An Assessment of Public Procurement Practices in Higher Educational Institutions: A Case Study of the University of Education, Winneba – Kumasi Campus

Yaw Akoto Baffour Osei

Directorate of Physical Works, Development and Facility Management,
University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (USTED-Kumasi), Ghana

Abstract

Public procurement accounts for a substantial share of government expenditure in Ghana and is central to the effective functioning of public universities. This study assesses procurement practices at the University of Education, Winneba – Kumasi Campus (UEWK) against the requirements of the Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663) as amended. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 91 staff and 97 suppliers through questionnaires and interviews and analysed descriptively with SPSS. Results show that UEWK has established the formal structures required by the Act and predominantly uses the Request for Quotation method. Significant gaps persist in professional staffing, quarterly plan updates, record-keeping, inspection protocols, complaints handling and threshold adequacy. Recent developments including GHANEPS and the 2025 amendment underscore both opportunities for modernisation and the continuing importance of institutional capacity. The study concludes that procedural compliance coexists with capacity and process weaknesses that undermine efficiency, transparency and value for money.

Keywords: Public procurement; Act 663; Higher education; University of Education Winneba; GHANEPS; Ghana

1. Introduction

Public procurement—the acquisition of goods, works and services with public funds—occupies a central place in the management of public resources. In Ghana it accounts for an estimated 50–70 per cent of government expenditure and roughly 14 per cent of GDP, making its efficiency, transparency and integrity matters of national economic significance. The principal legal instrument governing the activity is the Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663), later strengthened by the Public Procurement (Amendment) Act, 2016 (Act 914) and further adjusted by the Public Procurement (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 1139). The Act seeks to harmonise procedures across the public sector, secure the judicious use of state resources, and ensure that procurement is conducted in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

When procurement systems function well, they deliver value for money, support local industry and reinforce public trust. When they function poorly, they become channels for waste, delay and, in extreme cases, corruption. The economic significance of public procurement therefore extends beyond the sum of individual transactions. It shapes the quality of public services, the competitiveness of domestic suppliers and the credibility of public institutions. For higher educational institutions, the stakes are particularly high: delays or quality shortfalls in the acquisition of teaching materials, laboratory equipment, infrastructure and support services translate directly into constraints on teaching, research and student welfare.

Public universities fall squarely within the scope of the Act. As subvented agencies and procurement entities they are required to establish Entity Tender Committees, Tender Evaluation Panels and appropriately staffed procurement units, to prepare and update annual procurement plans, and to apply the methods and thresholds prescribed in the legislation. Compliance is not merely a legal obligation; it is also a practical necessity for institutions that depend on timely and cost-effective acquisition of the goods, works and services that sustain academic and administrative functions.

The University of Education, Winneba – Kumasi Campus (UEWK), also known as the College of Technology Education, is one such entity. Located at Tanoso in the Kumasi Metropolis, it forms part of the wider University of Education, Winneba system. At the time of the original fieldwork, senior financial officers of the Campus had expressed concern that the absence of professionally trained procurement personnel was contributing to delays, sub-standard acquisitions and an overall lack of professionalism, efficiency and value for money. These observations provided the immediate impetus for the present study.

Since the original data collection, the national procurement landscape has continued to evolve. The Ghana Electronic Procurement System (GHANEPS) has been progressively rolled out as the government's digital platform for tendering and related processes. Universities, including UEW, have participated in capacity-building workshops organised by the Public Procurement Authority (PPA) to strengthen compliance and operationalise the electronic system. Thresholds for various procurement methods have been revised upward in recent legislative instruments, and the 2025 amendment introduced additional controls relating to commitment authorisation. These developments reinforce the continuing relevance of institutional assessments that examine how well individual entities translate the legal framework into day-to-day practice.

The multi-campus structure of the University of Education, Winneba adds a further layer of complexity. Thresholds and decision-making authority that apply at campus level may differ from those that apply at the central administration in Winneba. Procurements that exceed campus thresholds must be referred upward, generating delay and administrative cost. Understanding how these structural arrangements interact with capacity and process weaknesses at campus level is essential for a complete assessment of procurement performance.

