International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies

ISSN(p): 3050-547X, ISSN(e): 3050-5488

Volume 02 Issue 11 November, 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55677/ijhrsss/05-2025-Vol02I11

Page No : 797-809

Is Public Procurement Truly Transparent and Fair?

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ABSTRACT: This study looks at how following procurement regulations affects viewpoint on fairness in public procurement practised at the Water Authority of Fiji. It further explores if perceived transparency does affect the linking between compliance and fairness. A very structured quantitative method was used to collect data from WAF employees who are involved in daily procurement activities. Analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics that showed that practicing strict compliance procurement regulation improves stakeholders' sense of fairness. Perceived transparency mediates the relationship between compliance and stakeholder's view. The findings suggest that only following regulations is not enough to build trust and maintain ethical transparency to create confidence in procurement processes. This research helps one to understand how well compliance, transparency and fairness interconnect to amongst each other to improve governance, accountability and ethical practices in public procurement. The result can assist policy makers strengthen stakeholder trust for efficient use of public resources.

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KEYWORDS:
Public Procurement, Regulation Compliance, Transparency, Fairness, Governance.

PURPOSE

The main purpose of this research is to find out to what extent level does public procurement practices reflect transparency and fairness across Water Authority of Fiji. The focus is on adhering procurement regulations that influence the perception of fairness, stakeholders point view on transparency that affect trust and confidence in procurement system. The research further explores the mediating relationship of perceive transparency between compliance and passive fairness. In addition, the research identifies the gap between procurement policy with practical implementation and then providing room for recommendations and strengthening accountability, its ethical behaviour and most importantly the managements support towards using public resources. In summary, this research aims to strive the understanding between fairness, transparency and trust in public procurement together with providing practical insights that improve governance, strengths stakeholder confidence and enhances organisations performance.

INTRODUCTION

The practicing of public procurement is important in order to ensure that public resources are used properly and that services are delivered effectively to society. However, studies have shown that unethical practices such as corruption, biasness, conflicts of interest, and involvement prevents public procurement from achieving its goals (Hope, 2020; Israel, 2022). These unethical practices reduce competence and liability, that waste public resources, delivering of poor-quality services at high costs and mis use of taxpayer's funds. Corruption in procurement affects important services such as the healthcare services, education system, and infrastructure facilities, while poor ethical standards harm the environment, through improper waste management (Lazaroiu et al., 2020; Akter et al., 2022).

Further on, the procurement processes that are transparent and fair helps organizations contribute to sustainable development. Transparency and fairness mean organizing procurement methods openly, making records available, and giving suppliers an equal chance to compete without discrimination or biasness (Andabaka & Sertic, 2020; Goiria & Bonachea, 2022). Using of tools like e-procurement help improve transparency and supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that encourages growth, revolution, and reduces discriminations (UNEP, 2021). Clear procurement methods also increase accountability and ensure public resources are used efficiently, and effective delivery of service at a reasonable cost. (Haddadi et al., 2021; Hope, 2020; Israel, 2023).

Procurement liability and management require equal involvement to follow rules, regulations, and ethical standards and at the same time being responsible for their actions (URT, 2013; World Bank, 2020). Studies also show that responsible procurement practices always lead to wise use of resources, and providing quality service delivery, employer and employee loyalty exchange that is important to achieve societal development goals (Goiria & Bonachea, 2022; Martin & Methven, 2019; Haque et al., 2020).

Given the circumstances, this study focuses on how compliance with procurement regulations affects perceptions of fairness and transparency in public procurement. The following questions guide this research:

R1: How does following procurement regulations affect stakeholders' views of passive fairness in the procurement process?

R2: How does passive transparency mediate the relationship between compliance with procurement regulations and stakeholders' perception of passive fairness?

By further studying these questions, the aim is to understand whether following procurement regulations and maintaining transparency truly strengthens stakeholders' trust and perceptions of fairness or if these procedures remain as a guideline or requirement that has no practical effect. It also explores how compliance and transparency can promote ethical behaviour, accountability, and proper use of public resources, which are critical for achieving social development goals like the SDGs. The research further considers whether transparent and fair procurement practices help reduce corruption, favouritism, and ineffectiveness and fully supporting equal opportunities and better-quality public services. Eventually, the findings seek to explain whether following procurement regulations and transparent practices contributes to honesty and fairness or whether they only function to largely show as practical responsibilities with minimal impact on stakeholders' assurance.

