

## Assessing Procurement Practitioners' Competencies for Public Sector Performance in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Globally, government spending on public procurement amounts to approximately \$13 trillion, yet inefficiencies caused by weak procurement capacities lead to significant losses. Factors such as inadequate training, poor supplier relationship management, and limited emphasis on sustainability hinder alignment with organisational goals. This paper investigates the essential procurement skills for achieving optimal performance among public sector practitioners in Nigeria. Through an extensive literature review, thirty (30) procurement competencies and skills were identified and categorised into procurement-specific skills (PSS) and soft skills (SS). The study sampled 220 of the 506 Nigerian public procurement practitioners. Data reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, while descriptive statistics were analysed with SPSS IBM version 27.0. Results reveal that fifteen (15) procurement-specific skills, including needs assessment, procurement planning, contract management, and decision-making, are particularly vital with "Needs assessment and Procurement planning" ranked highest. Additionally, twelve (12) soft skills such as analytical thinking, communication, and ethical practice were identified as critical. The findings highlight the importance of targeted training programs to develop these competencies, thereby enhancing procurement effectiveness and sustainability in the public sector. Future research could explore procurement competencies in private organisations and consider alternative frameworks beyond the European Union EU Competency Framework for Public Procurement Professionals, 2020.

**Keywords:** Procurement Competency, Procurement Practitioners, Procurement Specific Skills, Soft Skills, Public Sector Performance, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Globally, governments spend approximately \$13 trillion on public procurement, with inefficiencies causing significant financial losses due to weak procurement capacities (Josh & Karyawati, 2022; Murungi & Senelwa, 2019). 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.

Despite recognition of its importance, existing literature indicates a persistent skills gap among procurement practitioners, driven by inadequate training, poor supplier relationship management, and limited focus on sustainability (Pillai *et al.*, 2023; Basheka, 2021). This research addresses this gap by critically examining the procurement skills necessary for optimal performance in the Nigerian public sector.

#### **Key research objectives:**

- Identify core procurement skills required for effective practice
- Assess the current skill levels of Nigerian public procurement practitioners

Beyond identifying critical competencies, this study informs targeted policy interventions, shaping training programs and strategic reforms that can enhance procurement efficiency, promote transparency, and improve public sector performance. The findings offer practical insights for policymakers and organisational leaders aiming to strengthen procurement capacity and accountability

### **Literature Review**

#### **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**

|                        | Skills                                                                                                                         | Competencies                                                                                   |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Adeptness</b>       | Skills can be adopted easily.<br>Skills are often agile; one can develop them with education and skill enhancement programmes. | Competencies cannot be adopted easily.<br>Competencies are developed over long period of time. |
| <b>Transferability</b> | 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.               |

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Detailing</b> | <p>A specific skill gives an ability that can be applied in a specific setting to accomplish a predefined desired result.</p> <p>Skills involves ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills).</p> | <p>Competencies give ability to solve problem with combination of skills. Hence, depth of knowledge determines competencies.</p> <p>Empathy, integrity, loyalty, cannot be taught one needs to have them in their character.</p> |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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

### 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 these 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, 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.

### 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 Percy (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 Percy (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<br>et al.<br>(2006) | Tassabehji<br>&<br>Moorhouse<br>(2008) | Office of<br>Government<br>Commerce<br>(OGC)<br>(2008) | Basheka<br>(2021) | UK<br>Ministry<br>of<br>Justice<br>(MOJ)<br>(2012) | New Zealand<br>Government<br>Procurement<br>(NZGP)<br>(2014) | Kwofie<br>et al.<br>(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 procurement law and procedures |                               |                                        |                                                        | x                 |                                                    | x                                                            |                            |

|                                                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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)

### 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):

1. The “horizontal” cluster encompasses competences applicable to all stages of the public procurement lifecycle;
2. The “pre-award” cluster includes all competences required to perform all the tasks and activities taking place before the award of a public contract;
3. 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;

1. 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;
2. 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;
3. The “performance” cluster includes all competences public procurement professionals need to have in order to increase value for money in public procurement procedures.



