

Procuring Computers & Accessories Using Competitive Tendering

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Abstract

The study attempted to examine the effectiveness of using Competitive Tendering in the procurement of computers and accessories using Accra Polytechnic as a case study. The study therefore aimed to further examine how effective competitive tendering could help address the problems of time wasting, transparency and corruption in order to ensure supplier security, ensure that the best quality goods are supplied and also prevent any delay in the procurement of computers and accessories in Accra Polytechnic. The study focused on the procurement division of Accra Polytechnic. To achieve the objectives of the study, questionnaires and one-on-one interview were used. Competitive tendering has been found to be a better approach to address the waste in the procurement of computers and accessories. It has been found to save cost and also reduce cost in along the entire supply chain. Even though competitive tendering has helped in the achievement of the above listed goals, there are still a few challenges. According to our research, most of the respondents when asked about how effective the use of competitive tendering is in the procurement of computers and accessories in Accra Polytechnic, most of them responded in the affirmative but still acknowledged some few challenges facing the procurement division. Some of which were delay in the release of funds among other things.

Keyword: Procurement, Tendering, Procuring Computer & Accessories

I. INTRODUCTION

Considering the topic acquisition of computers and accessories using National Competitive Tendering, National Competitive Tendering is defined to be the bidding process for buying new government securities in the primary market nationally. Depending on the nature and size of the project and its procurement elements, the public entities may use any of the following competitive methods set out in the procurement to procure for goods commonly use competitive methods. Some of them include;

- National Competitive Tendering.
- International Competitive Tendering

A. National Competitive Tendering

Public Procurement Board regards National Competitive Tendering (NCT) as the preferred method of procurement with its overall principal objectives of the intended project. However, in many circumstances where it is determined that National Competitive Tendering is not feasible, the Entities may employ the use of alternative methods, where the estimated contract amount is lower than the value threshold. In such circumstances the Public Procurement Act, 663 requires that the selected method is both economic and efficient (i.e., obtains the value for money). All methods of procurement irrespectively must be open and fair to all interested offers to the extent possible.

Accra Polytechnic is a public sector tertiary educational institution which was established by an Act of parliament, Act 745, 2007. It is however a semi-autonomous institution and therefore the procurement, selection and training and development of its suppliers and contractors are the responsibility of the management and Entity Tender Committee (ETC). Accra Polytechnic (A-Poly) which started as a tertiary institution in 1993 currently has over five hundred (500) employees made up of management, academic staff (lectures and instructors) and administrative staff (office employees, workshop assistants and technicians, drivers, security and cleaners), and over thousand (10.000) students. The student's population comprises of Higher National Diploma (HND) Full time, Part time, Non-HND and Bachelor of Technology (B-Tech) to provide tertiary education through courses in the field of manufacturing, commerce, science and technology, applied social science and applied arts. These groups need computers and accessories for work and studies.

Ghana's approximate annual value of public procurement for goods, works, and consultant services has been given as US\$600 million representing about 10% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2003). Ghana Supply Commission was then the only authorized institution accredited to buy for the public goods, works and services (World Bank 2003). However, inadequately trained practitioners, absence of forecasting and effective planning for the vital goods, and lack of a proper database, and delays relating to release of funds by the government led to lengthy delivery periods. With the introduction of Public Procurement Act 2003, Act 663 many sector ministries and agencies are to execute their own procurement system.

Following the reviews and subsequent revelation of inefficiencies in public procurement processes, the government realized the need to improve public procurement by enacting the Public Procurement Act (Act 663).

- I. This is to ensure best value for money in the procurement of goods, services and works.
- II. It is also to ensure that, goods, services and works are procured at the right quality, at the right price, at the right time and at the right place through an open competitive tendering process.
- III. Furthermore, the management of state funds is done in judicious, fair, open and competitive and also permitting stakeholders and the citizens to obtain information on procurement activities for effective monitoring of tenders.
- IV. Last but not the least, to ensure that the rules governing public procurement are readily available to all interested parties (PPA 2003).

