

Determinants of Compliance with Public Procurement Laws and Regulations in Public Secondary Schools in Kabwe District, Zambia

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Abstract

Public procurement systems are governed by laws and regulations designed to promote transparency, accountability, and value for money in the use of public resources. Despite these frameworks, compliance challenges remain prevalent in many public institutions. This study examined the determinants of compliance with public procurement laws in public secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. Specifically, the study examined the influence of awareness, professionalism, and ethical conduct on compliance with procurement laws and regulations. A quantitative research design was employed, and data was collected using structured questionnaires administered to 122 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. The respondents included Head teachers, Deputy Head teachers, procurement officers, school accountants, Heads of Department, and Parent Teacher Association representatives from selected public secondary schools. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, and hypotheses were tested using the one sample chi-square test at 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that awareness alone did not have a statistically significant influence on compliance. In contrast, professionalism and ethical conduct demonstrated a statistically significant positive influence on compliance with public procurement laws and regulations. The study contributes to the understanding of procurement compliance by demonstrating that professional competence and ethical behaviour are critical determinants of compliance in public sector institutions. It recommends strengthening professional training, certification, and ethical oversight mechanisms within the education sector to improve compliance with procurement regulations.

1. Introduction

Public procurement plays a critical role in ensuring the efficient utilization of public resources and the delivery of essential goods and services in the public sector. In the education sector, effective procurement systems are vital for the timely acquisition of learning materials, infrastructure maintenance, and other support services necessary for quality education delivery. In Zambia, public procurement is regulated by the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020, which establishes a comprehensive legal and institutional framework to promote transparency, accountability, fairness, and value for money in the use of public funds. As public spending entities, secondary schools are required to comply with these legal provisions when procuring goods and services.

Despite the existence of this regulatory framework, compliance with procurement laws remains a significant challenge in many public institutions. Evidence from the Zambia Public Procurement Authority report indicates persistent irregularities in procurement practices within the education sector, including incomplete documentation, limited competition among suppliers, and weak asset management systems (ZPPA, 2022). Similar challenges have been observed in other developing countries, where weak institutional capacity, limited technical expertise, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms contribute to non-compliance (Thai, 2008; Gelderman et al., 2006). In the context of public secondary schools, procurement processes are managed by committees composed of administrative and teaching staff who may not possess specialised knowledge or training in procurement procedures, thereby increasing the likelihood of procedural errors and regulatory violations.

Recent audit findings further underscore the seriousness of the problem in public secondary schools. According to an internal audit by the Ministry of Finance and National Planning reported in the Zambia Monitor (April 11, 2024), between January 2022 and June 2023, a total of K356,040,228.12 was mismanaged across selected schools in six districts per province. This level of financial mismanagement indicates significant non-compliance with procurement regulations and highlights the risks associated with weak procurement oversight. In addition, the Minister of Education raised concerns about the misuse of government grants in schools, citing issues such as unauthorised procurements, tender splitting, unaccounted stock, and wasteful expenditure (News Digger, July 14, 2023). The implications of procurement non-compliance extend beyond financial losses. As noted by Consumer Units & Trust Society (2021), Poor procurement processes affect the quality of education and compromises the quality of public education for citizens. If these challenges are not addressed, continued mismanagement of public funds may hinder socio-economic development and weaken public trust in government institutions.

Although previous studies, such as Chiputa (2017) and reports from the Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA), have largely addressed non-compliance, corruption, and inefficiencies at national and ministerial levels in Zambia. However, despite these insights, there remains limited empirical research on the specific factors that influence compliance with procurement regulations within public secondary schools in Zambia. This study addresses this gap by examining the determinants of compliance with public procurement laws and regulations in public secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. In particular, the study focuses on three key determinants of compliance: awareness of procurement regulations, professionalism and ethical conduct of procurement officers.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Empirically, it provides context-specific evidence on procurement compliance within the education sector in Zambia. Practically, the findings offer insights for policymakers, the Zambia Public Procurement Authority, and the Ministry of Education in designing targeted interventions to strengthen compliance mechanisms. By identifying key determinants of compliance, the study supports efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficient utilization of public resources in public secondary schools.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public procurement and compliance

Public procurement refers to the acquisition of goods, works, and services by governments and public institutions using public resources. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), public procurement plays a critical role in ensuring efficient use of public funds and supporting public service delivery. Because procurement involves significant public expenditure, governments establish regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability, and value for money. However, despite the existence of such frameworks, many countries continue to face challenges related to procurement inefficiencies and non-compliance (Thai, 2008).

