

The Nexus of Real Earnings Management (REM): Financial Abilities among Construction Industry In Malaysia

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to provide empirical evidences of the relationships between the financial abilities towards in the financial statement to the Real Earnings Management (REM) among of public sector companies on Bursa Malaysia from year 2001 until 2012. Primarily, the initial samples was comprises 375 selected public listed companies with 4500 firm-years observation. From the samples, those companies who have not implies with the earnings management activities was excluded as a sample of the study. Thus, the final sample on this study was comprises 3971 firm-years observation. The study was adopted the Roychowdhury (2006) Model as a measurement model for Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business organization. Meanwhile, the findings on this study was indicates significant relationships between earnings ability (EAB), financial structure ability (FSAB), debt repaying ability (DRAB) and non financial factors (NFF) towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business organization. Therefore, these evidences can be used as new financial mechanisms to potential and existing stakeholders in order to assist them for any decision making purposes.

Key words: Real Earnings Management (REM) • Earnings Ability (EAB) • Debt Repaying Ability (DRAB) and Financial Structure Ability (FSAB)

INTRODUCTION

This study will examine the financial abilities, which might influence the earnings management level among of public listed companies on Bursa Malaysia from year 2001 until 2012. Therefore, this study was produced some useful input to potential stakeholders which rely the financial information disclosed by the business organization. This issue was very important to be discussed since the financial information disclosed by the business organization is based on the estimation calculation. These practices were allowed by the General Acceptable Accounting Practices (GAAP) and it has been applied to most listed companies on Bursa Malaysia. However, this provision would be manipulated by the irresponsible business organization due to several motives in their business organization. These strategies

were commonly known as earnings management activities strategies or cooking the books activities [1]. In other words, there are possible fraudulent activities could be derived from an aggressive earnings management strategies employed in the capital market. Therefore, it's very crucial to the existing and potential stakeholders to understand on how financial abilities that was contributed to the earnings management level in the business organization. Thus, by working on this concerned the current investigation was aimed to investigate the possible relationships could be exist between the financial abilities towards the earnings management level in the business organization.

Issues of the Study: An existing and potential stakeholders usually concern with the issues of the profitability financial information disclosed by the

business organizations towards the capital market players. However, the reliability issues of the financial information disclosed was not seriously concern by illiterate financial people during decision process was being made [2]. This also was contributed of the existing and potential stakeholders which are more interested with the profit and income figures that were disclosed in the financial report of the business organization. However, due to the increasing complexity of the business organizations activities nowadays, the accounting standard was provided some of leniency for the managers to manage their financial transaction [3]. Furthermore, with the accounting provision provided to the managers, there are possibilities of the aggressive earnings management activities were being employed by the business organization. Thus, these activities were being disclosed in the financial reports.

Consequently, the users of the financial reports usually were not aware with earnings manipulation activities that were employed by the managers to their financial information transactions [4]. In the other words, the potential and the existing stakeholders usually will rely with the information disclosed in the financial report in relation to make some decision with their investment activities.

Therefore, the reliability of financial information disclosed was been critically debated by the academic scholars regarding the impacts to the stakeholders [5]. It's because there are many issues related to the reliability of financial information which has been reported by the business organization. One of the close related issues with the reliability financial information is the factors of occurrence of earnings management activities [6]. By having unclear mechanism in accessing earnings management activities, it is considered these activities will lead to any potential losses towards the potential and existing stakeholders' decisions. Therefore, this study has provided some empirical evidence on how the financial abilities influence the earnings management activities among of business organization.

Earnings Management: Earnings management can be define as strategies by the managers in the business organization to manipulate the earnings level within the business organization activities [7]. These strategies were applied by the managers in the business organization in order to conceal unfavourable financial position in the eye of the existing and potential stakeholders. According to [8], during the financial distress in the business organization the managers will tend to manipulate their

earnings position within the business organization in order to avoid loss of confidence among of their potential and existing stakeholders.

Another reasons behind the application earnings management activities is due to complexity of business transaction involved in the capital market [9]. Therefore, these strategies were allowed by the General Accepted Accounting Principle or GAAP in the accounting standards in order to meet the global environments of business transaction in the capital market itself.

Apart from above, there are situations where the managers were excessively applied the earnings management activities in their business transaction. These situations were also directly influenced the interest of the potential and existing stakeholders within the business organization. It because, the users of financial information usually was not aware the strategies applied by the managers in the financial information disclosure [10]. Beside the awareness issues on the reliability with the financial information disclosed by the managers in the business organization, the illiteracy issue of financial information also were become a factors on how the managers can easily manipulate their financial position without stakeholders arguments.

