

THE ROLE OF PROCUREMENT POLICIES IN COMBATING CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Bulus Daniel Maiyaki¹ and Ademeso Tosin Success²

¹ Rural Electrification Agency, Abuja

² Department of Public Administration, University of Abuja

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of corruption in the public sector significantly undermines governance, economic development, and fosters ignorance among the citizenry regarding esteemed institutions. Procurement is one of the most vulnerable stages in public administration due to the substantial financial transactions involved, often leading to unethical practices such as bid-rigging, favouritism, and kickbacks. This journal examines how procurement regulations can mitigate governmental corruption. It analyses how well-designed, transparent, and efficiently implemented procurement procedures can serve as a significant tool in mitigating the likelihood of corrupt behaviours. The research employs qualitative methodologies and is grounded in a comprehensive literature review, analysis of policy papers, and case studies from various countries. The major findings indicate that procurement policies emphasising transparency, accountability, competitiveness, and supervision are effective in reducing occurrences of corrupt activities. Elements such as e-procurement, clear legal frameworks, the establishment of audit agencies, and protections for whistleblowers enhance the autonomy of procurement systems. Nonetheless, the success of these measures heavily depends on political will, institutional capacity, and devotion to implementation. Despite the establishment of good procurement regulations by various nations, the execution and accountability often fall short of ensuring their efficacy. The report asserts that only enhancing procurement policies is insufficient; a comprehensive approach involving capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and vigilance is essential. The results underscore the importance of integrating anti-corruption as a fundamental element of public procurement systems, thereby enhancing efficiency, equity, and trust in administration.

Corresponding Author:

Ademeso, Tosin Success,
Department of Public Administration,
University of Abuja

INTRODUCTION

The procurement of products, services, and infrastructure is a critical government function that is essential for the delivery of services to the public. It is a significant component of national budgets in all countries, and the World Bank (2020) estimates that public procurement accounts for approximately 12-20 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). Procurement processes are particularly susceptible to corruption due to the large amounts of money that are in circulation, particularly in the public or governmental sector, where there may be insufficient supervision and inefficient accountability tools. The economy's efficacy is disrupted by public procurement corruption, which results in unfair competition, high costs, and ultimately deprives citizens of quality services (Transparency International, 2022). In order to achieve clarity, justice, and accountability, procurement policies have become a critical instrument in the fight against corruption, providing organised procedures and protection.

Public procurement corruption manifests in various forms, including bid-rigging, bribery schemes, patronages, over-purchasing, and collusion between public agents and vendors (Kenny, 2021). Not only do these practices exploit the resources available to the populace, but they also result in a decline in trust in government institutions. For instance, it is not uncommon in a developing nation to observe infrastructure projects being allocated to unqualified contractors through corrupt agreements, which contributes to low-quality constructions and failures (IMF, 2019). The SNC-Lavalin controversy in Canada and the Volkswagen emissions scandal, which was associated with the awarding of government contracts, serve as examples of the inevitability of

corruption in the procurement sector, even in developed nations (OECD, 2021). The repercussions extend beyond a diminished financial foundation to encompass a decline in the public's confidence in institutionalised democracy, as well as poor governance and a reduction in foreign investments.

Governments are progressively adopting formal procurement policies that are designed to standardise procedures, enhance transparency, and promote competition in order to mitigate the risks. These policies typically consist of a combination of laws, regulatory guidelines, their bidding processes, review standards, and review. Competent procurement systems are essential for ensuring the quality of government expenditure and preventing corruption, as stipulated in the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) (United Nations, 2006). The Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) in the World Trade Organisation (WTO 2023) also enshrines the principles of transparency, equality, and non-discrimination in public tenders in a ranked manner. National procurement policies may be established by reference to international standards.

The integrity of government expenditure is contingent upon the formulation and adoption of procurement policies. A procurement system that is effective ensures that contractors are selected based on merit, value, and economic feasibility, as well as a well-organised tendering process. For instance, Estonia and South Korea have implemented e-procurement to increase transparency and reduce direct human interaction, thereby reducing corruption (European Commission, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2020). In Estonia, the national e-procurement system has enabled the real-time tracking

of tenders, the complete automation of proposal evaluations, and the access of procurement information to the general public, thereby virtually eliminating corrupt processes. In the same vein, the KONEPS (Korea National e-Procurement System) in South Korea has been reported to increase competition and decrease procurement costs by over 10% (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Despite the existence of procurement policies, they are not always sufficient to guarantee efficacy. In the majority of countries, including those with feeble institutions, policies are either not well enforced or intentionally avoided. The procurement regulations are typically rendered inefficient due to the absence of responsibility, interference in the country's politics, and the limited control that is being exercised (Andrews, 2022). For instance, in certain African nations, purchasing legislation is executed in writing; however, it is frequently circumvented through emergency procurement or direct contracting (Mawejje, 2019). This policy practice divide demonstrates that the mere possession of robust procurement structures is insufficient; rather, they should be implemented consistently and in all circumstances.

Furthermore, it is assumed that procurement policies are effective when they are implemented within a broader institutional framework that prioritises integrity. In terms of official accountability, the issue of an independent judiciary, a free press, an active civic society, and a professional administrative service is quite significant (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2023). Corruption can persist in the absence of well-established institutions, even in the most intricate procurement policies. For instance, Nigeria's procurement fraud rates are elevated, despite the existence of a robust Public Procurement Act, due to the country's systematic deficit in enforcement and political will (Adegbite & Zimba, 2020).

Transparency is an additional critical component of procurement policies that are effective. Active querying of corrupt actions is enabled by the transparency of procurement-related information, such as tender notices, bid evaluation, contract awards, and performance reports, which is implemented through open access. The Open Contracting Partnership recommends that procurement information disclosure be implemented as one of the primary strategies to mitigate corruption, as sunlight is the most effective disinfectant (Open Contracting Partnership, 2022). Countries that have implemented open contracting, such as Ukraine, have experienced a decrease in corruption and competition in tenders (ProZorro, 2021). All procurement data has been disseminated online on the system to enable citizens, the media, and watchdog groups to monitor purchases as they occur.

