

Electronic Public Procurement Implementation in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Globally, electronic procurement has become topical as a mechanism to build and sustain healthy public procurement systems. In this light, e-procurement reforms have the potential to modernise Zimbabwe's public procurement which is dented by centralisation, inefficiency, and corruption. The study employed a qualitative documentary review on the feasibility of modernising Zimbabwe's public procurement system through digital solutions. The study sought to analyse the benefits and opportunities of the e-procurement system, assess the challenges that hinder the implementation of the e-procurement system, and recommend critical success factors for implementing the e-procurement system in Zimbabwe. The findings of the study revealed that e-procurement is a viable procurement reform initiative that can foster public sector efficiency, effective communication, transparency, and disclosure of purchasing behaviours; prevent and control corruption and increase competition in the Zimbabwean public procurement system. Be that as it may, debacles, in the form of funding gaps, limited political will, poor Information Communication, and Technology infrastructure, and lack of system maintenance and upgrade may hamper the noble reform initiative in the country. Limited collaboration and engagement of stakeholders also present huge challenges to the effectiveness of the e-procurement system in Zimbabwe. For effective adoption of e-procurement, the study recommends mobilisation of adequate funds, commitment, and willingness of the political leadership, strategic collaborations, and regular maintenance, and upgrade of the system to ensure functionality and sustainability.

Keywords: E-procurement, public sector, public procurement, reform, feasibility

Introduction

The paper interrogates the implementation of e-procurement implementation as a reform initiative in Zimbabwe's public procurement system. The 21st century engrained in the fourth industrial revolution has introduced new approaches to the development and management of businesses and organisations through the integration of Information Communication and Technologies (ICTs) (Scwab, 2016). Johnson (2019) opines that in most countries across the globe, organisations have already felt the pinch of the exponential rate of evolving digitalisation with high velocity, shape, and systems impact. This implies that the development of technologies has pushed many countries and organisations across the globe to modernise their public procurement systems so as to reap the benefits brought by technologies in the management of organisations.

In North America, Jamaica is another country that re-invented the public procurement system through electronic means. The country has so far benefited through increased transparency in procurement activities, faster, easier, and more efficient ways of doing business (Ahmad, Aljafari, & Venkatesh, 2019). On a similar note, the United Kingdom which comprises of England, Scotland and Wales also made electronic procurement mandatory for all government purchases since April 2017 and e-platforms such as Contracts Finder, Sell2Wales and e-TendersNI, among others, have been functional in the UK to enhance the effectiveness of the public procurement (Hobson, 2019). In Spain, e-procurement has been also mandatory in the awarding of public sector contracts and the reform initiatives have enhanced transparency of the procurement process (De Silva, 2019). It is imperative to note that most recent developments in developed countries have focused on the modernisation of the public procurement system through electronic means. A cursory view of e-procurement adoption in developed countries has demonstrated that electronic procurement serves a vital function in building an efficient and functional procurement system in the public sector.

In Zimbabwe, the government enacted new legal frameworks to guide public procurement aiming to address deficiencies in the country's procurement system. The Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (PRAZ), formally the State Procurement Board (SPB), was created through an Act of Parliament, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act [Cap 22:23] which repealed the Act, No. 2/99 [Cap. 22:14] through Statutory Instrument S.I. 152 of December 2017 (Ali, 2019). The mandate of the Authority is to supervise public procurement procedures, to ensure transparency, fairness, honesty, cost-effectiveness, and competition as required by Section 315 of the Zimbabwean Constitution. Kazunga (2017) opines that the reform was further in recognition that the Procurement Act (Chapter 22:14) was now antiquated and no longer in sync with the current dictates and demands of modern procurement systems both regionally and internationally. The procurement reforms in Zimbabwe, therefore, aim to anchor transformational changes by replacing the country's old public procurement framework with a modern system that is more efficient, accountable, and transparent (Ali, 2019; Schwab, 2016).

