Procurement Personnel in Public Senior High Schools in the Kumasi Metropolis: Their Qualifications and Experience

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Abstract
The success of any organisation depends to a large extent on competent and well motivated workforce. Buying functions of organisations have often been treated as ordinary activities which could be carried out by any employee. This failure to recognise procurement as a specialised function deserving to be carried out by knowledgeable, competent, and skilful professionals has been the bane of many establishments. This study is an attempt to identify the calibre of personnel manning the procurement functions of sixteen (16) public second cycle educational institutions in the Kumasi metropolis of the Ashanti region of Ghana. Questionnaire was used to collect data from these schools; frequency was adopted to express the information collected into meaningful form. The findings of the study revealed that more than 50% of staff in charge of procurement are not procurement officers; the majority of personnel (40.6%) engaged in procurement have working experience of between 3 to 6 years whilst only 12.5% have worked in that capacity for more than 10 years. Relative to the academic qualifications of the personnel, the study revealed that more than 50% of those in charge of procurement have a bachelor’s degree as the minimum academic qualification and the least academic qualification is a higher national diplomat (HND). However, professional qualification is almost non-existent as out of the 32 personnel surveyed only 1 of them has some professional qualification related to procurement.

Key words: Procurement personnel, Public procurement, Senior High Schools, Qualification and Experience.

1.0 Introduction
Stating that human resource is very important to the success of an organisation is almost a truism; finding the right people with the requisite competencies to do the job is one of the most important functions of a manager since the success of the organisation depends significantly on the availability of appropriate human resource (Waldron, Vsanthakumar and Arulraj, 1997; Wright et al., 2001; Collins and Clark, 2003). Procurement activities in many public institutions in Ghana have at best been transactional, and as a result the benefits of best quality of goods and services, best price; best terms of delivery; best quantity; and in effect best value for money; which are benefits of strategic applications of procurement function have eluded many Ghanaian public institutions.

This study explores some characteristics of personnel in charge of procurement functions in 16 public second cycle educational institutions in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. It tries to find out the job designation of those procuring for the schools; other personnel characteristics explored are: the academic qualification, the professional qualifications, and the years of working experience.

The salient parts of this study include: a review of relevant literature; method of data collection and analysis; research findings and discussions; policy implications and recommendations; and conclusion.

2.0 Literature Review
The reviewed literature relates to the state of public procurement in Ghana, public procurement in Ghanaian public schools, what constitutes competent procurement personnel, the difference that
quality procurement personnel can make in public procurement, and how to attract and maintain competent procurement personnel in public second cycle institutions.

2.1 Public Procurement
Public procurement has gained much recognition especially in recent times as a major driver of innovation and a critical aspect of economic development of nations (Aschhoff and Wolfgang, 2008; Neves, n.d.; Rolfstam, Phillips and Bakker, 2009; Rolfstam, 2009). Public procurement in any country represents one of a government’s largest spending items; across OECD countries it accounts for about 15% of GDP and in developing countries it can take more than 25% of GDP and in the least developed countries especially post war countries it can account for as much as 70% of GDP (UNEP, 2012; European Commission, 2013; Bosch, Kemperman and Raes, 2012; Development Assistance Committee, 2005).

Public procurement can be explained as the acquisition through contractual means of goods, services and works by governments and state owned enterprises with resources from state and local authority budgets. It is the process by which public sector organisations acquire goods, services and works from third parties, and consists of a sequence of activities; ranging from need assessment through to contract awards and management and final payment (Office of Government Commerce, 2008; OECD, 2008).

2.2 Public Procurement in Ghana
Public procurement absorbs about 17% of Ghana’s GDP and about 80% of national tax revenue (Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2011). Ghana’s public procurement Act (Act 663) 2003 was introduced to curb inappropriate practices in public procurement, and to promote fairness, transparency, and value for state resources (Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2010; Osei-Tutu, Sarfo and Ameyaw, 2012).

Since the introduction of the public procurement Act, there has been deliberate measures to increase transparency through periodic assessment of procurement activities of public entities; the development of corporate website to provide information on government contracts and other relevant public procurement information; and the publication of a bi-monthly electronic bulletin to make procurement information available to the public (Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2011). Other successes chalked in Ghana’s public procurement include; the establishment of legal and institutional framework by public procurement authority to ensure probity and accountability and its potential effect of creating an investor friendly environment (Anvuur, Kumaraswamy and Male, 2006). However, there remains substantial challenges in Ghana’s public procurement, among these are: circumvention of the procurement process by some public officials, incompetence of most of procurement officers, non-compliance with the provisions of the public procurement law, low level of interaction between public procurement entities and the public procurement authority, conflict of interest, and corruption (Osei-Tutu, Badu and Owusu-Manu, 2010; Ameyaw, Sarfo and Osei-Tutu, 2012; Agbele, 2011).

