

**FAIR COMPETITION AND PROCUREMENT EFFICIENCY IN THE RIVERS
STATE GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES**

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between fair competition and procurement efficiency in Rivers State Government ministries. Fair competition was conceptualized as the independent variable, while value for money and public accountability served as measures of procurement efficiency. Two research questions guided the study, which adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The population comprised procurement officers across all 26 ministries in the Rivers State Government ministries. Given the manageable size of the population, a census approach was utilized. Instrument reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, with all items scoring above 0.70. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and two hypotheses were tested using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation at a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 significance threshold. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between fair competition and procurement efficiency within the ministries. The study concludes that promoting fair competition in public procurement processes enhances transparency, reduces costs, and improves value for money and public accountability. It is recommended that stringent procurement policies be implemented to encourage competitive tendering and foster efficient procurement practices across all ministries.

Key words: Fair competition, Procurement efficiency, Value for money, Public accountability, Transparency

Introduction

Fair competition and procurement efficiency helps organizations to build a strong structure in terms of transparency, accountability and value for money in the procurement of items for the organization. Fair competition helps organization to look for suitable firms that will compete in a fair atmosphere and the lowest bidder is considered. According to Albert Sanchez-Graells (2018), public procurement is a regulatory framework that aims to administer the interaction between the public buyer and the market in order to procure the best value for money in the expenditure of public funds to meet organizational requirements. However, most organization did not follow due processes in the tendering and competitive bidding processes, and this has hindered the development and growth of most public sectors in Rivers State, whereby encourage the procurement of low standard of facilities because of lack of fair competition, corruption and collusion. Addressing these shortcomings is paramount to not only upholding the principles of fair competition and transparency but also to fostering a competitive

environment that maximizes the benefits of public procurement tendering for the broader society.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework in this study helps to serve as the foundation for this research from which all the knowledge associated with the entire research process was constructed. The theoretical framework for this study serve as the structure and support for the rational of the research, statement of the problem, the aim or purpose, the significance and statement of the research questions. The theoretical framework provides the foundation or grounding base for the review of literature of this study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Hence, theoretical framework for this study will serve as the blue print for our paper inquiring and provide guidance on which to build and support this research.

Ethics-Based Theory

Ethics-based theory was propounded by Socrates, (470–399 BCE) and was expanded by Immanuel Kant, (1724-1804). This theory advocate self-regulation by the individuals and agencies involved, as it is applicable in the procurement processes. Ackermann (2002) argues that businesses organizations have two types of obligation to refrain from corrupt practices. First, businesses have an obligation to maintain market efficiency. Bribery undermines market efficiency and leaves the entire market system open to change of immorality and illegitimacy Secondly, firms are dependent for their success not only on the existence of a functioning markets system but also on a state that facilities market activity and maintain order and stability. The rationalistic stance toward ethics assumes that most of the financial and inequality problems can be blamed to a few bad or rule- breaking actors while majority follows the normative ethical standards and legal norms (Trevino & Weaver, 1994). It is also theorized that love of money is directly or indirectly related to propensity to engage in unethical behaviour (Tang & Chen, 2008). Thus, businesses have an obligation not to undermine the legitimacy of the state by indulging in unethical practices. Ethics theories have influenced the creation of instruments like codes of conduct, integrity pacts, and self-regulating rules in the procurement processes. Hence, this theory will serve as underpinning philosophies for this paper and guide the entire research process.

Conceptual Review

Fair Competition

Fair and transparent procurement procedures are a cornerstone of a well-functioning free-market economy. In particular, bidding for contracts is a way to bring about the best deal

for the least money. Competitive bid procurement, as the name implies, involves suppliers of services competing for a contract. The traditional method involves the Owner issuing an Invitation, which can be directed to a select group of suppliers (invitational bidding) or to the general contracting community (Public bidding). Bidders who wish to participate submit binding offers to do the required service by a fixed rate and time and in accordance with the Owner's requirements.

The value of procurement of various works and services by public authorities accounts a significant percent of the world gross domestic product (GDP), European Union acquisition directive 2004/17/EC. (Regan,2014). In conducting public procurement procedures, contracting authorities are required in respect of all economic operators to respect the principles established under the Law on Public Procurement, such as the principle of competition, the principle of equal treatment, the principle of non-discrimination, the principle of mutual recognition, the principle of proportionality and the principle of transparency. Contracting authorities are obliged to act in a manner that enables efficient public procurement and economical use of funds for public procurement (Onuorah, & Appah 2007).