Compliance in public procurement refers to adherence to established procurement laws, regulations, procedures, and ethical standards guiding procurement processes (Thai, 2001; Nsereko et al, 2023). It ensures that procurement activities are conducted in accordance with prescribed legal and contractual obligations throughout the procurement cycle. Compliance is essential for promoting fairness, transparency, and effective management of public resources (Transparency International, 2020). However, despite the existence of regulatory frameworks, many countries continue to experience procurement inefficiencies and non-compliance often linked to weak institutional capacity, poor enforcement mechanisms, and governance challenges (Thai, 2008). This suggests that the existence of procurement laws alone is insufficient to guarantee compliance.

2.2 Awareness and compliance with public procurement laws and regulations

Awareness of procurement laws and procedures is widely recognized as a key factor influencing compliance. Empirical studies in developing countries indicate that limited knowledge of procurement regulations among public officials contributes significantly to procedural irregularities. For example, studies in Kenya found that procurement committee members in public schools often lack adequate knowledge of procurement regulations, leading to procedural irregularities and non-compliance (Migosi et al., 2013; Onyinkwa, 2013). Similarly, research in Uganda found that limited knowledge of procurement regulations among school stakeholders contributed to low levels of compliance with procurement laws (Komakech and Maychyo, 2015).

Scholars argue that limited familiarity with procurement regulations may lead procurement officials to rely on personal discretion rather than established legal procedures (De Boer and Telgen, 1998). In the Zambian context, Chiputa (2017) emphasizes the importance of continuous sensitization and training to enhance awareness of procurement regulations among public officials. However, existing literature also suggests that awareness alone may not guarantee compliance, as other factors such as institutional capacity and ethical behavior may also influence procurement practices.

2.3 Professionalism and procurement compliance

Professionalism in procurement refers to the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to effectively manage procurement processes. Procurement professionals are expected to possess specialized training and technical expertise to interpret procurement regulations and implement procurement procedures effectively (Dobler and Burt, 1996). It also involves adherence to ethical standards and regulatory requirements, which are essential for ensuring compliance and accountability in procurement processes (Sarawa and Mas'ud, 2020).

Studies indicate that inadequate professional capacity among procurement personnel often contributes to procurement irregularities and non-compliance (Arrowsmith et al., 2000). Empirical studies in Africa have shown that professional training and competency significantly influence procurement performance and compliance. For example, Mrope (2017) found that professional competence accounted for a substantial proportion of procurement performance in public institutions in Tanzania. Similarly, Chiputa (2017) notes that lack of trained procurement personnel in Zambia contributes to procedural errors and regulatory violations. Supporting this view, Jama, Mwanza and Mwanaumo (2024) identify lack of technical expertise, inadequate resources such as human and financial capacity, and lack of employee training in procurement systems as key constraints affecting effective participation in procurement processes. These findings suggest that strengthening professional capacity is essential for improving compliance with procurement regulations. However, challenges remain in many public institutions where procurement responsibilities are assigned to individuals without formal procurement training, particularly in decentralized procurement entities such as schools.

2.4 Ethical conduct and compliance in procurement

Ethical conduct is another important determinant of procurement compliance. Procurement ethics emphasize principles such as integrity, transparency, fairness, and accountability in the management of public resources. According to Arrowsmith (2018), ethical procurement practices are critical for preventing corruption and promoting fair competition among suppliers.

