

Influence of Ethical Procurement Practices on Performance of Kitui County Government, Kenya

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of ethical procurement practices on performance of Kitui county government. The specific objectives of the study included: to examine the influence of transparency practice on performance of Kitui county governments in Kenya; to establish the extent to which accountability practice influence performance in county governments in Kenya; to investigate how professionalism practice influence the performance of Kitui county governments in Kenya and finally to determine the influence of Competition in procurement on performance of Kitui county governments in Kenya. The study was underpinned in three theories; principal-agency theory, systems theory and utilitarianism theory. The research design used was both quantitative and qualitative. The researcher used the sampling method to sample all the 589 employees from seven departments as the total population. Data collection tool was mainly a questionnaire. To ensure reliability of findings, the researcher applied the internal consistency technique, leveraging Cronbach's alpha. The findings indicate that there existed a positive and significant relationship between transparency practice and overall performance of employees in Kitui County government, Kenya with coefficient of correlation ($r = 0.617, p = 0.000$). It was also observed that accountability practice has a positive relationship with performance of procurement process in Kitui County government, Kenya with coefficient of correlation ($r = 0.107, p = 0.000$). The results established that professionalism practice has a significant positive relationship with performance of procurement practitioners in Kitui County government, Kenya with coefficient of correlation ($r = 0.377, p = 0.000$). Finally the findings indicated that there was a slightly significant positive relationship between competition practice and employees' performance in Kitui County government, Kenya with coefficient of correlation ($r = 0.017, p = 0.000$). It was concluded that; the procurement process needs to embrace transparency, competition, accountability and professionalism. The study recommended that procurement rules and regulations should be put into place and strictly adhered in every step of the tendering process to ensure transparency. Procurement officers should be given room to make independent decisions without undue influence from their seniors to ensure accountability.

Key Words: *Ethical Procurement Practices, Transparency Practice, Accountability Practice, Professionalism Practice and Competition Practice, Kitui County Government, Kenya*

1.0 Introduction

Procurement plays a pivotal role in enhancing the overall organizational performance. However, this can only be possible when the whole process is guided by ethical practices. According to Kabega (2016), both developed and developing countries have set out procurement reforms through enactment of laws and regulations. However, these efforts have achieved little success owing to little regulatory compliance. Their efforts to anchor procurement practices on the pillars of value for money, elevation of public service delivery and creation of an environment for private sector growth have delayed their main objective of effective governance. According to World Bank (2012), it is estimated that close to 20% of all global governments' expenditures are as a result of public procurement. According to Transparency international (2017), it is estimated that close to 20% of government contracts are infiltrated by corruption through awarding of tenders to firms with political linkages.

In Kenya, the procurement system has evolved greatly over the last five decades. According to Mukoswa (2015), procurement started in mid 1960s as a system with no regulations, then minimal regulations were introduced in the 1970s upto 1990s through Treasury Circulars. Serious regulations were enacted through the introduction of Public Procurement and Disposal Act (PPDA) in 2015 and the Procurement Regulations of 2022. This brought with it ethics within the procurement system thus making it a mainstream business practice in both public and private sectors in Kenya. Today Kenya boasts of a sound legal framework governing public procurement which came as a result of the enactment of the PPDA and the subsequent regulations.

The enactment of the 2010 new constitution in Kenya led to the establishment of the 47 devolved units called counties. Kitui County is one of the counties that were hived from the former Eastern province. Just like other counties, notable growth has been witnessed in terms of business and infrastructure. Despite the great potential, Kitui County is classified as Arid and Semi-Arid counties which exhibits relatively high levels of poverty (CIDP, 2018 - 2022). According to EACC report (2019), the county was under investigation due to irregular procurement of emergency construction works for drifts and road structures in various parts of the county following El-Nino rains. This included 21 projects valued at Kshs. 172,156,538. It was established that in the county procurement plan, the construction of drifts had not been included and in addition the contract exceeded the recommended threshold matrix by Kshs. 20,000,000/=.

Specific Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the influence of transparency practice on performance of Kitui county governments in Kenya
- ii. To establish the extent to which accountability practice influence performance of county governments in Kenya.
- iii. To investigate how professionalism practice influence the performance of Kitui county governments in Kenya.
- iv. To determine the influence of Competition in procurement on performance of Kitui county governments in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

The study was guided by the following theories: Principal – Agency theory designed by Jensen and Meckling (1976). In their argument, they suggested how a company is run based on conflict of interest between the owners of the company who are shareholders, company's managers and providers of debt finance. Systems Theory

proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1940s. The theory is based on the view that an organization is a single and unified set of interrelated parts or subsystems. Utilitarianism Theory was designed by Jeremy Bentham with a view of determining right from wrong by focusing on the outcomes.

3.0 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework aims at showing the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. The independent variable is Ethical procurement practices, while the dependent variable is performance of Kitui County government in Kenya.

