



THE EFFECT OF E-PROCUREMENT RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES ON PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to examine the effect of e-procurement risk mitigation strategies on preventing corruption in public procurement following the widespread use of bad corrupt practices in the public procurement process.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study employed a case study design, and the study population involved 140 staff working at the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries and officials working at the Prevention and Combating Corruption Bureau (PCCB). The study employed the Yamane formula to get a sample size of 104 respondents, whereby questionnaires, an interview guide and a documentary checklist were used as data collection instruments, and during administering the tools, all respondents were responsive, which made a response rate of 100%. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (regression model) to determine the effect of e-procurement on preventing corruption in public procurement.

Results: The results indicate that three variables out of five, namely visibility, risk control and political control, had a p-value < 0.05, which means that these variables significantly contribute to preventing corruption in public procurement under e-procurement.

Research Limitation: This study was limited to two organisations, which may not achieve the principle of study generalisation on corruption in Tanzania.

Practical Implication: When public procurement practitioners and suppliers use the e-procurement system effectively, it will prevent physical interactions between the parties, thus ending corruption.

Social Implication: The awareness campaign and empowerment of institutions and regulatory frameworks will help end loopholes that still tempt corruption in public procurement.

Originality: This paper contributes knowledge by providing first-hand information on electronic strategies for preventing corruption in public procurement.

Keywords: *Corruption. e-procurement. public procurement. risk. Tanzania*



INTRODUCTION

The World Bank (2018) defined electronic procurement (e-procurement) as the method by which governments use online systems to procure goods, services and works that the organisation needs. According to Ngatman et al. (2020), e-procurement has the potential to improve efficiency in public procurement due to increased visibility, transparency and accountability in the wider public sector.

In this view, most countries have introduced an e-procurement system to curb corruption, which involves using public funds for personal gain. This deters the government's effort to achieve value for money in public procurement.

Bribes, unjustified gratitude, conflicts of interest, theft of public monies, and economic extortion are all aspects of corruption (Nathan & Jakob, 2019). To increase accountability, openness, and public trust in government, countries have been supporting open government programs, including using e-procurement platforms to enable governments to share public procurement data in open, trustworthy and consistent data on procurement processes, increasing transparency.

Scholars have argued that electronic procurement is an effective method for preventing corruption in public procurement at the administrative level (TI, 2019). The use of e-procurement in other nations has demonstrated that it significantly reduces corrupt practices in public procurement. For example, in developed countries, e-procurement has reduced corruption in public procurement to about 85% (TI, 2019). Many developing countries have highlighted e-procurement systems as a crucial tool for reducing corruption due to increased visibility and openness in government procurement. Therefore, by using an e-procurement system, the chances of corrupt practices will be minimised in public procurement, hence saving the government funds. The E-procurement system enables bidders to participate in a "real-time" procurement process, thus making them aware of what their competitors bid and how likely they will succeed in the bidding process, hence aiding in reducing corrupt practices between bidders and procurement practitioners (Xinhua. (2017)

In Rwanda, using an e-procurement system has reduced corruption in many ways. Following the success of this technology, other countries within the region have learned a lesson which influenced them to adopt e-procurement (Hiba, 2018).

E-procurement prevents direct contact between clients and bidders because all required documents and information on public tendering can be obtained at the tenders' portal within the system, preventing physical interactions between procurement practitioners and bidders on the other side (URT, 2020). According to Dello and Yoshida (2017), procurement corruption incidents in Tanzania have frequently been reported, which puts the country at a high risk of losing public funds.



Furthermore, despite significant efforts by the government to introduce anti-corruption laws and establish the PCCB to control it, there is still widespread corruption in Tanzania, which makes corruption among the most challenging problems in most economic sectors (TI, 2019). Customs, land administration, taxation, and government contracting are among the industries most exposed to high risk of corruption. Furthermore, corruption appeared to be a barrier to the values of democracy, responsible government, and human rights, escalating the threat to society's peace and security (CAG, 2017).

The government of Tanzania began fully implementing an online procurement system in 2020 as an effort to increase efficiency and reduce corruption in the public procurement sector but the survey conducted by the Prevention and Combating Corruption Bureau (PCCB) of (2020) on the factors accelerating corruption practices in Tanzania revealed that about 65% of the respondents believed that lax procurement procedures were responsible for fueling corruption in the country. Such practices were played upon by those able to take advantage of the fusion between politics and business (politics-business fusion), regarded as the driver for corruption by 56.7% in compelling procurement officers to bend the rules, regulations and procedures in procurement. This indicates that a lack of clear visibility in procurement, a lack of competition, errors and political influence altogether pose serious corruption risks in public procurement that need to be addressed by researchers. Worse still, most of the past studies in Tanzania have failed to explore the problem of corruption in the use of e-procurement; instead, they have concentrated on linking e-procurement and other aspects of procurement performance in general (Kweka, 2021; Salumi & Ntimbwa, 2020). This shows that there is limited empirical evidence conducted to realise the role of e-procurement in preventing corruption in public procurement. As a result, the current study sought to analyse the effect of e-procurement risk mitigation strategies in preventing corruption in public procurement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principal-Agent Theory

