

Ethical Improprieties During The Procurement Stage in The Malaysian Construction Industry

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Abstract

This paper examines critical ethical challenges in procurement within Malaysia's construction industry, focusing on issues like transparency lapses, bid rigging, bribery, and collusion. These unethical practices are attributed to weak systems, unclear ethical standards, and inadequate awareness of regulations, particularly in complex procurement processes. The study evaluates the determinants, consequences, and preventive measures for such violations, emphasizing the significant economic, reputational, and regulatory impacts. Data was collected from construction stakeholders, including developers, consultants, contractors, and government agencies, using a quantitative survey methodology. Results reveal that ineffective management, poor legislation, and weak governance are primary contributors to unethical behavior. Major consequences include a pervasive culture of bribery and corruption. Recommended preventive measures include strict penalties such as fines, suspensions, blacklisting, and enforcing severe legal actions like imprisonment to uphold integrity and transparency.

1. Introduction

Construction projects are characterized by intricate procurement selections and production systems with a great number of activities to manage and coordinate. However, such complex projects present a substantial likelihood of unethical issues surfacing that affect human lives directly and the value of life in humans. There has been the presence of numerous ethical issues during procurement in the Malaysian construction industry. According to Razak (2018), the absence of ethics and integrity principles in the construction industry is a great problem, because there are no guidelines available to players for easy reference. He also noted that the current legislation does not pay enough attention to regulating players' behavior, as a result of which unethical behaviors and lack of integrity manifest. Within the construction industry, there are various factors of ethical improprieties among these include intense competition, unsympathetic leadership culture perceptual corruption flawed legal system lack of accountability ineffective enforcement feeble bureaucracy (Yap et al., 2022).

The severe adverse impacts that ethical wrongdoings and corruption have had on human lives, financial standing, as well as the environment concerning construction, is a source of immense losses (Mohd Zainudin, 2019). The integrity issue that has cast doubt on the construction industry is enough to make contracting and payment processes unbearable (Razak, 2018). Initiatives for ethical misconduct in the construction sector are advancing ethics consciousness and practicing good practices to comply with ethical principles (Razak, 2018; Yap, 2019). In 2022, the construction industry represented only 3.4% of Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP).

(Statista Research Department, 2023). According to Nor Rahim et al. (2021), the construction sector makes a significant contribution to economic development in the country. Similarly, Smith et al. (2021) stated, construction projects constitute a substantial part of world economic production and procurement contributes significantly to the success or failure of project performance. Therefore, the construction industry progresses worldwide, so addressing unethical conduct at the procurement stage is crucial.

From the study, the element of unethical conduct among Malaysian construction professionals, including government organizations, consultants, contractors, developers, and suppliers, who are directly involved in the procurement stage is determined together with the solution to the problem that can be used by each party in the industry to make sure that the professional ethics have been implemented. By doing this, the image, reputation and integrity of the professionals will be increase and professionals are going to be respected by the public. Additionally, we are able to identify the most common problems in the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Procurement in Construction Industry

Procurement is a critical and dynamic process that plays a vital role in the successful execution of construction projects. Procurement in construction simply means the success of completing a project on time. Koch & Finity (2023) and Gonzalez (2023) emphasize procurement involves several complicated stages like identification of the needs of the project, calling out to the market, choosing services, buying equipment and materials, management of contracts, and budget, time, and quality issues. Business and profit are greatly affected by project execution, and this is beyond doubt. When one is looking at building a project procurement model, one must take into account the consequences. According to Designing Buildings (2023) as well as Eriksson & Vennström (2009), the choice of the procurement method determines such things as results achievable, time taken to complete it, and cost involved.

In Malaysia, there are several types of procurement systems, including Traditional Procurement also known as Design-Bid-Build, which is a common type of procurement system, Design and Built, Trunkey, Public Private Partnership, Management Oriented, Public Finance Initiative, and many other methods based on the client needs and requirements. Hence, the study stated that it is important to carefully choose the procurement method for the desired results to be achieved.

