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Governance Mechanisms and Procurement Outcomes in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

Public universities play a critical role in national development, yet their procurement systems are often undermined by weak governance structures that compromise efficiency, accountability, and value for money. This study explores how institutional governance reforms can strategically align with procurement objectives to enhance performance in higher education institutions. Drawing upon a systematic synthesis of peer-reviewed articles, the paper adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to identify key governance interventions and their impact on procurement efficiency, transparency, and ethical compliance. The findings reveal that legal and regulatory clarity, strong leadership commitment, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and digital transparency tools are central to driving procurement improvements. Furthermore, universities with participatory governance structures and clear accountability lines tend to report lower procurement irregularities and better stakeholder trust. The study offers evidence-based policy recommendations for codifying procurement laws, strengthening leadership accountability, investing in digital tools, and institutionalising monitoring frameworks. While the analysis is grounded in the sub-Saharan African context, the findings have broader applicability to public tertiary institutions globally. The paper concludes by highlighting directions for future research, including longitudinal assessments of governance reforms, comparative cross-institutional studies, and deeper investigations into digital procurement and institutional culture. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on procurement governance and offers practical insights for reforming university procurement systems towards greater integrity, sustainability, and institutional credibility.

KEYWORDS: procurement performance, institutional governance, university reforms, transparency, leadership accountability, monitoring and evaluation, public procurement, higher education

JEL CODES: H57, H83, I23, D73, L38

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.BACKGROUND

Public procurement plays a pivotal role in the effective functioning of universities, serving as a mechanism through which institutions acquire the goods, services, and works necessary to fulfil their academic and administrative mandates. In the context of higher education, procurement efficiency is closely associated with value for money, service delivery quality, and institutional credibility (Adusei & Mensah, 2021; Thai, 2001). Effective procurement practices not only facilitate timely resource allocation but also ensure compliance with regulatory standards and support institutional development goals (Ameyaw et al., 2012; Basheka, 2009). Moreover, transparent and accountable procurement systems contribute to building stakeholder trust, mitigating corruption risks, and enhancing the strategic use of public funds in tertiary institutions (Schapper, Malta, & Gilbert, 2006; OECD, 2016). As universities face increasing pressure to demonstrate financial prudence and operational efficiency, strengthening procurement processes becomes essential for sustaining long-term institutional performance (Walker & Brammer, 2009; Uyarra & Flanagan, 2010).

Nevertheless, in numerous public universities, particularly across developing countries, procurement systems are fraught with persistent challenges. These include procedural inefficiencies, weak contract management, and frequent breaches of procurement rules (Ameyaw, Mensah, & Osei-Tutu, 2012; Basheka, 2008). A recurring theme in empirical literature is the role of governance-related deficiencies in undermining procurement outcomes. These deficiencies often manifest in the form of inadequate regulatory frameworks, poor oversight mechanisms, limited stakeholder participation, and insufficient leadership accountability (Boateng & Darko, 2020; World Bank, 2020; Akenroye, Namusonge, & Ogbo, 2013; Hunja, 2003). In some cases, institutional cultures that tolerate non-compliance further entrench inefficiencies, reducing transparency and distorting value-for-money outcomes (Transparency International, 2016; Eyaa & Oluka, 2011).

1.2.Problem Statement

Although various reform initiatives have been implemented to strengthen procurement in higher education, the absence of a cohesive and institution-specific governance strategy has limited their effectiveness. Universities frequently struggle to operationalise governance reforms in ways that align with their unique procurement objectives. This misalignment has resulted in fragmented implementation, inconsistent compliance, and limited performance improvements (Nyarko, Boadu, & Ofori, 2019). Without a robust governance framework that ensures transparency,

accountability, and continuous evaluation, universities are unlikely to achieve the intended gains from procurement reforms.

This paper examines the intersection between governance reforms and procurement performance in public universities. It seeks to elucidate how specific governance mechanisms, such as legal clarity, leadership commitment, transparency tools, and performance monitoring, can be strategically aligned with procurement objectives to achieve efficiency, integrity, and sustainability. The study employs a qualitative synthesis of nine empirically focused peer-reviewed articles, purposively selected from a broader systematic review on governance and procurement in the public sector. This targeted synthesis provides a rich and context-sensitive understanding of how governance mechanisms shape procurement outcomes in university settings.