Regardless of the enactment of the new law and institutional mandate, the public procurement system in Zimbabwe continues to be characterised by unflagging revenue leakages, insider trading, and corruption which undermines the viability of the system for effectual fiscal management (Ali, 2019). The procurement system remains under siege from political pressures and manipulation (Moyo & Mhundwa, 2020; Masinde, 2019). Grand misappropriation of resources, flawed tendering process, inflating of tender prices, delays in the provision of goods and services, and corruption within the tendering and contracting process envisage major debacles which continually beset the Zimbabwean procurement system (Dzuke & Naude, 2015; Nyamukondiwa, 2015; Ali, 2019; Moyo & Mhundwa, 2020). It is disturbing that Government departments and local authorities continue to defy the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDPA) Act Chapter (22: 23). As documentary evidence reveals, 294 government departments and 174 local authorities in 2019 failed to submit their registration the applications which signified 59,1% non-compliance rate (Moyo & Mhundwa, 2020). Recurrence of corruption in the tendering process, manipulation of tender procedures for personal gains and unfettered political interferences in the public sector signal a red flag on the effectiveness of the public procurement system (Kazunga, 2017; Ali, 2019).

This evidence mirrors compliance and viability challenges that continuously trouble the public procurement system in the country. This implies that the legal frameworks in the country have

remained cosmetic and more of a paper affair without visible changes in the public procurement system. The implementation of the electronic procurement system would therefore be a game-changer in enhancing compliance and efficiency in the public sector amid competing debacles that beset the procurement system in the country. The pertinent question is, therefore, what can be done to guarantee cost-effectiveness, transparency, and accountability in the procurement system in Zimbabwe? This study seeks to answer the question by assessing the feasibility of e-procurement as a panacea to the precarious procurement challenges bedevilling the public procurement system in Zimbabwe. The following objectives capture the locus of this paper; to assess the viability of e-procurement in Zimbabwe's public sector, to analyse the benefits and opportunities of adopting an electronic procurement system in the public sector in Zimbabwe, to assess the challenges that can counter the implementation of the electronic procurement system in Zimbabwe and to recommend critical success factors for implementing electronic procurement system in Zimbabwe. The thesis of the research is that e-procurement is the hub of efficient and effective public procurement within the public sector domain.

Research Methodology

The researcher made use of a qualitative, desk research method to assess the feasibility of adopting e-procurement systems in Zimbabwe's public sector. Through a review of e-government procurement in other countries, the study extracted policy and management lessons on how best to reform the public procurement system in Zimbabwe. Existing data in the form of both academic and grey literature were analysed to gain insights into the topic under study. These included journal articles, newspaper articles, and media reports. Content analysis was used as a qualitative data analysis tool to understand the feasibility of e-procurement as an alternate model for reforming Zimbabwe's government procurement system. The study organised, coded the data, and developed themes like; the benefits and opportunities of e-procurement in Zimbabwe, the role of e-procurement in national development, and the challenges that can hinder the implementation of e-procurement in Zimbabwe's public sector. The research's major limitation was the reliance on documentary evidence which may not be credible. The researchers considered the quality of the documents used in the study by cross-verifying data obtained from documents with other similar documents.

Literature Review

Several definitions have been put forward for e-procurement. Nawi, Roslan, Salleh, Zulhumadi, & Harun (2016) view e-procurement as the process of automating the procurement system of the company or organisation using web-based the applications. Candra & Gunawan (2017) understand e-procurement as the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the communication of the acquisition of goods and services. Electronic procurement can also be understood as a procurement reform initiative anchored to improve the traditional paper-based procurement system which has a slow uptake in processing the purchasing of goods and services through the adoption of internet-based solutions (Isikdag, 2019; Jacobsson, Linderöth, & Rowlinson 2017). Yevu & Yu (2019) aver that electronic procurement is a process of modernising the public procurement system as a response to the efficiencies of physical interactions and paper-based exchange of documents through an alternative innovative approach. Electronic procurement is therefore a reform initiative aimed at modernising the public procurement system so as to address the deficiencies associated with manual paper-based procurement in the public sector.