2.2 Factors that Contribute to Ethical Improprieties During the Procurement Stage in the Malaysian Construction Industry

People become entangled in ethical improprieties in project procurement for a variety of reasons. Research has been done in Malaysia to demonstrate how unethical behavior affects the quality of building (Abdul Rahman et al., 2007). As stated by Mohd Zainudin (2019) and Yap (2019), the Malaysian construction industry has been plagued by ethical improprieties and corrupt practices, which negatively impact its performance. Amoah & Steyn (2022) noted that compliance with the code of conduct has been a growing concern among professionals in the construction industry worldwide over time. This has resulted in failed projects on both the side of clients and contractors, resulting in losses. Construction projects are usually competitive and lead to unethical problems. The media has covered many scandals such as 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), Sabah Water Department, SRC International and Tabung Haji (GIACC, 2019). Major ethical wrongdoings connected with the procurement stage in construction industry may result to the destruction of buildings such as the failure of Tower 1 at Highland Tower (High Court Kuala Lumpur, 2000), Gombak LRT car park collapsed (Kumar, 2019), floor collapsed on 51st of Oxley Tower (Bernama, 2022) and beam collapsed in Sri Desa Entrepreneurs Park (Bavani, 2023).

Ethical misconduct in public procurement has become a significant global concern, especially in the construction industry, where procurement processes are complex and influential. Key phases such as solicitation, bidding, and selection are highly vulnerable to unethical practices, compromising fairness, transparency, and integrity. Evidence from countries like Malaysia, Nigeria, Portugal, Ghana, China, and Australia highlights the widespread nature of these issues. Ethical misbehavior during procurement can erode trust, reduce project credibility, and hinder sustainable development.

One major ethical challenge is ensuring fair competition. The procurement process must provide equal opportunities to all qualified bidders, eradicating favoritism and unfair advantages. Fairness is essential for maintaining stakeholders' trust and upholding the credibility of the industry. As Ashworth and Perera (2018) emphasize, fair competition ensures that decisions are made impartially, based solely on merit and qualifications.

Conflict of interest is another critical concern in procurement. The construction industry, involving numerous stakeholders, is inherently conflict-prone. Effective conflict identification and management are crucial

to preventing biased decision-making and ensuring impartiality. Additionally, transparency in procurement practices is fundamental. Transparent processes enable stakeholders to assess the fairness and integrity of decisions, fostering accountability and public trust. Cox (2009) highlights transparency as a cornerstone of public sector ethics, linking it to trust and ethical foundations in procurement.

Adherence to ethical and legal standards is also essential in procurement. Bribery, corruption, discrimination, and prejudice are prohibited under international guidelines, such as those from the International Chamber of Commerce (2005) and the Construction Industry Council (2015). Compliance with these standards ensures procurement decisions align with both legal requirements and ethical principles. Organizations that embrace ethical procurement practices enhance their credibility and contribute to a fairer industry.

Professional development plays a pivotal role in maintaining ethical standards in procurement. Continuous education equips professionals with updated knowledge of ethical guidelines and industry practices, promoting accountability and sustainability. The Project Management Institute (2018) underscores the importance of lifelong learning for construction professionals to adapt to evolving ethical challenges. To create a credible and trustworthy construction industry, ethical procurement must prioritize principles such as fair competition, conflict management, transparency, legal compliance, and professional development. By addressing these issues, the industry can foster trust, uphold integrity, and ensure sustainable practices, thereby enhancing the overall reputation of construction projects.

From the literature review, this study identified ten (10) factors of unethical procurement practices in the construction industry (Table 1) and eleven (11) major consequences of unethical procurement practices in the construction industry as shown in Table 2.