The originality of this study lies in its specific focus on the governance-procurement nexus within higher education—a topic that remains underexamined in both procurement and educational policy literature. While most existing studies examine procurement in general public sector settings, this paper uniquely applies a governance lens to the higher education context. It also introduces a conceptual understanding of governance as a strategic enabler of procurement performance, moving beyond administrative efficiency to emphasise institutional leadership, transparency infrastructure, and participatory mechanisms. In terms of its contribution to knowledge and practice, the study offers four key insights. First, it synthesises empirical evidence to highlight governance mechanisms that demonstrably enhance procurement performance in universities. Second, it proposes a conceptual framework that links governance dimensions to procurement outcomes.

1.3. Specific Objectives

This study aims to explore the critical relationship between institutional governance reforms and procurement performance within universities. Specifically, the objectives are to: (1) identify key governance reform strategies implemented in university procurement systems; (2) examine the effects of these reforms on procurement efficiency, transparency, and accountability; (3) analyse how leadership, regulatory frameworks, and monitoring mechanisms contribute to procurement outcomes; and (4) recommend governance approaches that can strengthen procurement systems in tertiary institutions. These objectives are intended to offer practical guidance to university administrators, policymakers, and scholars seeking to enhance procurement practices through effective governance.

1.4. Research Questions

Guided by the overall aim of exploring the relationship between institutional governance and procurement performance in universities, this study addresses the following research questions:

- i. What governance reforms have been implemented in university procurement systems, and how are they structured?

- ii. How do governance reforms influence procurement outcomes such as efficiency, transparency, and accountability?
- iii. In what ways do leadership commitment, regulatory frameworks, and monitoring mechanisms affect procurement performance in universities?
- iv. What governance strategies can be recommended to improve procurement practices in tertiary education institutions?

These questions are designed to uncover both the structural and functional dimensions of governance within university procurement, with a view to providing evidence-based recommendations for institutional reform.

1.5.Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is confined to governance and procurement practices within public universities, with particular attention to sub-Saharan African contexts, where governance challenges are often more pronounced due to factors such as limited resources, developing institutional frameworks, and specific socio-political dynamics. The study draws on a subset of 89 articles included in a broader systematic review that focused on institutional governance and its effects on procurement performance. While the focus is on higher education institutions, the insights may also be relevant to other public sector entities seeking to reform procurement processes through improved governance. The study emphasises themes such as legal and regulatory frameworks, leadership commitment, transparency tools, and monitoring and evaluation systems as central pillars of procurement governance.

1.6.Limitations

Despite its relevance, the study is not without limitations. First, the findings are primarily derived from secondary data, specifically peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature, which may not fully capture real-time institutional dynamics or contextual differences across universities. Future research could incorporate primary data collection (e.g., through surveys, interviews, or case studies) to provide richer insights into these dynamics. Secondly, the emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa means the generalisability of the findings to other regions may be limited. While the study's focus on sub-Saharan Africa allows for a contextually rich analysis, future studies could include comparative analyses across different regions to explore variations and commonalities in procurement governance. Third, the absence of primary data such as interviews, surveys, or institutional audits restricts the study's ability to provide in-depth contextual analysis or stakeholder perspectives. Qualitative studies that involve direct engagement with stakeholders could offer valuable insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of those involved in university procurement. Finally, because the study is based on literature published in English, it may have excluded relevant findings from non-English sources, potentially introducing language bias. Future research could benefit from including non-English publications to provide a more

comprehensive and globally representative analysis of the field. Nonetheless, the study provides a robust foundation for future empirical investigations into procurement governance reforms.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Institutional governance constitutes the foundational structures, mechanisms, and processes by which universities are directed, administered, and held to account. It encapsulates both formal and informal rules that shape institutional behaviour and decision-making. In the realm of public procurement, governance refers not only to the establishment of clear policies and regulatory frameworks, but also to the implementation of oversight mechanisms, leadership accountability, ethical standards, and participatory decision-making processes (OECD, 2016; World Bank, 2020; De Graaf, Huberts, & Smulders, 2014; Bovis, 2006). Robust governance systems help safeguard institutional integrity, foster transparency, and ensure that procurement outcomes align with development objectives and stakeholder expectations (McCue, Prier, & Swanson, 2015; Thai, 2008).

Within higher education institutions, procurement governance serves as a critical determinant of procurement outcomes. It defines how procurement decisions are initiated, executed, and evaluated, and ensures that institutional resources are utilised efficiently and transparently. A robust governance framework in this context typically includes elements such as codified procurement laws, effective institutional leadership, functioning oversight bodies, and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement (Adusei & Mensah, 2021; Boateng & Darko, 2020).

