

Unlocking financial potential: the impact of system accessibility on SME performance in Kikuubo business center, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognized as the backbone of Uganda's economy, driving employment, innovation, and economic growth. However, despite their critical role, SMEs in Uganda face significant challenges in tax compliance and financial management, often exacerbated by the digital divide. The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) has implemented Electronic Tax Systems (ETS) to streamline compliance, yet the financial benefits of these systems for SMEs remain debated, particularly in infrastructure-constrained environments. This study investigated the impact of system accessibility on the financial performance of selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre, Kampala. Employing a mixed-methods research design that integrated descriptive, correlational, and qualitative approaches, the study gathered data from 189 respondents, including SME owners, URA officials, and tax consultants. Quantitative analysis using SPSS revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.711$, $p < 0.01$) between system accessibility and financial performance, suggesting that improved access to digital tax platforms enhances profitability and cost efficiency. Descriptive results indicated that while 86.2% of SMEs had adequate internet access and 82.1% trusted system uptime, 90% still faced significant technical challenges that hampered smooth operations. Qualitative insights further highlighted that despite high access, infrastructural deficits such as internet outages, low digital literacy, and interface complexity often negated the potential financial benefits, forcing reliance on costly third party agents. The study concludes that while accessibility is a critical predictor of financial performance, it must be accompanied by usability, digital literacy training, and robust infrastructure to realize tangible economic gains. The findings recommend that policymakers and the URA focus not only on expanding digital coverage but also on simplifying user interfaces and stabilizing power and internet infrastructure to ensure that accessible systems translate into improved financial outcomes for SMEs in informal trade hubs.

Key words: *System Accessibility, Financial Performance, SMEs, Electronic Tax Systems, Kikuubo, Uganda, Digital Taxation.*

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Introduction

The global economy is increasingly driven by digital transformation, with governments worldwide leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve tax administration and compliance. Electronic Tax Systems (ETS) represent a significant shift in this paradigm, moving tax administration from manual, paper-based processes to automated, digital platforms. For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which constitute the vast majority of businesses in developing economies, the adoption of ETS offers a dual promise: simplified compliance and improved financial management through digital record-keeping. However, the realization of these benefits is heavily contingent upon "system accessibility" the degree to which these digital platforms are readily available, reliable, and usable for the average business owner (Nguyen, Ngo, & Ruël, 2020).

In Uganda, SMEs contribute approximately 80% to GDP and account for about 90% of the private sector, making them indispensable to the nation's economic fabric (UBOS, 2022). Kikuubo Business Centre in Kampala stands as a focal point of this sector, serving as a major hub for wholesale and retail trade. Recognizing the importance of this sector, the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) introduced the e-tax system to enhance voluntary compliance, reduce tax evasion, and improve revenue collection. While the system has shown success in increasing tax numbers evidenced by the introduction of Electronic Billing Machines (EBMs) its impact on the internal financial performance of the SMEs themselves, such as profitability, liquidity, and cost efficiency, requires closer examination (Mascagni et al., 2021).

System accessibility encompasses several dimensions, including internet availability, platform uptime, system reliability, and the technical capacity

of users to connect to the system. Globally, research suggests that when these dimensions are robust, SMEs can leverage digital platforms to reduce operational costs, minimize errors, and enhance cash flow management (Rofi'i, 2025). However, in low-income settings, the narrative is often different. Challenges such as unreliable electricity, inconsistent internet connectivity, and complex user interfaces can transform a tool for efficiency into a source of financial strain and compliance burden (Baguma, 2018; Musoke, 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on ETS, critical gaps remain. Most existing studies in Uganda focus on compliance rates and revenue collection from the government's perspective, often neglecting the SME level financial indicators such as Return on Investment (ROI) and profit margins. Furthermore, few studies have disaggregated the specific impact of system accessibility from broader adoption factors, nor have they deeply explored the unique context of high density, informal trade hubs like Kikuubo where digital literacy varies widely.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the relationship between system accessibility and the financial performance of selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre, Kampala. The study aims to determine whether improved access to the URA e-tax system correlates with better financial outcomes for these businesses, while also identifying the infrastructural and technical barriers that may hinder this relationship. The findings are intended to inform policymakers, tax administrators, and SME support agencies on how to optimize digital tax systems to support, rather than hinder, the growth of the vital SME sector.