Table 1 *Factors of unethical procurement practices*

Factor	Authors
Lack of Transparency	Badenhorst (1994)
Conflicts of Interest	Smith et al. (2021); Abdul Rahman et al. (2007); Abdullahi et al., (2019)
Poor Governance	Tamirat (2020);
Lack of Leadership	Brown (2019)
Economic Downturn	Zhang et al. (2017); Locatelli et al. (2017)
Inadequate Regulatory Framework	Amoah & Steyn (2022) and Zhi et al. (2019)
Inadequate Training and Education	Wan Ismail et al. (2022)
Pressure to Meet Deadlines	Mohd Nordin et al. (2023)
Unqualified Contractors	Mohd Nordin et al., (2023); Leong et al. (2020)
Favoritism and Unfair Competition	Dindi (2020)

2.3 Impacts of Unethical Procurement Practices

Unethical behavior at the procurement stage in construction may cause harm to many stakeholders and the general standing of the projects. Beyond only resulting in short-term financial losses, unethical behavior during the procurement phase in the construction business can have long-term effects. Based on earlier research, the impacts of ethical improprieties during procurement are evaluated to completely comprehend the study issue.

Bid rigging refers to an agreement amongst bidders aimed at influencing a competitive bidding process. Contractors who come together to tamper with the fairness of the competitive bidding system with the intent to suppress true competition and inflate prices artificially via bid rigging are wrongdoers. This bad behavior affects market dynamics by stifling genuine competition hence causing project owners and the public to lose out often through higher prices. Fair and transparent procurement norms are undermined by this unethical activity. Generally, in order to obtain an unfair edge over legitimate rivals, conspiring parties agree on the bidding terms, such as pricing or contract allocations (Fumagalli & Motta, 2006). The study also mentioned collusive tactics obscure the bidding process, obstructing transparency and keeping interested parties from reaching well-informed conclusions. While, Shamsudeen Abdulazeez et al. (2021) stated that bribery is described as providing a favor in exchange for money or something else. Corruption, a broad term, refers to different types of dishonest or immoral behavior, such as bribery, fraud, and abuse of authority.

The construction sector's procurement stage features unfair practices that violate moral requirements and undermine the integrity of the process. Unfair behavior includes activities that violate ethical norms and values, such as favoritism, biased decision-making, and discriminatory practices throughout the procurement process. According to (Banerjee, 2001), unfair conduct violates the norms of healthy competition by giving certain companies special treatment. The study also mentioned that biased decision-making and favoritism may disrupt the competitive environment, restricting possibilities for other competent contractors.

Table 2 *Impacts of unethical procurement practices*

Impact	Authors
Bid Rigging	Liang (2017) and Shah & Alotaibi (2017)
Bribery and Corruption	Abdul Rahman et al. (2007); Ebekoziem (2019); Smith et al. (2021); and Ibrahim et al. (2021)
Collusion	Shan et al. (2017)
Unfair Conduct	Bubna-Litic (2016)
Fraud	Johnston (2005)
Overbilling	Shamsudeen Abdulazeez et al., 2021
Project Failure	Mat Ya'acob et al. (2022)
Delay and Cost Overruns	Lynn et al. (2022); Ram et al. (2016); Ali (2018); and Tahir et al. (2019)
Damage to reputation	Zakaria et al. (2014)
Lower quality of work	Lynn et al. (2022)
Increased Risk of Litigation	Abu Hassim, 2012

3. Method

The research methodology applied in the study of the procurement ethical wrongdoings of the Malaysian construction industry is very important in uncovering and addressing the complexities associated with this critical issue. Through this literature review, a comprehensive overview will be provided of the research methodology adopted, focusing on different methods and approaches applied toward data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This eventually enhances an in-depth understanding concerning factors, impacts, and preventive measures involved with unethical procurement practices.

3.1 Preliminary Literature Study

The preliminary literature study is the work done to thoroughly go through previous academic works, industry reports, and major publications that shed light on the ethical improprieties prevalent in procurement procedures adopted by the Malaysian construction industry. It lays the basis for figuring out the key factors responsible for ethical impropriety and comprehension of the subtle elements of the situation.

3.2 Full Literature Study

The entire literature review has expanded on the preliminary literature study by examining research papers, case studies, and theoretical frameworks relevant to procurement practices with regard to ethical impropriety integrity in the construction industry. Mapping through these inclusive approaches will show insights into the factors, impacts, and preventive measures.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

One of the most important components in the research process is the design of the questionnaire. The study requires views from Malaysian construction practitioners, featuring developers, consultants, contractors, and government organizations with the aid of a focused and well-structured questionnaire. In order to guarantee relevance and accuracy in addressing the research objectives, the language, structure, and content of the survey are carefully considered throughout the design process.

