatism based on the Ball and Shivakumar model, has a mean of -1.1348 and a median of -0.0315. The standard deviation of 2.6981 is lower than that of BASU D1, suggesting less variation in this measure of conservatism. Furthermore, firm size, measured by the natural logarithm of total assets, has a mean of 10.3389 and a median of 10.4059. The standard deviation of 2.3283 indicates moderate variation in firm size across the sample. These descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into the distributions and characteristics of the key variables in the study. They help set the context for the subsequent correlation and regression analyses, allowing the reader to better understand the nature of the data and the potential relationships among the variables.

**Table 3. Correlation Matrix**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Tax Effectiveness</b>	<b>ACBASU D1</b>	<b>ACBASH D1</b>	<b>Firm Size</b>
Tax	1.0000			
Effectiveness				
ACBASU	0.0505	1.0000		
ACBASH	-0.0410	0.1791	1.0000	
Firm Size	-0.1006	0.0554	0.0306	1.0000

### **Correlation Analysis**

The correlation analysis presented in Table 3 above provides insights into the relationships between the key variables in the study. The first column of the correlation matrix shows the correlations between the dependent variable, Tax Liabilities, and the other variables. The correlation coefficient between Tax Liabilities and BASU, the measure of accounting conservatism based on the Basu model, is 0.0505. This positive correlation, although relatively weak, suggests that higher levels of accounting conservatism (as measured by BASU) are associated with higher tax liabilities for the firms in the sample. In contrast, the correlation between Tax Liabilities and BASH, the measure of accounting conservatism based on the Ball and Shivakumar model, is -0.0410. This negative correlation indicates that higher levels of accounting conservatism according to the Ball and Shivakumar approach are associated with lower tax liabilities.

The correlation between tax effectiveness and Firm Size (measured by the natural log of total assets) is -0.1006. This negative correlation implies that larger firms tend to have lower tax liabilities as a proportion of their total assets, potentially due to greater tax planning capabilities or other scale-related advantages. These correlation results provide an initial indication of the relationships between the key variables in the study. However, it is important to note that correlation analysis alone does not establish causality, and the magnitude of the correlations is relatively weak. Further regression analysis would be necessary to draw more robust conclusions about the effects of accounting conservatism on tax liabilities, while controlling for other relevant factors.

**Table 4. Multicollinearity Diagnostic of the Variables using Variance Inflation Factor**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>VIF</b>	<b>Tolerance</b>
ACBASU	1.04	0.964815
ACBASH	1.03	0.966989
Firm size	1.00	0.996284
Mean VIF	1.02	

As shown in Table 4 above, the results of a multicollinearity diagnostic using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for the variables in the analysis. The mean VIF across all variables is 1.02, which is well below the commonly used threshold of 10 for indicating the presence of problematic multicollinearity. A VIF value greater than 10 would typically suggest high multicollinearity, meaning the independent variables are highly correlated with each other, which could lead to unstable and unreliable regression estimates. However, the VIF values observed here are all very close to 1, indicating that multicollinearity is not a major concern in this model. The tolerance values, which are the reciprocals of the VIF values, are also quite high, ranging from 0.964815 for BASU to 0.996284 for Firm size. Tolerance values below 0.1 are generally considered to indicate potential multicollinearity issues, but the values in this case are well above that threshold. Overall, the multicollinearity diagnostic using VIF suggests that the independent variables in the model are not highly correlated with each other, and that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a problem in the regression analysis. This provides

confidence that the regression coefficients can be interpreted independently and that the model is not suffering from unstable or biased estimates due to high correlations among the predictors.

**Table 5. Summary of Regression Results**

<b>Tax</b>	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>P&gt; t </b>	<b>[ 95% Conf. Interval ]</b>	
<b>Effectiveness</b>						
ACBASU D1	0.3520378	0.1882134	1.87	0.042	-0.0173878	0.7214634
ACBASH D1	-1.761973	1.245483	-1.41	0.158	-4.206609	0.6826629
Firm size	0.304165	0.1029881	-2.95	0.003	-0.5063101	-0.1020195
_cons	9.330707	1.077522	8.66	0.000	7.2157440	11.44567
R <sup>2</sup>					0.0154	
R <sup>2</sup> a					0.0119	
F/Wald Test					4.36 (0.0046)***	

### Discussion of Regression Results

The regression results provide insights into the relationship between accounting conservatism and tax liabilities for non-financial listed firms in Nigeria. The dependent variable, Tax effectiveness, is represented as  $(\text{Deferred\_Tax\_Liabilities} + \text{Income\_Tax\_Payable}) / \text{Total\_Asset} * 100$ . The first independent variable, BASU, measures accounting conservatism using the Basu regression model. The coefficient on BASU is positive (0.3520378) and statistically significant (p-value = 0.042). This suggests that higher levels of accounting conservatism, as captured by the Basu measure, are associated with higher tax liabilities for selected firms. This aligns with the notion that more conservative accounting practices, which recognize economic losses in a timelier manner, can lead to higher reported income and thus higher tax obligations. Also, the results align with the findings of Herlina and Budyastuti (2023) while differ from the works of Muhsin (2019) as well as Saa'd *et al.* (2023).

The second independent variable, BASH, measures accounting conservatism using the Ball and Shivakumar regression model. The coefficient on BASH is negative (-1.761973) but not statistically significant (p-value = 0.158). This indicates that the Ball and Shivakumar measure of conservatism does not have a significant relationship with the tax liabilities of these firms.

This corroborate with the research findings of Thomas *et al.* (2020) and Lismiyati & Herliansyah (2021). With regards to the control variable, firm Size (natural log of total assets), has a positive and statistically significant coefficient (0.304165, p-value = 0.003). This suggests that larger firms tend to have higher tax liabilities as a proportion of their total assets, possibly due to greater tax planning capabilities or other scale-related advantages. More so, the overall model fit is relatively low, with an R-squared of 0.0154 and an adjusted R-squared of 0.0119, indicating that the independent variables explain a small portion of the variation in tax liabilities. However, the F-test statistic is statistically significant (p-value = 0.0046), suggesting that the model as a whole is meaningful.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study concludes that accounting conservatism have significant effect on tax effectiveness among non-financial listed firms in Nigeria. Hence, from a policy perspective, the findings suggest that accounting conservatism, as measured by the Basu model, may be contributing to higher tax liabilities for non-financial listed firms in Nigeria. This has implications for tax authorities, who may need to closely monitor the use of conservative accounting practices and their impact on reported income and tax payments. Policymakers could consider introducing guidelines or regulations to ensure that the application of accounting conservatism does not lead to unintended tax consequences or distortions in the tax system. Additionally, the lack of a significant relationship between the Ball and Shivakumar measure of conservatism and tax liabilities highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how different approaches to measuring accounting conservatism may have varying impacts on firm-level tax outcomes. Further research in this area could help inform more targeted policy interventions. Overall, this study provides a starting point for understanding the complex interplay between accounting conservatism and tax effectiveness in the Nigerian context, and the findings can serve as a basis for future investigations and policy discussions.

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