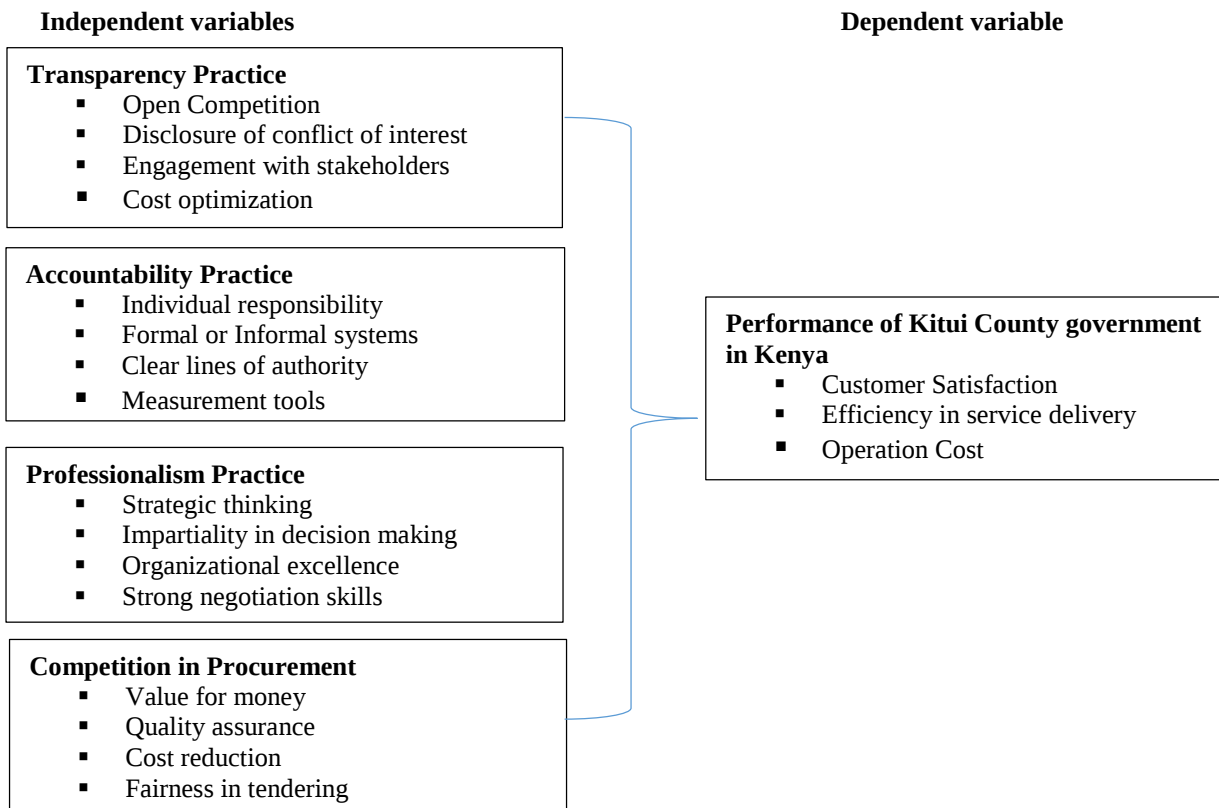


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Transparency Practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

In public procurement, transparency is the act of availing information concerning procurement processes to all interested parties like contractors, service providers and the public at large without bias unless there are valid reasons to keep the information confidential (Mokaya, 2021). According to OECD (2009), corruption thrives in an environment of secrecy and therefore the biggest challenge across many countries is to ensure transparency in the procurement process regardless of the procurement method used. Proper documentation and easy accessibility of procurement decisions eliminates biasness, promotes fair competition and makes the awarding

of contracts easy and justifiable within the public domain

In many countries, public procurement rules have been instituted in the countries' legislation in the form of statutes or code, for example, here in Kenya the are the PPDA Act 2015 and the regulations of 2022. In these rules, contracts are required to be fair, equitable, transparent, competitive and to a large extent cost-effective. However, Nantage (2021) observes that abuse of public procurement systems occurs mostly as a result of weak and inconsistent enforcement of rules since these laws are not effectively applied. Bending of procurement laws to suit vested interests and poor oversight by those implementing the laws are some of the vices that make the procurement cycle ineffective thus acting as obstacles for fairness while at the same time hindering transparency (Chiboiwa, 2019).

According to Hounaida (2020), effective management of the procurement function is an essential ingredient in ensuring system performance through the attainment of presumed goals for the organization. Transparency in the procurement function since it ensures that information is given to all the parties to compete on equal levels hence the best and qualified service provider is awarded the tender. Ejura (2020) adds that a well managed procurement system normally yields to reduced costs for the organization. It is therefore important to note that disclosure of procurement information as well as creation of a level playing field through transparency can contribute greatly towards maximization of growth of the organization while at the same time ensuring cost reduction (Mustaffa, 2019).