Against this background, the study set out to evaluate procurement structures and processes at UEWK, to determine the methods used for the acquisition of goods, works and services, to assess the degree of adherence to Act 663, to identify operational lapses, and to formulate practicable recommendations. The significance of the inquiry lies in its potential to strengthen institutional capacity, to inform the PPA and university management of implementation challenges (including threshold adequacy), and to contribute to the growing body of evidence on procurement performance in Ghanaian higher education.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on public procurement principles, the Ghanaian legal and institutional framework, and recent empirical work on university procurement. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the findings. Section 5 discusses the results in light of the literature and current policy developments. Section 6 offers conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Principles and Objectives of Public Procurement

Contemporary public-procurement scholarship emphasises a set of interlocking principles: professionalism, transparency, value for money, competitiveness, accountability, fairness, efficiency and ethical conduct. Value for money is understood not merely as the lowest price but as the optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality that meets the user's requirements. These principles underpin both international guidance and Ghana's domestic legislation. Recent studies continue to stress that formal compliance with rules does not automatically translate into superior outcomes unless accompanied by adequate capacity, effective contract management and robust monitoring (Akannobe et al., 2025; Ansere et al., 2025).

Professionalism requires that procurement decisions be made by educated, experienced and responsible officers who can interpret the legal framework, manage supplier relationships and safeguard institutional interests. Transparency demands that the same rules apply to all suppliers and that those rules are publicised in advance. Competitiveness is achieved by actively encouraging supplier participation through advertising, prequalification and open procedures. Accountability holds individuals and organisations responsible for the processes over which they exercise authority. Fairness requires impartiality at every stage, particularly in evaluation. Efficiency implies timely operation with minimum bureaucracy while remaining responsive to user needs. An ethical approach insists on conduct that would withstand public scrutiny.

When any of these principles is compromised—through capacity deficits, weak documentation or inadequate oversight, the system's ability to deliver value for money is correspondingly reduced. Capacity is particularly critical. Without professionally trained staff, the formal architecture of committees, plans and procedures cannot function as intended. Documentation and record-keeping are equally important: without accurate records of proceedings, the audit trail that underpins transparency and accountability is incomplete. Inspection and acceptance protocols that exclude the user department raise the risk that functionally unsuitable items enter the institutional inventory. Complaints and appeals mechanisms that do not exist leave aggrieved suppliers without a clear channel for redress.

The relationship between formal compliance and substantive performance is therefore contingent. Institutions may satisfy the formal requirements of the Act, establishing committees, preparing plans, applying prescribed methods, while still failing to achieve efficiency, transparency and value for money. Institutional-level assessments that move beyond the existence of structures to examine staffing competence, documentation quality, inspection protocols and the practical impact of threshold regimes are therefore essential for a complete understanding of procurement performance.

2.2 The Ghanaian Legal and Institutional Framework

Act 663 established the Public Procurement Authority as the central regulatory body and mandated Entity Tender Committees, Tender Evaluation Panels and Tender Review Boards. It prescribed preferred methods (national and international competitive tendering) and permitted alternative methods (restricted tendering, single source, request for quotation) under defined conditions and thresholds. The 2016 amendment (Act 914) refined certain provisions, while the 2025 amendment (Act 1139) introduced a requirement for commitment authorisation by the Minister before certain procurements may commence.

Parallel to legislative change, the PPA has driven the adoption of GHANEPS, an electronic platform intended to digitise tendering, improve transparency and reduce opportunities for irregularity. Universities have been among the institutions receiving targeted training on the system. Thresholds have also been adjusted. Earlier schedules set relatively low ceilings for decentralised entities; more recent legislative instruments have raised the levels at which international competitive tendering becomes mandatory, reflecting both inflation and the desire to expand the space for national competitive processes.