The Principal Agent Theory suggests that there should be greater transparency and accountability mechanisms, such as independent oversight and monitoring, strict procurement regulations, and penalties for corrupt behaviour. This can help align the agent's interests with the principal's and reduce the opportunity for corrupt behaviour. The main objective of principal-agent theory is to design contractual relationships between the principal and the agent as optimally as possible. In this context, the agent (public procurement practitioners) must be managed by the Government (principal) to implement public procurement functions ethically and thus prevent corruption in public procurement. The independent variable in this Theory is the oversight and monitoring of public procurement functions, while corruption prevention is the dependent variable. Therefore, ISSN: 2408-7920



this study seeks to address the electronic strategies as independent variables in preventing corruption in public procurement.

The Historical Development of E-procurement

E-procurement involves the use of the internet and related technologies to perform procurement activities (buying products and services over the internet) by “automating the whole purchasing process and making the information available for ordering and requisition along the entire supply chain (Samoei & Ndede, 2018). The earliest literature on e-procurement relates to electronic data interchange (EDI), which was used since the 1960s. E-procurement started in the late 1990s when several startup software companies developed suitable applications that allowed business entities to communicate and exchange information online. This turn of events dramatically altered procurement activities and transformed the procurement process from a regular activity into a strategic activity. The advent of the internet and globalisation were other factors that promoted the introduction of e-procurement in procurement functions as a strategy to replace the manual practices that people perceived to be labor-intensive and dominated by paperwork, thus making the procurement process inefficient. These inefficiencies caused many countries to shift from manual practices to e-procurement to improve performance in the procurement process.

Benefits of E-Procurement

E-procurement technology can potentially increase accountability and transparency in government procurement, thus establishing a better control mechanism for corruption (Kohler & Dimancesco, 2020). E-procurement also aids in reducing lead times, lowering costs, and increasing transparency. The use of the Internet reduces the prevalence of corruption in government procurement due to its ability to enable the parties to conduct virtual business (Adjei-Bamfo et al., 2019).

Risks and Consequences of Corruption

Corrupt procurement practices pose many consequences to society and the public at large, depriving the people of meeting their socio-economic conditions as taxpayers (OECD, 2022). For example, conflicts of interest lead to procurement corruption when a public official attempts to obtain benefits that should be awarded to the general public by circumventing formal procedures for themselves and associated parties. Also, corrupt practices such as price fixing, collusion, cartel maintenance, and other tactics hinder competition and prevent the government from getting the best value for money throughout the procurement process (Williams-Elegbe, 2018).

In the government sector, corruption raises the cost of public goods and services. It also causes public funds theft, hinders policy creation and implementation, and lowers public trust in the government (Graycar, 2015). Corruption in infrastructure generally affects the quality of the



structures by lowering them to below-standard levels compared to the amount of money spent on building such infrastructure (Kenny, 2006).

Public procurement corruption directly impacts public funds' distribution, resulting in higher costs and lower-quality goods, services, and Works (OECD, 2022). Bidders that pay bribes to procurement officials attempt to recover their funds by inflating costs (over-invoicing), billing for services that were never rendered, failing to satisfy contractual obligations, lowering work quality, or, in the case of a public works procurement, using inferior materials. As a result, prices increase and quality suffers.

According to the World Bank (2022), corruption in the infrastructure and extractives industries has negative consequences. It leads to insufficient and inadequate services and the misallocation of public funds. Public sector corruption jeopardises the integrity of policies, affects public sector outcomes, and erodes public trust in government institutions as it promotes a corrupt organisational culture that negatively affects the public sector. According to Rustiarini and Nurkholis (2019), improper management, ineffectiveness, and corruption may cause the loss of 10–30% of the investment in publicly funded construction projects.