2.3 Attracting and retaining competent Procurement Personnel
Suitably qualified procurement personnel are needed at every level of the procurement system, as purchasing performance of organisations is likely to be affected by the short supply of qualified and experienced procurement and supply managers at both middle and senior levels (Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2011; UK Audit Commission, 2002; Procurement Round Table, 2006).

In order to attract and retain a cadre of suitably qualified and experienced procurement personnel in the public sector, the government at both the national and local levels must adopt proactive and innovative measures. Strategies for attracting and retaining the right calibre of personnel in public procurement includes: offering a clear and attractive career path for quality top notch graduates to enter and rise to leadership positions within agencies; basing entry requirement on academic and performance merit; providing opportunity for structured training and enriching assignments broader than the immediate job; and collaborating with the private sector in sharing of knowledge and experience (Procurement Round Table, 2006).
The Public Procurement Authority (PPA) of Ghana recognises the key role of skilled professional procurement personnel in the effective implementation of the Public Procurement Act and relevant regulations to ensure transparency, fairness, accountability, and best Practice (Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2011). To this end the Authority has embarked on a number of capacity building programmes such as training for a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the procurement process. With the support of the Millennium Development Authority (MiDA), the PPA has embarked on a number of programmes to address the shortage of suitably qualified personnel in the short and long term, key among these initiatives are: the development of curricula and modules for three categories of procurement training (3-6 months training for procurement practitioners currently working in public sector but without procurement qualifications; 15-24 months post-HND course for the award of bachelor’s degree in procurement; and a 4-year bachelor degree programme to be pursued at the universities); internship programme for polytechnic and university students studying procurement courses; and the yet to be established career path for procurement practitioners and professionals who are working in the public sector (Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2011).

3.1 Method of Data Collection
A survey of 16 public second cycle schools in the Kumasi Metropolis was conducted to find out the calibre of personnel in charge of procurement activities in these institutions. Statistics Canada (2010) defines a survey as the activity of collecting information in an organised and systematic manner about characteristics of interest from a sample or total population, using well defined methods for the collection, organising and summarising such information into useful form. This study used the survey method so as to take advantage of its benefits of minimal staff and facility requirements, its versatility, its efficiency in data collection in terms of costs and time, and its attribute of generalisability (Durrance and Fisher, 2005; Sage, n.d. p.160). By using questionnaires, information was collected on the job titles, years of experience, and the academic and professional qualifications of the procurement personnel of the schools of this study. The collected data was then processed to derive meaning and usefulness.

3.2 Data Analysis
Two respondents each from the educational institutions of this study completed the questionnaires. These respondents are responsible for procurement activities of their schools therefore are in a better position to provide relevant information with respect to the calibre of procurement personnel in these schools. The analysis of data was with respect to the job designation of the officer who purchases for the schools; the years of work experience of the personnel; the academic qualification of the personnel; and the professional qualification of this person. The statistical package for social science (SPSS) was used to process the responses of the 32 respondents. Frequency tables were generated to show the attributes of officials who make up the procurement teams of the schools with respect to academic and professional qualifications, and years of working experience.

4.0 Findings and Discussion of the findings
The findings are presented and discussed under the headings: job designation of officer in charge of procurement activities; years of experience of the procurement officer; academic qualification of the officer; and the professional qualification of the officer.

4.1 Officers in charge of procurement.
In a little more than half of the schools surveyed, procurement activities are controlled by other personnel than officials designated as procurement officers. About 22% of the respondents indicated that the heads of their schools were in charge of the schools’ procurement activities. This finding suggests at least two things: probably some of the schools do not have a job title designated as ‘procurement officer’; the other possibility is that the procurement function has low status, and even though the position of procurement officer might be there, personnel in that position are not allowed to function as expected. The later reason is more probable in this instance, this is
because another question that respondents answered in the questionnaire was about respondents’ opinion on how procurement is done in their schools; about 19% of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with how procurement was done in their schools because officers designated as procurement officers were being restricted in their functions. Another evidence that supports the view of low status of procurement in the second cycle schools is provided by a question directed at the Public Procurement Authority at their 6th public forum in Kumasi in 2012; the question was about why personnel with purchasing and supply background were not permitted to perform the procurement functions but were instead assigned to the stores (Public Procurement Authority, 2012). See appendix for frequency tables 1 and 2.

4.2 Years of working experience of those manning procurement

Years of working experience of personnel working with the procurement units of the schools of this study was categorised into: those whose work experience is below 3 years; those who have worked for between 3 and 6 years; those who have been working for 7 to 10 years; and those who have been working for more than 10 years. Results of the collected data indicate the following: the majority of the personnel (40.6%) have work experience of between 3 to 6 years. This is followed by those whose work experience is below 3 years (28.1%). This indicates that a great number of personnel working in the procurement units of the schools have less than 10 years working experience. Low level of experience could work against the realisation of peak performance, and this can negatively affect the realisation of the objectives of effective and efficient public procurement. Extensive experience of activities in a domain, according to Ericson (2006) is a necessary condition for the achievement of high performance. Table 3 in the appendix shows a frequency table on years of experience.