Empirical studies indicate that unethical behavior among procurement officials contributes significantly to procurement non-compliance. For instance, studies in Kenya identified favoritism, bribery, and conflict of interest as major drivers of non-compliance in public procurement processes (Kangogo and Kiptoo, 2013; Onyinkwa, 2013). Similar findings were reported in Zambia, where Chiputa (2017) identified bribery, disclosure of confidential procurement information, and failure to declare conflicts of interest as major ethical challenges affecting procurement compliance.

While regulatory frameworks provide formal guidelines for procurement processes, their effectiveness largely depends on the ethical behaviour of personnel involved in procurement. Weak ethical standards and lack of accountability mechanisms can lead to deliberate violations of procurement laws, suggesting that compliance is not only a technical issue but also a behavioural and governance challenge.

2.5 Research gap

Although existing studies have examined procurement challenges in public institutions, most have focused on national-level organizations and central government entities. There is limited empirical research specifically addressing procurement compliance in public secondary schools, particularly within the Zambian context. Furthermore, while previous studies have identified awareness, professionalism, and ethics as important determinants of compliance, there is insufficient evidence on how these factors interact and influence compliance at the school level. This represents both a contextual and empirical gap in the literature. This study addresses this gap by examining the influence of awareness, professionalism, and ethical conduct on compliance with public procurement laws and regulations in public secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia.

2.6 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by institutional and principal–agent theoretical perspectives, which explains how regulatory structures and delegated authority influence compliance behavior in public organizations. Institutional theory suggests that organizational behavior is shaped by formal rules, norms, and regulatory pressures within the institutional environment (Scott, 2014). In the context of public procurement, laws and regulations create coercive pressures that encourage organizations to adhere to established procedures. In Zambia, procurement activities in public institutions are governed by the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020, which provides legal guidelines aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the use of public resources.

The principal–agent theory further explains the relationship between the government (principal) and public officials responsible for procurement activities (agents) (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this relationship, procurement officers are expected to act in the interest of the government and the public by ensuring compliance with procurement laws and procedures. However, information asymmetry, weak monitoring systems, and conflicting interests may lead to non-compliance.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes procurement compliance as the dependent variable influenced by three key independent variables: awareness of procurement regulations, professionalism of procurement officers, and ethical conduct in procurement processes. Higher levels of awareness, professional competence, and ethical behavior are expected to enhance compliance with procurement laws and regulations in public secondary schools.

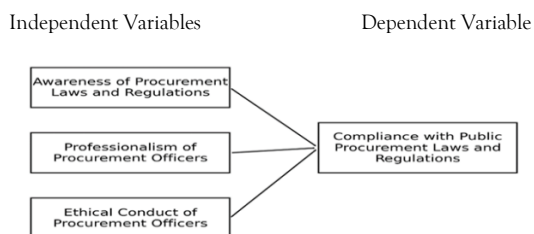


Figure 1 below shows the Conceptual Framework of the Study:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationship between awareness, professionalism, ethical conduct, and compliance with public procurement laws and regulations.

Source: Author (2024).

2.7 Research Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses to examine the influence of awareness, professionalism, and ethical conduct on compliance with public procurement laws and regulations in public secondary schools.

H1: Awareness of procurement laws and procedures has a significant positive influence on compliance with public procurement law and regulations in public secondary schools.

H2: Professionalism of procurement officers has a significant positive influence on compliance with public procurement law and regulations in public secondary schools.

H3: Ethical conduct of procurement officers has a significant positive influence on compliance with public procurement law and regulations in public secondary schools.

The null hypothesis in is that no significant positive relationship exists between the dependent and respective independent variables

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine Determinants of Compliance with Public Procurement Laws and Regulations in Public Secondary Schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. The quantitative approach was appropriate as it enabled the objective measurement and statistical analysis of relationships between variables, namely awareness, professionalism, ethical conduct, and procurement compliance.

The study was guided by a positivist research philosophy, which assumes that reality is objective and can be measured using empirical methods. This approach facilitated hypothesis testing and generalization of findings based on numerical data.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained using structured questionnaires consisting of closed-ended questions designed to capture responses on key study variables. The questionnaire was appropriate for ensuring consistency, ease of analysis,

and coverage of a relatively large sample.