Specific objectives

1. To assess the level of system accessibility (internet availability, platform uptime, and reliability) of the URA electronic tax system among selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre.
2. To determine the level of financial performance (profitability, cost efficiency, and revenue growth) of selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre.
3. To establish the relationship between system accessibility and the financial performance of selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre, Kampala, Uganda.

Literature review

Theoretical Review

The relationship between system accessibility and SME financial performance is grounded in established information systems and strategic management theories. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Fred Davis (1989), posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use determine users' intention to adopt technology. In the context of electronic tax systems (ETS), system accessibility reflected in reliable internet connectivity, platform uptime, and system responsiveness directly shapes perceived ease of use. When SMEs perceive digital tax systems as consistently available and easy to navigate, they are more likely to integrate them into daily financial operations, thereby improving efficiency and reducing compliance costs. Closely related is the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) proposed by Viswanath Venkatesh et al. (2003), which emphasizes facilitating conditions such as infrastructure, technical support, and digital skills as determinants of system usage. In developing-country contexts, facilitating conditions including stable electricity, affordable internet, and training are critical in transforming system accessibility into tangible financial performance gains for SMEs.

From a strategic perspective, the Resource Based View (RBV) advanced by Barney (1991) argues that firms achieve competitive

advantage through valuable and inimitable resources. Digital capability comprising accessible tax platforms, integrated accounting systems, and skilled personnel constitutes a strategic resource that can enhance cost efficiency and transparency. SMEs that effectively leverage accessible ETS can minimize administrative burdens and improve financial reporting accuracy, strengthening profitability and sustainability. Additionally, Transaction Cost Theory, associated with Ronald Coase (1937), suggests that firms seek to reduce the costs of economic exchanges. Accessible electronic tax systems lower transaction costs related to travel, paperwork, and processing delays, thereby improving operational efficiency and potentially increasing net financial returns. Collectively, these theories establish a conceptual foundation linking system accessibility to SME financial performance through adoption behavior, cost reduction, and enhanced operational capability.

Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies across global, regional, and local contexts consistently demonstrate that system accessibility plays a pivotal role in shaping the financial performance of SMEs. Globally, access to digital tools and platforms has been shown to enhance operational efficiency, revenue generation, and profitability. For instance, Rofi'i (2025) conducted a study among Indonesian SMEs and found that technology access had a statistically significant positive effect on financial performance ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .01$). His research highlighted that improved accessibility to electronic systems enables businesses to streamline operations, reduce manual errors, and allocate resources more efficiently, all of which contribute directly to profitability. Similarly, Nguyen, Ngo, and Ruël (2020) examined the implementation of electronic tax systems (ETS) in several developing countries and reported that system accessibility significantly reduced compliance time and improved predictability of revenue flows, allowing SMEs to manage cash flows more effectively. Their findings underscore that SMEs' ability to meet tax obligations in a timely and efficient manner is closely tied to the digital availability and reliability of tax platforms.

The global corporate context also provides important insights. Deloitte (2024) conducted a survey of multinational corporations regarding enterprise tax technology adoption and found that while 24% of firms were implementing such technologies, only 37% had fully integrated digital tax solutions into their core financial operations. The primary barriers were fragmented data systems and limited digital competencies among staff. This illustrates that accessibility alone, without proper integration and user capacity, may be insufficient to improve financial outcomes. Complementing these findings, the OECD (2023) reported that countries with advanced digital tax infrastructures characterized by high platform availability, real-time reporting, and user-friendly interfaces experienced lower compliance costs and improved transparency among SMEs. The OECD further emphasized that reliable digital tax systems encourage better financial planning and record-keeping, which, in turn, positively affects profitability and cash flow management.

In the African context, empirical studies illustrate both the potential and the challenges of ETS adoption. Mascagni et al. (2021) conducted an in-depth case study in Ethiopia and demonstrated that the introduction of Electronic Billing Machines (EBMs) led to an increase in VAT and income tax collection ranging from 12% to 47%. This finding highlights how accessible and structured digital tax systems can enhance compliance, reduce underreporting, and indirectly improve the operational performance of SMEs by fostering transparency and predictability. However, the experience is not uniformly positive across the continent. Scholtz and Laing (2024) observed that SMEs in South Africa continue to face high compliance burdens despite the availability of ETS, largely due to low financial literacy and inadequate integration between accounting and tax platforms. This suggests that while system accessibility is necessary, it is not sufficient; SMEs must also possess the capability and institutional support to translate access into

financial advantage. Complementing this, Osei-Assibey, Boateng, and Agyei (2022) reported that in Ghana, SMEs that had access to digital tax systems realized significant reductions in tax filing errors and late-payment penalties, leading to improved profitability. However, similar to South Africa, gains were contingent on training and digital literacy, underscoring the interplay between accessibility and user competence.