For campuses classified as decentralised procuring entities, however, the applicable ceilings for request-for-quotation methods have historically remained modest, creating a structural tension between the volume of institutional need and the formal limits of local authority. The practical consequence is that many routine but essential acquisitions must be referred upward, generating delay and administrative cost. Even with subsequent upward revisions of national thresholds, the principle remains: threshold regimes that are poorly matched to institutional needs generate avoidable delay and inefficiency.

The multi-campus structure of some universities adds a further layer of complexity. Thresholds and decision-making authority that apply at campus level may differ from those that apply at the central administration. Understanding how these structural arrangements interact with capacity and process weaknesses at campus level is essential for a complete assessment of procurement performance. The present study contributes to that understanding by examining one campus in depth.

2.3 Procurement in Ghanaian Higher Education

Empirical work on university procurement in Ghana has grown in recent years. Studies have examined contract-management practices and their relationship to procurement performance in technical universities (Akannobe et al., 2025), the effect of procurement processes on performance in public tertiary institutions (Awuah et al., 2022), and the degree of compliance with environmental-sustainability and legal requirements among university procurement officers (Ansere et al., 2025). A recurring theme is that formal structures and procedural adherence often coexist with capacity shortfalls, weak contract administration, delayed payments and incomplete realisation of value for money.

Research on educational-sector procurement more broadly has likewise concluded that reform has strengthened control and accountability mechanisms without fully delivering efficiency and economic outcomes (RSIS, 2026). These findings resonate with the classic concerns that motivated Act 663: the absence of comprehensive policy and legal frameworks, weak central oversight, and practices that compromised fairness, transparency and economy. They also underscore the importance of institutional-level assessments that move beyond the existence of committees and plans to examine staffing competence, documentation quality, inspection protocols and the practical impact of threshold regimes.

The present study contributes to that literature by providing a detailed campus-level account of structures, methods, decision processes and operational gaps. By combining staff and supplier perspectives, and by examining both formal compliance and substantive performance, the study offers a more complete picture of procurement practice at UEWK than would be available from either a purely legal or a purely operational assessment.

2.4 Digitalisation and Contemporary Trends

The progressive deployment of GHANEPS represents the most significant technological shift in Ghanaian public procurement in the past decade. The system is designed to enable online tender creation, submission, evaluation and monitoring, thereby improving auditability and reducing face-to-face interfaces that can facilitate irregularity. Adoption, however, remains uneven; many entities continue to operate hybrid or largely paper-based processes.

Capacity-building workshops, such as the four-day GHANEPS training conducted at UEW in April 2026, signal the recognition that technology alone is insufficient without trained users and supportive institutional cultures. Parallel policy discussions have explored the potential of blockchain and other emerging tools to further strengthen transparency, although regulatory frameworks have yet to incorporate such innovations explicitly. For individual campuses, the immediate priority is full operationalisation of GHANEPS for covered transactions, coupled with the human-resource and procedural reforms necessary to make digital processes effective.

Digitalisation offers a pathway to address several of the weaknesses documented in this study—weak record-keeping, incomplete audit trails, limited transparency, but only if the underlying capacity and process gaps are simultaneously closed. Technology is a complement to, not a substitute for, professional competence and sound institutional practice. The present study contributes to the evidence base by identifying the specific capacity and process gaps that must be closed if digitalisation is to deliver its intended benefits at campus level.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative data within a single case-study framework. The case-study approach was appropriate because the research sought to examine procurement practice in depth within a bounded institutional setting (UEWK) rather than to produce statistical generalisations across all public universities. The mixed-methods orientation allowed the study both to quantify patterns of practice (through structured questionnaires) and to explore the reasons and institutional dynamics underlying those patterns (through interviews and open-ended responses).

The case-study design is consistent with the exploratory and evaluative aims of the research. The study does not seek to test a formal hypothesis or to estimate a causal model of procurement performance. Instead, it seeks to document the structures, methods and processes in place at UEWK, to assess the degree of adherence to Act 663, to identify operational lapses, and to formulate practicable recommendations. These aims are well served by a design that prioritises depth of understanding within a single institutional setting.