The target population comprised 176 procurement committee members drawn from 22 public secondary schools in Kabwe District. These included Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers, Procurement Officers, and Heads of Department, School Accountants, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) representatives. From the target population, a sample of 122 respondents was selected. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of all categories of respondents. Stratification enhanced the representativeness and reliability of the data by capturing perspectives from different members of the school procurement committee.

To ensure the quality of the research instrument, validity was established through expert review and pilot testing, while reliability was assessed using the test-retest method, confirming consistency of responses over time.

3.3 Data Analysis

Collected data were coded, cleaned, and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and key variables. Inferential analysis was conducted using the Chi-square test of independence to examine the relationships between the independent variables (awareness, professionalism, and ethical conduct) and the dependent variable (compliance with public procurement laws). All hypotheses were tested at a 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$). The use of Chi-square was appropriate due to the categorical nature of the data and the study's objective of testing associations between variables.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the university of Zambia directorate of research and development prior to data collection, number IORG NO. 0005376 HSSREC IRB NO. 00006464 REF NO. HSSREC-2025-SEP-069. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation was ensured through informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained by ensuring that no personal identifiers were included in the data analysis or reporting. Additionally, respondents were assured that the information provided would be used solely for academic purposes.

4 Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study achieved a response rate of 93.44%, with 114 usable questionnaires from procurement committee members in public secondary schools in Kabwe District. As shown in Table 1, Heads of Department formed the largest group (38.6%), followed by Accountants and Procurement Officers (13.2% each), Deputy Head Teachers and PTA representatives (12.3% each), and Head Teachers (10.5%).

Most respondents had considerable institutional experience, with 43.9% serving between 6 and 10 years and 28.1% serving between 11 and 16 years. Similarly, a large proportion had served on procurement committees for 6–10 years, indicating that respondents possessed sufficient experience to provide credible insights into procurement compliance practices

Table 1: Position at School

Position	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Head Teacher	12	10.5	10.5	10.5
Deputy Head Teacher	14	12.3	12.3	22.8
Accountant	15	13.2	13.2	36
Procurement Officer	15	13.2	13.2	49.1
PTA Representative	14	12.3	12.3	61.4
Head of Department (HOD)	44	38.6	38.6	100
Total	114	100	100	

Source field survey (2025)

4.2 Results on Awareness on Compliance with Procurement Laws and Regulations

The descriptive statistics presented in table 2 below summarize responses from 114 participants regarding their awareness and familiarity with the Public Procurement Act of 2020 and related regulations. The results show that the mean values range from 1.51 to 3.38, indicating generally low to moderate levels of awareness and compliance across most items. The standard deviations, ranging between 0.46 and 1.29, suggest some variability in responses, meaning that awareness and adherence levels are not uniform among respondents.

Table 2: Descriptive Results on Awareness and Compliance with Procurement Laws and Regulations

Descriptive Statistics								
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Staff_Awareness	0							
Do you have access to the Public Procurement Act of 2020 and procurement regulations?	114	1	2	1.61	.046	.489	-.475	.226
How familiar are you with the Public Procurement law and regulations?	114	1	3	2.33	.062	.661	-.486	.226
The Zambia Public Procurement Act and regulations are useful in carrying out procurement activities on a day-to-day basis. Do you agree?	114	2	5	3.11	.085	.906	.371	.226
Is the procurement of goods and services in line with the annual procurement plan of your school?	114	1	3	2.28	.049	.524	.210	.226
Does your School follow the laid down procurement procedures in accordance with Public Procurement Act of 2020 and procurement regulations of 2022 when procuring goods and service?	114	1	5	2.39	.121	1.294	.773	.226
Does your school receive updated communication on changes to procurement laws and regulations?	114	1	2	1.70	.043	.460	-.894	.226
If yes, how do you receive them? Tick the appropriate answer	114	1	3	2.56	.061	.652	-1.205	.226
Do you think the level of awareness relates to compliance with public procurement law and regulations in public secondary schools?	114	1	2	1.53	.047	.502	-.107	.226
Valid N (listwise)	0							

Source: field Survey, 2025

Inferential Results for Awareness and Compliance

To determine whether awareness influenced compliance with public procurement laws and regulations, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results in Table 3 show that awareness did not have a statistically significant influence on compliance, $\chi^2(1, N = 114) = 0.219, p > 0.05$. The effect size ($\phi = 0.044$) indicates a negligible relationship. The null hypothesis was not rejected.