Accountability Practice and Performance Of Kitui County Government

Accountability in procurement means holding procurement practitioners responsible for their actions and decisions that they take in relation to the procurement process and for the resulting outcomes. The relevant entities takes steps to enable appropriate scrutiny of the procurement activity (Savas, 2020). This transition has brought with it a heightened responsibility for accountability on the part of the procurement practitioner (Thompson, 2019). The major distinction between public and private sectors in procurement is that, whereas in public procurement the practitioner is accountable to the tax payer, in private sector, the practitioner is interested in controlling costs through pricing in order to arrive at the main objective of profitability (Khemani, 2019).

According to Wang (2020), accountability and transparency is costly since it becomes extremely difficult to provide uniform information to the vendors, avoiding collusion and ultimately averting corrupt deals with decision makers. Some of these enticements play a significant role in encouraging corruption in the process. Chiboiwa (2019) adds that accountability dictates that procurement practitioners are subject to a set of standards that are used to judge whether they have undertaken their responsibilities in strict adherence to these standards and consequently impose sanctions in case of any deviation from the rules (Mutava, 2020).

External procurement controls are also essential in ensuring total integrity of the whole process. External controls through audits of procurement activities are undertaken to ensure that practices align with the processes (Delaney, 2021). Public procurement that is devoid of corruption is gauged against set metrics. Financial audits, both internal and external audits are critical in detecting and investigating fraud and corruption. In addition, Basheka (2020) posits that performance audits on the other hand are used to generate information concerning the actual benefits of procurement thus pointing out areas that need complete improvements. To ensure accountability, procurement activities should be classified according to the degree of risks involved, hence more complex and sensitive procurements need regular audits (Waiganjo, 2021).

Professionalism Practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

The government has a social contractual obligation with its citizens to provide essential goods and services. According to Agbodzakey and Upshaw (2019), governments spend a significant proportion of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through public procurement which necessitates public institutions to employ ethical practices in order to ensure accountability, fairness, integrity and confidentiality in their operations. To ensure the accomplishment of this objective, Snider and Rendon (2020) proposed that adequate reforms need to be carried out within the procurement institutions in order to strengthen ethical practices in public procurement. This can only be achieved through training of personnel to increase of their efficiency and productivity (Baily, 2011).

Professionalism in public procurement is the act of consistently doing the best in the right way and with strict adherence to set rules and regulations (Raymond, 2018). Arrowsmith (2022) pointed out that procurement is a profession that is largely dependent on theoretical knowledge, then perfected through frequent training and education and ultimately tested and examined in the actual workplace through adherence to professional code of ethics. The absence of professionalism exposes public procurement to corruption which is devoid of compliance to rules and regulations that govern the whole procurement process hence adversely affecting overall performance (Tukamuhabwa, 2022). According to Basheka (2020), organizations willing to embrace an effective procurement should be staffed with procurement professionals, not only trained in this profession but also recognized by the respective procurement professional body in the country.

In Kenya, the Kenya Institute of Supplies Management (KISM) is the professional body that ensures competence of procurement practitioners. This body draws its mandate from the supplies practitioners management Act No 17 of 2007. This is an act that provides the legal framework within which the institute is established and additionally operates as a corporate body promoting learning, development of best practices and application of the same to the practice of procurement and supply chain management (KISM 2021). This body provides a code which dictates the ethical standards to assist its members to address ethical dilemmas faced in their line of duty.

Competition in Procurement and Performance Of Kitui County Government

Competition in procurement is the process of rivalry between firms to supply their goods or services and it is usually takes the dimensions of price, quality and innovation (Njihia, 2022). Competition in procurement occurs mostly during bidding whereby multiple vendors are invited to bid for the same product as per the business's requirements. The public sector sources for their supplies from a relatively competitive market through procurement of goods, services and works (Eyaa, 2023). According to Weber (2019), competition in procurement is usually regulated through policies in order to guarantee eligibility of the participants.

Since public procurement is funded by the exchequer, all the information on requirements of procurement should be widely circulated in order to maximize the number of respondents from the public and enhance competition (Transparency international, 2019). Although not every contract can be awarded through competitive bidding, like the restricted tenders, it should be noted that those that do not fall into that category should be subjected to fair competition in order to give each interested party an even playing ground (Kakwezi, 2021). The private sector is vulnerable to buyer powers who aim at extracting concessions from suppliers thus discriminating other buyers and eliminating competition (Hunja, 2023).