Reward systems will also be beneficial. Independent oversight bodies, such as audit bodies, procurement tribunals, and anti-corruption agencies, are responsible for conducting investigations and enforcing compliance. For instance, the Swedish National Audit Office conducts an annual evaluation of the public procurement process and disseminates the findings, which are then employed to modify the policy (SNAO, 2020). Performance audits are conducted by the Controller and Auditor-General offices in the country to ensure that the procurement process adheres to regulations and provides value-care, as is the case in New Zealand (OGC, 2021). The institutions function as a system of checks and balances that reinforce the integrity of procurement systems.

Additionally, it is imperative that public institutions implement capacity building initiatives. Procurement officers would have been able to make unbiased decisions if they had been instructed on technical assessment, legal regulation, and ethical requirements. Lack of training and professional development, implementation, or exploitation can destroy even the most well-conceived policies. The ongoing educational and certification programs are also recommended by the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) to enhance the professionalism of procurement authorities (CIPS, 2022).

Despite these advancements, there are still challenges. In the majority of cases, procurement policies are also perceived as an obstruction to integrity. The perception has the potential to incite resistance among public officials, as transparency practices may be perceived as a hindrance to their discretionary authority.

Additionally, the procurement systems would be subject to constant evolution due to the rapid advancements in technology, and governments with restricted resources would face a challenge in accommodating these changes. The European Commission (2021) also notes that the use of e-procurement solutions is at risk due to cybersecurity threats, the digital divide, and the lack of robustness associated with the level of data privacy.

Furthermore, corruption in procurement is frequently institutionalised and encompasses facilitators, contractors, and chiefs of offices. It cannot be accomplished through technical interventions; rather, it necessitates political resolve and cultural transformation. The fight against corruption should not be limited to legal frameworks, as the incentives and norms that perpetuate the issue should also be addressed, as per Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2023).

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that contextual and exhaustive proxies are necessary to examine the return of procuring reform. The effectiveness of single-size solutions is typically limited due to the fact that the nature of corruption and its underlying causes differ across various sectors and countries. For instance, corruption in the realm of defence procurement may manifest in a variety of ways in contrast to procurement in the health or education sectors (Kenny, 2021). This is the reason why procurement policies must be subjected to the contingencies of specific threats and institutional contexts.

International organisations have also promoted the most effective approach. Technical assistance and funding are provided to procurement reforms in third-world countries by the African Development Bank, World Bank, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (World Bank, 2020; UNDP, 2021). These initiatives include the promotion of institutional strengthening, the encouragement of legal reform, and the support of digital procurement systems. However, sustainability necessitates national stewardship and long-term engagement from governments.

Public participation is an additional approach to address the emerging issue of procurement corruption. The procurement procedures can be inspected by citizens, civil society organisations, and private sectors, which will enhance transparency and accountability. India and the Philippines have implemented participatory budgeting programs, citizen report cards, and social audits to improve procurement (Malena, 2020). Citizens can act as watchdogs to ensure that elected leaders are held accountable through their knowledge and strength.

Furthermore, procurement policies are indispensable in the struggle against corruption in any of the government's sectors. They provide the legal and procedural foundation for competitive, transparent, and equitable procurement processes. When implemented effectively, these policies have the potential to eliminate corrupt customs and bolster public trust in the government. However, they have not yet been successfully implemented, as the sustainability of the institutional environment is contingent upon the political stability of the will and the high accountability system. The demands for the enhancement of procurement systems should remain a priority in the context of sustainable development and good governance as governments continue to make strides in combating corruption. This research will endeavour to ascertain the truth regarding the role of procurement policies in the reduction of corruption, the factors that influence the efficacy of these policies, and the lessons that can be learnt by other countries worldwide.

Statement of the Problem

Public corruption in public procurement is a systemic and curbing issue that impedes the credibility of government agencies, economic development, and good governance. Despite the existence of procurement policies in the majority of countries, corruption continues to dominate the public sector procurement process through bid-rigging, favours, bribery, and inflated contracts (Kenny, 2021). In addition to resulting in the misappropriation of public funds, these malpractices also diminish the quality and efficacy of the public services that are provided, which ultimately affects the well-being of the citizens. Lax

institutional design, institutional supervision, and institutional transparency are particularly prevalent in developing nations, which contributes to the prevalence of corruption (Mawejje, 2019).

Despite the fact that various governments have implemented policies and regulations on procurement to ensure transparency, impartiality, and accountability in the process, the gap between policy development and implementation remains large. In the majority of cases, procurement laws are either self-selected or disregarded, particularly during emergency procurement, direct contracting, or the manipulation of tendering criteria (Adegbite & Zimba, 2020). This undermines the procurement process's integrity and fosters impunity among public office holders and private contractors.

Moreover, the efficiency of the existing procurement systems is diminished by the absence of effective accountability mechanisms and arms-length supervisory organisations, as well as the inability of citizens to participate. Even in countries where e-procurement systems are well-established, they are not impervious to the factors that restrict the utilisation of anti-corruption opportunities: cybersecurity threats, lack of data transparency, and inadequate procurement officer capabilities (European Commission, 2021). It is challenging to ensure equitable competition and the merit principle of contract awarding, as politics and patronage systems often supplant institutional processes.

The primary research question in the proposed study would be to determine how procurement policies can be improved to combat corruption in the public sector. It examines the extent to which the existing policies have been enforced, the factors that impede the efficacy of the policies that have been implemented, and the measures that can be taken to enhance their efficacy. These insights are essential for the development of procurement systems that are more sustainable and transparent, as well as for the assurance of the integrity and accountability of the process to the public.

Research Questions

1. How does transparency in procurement policies contribute to reducing corruption in public sector procurement processes?
2. To what extent do enforcement mechanisms support the effectiveness of procurement policies in preventing corrupt practices?
3. What role do public oversight and accountability institutions play in strengthening integrity in public procurement?