Table 3: Chi-Square Results for awareness and compliance with procurement law and regulations

Variable	Test Used	χ^2	Df	p-value	Effect Size (ϕ)	Decision
Awareness	One-Sample Chi-Square	0.219	1	0.64	0.044	Fail to Reject H_0

Source: Field survey, (2025)

4.3 Results on Professionalism and Compliance with Public Procurement Laws and Regulations

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for variables measuring professionalism among school procurement officers and procurement committee members. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Professionalism was examined in terms of procurement training, qualifications, and professional competence of procurement committee members. The findings indicate low levels of formal procurement training and limited availability of designated procurement officers in public secondary schools. However, respondents generally agreed that training, experience, integrity, and independence are important factors in promoting compliance with procurement laws and regulations.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Professionalism Variables (N = 114)

Descriptive Statistics for Professionalism Variables (N = 114)					
Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Have you gone through any professional development training related to procurement while in your current position?	1	2	1.67	0.473	-0.717
If yes to training, do the training/capacity-building programmes meet school procurement needs?	1	5	3.24	0.934	-0.028
Inadequate training contributes to non-compliance with procurement laws and regulations	2	5	3.84	0.946	-0.698
School has a designated Procurement Officer	1	2	1.18	0.389	1.651
Level of expertise of the procurement officer in public procurement laws	1	3	1.96	0.583	-0.039
Academic qualifications are considered in procurement appointments	1	5	1.85	0.811	1.548
Professional procurement training/certification (e.g., CIPS, ZIPS) is considered	1	5	2.24	0.845	0.96
Work experience influences appointment	1	5	3.46	1.082	-0.633
Seniority (length of service) is considered	2	5	2.36	0.68	1.814
Administrative position/role in the school matters	1	5	3.56	1.065	-0.746
Ethical reputation and integrity are considered	2	5	2.37	0.707	2.083
Independence of the Procurement Committee in procurement decisions	1	4	1.79	0.857	-0.765
Lack of independence affects procurement committee decisions	1	4	3.85	0.972	-1.478
Majority of committee members have high seniority and experience	1	5	3.32	1.092	-0.784
Committee members have knowledge and experience in public procurement	1	5	2.24	0.695	1.574
Committee members have balanced knowledge and experience of school operations	2	5	2.36	0.766	2.291
Chairperson of procurement committee is the controlling officer	1	5	2.38	0.787	1.616

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.4 Inferential Results for Professionalism and Compliance

The Chi-square test results in Table 5 show a statistically significant relationship between professionalism and compliance, $\chi^2 (1, N = 114) = 15.474, p < 0.001$. The effect size ($\phi = 0.368$) indicates a moderate relationship. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, implying that professionalism significantly influences compliance with public procurement laws and regulations.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test Results for Professionalism and Compliance

Variable	Test Used	χ^2	Df	p-value	Effect Size (ϕ)	Decision
Professionalism	One-Sample Chi-Square	15.474	1	0	0.368	Reject H_0

Source: field survey (2025)

4.5 Results on Ethical Conduct and Compliance with Public Procurement Laws and Regulations

Ethical conduct was examined using six ethics-related procurement items, as presented in Table 6. The results show concerns relating to transparency, conflicts of interest, fairness, and procurement integrity. The overall mean score for ethics was 2.92 with a standard deviation of 0.73, indicating moderate ethical weaknesses in procurement processes within public secondary schools.