Over the years, the public sector has been marred with inefficiencies in resource use, delays in the provision of public services and corruption in the purchasing of government goods and services (Omary and Kalianga, 2017). This was taking place despite the recognition that public procurement is the central mechanism through which public resources are utilised within the public sector thus public procurement is at the heart of the public sector (Chigudu, 2014; Musanzikwa, 2013). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) has estimated that public procurement can account for up to 5% of gross domestic product in developing countries and averages about 20% of public expenditure. Public procurement, therefore, occupies a very important position for expenditure management and resource use in the public sector. As such, it demands greater probity and parsimony in resource use to ensure that public monies are invested with intention. This justifies the need for electronic procurement as it transforms the traditional and manual procurement system of government into an electronic system as well as internet-based activity through which both suppliers and buyers enjoy significant benefits through the opportunity to interact with each other effectively with greater convenience (Nawi *et al.*, 2016; Ahmad *et al.*, 2018). Electronic procurement reflects the automation of the entire procurement framework which is expected to offer considerable cost advantages, timeliness, and satisfaction of the public procurement system (Masinge, 2019; Alhola, Ryding, Salmenperä, & Busch, 2018; Yevu & Yu, 2019; Hafsa, Darnall, & Bretschneider, 2021). Evidence from extant literature suggests that electronic procurement reduces transaction costs which translate to better decision and value in terms of the public procurement output (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2018; Muszynska, 2016; Masinge, 2019; Hafsa, *et al.*, 2021).

Visibility of purchasing behaviours and prudent resource use within the public sector are some of the primary benefits of adopting the electronic procurement system. Effective public procurement systems can help governments see better value for money, reduce pressure on public budgets, and leave agencies better prepared to invite private investments (Khan, 2018; Alhola *et al.*, 2018; Masinge, 2019; Yevu & Yu, 2019). Public procurement, therefore, does not only transform the public procurement process but extends to the reduction in public expenditure and increases government efficiency. Therefore, the constellation of procurement fraud, flouting of tender procedures, and lack of disclosure of transactions in Zimbabwe (Dzuke & Naude, 2015) will be a thing of the past given the adoption of the e-procurement system which enhances the visibility of transactions, better disclosure of information and accountability. Implied is that the e-procurement system is a cornerstone to enhance greater parsimony in public resource use. Reducing pressure on public budgets and enhancing efficient resource use opens up more savings toward national socio-economic development. The achievement of national development priorities hinges on efficiency in public resource use which draws much from automating the public procurement system through digital solutions.

In Malaysia, electronic procurement was implemented in 2002 and the system is known as the 'e-Perolehan' which is responsible for online tendering and management of all business procurement systems (Nawi *et al.*, 2016). Since the adoption of e-procurement in the country, there has been increased competition in the procurement process, better cost-saving, and a reduction in delays in the procurement and contracting process (Ibid). Similarly, in Ghana is one of the African countries that have already integrated technologies in their public procurement system to enhance the effectiveness and viability of the systems (Whitehouse, 2019). The e-governance program (GHANEPS) evolved from 2012 where the country managed to plan and design for an electronic system that was premised on the need to modernise the public sector, reduce resource wastages through corruption, increase government efficiency and improve the quality-of-service delivery by the government (Agbeko, Effah, & Boateng,

2021; Whitehouse, 2019). This evidence mirrors successful cases of e-procurement adoption in other countries across the globe. Therefore, this challenges other developing countries like Zimbabwe to adopt e-procurement as a way to address the procurement shortfalls that ceaselessly undermine effective public expenditure management. E-procurement cases in Malaysia and Ghana have proved to be efficiency-enhancing mechanisms in public resource management. Therefore, can e-procurement induce efficiency in public resources management in Zimbabwe? The benefits of e-procurement remain to be seen and the opportunities that justify the need to implement the e-procurement system in Zimbabwe. The study, thus, aims to unpack the benefits and opportunities that accrue from the implementation of the e-procurement system in Zimbabwe.

While the benefits of e-procurement have been associated with a reduction in public expenditure, United Nations Procurement Handbook (2012) disagrees with the cost factor on the issue of E-Systems adoption highlighting installation costs, maintenance costs and the point that technology is always evolving hence the systems should be kept in shape with the change in technologies which could become more expensive than said in the reduction of costs. United Nations Procurement Handbook (2012) provided the best criticism on the desirability of adopting the e-procurement system with the aim of enhancing the performance of public procurement in the country. It raises the point that there are primary risks associated with adopting e-procurement which can lead to the missing of some strategies that can improve the effectiveness of the procurement process. Rotich (2016) reasoned along these lines indicating that despite the ability of e-procurement to enhance end-to-end e-solutions, the initiative can be an over-investment in which the e-procurement tools might fail to deliver the expected benefits. United Nations Procurement Handbook (2012) notes that the implementation of e-procurement can risk the organisation or country the opportunity to implement strategies that can effectively transform the procurement system without the need for electronic tools.