*Figure 2.7: 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                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Procurement specific competences</b> | <b>Horizontal</b>      | 1. Planning<br>2. Lifecycle<br>3. Legislation<br>4. e-Procurement and other IT tools<br>5. Sustainable procurement<br>6. Innovation procurement<br>7. Category specific<br>8. Supplier management<br>9. Negotiations |
|                                         | <b>Pre-award</b>       | 10. Needs assessment<br>11. Market analysis and engagement<br>12. Procurement strategy<br>13. Technical specifications<br>14. Tender documentation<br>15. Tender evaluation                                          |
|                                         | <b>Post-award</b>      | 16. Contract management<br>17. Certification and payment<br>18. Reporting and evaluation<br>19. Conflict resolution and mediation                                                                                    |
| <b>Soft competences</b>                 | <b>Personal</b>        | 20. Adaptability and modernisation<br>21. Analytical and critical thinking<br>22. Communication<br>23. Ethics and compliance                                                                                         |
|                                         | <b>People</b>          | 24. Collaboration<br>25. Stakeholder relationship management<br>26. Team management and Leadership                                                                                                                   |
|                                         | <b>Performance</b>     | 27. Organisational awareness<br>28. Project management<br>29. Business and performance orientation<br>30. Risk management and internal control                                                                       |

Source: European Union, (2020).

### 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 (Lamprey 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).

### **Identified Gaps for Literature**

While numerous studies have highlighted skills and competencies necessary for effective procurement (Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008; Basheka, 2021; EU, 2020), however, there is limited rigorous empirical evidence demonstrating the direct impact of specific competencies on procurement performance, particularly within the Nigerian public sector. Many existing studies are conceptual or rely on self-assessment, resulting in contested or weak conclusions about which skills genuinely improve procurement performance (Mushi *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, the shifting roles of procurement professionals from clerical to strategic raise questions about how well current competencies correlate with tangible performance metrics, revealing a significant gap in validating these relationships (Giunipero *et al.*, 2006; Fitzgerald & Stokes, 2022).

### **Connection between literature review and Research Questions**

The literature for this study underscores a broad range of procurement skills including technical, managerial, and soft skills organised into frameworks such as the European Union's Competency Matrix, which segments skills into procurement-specific and soft categories across the procurement lifecycle (EU, 2020). These themes directly inform our research questions for this paper as to which procurement skills are most critical for optimal performance and how do procurement practitioners perceive the relevance of these skills? To address these questions, the survey instrument (questionnaire) incorporates items

reflecting these competencies 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) for procurement-specific skills while soft skills were grouped under; personal, people and performance respectively. Respondents (Procurement practitioners) were requested to indicate their level of agreement base on a five-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, to 5-Strongly Agree).

### **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). In order to determine the required sample size for this study, sample size Table calculated based on Cochran’s formula (1977) cited in Sarmah & Hazarika, (2012) was used, with a precision level of 0.05, and a confidence level of 95%. The sample size of 220 was estimated using the sample size Table of Cochran’s formula (1977) cited in Sarmah & Hazarika, (2012). Hence, 220 questionnaire was purposively administered through electronic means (Google form) to Procurement officers of varies ministries, departments and agencies MDAs of Federal government of Nigeria who have attended professional training/workshop from Sustainable Procurement, Environmental & Social Standards Enhancement Centre of Excellence (SPESSECE). 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.

### **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 %        |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Educational Qualifications</b> |                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
|                                   | Ph.D.             | 3                | 2.5                 |
|                                   | M.Sc.             | 40               | 33.3                |
|                                   | B.Sc./HND         | 72               | 60                  |
|                                   | Others            | 5                | 4.2                 |
|                                   | Total             | 120              | 100.0               |
| <b>Years of Experience</b>        |                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
|                                   | 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( $\alpha$ ) | 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.

### 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 ( $\alpha$ ) | 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 Cronach's alpha of .753. All values > 0.7 indicating acceptable internal consistency according to acceptability threshold of George and Mallery, (2003).

