

ISSN: 1596-0773

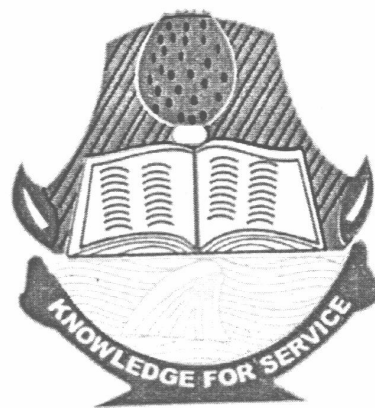
EDUCATION For TODAY

Vol. 15(2) June, 2019



*Journal of Faculty of Education
University of Calabar, Calabar - Nigeria*

EDUCATION FOR TODAY
Vol. 15(2) June, 2019
ISSN 1596-0773

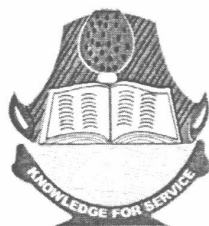


Journal of Faculty of Education
University of Calabar
Calabar – Nigeria.

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University of Calabar
Calabar - Nigeria.

ISBN: 1596-0773



Published
by
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Education For Today

Vol. 15(2) June, 2019

ISSN: 1596-0773



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From the Editor's Desk

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THE ROLE OF ICT IN REDUCING CORRUPTION IN THE PROCUREMENT OF INFORMATION MATERIALS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technology has been increasingly used by libraries and information professions in the acquisition of information materials comprises of both electronic and print in rendering information services to the satisfaction of the clientele; allocation of contracts to book vendors and bidders and in (e-procurement) of those materials. The benefits of e-procurement are many and they include: improvements in market access and competition; promotion of integrity; reduced information costs; easier access to information; and increased transparency and accountability; among others. In this context, e-procurement also has the capacity to prevent and reduce the opportunities for corruption in different stages of public library procurement. Realising this importance of ICT to guide against corruption in procurement, countries such as Albania, Georgia and South Korea have improved their procurement systems and mitigated the opportunities for corruption by publishing information on procurement online, standardising and streamlining processes, and facilitating control and oversight over the procurement cycle. However, it is observed that much has not been empirically documented in the context of library and information science research in Nigeria. Hence, the research sought to examine the role of ICT in reducing corruption in public library procurement of information materials.

Keywords: ICT, Corruption Reduction, Public Library, E-procurement, Information Materials.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology refers to technologies that facilitate by electronic means. The processing, transmission, and display of information is one of the forces shaping the twenty-first century. Through faster and cheaper communication, ICT provides the means for sweeping and reorganization of business; boosting efficiency and productivity; reducing transaction costs and barriers to entry; allowing people to seek, acquire, and share expertise, ideas, services, and technologies locally, nationally, regionally, and across the world; and generally makes markets more efficient. Globalization is its most pronounced outcome. Corruption can be caused by different sets of economic and noneconomic determinants. Economic factors impacting corruption that have been developed in the literature include variables such as

income, which is considered to be the most important determinant of corruption. The most common and obvious fact here is that in an economic buoyant countries, more resources can be allocated to combating corruption, and therefore a country's corruption level depends in part on its income level. Meanwhile, it has also been documented that high income levels increase corruption. More, corruption's economic determinants include openness to international trade. The trade openness tends to allow more international competition and that this reduces the monopoly power of domestic producers, thus reducing the scope these producers have to influence corrupt officials (Ades & DeTella, 1999). Inflation is also a main economic determinant of corruption. Obviously, higher inflation induces a deterioration of the purchasing power of

salaries, pushing officials to ask for bribes (Elbahnasawy, 2014).