Competition protection issues in the context of procurement relate to primarily in meeting the relevant legal standards of proof required in front of the relevant authorities or in the courts proceedings, considering the fact of the entitlement of an economic operator, who as a natural or legal person or association of such persons who offers execution of works or delivery of goods or services, not to be excluded from the public procurement processes, which is also established in the procurement law (Ogunsanmi, &Aje, 2008).

Hence, Good procurement is impartial and consistent, and should offer all interested suppliers, purchasers and consultants an equal opportunity to compete. Procuring entities must adopt practices that promote fair competition and allow adequate time in the tendering procedure for participating, as well as must avoid unnecessarily burden or constrain.

Procurement Efficiency

Procurement efficiency is a business term that refers to the ability of an organization to procure goods, services and works in a cost-effective manner Barsemoi, Mwangagi, and Asienyo (2014). It is a measure of how well an organization is able to acquire the goods and services it needs to run its operations, while minimizing the costs associated with the process. Here are some key reasons why effective procurement is crucial: Cost savings and effectiveness, effective procurement strategies help organizations obtain goods, services, and resources at competitive prices. This leads to cost savings, better utilization of resources, and

improved operational efficiency. Factors influencing procurement efficiency in organizations can vary depending on various internal and external factors. (Barsemoi *et al.*, 2014) highlight several key factors that impact procurement efficiency. One crucial factor is the level of transparency in the procurement process. Transparency ensures fairness and accountability, enabling organizations to identify potential inefficiencies and take corrective actions. Another factor is the presence of effective procurement policies and procedures. Organizations that have well-defined and streamlined procurement processes are more likely to achieve higher efficiency levels. Additionally, the availability of skilled procurement professionals plays a significant role in procurement efficiency. Competent personnel are essential in effectively managing supplier relationships, negotiating contracts, and implementing cost-saving measures. In summary, factors such as transparency, procurement policies, skilled professionals, technology adoption, and stakeholder collaboration all contribute to the procurement efficiency of organizations (Barsemoi *et al.*, 2014, cited in Idadokima, Nwaonuma & wordu 2024). Efficient procurement and cost reduction are essential for organizations to maintain profitability and gain a competitive edge in the market.

Measures of Procurement Efficiency

An effective procurement function contribute to the continuity of the organizations primary business activities, control and reduce all procurement related costs, reduce the organizations risk exposures in relation to its supply markets, and contribute to innovation that improves service delivery (Mueller, 2003 cited in Idadokima *et al.*, 2024), has reiterated that procurement performance connects with efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out daily activities. There are eight indicators that have been selected to measure procurement performance and these include; the level of contract utilization, suppliers performance, procurement cost, level of price variance, expiration management, procurement cycle time and variability, staff training and payment processing time.

Value for Money

The ultimate objective of the public procurement activity is to achieve best value for money in order to maximize economy and efficiency of public spending. This key operating principle relate to a number of factors which include not only the price of the goods, works or services, but also the suitability and satisfactory quality. Other influential factors may include total life cycle costs, maintenance, servicing costs, delivery/construction period, transportation or storage costs, as well as benefits of broader elements whether environmental, social and economic. Baker, Dross, Shah, and Plastron (2013) noted that Value for Money (VFM) is a

concept that has been widely used for some time within the commercial and industrial sectors which collaborated the views of Bidne *et al.* (2012) who acknowledged that value for money had been embraced internationally as an essential tool for assessing the relative costs and benefits of alternative options available for selection for the provision of a potential public project, though an often misunderstood phrase (Barr & Christie, 2014); Baker *et al.* (2013) further argued that there is no universal definition for the term value for money and the most cited definition states that value for money is ‘the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes. The definition’ of Value for Money is now in common currency, providing a framework for analysis shaped by economy, efficiency and effectiveness. However, the achievement of Value for Money should be assessed in conjunction with other project aspects such as service quality, risk transfer, and wider policy objectives (Akintoye, Hardcastle, Beck, Chinyio, & Asenova, 2003).

They further asserted that the overall project success is to a very large extent determined by the ability of the client to adopt and sustain the Value for Money regime throughout the project life. Therefore, It is worthy of note that securing value for money is not limited to some project delivery variants such as the traditional/conventional method of project delivery or to just design and build but to also variants such as public-private partnerships, relational contracting. Burger and Hawkesworth, (2011) noted that as a matter of principle, the choice between using a PPP or traditional procurement should be simple; however, governments should prefer the method that creates the most value for money.