Several respondents indicated that procurement decisions were at times influenced by personal relationships, that conflicts of interest were not consistently declared, and that suppliers were not always given equal opportunities. These findings suggest that ethical standards are not fully embedded in procurement decision-making.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics on Ethics and Compliance with Procurement Laws and Regulations

Ethics-related Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ethics play a role in procurement decisions made by officers	2.78	0.77
Level of transparency in the procurement process	1.44	0.89
Procurement officers do not declare conflicts of interest	3.68	0.99
Procurement officers grant contracts in return for compensation/kickbacks	3.29	0.93
Suppliers are not given equal opportunities during selection/evaluation	3.03	0.87
Procurement officers use friends or relatives as front companies	3.27	0.95

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.6 Inferential Results for Ethical conduct of Procurement officers and Compliance

To test the influence of ethical conduct on compliance, a Chi-square test was conducted. As shown in Table 7, ethical conduct had a statistically significant influence on compliance with public procurement laws and regulations, $\chi^2 (1, N = 114) = 21.930, p < 0.05$. The effect size ($\phi = 0.439$) indicates a moderate to strong relationship. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 7: Chi-Square Test Results for Ethical Conduct and Compliance with public procurement law and regulations.

Variable	Test Used	χ^2	Df	p-value	Effect Size (ϕ)	Decision
Ethical Conduct	One-Sample Chi-Square	21.93	1	0	0.439	Reject H_0

Source: field survey, (2025)

4.7 Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that awareness of procurement laws and regulations did not have a statistically significant influence on compliance. Although respondents reported some familiarity with procurement regulations, the low mean scores and insignificant Chi-square result suggest that awareness alone is insufficient to drive compliance behaviour. This implies that simply knowing the law does not necessarily translate into adherence to procurement procedures.

This finding is consistent with studies conducted in other African contexts. Sama and Mwalukasa (2024) argue that awareness must be reinforced by strong enforcement mechanisms and ethical leadership to produce meaningful compliance outcomes. Similarly, Komakech and Machyo (2015) found moderate compliance in Ugandan public institutions despite the existence of procurement guidelines. The present study therefore suggests that in the Zambian school context, procurement regulations may exist formally but are not adequately internalized in day-to-day administrative practice.

From a theoretical perspective, this result supports Institutional Theory, which holds that compliance depends not only on the existence of formal rules but also on the degree to which they are embedded within organizational routines (Scott, 2014). It also aligns with Principal-Agent Theory, which suggests that when agents have limited knowledge and weak supervision, monitoring becomes less effective and compliance weakens (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The study found that professionalism has a statistically significant positive influence on compliance with procurement laws and regulations. This indicates that schools with more competent and professionally capable procurement personnel are more likely to comply with procurement requirements. The descriptive results further showed that many respondents had not received formal procurement training and that designated procurement officers were limited, suggesting a capacity gap in school procurement systems.

This finding supports Chiputa (2017), who found that lack of professional capacity among procurement officers in Zambia contributes to procurement irregularities. It also agrees with Arrowsmith et al. (2000), who emphasize that effective procurement requires technical expertise in procurement legislation, tender evaluation, and contract management. The implication is that professional knowledge and skills enhance procedural accuracy, improve interpretation of procurement rules, and strengthen accountability.

In relation to Institutional Theory, the finding highlights the importance of the normative pillar, where professional values, standards, and competencies influence organizational compliance behaviour. From the perspective of Principal-Agent Theory, professional competence reduces the likelihood that agents will misuse delegated authority or deviate from procurement procedures, especially in decentralized institutions such as public schools.

The study further established that ethical conduct significantly influences compliance with procurement laws and regulations. The moderate to strong effect size indicates that ethics is a critical determinant of compliance in school procurement processes. The descriptive results suggest weaknesses in transparency, fairness, and conflict-of-interest management, indicating that ethical breaches may undermine lawful procurement practices.

This finding is consistent with Kangogo and Kiptoo (2013) and Onyinkwa (2013), who found that unethical practices such as favouritism, bribery, and conflict of interest contribute significantly to non-compliance in public procurement. Similarly, Chiputa (2017) identified unethical behaviour as a major driver of procurement irregularities in Zambia. Wanyonyi and Muturi (2015) also argue that ethical conduct strengthens trust, reduces procurement risk, and improves regulatory compliance.