The choice of UEWK as the case was motivated by the concerns expressed by senior financial officers about the absence of professionally trained procurement personnel and the resulting delays and quality shortfalls. The campus therefore provided a setting in which the gap between formal compliance and substantive performance could be examined in detail. The multi-campus structure of the University of Education, Winneba also made the case relevant to the broader question of how threshold regimes and decision-making authority interact across campus and central levels.

3.2 Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The target population comprised two groups: (i) staff of UEWK who possessed relevant knowledge of procurement activities, and (ii) suppliers, consultants and contractors registered with or known to the Campus. A sample of 200 respondents was targeted—100 staff and 100 suppliers. Staff were selected through purposive sampling, the criterion being possession of valid and useful information in respect of the research objectives (principal officers, finance and procurement staff, and user-department representatives). Suppliers were reached through snowball sampling: initial respondents who were available and willing to participate recommended others who met the study criteria, and the process continued until saturation of new information was approached.

The achieved response rates were 91 per cent among staff (n = 91) and 97 per cent among suppliers (n = 97). The high response rates reduce the risk of non-response bias and strengthen the credibility of the findings. The inclusion of both staff and suppliers allows triangulation of perspectives: staff provide an institutional view of structures, processes and constraints; suppliers provide an external view of how those structures and processes are experienced by the other party to the procurement relationship.

Purposive sampling of staff was appropriate because the research required respondents with direct knowledge of procurement activities. Random sampling of the entire staff population would have included many individuals with little or no involvement in procurement and would have diluted the quality of the data. Snowball sampling of suppliers was necessary because of the absence of a complete and accessible sampling frame of all suppliers registered with or known to the Campus.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Primary data were collected by means of structured questionnaires containing both closed- and open-ended items and by face-to-face interviews with key informants. The questionnaires covered procurement structures, planning practices, methods used for goods, works and services, decision processes, inspection and acceptance, record-keeping, and perceptions of process quality. Interviews allowed probing of the reasons for observed practices and of the operational consequences of threshold constraints and capacity gaps.

Secondary sources included Act 663 and its amendments, PPA training manuals, institutional documents and the scholarly literature reviewed above. These sources provided the legal and conceptual framework against which the empirical findings could be assessed. Data collection was conducted in person at the Campus; responses were recorded by note-taking and, where consent was given, by audio recording for later verification.

The combination of questionnaires and interviews supported both breadth and depth. The questionnaires provided structured data that could be analysed descriptively and presented in tables. The interviews provided qualitative depth that allowed the study to interpret the quantitative patterns and to explore the institutional dynamics underlying them.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative responses were analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Results are presented in tables and narrative form. Qualitative material from interviews was subjected to thematic content analysis: responses were coded, grouped into coherent categories, and examined for patterns of agreement and divergence between staff and supplier perspectives.

The combination of methods supported triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings. Where staff and supplier perspectives converged, the findings could be reported with greater confidence. Where they diverged, the divergence itself became a finding that required interpretation. The thematic analysis of interview material also allowed the study to move beyond the closed-ended questionnaire items and to capture nuances that structured instruments alone would have missed.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation and the anonymisation of individual responses. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and of their right to withdraw at any stage. No personal identifying information is reported in the findings.

Limitations of the study include the single-campus focus, which constrains generalisation to the wider UEW system or to other public universities, and the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to social-desirability bias. These limitations are offset by the high response rates and the triangulation of staff and supplier perspectives. Future research could usefully extend the analysis to other campuses and institutions, and could incorporate objective measures of cycle time, cost and quality where administrative data permit.

4. Results

4.1 Procurement Structures

All staff respondents (100 %) and all supplier respondents (100 %) confirmed that UEWK had established an Entity Tender Committee and a Tender Evaluation Panel in accordance with Act 663. The Tender Committee was reported to meet once every quarter by 98.9 % of staff. A procurement office exists, yet its human-resource profile falls short of professional standards. Record-keeping was weak, and no complaints and appeals unit existed.

