

A REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF FIRMS' CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY(CSR) ON INDIGENOUS CONSTRUCTION FIRMS' COMPETITIVENESS IN THE GHANAIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study aimed at determining the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility(CSR) that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry and, to determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. This qualitative study employed the Delphi technique. Data collected was analyzed using the interquartile deviation, median, standard deviation, mean and percentile. The study had its theoretical basis in the stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility; it revealed that, (9) attributes of firms' CSR impact on construction firms' competitiveness; with (2) having a very high impact (VHI: 9.00-10.00), while (7) recorded high impact (HI: 7.00-8.99). The study concludes that the attributes of firms' CSR that impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness include: having a well-functioning employees' conditions of service scheme, enhancing work-family balance for employees, and providing support for local business. The study recommends indigenous construction firms should ensure well-functioning of employee conditions of service scheme, work-family balance for employees, and provide support for local businesses in their quest of achieving competitiveness. This study will inform construction firms of the attributes of firms' CSR that impact on firms' competitiveness and aid policy makers in policy formulation.

Keywords

competitiveness, construction industry, corporate social responsibility, Ghana, indigenous firms

1. Introduction

Largely, earlier literature on competitiveness of firms in the construction industry argued that firms' competitiveness is derived from their technical and commercial responsiveness; whereas the social responsiveness aspect of firms' competitiveness was marginalized (see Wong, et al., 2000; Republic of Ghana, 2003; Flanagan, et al., 2005; Yongtoa, 2008). The issue of social responsiveness pertains to activities of firms' corporate social responsibility. However, with the advent of labour laws, green procurement, sustainable construction and the likes, social responsiveness of firms in competition (for example competitive or open tendering) is gradually gaining attention. However, little is known of studies that seek to investigate the very attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the construction industry. It is against this backdrop that this present study seeks to determine the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility (CSR) that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the construction industry and, determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on construction firms' competitiveness using the Ghanaian construction industry as a case study. The Ghanaian construction industry was chosen for the case study because it shares much resemblances with majority of the construction industries in developing countries and as a result, the findings of this study could be a true representation of what pertains in developing countries, though this study does not seek to generalize its findings to be same for all developing countries. Again, the Ghanaian construction industry was chosen as a case study for this study because the few studies that focused on construction firms' competitiveness and firms' CSR had the construction industry in the developed countries as their case study area (see Wong, et al., 2000; Flanagan, et al., 2005; Yongtoa, 2008).

According to Lall (2001), firms' competitiveness is the ability of a firm to do better than benchmarked firms in terms of market share, profitability, or sales in a given industry. Thus in this study, competitiveness is proxied by firms' market share, technical ability(s) and stakeholders' satisfaction benchmarked against best performing firms in the Ghanaian construction industry (see Porter, 1980; Porter, 1985; Porter, 2000; Lall, 2001; Flanagan et al., 2005; Wang, 2014). Further, in relation to firms' corporate social responsibility (CSR) the Commission of the European Communities (2001) defined it as a concept whereby firms "integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (Commission of the European Communities, 2001); influenced by the notion that "responsible behaviour leads to sustainable business success" (Ocran, 2011:28). Similarly, McWilliams & Siegel (2001:117) defined CSR as the firm's "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001:117). Thus, it could be deduced from the two definitions of CSR that firms voluntarily engage in CSR activities; CSR activities address social, environmental and economic concerns of stakeholders; some aspects of CSR is a legal requirement; and all CSR activities should be consistent with the laws of the industry or nation in focus. Firms' stakeholders could be within or outside the firm and their concerns ought to be addressed through the firms' CSR activities. In view of this, Anku-Tsede & Deffor (2014) accentuated that there are both internal and external CSR activities that a firm ought to be engaged in. Again, it must be admitted that, though not all aspects of CSR may generate direct economic benefit to a firm in the short term, generally the net benefit of CSR contributes to a firm's competitiveness, especially CSRs that form part of a firm's competitive strategy (Garriga & Melé, 2004). However, as to which attributes (activities) of CSR impact positively on firms' competitiveness, varied industry specific views have been advanced by some authors over the past decades. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of studies that investigate the impact of firms' corporate social responsibility on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness and had the Ghanaian construction industry as its focus. Therefore, this present study addresses the identified gap in literature as it seeks to determine the attributes of firms' CSR that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry and, to determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. The specific objectives that aided the study were:

- to determine the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility (CSR) that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry;
- to determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry;
- to suggest measures to enhance competitiveness of indigenous construction firms in the Ghanaian construction industry.