3.4 Questionnaire Measure

The overall emphasis of the study approach will be on a quantitative research design as it makes use of questionnaire measures. This methodology makes it possible to systematically obtain information through the use of the measurement tool and survey instrument in collecting answers that can be measured. In this study, the identified measures are at a complexity level accruing to ethical improprieties at all points of the procurement process, aimed at providing a sophisticated understanding of the different aspects of challenges construction professionals face. A few modes of questionnaire administration were used, such as personal distribution, mail, and social media applications. Human delivery enabled the respondents to get over any problems with the questions; personal persuasion ensured a high response rate. The inclusion of this questionnaire meant that the responders could access it over the Internet so that access via e-mail through Google Forms had been made. Recognizing the sensitivity of the research issue, numerous appropriate measures were implemented to increase response rates. First, ethical clearance on involving human subjects in the study was sought before actual data collection from an institution, which acts as a precautionary measure to ensure

the questionnaire is exposed to the least danger and difficulty. Furthermore, respondents were informed of their identity and secrecy in order to safeguard them. Survey participants were asked to grade against a five-point rating system using Likert scale to determine how they ranked their responses, and analyses using Average Relative Index (ARI).

The respondents for this study are Malaysian construction professionals, including government organizations, consultants, contractors, developers, and suppliers, who are directly involved in or affected by any form of ethical impropriety in the procurement process for construction. In total, 300 questionnaires have been handed out. The average response percentage of 30.33%, with 91 valid replies received from 300 questionnaires given to respondents engaged in the Malaysian construction industry.

4. Result and Discussion

A questionnaire survey was conducted to analyze ethical challenges in Malaysia's construction procurement, reflecting global trends of ethical malpractices in the industry. The study explored respondents' demographics, factors leading to ethical dilemmas, impacts of unethical practices, and potential solutions.

The survey targeted a diverse group of contractors, clients, and consultants, providing broad insights. Participants held roles such as Quantity Surveyors, Engineers, and Procurement Officers, ensuring direct engagement with procurement tasks. Their experience ranged from 1 to over 10 years, reducing bias from a single career stage. Most respondents, earning RM3,000 to RM5,000, were involved in private projects where ethical dilemmas frequently arose.

Key factors contributing to ethical issues included unclear procurement policies, often leading to misconduct. Conflicts of interest among stakeholders were another significant concern, with personal or financial motives influencing decisions. Additionally, weak supervision and lack of accountability encouraged unethical behavior. Insufficient training and awareness further hindered adherence to ethical standards. These findings highlight the need for clear procurement policies, stronger oversight, and comprehensive training programs. Addressing these issues can mitigate ethical dilemmas, fostering integrity and fairness in Malaysia's construction procurement processes.

4.1 Factors that Contribute to Ethical Improprieties During the Procurement Stage in The Construction Industry

This study has determined several factors that contribute to ethical improprieties during the procurement stage in the construction industry. Through data analysis using The Average Relative Index (ARI) can be calculated using this method, and the results will range from 0.2 to 1. The numbers of 0.2 reflect the lowest strength, while 1 represents the highest strength.

Refer to Table 3, the results show that some factors have been identified as being the major contributors to unethical behavior. A lack of proper managerial controls, legislation, and corporate governance is the major cause of unethical behavior. As stated in the studies by Tamirat (2020); Jones et al. (2020); Ebekoziem (2019); Mubarak et al. (2023); and Abu Hassim et al. (2010), this deficit establishes ill-defined roles and responsibilities and inadequate mechanisms to ensure accountability, providing a very fertile ground for unethical practices to thrive. Further, the requirement to instill transparency in procurement processes comes with the realization that non-transparent procedures provide avenues for corruption and are rife with bid rigging, favoritism, and other vices that work against fairness and integrity.