### 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.

### 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 o8 | Needs assessment and Procurement planning                   | 120 | 4.45 | .615 | 1    |
| PSS 13 | Contract Quality and Time management                        | 120 | 4.38 | .606 | 2    |
| PSS o6 | Decision making                                             | 120 | 4.36 | .832 | 3    |
| PSS 11 | Tender documentation and evaluation                         | 120 | 4.35 | .685 | 4    |
| PSS o9 | Market analysis and engagement                              | 120 | 4.35 | .644 | 4    |
| PSS o1 | Whole life costing and financial analysis skills            | 120 | 4.34 | .610 | 6    |
| PSS o3 | Sustainable design and Innovative skills                    | 120 | 4.33 | .665 | 7    |
| PSS o2 | e Procurement and other ICT skills                          | 120 | 4.31 | .821 | 8    |
| PSS o4 | Negotiations Skills                                         | 120 | 4.21 | .836 | 9    |
| PSS 12 | Cost management and accounting compliance                   | 120 | 4.20 | .788 | 10   |
| PSS o5 | 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 o7 | 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 o8** (“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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. These uniformly high ratings across all skills may suggest the influence of social desirability bias, where respondents tend to rate skills as highly necessary to conform to perceived expectations, which could overstate the actual importance of certain skills. However, the findings are consistent 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 skill 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).

### 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 skill 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 its procurement officers so as to mitigate the deficiency of procurement practitioners with low entrepreneurial skills.

## Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

### 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 findings of this study provide valuable insights for shaping continuous professional development programs, particularly within Nigeria's on-going efforts to enhance procurement capacity. The identification of 15 critical procurement-specific skills includes; needs assessment, procurement planning, contract quality and time

management, and decision-making skills highlights key areas where targeted training can significantly elevate practitioner performance. Similarly, the recognition of 12 soft skills such as analytical and critical thinking, communication, and ethical application emphasises the importance of holistic capacity building that integrates both technical expertise and professionalism. These insights can directly complement the Sustainable Procurement, Environmental & Social Standards Enhancement Centre of Excellence (SPESSECE) initiative, supported by the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) in collaboration with development partners like the World Bank. Specifically, the training modules can focus on strengthening these priority skills, ensuring procurement practitioners are equipped with the necessary competencies to navigate complex procurement environments, foster transparency, and deliver value for money. This strategic approach aligns with Nigeria's broader reform agenda to professionalise procurement across ministries, departments and agencies MDAs. Furthermore, embedding these evidence-based findings into on-going training initiatives will not only improve operational efficiency but also enhance public trust and accountability in Nigeria's public procurement system.

### **Conclusion**

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

### **Recommendations**

Public sector organisation should;

- Investigate the effectiveness of targeted training programs that focus on enhancing procurement-specific skills (Satisfaction assessment, Needs assessment and procurement planning, Contract time and quality management, Tender evaluation).
- Emphasise the development of essential soft skills, particularly; Analytical and critical thinking, Communication skills, Ethical guideline application.
- Ensure training programs are tailored to address the specific skill gaps identified within the organisation.
- Regularly evaluate and update these training initiatives to assess their impact on procurement performance

### Limitations of the Study

- Self-reporting bias: The reliance on self-administered questionnaires may have introduced social desirability bias, where respondents overstate their skills or knowledge to appear more competent. This can affect the accuracy of the findings.
- Cross-sectional design: The study's cross-sectional nature captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to assess changes over time or establish causal relationships between procurement skills and performance.
- Sample representativeness: The sample was purposively drawn from procurement officers across MDAs attending training sessions organized by SPESSECE, which may not fully represent the entire population of Nigerian public procurement practitioners. Additionally, state and local government officials were not included, affecting the generalizability of the results to all levels of government.

### Next Steps for Future Research

Future studies can;

- Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate how procurement skills evolve over time and their impact on procurement skills on sustainable procurement performance.
- Incorporate qualitative insights through interviews or focus groups to explore contextual factors influencing procurement practices and to better understand the nuanced skill gaps and training needs.
- Expand the sample to include state and local government officials, as well as private sector practitioners, for a more comprehensive understanding of procurement capacity across sectors and levels of government.
- Explore performance-based measures or empirical performance data to validate self-reported skills and assess their actual impact on procurement efficiency and transparency.

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