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EVALUATION OF KEY PROCUREMENT SKILLS FOR ENHANCED PUBLIC SECTOR PROCUREMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Globally, government spending on public procurement reaches approximately $13 trillion, yet inefficiencies due to weak procurement capacities result in significant losses. Inadequate training, poor supplier relationship management, and limited focus on sustainability have hindered alignment with organizational goals. This paper investigates the procurement skills necessary for optimal performance among public sector practitioners in Nigeria. Through an extensive literature review, thirty (30) procurement competences and skills were identified and clustered into procurement-specific skills (PSS) and soft skills (SS). Utilising a quantitative survey approach with 120 procurement officers as respondents with data analysed via SPSS. Findings indicate that seventeen (17) procurement-specific skills particularly needs assessment and procurement planning, contract quality and Time management, and decision-making are essential, with "Needs assessment and Procurement planning" ranked highest. Additionally, thirteen (13) soft skills including analytical and critical thinking, communication, and application of ethics guidelines were recognised as critical. The study underscores the importance of targeted training programs to enhance these competencies, ultimately improving procurement effectiveness and sustainability in the public sector.

Keywords: Procurement Competency/Skills, Procurement Specific Skills, Soft skills, Public sector performance.

1.0 Introduction

Global procurement spending is staggering, with governments worldwide allocating about $13 trillion to goods, services, and works. Yet up to 25% of this outlay driven by inefficiencies from limited procurement capacity may be squandered (Josh & Karyawati, 2022; Murungi & Senelwa, 2019). Due

to inadequate training, poor supplier relationship management and limited focus on sustainability by procurement practitioners in various organisations has led to misalignment with the overall strategic goals of various organisations (Pillai *et al.,* 2023). Questions have been raised about the role of skills in improving procurement performance by both stakeholders and academics (Basheka, 2021).This paper assesses the procurement skills of practitioners' in public sector organisation.

In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, procurement expenditures account for approximately 29.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and about 50% in most developing countries like Nigeria (OEDC, 2003). Such a high share of GDP makes public procurement indispensable for the very functioning of government as well as for pursuing most development outcomes. For instance, procurement of goods, works and services are typically executed through public contracts. In addition, a significant share of recurrent administrative expenditures such as; office equipment, electricity, or maintenance services are also procured. However, a quarter of this spending is lost to inefficiencies attributed to weak capacity of procurement officers (Josh & Karyawati, 2022; Murungi & Senelwa, 2019).

Due to this weakness in the competency of procurement practitioners, their performances in various organisations have been called into question by both stakeholders and academics (Basheka, 2021). Changalima and Mdee (2023) also recommended that organisations must ensure that procurement practitioners are fully equipped with the necessary procurement skills for procurement activities to be performed to globally acceptable standard. Changalima and Mdee (2023) argued that skills are relevant competencies that practitioners must possess in order to facilitate organisational operations. In this regard, procurement management skills are critical for government procurement processes. Literature has shown that procurement skills are required to ensure that procurement officer perform well in their day-to-day activities (Bals *et al.,* 2019; Mwaiseje & Changalima, 2020). Some of the procurement skills necessary for effective procurement practices include but not limited to individual technical skills such as cost analysis, product knowledge and computer literacy (Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008), communication skills (Changalima & Ismail, 2019), marketing skills, customer care management skills and risk management skills (Basheka, 2021). Procurement skills have been associated to the ease in which procurement processes (such as supplier management, problem solving and communicating needs as well as planning) can be performed (Changalima & Ismail, 2019; Basheka, 2021).