In light of this, public institutions are required to establish Procurement units in their organizations and Polytechnics are not exempted. This study therefore seeks to find out the extent to which procurement management in Accra Polytechnic is contributing towards the attainment of the Polytechnic's mandate. Currently, Polytechnic can boast of Higher National Diploma (HND) qualified procurement assistants, degree holders, Chartered Members of CIPS and assistant administrative officers. These shows that Polytechnics procurement staffs are well educated and able to apply the formal education they received in their current role.

Public procurement accounts for between 50% and 70% of total Government expenditure, representing about 10% of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and accounts for about 24% of total imports (World Bank, 2003). An improvement in the public procurement process will in no doubt create wealth, enhance transparency, promote standardized procurement procedures and reduce corruption (World Bank 2003).

Procurement as a major avenue for spending government scarce resources and donor funds, appropriate skills, competences and expertise and the associated best practices must be demonstrated by public procurement personnel in order to realize value for money (World Bank 2003).

The issue of procurement practices in Polytechnics has over the years remained unknown to many people within the Polytechnic community. Again it seems most purchases were made outside of the Procurement Department, by functions such as transportation, finance, human resource management and facilities management without consulting the procurement function because of the low status assigned to the function.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research discussed competitive bidding, Procurement law 2003, Procurement methods training policy, performance appraisal and evaluation of tender documents and selection of lowest evaluated bidder and finally benefits of competitive bidding. Generating savings through competitive procurement system improvements is done now almost routinely in the private sector, where the procurement function helps companies to respond quickly to market changes. As an example, the typical cost structure of a manufacturing firm is that for every dollar earned, around 60 cents is spent on purchased activities, and 10 cents in profit. If through better management of the purchasing function the cost of purchased materials were reduced by 10%, it would make a saving of 6 cents on every dollar. The result would be a 6% reduction in the total cost of the finished product (Wittig, 1999). In all these cases, billions of dollars have been, or are expected to be saved through improvement of procurement actions

A. Definition of Concepts

Procurement is the act of buying goods and services. The process includes preparation and processing of a demand as well as the receipt and approval of payment, it often involves purchase planning, standards determination, specification development, supplier research and selection, value analysis, financing, price negotiation, making the purchase, supply contract administration, inventory control and stores. Procurement can also be defined as the acquisition of goods, buying or purchase of works, hiring contractors and consultants services (International Bank for reconstruction and Development Guidelines for Procurement, 2004). Procurement process therefore concerned with activities that both precede and follow the signing of a contract. It is a common practice in countries to regulate public sector procurement in a legal framework. This is a manner in which goods, services and works are obtained and the manner in which rights are granted and controlled. The use of public procurement to achieve social outcomes is widespread, but detailed information about how it operates is often sketchy and difficult to find. It is considered how governments currently attempt to use contract to produce desired social policy outcomes through public procurement.

Governments also increasingly play a role as active participants in the market itself, by purchasing public works, supplies and services. The focus of government attempts to combine these two functions: participating in the market as a purchaser and at the same time regulating it through the use of its purchasing power to advance conceptions of social justice. Although the term shares certain similarities, the diversity of ways in which procurement and social policy have been brought together goes beyond simply awarding contracts in certain conditions, and extent include for example the definition of the contract, the qualifications of contractors and the criteria for the award of contract (McCrudden, 2004). As a way of summary, procurement can simply be defined as the process by which an organization obtains materials, services and equipment needed to carry out its activities in order to achieve its objectives or goals.