There is a raging debate over the desirability of implementing an e-procurement system that is aimed to revamp procurement. Daoud & Ibrahim (2019) think that e-procurement might not necessarily address the challenges affecting the public procurement systems without effective supportive structural, policy, and legal frameworks that support the functionality of the initiative. It becomes interesting, therefore, that while literature is divided on the topic, one cannot deny the transformative power and impact of technologies on organisational management and enhancing viability while also the risks of technology adoption should not be ignored. It will be also academic mischief to cast a blind eye to the challenges which can hamper the effectiveness of e-procurement implementation. A lack of systems compatibility within the organisations and suppliers is one of the obstacles that can impede the modernisation of the traditional procurement system to a technologically powered electronic procurement system (Mushi, 2018; Khan, 2018; Isikdang, 2019; Daoud & Ibrahim, 2019). Further, most E-Systems across the globe have been largely a failure due to network failure coming from poor network infrastructure in those countries (Mbwayo, 2017; Mushi, 2018; Mang'ana & Katundu, 2018). This coincides with Jacobson *et al.* (2017) who note that poor network infrastructure causes high internet downtime, yet the functionality of the e-procurement system is contingent upon a strong and vibrant network infrastructure that allows organisations and individuals to penetrate the e-procurement system at any point at any time. Power outages and a lack of an innovative culture amongst organisations in developing countries have been coined as other impediments to the effectiveness of e-procurement systems (Ranchna and Singh, 2013; Nawi *et al.*, 2016; Lundh & Svensson, 2018; Ngeta and Kisimbii, 2020; Pattrucco, Luzzini, & Stefano, 2017; Hafsa *et al.*, 2021). It is evident from extant literature that regardless of the benefits and opportunities that accrue from the implementation of the e-procurement systems,

the innovation is coupled with risks and challenges which can undermine the viability of the reform initiative. A critical question to ask is how prepared are the organisations and the systems in the context of Zimbabwe to embrace the innovation of the e-procurement? What practical challenges can be faced in terms of adoption of e-procurement system in the context of Zimbabwe? To answer this, the study is in search of contextual factors that can impede the modernisation process through assessing the feasibility of the e-procurement system as a substitute to the traditional public procurement system.

Theoretical Framework

The New Public Management (NPM) theory advocated by Hood (1991) emphasises the need to weed-off inefficiencies by government in the provision of public goods and services. The emphasis of the NPM paradigm is to reduce wastages and inefficiencies in the way government utilises public funds (Hood, 1991; Hughes, 2003). The need to reform the public procurement system is in line with the need to address the precarious procurement challenges that impedes efficiency in public resource usage in Zimbabwe's public sector. According to Hood (1991), the main antecedents to the NPM was to reduce the pressure of public sector expenditures on the public budgets. Joukie-deVries (2010) notes that NPM seeks to ensure that the public sector operates with efficiency through cutting unnecessary costs in the delivery of goods and services in the public sector. Therefore, the study seeks to understand how the use of e-procurement systems in the public sector can induce efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public goods and services. E-procurement system seeks to reduce transaction costs of the government by introducing technologies in the process of public procurement (Ali, 2019; Madzinga, Sibanda, & Munuhwa, 2020). The NPM doctrine emphasises on the shift to greater competition in the public sector (Hood, 1991). This means that the public sector should be exposed to effective tendering procedures and market disciplines as the private sector to ensure lower costs, better standards and overall quality of the goods and services (Hughes, 2003; Jouke-DeVries, 2010). This implies that the public procurement system ought to be reformed to follow standardized tendering procedures which overall can produce quality public goods and services as well as reduction in the cost of delivery in public goods and services. Jouke-DeVries (2010) notes that the introduction of ICTs is becoming a critical or enabling factor in the NPM doctrine as technologies remain at the centre of modernising the public sector to operate like the private sector. Therefore, guided by the NPM theoretical underpinnings, the study seeks to understand to assess the viability of implementing e-procurement system in the Zimbabwean public sector. The thesis of this study, therefore, is centred on understanding the viability of e-procurement implementation in Zimbabwe's public sector.