This paper seeks to identify the requisite procurement skills by practitioners to perform optimally in public sector organisation. Identifying the essential procurement skills can lead to improved efficiency, effectiveness, and overall performance of practitioners in the public sector. This understanding can inform targeted training, better policy formulation, and strategic development within public organisations, ultimately enhancing procurement outcomes and public service delivery.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Overview of skills and competency

Although competency and skill may appear similar, they have apparent differences, hence understanding these differences between is important for organisations. Skills are measurable and can be standardised positions-wise, for instance; communication, language proficiency, computer skills, customer service, interpersonal skills are some common skills. On the other hand, competencies are value-based which cannot be easily measured or standardised unlike skills. They're specific to an organisation or project since they're tied to values and culture (Hattangadi, 2023). Table 2.1 presents summary of the comparison between skills and competencies under the following headings; Adeptness, Transferability and Detailing.

Table 2.1: Comparison between Skills and Competencies

Characteristics	Skills	Competencies
Adeptness	Skills can be adopted easily and developed through education and skill-enhancement programs	Competencies represent an integrated mix of skills, knowledge, and behaviours required for competent performance.
Transferability	A set of skills help one to change organisations or roles, across jobs, projects, and tasks.	Competencies cannot be transferred across professions or collaborative projects.
Detailing	A specific skill gives an ability that can be applied in a specific setting to accomplish a predefined desired result.	Competencies give ability to solve problem with combination of skills.

Skills involves ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills).	Hence, depth of knowledge determines competencies. Empathy, integrity, loyalty, cannot be taught one needs to have them in their character.

Source: *Difference between Skills and Competencies, (Hattangadi, 2023).*

2.2 Procurement Skills and Competencies

The United Nations Global Marketplace UNGM, (2021) describes Procurement capacity as the process through which individuals, organisations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time. It can be conceptualised as comprising of two interrelated aspects namely; individual and organisational/environmental (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD and World Bank, 2003; UNGM, 2021). According to EU, (2020), procurement specific competences are a category of competences specific to the management of the public procurement procedures. This study looked at both individual organisational facet, which are pertinent to the skills, knowledge and experience of procurement personnel at individual and organisational level.

Skills required by procurement professional have evolved over-time due to role-shift of the procurement function itself. From that of a simple-purchaser to that of a professional procurement personnel managing strategic long-term, complex agreement between internal stakeholders and suppliers (Basheka, 2021). Due to this realities procurement professionals now require a complex set of managerial and technical professional skills. These role-shifts affect procurement professionals in both public and private sector environments in developed and developing countries. With procurement's perceived evolution from a clerical service to a strategic organisational function, the calibre of personnel in terms of training, education and skills must increase so as to fulfil its strategic potential. A skilled workforce contributes immensely to the overall success of an organisation most especially in a rapidly changing environment, a well-trained and skilled professionals are essential. This study views procurement skills as the relevant skills and competencies procurement practitioners within organisations possess in order to facilitate organisational performance.

2.3 Public Procurement Practitioners Skills and Competencies

Public Procurement practitioners need to update their skills and competence in order to be effective in their day-to-day activities. Empirically, studies have centred on discovering the required procurement skills for public procurement practitioners that are considered necessary for effective procurement performance (Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008; Basheka, 2021). Skills required for procurement have become increasingly multi-disciplinary, cut across technical, strategic, interpersonal and managerial skills (Tassabehji and Moorhouse, 2008). Modern procurement requires skills related to market focus, value derivation, life cycle thinking, sustainability and the application of information technology (Giunipero *et al.,* 2006; Basheka, 2021; Addo-Duah *et al*., 2014).

The required skills for procurement practitioners include but are not limited to individual technical skills such as cost analysis, product knowledge and computer literacy (Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008), communication skills (Changalima & Ismail, 2019), marketing skills, customer care management skills, and risk management skills (Basheka, 2021). Giunipero and Pearcy (2000) identified the five most important skills procurement professionals need as; (1) interpersonal communication skills, (2) ability to make decisions, (3) ability to work in teams, (4) negotiations, and (5) customer focus. Those skills are all needed to facilitate and effectively manage the interactive, cross-functional and dynamic nature of the purchasing function. Giunipero and Pearcy (2000) also identified seven different skills categories that all world class procurement practitioners should possess to include; strategic skills, process management skills, team skills, decision-making skills, behavioural skills, negotiation skills and quantitative skills.