The result can be interpreted through Principal-Agent Theory, which explains that unethical behaviour emerges when agents exploit weak oversight systems for private gain. At the same time, Institutional Theory suggests that where ethical norms are weakly embedded in organizational culture, compliance is likely to be compromised. These findings imply that strengthening ethical governance, transparency, and accountability mechanisms is central to improving procurement compliance in public secondary schools.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the determinants of compliance with the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020 and its 2022 Regulations in public secondary schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. The analysis focused on three key factors: awareness of procurement laws, professionalism of procurement officers, and ethical conduct of procurement officers.

The findings revealed that awareness of procurement laws alone does not significantly influence compliance with public procurement regulations. Although some procurement committee members were aware of the procurement legislation, the statistical results indicated that knowledge of the law does not automatically translate into compliance behaviour. This suggests that awareness, while necessary, is insufficient without supportive institutional mechanisms such as monitoring systems, training, and enforcement structures.

In contrast, professionalism was found to have a significant influence on compliance with procurement laws and regulations. The results indicate that the absence of professionally trained procurement personnel in many schools limits the ability of procurement committees to interpret and implement procurement regulations effectively. In many cases, procurement responsibilities are assigned to school staff based on administrative roles rather than professional qualifications. This practice weakens procurement governance and increases the likelihood of procedural irregularities. Strengthening professional capacity among procurement officers is therefore essential for improving compliance.

The study also established that ethical conduct significantly influences compliance with procurement regulations. Weak ethical standards, limited transparency, and inadequate accountability mechanisms were identified as key factors contributing to non-compliance. The persistence of practices such as favouritism, conflicts of interest, and informal decision-making indicates that ethical norms are not fully institutionalized within school procurement systems. Promoting ethical behaviour and integrity among procurement officers is therefore critical for strengthening compliance and safeguarding public resources.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that effective compliance with public procurement laws in public secondary schools depends largely on professional competence and ethical governance rather than awareness alone. Strengthening these institutional and behavioural factors is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and value for money in public procurement.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen Professional Training and Certification: The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Zambia Public Procurement Authority and the Zambia Institute of Purchasing and Supply, should strengthen professional training and certification programmes for individuals involved in procurement activities within schools. Continuous professional development programmes should be introduced to enhance procurement knowledge and skills among procurement committee members. In addition, professional procurement qualifications should be considered a key requirement when appointing officers responsible for procurement functions in public secondary schools.

Promote Ethical Standards and Accountability: Schools should establish and enforce clear ethical guidelines governing procurement activities. Codes of conduct for procurement committee members should be strengthened and mechanisms for declaring conflicts of interest should be introduced to promote transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should incorporate ethics and integrity training into induction programmes for school administrators and procurement committee members to reinforce ethical behaviour in procurement processes.

Improve Access to Procurement Laws and Guidelines: Public secondary schools should ensure that procurement committee members have easy access to updated copies of procurement laws, regulations, and operational guidelines. The Zambia Public Procurement Authority should also develop simplified procurement manuals tailored for school-level procurement committees. Increasing access to procurement information will improve understanding of procurement procedures and enhance compliance with regulatory requirements.

Strengthen Monitoring and Oversight Mechanisms: Effective monitoring and oversight systems should be strengthened to ensure adherence to procurement regulations in schools. The Ministry of Education, through district and provincial education offices, should conduct regular audits and monitoring visits to review procurement practices in public secondary schools. Strengthening oversight mechanisms will help detect procurement irregularities early and promote greater accountability in the management of public resources.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides useful insights into procurement compliance in public secondary schools, it focused only on schools in Kabwe District. This limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to other districts in Zambia. Future studies could expand the research to include schools in other districts in order to provide a broader understanding of procurement compliance across the country. In addition, further research could examine how digital procurement systems, such as e-government procurement platforms, influence transparency and compliance in school procurement

processes. Comparative studies between rural and urban schools may also provide deeper insights into differences in procurement practices within Zambia's education sector

Declaration of Competing Interests

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Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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