Public Accountability

The concept of accountability involves the proper documentation of all the activities that take place in the procurement process and the responsibility to demonstrate that acquisition, works, services has been executed in accordance with the articulated rules and standards and the officer reports fairly and accurately on performance results vis-à-vis mandated roles and or/plans (Adegite, 2016). It means doing things transparently in line with due process and the provision of feedback. It shows the extent to which a person can be answerable to whoever has invested some amount of trust, faith and resources on them (Onuorah & Appah, 2014). Public accountability is an essential component for the functioning of our political system, use of public fund and the ascertainment of the procurement cost. Accountability is very important in determining the rationale behind all procurement decisions. Accountability guarantees accurate written records, including computer records which are essential in demonstrating that proper ethical standards have been observed. Hence, appropriate records should be maintained

throughout the procurement process. These records should provide an audit trail of the reasons for making a particular procurement decision. The type and detail of information that is recorded should be specified in local procedural guidelines and will depend on the complexity or sensitivity of the particular purchasing issue Nadi, (2009). As accountability means that those who are charged with drafting and/or carrying out policy should be obliged to give an explanation of their actions to their subjects, (Johnson, 2004). This mechanism allows the openness of the process and brings defaulters to book Okafor and Modebe (2015) opine that when activities are recorded accurately in the various stages of the procurement procedure accountability become feasible, and enable appropriate audit trail of procurement decisions for controls, and serves as the official records in cases of administrative or judicial challenges and provide the avenue for citizens to monitor.

Fair Competition and Procurement Efficiency

Edlira-Martiri and Etion-Kapedani, (2025) did a study on Competition, savings, and accountability: a study of Albania's public procurement of services. This study examines the evolution of competition in Albania's public procurement of services sector from 2010 to 2022, utilizing quantitative analysis of data from the Public Procurement Agency. Key indicators, such as average bids per tender, funding allocations, contract numbers, disqualified bids, and single vs. multiple bid contracts have been assessed. The research reveals a concerning 45% decline in bid competition over the study period, despite increased funding and contracts, posing challenges to cost-effectiveness. The prevalence of single-bid contracts exacerbates this issue. Importantly, the study highlights a direct link between competition levels and cost savings in public procurement, hence, it enhance transparency and efficiency. The study however focus on Albania's public procurement service sector while this study is in the Rivers State government ministries. Matilla-García, and Vega (2024). Carry out a study on an empirical analysis of the impacts of competition on procurement costs. The researchers exploited a dataset based on the Spanish procurement award notices for the years 2012–2017. According to the sample, the contracting authorities of the ministries use the open procedures with a frequency of 57.2% while the contracting bodies not belonging to ministries use these procedures with a frequency of 49.9%. This difference is statistically significant with a 99% confidence level based on a Welch's t-test, which does not assume equal variances and adjusts the degrees of freedom, making it more robust and suitable for comparisons between samples of different sizes and variances. Generally, without distinguishing by type of contract, the median number of participants in Ministry tenders is 3, while in non-Ministry organizations it

is 2. The difference in medians is significant at a 99% confidence level with the Wilcoxon test. After controlling for possible endogeneity, we show that a more competitive environment significantly reduces the cost of Spanish procurement. In particular, the use of the open procedure, the most competitive one, would reduce the procurement price by 9.9%, while the increase by one unit of the number of participants would on average lead to a 2.1% decrease in the procurement price. Consequently, a more extensive use of fair competition would generate savings. These findings can have an important effect on the public deficit of a country. Although, the study was carried out in Spain while our study is in the Rivers State government ministries. In conclusion, the adoption of fair competition has proven to have a positive impact on procurement efficiency, as it improves transparency, reduce cost of Government spending, and enables economic growth. Based on the foregoing, the study thus hypothesized that:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between fair competition and value for money in the Rivers State Government ministries.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between fair competition public accountability in the Rivers state Government ministries.

This study conceptualized a frame work as shown in Figure1.