Figure 1.1 shows how compliance with procurement regulations influences passive fairness. Compliance directly increases fairness and indirectly improves through perceived transparency. Simultaneously, these factors build trust, accountability, and ethical management of public resources.

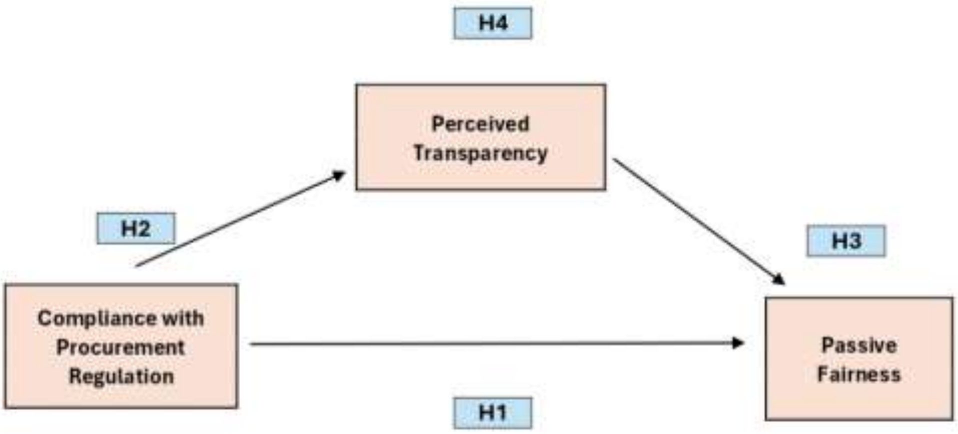

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Compliance with Procurement Regulation and Passive Fairness

Following procurement regulations is essential in determining clear perception towards fairness and honesty within the procurement system. The practise of sustainable framework aims to align procurement techniques with social and environmental objectives like transparency, accountability that can build trust among stakeholders (Allen, 2021; Andabaka and Sertic, 2020). When processes are carried through following proper policies and procedures, it convinces its stakeholders that decisions are made independently, and this increases individuals' confidence in the fairness of outcomes. Through maintaining strict compliance also minimizes the risk of breaching like fraud, biasness and corruption, that will harm trust and intend to damage an organization's rightfulness (Popescu, 2018).

The debate is on how rigorous rules should be contrasted to how much freedom a manager should have. (Kelman 1990, 2005) further explains that simple and transparent rules help impose policies and reduces opportunities for misconduct and unfair decision-making. While too many rules only increase administrative costs and make management difficult, having strong principles is essential for procurement to be seen as fair and at the same time prevent actions that harm service quality that make individuals feel the processes are unfair, such is seen in places like South Africa (Muchainyerwa 2013).

Studies by Kagume, J., & Wamalwa, N. (2018) shows support towards positive responsibility that adhering to procurement regulations improves the outcome and stakeholders' perception towards fairness and integrity. They also found out that any organization which strictly follows major key procurement process that is planning, supplier evaluation, effective contract management through right use of electronic procurement system will is an improved awarding system. Following these practices not only ensure that resources are allocated efficiently but also create a competitive environment for suppliers to have equal opportunities to take part in bidding process. Expanding transparency with reducing the risk of disputes helps build greater confidence among stakeholders in the procurement process. Similar findings from publicly available government data highlights on the framework of "passive waste," which refers to inadequacies like excessive paperwork and administrative delays. These wastes make the system seem unfair, frustrating stakeholders and showing that resources are not being used effectively (Kelman 1990, 2005).

In addition to the direct benefits of complying with procurement procedures, research on passive fairness shows that fairness exists because there is no availability of direct evidence on bias or misconduct because of deliberate actions. Studies by Bobocel et al., 1997; Tyler & Bies, 1990, shows that when decision making processes are transparent and accountable, people intend to trust and accept outcomes even if they are not directly involved.