4.3 Academic Qualification of personnel

Personnel working with the procurement units of the institutions of this survey have various levels of academic qualifications: 50% of them have a bachelor’s degree, and the lowest level of academic qualification of these personnel is higher national diplomat (HND), and 37% of the personnel have HND. This indicates that the level of academic qualification of those working in procurement departments of the second cycle institutions in the Kumasi metropolis is quite high. With this level of education, getting the personnel trained to acquire the needed procurement skills and competencies will not pose much difficulty; this is because studies have shown that trainees with high level of education tend to be more motivated to learn and accomplish more (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005). Table 4 in appendix shows a frequency table on personnel academic qualification.

4.4 Professional Qualification of Personnel

The responses provided with respect to professional qualification of the respondents indicate that out of the 32 respondents only 1 of them has pursued a professional course with a procurement related professional body. In effect 31 of the respondents representing about 97% of personnel working in the procurement units of these institutions have no professional qualification at all; whether in purchasing/procurement, logistics, accounting, or finance. This is a serious deficiency for the professional capacity of these institutions. In the absence of professional competence, procurement continues to be regarded as a transaction-oriented back-office function and is managed in a haphazard manner. It is of utmost importance that procurement is accorded professional recognition, and equally important is the professional qualifications of procurement staff, as this will ensure effective and efficient procurement processes (Terzi and Posta, 2011).

4.5 Summary of Findings

From the findings of the study, it is quite clear that much needs to be done to enhance the skills and competencies of personnel in charge of procurement in the public second cycle schools in the Kumasi
Metropolis. The fact that procurement activities in more than half of the schools studied are performed by staffs who are not procurement officers suggests that procurement is not been considered as an important function in these schools. With this lack of recognition not much would be done to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of procurement processes. This often leads to procurement function being seen as a function that anyone at all could perform; making professional competence and specialised skills in procurement of little value in such institutions. With respect to this study, years of experience of personnel involved in procurement activities are of little consequence because the majority of these personnel are actually not procurement staffs though they perform procurement functions. Though the personnel doing procurement activities in the schools of this study have high level of academic qualification, professional qualification is non-existent, probably because of lack of recognition for procurement as a profession. The high level of academic qualification of the personnel of the procurement unit is however important for procurement training and development purposes.

5.1 Policy Implications and Recommendations
The Public Procurement Authority (PPA) must see to it that all public institutions which spend money to procure goods and services including public educational institutions have qualified procurement staffs to take charge of the procurement functions. There is also the need to project procurement as a very important function in organisations. Professional bodies of procurement like the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) should consider awareness creation about the functional importance of professional procurement to an organisation as part of their corporate social responsibilities. This can help in making procurement assume its rightful place amongst the key functions of an organisation.

Again, the PPA needs to put in place measures which would require public institutions to ensure that staffs employed for procurement functions are adequately trained and developed with the requisite competencies to execute the procurement functions effectively and efficiently. In addition procurement personnel should be encouraged to pursue professional courses in procurement/purchasing and supply, logistics, and other supply chain related courses. This can be done by paying the registration fees of courses that employees have passed and also promoting employees who have successfully completed some of the levels of the professional courses. As indicated by Tarzi and Posta (2011), the number and professional qualifications of procurement staffs is of utmost importance in ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in the procurement processes. This efficiency and effectiveness of procurement practices in the public sector is of utmost importance to the Government of Ghana, to tackle the problems of incompetent procurement practices, ever increasing procurement costs, procurement of sub-standard supplies, problems with timely delivery of supplies, poor negotiation skills which translate into poor contractual agreements, conflicts of interests, and corruption.

5.1 Limitations of the study
The major limitation of this study has to do with the limited scope of the study. The focus of the study was limited to 16 second cycle public schools in the Kumasi Metropolis. This was done as an initial step for a wider and more comprehensive study to find out the calibre of personnel manning the procurement units of public institutions in Ghana. This will however require substantial financial commitment which is currently not available to the researchers.

Further research should cover more institutions and include questions on the specific programmes of study of the officers in charge of procurement, training programmes attended since appointment, and availability of learning materials to enhance competencies and skills.

Conclusion
A competent and well motivated employee is a great asset to an organisation. Employees are motivated to give of their best when the roles they play are recognised and appreciated. Currently this does not seem to be the situation with the procurement profession in Ghana. To this end, the public procurement authority has a lot to do to create the awareness about the importance of procurement as a profession.
Heads and managements of institutions must recognise that the success of the organisations they manage greatly depends on how effectively and efficiently procurement functions are performed. Employment of qualified procurement personnel is of great essence in an effort to professionalise the procurement function. Procurement staffs need to be trained and encouraged to acquire professional qualifications. More importantly the ethical aspects of procurement professionals need to be enhanced. When all these are done, Ghana will be better off with well qualified, competent and ethically sound procurement professionals who would help the country achieve value for money in all transactions.

References