Over the years, the skills required of procurement professionals have changed, increasing the emphasis on more generic and management orientated skills applied in a procurement context. This is represented in the new category by Tassabehji and Moorhouse (2008) that classifies the procurement skills into five categories which reflect the requirements of procurement professionals. Those five skills categories include specific procurement skills, which are the core requirement for procurement professionals combined with more general managerial skills for procurement. They are; technical skills (TS), interpersonal skills (IS), internal enterprise skills (IE), external enterprise skills (EE) and strategic business skills (SB).

Technical skills are the fundamental and basic administrative skills any purchasing professional needs and include product- and technical knowledge, total-quality-management (TQM) and knowledge of

laws and regulations. Technical skills also include skills such as category management, project planning and e-procurement. Interpersonal skills are skills necessary for the interaction with other people in teams or on individual level and include spoken and written communication, conflict avoiding behaviour, influencing, leadership, problem solving, recognizing group dynamics and interpersonal and cultural awareness. (IS) are required at every level of the organization for effective procurement management.

Internal enterprise skills and external enterprise skills focus more on the organization. Internal enterprise skills focus on the overall business and how different functions interact and work together in the overall business while external enterprise skills relate to the suppliers, supply chain and its stakeholders. Strategic business skills are the last skill category identified by Tassabehji and Moorhouse (2008). Skills within this category are related to broader strategic issues and on how procurement can impact the overall value creation in the organisation, such as planning and managing strategic partnership and alliances and risk management. Similarly, Fitzgerald and Stokes, (2022) also identified some other procurement skills to comprise; negotiation, supply chain management, data analysis, and stakeholder engagement. Recently, Mushi *et al.,* (2024) found that procurement skills in terms of strategic analytical skills, technical tactical skills, as well as interpersonal skills are positive and significant determinants of cross-functional coordination. The findings imply that procurement skills are critical in influencing cross-functional coordination in the procurement process among public entities. Numerous other authors have researched procurement skill and many of the identified skills by these different authors overlap. Table 2.2 presents List of requisite skills for procurement practitioners by Mahamadu *et al.,* (2018) compiled from various literature sources**.**

Table 2.2: List of Procurement Skills

Skills	Giunipero et al. (2006)	Tassabehji & Moorhouse (2008)	Office of Government Commerce (OGC) (2008)	Basheka (2021)	UK Ministry of Justice (MOJ) (2012)	New Zealand Government Procurement (NZGP) (2014)	Kwofie et al. (2016)
Communication (oral/written)	x	x		x		x	x
Computing/ICT	x	x		x	x	x	
Conflict resolution and management		x			x		x
Whole life costing & financial analysis			x	x			
Cost & accounting management	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Leadership	x	x	x		x	x	
Negotiation	x	x	x	x		x	x
Proposal evaluation	x	x	x			x	

Quality management		x	x			x	
Relationship management	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Risk management	x	x	x	x			x
Responsible sourcing/green procurement			x	x	x		x
Strategic planning	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Variation/change management		x					
Time management		x		x		x	
Application of ethics guidelines			x	x		x	
Procurement planning		x	x	x	x	x	x
Decision-making	x	x		x		x	
Entrepreneurship		x		x			
Creative thinking		x		x		x	
Problem-solving		x		x		x	x
Stakeholder management		x	x	x		x	
Application of national procurement law & procedures			x	x	x	x	x
Application of international				x		x	

procurement law and procedures							
Application of modern integrated procurement procedures			**x**				
Contract management and enforcement		**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
Marketing				**x**	**x**		
Research and development	**x**			**x**		**x**	**x**
E-procurement	**x**	**x**					
Sustainable design			**x**				**x**
Data analysis		**x**					
Team building	**x**	**x**	**x**			**x**	
Market analysis and forecasting	**x**	**x**			**x**	**x**	
Business case development	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**		**x**	
Project scope definition	**x**	**x**		**x**	**x**		
Project strategy development/ organisational governance	**x**	**x**	**x**		**x**		