This theory connects with theoretical views of Rawls' principle of fairness that argues that fairness can be recognized even without direct participation if procedures are followed and no one is taking advantage of (Rawls, 2009). Also, fairness theory links the concept of justice closely to accountability where no one can be blamed for wrongdoings because all protocols are properly followed where stakeholders usually perceive the system as fair with justice (Roese, 1997). This understanding of passive fairness is important in procurement where active involvement from every stakeholder is not always feasible, but fairness and trust must be maintained. The research also shows that implementing green procurement is an effective way for organizations to support sustainable development goals (SDGs). The main aim is to ensure that organizations operate in those ways that does not harm the environment (Chersan et al., 2020; Lazaroiu et al., 2020; Terman & Smith, 2018). The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) Act of 2003, under Act 38, also provided instructions that emphasizes on collaborating with qualified contractors that have the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out projects that promote sustainability and deliver quality services.

The ethical practices are also necessary for effective public procurement (Gelderman et al., 2015; Israel et al., 2019; Terman & Smith, 2018). To help stakeholders accomplish the SDGs through public procurement, policymakers should release clear policies and codes of conduct. These measures to provide transparent instructions that support cost-effective and reliable delivery quality goods and services. Mumba and Achuora (2021) revealed that supplier's evaluation also has drastic impact on supply chain productivity in industrial enterprises in Nairobi, Kenya. The results indicated a positive relationship between suppliers' evaluation criteria and the success of supply chains, particularly in manufacturing industries. Obura, Shale, and Mukanzi (2021) also researched that supplier's evaluation criteria also affect the purchasing function. Theor findings specify that companies using supplier evaluation criteria achieves better quality products and services, more customer satisfaction, lower costs and fair results.

Existing research showed that people intend to easily judge fairness in two ways by looking at the results of any decision (distributive justice) and looking at how the results were finalized (procedural justice). The aim of both fairness is to structure how people feel and act towards it at workplace. Folger's (1987) Referent Cognitions Theory (RCT) wrote on fairness theory where he says that people always judge their own results by comparing it to a standard outcome known as a "referent outcome". For example, one compares with what they have with over what one has received therefore most RCT studies focus on material or financial fairness outcome rather than to an individual's emotional outcome. It is common in people where if they see their results are lower than their opponent, they raise questions on why it was done these ways and not that way. George Klosko (1987) pointed out that fairness always creates a space where contribution towards people passively benefiting cannot be excluded. He said that this is applicable towards those goods which are very valuable and justifies the effort taken to achieve it. Second is those essential goods that anyone can presume to live a decent life. Klosko studies supports that the principle of fairness is strong in cases where vital goods are involved that people accept without choosing to.

For future research on fairness, public engagement is important to bring knowledge and people closer together by involving stakeholders and promoting fair engagements. To ensure procedural fairness is maintained for all decisions made it is important people are involved to give opinions and ideas that challenge and avoiding unfair decisions and outcomes. The main purpose for involving stakeholders is not only to reach an agreement to complete a task but to consider fairness and communication of diverse perspectives.
H1*: CPR positively associated with PF.*

Compliance with Procurement Regulation and Perceived Transparency

Transparency is essential for building positive relationships between consumers and organizations, often facilitated through corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication (Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008). Willmott (2003) highlights that transparency combined with communication and preciseness strengthens brand trust. Taking accountability towards stakeholders is a fundamental part of social responsibility and transparency highly backs this accountability (Waddock & Bodwell, 2007). Waddock (2004) also argued that transparency exclusively shapes economic, social, and environmental aspects of corporate behaviour which is beyond formal governance measures such as anti-corruption policies and strictly following the rule of law. Corruption, nepotism, conflicts of interest, and conspiracy are those major immoral practices in public procurement that hinder development (Hope, 2020; Israel, 2022). These behaviours weaken professionalism, accountability, and commitment among stakeholders and businesses resulting in mismanaged resources, costly and low-quality public services, and highly threat to essential services like healthcare, education, and water infrastructure. Unethical ways also contribute to environmental harm, like improper waste management (Lazaroiu et al., 2020; Akter et al., 2022).