CSR is synonymous with Social Investment, Social Demand, Corporate Responsibility, Social Enterprise, Triple-bottom Line, Corporate Citizenship, Sustainable Development, Corporate Ethics, and in some cases, Corporate

Governance (see Bassen, et al., 2006; Amponsah-Tawiah & Dartey-Baah, 2012; Anku-Tsedde & Deffor, 2014) and this study is invariably indifferent. Further, indigenous construction firms are registered contractors who undertake civil engineering works in Ghana in accordance with; such firms are 100% owned by indigenes or indigenes are majority shareholders in the firm in accordance with section 98 of the Public Procurement Act 663 of the Republic of Ghana (Republic of Ghana, 2003).

2. Literature Review

Existing literature informs that two groups of complementary reasons account for firms' involvement in CSR. The instrumentalists are of the opinion that firms engage in CSR because it is related to firms' profitability, growth and competitiveness; whereas the normative stance holds the view that, firms engage in CSR because they see it as morally correct (Porter & Kramer, 2002). Hence, the novelty of this current study is that it integrates both normative and instrumentalist views in determining the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness, making it more comprehensive. But notwithstanding the underpinning philosophy influencing firms' involvement in CSR, Ocran (2011) informed that the object of firms' CSR is the firms' stakeholders, in other words firms' CSR activities are directed towards their stakeholders. In a given industry, a firm's actions either impact positively or negatively on its stakeholders, whereas stakeholders' behaviour is a repose to a firm's actions (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, 2004). Hence, Ocran (2011) contended that the CSR process involves firms identifying their stakeholders and then incorporating their needs and values into the strategic day-to-day decision-making process of the firm. However, owing to the heterogeneous nature of the construction industry, coupled with the varying needs of its stakeholders (Maduenoa, et al., 2016); it will be inaccurate to generalize the attributes of CSR that has impacted on firms' competitiveness in other nations to be same in Ghana. Hence this study seeks to determine the attributes of firms' CSR that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry and, to determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry.

Evidently, some attributes have been used to measure firms' CSR in some national context over the past years; for example, Turker (2009) found firms' 'concern for the health and well-being of employees, existence and functioning employees' training programmes, ensuring equality of opportunities for workers and, enhanced work-family relationship as element of CSR. More so, Vives (2006) identified firms' compliance with environmental safety and other regulations of regulatory bodies as attributes of firms' CSR (Vives, 2006). Additionally, Maduenoa et al. (2016) revealed that firms' CSR is inclusive of firms' reputation, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and firms' being leader in terms of price, quality and innovation. In related studies, better salary and end of service emolument, better condition of service, annual leave and reward for overtime, existing of training programme and other staff development measures were identified to be attributes of firms' CSR (Labour Act, 2003; Momaya & Selby, 1998; Momaya, 2004; Akben-Selcuk, 2016); while Shen et al. (2006) argued that attributes of CSR include better return on investment (Shen et al., 2006). Also, firms' compliance with health and safety regulations and, environmental cautiousness of the firms' operations constitutes attributes of firms' CSR (Feurer & Chaharbaghi, 1994; Ayarkwa, 2010). Similarly, abiding by the tenet of local content and participation forms part of CSR in some national contexts (Republic of Ghana, 2003); whereas the Commission of the European Communities (2001) found existence of lifelong learning scheme, equal pay and career for all gender, profit sharing, job security, and promoting health and safety at work.

In addition, CSR attributes include adopting progressive human resource management programs, recycling, supporting local businesses, abating pollution and embodying products with social attributes or characteristics (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). However, notwithstanding the findings of the previous studies, little is known of studies that investigated the impact of firms' CSR on construction firms' competitiveness. There exist a gap in literature as to what attributes of firms' CSR impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry; also there exist a gap in relation to the relative impact of each of the attribute of firms' corporate responsibility on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. Therefore, this present study addresses the identified gaps as it aims at determining the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry and, to determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. The Ghanaian construction industry was chosen for the study because it shares much resemblances with majority of the construction industries in developing countries and as a result, the findings of this study could be a true representation of what pertains in developing countries, though this study does not seek to generalize its findings to be same for all developing countries. Again, the Ghanaian construction industry was chosen because the few studies that focused on

construction firms' competitiveness and firms' CSR had the construction industry in the developed countries as their study area (see Wong , et al., 2000; Flanagan, et al., 2005;Yongtoa, 2008).