Corruption Risk Mitigation

Corruption risk mitigation refers to measures to reduce the risk of corruption. Automating public procurement functions is an important anti-corruption factor that provides all bidders with equal opportunities (Neupane et al., 2012). Bidders can access government bid information at their suitable time via a tender portal, whereby bidders do not have to travel any more to submit a bid in paper, avoid physical attacks on bidders on their way to submit the paper bid, and save much time. Other anti-corruption factors of e-procurement are efficient and secure document transmission, automation in public works and services, monitoring and tracking bidding applications, making the procurement process transparent and avoiding unnecessary human interference in bidding, and managerial control. In this view, adopting an e-procurement strategy is the best anti-corruption tool to minimise corruption in public procurement (Iqbal & Seo, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out at the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries in Dodoma region because it is one of the public entities with the most significant volume of yearly procurements. Also, the Office of the Prevention of Corruption and Combating Bureau (PCCB) interviewed some key informants, specifically the Public Education Desk. This study adopted the case study research design since it aims to describe the subject matter in greater detail to ensure a better understanding of the problem (Stake, 2021). For this study, the target population comprises 140 staff involved in public procurement at the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries. The Yamane formula (1967) was



used to determine the sample size for this research study, whereby, after calculation, a sample size of 104 respondents was obtained.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

$$n=140/1+140(0.05)^2$$

$$n=104$$

The respondents were chosen from the study population using the simple random selection method and the purposive sampling methodology. In the first case, a simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents involved in public procurement at the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries. In the second case, the purposive sampling technique was used to get key informants because this category of respondents had the required information, skills and experience on matters relating to corruption and e-procurement in the public sector. Concerning data collection methods, a questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data from respondents.

A list of structured questions with five-point Likert scale responses was prepared and circulated to respondents using the DOPU (Drop Out and Pick Up) approach, whereby after filling the documents, the questionnaires were collected and analysed. On the other hand, an interview guide containing structured questions was prepared and used to interview key informants working at the PCCB office because these staff are well informed on corruption in public procurement. Furthermore, a documentary review involving various documents such as audit reports from the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA), Controller and Auditor General (CAG), Prevention of Corruption and Combating Bureau (PCCB) and other relevant materials available was reviewed (CAG, 2021). This method was important for obtaining secondary data, which might not be collected through interviews and questionnaires. In data analysis, data on demographic characteristics of respondents were analysed by using descriptive statistics as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2021) while data relating to specific objectives were analysed by using regression analysis to determine the causal relationships between the variables and in both cases computation of data were done with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme.

$$Y_0 = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \epsilon_i \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

Where:

Y=Prevention of corruption in procurement

α = Constant term

ISSN: 2408-7920

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β = Beta coefficient

ε =Estimated Error

X_1 =Increased Visibility

X_2 =Online risk control

X_3 =Political control

Thematic content analysis, which involves reading, categorising and coding, was used to analyse the qualitative data. The researcher also used Cronbach’s Alpha to assess the reliability of the data generated from the questionnaires. Results in Table 1 show that the internal consistency value is .99, above the acceptable value of .7 as recommended by Lawson (2014).

Table. 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.990	18

Source: Field data (2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender distribution of the respondents

Table 2 indicates the gender distribution of the respondents.

Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	61	58.7	58.7	58.7
Female	43	41.3	41.3	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data (2023)

The results indicate that respondents were dominated by males, comprising 58.7% of the total sample size. This implies that females were less likely to participate in the research studies due to several factors, such as lack of time and interest.



Age group of the respondents

Table 3 indicates the age distribution of the respondents.

Table 3: Age Group of Respondents

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
26-35	16	15.4	15.4	17.3
36-45	49	47.1	47.1	64.4
46-55	5	4.8	4.8	69.2
56 and above	32	30.8	30.8	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data (2023)

The results in Table 3 show that the majority of respondents 47.1% have the age between 36-45 years which implies that the respondents were highly energetic workforce.

Education level of the respondents.

Table 4: Education Level

Education	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Diploma	23	22.1	22.1	22.1
Bachelor	48	46.2	46.2	68.3
Masters and above	33	31.7	31.7	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data (2023)

Table 4 indicates that 48 respondents, equivalent to 46.2%, hold bachelor degrees, implying that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties effectively.



Working experience of the respondents.

Table 5 indicates the working experience of the respondents from the field of study.

Table 5: Work Experience of the Respondents.

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 1 year	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
1-5 years	19	18.3	18.3	20.2
6-10 years	21	20.2	20.2	40.4
11- 14 years	25	24.0	24.0	64.4
15 years and above	37	35.6	35.6	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data (2023)

The results show that the majority of the respondents (62), equivalent to 59.6%, have experience ranging from 11 years and above, which implies that the respondents were more experienced in their work and hence appropriate to address the problem under the study.

The Effect of E-procurement Risk Mitigation Strategies in Prevention of Corruption in Public Procurement

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether the independent variables (e-procurement) prevent corruption (dependent variable) through factors such as increased competition, efficient handling of the procurement process, control of political interference, minimisation of human errors, and increased visibility in the procurement process.

Model Summary

Using regression analysis, the model's fitness was tested to determine its credibility in examining the effect of e-procurement on preventing corruption in public procurement, as shown in the following table.



Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.965 ^a	.932	.928	.25642

Source: Research Findings, (2023)

From the Model Summary in the Table above, results were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the regression model by observing the R square value (coefficient of determination) to show the contribution of independent variables to the dependent variable. Under R Square results, the findings indicate that the R square value is 0.967, which indicates that the independent variables significantly changed the dependent variable by 96%.

Analysis of Variance

The findings in Table 7 indicate that the F value is 231.036 significant at a significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 at a 5% significance level. This finding indicates that overall, the independent variables such as e-procurement prevent corruption through factors such as increased competition, efficient handling of the procurement process, control of political interference, minimised human errors and increased visibility in the procurement process.

Table 7: Anova^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88.085	5	17.617	267.926	.000 ^a
	Residual	6.444	98	.066		
	Total	94.529	103			

Source: Research Findings, (2023)

The study also sought to determine the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable, the prevention of corruption in public procurement, as shown in Table 8.



Table 8: Regression of Coefficient

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.264	.196		6.459	.000
Automated processes increase efficiency in procurement	.032	.069	.037	.472	.638
E-procurement increases visibility and thus prevents corruption in procurement	.577	.081	.730	7.136	.000
Limited political interference	.196	.067	.258	2.922	.004
Risk control	.812	.73	1.49	.172	.016
Competition Increase	.013	.082	.019	.163	.871

Source: Research Findings, (2023)

Results from the Table above indicates that independent variables included in the model were a good predictor of the prevention of corruption in public procurement. The findings revealed that implementation of e-procurement increased visibility (positive beta coefficient = 0.73, P value = 0.00), e-procurement increased efficiency (positive beta coefficient =0.037, P Value= 0.638), e-procurement control risk of corruption (positive beta coefficient =1.49, P value =0.016), e-procurement control political interference in procurement process (positive beta coefficient =0.258, P value =0.004) and finally e-procurement increase competition in public procurement (positive beta coefficient = 0.019, P value = 0.871).

The results indicate that three variables among the five presented have shown statistically significant relationships between e-procurement practices and the prevention of corruption in public procurement. These independent variables include an increase in visibility, control of political interference and corruption risk control; these findings suggest that an increase in the use of e-procurement leads to the prevention of corruption through increased visibility, limiting political interference and mitigating risks associated with corruption in public procurement. Following the results, the alternative hypothesis was accepted that e-procurement implementation



in public procurement is a valuable tool for preventing corruption if it is fully utilised. Furthermore, the argument was supported by interviewed key informants as follows:

“..... E-procurement implementation in public procurement plays several crucial roles in preventing corruption. Firstly, it enhances transparency by providing a centralised platform for all procurement activities, making the process more visible and accessible to all stakeholders. Additionally, e-procurement reduces risks of bribery and favoritism by automating the bidding process and ensuring fairness and equal opportunities for all potential suppliers. Lastly, it improves accountability as electronic records and audit trails enable easier monitoring and detection of irregularities or fraudulent activities...”

The research findings concur with those of the study conducted by Zahra et al. (2021), which concluded that electronic procurement reduces the possibility of arbitrary decisions and helps to lessen cartels, collusions, and bid-rigging among bidders in nations where political control over public policy is shared. When looking for anti-corruption solutions, transparency and accountability must be strengthened.

Technology may significantly improve transparency by making transactions transparent and allowing for closer public observation. Furthermore, it can reduce the interpersonal interactions that often lead to corruption in the first place (Rizki, 2018). Therefore, e-procurement is one of the best strategies to prevent corruption in public procurement because the system prevents physical interaction between procurement practitioners and suppliers on the other side. According to Maagi (2020) by adopting and implementing e-procurement, efficiency in the procurement process is increased through automation of various processes such as tender invitation, handling of clarifications, tender opening, tender evaluation and notifications of award of a tender which in totality enhances high level of transparency and competition in the procurement process.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of e-procurement practices has a significant effect on preventing corruption in public procurement. This implies that e-procurement applications prevent physical interactions between practitioners and suppliers, posing the risk of corruption practices in the public procurement process. This is crucial because corrupt practices retard the government's initiatives to improve the socio-economic condition of its people due to funds squandered by few unethical people for their motives. State the contribution to the existing body of knowledge

Implications

The study has the following implications for applying e-procurement in public procurement.



On policy implications, the study implies that corruption will be prevented when there is an awareness campaign and institutions and regulatory frameworks are empowered and responsible for controlling political interference in public procurement.

On practical implications, the study implies that when public procurement practitioners and suppliers are involved in the public tendering process using e-procurement effectively, it will help end physical interactions that lead to temptations of bribery.

Areas for further studies

This study's scope was limited to one public organisation; further study should involve many public organisations to widen the scope and thus generalise the findings.

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ISSN: 2408-7920

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