From another point of views, earnings management activities could be used as a marketing financial method to the potential investors. Therefore, according to [11], they found that earnings management may be used as a marketing strategies in order to attract more investors attention with their income smoothing activities. They also claimed that, the marketing officers have more knowledge on accounting manipulation. It is could be significant in promoting their companies with earnings management activities to get more funds from any potential investors in the capital markets.

The earnings management strategies also will be more functional if it could meet the analysis forecast by the potential investors. This also was supported by [12] who claimed the earnings management strategies have significant impact to the securities analyst towards the performance of the company. In other words, they were argued the earnings management strategies will help the securities analyst on measuring the company's performance before they made decision on making some investment on the company. The arguments on how the income smoothing will enhance the information of stock price was also studied by Salehi & Manesh [13]. In that research, the finding shows that earnings management activities will improve the information contents towards the level of stock price in capital market.

They also claimed that the effects of informativeness of stock price were closely related to the future earnings level of companies. However, this arguments were not supported by Suwardi [14] where as that research found that creative accounting strategies will not directly influence the stock price in capital market because that kind of information will be treated as window dressing of financial position of a company. On the next section in this study, the discussions were continued with the measurement of variables used in this particular research.

Measurement of Real Earnings Management: In contrast with the Accrual Earnings Management (AEM) estimation model, the estimated residual in the Real Earnings Management (REM) model represents the estimated residual for the real accounting manipulation activities among the selected companies during current accounting period [15]. On the other hand, the residual values in this model could be understood as the abnormal residual values obtained from the estimated model. The abnormal values (estimated residual) could also be simply understood as the difference between the actual accounting activities and the normal accounting activities. Therefore, these values could simply be obtained from the estimated residual values between the estimated total accrual for current year towards the selected financial transactions in the current accounting period. At the same time, it is always important to be understood that the estimated residual values for REM could be measured using the three well-known estimation models proposed by Roychowdhury [16]. These models are simple to be understood among researchers in Earnings Management studies since they involve less complex estimated components to obtain the estimated residual values.

The first of these estimation models is concerned with the abnormal Cash Flows Operation (CFO). This model represents the REM strategies from the cash flows operation activities. Meanwhile, the second model is related to REM in the Cost of Good Sold (COGS) transaction. This means that in this model, it is also possible to estimate the abnormal residual from the actual accounting transaction towards the normal COGS transaction. The third option for estimation model is related to the Discretionary Expenses model (DEXP). This third model was initially developed in order to detect REM in the selected Discretionary Expenses transaction in the business organizations during the current accounting period. Out of these three estimation models for REM, the

current study only adopted the first estimation model. The reason for this was that the current study merely focused on estimated REM strategies and it was not interested in comparing the models. Therefore, in estimating residual values form the CFO model, the following equation was used in the current study:

$$REM = [(CFO_t / A_{t-1} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1(1 / A_{t-1}) + \beta_1(S_t / A_{t-1}) + \beta_2(\Delta S_t / A_{t-1}) + \epsilon t)] \quad (1)$$

where:

CFO_t : Cash flow from operations (current year)

A_{t-1} : Retained Earnings / Total Asset

S_t : Earnings Berfore Interest and Tax / Total Asset

ΔS_t : Market Value / Deferred Tax

Financial Abilities Towards Earnings Management: In this particular study, there are several financial abilities were being addressed in order to investigate the possible relationship towards the earnings management level in the business transaction activities. As mentioned earlier, the financial abilities could be useful information among of existing and potential stakeholders in order to access the earnings management activities in the business organization. According to Perols & Lougee [17] there is significant relationship between the earnings management activities with the accounting information disclosed in the financial report. In the other words, the earnings management activities in the business organization could be traced through the information disclosed in the income statement of the business organization. However, this arguments was not give a clear mechanism on how the earnings management activities in the business organization could be identified by the existing and the potential stakeholders.

On the meanwhile, according to Selahudin, Zakaria, Sanusi, & Budsaratragoon [18] they was investigated the earnings management activities which regards to the financial ratios such as leverage and financial distress in the business organization. It was claimed in their study, the earnings management was significantly influence between the tested financial ratios. In the other hands, according to Chen [19], it was claimed there is significant relationship between the financial abilities with financial distress in the business organization. However, their study was not mentioned the relationship between the financial abilities and the earnings management activities in the business organization. In fact, the term of financial

distress was closely related to the earnings management activities in the business organization [8]. Therefore, the financial abilities were being used in order to be tested towards the earnings management level in the business organization.