Those organizations that carry out procurement openly and fairly are likely to support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Being transparent and fair with suppliers helps ensure public funds are used wisely and that services are delivered successfully (Israel et al., 2019; Farooq et al., 2022; Andabaka & Sertic, 2020). Practical studies support these as Dabbaghi (2020) found that deliberate procurement planning improved supply chain performance at the Iranian Oil Terminals Company through using a balanced scorecard approach. Mutunga (2020) on the other side observed a positive connection between e-procurement adoption and SME performance in Nairobi City County, Kenya, through a descriptive study of 97 respondents. Kosgei and Kibet (2019) reported that supplier evaluation and matrix processing drastically influenced the performance of road construction projects managed by the Kenya Urban Roads Authority. While past studies focused only on specific organizations, their findings emphasize the larger importance of transparent and fair procurement practices, which the current study analyses in countries across Lake Region Economic Bloc.

The prevention of abnormalities is usually managed at the organised level through establishing and imposing controlled and managed procedures. Following these steps ensures funds are used properly and the principles financial management are set out in EU law. The process for selecting and approving financial support aims to promote efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness that ensures fair competition and equal treatment without biasness. Transparency is also achieved by ensuring information on funding procedures is available to all interested parties, and conflicts of interest are avoided throughout the selection process. In addition, activities funded by European grants should not at the same time receive non-reimbursable support from other sources, except for legal permitted aid only.

When government agencies and firms see non-basic assets as expensive, they may respond in two ways. Firstly, at the intensive margin where the contract values might be lowered to fit contract rules that cause many contracts to group just below the threshold and fewer to be above it. Secondly, at the extensive margin, some contracts may no longer be practical under the rules and could be dropped, creating extra gaps above the threshold. Transparency is often implied to address key problems in democratic governance like citizens' declining trust in government. Studies reveal that giving people more information about government activities and performance can increase understanding and build and at the same time build trust (Bok, 1997; Cook et al., 2010). The impact of transparency is not always clear, as some researchers believe it encourages directness in government and builds trust (Hood, 2006), while others argue it may create misperception or doubt (O'Neill, 2002) and that the other factors will influence trust more strongly than transparency (Roberts, 2006). Observed studies showed that transparency's positive effect on trust is limited and rare (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; De Fine Licht, 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012).

Clarity has become an important topic in many fields like management and leadership (Schnackenberg et al., 2020), supply chain and operations management (Mohr & Thissen, 2022), corporate social responsibility (Tang & Higgins, 2022), information systems (Granados & Gupta, 2013), and communications (Gibbs et al., 2022). In marketing and consumer behaviour, studies questioned how sharing information affects branding and marketing strategies (Lambillotte et al., 2022; Totzek & Jurgensen, 2021). Overall, transparency is seen as a valued asset for building brand (Keller, 2020). According to Bushman et al., 2004, from a policy perspective, transparency means organizational practices that allows public oversight, promoting good governance (Christensen & Cheney, 2015), and holding decision-makers accountable (Leitch, 2017). It can be outlined in many ways like sharing pay information (Brown et al., 2022) or reporting environmental, social, and governance (ESG) operations (Reber et al., 2022). Openness towards disclosing information (Leitch, 2017; Rawlins, 2008) reduces negative effect of public information (Dennis et al., 2019), and builds integrity and trust (Hogreve et al., 2019). Transparency also supports stronger supply chain relationships by keeping stakeholders updated and fostering trust and commitment (Eggert & Helm, 2003; Montecchi et al., 2021).

Research on transparency often overlooks how cultural differences between countries affect ideas to shapes citizens' ideas. People's concern on general views of government influence matters as how it interprets their actions (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2012). Considerations like education, age, and political aspects shape the attitudes and studies have proved that personal attributes can influence both trust and perceptions on transparency (Nye et al., 1997; Putnam, 2002).
***H2**: CPR positively associates with PT.*

Perceived Transparency and Passive Fairness
The bond between businesses and their customers is not only shaped by the company's daily practices but as to how consumers recognize their behaviour in situations where information is not fully available (Kitchin, 2003). Firms that engaged in corporate social responsibility (CSR) always faces unique challenges. Customers are not requesting trust in terms of product quality or handling complaints and returns but they seek certainty in face-to-face communication and unseen commitment to act responsibly (Kitchin, 2003).