Effective competition in the procurement process can be enhanced if a sufficient number of bidders respond

well to invitation to tender while ensuring them of the incentive to compete for the contract (Kakwezi, 2021). To avoid collusive practices among a pre-qualified group, Nantage (2021) suggests that bidders should be qualified during the procurement process, as this will increase the amount of uncertainty among firms as to the number and identity of bidders. In addition the time period between qualification and award should be kept short in order to avoid collusion (Deases, 2021). Competition can also be increased through sub-dividing big contracts. Collusive tendering is most prevalent in instances where the contracts involve large sums of money and overall profitability is high (Delaney, 2021).

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design used was both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Quantitative approach on the other hand tries to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed in to usable statistics.

3.2 Target Population

For this study, the total population was all 589 county employees working in the 10 ministries in Kitui County Government as shown in table 1;

Table 1: Target Population

Ministry	Number
Finance and Economic Planning	48
Administration and Co-ordination of County Affairs	63
Tourism and Natural Resources	36
Environment, Energy and Minerals Investments development	57
Basic education, Training and skills development	48
Health and Sanitation	84
Culture, youth, sports and social services	31
Lands, infrastructure and urban development	47
Trade, Industry, ICT and Co-operatives	69
Agriculture, water and Irrigation	52
Procurement Department	54
Total	589

3.3. Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample is viewed as representative of the whole population and their views are regarded as the views of the whole population. Therefore, to come up with the sample, the researcher used a mathematical formula by Yamane (1967).

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

Where;

N = Population size

n = Sample size

e = Margin of error

For this study therefore;

$$N = 589$$

$$e = 0.05$$

Therefore;

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

$$n = \frac{589}{1 + 589(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 238.22$$

$$n = 238$$

The sample for this study was 238 respondents.

This study employed a stratified random sampling technique. The stratas in this study are the different ministries and the procurement department in Kitui county where the researcher randomly picked the respondents from each strata as indicated in the table 2;

Table 2: Sample Size

Ministry	Number	Sample Size
Finance and Economic Planning	48	15
Administration and Co-ordination of County Affairs	63	19
Tourism and Natural Resources	36	18
Environment, Energy and Minerals investments development	57	18
Basic education, training and skills development	48	23
Health and Sanitation	84	40
Culture, youth, sports and social services	31	15
Lands, infrastructure and urban development	47	15
Trade, Industry, ICT and Co-operatives	69	21
Agriculture, water and irrigation	52	24
Procurement department	54	30
TOTAL	589	238

3.4. Data Collection Method

Data was collected using several instruments that the researcher considered to be effective for this study. The following instruments were used;

3.4.1 Questionnaires

Primary data was collected through the use of a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a data collection instrument that is quantitative in nature, cheap and convenient for data collection and very commonly used in social researches (Blumberg, 2011). A closed ended questions and 5 point likert scale questions in the questionnaire.

3.5 Validity of the Research Instruments

Barasa, Namusonge and Iravo(2015) asserts that Validity is the standard for evaluating how well a design uses measurement techniques to gather data for the purpose of answering the research questions. Content validity is related to a type of validity in which different skills and behaviours are adequately and effectively measured. Internal validity is concerned with the congruence of the research findings with the reality.

3.6 Reliability of the research instrument

Cronbach's Alpha is a commonly used method for testing instrument reliability, as elucidated by Wise (2019).

In this study, constructs with an alpha score of 0.7 or higher will be deemed reliable and included in the analysis. Any construct with an alpha score below the critical value was revised.

The study ensured that the instruments were measured to assess their reliability status. A pre-test study was done at Kitui county office.

Table 3: Table Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Transparency Practice	0.905	7
Accountability Practice	0.931	7
Professionalism Practice	0.964	7
Competition in Procurement	0.941	7
Performance of Kitui County	0.901	4

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

Here, the researcher presented the analysed data from the questionnaires as generated by the SPSS software in form of graphs and tables. A mean of 0.1 – 1.0 indicates Strongly Disagree, 1.1 – 2.0 indicates Disagree, 2.1 – 3.0 indicates neutral, 3.1 – 4.0 indicates agree while 4.1 – 5.0 indicates strongly agree. The overall mean score is 3.33 out of a score of 5 with a standard deviation of 0.951.

4.1 Transparency Practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on Transparency practice

Transparency practice Statements	N	Mean	Std Deviation
There is open competition in the procurement processes	236	1.24	0.872
There is strict adherence to procurement rules and procedures	236	1.33	0.667
The practitioners are usually involved in strategic planning	236	1.37	0.069
Practitioners usually state in case of conflict of interest	236	2.88	1.158
Training is regularly undertaken to enhance stakeholder engagement	236	1.24	1.004
The procurement process promotes fair competition	236	0.71	1.142
All procurement processes usually aim at cost optimization	236	2.76	1.405
Overall Mean Score		1.65	0.902