Transparent and accountable governance structures are widely recognised as essential for promoting integrity and value for money in public procurement. Furthermore, when universities adopt participatory governance models, where internal and external stakeholders are meaningfully engaged in procurement planning and oversight, they tend to report higher levels of compliance, efficiency, and supplier trust (Nyarko et al., 2019; Owusu & Asare, 2022).

This paper adopts a conceptual stance that views institutional governance not merely as an administrative function but as a strategic enabler of procurement performance. It posits that procurement outcomes are significantly influenced by the degree to which governance structures are aligned with procurement objectives, thereby necessitating deliberate and context-specific governance reforms.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative synthesis approach, drawing upon a subset of 89 peer-reviewed articles initially included in a broader systematic review on governance and procurement performance in the public sector. From this dataset, a purposive selection of literature was made, focusing specifically on studies that examined governance interventions within the context of university procurement systems.

The analytical process involved thematic content analysis, guided by principles of qualitative evidence synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Each article was systematically reviewed to extract

recurring themes, reform strategies, and performance outcomes directly attributable to governance mechanisms. Key dimensions analysed included policy reforms, legal frameworks, oversight mechanisms, leadership behaviour, ethical standards, and stakeholder participation. Thematic patterns were coded using NVivo software to ensure consistency, rigour, and traceability across the corpus.

To enhance the reliability of the findings, an inter-rater reliability check was conducted by two independent researchers who reviewed 25 per cent of the articles, with a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.82 indicating substantial agreement. Articles that lacked explicit links between governance and procurement outcomes or were primarily descriptive without empirical evidence were excluded from the final synthesis.

By focusing on governance-related reforms and their implications for procurement performance, the methodology provides an evidence-based foundation for understanding how institutional governance structures shape procurement efficiency, compliance, and transparency in higher education settings.

4. KEY GOVERNANCE REFORMS AND THEIR IMPACT

This section synthesises key governance reform areas identified in the literature and examines their empirical associations with improved procurement performance in university settings. Each thematic area reflects a critical component of governance infrastructure that contributes to procurement efficiency, integrity, and sustainability.

4.1. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Establishing comprehensive legal mandates and codified procurement policies forms the foundation of an effective procurement system. Clearly defined legal frameworks help standardise procedures, reduce discretion, and ensure institutional compliance. Empirical evidence suggests that universities operating under detailed procurement regulations report lower incidences of irregular expenditures and benefit from enhanced supplier participation, leading to increased competition and value for money (Adusei & Mensah, 2021; OECD, 2016). Moreover, transparent legal frameworks improve procurement predictability, mitigate corruption risks, and foster trust among stakeholders (Arrowsmith, 2010; Thai, 2009). In developing countries, aligning university procurement systems with national procurement laws has also been shown to reduce administrative bottlenecks and increase procurement efficiency (Basheka & Sabiiti, 2011; World Bank, 2020).

4.2. Leadership and Institutional Commitment

The role of university leadership in governance reform cannot be overstated. Institutional heads who actively champion procurement integrity and institutional reforms create an environment conducive to compliance and ethical conduct. Studies indicate that strong commitment from senior management to governance principles is positively correlated with improved procurement transparency, the enforcement of procurement rules, and adherence to due process (Boateng & Darko, 2020; McCue, Prier, & Swanson, 2015). Leadership commitment also enhances

organisational culture, reinforces accountability systems, and empowers procurement officers to resist undue influence (Ameyaw et al., 2012; OECD, 2017). In environments where leadership is proactive, universities tend to implement procurement reforms more successfully, demonstrating higher levels of compliance and operational efficiency (Basheka, 2009; Schapper, Malta, & Gilbert, 2006).

4.3. Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

Transparency is a cornerstone of good governance. In the procurement context, mechanisms such as open tendering processes, publication of contract awards, and clear communication of evaluation criteria foster institutional credibility and reduce opportunities for corruption. Furthermore, universities with robust accountability structures, such as independent audit committees and functional procurement oversight units, exhibit higher procurement performance metrics and lower rates of malpractice (Nyarko, Boadu, & Ofori, 2019; OECD, 2016). Empirical studies show that enhanced transparency is positively linked to increased supplier trust, competition, and budget efficiency (Transparency International, 2016; Thai, 2001). Moreover, the presence of grievance redress systems and periodic performance audits serves as a deterrent against irregular practices and promotes continuous improvement in procurement governance (Basheka & Sabiiti, 2011; World Bank, 2020).