In addressing the gaps identified, the stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility was drawn upon; whereas relevant attributes of CSR that previous studies have used were synthesized to form the specific attributes for measuring CSR in the Ghanaian construction industry.

3. Theoretical basis

The stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility was drawn upon when addressing the gap of the impact of firms' corporate social responsibility on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. The theory is dynamic, robust, and comprehensive in explaining the attributes of firms' CSR; and have been used in similar studies in the past with the study by Anku-Tsede & Deffor (2014) appearing to be the recent to have used the theory in a CSR related study. The theory posits that, firms have relationships with stakeholders , and that, the stakeholders both affect and are affected by the actions of the firms (Freeman, 1984;2004).However, firms that are able to satisfy the interest of their stakeholders have competitive edge over their rivals (Momaya & Selby,1998;Porter & Kramer, 2002);or manage the relationship with their stakeholders for value generation enhance their competitiveness (Freeman, 1984;Hammann, et al., 2009;Maduenoa et al., 2016).Thus, according to Freeman (1984) and the Commission of the European Communities (2001),CSR is a means through which stakeholders' diverse needs are met and firms enhance their competitiveness in the industry within which they operate. As a result, crucial to the application of this theory is the ability of a firms to identify its key stakeholders whose actions are affected by firm and vice versa. However, since key stakeholders in one industry might not necessarily be the same in all industries; Momaya & Selby (1998) and Flanagan, et al. (2005), in earlier studies, identified the key stakeholders in the construction industry to be inclusive of employees, shareholders, community and regulatory bodies. However, the nagging question is how to satisfy the needs and/or manage the relationship of industry-specific stakeholders for a firm's competitiveness. In allusion to this, several views have been advanced in existing literature; for example, Maduenoa et al. (2016) argued that stakeholders' interests are met or managed through: reputation, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, price leadership, quality assurance and innovation (Momaya & Selby,1998; Shen et al.,2006).Similarly, that of regulatory bodies included: firms' compliance with health and safety measures as well as environmental cautiousness of the firms' operations (Feurer & Chaharbaghi,1994;Ayarkwa, 2010).In addition, the interest of society are satisfied and the relationship is well managed through: society's inclusion in design, construction and management of the project (Flanagan, et al.,2005).Therefore, though the needs of the stakeholders may differ, firms ability to satisfy or manage them give them competitive advantage in the industry (Maduenoa, et al., 2016).Hence guided by the theoretical framework of this study, the relevant attributes were organized and investigated to empirically ascertain their relative impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a two stage approach to research. The first stage was a literature review which aided the identification of the specific attributes for measuring firms' corporate social responsibility(CSR) as well as indicators of firms' competitiveness. The second stage was the use of the Delphi method to seek the opinions of experts on the extent of impact of the attributes of firms' CSR on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. In all 17 experts completed three rounds of the Delphi process. This size of experts is consistent with many studies in engineering and management that employed the Delphi method (that is 8 to 20 experts) (see Ameyaw et al.,2016). According to McKenna (1994) the expert panel is a panel of informed individuals. The Delphi method was employed in accordance with the principle that, forecasts (or decisions) from a structured group of persons are more accurate than forecasts from unstructured groups (see Rowe & Wright, 2001;Ameyaw, et al., 2016). Additionally, it is suitable for studies that seek to solicit the opinions from a group of experts in an attempt to build consensus in experts' opinions, and to predict the timing and likelihood of a future event (Lang, 1995).According to Miller (1993) and Hanson et al.(2000),the Delphi method is a qualitative methodology and it seeks to establish consensus in experts' opinions through rounds of survey (Miller, 1993;Hasson, et al., 2000).It uses structured questionnaires in collecting data from experts(Aigbavboa,2014;Ameyaw et al., 2016).In this study, the experts were drawn from academia and industry.The common criteria for selecting them was that,an expert should have had both theoretical and practical knowledge in firms' CSR and competitiveness. Again, the panel of experts, were carefully selected, to represent a broad spectrum of opinion on the issue being examined (see Loo,2002; Aigbavboa,2014; Tilakasiri, 2015).Subsequently, after each round of the Delphi survey, a statistical estimate of the experts' opinions was computed

and analyzed using the median, standard deviation, the mean and interquartile deviation. The adopted scale for measuring consensus was:

1. Strong consensus - median 9-10, mean 8-10, interquartile deviation (IQD) ≤ 1 and $\geq 80\%$ (8-10);
2. Good consensus - median 7-8.99, mean 6-7.99, $IQD \geq 1.1 \leq 2$ and $\geq 60\% \leq 79\%$ (6-7.99); and
3. Weak consensus - median ≤ 6.99 , mean ≤ 5.99 and $IQD \geq 2.1 \leq 3$ and $\leq 59\%$ (5.99).