Consumers understand that CSR activities are often motivated by a business self-interest. Scholder et al. (2006) said that it's important to understand how consumers see and understand the reasons behind events. Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) also added that transparency is important in CSR but at the same time being too open can sometimes backfire by revealing companies' performance. Research paers also showed that customers in many cases favour the companies that is responsible in the market (Barone et al., 2000; Berger & Kanetkar, 1995; Creyer, 1997). Luo and Bhattacharya in 2006 showed that CSR programs can boost a company's market value as it improves customer satisfaction. This indicated that people's opinions on company's responsibility are associated with their overall opinion of the company.

Word of Mouth (WOM) is seen as an influencer to customers concern about companies' honesty and social accountability. Maxham and Netemeyer (2003) said that when customers feel companies share their values are likely to voice out on complains and issue. Likewise, Handelman and Arnold (1999) said
that companies that follow social liability business standards tend to have more positive WOM. Beigang (2022) emphasized that fairness should not be evaluated only on technical aspects but also on how the results are utilised across. According to Zezulka and Genin (2024), fairness must be seen as a concern at different stages. Many of the scholars suggested that one must adopt straight forward perception to examine socio-practical environment and the decision-making method and how it affects the society (Carey and Wu, 2023; Green and Hu, 2018; Kasirzadeh, 2022; Selbst et al., 2019).

Growth in Information and Communication Technology and internet usage has created new findings to make public procurement transparent and easier to store and share information. any individual with internet access can view government data and information anytime from any location. This is called digital transparency (Meijer, 2009). Freedom to receive information on laws is the main core for digital transparency and part of modern governance. Transparency is often understood as sharing of information from those who have fair knowledge about it, whether they are government officials, public or private entities. Infact, in real world complete and infinite honesty and clarity is not always realistic due to legal and practical limitations. Therefore, transparency is generally defined as providing information that can be shared in a manner that is both ethical and lawful (Rawlins, 2008). Klosko provides a similar example using national defence in a country that faces constant military threats. In this situation, it may be permissible for someone to benefit from the defence system without contributing, if doing so does not place extra burden on others or diminish the overall advantage. If everyone utilises this approach, then it's a high risk of system to fail. This analyses that very less input is required, and once that reached further effort is not required. Increase in records show companies can use transparency deliberately. For example, Paula's skincare brand shows detailed ingredients, so consumers know exactly what they are applying to their skin. Because of its clear and open communication, the brand is popular with Generation Z and widely discussed on Reddit (Robert, 2021). In another example, the videoconferencing platform Zoom now provides detailed explanations of how it handles data requests from governments and enforcement agencies. By being open about these practices, Zoom was able to regain the trust of users concerned about privacy (Barber, 2020). Rawlins, 2008 finally explained that transparency is always about honesty and access to clear information about public procurement activities. Public officials and leaders to be more conservative about their actions. Bureaucrats are to provide precise, reasonable, and useful information that is easily accessible so that stakeholders can make informed decision. This also require transparency, accuracy and timely providing of information that is easily understood (Wakefield & Walton, 2010). These findings suggest that negotiators may overestimate how much their partners understand their preferences, experiencing what is called an illusion of transparency. This matters because previous research shows that reaching the best possible agreement often depends on accurately understanding what others know about one's own preferences (Bazerman & Neale, 1992; Raiffa, 1982; Thompson, 1991).
***H3**: PT positively associates with PF.*

Perceived Transparency will mediate the relationship between Compliance with Procurement Regulation and Passive Fairness

The way stakeholders view an organization depends not only on the actions they can see, but also on how they perceive its behaviour in areas that are not directly observable. Kitchin (2003) notified that organizations should not be only recognised for the end results but also for behind the scenes of their actions. Stakeholders need to understand that organizations rules and policies are placed to control unwanted activities, even in areas where processes are not visible. In return organizations expect stakeholders to trust what they show publicly in shaping trust and fairness perceptions.

Scholder et al. (2006) explained that self-interest can be a factor that influence stakeholders views on why organizations place strict regulations to corporate fairness evaluations. Ynolds and Yuthas (2008) suggested that while transparency is critical for responsible behaviour it may also disclose mistakes at the same time building trust and integrity with stakeholders. In public procurement, organisations, stakeholders and involved individuals that fail to follow procedures face serious consequences. In Nigeria, educational institutions projects have failed due to government procuring procedures and frauds(Ugochi, 2020). Likewise, Chaneyalew (2020) highlighted that construction projects performance will only improve if the procurement practices within the policy, organized, documented, within budget, meeting the requirement and finishing on time. This alone is not sufficient to promote healthy procurement activities unless stakeholders also perceive and understand that regulations are applied equally.