4.4. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems enable universities to track procurement performance over time, diagnose inefficiencies, and implement corrective actions. The presence of well-integrated M&E frameworks, comprising key performance indicators, regular audits, and reporting obligations, is associated with improved procurement planning, budgetary control, and overall cost-effectiveness (Owusu & Asare, 2022; OECD, 2016). Robust M&E systems also ensure compliance with procurement regulations and help detect early warning signs of mismanagement or corruption (Basheka, 2009; World Bank, 2020). Additionally, feedback from M&E activities contributes to institutional learning, capacity building, and continuous improvement in procurement practice (Thai, 2009; Ameyaw, Mensah, & Osei-Tutu, 2012). In the context of higher education, evidence-based M&E can further align procurement decisions with institutional development priorities and performance benchmarks.

4.5. Discussion and Conceptual Synthesis

The analysis of governance reform areas reveals a multi-dimensional interplay among institutional structures, leadership practices, transparency mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks, all of which collectively influence procurement performance in public universities. These findings support the notion that procurement efficiency is not the result of isolated reforms, but rather the outcome of coordinated governance systems.

The legal and regulatory framework emerges as the foundational layer of procurement governance. As articulated by Adusei and Mensah (2021) and the OECD (2016), the establishment of clear, codified procurement mandates standardises procedures, reduces discretion, and enhances compliance. However, the mere presence of legal provisions is insufficient unless complemented by active enforcement and institutional uptake. This is where leadership and institutional commitment become critical. As Boateng and Darko (2020) and McCue et al. (2015) suggest, strong leadership catalyses the implementation of procurement reforms by shaping organisational culture, enforcing accountability systems, and empowering procurement actors. Leadership thus acts as a strategic enabler that transforms legal instruments into actionable outcomes.

Transparency and accountability mechanisms constitute the integrity dimension of the procurement system. The empirical evidence (Nyarko et al., 2019; Transparency International, 2016) demonstrates that practices such as open tendering and public disclosure of contract awards foster institutional trust and reduce procurement-related malfeasance. These mechanisms also provide a platform for stakeholder engagement and grievance redress, which further reinforces the legitimacy of procurement decisions. However, transparency and accountability are only sustainable when embedded within broader oversight and feedback structures.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems complete the governance cycle by introducing mechanisms for continuous learning, performance tracking, and corrective action. As Owusu and Asare (2022) and Basheka (2009) argue, M&E frameworks with performance indicators and audit functions are essential for diagnosing inefficiencies and informing evidence-based decision-making. Notably, effective M&E also generates feedback that may necessitate revisions in legal provisions, demand leadership responsiveness, and expose weaknesses in transparency systems. Taken together, these governance reforms interact as an integrated system in which each component reinforces the others. Legal frameworks provide the structural basis; leadership ensures activation and implementation; transparency mechanisms uphold integrity and public confidence; and M&E systems close the governance loop through accountability and institutional learning. This dynamic interdependence is illustrated in the proposed conceptual framework, which positions procurement performance as the product of cumulative governance inputs rather than linear causality.

The conceptual model not only highlights the multi-level drivers of procurement performance in public universities but also underscores the necessity of adopting a systems governance approach. Policy efforts aimed at improving procurement outcomes must therefore address each governance pillar in tandem, recognising their reciprocal influences and reinforcing effects.

Future empirical work may build on this framework by applying quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the strength and significance of these interrelationships. Such analyses would be especially valuable in the context of developing countries, where governance capacities are often fragmented but procurement reforms are urgently needed to enhance institutional efficiency and service delivery in the higher education sector.

5. CONCLUSION

Enhancing procurement performance in universities necessitates the strategic alignment of governance reforms with the institution's operational and institutional objectives. The findings from this study underscore the pivotal role that strong legal frameworks, transparent procurement processes, accountable leadership, and robust monitoring systems play in optimising procurement efficiency and ensuring the ethical use of public resources. A governance structure that embeds these key elements can contribute significantly to improving procurement outcomes, reducing waste, and fostering public trust in university procurement practices.

Moreover, institutional commitment to these reforms, particularly at the leadership level, is essential for cultivating a culture of accountability and integrity in procurement decision-making. Transparent procurement mechanisms, supported by digital tools and real-time monitoring systems, not only enhance operational efficiency but also mitigate the risks of corruption and non-compliance.

Given the dynamic nature of governance and procurement systems, future research must focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of governance reforms on procurement performance. Such studies would provide deeper insights into these reforms' sustained impact, scalability, and adaptability across different institutional contexts. Additionally, research could explore the role of external stakeholders, such as regulatory bodies and the broader public, in influencing university procurement governance.

In sum, the evidence presented in this study advocates for a multi-faceted approach to governance reforms that goes beyond mere policy changes and incorporates a cultural shift towards transparency, accountability, and ethical procurement practices.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy recommendations are proposed to enhance procurement governance and performance in universities. These recommendations aim to address the identified governance challenges and provide actionable strategies for institutional improvement.