B. Compliance with Procurement Procedures

The Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663) is an act of parliament to provide for public procurement, establish the Public Procurement Board; make administrative and institutional arrangements for procurement; stipulate tendering procedures and provide for purposes connected with these (The Public Procurement Act 2003). The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, had said that the government was committed at the highest level to ensuring compliance with procurement procedures. That he said was to ensure value for money thus acts as a disincentive to corruption (Daily Graphic, Monday, May 22, 2006, pp.41). The minister said compliance with transparent procurement practices would enable the government to put into practice its concept of good governance and “zero tolerance” for corrupt behaviour. He said the government therefore, attached great importance to the implementation of the Public Procurement Act, (Act 663) to ensure that the nation’s scarce resources were efficiently utilized (Daily Graphic Monday, May 22, 2006 pp 41). The Chief Executive of the Public Procurement Board (PPB), Mr. Agyenim Boateng Adjei has assured the public that the board would supervise, monitor and evaluate procurements by public institutions to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Public Procurement Act 2003, (Act 663). He stated that “in spite of all difficulties, the board would press on to entrench the use of fair and transparent methods in the acquisition of goods, works and services with regard to the use of public funds” (Daily Graphic, Saturday, August 26, 2006 pp,16).

The chairman of the Public Procurement Board, Mr. Kwasi Abbey Sam, also said that since the inauguration of the board in August 2004, it had worked diligently to fulfill its objectives to “ensure that the acquisition of goods works or services by the public sector were done at the best possible total cost in an open and sincere manner”. He explained that the board did not do procurement to clear the erroneous impression, adding that its role was to steer procurement activities in the public sector in the right direction (Daily Graphic Saturday August 26, 2006, pp 16).

C. Involvement of the Top management and Entity Tender Committee (ETC in Selection of Inputs and Logistics

User units, departments and experts of the entity are in the better position to describe and give specifications of the right types of inputs and logistics required for the performance of their duties. It is therefore necessary for the management to seek their inputs into the preparation of the procurement plan. Procurement decisions of an entity shall

be taken in a corporate manner and any internal units concerned shall contribute to the decision making process (Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663), Section 15(3)).

D. Presence and Implementation of Annual Procurement Plan

According to the Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663) section 21, a procurement entity shall prepare a procurement plan to support its approved programme and the plan shall indicate:

- Contract package
- Estimated cost of each package
- The procurement method
- Processing steps and times

A procurement entity shall submit to its Entity Tender committee not later than one month to the end of the financial year the procurement plan for the following year for approval. After budget approval, and at quarterly intervals after that, each procurement entity shall submit an update of the procurement plan to the Entity tender committee. The procurement entity shall send to the Tender Review Board, procurement notices for contracts and procurement plans above the thresholds stipulated in schedule 3 for concurrent approval. A procurement entity shall not divide a procurement order into parts or lower the value of a procurement in order to avoid the application of the procedures for public procurement in the Act (Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663)). As part of preparation of World Bank financed project, the borrower shall prepare and, before loan negotiations, furnish to the Bank for its approval, a procurement plan acceptable for the Bank setting forth:

- The particular contracts for the goods, works and or services required to carry out the project during the initial period at least eighteen months;
- The proposed methods for procurement of such contracts that are permitted under the loan agreement and
- The related Bank review procedures. The borrower shall update the procurement plan annually or as needed throughout the duration of the project. The borrower shall implement the procurement plan in the manner in which it has been approved by the Bank (Procurement Guidelines under the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2004).

E. Stores Management

In manufacturing as an example, the basic function of the stores is top providing a service to the operating departments. All other stores activities, although have their own relative importance, they are subordinate to this main responsibility. Much in the same way the stores management in Accra Polytechnic also serve these purposes, which can be analyzed into five parts as follows:

- To make available a balanced flow of raw materials components, tool, equipment and any other consumables necessary to meet operational requirements.
- To provide maintenance materials, spare parts and general stores as required.
- To receive and issue work in progress and finished products.
- To accept and store scrap and other discarded materials as they arise.
- To account for all receipts, issues and goods in stock.