As suggested from the above, there are several financial abilities could be used in order to access the earnings management activities in the business organization such as earnings ability (EAB), financial structure ability (FSAB), management performance ability (MNPER), debt repaying ability (DRAB) and non-financial factors ability (NFF). Next we continued the discussions with the earnings ability (EAB) towards the earnings management level in the business organization. The earnings ability can be defined as the abilities of the business organization to achieve profit or margins in the business transaction [20]. The earnings ability can be further measured by various financial ratios.

Meanwhile, a previous study done by Farrell, Unlu, & Yu [21], they was claimed the earnings per share ratios could be used as a measurement for the earnings ability indicator towards accessing the earnings management level in the business organization. Next, it is also believed that the financial structure ability (FSAB) could also important to the earnings management activities in the business organization. It can be simply defined as the capacity of the business organization to meet their liabilities from the investment made by the stakeholders [22]. Thus, this type of financial ability could be measure by the debt to equity ratio in the business organization in order to access any suspicious accounting transaction disclosed in the financial report [23]. Meanwhile, the debt equity ratio was also used in fraudulent financial report within the business organization in the capital market activities [24].

Another focused of the financial ability that was tested in this particular study is based on the management performance ability (MNPER) towards the earnings management level in the business organization. This type of financial ability could be defined as ability of the managers in the business organization to meet their forecast in business transaction through their operating expenses transactions. According to Dharmapala & Riedel [25], the management performance was closely related to the capacity of the managers in the business organization to manage their business expenses level. Meanwhile [26] was suggested that management accounting transaction was useful in order to capture the fraudulent activities in

the financial report transaction. Therefore, pretax margin ratio was used to measure this type financial ability in order to investigate the possible relationship towards the earnings management level in the business organization.

Debt repaying ability was important to be concerned by the existing and potential stakeholders in order to access the capacity of the business organization meet their current liabilities based on their current asset holdings [27]. It also can be translated as the capabilities of the business organization fulfil their current obligation with their current capacity of asset level in business transaction activities. In the other words, if the business organization was not able to meet their current liability based on their current asset level, there is a red flag on earnings management to be happened within the business transaction activities [28]. For another point of view, the debt repaying ability also was being used by the financial institution in their consideration in lending additional capital to the business organization. This mechanism was used in that purposed due to ensure the business organization was able to meet their obligation from the capital injunction in their business organization [29].

Further, the last type of financial ability that was commonly used in accessed the financial position in the business transaction is related to the non financial factors ability (NFF). The non financial factors was become interesting among of managers in the business organization for their earnings management activities is because it was not directly represent the current financial position of the business organization [30]. It is because, the non financial factors was usually inflated with earnings management activities in order to prevent the entrenchment among of stakeholders in the business organization [31]. On the next section, the discussion was continued with the research methodology used in this particular research.

Based on the Table 1 above, the current study was identified several significant relationships between the financial abilities towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) (EM) among of selected public listed companies on Bursa Malaysia. It was started with earnings ability (EAB) in which it has significant relationship towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) (EM) in the business organization. In the other words, this variable was able to influence the earnings management activities in the business transaction.

Table 1 : Summary of The Regression Analyses

	Pooled OLS
Mean REM	4.613
(P-Values)	
Coefficient	
EAB	0.0000***
	-0.332
FSAB	0.0000***
	-0.147
MNPER	0.5013
	-0.01
DRAB	0.0000***
	-0.574
NFF	0.0000***
	-0.45
R ²	0.9765
Adjusted R ²	0.9765
Durbin Watson Statistic	1.3185
Prob (F-statistic)	0.000***

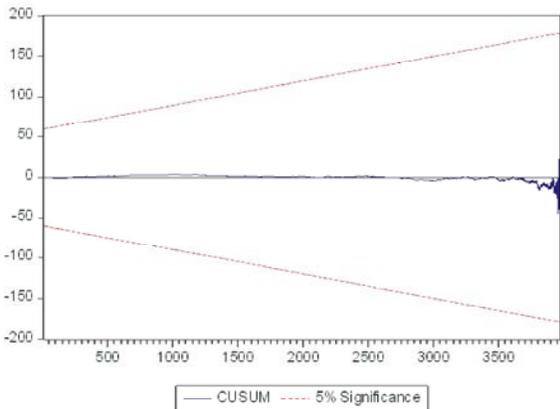


Fig. 1: Stability result for the model tested

It was followed by financial structure ability (FSAB) towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) (EM) in which it was identified as significant relationship towards the earnings management activities within the business organization activities. However, the study was recognized the management performance ability (MNPER) as not significant relationship towards the dependent variable which is Real Earnings Management (REM) (EM) in the companies. In the other words, the management performance ability was not giving any influence towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business organization. A part from this analyses also, the current study was identified the significant relationships between the debt repaying ability (DRAB) and non financial factor ability (NFF) towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business transactions.

On the meanwhile, based on the Figure 1 above, the analyses were confirmed that the model tested in the current study was stable to be carried out along the

investigation process. Apart from that, the structural break for the model used was not exceeding with 5% significant level. The consume test was important to be employed in panel data analyses since it will ensure the stability of the model tested in the regression analyses [32]. Therefore, based on the findings in the current study, it was believed the financial abilities could be used as a financial mechanism in detecting earnings management activities in the business organization. Next, the following section was continued with discussion of the current study together with several past research works in this area.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

As was mentioned in the previous section in this paper, the current study was identified significant relationships between the earnings ability (EAB) with Real Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business organization among of the companies in the construction industry. This result was indicates any changes happened in the earnings ability (EAB) within the business organizations for their Real Earnings Management (REM). This result was consistence with the previous study done by Fung, Su, & Gul [33] in which they was claimed the earnings ability was being used by the managers in the business organization in order to prevent the entrenchment of their shareholders. Therefore, it is believed by having such mechanism the existing and potential stakeholders should be more alert with red flag of earnings management activities in the business organization.

Next, the study also was recognized significant relationship between the financial structure ability (FSAB) with the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business organization. In the other words, the business organizations also have an opportunity to manage their earnings level through their financial structure ability. The companies usually used the financial structure ability in order to get more capital from the capital market players. Hence, this strategy was used to ensure the business organizations able to finance their debts level from their equities level [34]. In the other words, the business organizations were probably having an initiative of Real Earnings Management (REM) activities with their offering of equities in the capital market transactions.

Nevertheless, the current study was also examined the insignificant relationship between the management performance ability (MNPER) towards the Real Earnings

Management (REM) in the business organization. In the other words, this type of financial ability was not given any influence or relationship towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business transaction activities. Hence, this result was suggested the pretax margin ratio cannot be used as a proxy for management performance ability in order to trace the earnings management activities in the business organization. However, this evidence was not consistence with the previous study done by Marques, Rodrigues, & Craig [35] in which they was claimed that the earnings management activities could be influenced from the pretax margin in the business transaction activities.

On the meanwhile, the current study was also identified the significant relationship between the debts repaying ability (DRAB) towards the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business transaction activities. This situation were represented the capabilities of the companies in meeting their current liabilities based on the current asset level in the business transaction activities. Moreover, this financial ability can be used among of existing and potential stakeholders in order to trace the companies ability whether it have reasonable capacity to meet their current obligation in their business activities. This result also was consistence with the past study done by de Andrés, Landajo, & Lorca [36] which claimed the debt repaying ability was useful to be used in order to trace the financial distress in the business organization.

For the last findings of this study, it was also recognized as significant relationship between the non financial factor ability (NFF) with the Real Earnings Management (REM) in the business transaction activities. The rationale behind this result is the managers in the business organizations would manipulated the dividend rates towards their stakeholders in the capital market. This strategy was enabled the business organization maintain the confidence level of the stakeholders in the capital market strategies. Moreover, this evidence was also consistence with the past study done by Al-Malkawi, Bhatti, & Magableh, [37]. In the other words, the managers in the business organization could employed strategies for earnings management activities based on dividend rate smoothing activities in the capital market transactions.

Therefore, based on the evidences disclosed in this particular study, it was suggested that the financial abilities could be used a financial mechanism in order to trace any irregularities of financial transaction or earnings

management activities in the contraction companies in the capital market transaction. However, it was recommended for the future research to be explored if there is relationship between the Real Earnings Management (REM) towards the firm values of the companies. It is because, the firm values criteria also was become an interest among stakeholders while investigating the Real Earnings Management strategies by the business organization.

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