Discussion of Findings

The research sought to understand the viability of the implementing e-procurement system in the public sector. Findings from the study revealed that the adoption of e-procurement systems is viable in Zimbabwe's public sector as it is associated with a number of advantages which overall contribute towards improved public sector management and efficient usage of resources. The study made the revelation that transparency and the disclosure of public procurement data and purchases are the benefits that make e-procurement implementation in the Zimbabwe's public sector viable. E-procurement system in Zimbabwe would guarantee the ability to have the monitoring and oversight of public procurement activities to all stakeholders through real-time publishing and access to information via the electronic catalogues (Hassan, 2016). Further, public procurement transactions will be subjected to open monitoring and public scrutiny which compels procurement practitioners to handle public monies with greater

transparency and probity (Ligon, Malick, Sheth, & Bingley 2019; Lundh & Svensson, 2018). Transparency and disclosure of procurement data do not only deter irregularities in the procurement process but go beyond to allow for effective monitoring and oversight of public expenditure. This can be achieved in Zimbabwe where some suppliers and public officials tend to collude to prejudice the government a lot of resources by not going to tender and not following the right procedures in awarding of public sector contracts. These findings corroborate with empirical studies on the benefits that are offered by e-procurement implementation (Nawi *et al.*, 2016; Madzinga *et al.*, 2020; Agbeko *et al.*, 2021). Further, in the study of the e-procurement effectiveness in Bangladesh, Islam and Tembon (2018) note that public access to procurement information in 2007 was 15% but rose to 75% by 2017 due to the use of E-Systems in the procurement process. Transparency and disclosure of procurement transactions is a tenet of international best practices in public procurement. It constitutes a core principle in public procurement where relevant information concerning procurement process is to be publicly available, appropriate reporting of procurement activities and public monies to be used in a consistent manner that conforms to the intended purposes (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2018).

The study further revealed that efficiency in public resource use is one of the direct benefits that can be realised from the implementation of e-procurement in Zimbabwe's public sector. The use of E-Systems in sourcing, communication and evaluation of bids reduces the transaction costs to the government as in the traditional procurement system (World Bank, 2018; Gerede, 2020). This seeks to address the pitfalls of the conventional system which is vulnerable to manipulation by individuals who seek to benefit from the procurement loopholes and prejudice the government a lot of resources (Dzuke & Naude, 2017; Madzinga *et al.*, 2020). The Covid-gate scandal is an illustration of how public officials could take advantage of the loopholes in the procurement system to steal public funds (Kudzayi, 2020; Mashingaidze, 2020). Therefore, as a core component of the NPM reform agenda, ICTs have demonstrated the potency to induce public sector efficiency through reducing the cost of procuring public goods and services, dealing away with bureaucratic inefficiencies, delays and poor quality of goods and services. Findings from the study answer the central question in the research problem of whether e-procurement implementation is a viable reform initiative to the public procurement system in Zimbabwe. As demonstrated above, e-procurement can guarantee cost-effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector. If well implemented just like in Ghana and Malaysia, the country can weed-off inefficiencies and delays that ceaselessly drag back the achievement of the country's national development plans. In OECD countries, e-procurement implementation has resulted in a reduction in government operating costs by 5%-30% saving at least US\$10-US\$70 per transaction (Hadden, 2016). As such, governments should invest with the intention to ensure that each dollar bears fruits in national development. Findings support the thesis of the study that e-procurement is a hub for effective and efficient resource use in the public sector. This implies that e-procurement is a viable reform initiative in the country's public procurement system.