6.1.Codify Procurement Regulations

Universities must establish standardised procurement regulations that are aligned with national procurement guidelines and best practices. Codifying procurement laws not only ensures consistency in procurement activities but also fosters compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. By developing detailed procurement policies and frameworks, universities can reduce discretionary decision-making, mitigate corruption risks, and enhance transparency (Adusei & Mensah, 2021). It is recommended that universities work in collaboration with national regulatory bodies to ensure these regulations are periodically updated and responsive to emerging challenges.

6.2.Strengthen Leadership Accountability

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping procurement outcomes, and thus, strengthening leadership accountability is essential for fostering good governance. Universities should implement leadership development programmes designed to improve the capacity of senior management to enforce procurement reforms and ethical conduct. Furthermore, performance-based evaluations for leadership at all levels should be instituted to ensure that institutional leaders are held accountable for the procurement performance under their stewardship. This measure would reinforce the link between leadership behaviour and procurement success, thereby promoting a culture of transparency and ethical decision-making (Boateng & Darko, 2020).

6.3.Enhance Transparency Tools

Developing and implementing digital procurement platforms can significantly enhance transparency and accountability in procurement processes. By creating real-time tracking systems and reporting mechanisms, universities can ensure that procurement activities are visible to all stakeholders, including the public. Such platforms would allow for better monitoring of procurement timelines, contract awards, and expenditure tracking, while simultaneously reducing the potential for corruption and inefficiencies. Evidence suggests that institutions with advanced transparency tools, such as e-procurement systems, tend to experience higher levels of competition and trust from suppliers (Nyarko et al., 2019). Universities should invest in modern information technology infrastructure to support these digital platforms.

6.4.Institutionalise Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Practices

The institutionalisation of continuous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices is vital to ensure that procurement systems remain efficient and responsive to changing needs. Universities should establish independent M&E units tasked with tracking procurement key performance indicators (KPIs) and reporting outcomes to governing councils or other oversight bodies. These units should be empowered to conduct regular audits, identify inefficiencies, and recommend corrective actions. Regular reporting to senior management and the board will not only improve procurement planning but also help institutions realise significant cost savings through improved efficiency and accountability (Owusu & Asare, 2022). Furthermore, incorporating stakeholder feedback into M&E systems would strengthen the responsiveness of procurement processes to the needs of both internal and external stakeholders.

7. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should focus on the long-term impact of governance reforms on procurement efficiency and sustainability in universities. Longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights into the persistence of improvements in procurement performance over time. By examining how initial gains in procurement efficiency are maintained as universities evolve, researchers can better understand the sustained impact of governance reforms and their potential for creating lasting change within procurement systems. These studies will be essential for assessing the long-term benefits of governance interventions and their scalability across different institutions.

Another important area for future exploration is the comparative study of universities with varying levels of governance maturity. Such research could provide critical insights into the effectiveness of different governance structures in improving procurement outcomes. By exploring how universities at different stages of governance development manage procurement processes, researchers can identify best practices and determine which governance mechanisms are most effective in enhancing procurement performance. Additionally, comparative studies across national contexts could offer a broader perspective on how procurement systems differ globally and how these differences influence governance practices.

The increasing reliance on digital tools for procurement processes also warrants further investigation. As universities adopt digital platforms for procurement activities, it is crucial to explore how these systems contribute to improved transparency and accountability. Research could assess the effectiveness of e-procurement platforms in fostering competition, reducing corruption, and enhancing the decision-making process in university procurement. These studies could also explore the challenges and benefits of implementing digital systems in procurement and how they impact the overall efficiency of procurement processes.

Another key avenue for future research is the influence of external stakeholders, such as regulatory authorities, audit bodies, and the general public, on procurement practices. Understanding how external pressures and oversight mechanisms shape university procurement governance can offer a more comprehensive view of how universities are held accountable for their procurement decisions. Investigating the role of these external forces could provide insights into how universities can align their procurement systems with broader societal expectations and legal frameworks.

Finally, future research should examine the impact of organisational culture within universities on the implementation and success of procurement governance reforms. The role of leadership in promoting ethical procurement behaviour and ensuring transparency is critical to the successful institutionalisation of governance structures. Research in this area can explore how leadership practices influence the cultural alignment of procurement processes with ethical standards and institutional values. By understanding the relationship between culture and governance, researchers can propose strategies for embedding effective governance practices into the fabric of university operations.

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