Stores responsibilities are to make sure that inputs and logistics used in the institution are always available to keep teaching and learning going. Effective stores management system is guided by the following principles or tenets:

F. Economy

It has been emphasized that service is the principal objective of the stores function, but it is obviously desirable to provide that service economically. The most important consideration here is to keep the inventory value at the lowest practicable level to economize in the use of working capital and to minimize the cost of storage (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

G. Identification

Identification is the process of systematically defining and describing all items of stock. It includes the preparation of a stores code or vocabulary, the adoption of materials specifications and the introduction of a degree of standardization (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

H. Receipt

Receipt is the process of accepting, from all sources, all materials, equipment and parts used in the institution, including supplies for operating processes, plant maintenance, offices, capital installations and finished products (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

I. Inspection

Inspection, in this context means the examination of incoming consignments for quantity and quality. Very often in section of goods are done in collaboration with the user department, an expert from computer department and stores personnel. Whatever the system of inspection in force, it is the duty of the stores unit to see to it that the inspection is done before items are accepted into stock. Quality assurance activities and co-maker relationships between buyers and suppliers have reduced the extent to which the inspections of incoming goods are undertaken, but it remains an important activity (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

J. Issue and Dispatch

This is the process of receiving demands, selecting the items required and handing them over to users. It includes also, where necessary, the packing of issues and the loading of vehicle with goods for delivery (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

K. Stock Records

These may be manual or maintained on computer, and record particulars of receipts, issues and balances, of stock (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

L. Stores Accounting

Stores accounting is the process of recording stock movements and balances in value.

There are four main methods of pricing of materials issued. These are cost price, average price, market price and standard price (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

M. Stock Control

Stock control is the operation of continuously arranging flows of materials so that stock balances are adequate to support the current rate of consumption, with due regard to economy. It includes the related process of provisioning, which is the means whereby instructions are given for the placing of orders, minimum and maximum levels, re-order level and economic order quantity (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

N. Stocktaking, Stock Checking and Stock Audit

Stocktaking is the process of physical verification of the quantities and condition of goods, usually on a periodic basis for the purpose of ensuring that an appropriate figure appears in the organization's accounts. Stock checking is similar, but may be done on and hoc basis for operational reasons. Stock audit involves an external agency and the purpose is for verification (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

O. Storage

Storage comprises the management of storehouses and stockyards, the operation of handling and storage equipment and the safe custody and protection of stock (Jessop and Morrison, 1994)

P. Disposal of Waste and obsolete items

Items which have expired and become obsolete are disposed off as quickly as possible through the laid down procedure to avoid cost of keeping them (Jessop and Morrison, 1994).

Q. Procurement Methods, Processes and Procedures in the Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663)

The following methods and procedures are stipulated in the Public Procurement Act:

a. International Competitive Bidding (ICB)

International competitive tendering is used and effective competition cannot be obtained unless foreign firms by nature or by value of contract are invited. ICB procedures are also used for goods and works contract exceeding the threshold of fifteen billion cedis and twenty billion Cedis respectively. ICB tenders shall be openly advertised and eligible bidders shall be allowed to submit bids. The tender document shall be in English and expressed freely in convertible currency. The bidding period shall not be less than six weeks from the first date of advertisement or the date of availability of the tender document whichever one comes later. The advertisement shall be made in a national newspaper of wide circulations. Additionally, the advertisements shall be placed in the international press at least six weeks prior to the deadline of submission of bids (Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act663), Section 45).

b. National Competitive Bidding (CB)

National competitive Bidding procedure shall be where the entity decides that only domestic suppliers or contractors may submit tenders either by nature or by value of contract. The local currency (cedi) shall generally be used for the purposes of bidding and payment unless specified otherwise in the bidding documents. Invitations to bid shall be advertised in at least one widely circulated national daily newspaper and the Public Procurement Bulletin.

The time allowed for bidding this and deadline for submission of bids shall be at least thirty (30) days from the date of publication or the date of availability of the tender documents. The value of threshold for goods is between two hundred million and two billion Cedis, whilst works goes for between five hundred million Cedis and fifteen billion Cedis and technical service is between two hundred million Cedis and two billion Cedis(Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663), Section 44).