There is little adherence to competition in the procurement process as shown by the mean of 1.24 and a standard deviation of 0.872. The results also show that there is no strict adherence to procurement rules and procedures as shown by the mean of 1.33 and a standard deviation of 0.667. A mean of 1.37 and a standard deviation of 0.069 shows that procurement practitioners are not usually involved in strategic planning. However, the respondents were neutral about reporting cases of conflict of interest as indicated by the mean of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 1.158. Stakeholder engagement through training is not regularly undertaken within the county as many respondents disagreed hence forming a mean of 1.24 and a standard deviation of 1.004. The procurement process in Kitui county does not promote fair competition according to a great number of respondents who strongly disagreed with a mean of 0.71 and a standard deviation of 1.142. The respondents were neutral on whether the procurement processes are aimed at cost optimization with a mean of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.405. The overall mean of 1.65 and a standard deviation of 0.902 indicates that the respondents are of the overall view that transparency is not regarded as a vital ingredient in enhancing performance in the procurement process.

Table 5: Transparency Practice and Performance

		Transparency practice	Performance in Kitui County Government
Transparency Practice	Pearson Correlation	1	.617**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	236	236
Performance in Kitui County Government	Pearson Correlation	.617**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	236	236

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

The findings indicate that there existed a positive and significant relationship between transparency practice and overall performance of employees ($r = 0.617$, $p = 0.000$). This means that an increase in transparency would definitely enhance the performance of employees.

4.2 Accountability Practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

Table 6: Descriptive analysis on Accountability Practice

Accountability practice Statements	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Each procurement officer is liable for the decision he/she makes in the procurement activity	236	0.77	1.453
There have been prosecutions of procurement practitioners over cases of procurement malpractices	235	3.27	0.852
Procurement practitioners are aware of all the risks that come with violation of procurement regulations	236	4.28	0.769
Frequent trainings are usually undertaken in order to make procurement officers more accountable in their profession.	236	3.79	0.563
Frequent reviews of procurement practices are required in order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the practices	235	4.61	1.428
There is little bureaucracy within the procurement systems that give procurement practitioners room to make independent decisions	236	0.37	1.002
The county government facilitates the procurement practitioners with an enabling environment in order to be keen in their work	236	1.87	0.968
Overall mean score		2.71	1.005

The findings show that procurement officers are not normally held liable for the decisions they make as shown by a mean of 0.77 and standard deviation of 1.453. There have been prosecution of procurement officers over cases of procurement malpractices in the recent past as evident from the mean of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 0.852. Similarly, the procurement officers are usually aware of all the risks that come with the violation of procurement regulations as shown by the mean of 4.28 and a standard deviation of 0.769. The respondents agree with the view that regular trainings are usually undertaken with a view of making procurement officers more accountable in their profession as indicated by the mean of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 0.563. The respondents also agree with the view that frequent reviews of procurement practices are required in order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the practices with a mean of 4.61 and a standard deviation of 1.428. However, bureaucracy within the procurement system seems to be high thus giving procurement practitioners little room for making independent decisions as indicated by the mean of 0.37 and a standard deviation of 1.002. In relation to this, the county government of Kitui does not facilitate procurement practitioners with an enabling environment in order to be keen in their work as shown by the mean of 1.87 and a standard deviation of 0.968.

The overall mean of 2.71 and a standard deviation of 1.005 indicates that accountability is very minimal within the procurement practice within the county and therefore is not given high priority as a precursor to performance.

Table 7: Accountability and Performance

		Accountability practice	Performance in Kitui County Government
Accountability Practice	Pearson Correlation	1	.107**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	236	236
Performance in Kitui County Government	Pearson Correlation	.107**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	236	236

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

It was observed that accountability practice has a positive relationship with performance of procurement process ($r = 0.107$, $p = 0.000$). This means that an increase in accountability will likely lead to proportionate increase in the performance of procurement practitioners and vice versa.

4.3 Professionalism practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

Table 8: Descriptive analysis on Professionalism practice

Professionalism Practice Statements	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Procurement practitioners are usually involved in trainings to enhance their professional skills	236	3.63	0.372
Procurement practitioners are involved in strategic thinking for the county government	234	0.68	1.751
Impartiality in tendering process is highly encouraged in the procurement department	235	1.79	0.766
Procurement practitioners' input is a vital tool in the decision making process	236	0.72	1.641
Strong negotiation skills are vital in the tendering process within the county	236	0.84	1.569
Innovation is highly regarded in the procurement process	235	1.36	0.663
There is need to develop leadership skills for all the employees within the procurement department	235	4.81	1.568
Overall Mean Score		1.98	1.190