Tendering			x	x	x	
Project monitoring & auditing/evaluation		x		x	x	x
Application of diversity & equal opportunities procedures					x	
Application of CSR		x			x	
Cross-cultural awareness	x				x	
Stress management	x				x	
Environmental management		x				
Health & safety management		x				
Value engineering	x	x				

Source: Adapted from Mahamadu *et al.*, (2018)

2.4 Structure of Competency Matrix

The Competency Matrix developed European Competency Framework for public procurement professionals outlines the core competences public procurement professionals should demonstrate in order to perform their job effectively and efficiently and carry out public procurement procedures that bring value for money (EU, 2020).

There are thirty (30) competences (Table 2.3) in the Competency Matrix grouped in two (2) categories namely: (i) Procurement-specific and (ii) Soft competences.

Procurement-Specific Competences

These are competences which encompass the competences necessary at each stage of the public procurement lifecycle. They are derived from the knowledge and skills required to perform the main tasks and activities of a procurement stage. They are grouped into three (3) clusters (Figure 2.1):

i. The "horizontal" cluster encompasses competences applicable to all stages of the public procurement lifecycle;
ii. The "pre-award" cluster includes all competences required to perform all the tasks and activities taking place before the award of a public contract;
iii. The "post-award" cluster contains competences necessary for the contract management after the award of a public contract.

Soft Competences

These represent the soft skills public procurement professionals should have in order to master procurement specific competences. Hence soft competences complement procurement specific competences. By nature, soft competences are transversal competences. They are also grouped into three (3) clusters;

i. The "personal" cluster captures the behaviours, skills and attributes, public procurement professionals should possess, as well as the mind-set they should display according to their job profile;
ii. The "people" cluster comprises those competences enabling public procurement professionals to interact and cooperate with other professionals, and to do so in the most professional manner;
iii. The "performance" cluster includes all competences public procurement professionals need to have in order to increase value for money in public procurement procedures.



Figure 2.1: Clusters of Competences (European Union EU, Competency Framework for Public Procurement Professionals, 2020).

Table 2.3 presents an overview of the thirty (30) procurement competencies contained in the Competency Matrix of the European Competency Framework for public procurement professionals. They are clustered into six (6) distinct groups under two (2) broad categories of competencies namely; i. procurement specific competencies and ii. Soft competencies.

Table 2.3: Overview of Procurement Competences Matrix

Category of competence	Cluster of competences	List of Skills
	Horizontal	1. Planning 2. Lifecycle 3. Legislation 4. e-Procurement and other IT tools 5. Sustainable procurement 6. Innovation procurement 7. Category specific

Procurement specific competences		8. Supplier management 9. Negotiations
	Pre-award	10. Needs assessment 11. Market analysis and engagement 12. Procurement strategy 13. Technical specifications 14. Tender documentation 15. Tender evaluation
	Post-award	16. Contract management 17. Certification and payment 18. Reporting and evaluation 19. Conflict resolution and mediation
Soft competences	**Personal**	20. Adaptability and modernisation 21. Analytical and critical thinking 22. Communication 23. Ethics and compliance
	People	24. Collaboration 25.Stakeholder relationship management 26. Team management and Leadership
	Performance	27.Organisational awareness 28. Project management 29.Business and performance orientation

	30.Risk management and internal control

Source: European Union, (2020).