c. Price Quotation

Shopping shall be used for procuring readily available off-the-shelf good of standard specifications of commodities that are small in value, not exceeding the threshold of two hundred million Cedis for goods, five hundred million Cedis works and two hundred million Cedis for technical services. Quotations shall be solicited from as many different suppliers as possible but in any case not less than three. Invitation of quotations shall be in writing and will indicate the description and quantity of the goods as well as desired delivery time, and place of delivery, including date, time and place of submission of quotations. Quotations shall be in writing and shall be opened and evaluated at the same time as indicated in the request for quotations. The request for quotations should indicate that quotations submitted later than the time and date specified in the request would be rejected (Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663), Section 42).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The design that was considered for the research was survey. The case study approach that was adopted took place at Accra Polytechnic. The case study method was chosen because; case study is suitable for practical problems. It is often seen as being problem – centered, small scaled and manageable. Again, case study method has the uniqueness ability to use and apply differently a lot of different empirical evidence, Yin (1994). The aim of this research was to identify the extent to which organizational change have an effect on the performance of employees for the achievement of organizational goals in Accra Polytechnic and development to motivate and improve the performance of its employees and therefore the choice of case study.

B. Population

The case study focused on Procurement and stores staff of the Polytechnic. This was based on the assumption that, this group of employees within the administrative set up were the pivot around which all procurement activities in the

Polytechnic revolves. They assist management staff of the Polytechnic in implementing the policies of management and ensuring that work in the Polytechnic progresses smoothly. The total population of the procurement staff in the Accra Polytechnic (including user departments and specialist) is about seventy (70). Therefore the purposive sampling would eliminate from the population those who do not matter in the research.

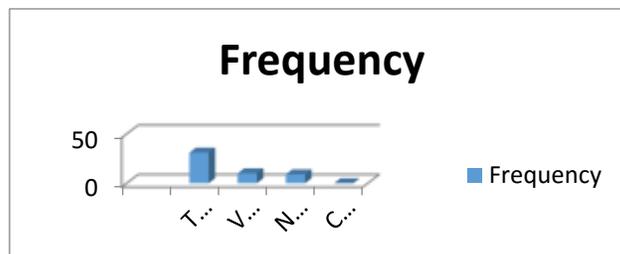
C. Sampling Technique

The purposive (also known as judgmental or subjective) sampling technique was used in the sampling process of the population of the research. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling in which the decision concerning the individuals to be included in the sample was taken by the researcher based on the fact that these individuals have been around long enough to have the knowledge of the research issue and also the willingness to participate in the research. This technique was also chosen because the sample size was quite small when compared with probability sampling.

D. Sample Size

The total population of the 70 mentioned above involve procurement, store, user department and staff in academics. These groups of senior staff are therefore eliminated from the research sample in line with the purposive sampling technique that was adapted to the research. A sample size of fifty (50) senior staff within A-Poly administration were selected and interviewed for the research. Respondents were supplemented with a set of questionnaire.

Composition	No.
Principal Assistant Administrators	10
Senior Assistant Administrators	20
Senior Finance Administrators	5
Assistant Administrators	15
Total	50



Source: field study October, 201

E. Data Collection Procedure

With the source of information been the sampled senior staff, the data collection procedure adapted was the self-administered questionnaire by the respondents (selected senior staff). The respondents to this questionnaires were free to answer the questions according to their own conscience without been compelled to satisfy the researcher. Information from these questionnaires constituted the primary data for the research. Additionally interviews were conducted with the selected executive members and heads of departments. The interviews were conducted because; it is an important source of gathering data for case studies. The kind of interview used was what is called by Merriam (1998), semi-structured interview. Because of the presence of pitfalls in the use of interviews by way of response bias and reflexivity Yin (1994), though questions are predetermined, the questions for the interview were not asked in any specific order. The interview was designed to allow respondents bring up other issues they felt were of interest to the subject matter. This created the needed friendly and cordial atmosphere which enabled researcher to ask follow-up questions freely.

The questionnaires were pretested on a smaller size of the sampled respondents for the research. This was to ensure that the questionnaires designed solicited the appropriate responses from the respondents to answer the research

question for the achievement of research stated objectives. The use of closed end as well as opened ended questions allowed the researcher to make easy categorization and analysis.