From the results presented on the table above, the mean of 3.63 and a standard deviation of 0.372 indicates that procurement practitioners are usually involved in trainings in order to enhance their professional skills. However, on the negative side the practitioners are not involved in strategic thinking as shown by a mean of 0.68 and a standard deviation of 1.751. the results also show that the tendering process is usually partial as shown by the mean of 1.79 and a standard deviation of 0.766. The respondents also with the view that the practitioners' input is vital in decision making process with a mean of 0.72 and a standard deviation of 1.641. In addition to this, strong negotiation skills are not usually vital in the tendering process as indicated by the mean of 0.84 and a standard deviation of 1.569. Similarly, innovation is not highly regarded as shown by the

mean of 1.36 and a standard deviation of 0.663. On the other hand, the respondents agreed with the view that there is the need to develop leadership skills for all the employees within the department as indicated by the mean of 4.81 and a standard deviation of 1.568. The overall mean score of 1.98 and standard deviation of 1.190 indicates that professionalism is not highly regarded as an important tool in enhancing professionalism within the county government of Kitui.

Table 9: Professionalism and performance

		Professionalism practice	Performance in Kitui County Government
Professionalism Practice	Pearson Correlation	1	.377**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	236	236
Performance in Kitui County Government	Pearson Correlation	.377**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	236	236

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

It was established that professionalism practice has a significant positive relationship with performance of procurement practitioners as shown by the co-efficient of ($r = 0.377$, $p = 0.000$). This mean that an increase in professionalism will lead to increased performance of the procurement practitioners and vice versa.

4.4. Competition in Procurement practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

Table 10: Descriptive analysis on Competition on Procurement practice

Competition Statements	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Procurement information is availed to all potential bidders fairly	236	0.46	0.379
There is influence on procurement practices by employees higher in the hierarchy	234	4.55	1.882
Procurement officers usually collude with contractors to influence the outcome of the evaluation process	235	4.37	0.966
Unsuccessful bidders usually get regret letters after evaluation and award of contracts to successful bidders	236	2.88	1.586
There is strict use of list of prequalified suppliers who are awarded tenders fairly according to their categories	236	2.62	1.889
There is strict use of an evaluation criteria that the evaluation committee uses in order to award tenders fairly	235	1.44	0.949
Tender opportunities are usually advertised in the media with wide circulation in order to reach a wide range of potential bidders	236	1.67	1.751
Overall Mean Score		2.57	1.343

From the results displayed in the table above, the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that procurement information is availed to all potential bidders fairly as shown by the mean of 0.46 and a standard deviation of 0.379. On the other hand, the respondents strongly agreed with the view that there is influence on procurements by seniors as shown by the mean of 4.55 and a standard deviation of 1.882. The results also indicate that there is collusion between contractors and procurement officers with a mean of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 0.966

confirming this view. However, the respondents expressed mixed reactions on the view that unsuccessful bidders usually receive regret letters through a mean of 2.88 and a standard deviation of 1.586 showing that they were neutral about this matter. Similarly neutral results were realized on the view that there is strict use of a list of prequalified suppliers who are fairly awarded tenders as indicated by the mean of 2.62 and a standard deviation of 1.889. The results also show that there is no strict use of an evaluation criteria that is used by the evaluation committee to award tenders fairly as indicated by the mean of 1.44 and a standard deviation of 0.949. Tender opportunities are also not advertised through media with wide circulation as shown by the mean of 1.67 and a standard deviation of 1.751. The overall mean score of 2.57 and a standard deviation of 1.343 shows that the respondents held mixed views about the role of competition in enhancing performance. The overall results show that they were neutral about this view.

Table 11: Correlation Analysis on Competition in Procurement

		Competition practice	Performance in Kitui County Government
Competition Practice	Pearson Correlation	1	.017**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	236	236
Performance in Kitui County Government	Pearson Correlation	.017**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	236	236

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

The correlation results shown on the indicate that there is a slightly significant positive relationship between competition practice and employees' performance as indicated by the correlation coefficient of ($r = 0.017$, $p = 0.000$). This means that increase in competition within the procurement process is likely to result to a small positive change in employee performance and vice versa.

4.5 Performance of Kitui County Government

Table 12: Descriptive analysis on Performance of Kitui County Government

Performance Statements	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Kitui county is usually ranked among the best performing counties in terms of fairness in procurement	236	1.96	0.321
Corruption is minimal in the tendering processes within the county	235	0.88	0.961
Kitui county usually gets value for money in its procurement processes	235	0.69	0.197
Suppliers are usually satisfied with the procurement processes and usually get regret messages for those who do not get the tenders.	236	1.48	0.762
Overall mean score		1.25	0.560

From the findings, a mean of 1.96 and a standard deviation of 0.321 indicates that Kitui county is not ranked among the best performing in terms of fairness in procurement. Consequently, corruption in the tendering process is high as shown by the mean of 0.88 and a standard deviation of 0.961. Similarly, the county does not get value for money in its procurement processes as shown by the mean of 0.69 and a standard deviation of 0.197. In line with this, suppliers are not satisfied with the procurement processes and also do not get regret messages for after failing to get tenders as shown by a mean of 1.48 and a standard deviation of 0.762. The overall mean of 1.25 and a standard deviation of 0.56 indicates that performance of kitui county government is below par owing to little regard to procurement processes.