2.5 Importance of Procurement Skills and Competences in Public Procurement

The World Bank (2003) has drawn a link between the reliance on untrained procurement staff and the misapplication of the procurement procedures and sometimes unethical practices in procurement systems in developing countries. Deficiencies in procurement skills and competencies of procurement practitioners results to procurement malpractices (Mrope, 2018), unethical conduct (Israel *et al.,* 2019), and studies have shown that challenges affecting procurement practices in the public sector have been directly associated with the inadequacy of procurement skills among practitioners (Mazibuko & Fourie, 2017). Despite the numerous attempts to develop skills to meet changes in public sector procurement practice (Addo-Duah *et al*., 2014)., there is no global central reference point of procurement skills for consistency in terms of capability development policy (Giunipero and Pearcy, 2000).

Professionalism and competency of procurement practitioners are measured based on relevant skills related to cross-function teamwork, integrity, confidentiality, conflict of interest, procurement knowledge and experience (Wanjiru & Chege, 2020). The skills and competencies required in procurement are vital for effective performance and they include a combination of technical, analytical, and soft skills (Monczka *et al.*, 2015). According to Appiah (2011), no matter how elaborates the regulation or law on public sector procurement, its effective application depends largely on a trained and skilled workforce. Individual capacity is considered an important feature of a public procurement function (Lamptey and Elle, 2000). A competent procurement practitioner is important to enhance performance in terms of improving procurement operations (Odongo & Kazungu, 2022). The increasing scope of procurement requires a workforce with the requisite skills, as well as knowledge of trends in the technologies necessary for managing modern procurement (Addo-Duah et al., 2014).

3.0 Method Design, Methods and Techniques

A quantitative data collection method, the questionnaire was administered to procurement officers in public sector organisations to measure their perceptions, experiences, and competencies regarding procurement skills and sustainable practices. This method facilitates the collection of large amounts

of data efficiently. The population for this research comprises the public sector procurement practitioners in Nigeria federal civil service which total numbers stands at 506 as at of July 2024 verification exercise jointly conducted by the Bureau of Public Procurement BPP and Federal Civil Service Commission FCSC (BPP, 2024). Based on the population of 506 i.e. N=506, the sample size of 220 procurement officers was estimated using the sample size Table cited in Sarmah & Hazarika, (2012), based on a precision level of 0.05, and a confidence level of 95%. Descriptive statistics (frequency tables, mean item score, standard deviation) was done using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) IBM version 27.0 software to summarise and describe data collected for the study. The internal consistency of the data was tested using the Cronbach's alpha method as part of a reliability test.

4.0 Data presentation and Analysis

Out of a total of 220 questionnaires administered to respondents (procurement practitioners), 120 questionnaires which represent about 55% of the total administered questionnaire were retrieved and found useable for data analysis. This number (120 response rate) is adequate for the data analysis as Leedy and Ormrod (2005) pointed out that a minimal sample size of 30% is sufficiently large to provide an effective normal approximation as a general rule of thumb, irrespective of the shape of the population frequency distribution. Table 4.1 presents the response rate of respondents for the study.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Research population	506
Questionnaires Administered	220
Questionnaires Retrieved	120
Response rate	55%

Field Survey (2024)

Demography of Respondents

The respondents that took part in the research belong to the Procurement unit of public sector organisation in Nigeria. Most of them have clear understanding, knowledge and experience of the policies of the organisation as it relates to procurement practices. Table 4.2 presents the demographic information of the respondents to this study.

Table 4.2: Demography of Respondents

Demography	Classification	Frequency	Percentage %
Educational Qualifications		**Frequency**	**Percentage %**
	Ph.D.	3	2.5
	M.Sc.	40	33.3
	B.Sc./HND	72	60
	Others	5	4.2
	Total	120	100.0
Years of Experience		**Frequency**	**Percentage %**
	Less than 5 years	52	43.3
	5 to 10 Years	32	26.7
	11 to 15 Years	29	24.2
	16 to 20 Years	2	1.6
	over 20 years	5	4.2
	Total	120	100.0

Field Survey (2024)

Table 4.2 presents the demographic information of the respondents. The educational qualification shows that 60% of the respondents are holders of B.Sc./HND, 33.3% had M.Sc., while only 2.5% hold a Ph.D. degree. This implies that the respondents are sufficiently educated. 43.3% of the respondents has less than 5 years of experience, 26.7% has 5 to 10 years of experience, 24.2% of the procurement practitioners that responded to the survey has working experience of 16 to 20 years while only 4.2% has over 20 years of experience. This implies that most of the respondents are at the mid stage of their

careers and should be aware of the requisite skills for procurement officers to enhance organisational performance.