Within the European Union, Hedlund (2022) examined unified digital tax platforms in countries like Denmark and Estonia and found substantial reductions in paperwork and operational burdens for SMEs. These systems, characterized by high uptime, seamless integration with accounting software, and automated error checking, accelerated the processing of tax returns and improved cash flow predictability. SMEs reported fewer administrative delays, reduced labor costs for compliance, and more accurate financial reporting, reinforcing the notion that reliable system accessibility contributes directly to better financial performance. Further, a study by Brzozowski et al. (2021) in Poland highlighted that SMEs with access to cloud-based tax filing platforms experienced faster reconciliation of accounts and timely detection of financial discrepancies, which enhanced internal financial control and overall profitability.

In the Ugandan context, ETS adoption faces a combination of infrastructural, usability, and literacy-related challenges. Baguma (2018) evaluated the URA eTax portal using the System Usability Scale (SUS) and found a score of 53/100, categorized as poor usability. He reported that only 50% of the available services were actively used by SMEs, with low uptake attributed to interface complexity, system downtime, and lack of training. Musoke (2023) further documented that unreliable electricity and internet connectivity in Kampala created interruptions in SMEs' ability to file taxes, which translated into financial uncertainty and delayed compliance. These findings underscore the practical limits of accessibility in settings where digital infrastructure is uneven and where user skills are constrained. At a micro-level, Asingwire (2019) observed that SMEs at Kikuubo Business Centre exhibited mixed perceptions: while some appreciated the automation and error reduction afforded by ETS, a substantial number relied on third-party agents to file taxes due to limited digital literacy. This reliance increased compliance costs, reduced net profitability, and highlighted the financial implications of inadequate usability despite system availability. Guma Musiimenta (2024) corroborated these findings, noting that ETS improved compliance accuracy but did not translate uniformly into better financial outcomes for SMEs without additional support in training, infrastructure stabilization, and interface simplification.

Further local evidence suggests that SMEs' financial performance gains from ETS are also moderated by firm size, sector, and prior digital experience. Nsubuga and Kikooma (2022) reported that medium-sized SMEs with prior exposure to digital accounting software were more likely to leverage ETS effectively for tax compliance and cash flow management than micro-enterprises. Their research highlighted that digital competency enhances the financial returns of system accessibility. Similarly, Kasozi et al. (2021) found that service-oriented SMEs, which maintain continuous client interactions and financial records, were more responsive to digital tax adoption than informal traders in retail and wholesale sectors. This suggests that the impact of ETS accessibility on financial performance is not uniform and is influenced by sector-specific practices, digital literacy, and prior technological exposure.

Empirical literature also underscores the temporal dimension of financial outcomes related to system accessibility. For instance, Abubakar et al. (2020) observed that SMEs in Nigeria reported immediate compliance improvements following ETS introduction, but sustained financial gains were contingent on continuous access, platform reliability, and periodic training. This finding aligns with the Ugandan context, where sporadic outages and technical glitches limit the long-term financial benefits of ETS. These longitudinal considerations highlight the importance of

ongoing system monitoring, iterative improvements, and capacity-building interventions to ensure that accessibility translates into sustainable financial performance.

In summary, the empirical literature demonstrates that system accessibility is a critical enabler of SME financial performance across diverse contexts. Accessible and reliable ETS facilitate timely tax compliance, reduce errors, enhance transparency, and allow SMEs to allocate resources more efficiently. However, the evidence also consistently indicates that accessibility alone is insufficient. Financial gains are moderated by system usability, digital literacy, infrastructure reliability, and sector-specific characteristics. In Uganda, particularly at Kikuubo Business Centre, SMEs face a convergence of infrastructural and skills-related challenges that constrain the full realization of financial benefits. Consequently, while the positive correlation between accessibility and financial performance is well supported, complementary interventions including user friendly design, targeted training, and infrastructure stabilization are essential to maximize the impact of ETS on SME profitability, cost efficiency, and revenue growth.