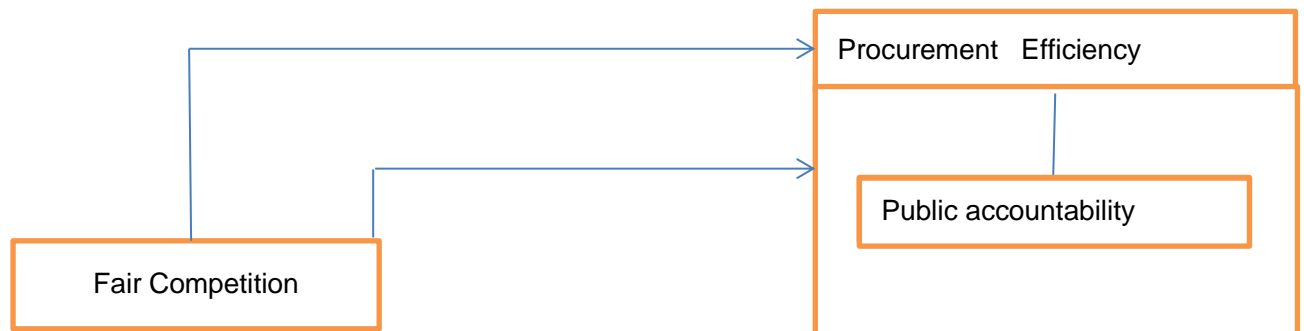


Figure 1.1: Conceptual frame work of fair competition and Procurement efficiency in the Rivers State Government ministries.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. The population for the study comprised twenty-six (26) ministries in the River State civil service. The study focused on procurement officers in the 26 ministries. Preliminary investigation from the office of Head of service revealed that there are at least three (3) procurement officers in each of the ministries. To research questions were asked. However, there was no need to venture into rigorous procedures for determining an appropriate sample size because our population of study was not large and is less than thirty (30). Hence, we studied the entire accessible

population (census) of twenty (26) Ministries in the Rivers State Civil Service. The researcher randomly distributed three (3) structured copies of the questionnaire per ministries, which correspondingly summed up to seventy eight (78) copies of questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. Two hypotheses were tested using the spearman's Rank Order correlation coefficient with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The test were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.5 level of significance.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1.1 Reliability Coefficients of Variable Measures

S/N	Dimensions/Measures other study variable	Number of items	Cronbach 's Alpha	Comment
1	Fair competition	5	0.781	Reliable
2	Value for money	5	0.798	Reliable
3	Public accountability	5	0.780	Reliable

Source: SPSS Output, (2024).

Table 2.1 Response Rates and descriptive statistics for Fair Competition (n=59)

<i>Fair Competition</i>		VHE	HE	ME	VLE	VHE	Mean	Std.
1	one of the ways to tender for contract in our ministry is through fair competition	8	9	9	15	18	3.44	1.418
2	fair competition enhance transparency in the tendering process	6	6	9	21	17	3.63	1.285
3	fair competition promote questioning and accountability in our ministry	5	4	8	13	29	3.97	1.299
4	in my organization most contractor do not like fair competition	-	1	7	33	18	4.15	0.690

Source: Research Survey Data, (2024).

In response to item one, respondents affirmed that one of the ways to tender for contract in our ministry is through fair competition. This is accounted for by the high mean score of 3.44. Similarly, it was agreed that fair competition enhance transparency in the tendering process. This is also confirmed by the high mean score of 3.63. More so, the third item got similar approval as respondents agreed fair competition promotes questioning and accountability in our ministry. The mean score of 3.97 also speaks volume of this status. Furthermore, fourth item got an affirmative response that in their organization most contractor do not like fair competition. This is backed by a mean score of 4.15.

Table 2.2 Response Rates and descriptive statistics for Value for Money (n=59)

	Value for Money	VHE	HE	ME	VLE	VHE	Mean	Std.
1	Value for money helps contractors to utilize resources efficiently to achieve the intended outcomes'	5	4	8	13	29	3.97	1.299
2	Value for Money helps contractors to have a better understanding of the cost implications of product	6	7	6	15	25	3.78	1.378
3	Value for money helps contractors combine cost, quality, and sustainability to meet customer requirements	-	4	9	25	21	4.07	0.888
4	Project success is determined by the ability of the client to adopt and sustain the value for money throughout the project life	-	-	11	39	9	3.97	0.586

Source: Research Survey Data, (2024).

Table 2.3 Response Rates and descriptive statistics for Public accountability (n=59)

	Public accountability	VHE	HE	ME	VLE	VHE	X	Std.
1	Public accountability enhance contractors confidence in bidding process	9	8	6	26	10	3.34	1.334
2	Public accountability enhance transparency	8	9	9	15	18	3.44	1.418
3	Public accountability promote transparency	6	6	9	21	17	3.63	1.285
4	Accountability checkmate low standard of purchase materials of contractors	5	4	8	13	29	3.97	1.299

Source: Research Survey Data, (2024).