Reliability Test

The reliability of the research instrument was carried out using the Cronbach's alpha analysis to test the internal consistency of the variable in the questionnaire as well as the reliability analysis, and the results are compared with George and Mallery, (2003) acceptability (Table 4.3) of any coefficient of Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.6. The analysis reflects the extent to which items within an instrument measure various aspects of the same variable or construct. Table 4.3 gives the range of the Cronbach's alpha analysis.

Table 4.3: Cronbach's alpha level of reliability

Cronbach's Alpha(α)	**Internal Consistency**
Above 0.9	Excellent
0.8 – 0.9	Good
0.7 – 0.8	Acceptable
0.6. – 0.7	Questionable
0.5 – 0.6	Poor
Less than 0.5	Unacceptable

Source: George and Mallery, 2003.

4.1.3.1 Reliability Analysis for Procurement Skills

The reliability test was conducted to test the internal consistency of the variables under procurement skills set for further analysis. The outcome (Table 4.4) indicated that, all items were within the acceptability threshold of George and Mallery, (2003).

Table 4.4: Internal Consistencies of Procurement Skills

Procurement Skills	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Internal Consistency
Procurement Specific Skills	17	.772	Acceptable
Soft Skills	13	.753	Acceptable

Source: Field Survey, (2024).

It can be deduced from the Table 4.4 that the 17 items under procurement specific skills have Cronbach's alpha of .772, while the 13 variables that represents the soft skills has a Cranach's alpha of .753. All values > 0.7 indicating acceptable internal consistency according to acceptability threshold of George and Mallery, (2003).

4.2 Assessment of Procurement Skills of Practitioners in Public Sector Organisation

From the review of literature in this study, procurement skills are classified into two categories namely; procurement specific and soft skills. The procurement specific skills, which encompass the skills necessary at each stage of the public procurement lifecycle. They are derived from the knowledge and skills required to perform the main tasks and activities of at procurement stage. While soft skills are personal attributes of procurement practitioner that enable them interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. It is an interpersonal skill that characterise the relationships with other people and complement the procurement specific skills in the work place.

4.2.1 Assessing the Procurement specific skills

For this study, seventeen (17) procurement specific skills were identified and grouped into three (3) clustered under "horizontal" (i.e. all stages of the public procurement lifecycle),"pre-award" (skills required before the award of a public contract) and "post-award" (skills necessary for the contract management after the award of a public contract). Respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement of the procurement skills to the attainment of sustainable procurement performance on a five-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, to 5-Strongly Agree).

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of Procurement Specific Skills

Code	Procurement Specific Skills/competences	N	Mean	SD	Rank

PSS 08	Needs assessment and Procurement planning	120	4.45	.615	1
PSS 13	Contract Quality and Time management	120	4.38	.606	2
PSS 06	Decision making	120	4.36	.832	3
PSS 11	Tender documentation and evaluation	120	4.35	.685	4
PSS 09	Market analysis and engagement	120	4.35	.644	4
PSS 01	Whole life costing and financial analysis skills	120	4.34	.610	6
PSS 03	Sustainable design and Innovative skills	120	4.33	.665	7
PSS 02	e Procurement and other ICT skills	120	4.31	.821	8
PSS 04	Negotiations Skills	120	4.21	.836	9
PSS 12	Cost management and accounting compliance	120	4.20	.788	10
PSS 05	Value engineering	120	4.15	.811	11
PSS 17	Environmental Health and safety management	120	4.13	.803	12
PSS 10	Technical specifications	120	4.10	.856	13