The researcher also conducted a multiple linear regression analysis in order to ascertain the relationship between performance and the other four independent variables namely; Transparency, Accountability, Professionalism and Competition.

The regression equation was as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where;

β_0 = Constant

X_1 = Transparency

X_2 = Accountability

X_3 = Professionalism

X_4 = Competition

Table 13:Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of Estimate
1	0.833	0.748	0.784	0.4126

a). Predictors (Constant), Transparency, Accountability, Professionalism, Competition

b). Dependent Variable: Performance

This study employed the use of R-Square. In this case, the R-Square was used to ascertain the degree to which performance varied with transparency, accountability, professionalism and competition. From the results, the four independent variables account for (74.8%) of the factors affecting performance of procurement practitioners in Kitui County Government as shown by the coefficient of determination (R-Square). This therefore means that other factors that affect performance of procurement practitioners and were not studied in this research account for (25.8%).

Table 14:ANOVA

		ANOVA				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.68	81	1.312	43.312	.000(a)
	Residual	3.611	155			
Total		15.291	236			

a). Predictors: (constant), Transparency, Accountability, Professionalism, Competition

b). Dependent Variable: Performance

ANOVA was used to establish the significance of the regression model where f-significance value of ($p < 0.05$) was established. This indicates that the regression model has less than 0.05 probability of giving wrong prediction. Therefore, the regression model has a confidence level of above (95%) thus indicating a high reliability of the results. The model can be regarded as statistically significant in predicting how transparency, accountability, professionalism and competition affect the overall performance of procurement practitioners in Kitui County government.

Table 15: Coefficient Results

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std Error	Beta		
Constant	0.114	.188		0.613	.528
Transparency	0.581	.068	.548	8.487	.000
Accountability	0.136	.041	.267	3.672	.035
Professionalism	0.368	.043	.299	2.161	.022
Competition	0.017	.005	.241	6.876	.002

a). Predictors (Constant), Transparency, Accountability, Professionalism, Competition

b). Dependent Variable: Performance

The established regression equation was as indicated below;

$$Y = 0.114 + 0.581X_1 + 0.136X_2 + 0.368X_3 + 0.017X_4 + \varepsilon$$

The regression equation above means that holding the factors (transparency, accountability, professionalism and competition) constant, performance of procurement practitioners in Kitui County government would be 0.114. On the other hand, holding all other variables at zero, a unit increase in transparency would lead to a 0.581 increase in scores of performance. Similarly, a unit increase in accountability would lead to 0.136 increase performance. A unit increase in professionalism will lead to a 0.368 increase in performance while a unit increase in competition would lead to a 0.017 increase in performance. This infers that transparency has the greatest influence on performance, followed by professionalism, accountability and lastly competition. This study also established a significant relationship between performance and the independent variables; transparency ($p = 0.00 < 0.05$), accountability ($p = 0.035 < 0.05$), professionalism ($p = 0.022 < 0.05$) and competition ($p = 0.002 < 0.05$) as indicated by the p values.

5.0 Summary and Findings

5.1 Transparency Practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

The results indicate that transparency is not adhered to within the procurement process in the County Government of Kitui. This was contrary to both the correlation and the regression results that indicated that transparency practice has a positive and significant relationship with overall performance of procurement practitioners. This means that an increase in transparency has a high likely of leading to an increase to performance. The findings in this study indicated that procurement practitioners are not usually involved in strategic planning. Lack of strict adherence to procurement rules and regulations is one of the major setbacks to transparency in the county government of Kitui.

5.2 Accountability practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

The findings indicate that accountability in the county government of Kitui is minimal as a result of adherence to ethical practices. The findings indicate that reviews of procurement practices are required in order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in their practices. Contrary to this, bureaucracy is still prevalent in the procurement systems thus limiting the room of making independent decisions. This does not facilitate the procurement practitioners with an enabling environment to work. The findings also showed that the respondents agreed with the view that frequent trainings aimed at making them accountable in their work were undertaken.

5.3 Professionalism practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

From the findings, the respondents were clear that the county government of Kitui usually carries out trainings in order to enhance the professional skills of the procurement practitioners. It was also discovered that the

procurement officers are not usually involved in strategic planning in Kitui county Government. However, in the County Government of Kitui and many other places, the tendering process is usually predetermined and the outcome of the evaluation process directed towards well connected contractors. The procurement professionals' input is less regarded and hence the ethical standards that are supposed to be observed in the procurement process are not given their due importance. The findings also show that strong negotiation skills are not vital in the tendering process within the county.