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the role of procurement policies in combating corruption in the public sector and to identify the key factors that influence their effectiveness. The specific objectives include;

1. To assess how transparency in procurement policies contributes to reducing corruption in public sector procurement processes.
2. To examine the extent to which enforcement mechanisms support the effectiveness of procurement policies in preventing corrupt practices.
3. To explore the role of public oversight and accountability institutions in strengthening procurement integrity.

Scope of the Study

The current investigation will focus on the role of procurement policies in combating corruption in the public sector. It also examines the design, implementation, and effects of such policies, with a particular emphasis on transparency, enforcement instruments, institutions, and oversight agencies. The analysis utilises international examples of best practices and countries that have achieved commendable procurement systems. However, the paper does not address procurement in the private sector, as its

primary focus is on the system of public expenditure and the accountability of citizens.

The research will be limited to qualitative research, which will be conducted using existing literature, policy documents, and published case studies. The results are interpretational and contextual, as they are not founded on new data measurements, as they do not involve primary data collection such as interviews or field surveys. As a result, the inferences suggest trends and patterns that are identified in written experiences, rather than statistical generalisation.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

The process by which governments and public entities acquire products, services, and works in order to initiate their operational and developmental mandates is referred to as public procurement (World Bank, 2020). It is a critical component of public administration and represents one of the largest sectors of global public expenditures. Procurement is susceptible to corruption, neglect, and inefficiency due to the substantial volume of financial transfers involved, which can sometimes account for 10-20 percent of a state's GDP (OECD, 2021). The consequences of corruption in procurement procedures include the exaggeration of project price levels, the compromising of citizen trust in state agencies, mal-competitiveness, and reversed economic development (Transparency International, 2022). In this context, procurement policies have emerged as a critical instrument that promotes transparency, accountability, and integrity in government expenditure.

The procurement policy is an official document that establishes the rules, procedures, standards, and management systems that govern the process of supplying products and services to public institutions (UNDP, 2021). They primarily pertain to regulations that are stated in national laws, regulations, and institutional manuals. Their primary objective is to ensure fair competition, deliver value for money, prevent the appearance of favouritism, and minimise the likelihood of corruption activities. The bureaucratic instruments of effective procurement policies are, in fact, strategic instruments that establish the ethical integrity and efficacy of government service performance.

The procurement policy is characterised by the concept of transparency. Transparency is defined as the availability and accessibility of procurement information, including notices of tenders, bid documents, evaluation guidelines, contracts awarded, and performance reports (Open Contracting Partnership, 2022). The transparent nature of procurement processes allows stakeholders, including suppliers, auditors, civil society, and the general public, to monitor the transactions and penalise the officers. Research suggests that transparency reduces information asymmetry, which is one of the factors that contributes to corruption (Kenny, 2021). This is especially critical in contexts with a history of opaque governance, where a lack of transparency is a key enabler of corrupt practices (Oyadiran & Success, 2015). An example is when the criteria used in proposal evaluation are made publicly available in advance, making it more difficult to convince officials to favour certain bidders over others by offering incentives.

The notion of transparency is quite closely linked to the concept of competition. They select the most preferred and economical suppliers of the provided contract through competitive bidding, rather than through backdoors or political deals. Fair and open competition is a critical factor in the prevention of corruption and the determination of efficacy, as stipulated in the World Trade Organisation agreement on government procurement (WTO, 2023). The competition between two or more suppliers bidding on the same contract will result in reduced possibilities of collusion, enhanced quality, and lower prices. However, the competition may be impeded by the use of practices such as bid-rigging, in which companies may collude to inflate their prices or take shifts winning contracts (IMF, 2019). Consequently, procurement policies should be accountable for detecting and preventing anti-competitive conduct.

Accountability is an additional term that is noteworthy, as it denotes the obligations of governmental officials to justify their decisions and actions during the procurement process. Accountability is enforced through internal reviews, audits, and criminal penalties for misconduct (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2023). Due to the absence of accountability through discretionary exploitation, procurement systems are unable to remain competitive and transparent. For instance, a procurement officer may grant an award to a relative or associate by minimally manipulating the evaluation requirements after completing all necessary procedures. Consequently, it is imperative to implement effective accountability measures, such as the protection of whistleblowers and supervision institutions, in order to discourage this behaviour. The effectiveness of such whistleblower policies has been identified as a significant factor in reducing corruption, particularly within the Nigerian public sector context (Ademeso, 2024a).

Integrity is the second fundamental concept in procurement policy. Integrity can be elucidated by adhering to ethical, professional standards and eliminating conflicts of interest. It mandates that procurement officials maintain impartiality, refrain from receiving gifts or favours from suppliers, and disclose any personal interests that may influence their procurement decisions (CIPS, 2022). In order to guarantee integrity, the majority of nations have implemented codes of conduct and ethics training for their procurement personnel. The foundation for this lies in established public service rules which mandate ethical conduct for public officers; however, the effectiveness of these rules is often contingent on enforcement mechanisms and political will (Ademeso, 2024b). However, as Mawejje (2019) notes, it is impossible to manage integrity solely through regulations, as one must rely on a culture of honesty and the desire to serve the population in institutions.

Its significance is difficult to overstate in the context of the influence of legal and regulatory systems on procurement outcomes. The legal foundation would establish a clear understanding of the purchasing process, define the roles of the protagonists, and illustrate the repercussions of fallibility. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) emphasises the importance of comprehensive procurement laws as a method of combating corruption (United Nations, 2006). Similarly, the bottom line for transparency, disputes, and equitable treatment is established by local regulations, such as the Public Procurement Directives of the European Union (European Commission, 2021). However, this is insufficient, as legislation is required. As Adegbite and Zimba (2020) observe in the context of the Nigerian government, procurement legislation is frequently rendered ineffective by political interference and negligent enforcement.