PSS 14	Monitoring Certification and payment	120	4.07	.775	14
PSS 15	Conflict resolution and mediation	120	4.01	.784	15
PSS 16	Variation and change management	120	3.93	.875	16
PSS 07	Application of diversity and equal opportunities procedures	120	3.85	.966	17

Likert Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 4.5 shows that the respondents agreed to the procurement specific skills identified as required skills for procurement practitioners to attain sustainable procurement performance in public sector organisation in Nigeria. All the seventeen (17) procurement specific skills were rated high by the respondents with mean score ranging between 3.85 to 4.45. The highest ranked skills, **PPS 08** ("Needs assessment and Procurement planning"), received a mean score of 4.45, making it the most agreed upon skills to attain sustainable procurement performance by the respondents. This highlights the important of needs assessment in procurement planning and the need for organisation to equip procurement officers with these skills to attain sustainable procurement performance in their organisation. **PSS 13** "Quality/time management" (M = 4.38; SD = 0.606) and **PSS 06** "decision making skills" (M = 4.36; SD = 0.823) were ranked 2nd and 3rd respectively. These findings are consistence with the study by Mahamadu, *et al.*, (2018) which also ranked decision-making and leadership amongst the most important strategic skills.

The least ranked procurement skills is **PSS 07** "Application of diversity and equal opportunities procedures" with mean score of (M = 3.85; SD = 0.966), placing it at the lower end of level of agreement but still above the moderately agreed upon skills threshold. This indicates the level of value public sector organisation pay to issues of equity and diversity during procurement exercise. The procurement specific skill that leads to the attainment of sustainable procurement performance in public sector organisations are largely skills related to Needs assessment at Procurement planning stage and Quality/time management and decision-making skills. This aligns Patrucco *et al.,* (2024),

that highlight that needs assessment serves as a strategic tool that enables procurement professionals to identify and articulate requirements that align with both organisational goals and sustainability objectives. By thoroughly analysing demand and engaging stakeholders, procurement officials can prioritise procurement that minimise environmental impact while enhancing social value (Thai, 2017).

Socio-economic, political, and governance factors help explain the observed skill rankings: needs assessment and procurement planning are highly valued due to governance instability, weak institutional capacity, data gaps, and fragmented inter-ministerial coordination, which make robust needs analysis a safeguard against wasteful procurement and align purchasing with fiscal scrutiny and development plans. Quality and time management rise in importance because bureaucratic bottlenecks and administrative inertia slow processes, making timely, quality-focused delivery essential to meet service-delivery expectations. Decision-making skills are crucial amid policy volatility, stakeholder pressure, and market risks, requiring sound judgment to balance competing claims, deter corruption, and justify choices under uncertainty. Overall, these dynamics reflect Nigeria's governance context and market conditions, where planning, efficiency, and prudent decision-making are leveraged to achieve sustainable procurement outcomes.

4.2.2 Assessing the Soft Skills for Procurement Practitioners

Soft skills are the interpersonal skill that characterise the relationships with other people and complement the procurement specific skills in an organisation. For this study, thirteen (13) soft skills were identified from literature and clustered into three (3) clusters; personal, people and performance. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with the Soft skills that leads to the attainment of sustainable procurement performance in public sector organisation on a five-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, to 5-Strongly Agree). The results of the ranking of the assessment of soft skills of procurement practitioners are summarised in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Assessments of Soft Skills of Procurement Practitioners

Code	Soft Skills/Competences	N	Mean	SD	Rank
SS 01	Analytical and critical thinking	120	4.25	.696	1
SS 02	Communication skills	120	4.25	.666	1
SS 03	Application of ethics guidelines	120	4.25	.826	1