Table 1. Existence and functionality of procurement structures (Staff, n = 91)

Structure / Practice	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Entity Tender Committee exists	100	0	100
Tender Evaluation Panel exists	100	0	100
Tender Committee meets quarterly	98.9	1.1	100
Procurement office exists	100	0	100
Office staffed by professional procurement officer	0	100	100
Staff attend PPA refresher courses	21	79	100
Supplier database maintained	39.6	60.4	100

Records of proceedings kept	5.5	94.5	100
Complaints and appeals unit exists	0	100	100

4.2 Planning and Process Duration

An annual procurement plan was prepared (100 % of staff). However, the plan was not reviewed or updated quarterly as required by the Act. The overall procurement cycle routinely exceeded the maximum of approximately five weeks expected for request-for-quotation processes.

Table 2. Procurement planning and cycle-time indicators (Staff, n = 91)

Indicator	Compliant (%)	Non-compliant (%)	Total (%)
Annual procurement plan prepared	100	0	100
Plan updated quarterly	0	100	100
Tender documents prepared within 1 week	0	100	100
Overall cycle within 5 weeks	0	100	100

4.3 Methods and Contract Award

UEWK predominantly used the Request for Quotation method. Contracts were awarded primarily on the basis of the least responsive bidder. The Head of Entity chaired Tender Committee meetings, reviewed and approved award recommendations, and signed all contracts.

Table 3. Procurement methods used at UEWK (Staff, n = 91)

Category	RFQ (%)	Depends on value (%)	Total (%)
Goods	94.5	5.5	100
Works	81.3	18.7	100
Services	100	0	100

4.4 Inspection, Acceptance and Perceived Quality

Inspection and acceptance were performed solely by the procurement office according to 89 % of staff. The user department was routinely excluded. Staff ratings of the procurement process were moderate.

Table 4. Responsibility for inspection and acceptance (Staff, n = 91)

Inspection arrangement	Frequency (%)
Procurement office alone	89
Broader team	11
User department routinely included	0

4.5 Threshold Constraints and Institutional Impact

The low statutory thresholds applicable at the time of the study created operational difficulties. Procurements above threshold had to be referred to the main campus at Winneba, resulting in delays of weeks or months. Even with subsequent upward revisions of national thresholds, the principle remains: threshold regimes that are poorly matched to institutional needs generate avoidable delay and inefficiency.

5. Discussion

The findings portray a dual reality. On the one hand, UEWK has put in place the core institutional structures required by Act 663 and follows the prescribed method and award criterion appropriate to its threshold classification. The active role of the Head of Entity in chairing meetings, approving awards and signing contracts further aligns with the statute. On the other hand, critical weaknesses in professional capacity, documentation, inspection practice, complaints handling and threshold adequacy undermine the achievement of the Act’s substantive objectives of professionalism, efficiency, transparency and value for money.

These results are consistent with the broader empirical literature on university procurement in Ghana. Recent studies have likewise found that formal compliance coexists with capacity shortfalls, weak contract administration and incomplete realisation of value for money (Akannobe et al., 2025; Ansere et al., 2025; Awuah et al., 2022). The absence of professionally qualified staff is particularly consequential: without adequate expertise, interpretation of the rules, supplier management and documentation quality all suffer.

Failure to update the procurement plan quarterly reduces flexibility and the capacity to respond to changing needs. Non-maintenance of records and the lack of a complaints mechanism compromise transparency and expose the institution to risk. Sole inspection by the procurement office, without user-department participation, increases the likelihood of accepting unsuitable items. Each of these gaps is individually significant; together they constitute a systemic weakness that formal architecture alone cannot remedy.

The threshold constraint is a structural issue that affects not only UEWK but potentially other decentralised campuses. While the Act permits referral of higher-value procurements to a higher-level entity, the resulting delays impose real operational costs. Subsequent national revisions of thresholds have eased some of the pressure, yet the underlying principle—that thresholds should be periodically reviewed against market prices and institutional realities—remains valid. Threshold regimes that are poorly calibrated to institutional needs generate avoidable delay and inefficiency.