The achievement of national development goals can be realised through the implementation of an e-procurement system in the public sector in Zimbabwe. The study found that e-procurement implementation enhanced national socio-economic development in the country (Hassan, 2016; Gerede, 2020; Moyo & Mhundwa, 2020). The findings agree with the literature on the role of e-procurement as a proxy to drive national development (Alhola *et al.*, 2018; Yevu & Yu, 2019; Hafsa *et al.*, 2021). This implies that modernising the public procurement system, therefore, occupies a strategic position in the development discourse of the country as ICTs are seen as modalities to induce optimum resource usage in the public sector. It should be noted that the

reform agenda is part of the broader paradigmatic shift from the Traditional Public Administration (TPA) to Digital Public Administration (DPA) where technology is a driver of the governance process. The realisation of national development priorities like vision 2030 hinges on innovative approaches to public sector management through the implementation of e-procurement systems.

The adoption of the e-procurement system in Zimbabwe provides an opportunity for the country to have better prevention and control of corruption. Corruption in the public procurement system in Zimbabwe has risen to alarming levels where it presents a threat to socio-economic development in the country (Kudzayi, 2020). Based on the research findings of a review of documentary sources, e-procurement promises a visible decrease of bid-rigging and insider trading which was associated with the traditional public procurement system. Basically, e-procurement induces compliance of the organisations to the public procurement laws and procedures limiting the risk of corruption in public expenditure management (Nawi *et al.*, 2016). This comes at a right time where most public sector organisations in Zimbabwe have been defying the Public Procurement and Disposal of Assets Act Chapter [22:23] as evidenced by 294 government departments and 174 local authorities who failed to submit their registration the applications in 2019, which signified a 59,1% non-compliance rate with the legal architecture for public procurement in Zimbabwe (Moyo & Mhundwa, 2020). Returns of implementing the e-procurement system in the country aim to anchor viability and compliance of organisations with procurement frameworks which in the way helps to prevent and control corruption in the country.

E-procurement implementation in Zimbabwe is born of the realisation that the level of impunity and fiscal leakages in the public expenditure management has risen to alarming levels fortifying the efforts to ameliorate poverty and ultimately the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is a disappointment that during the times when the country battles with excessive power cuts, Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) and Zimbabwe Power Company (ZPC) paid US\$4.9 million and US\$ 562 000 to Pito Investments for the payment of transformers which had not yet been delivered from 2010 (Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development, 2020; Auditor General Report, 2018). Research findings reflect that the level of immunity in the country critically detracts the power utility companies from providing effective service delivery which is vital for industrial growth and national development. As such, the use of electronic means in the public procurement system promises to deal away with these procurement shortfalls through effective supplier appraisal and evaluation to assess the capacity of the supplier and the competence of the supplier before an award of contract has been given (Dzuke & Naude, 2017; Madzinga *et al.*, 2020). Further, through e-procurement systems, there is greater transparency and purchase monitoring which non-performing suppliers can be detected, and corrective action can easily be done (Nyamukondiwa, 2020; Madzinga *et al.*, 2020).

Arguably, e-procurement will serve as a mechanism to address fiscal leakages, corruption, and misuse of public funds in the public sector and ultimately drive national socio-economic development in Zimbabwe. The implementation of an e-procurement system should also be viewed as part of the Results Based Management System (RBM) where institutions should strive for economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the utilisation of public resources to provide relevant and timely services to the people. The concept of RBM emphasises the need for an integration of budgeting, planning, monitoring, staff management, and evaluation in decision making (Mudondo, Chanda, Ndhlovu, & Wamulume, 2019). As such, e-procurement is viewed as one of the modalities which can be means for the implementation of the RBM approach to

enhance public sector effectiveness towards driving national development and limiting loss of resources which could be channelled for development through corruption and weak public expenditure management. Findings corroborate the observation by Mundopa (2020), who recommends that there is need by the government of Zimbabwe to ensure that it implements an online procurement system that ensures that the performance of public entities are traceable, fast, and effective towards the achievement of national development priorities. From the above evidence, it can be observed that e-procurement remains an essential economic activity that has the power to revamp the effectiveness of public sector activities and ultimately translate to the achievement of national development.