The procurement procedure in governments has been revolutionised by e-procurement. The procurement process is automated by e-procurement systems, which optimise efficiency to reduce the number of abriations and automate the production of tenders and contract administration (Kim & Lee, 2020). Estonia and South Korea are two examples of digital platforms that have demonstrated the capacity to enhance transparency, reduce the number of processing periods, and reduce the likelihood of corruption. For example, the e-procurement system in Estonia enables the real-time tracking of tenders and the automatic evaluation of bids, thereby substantially reducing the likelihood of outsmarting (ProZorro, 2021). However, it is misguided to regard e-procurement as a form of sorcery. In low-income countries, it is more difficult to be of assistance, and one may encounter obstacles such as cybersecurity threats, digital exclusion, and a lack of technical capacity (European Commission, 2021).

The population's involvement is also considered a critical component of ethical purchasing. The involvement of citizens, civil society organisations, and the media as external watchdogs in the supervision of procurement processes contributes to the improvement of accountability. India and the Philippines have implemented a variety of participatory budgeting processes, citizen report cards, and social audits to improve procurement outcomes

(Malena, 2020). The Open Contracting Partnership advocates for an approach that involves the public disclosure of procurement information in a language that is easily comprehensible, allowing civil society to interpret it and report any violations (Open Contracting Partnership, 2022). This is the form of participatory governance that fosters trust and strengthens the legitimacy of public institutions.

Despite the fact that these activities are implemented, public procurement systems continue to be plagued by a number of deficiencies. Discretionary power, which grants government officials significant control to make decisions without specific guidance, poses a substantial risk. Discretion may be abused to authorise direct contracting, modify the provisions of the contract, or select suppliers without competitive bidding. In the majority of developing nations, emergency procurement clauses are frequently implemented to circumvent the conventional procurement procedures, thereby creating an opportunity for corruption (Mawejje, 2019). Therefore, the procurement policies should establish clear boundaries for discretionary actions and provide justification and authorisation for exceptions.

The lack of procurement officials' competencies is the other weakness. Inadequate training, low salaries, and heavy duties may result in poor decision-making and susceptibility to bribery. This will involve the professional development, accreditation, and career advancement of a workforce that is experienced and ethical in the procurement sector, as emphasised by the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS, 2022). Without investment in human capital, procurement systems that are the most advanced may prove to be ineffective.

The matter of political interference continues to be discussed. In other instances, procurement decisions are made through patronage, electioneering, or coercion by influential figures.

This is unjust and undermines the independence of the procurement agencies. In Uganda, research has demonstrated that contracts are typically awarded to companies with connections to the political leadership, rather than the most beneficial providers (Mawejje, 2019). The political interference necessitates institutional modifications that would reduce the susceptibility of procurement bodies to unlawful influence and enhance their autonomy. This underscores the critical need for strong, independent audit functions that can operate without political influence to ensure that procurement adheres to regulations and delivers value, as the effectiveness of audit is a cornerstone of corporate and public sector sustainability (Adefiranye, 2009).

The monitoring and evaluation cannot be more succinctly defined as the process of ensuring the efficacy of the procurement policies that have been implemented. Periodic audits, performance evaluations, and feedback systems are highly beneficial in identifying areas of deficiency that can be addressed to enhance policies. For instance, the National Audit Office of Sweden conducts periodic evaluations of the public procurement system and publishes their findings, which in turn induce corrective actions (SNAO, 2020). Similarly, the New Zealand Office of the Controller and Auditor-General (OGC, 2021) monitors the value for money and regulatory compliance of procurement. These control mechanisms are essential for maintaining the integrity of the system.

The protection of whistleblowers should be an additional concern in the anti-corruption procurement policies. Internal reporting regarding malfeasance should be safeguarded, as employees or contractors are incapable of being penalised in order to promote such reporting. Corruption may be concealed in the absence of such safeguards, as whistleblowers may be apprehensive about losing their employment or facing harassment. The OECD (2021) recommends that governments establish whistleblower protection laws and secure reporting mechanisms as part of their procurement integrity frameworks.

The integration of risk management into procurement policy design is becoming increasingly more prevalent. Modern approaches to corruption approach it as a systematic risk rather than a singular act, and proactive detection and mitigation are essential. Risk-

based procurement options necessitate a high-risk specification of fields, such as construction, defence, or health, and enhanced control, such as forensic audits or second-time mandatory approval (World Bank, 2020). This selective approach enables the concentration of the limited resources that are available in the appropriate areas.

The standardisation of procurement procedures also contributes to the elimination of corruption. There is limited room for manipulation in situations where the processes are standardised and predictable. Standard tendering documents, template evaluation criteria, and central purchasing units are typically used to ensure that there is consistency among different agencies and levels of government. The concept of centralised procurement, which is implemented in countries such as Denmark and Singapore, has the potential to surmount economies of scale and fragmentation (OECD, 2021).

The disparity in implementing these best practices is a significant challenge, despite their existence. The majority of countries have implemented sound procurement laws on paper; however, these laws are not enforced due to a lack of political will, institutional capacity, or awareness among citizens. Andrews (2022) contends that institutional reform is ineffective when it is not established on the basis of altering the power structure and incentives, as it superficially happens. For instance, corrupt officials who benefit from the status quo may either oppose reforms or obstruct their implementation.

The efficacy of procurement policies is also influenced by cultural factors. In other cultures, the formal rules are difficult to enforce due to the significant role that factors such as gift-giving or personal connections between individuals play in business transactions. It is imperative that anti-corruption initiatives consider local values and endeavour to alter cultural attitudes towards professionalism and integrity (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2023).

The actions of international support have encouraged procurement reform. The World Bank, African Development Bank, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are among the organisations that can provide technical advice, financing, and policy guidance to the country in order to strengthen its procurement systems (UNDP, 2021; World Bank, 2020). These practices frequently involve the transition to online procurement systems, as well as the advocacy of legal changes and the development of capacity. However, sustainability is contingent upon the establishment of long-term governmental commitment and local ownership.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the development of integrated anti-corruption strategies that transcend procurement policies. These include the improvement of court systems, the improvement of financial and fiscal management, and the guarantee of transparency in the financing of political processes. Because corruption in procurement is not the sole issue that can be addressed separately, as Transparency International (2022) notes, it is incorporated into the broader system of governance issues.