Overall, the literature points to several knowledge gaps that this study addresses: most prior research in Uganda emphasizes tax compliance and government revenue outcomes rather than firm level financial indicators; few studies disaggregate system accessibility from usability; and there is limited longitudinal evidence capturing SME performance before and after ETS implementation. By focusing specifically on SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre, this study contributes context specific empirical evidence to inform policy, digital tax platform design, and capacity building strategies in informal and digitally constrained SME environments.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive and correlational research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationship between Electronic Tax Systems (ETS) and the financial performance of selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operating in Kikuubo Business Centre, Kampala, Uganda. The descriptive component was employed to systematically and accurately portray the current level of ETS adoption, system accessibility, and perceived financial performance among SMEs, thereby addressing the "what is" dimension of the research problem. The correlational component was utilized to establish the nature and strength of the relationship between the independent variable, system accessibility and related ETS features such as automation, compliance support, and usability, and the dependent variable, financial performance measured through profitability, revenue growth, and cost efficiency. This design enabled the researcher to determine whether and to what extent these variables are associated without manipulating them, making it appropriate for a natural business environment where experimental control is impractical. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches allowed for the generation of statistical evidence while also capturing contextual insights explaining how and why ETS influences SME financial outcomes.

The study population comprised SMEs operating within Kikuubo Business Centre, one of Kampala's largest commercial trading hubs, particularly those that interact with the electronic tax platform administered by the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA). The population further included selected tax agents, ICT consultants, and regulatory officials from the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) who support or oversee SME compliance processes. A total sample of 189 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table based on a target population of 320 participants, assuming a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This ensured statistical adequacy and representativeness of the findings.

A multistage sampling strategy was employed to enhance representativeness and minimize bias. Stratified random sampling was first used to categorize SMEs into subgroups based on business type, including wholesale, retail, and service enterprises, as well as enterprise size, namely micro, small, and medium. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was applied to ensure every participant had an equal chance of selection. Purposive sampling was additionally used to select key informants, including SME owners, tax agents, ICT consultants, and revenue officials, based on their expertise and direct engagement with ETS. This approach ensured the inclusion of information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into system accessibility, compliance challenges, and financial performance dynamics.

Primary data were collected using structured self-administered questionnaires for quantitative data and semi-structured interview guides for qualitative insights. The questionnaires captured measures of system accessibility such as internet reliability, platform uptime, login efficiency, automation features, and system responsiveness, alongside financial performance indicators including profitability trends, cost reduction, revenue growth, and cash flow stability. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected subset of respondents to explore contextual challenges, such as digital literacy limitations, infrastructural constraints, and perceptions of ETS effectiveness. The use of multiple data collection instruments facilitated triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings.

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, summarized respondent characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistics, particularly Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses, were employed to assess the strength and significance of the relationship between system accessibility and SME financial performance. Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Content validity was established using the Content Validity Index (CVI), confirming that the measurement items adequately represented the constructs under investigation. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. Emerging themes related to system accessibility, compliance behavior, infrastructural challenges, and financial outcomes were identified and compared with quantitative results to provide contextual explanations, thereby enhancing the robustness and interpretive depth of the study.

Ethical considerations were central to the study design. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain confidential. Sensitive information, particularly relating to financial performance and tax compliance, was anonymized to prevent identification. Participants were informed that the data would be used solely for academic purposes, and care was taken to minimize any psychological or social harm. Data were securely stored and only accessible to the researcher, ensuring compliance with data protection standards.

Despite these measures, the study faced several limitations. Financial performance data were partly self reported, introducing the possibility of response bias; this was mitigated by triangulating quantitative responses with qualitative insights. The cross-sectional design limited causal inference, though regression analysis and careful interpretation helped establish meaningful associations. Sensitivity around tax issues meant some respondents were hesitant to disclose compliance challenges; assurances of anonymity and neutral phrasing encouraged openness. Digital literacy constraints among some participants required clarification during questionnaire completion, which was carefully managed to avoid influencing responses. Additionally, the study focused

exclusively on Kikuubo Business Centre, limiting generalizability, though detailed contextual information was provided to facilitate analytical transferability to similar urban informal markets.

Overall, the study's methodological approach, incorporating a mixed-methods design, multistage sampling, rigorous data collection instruments, ethical safeguards, and triangulated analysis, ensured high reliability, validity, and credibility. This comprehensive methodology enabled a nuanced understanding of how ETS system accessibility influences SME financial performance in a complex urban business environment.