Being transparent is essential to achieve good governance. In 2005, Issuing explained that public entities should not show transparency as a matter to show following the law and regulations but to improve and build legitimacy. Today, many organizations utilise media as a way of communication channel between them and stakeholders and keeping them updated regarding underway and upcoming projects. According to Slemrod, 2013; Kleven & Waseem, 2013 transparency is kind of regulatory checkpoint where if exceeded then extra cost and reviews are required. This approach ensures that stakeholders perceive processes as fair, even when full disclosure is impractical. In this way, perceived transparency strengthens the link between compliance and passive fairness by showing that rules are applied consistently and ethically.

Trust builds through fairness and clarity strengthen relationship between organization and stakeholders for long term. Keller (2020) and Mukherjee & Althuizen (2020) pointed out that organizations that see transparency as a key part of their approach will always differentiate themselves and gain stronger customer loyalty. Suddaby & Panwar, 2022; Branco et al., 2016 found out that executing transparency also comes with costs, risks of information leaks, conflict of interest and providing stakeholders with too much information. Providing extra or too much information or unclear communication can confuse people that can lead to trust issues and lessen compliance impact on others.

Bovis (2009) and Jeppesen (2010) explain that lack of transparency limits openness in business transactions where information is hidden or half shared. Wakefield and Walton (2010) advised the idea of selective openness which, creates a balance between sharing information and keeping information confidential where just enough information is released to provide guidance to stakeholders and at the same time defending confidential data.

Environmental and ethical practices improve transparency and trust. According to Farooq et al. (2022) and Wang et al. (2020) discussed that adopting to eco-friendly procurement strategies from responsible suppliers and minimising environmental impact imply heavily on organizational responsibilities. This behaviour makes compliance reliable and evident to stakeholders that support their perception of fairness. At one point of time, some stakeholders still rely on pre-present information to finalise data (Scheibehenne et al., 2010; MacInnis et al., 1991; Basu et al., 2022). This reflects that the need for clear and daily communication is essential to achieve transparency.

Transparent policies and practical guidance help stakeholders understand that compliance makes sense and is fair (Mafunisa, 2008). The policies, code of conduct, and development processes improve stakeholders' rights with compliance that makes transparency effective in intermediating perceptions of fairness. Organizations must adapt to transparent practices that associate with cultural opportunities to ensure compliance transforms into perceived fairness. Proper communication process and applying regulations constantly between perceived transparency and mediates the relationship between compliance and passive fairness showing its role in organizational trust and governance. According to Hofstede, 2001; Bond, 1991, the cultural factors also affect how transparency is identified. Stakeholders' opinions on compliance and transparency are shaped by views on power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individuality versus communalism, and long-term preference.

H4: *PT mediates the relationship between CPR and PF.*

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Procedure

This study focuses on observing and measuring data systematically through positive approach exploring the relationship between compliance, procedural fairness, and transparency within the Water Authority of Fiji. Data was collected using quantitative method where 150 questionnaires was used as random sampling on employees with specific procurement responsibilities. The participants represented diverse demographic characteristics, with mostly aged between 26 and 35 years, and commonly having 4 to 7 years of occupational experience, only a small segment had over 18 years. Salary levels also altered, where the largest ratio earned between FJD 20,001 and 30,000. The gender was also coded as a control variable (0 = male, 1 = female), with males comprising 56% of the sample. Descriptive statistics showed positive responses throughout compliance, procedural fairness, and transparency measures. Correlation analyses showed significant positive connections between age, occupational experience, and salary, as well as strong interrelations among compliance, perceived fairness, and transparency. Reliability assessments confirmed the consistency of the measurement items, that supported the strength of collected data. The mediation analysis indicated that transparency moderately explains the connection between compliance and perceived fairness, that showed how these factors are closely connected. No data were missing data, and all processes were carefully applied to ensure that the findings correctly reflected the patterns and the relationships within the study population.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Gender	**Male**	**Female**			
	56.00%	44.00%			
Age	**20-25**	**26-30**	**31-35**	**36-40**	**41 years and over**
	11.30%	27.30%	31.30%	17.30%	13.30%
Occupational experience	**1-3 years**	**4-7 years**	**8-11 years**	**12-14 years**	**18 years and over**
	16.70%	38.70%	17.30%	4.00%	23.30%
Salary scale	**FJD ≤ 10,000**	**FJD 10,000-20,000**	**FJD 20,000-30,000**	**FJD 30,000-40,000**	**FJD > 40,000 over**
	14.00%	29.30%	40.00%	10.70%	6.00%
Reliability Test	**Compliance with Procurement Regulation**	**Passive Fairness**	**Perceived Transparency**		
	0.87%	0.88%	0.92%		

Measures

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants who took part in the study. The participants represented in range of age groups, where majority were between 26 and 35 years that indicated young to mid-career workforce. Whereas in gender, there were more males (56%) than females (44%), implying a balanced representation of both genders. In Occupational experience there were imbalances between respondents having 4–7 years of experience, while a significant fraction had more than 18 years, implying a mix of early-career and highly experienced employees. In terms of salary portion, the largest earning group was FJD 20,001 and 30,000, then those earning between FJD 10,001 and 20,000, indicating a reasonable salary range amongst the participants. Overall, the sample focused on those aspects that ensured the findings provide significant result across.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation of Variables for the Study

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	3.56	1.18	1						
2. Gender	1.49	0.50	-0.086	1					
3. OCP exp	3.48	1.15	.752**	-0.126	1				
4. Salary	3.97	1.06	.494**	-0.119	.501**	1			
5. CPR	4.47	0.66	0.047	0.008	.187*	0.071	1		
6. PFPP	4.34	0.70	-0.044	0.086	0.117	-0.063	.738**	1	
7. PTP	4.35	0.75	-0.002	0.100	.233**	0.089	.679**	.741**	1
Discriminant validity									

Note: *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the studied variables. The participants scored high in **CPR** (M = 4.47, SD = 0.66), **PFPP** (M = 4.34, SD = 0.70), and **PTP** (M = 4.35, SD = 0.75), this indicates positive response. Substantially correlations were observed between variables like, Occupational Experience is positively related to Age (r = .752, p < 0.01) and Salary (r = .501, p < 0.01), that shows that the older and more experienced participants intend to earn higher salaries. CPR is strongly correlated with PFPP (r = .738, p < 0.01) and PTP (r = .679, p < 0.01), while PFPP and PTP are also strongly related (r = .741, p < 0.01). These shows a strong relationship between the variables that support further analysis.

Table 5. Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Item	Mean	SD
CPR1	4.44	0.67
CPR 2	4.51	0.599
CPR 3	4.42	0.668
CPR 4	4.47	0.711
CPR 5	4.52	0.642

PFPP 1	4.26	0.67
PFPP 2	4.29	0.763
PFPP 3	4.36	0.735
PFPP 4	4.39	0.693
PFPP 5	4.51	0.642
PTP 1	4.31	0.785
PTP 2	4.37	0.718
PTP 3	4.33	0.748
PTP 4	4.39	0.767
PTP 5	4.37	0.806

Note: *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

The descriptive statistics of Table 5 show that participants overall had high scores. **CPR** has means ranged from 4.42 to 4.52 (SD = 0.599–0.711), that indicates positive perceptions while **PFPP** has means between 4.26 and 4.51 (SD = 0.642–0.763) and **PTP** ranges from 4.31 to 4.39 (SD = 0.718–0.806), this shows positive responses. These results provide findings to interpret correlations and room for further analysis of CPR, PFPP, and PTP in the study.

Table 6. Mediation of CPR on PFPP through PTP

Parameter	Dependent	R^2	F	P	Coefficient	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	PTRAN	0.461	126.49	<0.001	0.643	0.332	1.938	-0.013	1.300
COM	PTRAN				0.829	0.074	11.247	0.683	0.975
Constant	PFAIR	0.651	137.05	<0.001	0.520	0.242	2.151	0.042	0.997
PTRAN	PFAIR				0.396	0.059	6.701	0.279	0.513
COM	PFAIR				0.474	0.072	6.568	0.331	0.616
Direct effect of X to Y									
					.4738	.0721	6.5681	.3312	.6163
The indirect effect of X to Y									
					.3281	.0707	–	.1972	.4755
The total effect of X to Y									
					.3019	.0635	4.754	.1822	.4321

DISCUSSION

This research explores ways where following procurement guidelines will affect stakeholders' insight towards fairness and practicing perceived transparency in the business relationship. The findings show that rigorous compliance and rules give stakeholders idea that procurement processes are fair and unbiased. When organizations practice rules daily, stakeholders also trust the process and see that decisions are objective and allocated properly, opportunities are distributed amongst all, this supports Hypothesis 1 (H1). Compliance alone does not guarantee perceived fairness, The results show that perceived transparency plays an important role in connecting compliance to passive fairness, this supports Hypothesis 4 (H4). Stakeholders are always concerned about fair decisions. They only view procurement as fair when they have clear access to information about decisions on timely basis. This supports the idea that fairness can only be recognized without even participating if processes are transparent and regularly applied. This has also strengthened trust and confidence; this supports Hypotheses 2 and 3 (H2 and H3). Clear communication also helps stakeholders understand an organization's objective that reduces ambiguity that promotes confidence in outcomes. The study also highlights the importance of balancing rules with compliance for daily effective communication. A firms process without clarity and transparency can be inefficient and unfair while the clear and consistent information builds trust and ensure decisions are ethical and fair. Fair and sustainable procurement practices like green procurement with responsible sourcing and following codes of conduct enhances perceived fairness and determines responsible use of resources.

Circumstances and values also influence determine views towards fairness. A stakeholder's concerns are shaped together with social norms and cultural expects whereas and individual's characteristics determines education experience, and previous exposure to governance practices. Providing timely information through e-procurement channels like Tenderlink, trainings and reports will strengthen perceptions of fairness and build trust. In summary, compliance with procurement procedures not only improves passive fairness, but also have positive effect in strengthening stakeholders perceive processes as transparent. Merging compliance, transparency, and ethical practices ensures procurement is not only policy wise correct but also seen as fair and trustworthy. These findings provide long term guidance to improve governance, reducing unethical behaviour, and promoting accountability in public procurement.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

This research outcome intends to provide handful of guidance on public procurement practices. First, the basic rule of following rules and guidelines that is not only important but necessary in any organization. Entities should always combine rules and compliance clearly in timely manner about procurement process to maintain fairness. Some of the daily used tools like e-procurement system, reports and open communication helps build trust among members and stakeholders that reduces biasness.

Secondly, policy makers should also add clauses that promote ethical and sustainable practices in procurement activities. This can include; environmental protection, adherence to code of conduct and act of social responsibilities. These principles will not only ensure compliance but create long term value creation and trust in the process. To add on, staff training on procurement process is important to turn compliance into trust. Employees needs to know and understand technical aspects together with clear communication to share information transparently. This will help reduce disputes and improve efficiency that strengthens trust. Finally, local and organizational cultural factors should be considered when sharing information. it is important to understand how stakeholders see fairness will help create communication that is clear and trustworthy. The combination of compliance, transparency, and ethical practices, will help accomplish better results and stronger stakeholder confidence.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

While this research has provided insights, it also has drawbacks and limitations to future studies. The research was carried out in one organization only that limits the findings and discussion with other public entities. Future studies can include other sectors that practice public procurement to compare and analyse findings. Secondly, the research was carried out using self-reported surveys where participants might have given feedback out of feelings towards the organization's reputation. Future research can be strengthened by mixing data such as procurement records and independent assessments to make the results more reliable. Thirdly, the study only considered perceive transparency as a mediator towards fairness but looked out for other variables like leadership style and organizational culture that can help explain how compliance and transparency affect fairness.

Finally, the research only provided in depth information on passive fairness, future studies could also explore on opportunities as how active stakeholder engagement in decision making processes influences one's perception of fairness and transparency un procurement processes. In summary, resolving these gaps will create a detailed understanding on an organizations policies and procedures, transparency and ethical practices that when combined can facilitate and enhance trust amongst actors in public procurement.

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