Procurement of information materials in public libraries

Book acquisition is the method by which collection is build or added to the stock of library. This method may include: By purchases; Gift and donation; Exchange; Inter library loan; Deposit on copyright law (Only for National Library) (Ashikuzzaman, 2014)

1. **By purchases:** Most librarians try to purchase necessary reading materials for libraries according to libraries' annual budgets, for this, the librarian orders books from the publisher, bearing in mind which publisher gives the maximum discount; speedy service; bill in local account and which is the promptest in rectifying mistakes
- 2 **Gifts and donations:** Gifts and donation are valuable sources of enriching the library's collection. No library can purchase all reading materials, which are needed by the users. So the library relies to some extend on acquiring publication through this method. Many rising and valuable materials can be acquired through this process.
- 2 **Bequeath:** Personal collection of philanthropies, organization are sometimes willed out to libraries as a result of death or as a means of contributing to the body of knowledge by "the lovers of libraries." These collections usually include books, government publication and other relevant information materials.
- 3 **Inter-library loans:** Inter library loans means exchanging library materials between two or more libraries. In recent year there has been very large number of publications appearing in the marketing. It is generally accepted now that to speed up some sufficiency in the face of such quantities materials is absorb. This process of obtaining materials through inter-lending scheme

is an important source of collection development.

- 4 **Deposit on copy-right law:** Some information materials are deposited only for National Library on copyright law. Through only National Library can get the opportunity, but other library can also collect this type of library materials on permission of National Library.

ICT and Procurement of Information Materials: E-procurement

Information and communication technology has been increasingly used by governments in the acquisition of goods and services, the allocation of contracts to bidders and in contract management. The benefits of e-procurement are many which include: improvements in market access and competition; promotion of integrity; reduced information costs; easier access to information; and increased transparency and accountability, among others. In this context, e-procurement also has the capacity to prevent and reduce the opportunities for corruption in the different stages of public procurement.

The establishment of e-procurement as a stand-alone reform is unlikely to bring about positive transformational results. Countries have to invest in coherent legal frameworks, training and oversight capacity to ensure that the potential benefits of e-procurement in terms of reducing corruption are exploited to their maximum.

The Role of Technology in Public Procurement

Corruption risks in public procurement

Public procurement is an operational area with high corruption risks as the large amounts of funds involved and the frequently high levels of discretion and bureaucracy provide both incentives and opportunities for rent-seeking behavior (Transparencia Mexicana 2012). The OECD estimated that the money lost through corruption amounts to between 20 and 25 per cent of the procurement budgets (OECD 2013). In addition to monetary loss, corruption in public procurement also distorts competition, reduces the quality and

safety of public projects and purchases, and erodes society's trust in governments (Transparency International 2014).

Using technology in public procurement

Information and communication technologies have been increasingly used by governments across the world as part of procurement reform processes. This so-called e-procurement is defined as the use of any internet-based inter-organisational information system that automates and integrates any parts of procurement process in order to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability in the wider public sector by governments to conduct procurement-related tasks, such as the acquisition of goods and services, and the allocation of contracts to bidders ((Vaidya, 2007 & Neupane et al., 2014).

There are several types of e-procurement, including e-tendering, e-auctions, and contract management databases (OECD, 2011). Each of them aims to address issues that are also seen as problematic from a corruption risk perspective in the different stages of the procurement process, namely, (i) contracting process, covering the initial needs assessment, budget allocation and initial market research through the preparation of the tender, and (ii) evaluation of applications and (iii) award of contracts.

In general, the application of e-procurement systems to public procurement has become the focus of attention for various reasons, most notably because of its potential to enhance efficiency and to increase the speed and quality of the purchasing processes. This answer analyses the role of e-procurement in enhancing transparency and accountability and reducing corruption, and provides an overview of how e-procurement was designed and implemented in three different contexts.

E-Procurement and Reduced Rate of Corruption

Several benefits of e-procurement, including: improvements in market access and competition, promotion of integrity, reduction of costs of information, easy access to information, and increased transparency and

accountability, among others. With regard to corruption, Schapper (2007) stresses that "the strength of e-procurement in the anti-corruption agenda arises from this capacity to greatly reduce the cost and increase the accessibility of information as well as automate practices prone to corruption".

Standardizing and establishing the automation of processes

Non-standard bidding documents can create space for manipulation and lead to opaque decision-making. In order to reduce the opportunities for corruption, it is essential that administrative procedures and decisions happen in full compliance with the law, in a transparent manner and with limited discretionary decision-making powers (Transparency International 2014). E-procurement can facilitate if designed and implemented in a manner that rules and procedures are standardized and consistent, increasing predictability and easy access to bidding documents and information about the process. For instance, the standardization followed by the automation of the basic steps of the bidding process, such as the distribution of forms and the acceptance of documents, limits the opportunity for public officials to manipulate the process or request bribes and kickbacks. (Pictet & Bollinger, 2008; Iqbal & Seo 2008; Martini 2012).