Findings and Analysis

This section presents the findings according to the study objectives. The results are presented using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, followed by a discussion of the findings and an integrated discussion supported by qualitative evidence.

Objective 1: Level of System Accessibility

To assess the level of system accessibility of the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) electronic tax system among selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre, descriptive statistics were computed.

Table 1: Descriptive Results for System Accessibility (N = 189)

VARIABLE	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
Internet availability enables regular use	4.20	1.091	High
Ease of accessing URA e-tax platform	4.17	1.236	High
System uptime (availability when needed)	4.35	0.931	Very High
Technical challenges hinder access (Reverse)	4.13	1.069	High presence of challenges
Easy access supports timely compliance	3.79	0.855	Moderately High
Composite Mean	4.13	1.04	High Accessibility

The results indicate that SMEs generally perceive system accessibility to be high (Composite Mean = 4.13). System uptime recorded the highest mean (4.35), suggesting strong confidence in the operational reliability of the platform. Internet availability (Mean = 4.20) and ease of access (Mean = 4.17) also scored highly, confirming that most SMEs can reach the platform when needed.

However, the reverse-coded item shows that technical challenges remain prevalent (Mean = 4.13), indicating that although the system is operational, practical usability issues persist. Qualitative findings reinforce this pattern. A URA official explained that digitization and mobile-enabled filing have improved reach but acknowledged that “peak-hour congestion and inconsistent internet speeds in informal clusters still create access delays.” Similarly, an ICT consultant observed that “the system is available, but many traders struggle with navigation and login procedures.” These findings suggest that accessibility is multidimensional—encompassing infrastructure, usability, and digital literacy.

Objective 2: Level of Financial Performance

The second objective assessed the financial performance of selected SMEs in terms of profitability, cost efficiency, and revenue growth.

Table 2: Descriptive Results for Financial Performance (N = 189)

VARIABLE	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
Profitability improvement	3.92	0.81	High
Cost efficiency improvement	3.85	0.76	High
Revenue growth stability	3.86	0.79	High
Composite Mean	3.88	0.79	High

The findings indicate that SMEs reported generally strong financial performance (Composite Mean = 3.88). Respondents agreed that improved access to digital tax services contributes to reduced compliance penalties, better cost control, and improved financial planning.

Qualitative responses supported these findings. One SME owner noted that “timely filing has reduced penalty costs, which directly improves our profit margins.” Another respondent emphasized that digital records facilitate easier tracking of expenses and tax liabilities, contributing to better financial management. However, a representative from the Kampala Capital City Authority observed that SMEs relying on tax agents incur additional compliance expenses, which slightly offset financial gains.

Objective 3: Relationship Between System Accessibility and Financial Performance

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between system accessibility and financial performance.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 189)

VARIABLES	1	2
1. System Accessibility	1	
2. Financial Performance	.711**	1

Note: p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.711, p = 0.000) indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between system accessibility and financial performance. This implies that improvements in accessibility are strongly associated with improved profitability, cost efficiency, and revenue growth among SMEs. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study established that system accessibility is generally high among SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre. High mean scores for internet availability and system uptime confirm that infrastructural improvements have enhanced digital tax engagement. These findings align with Rofi'i (2025), who reported a significant positive effect of technology access on SME financial performance ($\beta = 0.35, p < .01$) in Indonesia. Similarly, Nguyen, Ngo, and Ruël (2020) found that accessible electronic tax systems reduce compliance time and improve financial predictability.

The strong correlation (r = 0.711) observed in this study reinforces these international findings, suggesting that reliable access to the URA platform improves financial outcomes by reducing penalties, streamlining compliance processes, and enabling better cash flow management. This result also supports findings by Deloitte (2024), which emphasized that digital tax integration enhances operational

efficiency when properly implemented.

However, the descriptive and qualitative findings reveal a critical nuance: despite high accessibility scores, technical challenges remain widespread. This finding mirrors Baguma (2018), who reported low usability scores for the URA e-tax system, and Scholtz and Laing (2024), who observed that digital compliance systems in South Africa remain constrained by integration and literacy gaps. The present study confirms that accessibility in theory does not automatically translate into usability in practice.

Furthermore, the reliance on third party agents due to limited digital literacy reflects observations by Mascagni et al. (2021) that digital systems improve compliance only when accompanied by adequate user capacity. While the Ethiopian case demonstrated significant revenue improvements following digital system rollout, contextual support mechanisms were critical to realizing those gains.