Despite the anticipation for improved service delivery through the adoption of the e-procurement system, the study revealed that there are several predicaments that impede the realisation of effective and efficient public sector management. The existence of a funding gap is one of the challenges preventing the implementation of an e-procurement system in the country. The project is estimated to be implemented at a cost of US\$3-US\$4 million (Gerede, 2020). Further, poor ICT infrastructure, limited stakeholder collaboration, lack of effective system maintenance and upgrade and limited political will are hurdles that can undermine the implementation of the e-procurement system in Zimbabwe (Kunambura, 2019; Gwanyanya, 2020; Ropa, 2018; Gumbo, 2020; Munemo, 2019; Nyambayo, 2018). A closer analysis of most of the challenges reveals that there is need for political will to expedite the reform agenda. Notwithstanding fiscal challenges facing the country, the value and benefits that are bestowed in the reform agenda should make the political elites pursue the agenda for better service delivery and development in the country. Reasoning along these lines, the researcher interrogated the reasons why such an important tool in enhancing public expenditure management seem to be neglected or taking a snail's pace in implementation, yet it is central in the national development agenda? This is supported by Bleetman (2021) who notes that pervasive occurrences of corruption in the most difficult time of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe has shown that the government does not have real political commitment to reform the public procurement system so that it enhances trust between the citizens and the government as well as save the country from huge expenditure losses. Further, a stubborn retreat of procurement shortfalls in the country should have awakened the need for urgent implementation of the e-governance initiative to address the challenges faced in public expenditure management (Khan, 2018, Moyo & Mhundwa, 2020). A possible explanation could be lack of commitment from the political elites to implement digital solutions in the management of the public sector. These findings corroborate with literature that posits that innovation occupies a peripheral position in most developing countries in Africa (World Bank, 2017). Further, the results agree with the observation by Whitehouse (2019) that political will is a major challenge undermining reforms in Africa.

A critical observation from the findings is that while the implementation of the e-procurement system is desirable, it remains intractable due to the political milieu occasioned with other competing predicaments which threatens the sustainability of the E-Systems initiatives. Gleaning from past e-governance initiatives in the country, findings reveal that the practices and systems seem not to be compatible with the governance model that is used hence it can possibly undermine the sustainability of the reform agenda. More specifically, findings suggest that there is stubborn retreat of Traditional Public Administration (TPA) managerial practices yet the 21st century development paradigm emphasise digitalisation and innovation for government effectiveness. For instance, without proper system maintenance, stakeholder collaboration, system interoperability and upgrade, the e-procurement systems remain inefficient, yet the objective is to induce sustainable development through the reform initiative.

Using the NPM paradigm as an interpretive framework, the government should thrive to reform the public procurement through technologies so as to introduce efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public goods and services. As such, there is need for the realisation that the systems and practices for public sector management should be in line with new management paradigms for effectiveness and viability of public sector management.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that e-procurement adoption is critical in Zimbabwe's public sector basing on a number of benefits and opportunities it offers. As evident from the study, e-procurement can enhance transparency and disclosure of purchasing behaviours, reduce delays in the procurement process, help to prevent and control corruption in the public sector. Further, e-procurement helps to see the value for money in public expenditure management through reducing pressure on budgets and elimination of wastages. The use of electronic systems in the procurement process can also improve communication of stakeholders in the public procurement process. Resultantly, E-Systems are key to revamp Zimbabwe's procurement frameworks consistent with the national developmental goals like the National Development Strategy (NDS) 1 of 2021-2025. It is trite to say that limited political will and lack of capacity from the public sector to integrate and effectively utilise the E-Systems presents major debacles that can drag back the reform initiative in modernising the public procurement system. The study recommends that, for the successful implementation of the e-procurement system, there is need to undertake the following actions.

- i. The central government should channel more resources through the annual national budget towards the implementation of the e-procurement system in the country.
- ii. There is need for greater collaboration between the government, the private sector, citizens at large, and NGOs for effective implementation of e-procurement system in the country.
- iii. The system's interoperability is required for successful implementation of e-procurement system in the public sector. This follows the observation that the country's technological infrastructure to an extent has not developed adequately to match the requirements for many players and stakeholders to take advantage of the e-procurement strategy. As such, system interoperability can deal with network infrastructure challenges through sharing of network infrastructure between the telecommunication providers for uninterrupted access of stakeholders to the e-procurement system.
- iv. There is need for political will and commitment from the top government leaders to ensure that e-procurement has been implemented in the country.

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