The scale was based on a 10-point impact scale where 1 and 2 represent no impact; 3 and 4 represent low impact; 5 and 6 represent medium impact; 7 and 8 represent high impact; 9 and 10 represent very high impact (see Aigbavboa, 2014). Ethically, the identity of the experts was kept confidential in this study.

Further, informed by the aim, the research paradigm as well as the major philosophical considerations of this research, this research adopted qualitative methodology, subjectivity epistemology stance (see Jean, 1992). Phenomenal about subjectivity epistemology is that, meanings to reality are constructed (constructivism) and interpreted (interpretivism) by the researcher, thus align to the concept of interpretivism and constructivism (Creswell, 1994). However, since reliability and generalization of the findings are undermined as mainly data generated in qualitative studies are heavily impacted by the values and views of the researcher (Bryman, 2001; Sarantakos, 2005). Nevertheless, the weakness of non-generalization and non-reliability of qualitative research is overcome when a qualitative research is based on sound theoretical reasoning (Mitchell, 1983). Thus, this study has its theoretical bases in the stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility (Freeman, 1984; 2004). It worth emphasizing that though the findings of this study may be a true representation of the impact of CSR on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the construction industry in other developing countries which share much resemblance with the industry in Ghana but it only limited to the views of the Delphi experts this study empaneled.

5. Results and Discussions

Table 1.0: Attributes of firm's corporate social responsibility

| Sub-attributes | M | \bar{x} | σ_x | IQD | |
|---|---|-----------|------------|-----|-----------------|
| Recycling wastes generated by the firm | 8 | 8.07 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 7 th |
| Being prompt in the payment of employee benefits | 8 | 8.27 | 0.88 | 1 | 4 th |
| Having a well-functioning training programme for employees | 8 | 7.93 | 0.46 | 0 | 9 th |
| Having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme | 9 | 8.60 | 0.51 | 1 | 1 st |
| Reducing pollution of the environment | 8 | 8.40 | 0.51 | 1 | 3 rd |
| Providing support for local business | 8 | 8.20 | 0.41 | 0 | 5 th |
| Enhancing work-family balance for employees | 9 | 8.47 | 0.99 | 0.5 | 2 nd |
| Maximizing return on shareholder investment | 8 | 8.07 | 0.59 | 0 | 7 th |
| Complying with the local content and participation regulations | 8 | 8.20 | 0.41 | 0 | 5 th |

M = Median; \bar{x} = Mean; σ_x = Standard deviation; IQD = Interquartile deviation

Objective one: to determine the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry;

In relation to objective one, nine (9) attributes of **firm's corporate social responsibility** were found to have impacted on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. The nine attributes were: *recycling wastes generated by the firm, being prompt in the payment of employee benefits, having a well-functioning training programme for employees, having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme, reducing pollution of the environment, providing support for local business, enhancing work-family balance for employees, maximizing return on shareholder investment, and complying with the local content and participation regulations.* The attributes are similar to that of previous studies found to have been attributes of firms' CSR in some national contexts as highlighted under the literature review section; but the degree of impact of each of the attributes relative to one another varied in Ghanaian construction industry.

Objective two: to determine the relative impact of each of the attributes on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry;