Looking forward, the progressive adoption of GHANEPS and the capacity-building programmes already under way at UEW offer a pathway to address several of the documented weaknesses. Digital platforms can improve audit trails, reduce opportunities for informal interference and accelerate routine processes. Their benefits, however, will materialise only if the underlying human-resource and procedural gaps are simultaneously closed. Technology is a complement to, not a substitute for, professional competence and sound institutional practice.

The multi-campus structure of the University of Education, Winneba adds a further dimension to the discussion. Capacity and process weaknesses at campus level interact with threshold and referral arrangements that link the campus to the central administration. Strengthening campus-level capacity is therefore not only a local improvement; it is also a contribution to the efficiency of the wider institutional system. Recommendations that address staffing, documentation, inspection, complaints handling and threshold review should be understood in this broader institutional context.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of institutional-level assessments that move beyond the existence of formal structures to examine how those structures function in practice. Formal compliance is necessary but not sufficient. Without competent staffing, functioning support systems and threshold regimes that are calibrated to institutional needs, the architecture of the Act cannot deliver the intended outcomes of efficiency, transparency and value for money.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This study has shown that the University of Education, Winneba – Kumasi Campus has established the formal structures required by Act 663 and generally follows the prescribed procurement methods and decision-making processes for its threshold category. At the same time, deficiencies in professional capacity, documentation, inspection practices, complaints handling and threshold adequacy limit the effectiveness of the system. Consequently, the full benefits of the Act are only partially realised.

Three overarching conclusions follow. First, formal institutional architecture is necessary but not sufficient; without competent staffing and functioning support systems, the architecture cannot deliver the intended outcomes. Second, threshold regimes that are poorly calibrated to institutional needs generate avoidable delay and must be kept under periodic review. Third, digitalisation (GHANEPS) offers a significant opportunity to improve transparency and efficiency, but only if accompanied by the human-resource and procedural reforms identified in this study.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Recruit a qualified procurement officer with at least a postgraduate qualification in logistics, supply-chain management or a related field, supported by two assistants holding Higher National Diplomas in the same disciplines.
2. Ensure that procurement staff regularly attend refresher courses and GHANEPS training organised by the Public Procurement Authority.
3. Maintain accurate records of all procurement proceedings and an up-to-date supplier database.
4. Establish a functional complaints and appeals unit.
5. Constitute a multi-stakeholder inspection and acceptance team comprising the procurement office, the user department, stores and internal audit.
6. Update the annual procurement plan quarterly and streamline documentation processes.
7. Advocate for periodic review of the thresholds applicable to decentralised campuses.
8. Accelerate the full operationalisation of GHANEPS at campus level.

References

1. Akannobe, W. N., Adinyira, E., & Alidu, A. R. (2025). Contract management–procurement performance nexus: Evidence from a public university in Ghana.
2. Ansere, B., Ayarkwa, J., Addy, M. N., Osei-Asibey, D., & Acheampong, A. (2025). Environmental sustainability and procurement law compliance in Ghana’s university goods procurement. Journal of Public Procurement, 25(4), 476–496.

3. Awuah, G., Anane, A., & Egyir, S. A. K. (2022). The effect of procurement process on procurement performance of public tertiary institutions in Ghana. World Journal of Advanced Research, 13(2), 121–130.
4. Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663) as amended by Act 914 and Act 1139. Republic of Ghana.
5. Public Procurement Authority. (n.d.). Ghana Electronic Procurement System (GHANEPS) training materials. Accra: PPA.
6. RSIS International. (2026). Public procurement reform in the educational sector of Ghana. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 9(12), 3741–3750.
7. University of Education, Winneba. (2026). UEW ends four-day GHANEPS capacity-building workshop.
8. Adjepong, K. B., & Anane, A. (2022). Factors affecting procurement performance in selected municipal assemblies in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana.