



ETHICAL PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITY PROCUREMENT PROCESSES AS CORRELATES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study investigated ethical practices in university procurement processes as correlates of sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to investigate ethical practices in university procurement processes as correlates of sustainable development of public universities. The design adopted for this study was the correlational research design. The population comprised all 208 personnel involved in procurement-related activities across the three public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. The entire population was sampled using census sampling technique. Data were collected questionnaires titled “Ethical Practices in University Procurement Processes Questionnaire (EPUPPQ)” and “Public Universities Sustainable Development Questionnaire (PUSDQ).” The instruments were structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instruments were validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. Cronbach Alpha was to determine the reliability of the instruments and the result yielded 0.87. The data collected were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that there is a very strong positive significant correlation between accountability of procurement officers and fairness in vendor selection with sustainable development of public universities in Benue State. The study concludes that ethical practices in university procurement processes have potential to enhance sustainable development of public universities. The study recommends among others that university management and governing councils should establish and enforce strict accountability frameworks for procurement officers, including routine audits, transparent documentation systems, and mandatory reporting procedures.



Keywords: *Ethical practices, procurement process, accountability, fairness, vendor selection, sustainable development*

Introduction

The growing global demand for sustainable development of public universities has gained momentum in recent times, driven by the pressing need to produce competent graduates who can actively contribute to reversing the declining socio-economic conditions of nations, particularly in the face of recurring global economic recessions that threaten development efforts worldwide (UNESCO, 2021). However, in many developing countries, including Nigeria, public universities remain underdeveloped due to poor governance, inadequate funding and weak adherence to ethical standards in institutional processes (Adebayo & Ibrahim, 2020). This underdevelopment has manifested in dilapidated infrastructure, low staff morale and a decline in the quality of education, ultimately undermining the employability and productivity of graduates (Okebukola, 2018). According to Ezekwesili and Danjuma (2019), ensuring sustainable development in the public sector, including public universities, requires deliberate actions such as transparent leadership, effective accountability mechanisms and importantly, the enforcement of ethical practices in university procurement processes. These measures promote institutional integrity and efficient use of resources, thereby advancing the sustainable development of public universities in Nigeria.

Sustainable development of public universities refers to the steady advancement of university systems in ways that ensure present and future educational needs are met through efficient resource use, institutional accountability, and academic excellence (UNESCO, 2021). It is considered essential for producing graduates capable of addressing national development challenges. However, ensuring sustainable development in public universities across Nigeria remains a significant challenge. Musa and Alabi (2019) argue that Nigerian universities continue to retrogress in quality due to the high cost of contract execution, poor project delivery, procurement fraud and the diversion of funds. These problems appear to weaken infrastructural development and hinder long-term institutional growth. Ezekwesili and Danjuma (2019) posit that such setbacks persist due to the failure of university administrators to comply with established ethical procurement practices, thereby fostering corruption, resource wastage, and a lack of transparency, all of which obstruct sustainable development efforts in public universities.

Procurement processes refer to the systematic procedures through which organizations acquire goods, services, and works from external sources to achieve their operational goals. In public universities, procurement involves activities such as tendering, evaluation, contract award, and project supervision for infrastructure, instructional materials, and services (Musa & Alabi, 2019). For these processes to contribute meaningfully to institutional growth, university administrators must ensure strict compliance with ethical practices such as transparency, accountability, fairness, and value for money. Ezekwesili and Danjuma (2019) posit that compliance with ethical practices in procurement processes is critical for minimizing corruption, promoting efficient resource use, and ultimately supporting the sustainable development of public universities.