5.4 Competition practice and Performance of Kitui County Government

From the findings, the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that procurement information is usually availed to all potential bidders fairly. This is a sign that competition in the county government of Kitui is not fair and thus information is skewed in favour of certain bidders where the procurement officers have interest in. Influence of procurement practices by employees higher in the hierarchy is also prevalent within the county government of Kitui. From the findings, it's evident that procurement officers collude with contractors in order to influence the outcome of the evaluation process. This clearly eliminates fair competition in the procurement process.

5.5 Performance of Kitui County Government

In terms of performance, the findings indicate that the County Government of Kitui is usually ranked among the best performing counties in terms of fairness in procurement. Contrary to this, the findings also indicate that the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that corruption is minimal in the tendering process within the county. This means that collusion, skewed decisions, partiality and price inflations are vices that are prevalent within the whole procurement process. The County government of Kitui does not get value for money in its procurement processes. This is evident from the respondents who strongly disagreed with this view. This is an indicator that the quality of goods and services procured does not normally meet the required standards.

6.0 Conclusion

From the findings of this research concerning the impact of transparency of performance of procurement practitioners, it can be concluded that transparency within the procurement process has continually been ignored. This has been evidenced through the lack of open competition, disregard of procurement rules and procedures, lack of involvement of procurement officers in strategic planning, rampant cases of conflict of interest and little importance attached to cost optimization.

Accountability in the county government of Kitui has been neglected according to the findings in this study. This can be seen from the fact that employees are not liable for the decisions that they make and few prosecutions of staff who contravene rules have been made despite knowing the risks that come with such acts. The frequent trainings that are carried out in order to improve on their accountability have been bearing little fruits. High bureaucracy redtape has made the chain so long such that it becomes hard to apportion blame to one person.

The county government of Kitui has been recognizing the need for professionalism skills according to the results from this study. However, when it comes to exercising these skills in the workplace, they are not given the chance. This is because their input is not usually employed in strategic thinking and also in the decision making process. The tendering process is usually partial meaning it's skewed in favour of certain suppliers and their negotiation skills are not needed. From these findings the professional skills held by the procurement officers are idle and not put into use in enhancing performance.

Competition in the tendering process within the county government of Kitui is has continued to be very much limited. This is because the results indicate that procurement information is not availed to potential bidders

fairly because of interference by senior officials. There has also been prevalence of excessive collusion between procurement officers and suppliers in order to influence the outcome of the tendering process. The results show that tenders are usually predetermined and the tender documents are designed with specific suppliers in mind.

Despite the presence of all the vices, the county government of Kitui has been ranked as one of the best performing counties in Kenya. This good performance has been achieved through the underlying cases of corruption in the tendering process. This ranking seems to disregard the means through which the perceived performance has been arrived at. It is no secret that many projects have been initiated and completed while others are in progress. What is not seen and factored is how the contractors won those tenders and the price of the tenders. The performance that is ranked is the physical manifestation of projects by not the performance of then procurement practitioners.

7.0 Recommendations

The findings indicated that there is no transparency in the county government of Kitui. This study therefore recommends that the county should endeavor to streamline the procurement processes through embracing open competition. Procurement rules and regulations should be put into place and strictly adhered in every step of the tendering process. In addition, procurement officers should state any conflict of interest and an effective reporting channel installed in order to unearth any irregularity within the process.

The findings indicate that there is no accountability in the county government of Kitui. Owing to the high bureaucracy that is present within the county government, it becomes extremely hard to apportion responsibility to any employee. Accountability becomes hard to be realized. This study therefore recommends an institution of clarity and scope of duties so that each employee can be held personally responsible for their actions. Procurement officers should be given enough room to make their own independent decisions without any undue influence from their seniors. In addition, they should adhere to the set rules and guidelines that ensure ethical processes.

The findings of this study indicate that regular trainings are carried out with the sole aim of enhancing professionalism of the employees. However, the employees only acquire theoretical skills which are not usually appreciated in the workplace. This study recommends that employees be trained regularly in their areas of specialization and later given room to exercise that what they have trained in. regular reviews of their performance should also be undertaken. Monitoring and evaluation of processes in line with the professional training is very important. Employees' input should also be considered in making strategic decisions for the county government of Kitui.

The procurement process in Kitui county does not encourage competition according to the findings of this research study. It's clear that it's opaque in nature and information is skewed in favour of some preferred suppliers. In line with this, the study recommends that all information concerning procurement opportunities be made open to all prospective suppliers. In addition, there should be no collusion between procurement officers and the contractors and also senior officers should not influence the outcome of the tendering process. The list of the prequalified suppliers should strictly be used.

Based on the findings of this study, the overall performance of the county is ranked highly based on the initiated projects but the underlying processes of these projects are marred by irregularities. This study recommends that all the procurement processes be streamlined such that the success of the projects is replicated by the fairness and transparency of the process. This is therefore the true meaning of good performance.

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