Increasing access to information

One of the main benefits of e-procurement systems highlighted in the literature is the improved accessibility to key documents and information. More transparency and access to information help to improve fairness, efficiency and competition as well as reducing the opportunities for corruption (Transparency International 2014).

Increasing competition and avoiding collusion

Transparency in public procurement processes may influence the level of competition in the market, such as the number and quality of bidders. E-procurement system therefore may solve several of the problems often identified by companies wishing to participate in public procurement processes,

such as favouritism, where privileged information is distributed to firms related to or in agreement with procuring officials (Amaral, Saussier, Yvrande-Billon 2009). Research has shown that e-procurement, transparency and ease of access to information increase the participation of "honest" firms (Boehm & Olaya 2006).

Facilitating contract oversight

After the contract is awarded, the risks of corruption and mismanagement are numerous. The specifications of the contract can be altered by public officials to benefit the awarded supplier, invoices may not be paid on time, the service may not be performed/delivered according to the original specifications (e.g. bad quality material), there may be delays in the delivery of goods and costs overrun, etc. (Croom & Jones, 2007; Transparency International, 2014).

Improving oversight and audit capabilities

According to Neupane et al. (2012), public e-procurement is particularly important in improving the government's audit trail capabilities, which in turn can help to increase transparency and accountability and detect corruption. Electronic systems may allow the detection and prevention of corruption in public procurement if data on tenders, bidders and contractors are collected and stored in a structured way and is accessible for investigation and analysis. For instance, this data could allow ex-ante monitoring and ex-post analysis of indicators of corruption (e.g. number of contracts awarded to the same bidder, number of bidders, etc.), and data mining techniques could be used to detect anomalies in the data, revealing potential cases of fraud or corruption (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2013).

Enhancing horizontal accountability

E-procurement may also increase and improve opportunities for citizens, the media, civil society and even bidders themselves to monitor procurement processes (Transparency International 2014). The media, academia and civil society have been making use of the data available in e-procurement portals to

investigate and expose potential corruption cases. For instance, Transparency International Slovakia created a web portal to make the information published by the Slovakian government more easily accessible and encourage social control.

Use of ICT to guide against corruption in procurement

Adopting ICT as a Control measure of Corruption

The literature shows that ICT adoption can be an efficient way to remove barriers that hinder economic development in many countries (Piatkowski, 2006). Many empirical studies illustrate that ICT have a major role in public management reform since it improve the quality of public service delivery while reducing time and cost (Basu, 2004). For example, ICT helps people to find jobs and public services in general to function more efficiently (Brueckner, 2005), helping in the same way in establishing a public engagement and achieving community development (Hammerman, 2005). From purely economic point of view, it has been established that ICT adoption improves public productivity (Yang, & Rho, 2007), efficiency (Von Waldenberg, 2004)), and good governance (Basu, 2004).

In this regard, it has been reported that many governments have reduced their level of corruption in the public sector by improving the effectiveness of their internal work and the relationships with their citizens (Bhatnagar, 2000.). Improvement of these relationships can be achieved through the use of ICT in enhancing reform initiatives to reduce corrupt acts and behaviors (Shim, & Eom, 2009). By doing so, governments commit themselves to allowing citizens to track and monitor both the progress of their applications and the behavior of officials. The authors stress that the effectiveness of ICT in curbing corruption requires a particular set of social attitudes. For example, increasing citizens' participation can significantly reduce bureaucracy and promote efficiency and transparency (Andersen, Henriksen, Medaglia, Danziger, Sannarnes & Enemærke, 2010; Shim & Eom, 2009; Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010).