Ethical practices in procurement refer to the application of moral principles and professional standards that guide the conduct of procurement officers and ensure fairness, transparency, and integrity in the acquisition of goods, services and works. These practices include accountability, fairness in vendor selection, transparency in tendering processes, avoidance of conflict of interest, and strict adherence to due process (Okoro & Adeyemi, 2021). When university procurement processes are ethically driven, they promote trust, ensure value for money, and enhance the timely delivery of quality infrastructure and services. Nwankwo and Salisu (2020) suggest that compliance with these ethical standards reduces financial mismanagement, curbs corruption and fosters effective resource utilization all of which are essential for the sustainable development of public universities. Ezekwesili and Danjuma (2019) aver that the accountability of procurement officers serves as the foundation for transparency in procurement processes, which in turn strengthens institutional integrity and supports the sustainable development of public universities.

Accountability in procurement refers to the obligation of procurement officers to answer for their actions, decisions and use of resources in accordance with established rules and ethical standards. It entails maintaining proper records, adhering to due process, providing justifications for procurement choices, and being answerable to oversight bodies (Ishola & Ezeani, 2020). In public universities, accountability of procurement officers helps ensure that funds allocated for infrastructure, instructional materials and services are used judiciously and transparently, leading to improved service delivery and sustainable institutional development (Ajayi & Musa, 2021). When procurement officers are held accountable, the risks of contract inflation, procurement fraud and project abandonment are reduced, thereby promoting effective resource utilization and institutional credibility. Findings by Ajayi and Musa (2021) revealed that universities with stronger accountability frameworks in procurement recorded higher levels of infrastructural growth and operational efficiency. Similarly, Ishola and Ezeani (2020) found that procurement accountability correlates positively with transparency and long-term development outcomes in Nigerian public universities. As accountability strengthens oversight and discourages unethical practices, it also creates an enabling environment for fairness in vendor selection, another key driver of sustainable development in public universities.

Fairness in vendor selection refers to the impartial and equitable process of identifying and awarding contracts to suppliers based strictly on merit, competence, and compliance with procurement criteria (Ibrahim & Ogundele, 2020). This principle requires that all prospective vendors be given equal opportunities to compete without bias or favoritism, ensuring that procurement outcomes are based on value rather than personal or political influence. In public universities, adherence to fairness in vendor selection enhances competition, promotes efficiency, and increases the likelihood of engaging qualified vendors who deliver timely and high-quality services. Studies have shown that fairness in vendor selection contributes significantly to institutional performance and credibility. Ibrahim and Ogundele (2020) found that universities that implement fair vendor selection processes experience fewer procurement disputes and benefit from improved project delivery and institutional growth. Similarly, Abah and Danladi (2021) observed that fairness promotes cost-effectiveness and accountability, which are critical drivers of sustainable development in tertiary institutions. These findings suggest that fairness in vendor selection not only ensures ethical compliance but also reinforces institutional integrity and supports optimal resource utilization for the sustainable development of public universities, particularly in Benue State, Nigeria.

Public universities in Benue State, Nigeria, require strengthened accountability among procurement officers and enhanced fairness in vendor selection to achieve sustainable institutional growth. These ethical practices are fundamental to effective resource management, transparency, and institutional credibility (Ishola & Ezeani, 2020). However, there are indications that such practices are not consistently upheld across procurement processes, which may be contributing to the slow pace of development in the university system within the state. In comparison with their counterparts across Nigeria, public universities in Benue often lag behind in infrastructural development and service delivery. As ethical lapses continue to hinder effective procurement outcomes, the need to explore the relationship between ethical practices and sustainable development becomes increasingly relevant. It is based on this background that the researcher was inspired to investigate *ethical practices in university procurement processes as correlates of sustainable development of Public Universities in Benue State*.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Nigeria are expected to serve as centres of innovation, manpower development and national transformation. However, the development of these institutions, particularly in Benue State, appears to have stalled in recent years. Many public universities in the State continue to face persistent challenges such as poor infrastructure, delayed service delivery, mismanagement of funds, persistent delays in executing capital projects and substandard project execution ultimately leading to declining educational standards, poor learning environments and loss of public confidence. These challenges appear to stem from unethical practices in university procurement processes, particularly lack of accountability among procurement officers and unfair vendor selection, which

seems to continually undermine the pace and sustainability of development in public universities across Benue State.