F. Data Analysis

Returned questionnaires were edited to correct probable errors and to sort out misconception and misunderstandings to ensure credibility of the research. In order to collect and organize data in such a manner that was acceptable which was later used to conduct the required analysis, the research questionnaires were structured according to the steps provided by the general thesis writing hand book. The data was therefore first put in topical and chronological order so that it was presented in a descriptive manner. Secondly, data was classified into categories, themes and theory to allow the use of quantitative methods to be used to analysis some of the data collected. Finally, information from data analysis was summarized and conclusions and recommendations were made for application by Accra Polytechnic in its training and development programmes of employees.

IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Summary of Findings

This research examined ‘the effect of competitive bidding on acquisition of computers and accessories’ a case of Accra Polytechnic. The research had the objectives to find out how competitive bidding contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Polytechnic. Again it found out whether there were organizational issues that constrain competitive bidding in the Polytechnic. Furthermore it investigated how competitive bidding help in selecting the lowest evaluated bidder.

To achieve these objectives a sample of 50 senior staff were selected and questionnaire were administered. This was further supported with an interview of the rector, registrar and finance officer and Procurement Officer of the Polytechnic. The study revealed the following interesting findings:

Firstly total respondents representing 100% indicated that competitive bidding contributed to achieving effectiveness and efficiency of A – Poly goals. Additionally this same percentage mentioned that competitive bidding has been used to ensure that, the right product is purchased at the right quantity and at the right time. Again the total respondents representing 100% said that competitive bidding help in selecting the lowest evaluated bidder at Accra Polytechnic. Furthermore, 60% of the sampled staffs admitted that, impact of competitive bidding on acquisition of computers was excellent. They indicated also that, competitive bidding was relevant to achieving the needs of Accra Polytechnic

B. Conclusions

The study confirms that competitive bidding in line with public procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663) is observed to proffer solutions which in the view of this study attained 80% compliance level. However this achievement is not without challenges. In the pursuit to encourage competition among suppliers public entities must establish the required structures and engage procurement professionals to manage them. Coverage of monitoring activities must be increased to cover more low spend items across all sections in the school. Short/long term training must be introduced to improve capacity of procurement staff and suppliers to operate efficiently and effectively in the procurement system. PPA, Cabinet and Parliament must hasten to amend the Act to ensure smooth implementation and compliance.

C. Recommendations

In light of the discussions, findings and the conclusions, the following recommendations are hereby coined;

Engagement of Procurement Professionals.

Entity must ensure that suitable candidates are employed on the basis of merit and placed in their relevant qualifications, skills, and experience with their roles and responsibilities clearly defined to avoid role conflicts with other professions and departments. Strategies must also be put in place to retain them. Public procurement (competitive bidding) cannot be perceived as a mere 'clerical routine,' activity.

Reducing Procurement Challenges on Entities

Lack of proper contract management is partly the result of escalation of high project costs. PPA must develop Contract Management Manual, buyer-supplier relationship Management and record Keeping Manuals and train entities on them. These manuals can help procurement practitioners with their daily contract and relationship management and record keeping of procurement activities.

Amendment of the Public Procurement Act

Review Thresholds of Procurement Methods and Approval Authority the Public Procurement Act must be amended to address the eminent difficulties facing smooth implementation. To improve on compliance of entities in the region PPA must, as a matter of urgency, expedite action on the review process of the Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663). The proposed increase in thresholds will give Procurement Entities greater control over procurement decision to reduce lead time and needless delays caused by Tender Review Boards (TRBs). Invariably, it will enhance the local government concept of decentralization.

Composition of Entity Tender Committee. The composition of ETCs must be reviewed to include procurement practitioners to ease the difficulty in the application of the law. Public Procurement and Stores Administration Procurement is incomplete if the right goods purchased do not reach the end user. At the moment the Act only dealt with Disposal of Stores and was silent on Stores Management in Public Entities.

Enforcing Accountability to Reducing Corruption in Procurement.

Corruptions and bribes are widespread in government contracts (www.transparency.org). To prevent corruption in public procurement PPA should seriously enforce blacklisting bidders who have contravened the provisions of the Act and take disciplinary action against public officials who engage in irregularities.

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