According to Grönlund (2010) ICT can be an effective tool in curbing corruption mainly when it is used to automate administrative actions, to identify anomalies and under performance, to raise awareness by informing the public about their rights and thus prevent arbitrary treatment, to ensure detection of corruption when it is used to monitor networks and individuals, to report and punish violations, to record information about documented cases of corruption, and to promote ethical attitudes. ICT can therefore help to reduce the abuse of power by public officials and monitor their actions and any arbitrary behavior at a low cost. ICT can also be used to report abuses and place administrative complaints through mobile applications, hotlines, and websites.

Internet and mobile technologies are effective tools in reducing the cost of collecting, distributing, and accessing government information (Roberts 2006). According to Wellman et al. (Wellman, Hasse., Witte & Hampton, 2001), "the low cost of internet services compared to off-line measures encourages people to use email and blogs to contact their relatives and friends." Moreover, by connecting isolated and disadvantaged people, ICT build bridges and create better opportunities for these groups (Lin 2001). In the end, Internet use improves information access and eases information dissemination, which improves the level of awareness and makes the detection of corruption easier (Goel, Nelson & Naretta, (2012). The Internet offers new opportunities in curbing corruption as it can create instant social interaction and the development of citizens' participation, especially when traditional media are inefficient, controlled by the state or by lobbies, or when there is not enough media coverage. Mobile technology adoption is also an effective tool in combating corruption by allowing citizens to report corrupt acts and officials. Their effectiveness emerges when scenes of corruption and conversations with official asking for bribes are recorded and documented.

Challenges Faced by Anti-Corruption Policies Using ICT Adoption

It is largely established now that ICT can serve as anti-corruption tools and that their diffusion can assure a sustained culture of transparency. However, many obstacles can hinder their effectiveness. A main challenge which may restrict the positive impact of ICT is the relative lack of access to these technologies in developing countries. Despite their worldwide expansion, many countries still have no or limited access to information technologies. There may be little availability of computers, poor ICT literacy at government level, lack of Internet access for some population segments, distrusted ICT providers, and unsuitable technological infrastructure.

Filtration of Internet content by government could also be considered as a real challenge to anti-corruption strategies since the amount of accessible information can significantly change. Some countries filter and block websites not only for security but also for political and social reasons, for instance, blocking information linked to human rights and free expression, or on health and religious grounds (Zittrain & Palfrey, 2008). For example, the creation of firewalls, filters and blocking of web domains can provide governments with users'-generated content and browsing histories, indicating their social and political beliefs and thus infringing users' personal confidentiality. This of course could reduce potential criminal behavior by controlling Internet surfing but can induce a greater control and central monitoring of the Internet, especially when Internet providers are unable or unwilling to take the required actions to protect the rights of their customers. Many countries, mainly in East Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and central Africa, have filtered or still limit the Internet access (Zittrain & Palfrey, 2008).

Furthermore, the potential of ICT as an effective tool to help in curbing corruption depends on several infrastructural, social and economic factors, and on political willingness to promote deep anti-corruption strategies. Easy access, low costs, and confidentiality are all essential for effective ICT-driven strategies (Hellström, 2008).

Another challenge that could restrict the effectiveness of ICT in curbing inflation is

purely juridical. Although legislation allows the use of digital evidence in corruption cases, judges are sometimes reluctant to accept it. Obviously, corrupt acts will continue to occur with impunity in these conditions.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the e-procurement platform is capable of streamlining procurement processes, increase competition, limit the discretionary power of procurement officials, enhance transparency and, in turn, reduce the opportunities for corruption. With e-procurement, library can enhance the role of library users and the media in overseeing the public library procurement process. For instance, the information disclosed on the e-procurement portal can be published on another website in a user-friendly manner where the public and the users at large can search, monitor and analyse the contracts (Huter & Chaturian 2014).

Recommendations

1. ICT diffusion strategies should be supported by a legal framework, administrative, institutional reforms, and a political will to combat corruption.
2. Government bodies and institutions involved in combating corruption must bear in mind battle ready to effectively utilize Information and Communication Technologies to reducing rent-seeking activities that could give the possibility in abusing these technologies for corrupt ends.
3. Governments involved in ICT anti-corruption strategies should also assess the risk in using these strategies in public administrations, in order to prevent any abuse of ICT.
4. In this regard, governmental bodies and institutions should be created to collect statistics, date, report of any abuse, and respond accordingly.

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