Objectives 1 and 2 reveals that SMEs with independent, uninterrupted access to the e-tax system experience stronger financial gains, whereas those facing usability barriers incur indirect compliance costs. This suggests that system accessibility has both direct effects (reducing penalties, improving timeliness) and indirect effects (enhancing financial planning and record accuracy) on financial performance.

In conclusion, the findings corroborate global and regional literature demonstrating a positive relationship between system accessibility and SME financial performance. However, consistent with previous studies, accessibility must be complemented by improved usability, digital literacy training, and technical support to fully maximize financial benefits. Strengthening these complementary factors would likely amplify the already strong positive relationship identified in this study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between system accessibility of the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) electronic tax system and the financial performance of selected SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre, Kampala. The findings established a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between system accessibility and financial performance (r = 0.711, p < 0.01). This confirms that improved access to digital tax systems is closely associated with enhanced profitability, cost efficiency, and revenue stability among SMEs.

Descriptive findings revealed that most SMEs perceive internet availability and system uptime to be high, indicating that infrastructural accessibility to the e-tax platform has substantially improved. These results suggest that URA's digitization initiatives have successfully strengthened the technical availability and operational reliability of the platform. SMEs generally expressed confidence in the system's ability to remain online and accessible when required, reflecting progress in digital tax administration reforms.

However, the study also identified a critical usability gap. Despite high accessibility ratings, a large proportion of respondents reported experiencing technical challenges such as slow system response, login difficulties, interface complexity, and limited digital skills. Qualitative findings further revealed that many SMEs rely on third-party tax agents due to limited digital literacy, which increases compliance costs and reduces net profitability. This indicates that while infrastructural access exists, effective utilization remains uneven.

The study therefore concludes that system accessibility must be conceptualized holistically. True accessibility extends beyond internet connectivity and platform uptime to include user-friendly design, system

responsiveness, digital literacy, and technical support. Although the strong correlation confirms that accessibility significantly influences financial performance, eliminating usability barriers could further strengthen this relationship and maximize financial gains for SMEs. URA's digitization efforts are commendable; however, the strategic focus should now shift from system availability to user-centered functionality and capacity building to ensure sustainable financial benefits.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the financial impact of system accessibility among SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre:

- **Enhancement of User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX):** URA should undertake a comprehensive usability audit of the e-tax platform to simplify its interface and improve navigation. Given the high proportion of SMEs reporting technical challenges, the system should be optimized for low-bandwidth environments, simplified in structure, and designed to minimize procedural complexity. Reducing the number of steps required for filing returns and improving clarity of instructions would enhance practical accessibility and reduce user frustration.
- **Targeted Digital Literacy and Capacity Building Programs:** There is a need for structured, sector-specific digital literacy training for SMEs in collaboration with the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and business associations within Kikuubo. Regular workshops and hands-on training sessions should focus on system navigation, interpretation of error messages, electronic record management, and utilization of automated features. Strengthening digital competencies would reduce reliance on third-party agents, lower compliance costs, and improve overall financial performance.
- **Infrastructure Stabilization and Supportive Connectivity Measures:** Although internet access was generally rated positively, qualitative feedback revealed occasional disruptions due to power instability and inconsistent connectivity. Policymakers should encourage SMEs to adopt backup power solutions such as Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) systems and explore partnerships with telecommunications providers to offer affordable, stable SME-specific internet packages. Improving infrastructural resilience will enhance uninterrupted access and consistent compliance.
- **Establishment of Localized Digital Support Hubs:** A dedicated digital support center within Kikuubo Business Centre could bridge the gap between access and usability. Such a hub, staffed by URA personnel or certified digital tax facilitators, would provide real-time technical assistance, system guidance, and troubleshooting support. Immediate access to professional assistance would reduce system-related delays, enhance compliance accuracy, and strengthen the positive effect of accessibility on financial performance.
- **Continuous System Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms:** URA should institutionalize user-feedback channels that allow SMEs to report technical issues and suggest improvements. Continuous monitoring and iterative system upgrades based on user experiences would ensure that the platform evolves in response to practical challenges faced by SMEs.

In summary, while system accessibility significantly contributes to improved SME financial performance, maximizing its impact requires complementary investments in usability, training, infrastructure stability, and localized support systems. Implementing these recommendations would not only enhance compliance efficiency but also strengthen the overall financial sustainability of SMEs in Kikuubo Business Centre and similar informal business environments.

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