In relation to objective two, out of the 9 attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that impact on construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry, (2) had very high impact (VHI: 9.00-10.00) on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness; while the remaining seven (7) had a high impact (HI: 7.00-8.99). None of the attributes was found not to have had an impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. More so, the IQD scores revealed that strong consensus was achieved for the (9) items in the views expressed by the expert panelists as each of the 9 attributes obtained scores ranging from 0.00 to 1.00. It was also evident in the respective standard deviation (σ) values that there was consistency in the responses of the experts; ranking by the respective mean scores, *having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme* with a mean value of (8.60) was ranked first; which supports studies that identified better condition of service as an attribute of firms' CSR (see Momaya,2004;Akben-Selcuk,2016).Likewise, *enhancing work-family balance for employees* with a mean value of (8.47) emerged second most impactful attribute of firms' CSR on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. This is consistent with the findings of the study by Turker (2009) that identified work-family relationship as an attribute of firms' CSR. Further, *reducing pollution of the environment* with a mean score of (8.40) emerged the third ranked attribute of firms' CSR that impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. This affirms the findings of McWilliams & Siegel (2001) that being environmentally conscious by reducing pollution on the environment,among other things are attributes of firms' CSR.Additionally, *being prompt in the payment of employee benefits* ranked fourth with a mean value of (8.27), supporting the study by Akben-Selcuk (2016) which identified prompt payment of employees benefits such as overtime allowance and leave allowance to be attributes of firms' CSR. More so, *complying with the local content and participation regulations* and *providing support for local business* jointly emerged the fifth ranked attribute of firms' CSR that impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry as each recorded a mean value of (8.20).This is consistent with the provisions of the Public Procurement Act of the Republic of Ghana which requires firms in competitive tendering to meet local content and participation requirements peculiar to the project at hand. It also enjoins competing firms to satisfy the requirement of support for small local firms (Republic of Ghana, 2003). The seventh ranked attribute of firms' CSR that impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness was *maximizing return on shareholder(s)' investment* which appears consistent with the studies that identified better returns on shareholders' investment as an attributes of firms' corporates social responsibility (Feurer & Chaharbaghi,1994;Buckley et al.,1998; Shen et al.,2006).Concurrently, seventh ranked attribute of firms' CSR that impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry was *recycling wastes generated by the firm*. This attribute had a mean value of (8.07) and affirms the assertion by McWilliams & Siegel (2001) and Ayarkwa (2010) that firms that are environmentally conscious of their operations, for example-recycling wastes that it generates, enhance their competitiveness. Lastly, *having a well-functioning training programme for employees* with a mean value of (7.93) was ranked ninth, supporting the findings by Turker (2009) that firms with a well-functioning employee's training programmes enhance their competitiveness.

Objective three: to suggest measures to enhance competitiveness of indigenous construction firms in the Ghanaian construction industry;

As a result of the findings of this current study, it is recommended that for indigenous construction firms to enhance their competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry, they ought to embark on CSR activities that strategically impact on their competitiveness. These CSR activities include *recycling wastes generated by the firm*, *being prompt in the payment of employee benefits*, *having a well-functioning training programme for employees*, *having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme*, *reducing pollution of the environment*, *providing support for local business*, *enhancing work-family balance for employees*, *maximizing return on shareholder investment*, and *complying with the local content and participation regulations*. In the midst of resource scarcity, attributes such as *having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme* and *enhancing work-family balance for employees* should be given the utmost priority since they were the two attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that had very high impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry.

6. Conclusions and Implications

In line with the objectives of this study, this study concludes that 9 attributes of firms' CSR impact on firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry (see Table 1.0). This is consistent with the attributes of firms' CSR that previous studies have identified. However, it is the relative impact of the 9 attributes that varied with regards to the Ghanaian construction industry. Relatively, *having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme*

was the first ranked attribute of firms' CSR; it had very high impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry whereas, *having a well-functioning training programme for employees* was ranked ninth having obtained a high impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. Therefore, this study recommends that indigenous construction firms that are desirous of being competitive in the Ghanaian construction industry should focus on 9 main attributes of firms' CSR namely: recycling wastes generated by the firm, being prompt in the payment of employee benefits, having a well-functioning training programme for employees, having a well-functioning employee conditions of service scheme, reducing pollution of the environment, providing support for local business, enhancing work-family balance for employees, maximizing return on shareholder investment, and complying with the local content and participation regulations.

Finally, the findings of this study will inform indigenous construction firms of the attributes of firms' corporate social responsibility that impact on firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry. More so, it provides the basis for future studies into corporate social responsibility and firms' competitiveness by adding to existing body of literature. It will also aid in updating existing curricula on firms' competitiveness and firms' corporate social responsibility in institutions of higher learning in Ghana to reflect new trends in corporate social responsibility and competitiveness studies in the Ghanaian construction industry. It will also inform policy makers when formulating policies that seek to positively impact on indigenous construction firms' competitiveness in the Ghanaian construction industry.

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Biographies

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