The researcher observe that in many public universities in Benue State, procurement officers are often not held accountable for their decisions, leading to issues such as contract inflation, project abandonment and poor resource utilization. Furthermore, vendor selection processes in some universities in most cases are marred by nepotism and favoritism, which undermine transparency and limit competition. These unethical practices not only waste public funds but also slow down institutional growth and development in public universities in Benue State. It is against these backdrops that the researcher was motivated to investigate ethical practices in university procurement processes as correlates of sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate ethical practices in university procurement processes as correlates of sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the correlation between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. assess the correlation between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the correlation between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What is the correlation between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant correlation between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant correlation between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The design adopted for this study was the correlational survey research design. The population comprised all 208 personnel involved in procurement-related activities across the three public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. The entire population was selected using census sampling technique, which was adopted because the population was relatively small and manageable, and it was necessary to gather comprehensive and representative data from all stakeholders directly involved in the procurement processes of the universities. Data were collected using two researcher-developed questionnaires titled “Ethical Practices in University Procurement Processes Questionnaire (EPUPPQ)” and “Public Universities Sustainable Development Questionnaire (PUSDQ).” The EPUPPQ was structured in two clusters: Cluster A (Items 1–5) focused on accountability of procurement officers, while Cluster B (Items 6–10) focused on fairness in vendor selection. The PUSDQ consisted of 10 items that elicited responses on the sustainable development of public universities. Both instruments used a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, chosen to provide respondents with a range of options to express their level of agreement. The instruments were validated by three experts: two in educational management from the Department of Educational Foundations, and one in measurement and evaluation from the Department of Mathematics and Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, Rev. Fr. Moses



Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. A reliability test was conducted for the instruments using Cronbach Alpha and reliability coefficients of 0.89 and 0.91 were found for PUSDQ and EPUPPQ respectively with a grand index of 0.90. The data collected from the study were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule in answering the research questions was that the closer the calculated correlation coefficient (r) is to +1 or -1, the stronger the relationship between the variables; a positive value indicates a direct relationship while a negative value indicates an inverse relationship. The strength of the correlation was interpreted using the guideline by Nworgu (2015): 0.00 – 0.19 = Very weak correlation, 0.20 – 0.39 = Weak correlation, 0.40 – 0.59 = Moderate correlation, 0.60 – 0.79 = Strong correlation, 0.80 – 1.00 = Very strong correlation. In testing the hypotheses, the decision rule was that if the calculated p-value is less than or equal to 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected; otherwise, it was not rejected. PPMC was adopted because it is suitable for determining the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables, making it appropriate for assessing the relationship between ethical procurement practices and the sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the correlation between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 1:

Correlation of Accountability of Procurement Officers and Sustainable Development of Public Universities in Benue State, Nigeria

Variables		$\bar{X}$	SD	Accountability of Procurement Officers	Sustainable Development of Public Universities
Accountability of Procurement Officers	Pearson Correlation	2.97	0.85	1	.82**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N			208	208
Sustainable Development of Public Universities	Pearson Correlation	2.96	0.87	.82**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	
	N			208	208

Source: Field Survey Results (2025).

The result in Table 1 shows that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities is 0.82. Since the value of $r = 0.82$ falls within the range of **0.80–1.00**, it indicates a very **strong positive correlation**. This implies that an increase in the level of accountability among procurement officers is associated with a corresponding improvement in the sustainable development of public universities in Benue State.

Research Question 2: What is the correlation between Fairness in Vendor Selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 2:

Correlation of Fairness in Vendor Selection and Sustainable Development of Public Universities in Benue State, Nigeria

Variables		$\bar{X}$	SD	Fairness in Vendor Selection	Sustainable Development of Public Universities
Fairness in Vendor Selection	Pearson Correlation	2.87	0.86	1	.76**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N			208	208
Sustainable Development of Public Universities	Pearson Correlation	2.85	0.87	.76**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	
	N			208	208

Source: Field Survey Results (2025).