SS 04	Collaboration and Relationship management	120	4.21	.814	4
SS 10	Project management	120	4.21	.791	4
SS 06	Team management and Leadership	120	4.20	.810	6
SS 13	Problem solving skills	120	4.20	.799	6
SS 05	Stakeholder relationship management	120	4.16	.796	8
SS 12	Risk management and internal control	120	4.15	.647	9
SS 11	Business and performance orientation	120	4.11	.668	10
SS 08	Application of corporate social responsibility CSR	120	4.11	.892	10
SS 09	Organisational awareness	120	4.00	.754	12
SS 07	Entrepreneurship	120	3.77	.864	13

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 4.6 shows the thirteen 13 soft skills required by procurement practitioners to attain sustainable procurement performance in public sector organisation. The mean score of the soft skills SS ranges between 3.77 to 4.25. The highest rank skills are; **SS 01** "Analytical and critical thinking", **SS 02** "Communication skills" and **SS 03** "Application of ethics guidelines" with mean score (M = 4.25; SD = 0.696, M = 4.25; SD = 0.666, M = 4.25; SD = 0.826) respectively. This implies that for public sector organisation to attain sustainable procurement, individual procurement officers should possess analytical/critical thinking skills and communication skills as well as utilisation of ethics guidelines during procurement process. This aligns with literature that highlights the critical role of soft skills such as communication, negotiation, and stakeholder engagement in facilitating organizational change towards sustainability (Abarca & Majluf, 2021).

The least ranked soft skills is **SS 07** "Entrepreneurship" with mean score (M = 3.77; SD = 0.864), this indicates that public sector organisation should encourage the entrepreneurial skills amongst it procurement officers so as to mitigate the deficiency of procurement practitioners with low entrepreneurial skills.

Contextual implications for practice and policy in Nigeria emphasise targeted capacity-building to boost analytical/critical thinking, ethics-aligned decision-making, and cross-ministerial communication; embedding ethics guidelines into standard operating procedures, reviews, and performance metrics to reinforce integrity; fostering structured entrepreneurship within defined

boundaries through pilots and supplier development while ensuring compliance and risk oversight; enhancing stakeholder engagement and transparency with clear communication strategies and dispute-resolution mechanisms to bolster legitimacy; and integrating soft-skill indicators into procurement dashboards to link training to tangible gains in efficiency, supplier performance, and cost-effectiveness.

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

This paper aimed at identifying the requisite procurement skills by practitioners to perform optimally in public sector organisation. Extensive literature review was conducted and thirty (30) Procurement competences and skills were identified and clustered under PSS (17) and SS (13). The result revealed that 17 skills were agreed to be the required procurement specific skills PSS to be possessed by procurement practitioners to perform optimally in public sector organisation, with "Needs assessment and Procurement planning", "Contract Quality and Time management" and "Decision making" skills were ranked 1st , 2nd and 3rd respectively. Similarly, the result revealed that 13 Soft Skills SS were agreed to be required to be possessed by procurement practitioners to optimise the performance of procurement practitioners in public sector organisation, in which "Analytical & critical thinking", "Communication skills" and "Application of ethics guidelines" skills were all ranked 1st.

5.2 Conclusion

This study assesses the procurement skills (PS) of practitioners that optimise performance in Nigeria public sector organisation. It was discovered that needs assessment/procurement planning skills, contract quality & time management skills and decision making skills were the most important procurement specific skills. While analytical, communication and application of ethics guidelines were the most important soft skills required by procurement practitioners to attain sustainable procurement performance.

5.3 Recommendation

Public sector organisations in Nigeria should implement targeted training programs that strengthen both procurement-specific skills such as needs assessment and procurement planning, contract quality

and time management, and decision making and soft skills, particularly analytical thinking, effective communication, and the application of ethics guidelines, to enhance procurement practitioners' capabilities and drive sustainable procurement performance.

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