Finally, it is consistently challenging to evaluate the success of procurement reform. The deeper effects of corruption and mistrust on the citizens are not necessarily reflected in the cost savings, rate of proposals tendered per offer, and contraction delay reduction, which are noticeably common indicators. In order to offer a comprehensive perspective, it is necessary to include qualitative indicators, including stakeholder perception, media coverage, and case studies, in addition to quantitative data.

In summary, procurement policies are a critical tool for addressing malfeasance within the government. They provide the legal and procedural foundation for procurement procedures that are transparent, competitive, and accountable. They are constructed and operate in accordance with fundamental principles of accountability, transparency, integrity, and oversight. However, the effectiveness of these policies is contingent upon a variety of factors, including robust institutions, effective personnel and political authority, and engaged citizens, in addition to the paper-

based regulations. Given that governments are still grappling with the corruption issue, it is imperative that procurement systems be improved as part of the broader agenda of sustainable development and good governance.

Theoretical Review

The literature review of procurement policies and corruption is comprehensively examined from a variety of theoretical perspectives and grounds, which aid in the articulation of the causes, dynamics of occurrence, and potential solutions to corrupt practices in public procurement.

The Principal-Agent Theory is one of its most potent components (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In this theory, the public and government officials (principal and agent) are regarded as being in a relationship in which the agent is granted the authority to make decisions on behalf of the principal. However, information asymmetry and structural disconnects between agents and the government can enable agents to prioritise the personal good over the communal good, such as by accepting bribes and giving preference to certain contractors. Monitoring, performance analysis, and punishment are all methods employed by procurement policies to guarantee that the agent's conduct is consistent with the principal's objectives.

Institutional Theory (North, 1990) is concerned with the existence of formal and informal rules that will influence behaviour. This perspective asserts that corruption is only sustained when the institutions that are typically responsible for upholding integrity are incapable of doing so, rather than the norms, laws, and organisational cultures. Rigid procurement policies are formal institutions that, when effectively implemented, can reduce corruption opportunities and restructure incentives. Nevertheless, Scott (2014) underscores that institutions are constructed within cultural and cognitive frameworks that must be altered in order to effect change, resulting in a protracted process.

The Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962) posits that government officials are purely rational beings who aim to maximise their individual utility, which can include wealth, power, or employment security. In order to achieve this objective, corruption is characterised as the occurrence of corruption when the penalties for being discovered engaging in corruption are less than the benefits of doing so. This value-cost analysis is intended to be altered and corruption discouraged by a new procurement policy that is intended to increase transparency, establish a competitive tendering process, and strengthen punitive measures.

Transaction costs and opportunism are also incorporated into the context of contracting with the government in the New Institutional Economics (Williamson, 1985). It is asserted that the presence of poor procurement systems results in elevated transaction costs and the potential for rent-seeking. These costs can be reduced in addition to the enforcement of the contracts through the implementation of standardised procurement procedures and the restriction of discretion in procurement policies.

Collectively, these theories provide a solid foundation for elucidating the ways in which procurement policies can be developed to reduce the prevalence of corruption by enhancing the information vacuum, aligning incentives, and fostering institutional accountability.

Empirical Review

Experiential evidence, primarily from various countries and international institutions, indicates that procurement policies that are well-organised and enforced efficiently have a significant impact on the reduction of corruption within the government. In order to achieve a more efficient and clean procurement system, a multitude of case studies, analyses, and evaluations are conducted to underscore the importance of transparency, digitalisation, implementation, and institutional oversight. These reality tests provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of certain strategies, as well as the reasons those strategies fail.

One of the most remarkable success tales is that of Ukraine, which reimaged its procurement system in response to high-level

corruption and civic pressure. Ukraine ProZorro, a transparent e-procurement ecosystem, was introduced in Ukraine in 2016. All purchase data can be viewed in real time. It is built on the principles of open contracting, which means that all processes, from the announcement of the tender to its ultimate implementation, can be made publicly accessible. According to ProZorro (2021), the platform resulted in a 15% increase in the number of respondents per tender and a 10% to 15% decrease in the average procurement price during the first three years of implementation. Furthermore, the system provided civil society organisations with the ability to monitor tenders and document dubious transactions. For instance, the automated mechanism developed by the local chapter of Transparency International, TI Ukraine, was designed to identify high-risk contracts, such as those with a sole winner or abnormally high prices. This transparency in procurement has served to mitigate corruption and inspire accountability among procurement officers. The World Bank (2020) has identified Ukraine as an example for other countries, stating that corruption risks can be significantly reduced when transparency is accompanied by the comprehension of the citizens.

In the same vein, Estonia's online procurement solutions have been exceedingly successful on a national scale. Estonia, which is one of the most computerised administrations in the world, integrated the procurement system into its comprehensive e-governance system. The tender process is conducted entirely online, and the proposals are automatically verified and electronically signed to ensure their integrity and traceability. The opportunities for manipulation are diminished as individuals are compelled to manage human intervention. Estonia's system has led to a high contestation rate, with an average of 5 to 7 bidders per tendering composition (European Commission, 2021). Additionally, it has nearly eradicated manual errors and bias in processes. The digital procurement model is effective in the country, as evidenced by its ranking as the 13th least corrupt in the world by Transparency International (2022). The Estonian experience illustrates that the procurement process can be rendered corruption-resistant when the technology is implemented in an environment of transparency and trust among institutions.

Since its implementation in 2000, the Korea National e-Procurement System (KONEPS) has been instrumental in improving efficiency and reducing corruption in South Korea. KONEPS, which is under the control of the Public Procurement Service (PPS), automates the entire procurement process and provides suppliers and auditors with real-time information. Kim and Lee (2020) determined that the system reduced bid-rigging by increasing transparency and ensuring consistency in the process. The research findings suggested that the number of competitive bids increased by 25% and the cost of procurement decreased by over 10% once the system was entirely implemented. The system also includes its own analytics, which are capable of detecting anomalies such as the re-awarding of contracts to the same supplier or the establishment of unreasonable pricing. The features enable investigative agencies to detect fraud risks prior to their execution and to remain ahead of the fraud.

Nevertheless, the majority of nations with a robust legal framework continue to be characterised by political interference and feeble enforcement, while others are not experiencing any signs of success. For instance, Nigeria established the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) and enacted the Public Procurement Act in 2007, both of which are designed to promote competition and transparency. Nevertheless, empirical research is scarcely capable of influencing corruption. Adegbite and Zimba (2020) conducted research that indicates that direct contracting, which is intended to be employed solely during emergencies, is being fraudulently employed to circumvent the competitive tendering process. Their federal procurement data revealed that over 40% of contracts from 2015 to 2019 were not subject to competition, with the majority going to politically connected firms. Additionally, the audit's recommendations are frequently overlooked, and sanctions that are implemented in the event of noncompliance are seldom enforced. The role of political will and the institution's independence in determining the success of procurement reforms is underscored by the discrepancy between policy and practice. This persistence of

corrupt practices occurs despite the existence of public service rules meant to guide ethical conduct (Ademeso, 2024b) and highlights a systemic failure where formal policies are undermined by informal power structures and a lack of political will (Oyadiran & Success, 2015). Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of whistleblower protection mechanisms likely contributes to the perpetuation of these schemes, as insiders may fear reprisal for reporting malfeasance (Ademeso, 2024a).

Uganda has also observed a comparable trend, where procurement laws are in existence but not consistently enforced. The political economy study conducted by Mawejje (2019) on the topic of procurement reform also demonstrates that deep-rooted established elites interfere in the procurement process to secure favours for those who are aligned with them as a means of consolidating power. For instance, local governments may divide substantial contracts into smaller ones in order to remain below the competitive tendering thresholds. The research also revealed that the oversight agencies, such as the Auditor General's office, are subject to political pressure and have never been authorised to implement corrective measures. As a result, the corruption in procurement continues to be widespread, which has had a negative impact on the delivery of services to the public and the erosion of trust in their government.

Conversely, the case of New Zealand is an impeccable illustration of how procurement integrity can be improved through effective institutional oversight. The Office of the Controller and Auditor-General (OCG) conducts systematic performance audits of the performance of public procurement, which include regulatory, risk, and value for money considerations. These audits have facilitated the enhancement of policies, contract administration, and other aspects, as per OGC (2021). For instance, in 2019, an audit of the health sector procurement revealed that the assessment of suppliers was a vulnerable area and that the procurement uniform scoring systems should be implemented. This recommendation was subsequently implemented. The OGC's independence and the ability to publish findings ensure that audit recommendations are taken seriously, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

It also demonstrates the value of independent audit institutions in Sweden. The Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO, 2020) conducts routine audits of public procurement conducted by ministries and agencies, with an emphasis on three key factors: transparency, competition, and economy. Parliamentary debates and policies are consistently stimulated by their candid discoveries. It was discovered during a single audit that certain agencies exhibited a propensity to prioritise incumbent suppliers without providing a valid rationale. Subsequently, modifications were implemented to the evaluation criteria and supplier selection processes. The purpose of these watchdogs is to promote public trust in government activities and to prevent corruption from erupting.

Empirical evidence has also been used to demonstrate the role of civil society in improving the integrity of the procurement process. The Social Watch initiative in the Philippines conducted training sessions for community members to enable them to monitor project-related initiatives at the local level. This training was inclusive of procurement practices. Malena (2020) documents instances in which citizen monitors have identified overpricing, inadequate material attracting standard, and unqualified contractors, which necessitate investigations and the recovery of funds. These local practices demonstrate that citizen feedback can augment institutionalised supervision and enhance the extent to which accountability is enforced at the local level.

In general, the empirical evidence supports the notion that the most effective procurement policies are characterised by explicit systems, robust enforcement, independent supervision, and active citizen participation. Despite the existence of a legal framework and technology, their performance is contingent upon the expanded institutional and political environment. The most significant reductions in procurement corruption are achieved through the integration of digital innovation, institutional integrity, and the participation of the population.

Research Methodology

This paper is a qualitative research study that aims to investigate the extent to which purchase policies contribute to the prevention of corruption within the government. This subject is particularly well-suited for qualitative research due to its potential to represent a complex social phenomenon, such as governance, institutional behaviour, and ethical decision-making, which are not readily quantifiable. The primary objective is not to quantify variables or to formulate statistical hypotheses, but rather to develop contextual insights into the actuality, operation, dead ends, and challenges that procurement policies encounter in their efforts to reduce corruption.

The study is based on a comprehensive review and thematic analysis of all available literature, including scholarly journals, policy reports, government reports, international organisation reports, and case studies from various countries. Sources were selected based on their relevance, creditability, and contribution to the field of procurement integrity and anti-corruption strategies. In order to achieve a comprehensive and equitable viewpoint, the literature was compiled using both developed and developing contexts. This desktop strategy enabled the researcher to compare the experiences of various institutional and cultural contexts, identify common themes, and incorporate a variety of opinions.

The data collection process employed a variety of sources, including secondary sources that provide concise summaries, policy assessments, and practical examples of procurement system implementation. Special attention was given to countries that have implemented significant procurement reforms, such as Estonia, South Korea, Ukraine, and New Zealand, as well as those where corruption persists, such as Nigeria, Uganda, and India. The best practices and common aberrations of procurement governance were also investigated through the examination of organisation case studies from organisations such as the World Bank, OECD, and Transparency International.

The analysis was conducted with a thematic focus, utilising the primary concepts of transparency, enforcement, accountability, and oversight as analytical lenses. The information obtained from the selected sources was categorised and classified into themes that were consistent with the research questions. As an illustration, the data concerning procurement transparency, including the availability of bidding documentation, the publication of contract information, and open tendering, were classified as such. Similarly, the audit mechanism, penalty, and disciplinary measures were classified as enforcement information, while the role of anti-corruption agencies, civil society, and the media was considered to be under supervision and accountability.

Triangulation was implemented to ensure the credibility and rigour of the information collected from sources, as it was cross-verified. Inconsistencies were identified and elucidated in relation to the overarching context. The analysis also considered the limitations of the sources, such as the generalisability of case studies and the biases in government reports. The issues were interpreted in a conservative manner, with the objective of ensuring a balanced and nuanced perspective.

The qualitative nature of the research allows for the examination of the social-political drivers, internal mechanisms of organisations, and underlying motivators that can influence the success of procurement policies. It permits the learning of lessons in disguise, pattern, and contradiction, which are then prepared for use in policy and practice. The results will be significant in terms of their potential application to other contexts and their potential to enhance the integrity and minimise corruption of procurement systems, despite the fact that they cannot be generalised.

The ethical considerations were adhered to by exclusively utilising publicly available material and accurately citing it. Consent and confidentiality were not a concern, as no secondary data was collected regarding human subjects. However, the study's limitations were presented and the information was presented objectively, ensuring that it was not misrepresented.

To conclude, this qualitative methodology is systematic and reflective in its approach to procurement policies in relation to corruption in the public sector, given the intricate nature of the relationship between the two. The study will succeed in its objective of examining the experiences and opinions of experts, which will subsequently generate valuable knowledge in an effort to establish a new foundation for the development of more transparent, accountable, and effective public procurement systems.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The review of the literature uncovered a number of correlated themes that offer insight into the potential of procurement policies to combat corruption in the government sector. The potentials and limitations of procurement reforms are best identified by examining the aforementioned issues and themes: transparency, enforcement, supervision, institutional capacity, and political will. This section is capable of interpreting the data and providing a comprehensive understanding of the behaviour of procurement policies in real-world settings, as well as the reasons behind their success and failure, through the use of case studies, policy reviews, and expert reviews.

The fact that transparency is one of the fundamental aspects in minimising the risk of corruption in public procurement is similar in nature to the remainder of the findings presented in the literature. The implementation of an open procurement system, such as the ProZorro platform in Ukraine and the e-procurement system in Estonia, demonstrates the significant increase in cost efficiency and competition, as well as the development of trust, as a result of the transparency in this specific environment. For instance, the ProZorro system mandates that all procurement process data be published in real-time to enable citizens, independent journalists, and civil society organisations to monitor the tenders and report any suspicious activities. According to ProZorro (2021), this transparency has led to a 15% increase in the number of applicants per tender and a 1015% decrease in procurement prices. Simultaneously, Estonia's expenditure process is entirely digitalised, which reduces the likelihood of individuals engaging in favouritism and manipulation. The examples suggest that corrupt practices are difficult to conceal due to the lack of visibility to processes and accessibility to procurement information. Transparency serves as a deterrent by increasing the likelihood of detection and confrontation by the populace.

Nevertheless, mere transparency is insufficient. The data suggests that the enforcement mechanisms are also of the utmost importance. Despite the existence of a well-organised Act (the Public Procurement Act) and an agency known as the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) in Nigeria, enforcement is lax due to the poor sanctions, sluggish rate of investigations, and interference of politicians (Adegbite & Zimba, 2020). This gap between formal rules and practical enforcement reflects a broader governance challenge, where the strength of institutions is more critical than the mere existence of policies (Ademeso et al., 2025). As a result, the absence of punishment for unlawful activities such as bid-rigging and contract splitting illegitimizes the entire system. In contrast, countries such as Sweden and New Zealand are more effective at enforcing such powers. These countries have independent audit organisations that conduct regular performance checks and disclose results that inform corrective measures (SNAO, 2020; OGC, 2021). These institutions are largely autonomous and have the authority to recommend disciplinary actions, thereby ensuring that the procurement regulations are not merely cosmetic but also have a cost. The analogy shows that enforcement would render the procurement policies operational rather than incidental.

The utilisation of supervision institutions to improve procurement integrity is another significant theme that can be deduced from the data. The participation of civil society, as well as internal management and external auditing, are all components of good governance. South Korea's low corruption perception index is attributable to the proactive nature of the Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI), which is recognised for its assistance in the surveillance of government contracts and the investigation of

irregularities (Kim & Lee, 2020). Similar to this, civil society organisations in the Philippines implemented a social audit to monitor local government procurement, which revealed inflated contracts and the subsequent recovery of public funds (Malena, 2020). The cases demonstrate that the most reliable watchdogger is the multi-layered watchdogger, which is composed of formal and informal institutions. The enlightened and well-informed citizens are those who prioritise their involvement in the state's operations over receiving services.

The data has also demonstrated that institutional capacity is a significant factor in the reduction of the impact of procurement policies. The majority of procurement officers employed in numerous developing nations are susceptible to corruption and errors due to inadequate training, excessive duties, and antiquated systems. The Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS, 2022) is once again emphasising the importance of effective professional development and certification plans in order to maintain a clean and well-maintained workplace. To provide an example, the Government Procurement Division, the centralised procurement agency in Singapore, allocates a significant amount of resources to the training and career development of its staff. This is one of the factors that contributes to the high levels of compliance and efficiency. In contrast, procurement systems that are highly decentralised and have not received any training, such as those in Canada, the United Kingdom, and numerous other countries in Africa and South Asia, encounter challenges in implementing the most effective policies. This suggests that the procurement reform procedure should incorporate the development of human capital.

The analysis may have highlighted the most significant aspects regarding political will. When political leaders lack sincerity, even the most sophisticated procurement systems can be compromised. For instance, in Uganda, procurement regulations exist; however, contracts are frequently awarded to politically affiliated organisations through discretionary exemptions (Mawejje, 2019). Similarly, it is a prevalent practice in numerous Latin American countries to exploit emergency procurement clauses in post-emergency situations to circumvent competition. The patterns suggest that corruption in procurement is often not a shortcoming of policymaking, but rather a manifestation of power structure and patronage (Police). According to Andrews (2022), institutional reforms that are unsuccessful in altering the incentives that motivate corrupt behaviour are unlikely to be successful. Therefore, political leadership should prioritise the promotion of transparency, the protection of tick institutions from any form of intimidation, and the prosecution of offenders, irrespective of their positions.

In addition, the statistics suggest that technological innovation, such as open contracting platforms and e-procurement, has the potential to enhance integrity; however, this is contingent upon the establishment of an appropriate institutional framework. Digital systems are not exclusively used for manipulation, despite their advantages of high traceability and reduced manual labour. In certain instances, the authorities have already been identified as tampering with computer-based records or restricting information to the preferred suppliers. Furthermore, the digital divide may prevent small and rural businesses from participating in government proposals, as it limits their engagement. This suggests that technology is used as an enabler rather than a solution. Its success is contingent upon the implementation of complementary changes in the areas of governance, capacity, and inclusivity.

Finally, the discussion underscores the importance of a multidimensional and context-specific approach to procurement reform. The reasons for the existence of corruption are distinct for each sector and country, which is why standard solutions to interpersonal corruption are often ineffective. Another example is that the defence procurement may involve heightened confidentiality and fewer competitors, which would suggest that the protection measures are distinct from those in the health or education procurement. The successful examples that can be cited, such as those in Estonia and South Korea, were locally structured, developed over time, and involved the consultation of stakeholders. Additionally, they integrated the anti-corruption policies into more

comprehensive systems of financial management that were both sustainable and coherent.

In order to interpret these findings, it is evident that the most effective approach to facilitating procurement policies is to integrate them into the broader accountability ecosystem. The obligation should be accompanied by a significant increase in transparency, oversight should be impartial, and reforms should be supported by effective governance and robust institutions. Despite the fact that no regime is entirely impervious to corruption, the evidence suggests that well-intentioned, well-funded, and systematically implemented policies can significantly reduce the likelihood of misuse and restore traditional trust in the government.

The data analysis underscores the significance of the notion that the struggle against corruption in the public procurement sector is not merely a technical issue, but also a governance issue. It necessitates the presence of explicit regulations, robust institutions, competent personnel, and an integrity culture. The experiences of the countries that are currently undergoing reform serve as a valuable lesson: progress is feasible; however, it necessitates patient labour, transparency, and the public interest at the expense of personal or political interests.

Conclusion

Public procurement is also essential for the operations of government, as it is the primary mechanism by which governments distribute their resources in order to provide fundamental services to their citizens. Nevertheless, governments continue to regard procurement as a vulnerable area to corruption due to the substantial sums of money and the numerous procedures that are involved in the process. This paper has examined the potential of procurement policies to act as a significant impediment to the misconduct of corruption, including bid-rigging, favouritism, and contract manipulation. These findings suggest that transparent and well-formulated procurement systems are effective in reducing corruption and fostering public confidence in governance.

In the context of procurement, transparency is a critical component of integrity. The publication of tender processes, evaluation standards, and contract award allows stakeholders, including suppliers, auditors, and citizens, to monitor the activities and identify any anomalies. Examples such as the ProZorro system in Ukraine and the e-procurement platform in Estonia demonstrate that transparency fosters a more competitive environment, lower prices, and reduced manipulation. However, transparency is insufficient to achieve lustre. The most open systems could be exploited without the use of potent enforcing mechanisms. The country of Nigeria serves as a prime illustration of how political infringements and unsubstantial sanctions can render any effective procurement legislation null and void, thereby allowing corruption to persist in it.

The role of the control agencies is also of considerable importance. The provision of such constraints on power is facilitated by an active civil society, anti-corruption institutions, and independent audit agencies. This is because the independence of these institutions, which is to conduct investigations and report findings about the misconducts, serves as a check to promote transparency and prevent the occurrence of unethical acts. Additionally, procurement officials' capabilities cannot be disregarded. The money of the people should be handled by the most qualified and ethically upheld individuals, who are also trained, professionally developed, and ethically guided.

Ultimately, the success of procurement policies is contingent upon political will. Despite the ability to implement technical reforms, enact laws, and computerise systems, these modifications are merely ornaments in the absence of leadership commitment. The patronage and power that are intrinsic to corruption in procurement necessitate courage, consistency, and a culture of accountability in order to be surmounted. Ultimately, combating procurement corruption is not just a technical challenge but a core governance issue, requiring a holistic approach that integrates transparent procurement policies with broader public service reform, robust oversight, and active civic engagement (Ademeso et al., 2025;

Abubakar, Ademeso, & Livinus, 2021). Thus, the most successful reforms are contextually specific, inclusive, and embeddable.

In conclusion, procurement policies are no longer merely administrative instruments; they are now instruments of good governance. They safeguard shared resources and, when properly devised and executed, promote democracy and justice. While there may be obstacles, the results demonstrate that change can be achieved through long-term efforts, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to transparency and accountability.

Recommendations

- All procurement data—including tender notices, bid evaluations, contract awards, and performance reports—should be published in accessible, real-time formats by governments that implement open contracting standards.
- Establish e-procurement systems that minimise human intervention and enable public monitoring of procurement cycles.
- Facilitate civil society and media monitoring by ensuring that procurement information is accessible to the public through user-friendly portals and that data is available in open, machine-readable formats.
- Enhance legal frameworks by establishing explicit penalties for procurement violations and guaranteeing the prompt investigation and prosecution of malfeasance.
- Create independent disciplinary divisions within procurement agencies to enforce compliance and address complaints.
- Conduct consistent audits and disseminate audit findings to promote accountability and discourage noncompliance.
- Provide supervision bodies, including audit institutions, anti-corruption commissions, and ombudsman offices, with the legal authority, autonomy, and funding necessary to investigate procurement malpractice.
- Foster civil society engagement by establishing formal channels for citizen monitoring of procurement initiatives, social audits, and public feedback.
- Establish and safeguard whistleblower mechanisms that enable employees and contractors to disclose corruption without fear of retribution. Evidence from the Nigerian context confirms that well-implemented whistle-blowing policies can have a significant impact on corruption reduction and are a critical component of any integrity strategy (Ademeso, 2024a)

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