From table 4.11 in response to item one, respondents affirmed that public accountability enhance contractors confidence in bidding process. This is accounted for by the high mean score of 3.34. Similarly, it was agreed for the second item that public accountability enhance transparency. This is also confirmed by the high mean score of 3.44. Furthermore, the third item shows that their public accountability promote transparency This is accounted for by the high mean score of 3.63. Finally, it was agreed for the last item that accountability checkmate low standard of purchase materials of contractors. This is also confirmed by the high mean score of 3.97.

Table 3.1 Correlation for the relationship between fair competition and procurement efficiency

			Fair Competition	Value for Money	Public Accountability
Spearman's rho	Fair Competition	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.890**	.636**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	130	130	130
	Value for Money	Correlation Coefficient	.890**	1.000	.846**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	130	130	130
	Public Accountability	Correlation Coefficient	.636**	.846**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	130	130	130

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data (2024) and SPSS output version 23.0

Table 3.1 illustrates the test for the two previously postulated bivariate hypothetical statements. The results show that for:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between fair competition and value for money in the Rivers State government ministries

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between fair competition and value for money. The *rho* value 0.890 indicates this relationship and it is significant at $p\ 0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicating a very strong relationship. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between fair competition and value for money in the Rivers State government ministries.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between fair competition and public accountability in the Rivers State government ministries

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between fair competition and public accountability. The *rho* value 0.636 indicates this relationship and it is significant at $p\ 0.000 < 0.05$. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicating a very strong relationship. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between fair competition and public accountability in the Rivers State government ministries.

Discussion of Findings

The relevance of Ethics-based theory by Socrates and Kant, (1724-1804). This theories advocate self-regulation by the individuals and agencies involved, as it is applicable in the procurement processes. Ackermann (2002) argues that businesses organizations have an obligation to refrain from corrupt practices. Businesses have an obligation to maintain market efficiency. Bribery, bid rigging and collusion undermines market efficiency and leaves the entire market system open to change of immorality and illegitimacy. This study examine the relationship between fair competition and procurement efficiency in the Rivers State Government ministries. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between fair competition and procurement efficiency. This findings agrees with the study of Edlira-Martiri and Etion-Kapedani, (2025). The researchers reveals a concerning 45% decline in bid competition over the study period, despite increased funding and contracts, posing challenges to cost-effectiveness. Importantly, the study highlights a direct link between competition levels and cost savings in public procurement, hence, it enhance transparency and efficiency. Matilla-García, and Vega (2024). On their empirical analysis of the impacts of competition on procurement costs. The researchers exploited a data set based on the Spanish procurement award notices for the years 2012–2017. According to the sample, the contracting authorities of the ministries use the open procedures with a frequency of 57.2% while the contracting bodies not belonging to ministries use these procedures with a frequency of 49.9%. In conclusion, the adoption of fair competition has proven to have a positive impact on procurement efficiency, as it improves transparency, reduce cost of Government spending, and enables economic growth.

Conclusion

Fair competition refers to an environment where all participants have an equal opportunity to succeed based on their merits and efforts, without undue advantages or disadvantages. It ensures that market players can compete on a level playing field, promoting innovation and efficiency. Additionally, fair competition enables greater transparency and fairness in the procurement process by providing a centralized platform for all stakeholders to participate and monitor the bidding process. This transparency reduces the likelihood of favoritism or corruption, leading to more efficient procurement outcomes. While, Procurement efficiency is a business term that refers to the ability of an organization to procure goods, services and works in a cost-effective manner. It is a measure of how well an organization is

able to acquire the goods and services it needs to run its operations, while minimizing the costs associated with the process. Specifically, also and in line with the objectives of this study, the study concludes that and also found that fair competition enhances procurement efficiency in the Rivers State Government Ministries.

Recommendations

1. There is need to enormously implement stringent procurement policies which encourage fair competition in tendering processes in the Rivers State Government ministries.
2. Invest in training programs for procurement officials to enhance their skills and knowledge in areas such as contract management, negotiation, and risk assessment in order to improve transparency, accountability and reduce cost of Government spending.
3. Public Organizations in Rivers State should properly evaluate the tenders from vendors in order to ascertain the most suitable in terms of technical suitability, cost efficient and other capabilities.

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