The result in Table 2 shows that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities is 0.76. Since the value of $r = 0.76$ falls within the range of 0.60–0.79, it indicates a strong positive correlation. This implies that as fairness in the selection of vendors increases, the sustainable development of public universities in Benue State is also likely to improve. In essence, the more transparent and equitable the vendor selection process is, the greater the likelihood of advancing sustainable development within these institutions.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant correlation between accountability of procurement officers and **sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria**

Table 3:

Significant Correlation of Accountability of Procurement Officers and Sustainable Development of Public Universities in Benue State, Nigeria

Variables		Accountability of Procurement Officers	Sustainable Development of Public Universities
Accountability of Procurement Officers	Pearson Correlation	1	.82**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	208	208
Sustainable Development of Public Universities	Pearson Correlation	.82**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	208	208



* Correlation coefficient is significant at $p < 0.05$; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's Field Survey Results (2024)

The result in Table 3 shows that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities is $r = 0.82$, with a significance value of $p = .000$. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State was rejected. This implies that there is a very strong positive significant correlation between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State.

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant correlation between fairness in vendor selection and **sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria**

Table 4:

Significant Correlation of Fairness in Vendor Selection and Sustainable Development of Public Universities in Benue State, Nigeria

Variables			Fairness in Vendor Selection	Sustainable Development of Public Universities
Fairness in Vendor Selection	Pearson Correlation	1	.76**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N	208	208	
Sustainable Development of Public Universities	Pearson Correlation	.76**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	208	208	

* Correlation coefficient is significant at $p < 0.05$; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Results (2024)

The result in Table 3 shows that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities is $r = 0.76$, with a significance value of $p = .000$. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State was rejected. This implies that there is a strong positive significant correlation between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents discussion of findings as follows:

The first finding of the study showed that there is a very strong positive significant correlation between accountability of procurement officers and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State. This implies that as procurement officers become more accountable in their responsibilities through proper record-keeping, adherence to established procedures and transparent

justification of procurement decisions, the likelihood of achieving sustainable development within public universities increases. This finding corroborates the work of Ajayi and Musa (2021), who reported that universities with stronger accountability frameworks in procurement recorded higher levels of infrastructural development and operational efficiency. It also aligns with the findings of Ishola and Ezeani (2020), whose study established that procurement accountability correlates positively with transparency and long-term development outcomes in Nigerian public universities. In essence, this study affirms that strengthening accountability mechanisms among procurement officers contributes meaningfully to the sustainable development of public universities in Benue State by fostering transparency, responsible spending, and improved service delivery.

The second finding of the study revealed that there is a strong positive significant correlation between fairness in vendor selection and sustainable development of public universities in Benue State. This implies that when public universities ensure fairness in the selection of vendors by adhering to transparent, competitive and merit-based processes, the likelihood of achieving sustainable development in universities increases. Fairness in vendor selection helps minimize procurement irregularities, encourages healthy competition and ensures that quality goods and services are delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner. This finding supports the study by Ibrahim and Ogundele (2020), who found that universities that implement fair vendor selection processes experience fewer procurement disputes and benefit from improved project delivery and institutional growth. The finding also aligns with the work of Abah and Danladi (2021), who observed that fairness in vendor selection promotes cost-effectiveness and accountability, both of which are critical drivers of sustainable development in tertiary institutions. Therefore, this finding affirms that ensuring fairness in vendor selection enhances procurement efficiency and contributes significantly to the sustainable development of public universities in Benue State

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that ethical practices in university procurement, particularly accountability of procurement officers and fairness in vendor selection have a strong positive and significant relationship with the sustainable development of public universities in Benue State, Nigeria. This underscores the importance of transparent and responsible procurement processes as key drivers of institutional growth and long-term development in public universities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. University management and governing councils should establish and enforce strict accountability frameworks for procurement officers, including routine audits, transparent documentation systems, and mandatory reporting procedures.
2. Public universities should adopt and strictly adhere to fair and competitive vendor selection processes by using open bidding systems, objective evaluation criteria, and third-party oversight.

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