The next important factors are favoritism and unfair competition also reinforce ethical problems, leading to poor quality work and inflated costs of the projects. On the other hand, conflict of interest among the stakeholders and the involvement of unqualified contractors also influences procurement integrity immensely and results in poor outcomes with unethical practices. Besides, the other major factors that contribute to it are the lack of proper regulation and enforcement as stated in the findings, bringing out the need for strict regulatory measures and legal compliance to avert this undesirable behavior.

In organizations, management leadership in values is critical to the setup and sustenance of ethics set up, without ethical leadership, employees are more prone to behaving unethically. Moreover, having unrealistic goals and pressure to achieve them will force people into sacrificing ethical standards. Thus, lack of ethical training and awareness will make the stakeholders incapable of understanding the codes of ethics and upholding the same. Less important factors were related to economic factors, but bad economic conditions can also push organizations and individuals into unethical means of sustaining their businesses. Other factors cited by the respondents are internal organizational politics, pressure from higher management, and cronyism which also lead to ethical impropriety and thus warp the procurement process and institutionalize unethical practices.

In a nutshell, systemic factors such as inefficiency, lack of transparency, and favoritism are the most contributory to unethical behavior in the procurement stage. This calls for a need to streamline such by way of effective regulation, transparent processes, and leading by example. While other factors, such as economic conditions and lack of training, are also key contributors, addressing only the very top-ranked factors would go

a long way in enhancing the ethical standards in the procurement process. These insights into internal political processes and management expectations provide a holistic view of the impediments to ethical procurement practices, pointing to the need for a wholesome approach to the cultivation of integrity within the industry.

Table 3 *Factors that contribute to ethical improprieties during the procurement stage*

Factors	ARI	Rank
The absence of clear and transparent procurement processes can lead to unethical practices.	0.88	2
Conflicts of interest among project stakeholders play critical roles in unethical behavior.	0.86	4
Ineffective management, poor legislation, and governance were the leading drivers of unethical behavior.	0.89	1
Lack of leadership might pave the way for ethical errors in the context of construction procurement.	0.83	6
Economic downturn drives unethical professional activities in the construction business.	0.75	9
Lack of effective regulation and enforcement creates an environment conducive to unethical practices.	0.85	5
Lack of ethical training and awareness among project stakeholders can contribute to a culture of unethical behavior.	0.78	8
Unrealistic expectations and pressures to meet project deadlines can lead to unethical practices.	0.81	7
The involvement of unqualified or immoral contractors can lead to substandard work and unethical practices.	0.86	4
Favoritism and unfair competition among contractors can lead to unethical practices.	0.87	3

Most of the respondents believe the urgent need for transparency in procurement processes. In return, tenders and procurement processes that are not well transparent provide ample opportunity for some departments, contractors, and other individuals to indulge in unethical acts like favoring pre-selected contractors or companies, bid rigging, and corruption. This specifies that clarity is very important to foster fairness in contracts and prevent people from taking advantage of others. Another major problem that affects procurement integrity is favoritism and unfair competition within procurement activities. When contractors incur the selection process through favoritism rather than deserving merits, it not only boosts unethical conduct but often poor quality of work and excessive expenses on the project.

4.2 The Impacts of Ethical Improprieties During the Procurement Stage in the Construction Industry

This study has found the impacts of ethical improprieties during the procurement stage in the construction industry. The results, refer to Table 4, based on ARI, include some deep and far-reaching consequences of such unethical behavior. The most important impact identified is the perpetuation of this culture of bribery and corruption. This impact minimizes the credibility of the construction industry by lessening the public's trust through unethical practices. The environment created causes a loss of confidence among genuine contractors, hence diminishing the quality and efficiency of construction projects. The answer lies in strict anti-corruption measures and rigid adherence to ethical practices and transparency.

Next, the second significant impact involves the negative effect on company image and corporate reputation as stereotyped unethical practices of construction firms, contractors, and the government in a bad light lose business and public trust, having that negative perception which is hard to alter over the long term. It not only affects individual companies but also scares away potential investors and skilled labor from being associated with such an industry.

Third, the two major impacts are fraudulent practices and the selection of an incompetent contractor. According to the number of research papers, fraudulent practices create financial losses, legal penalties, and negative project results during the procurement phase. Similar to choosing an incompetent contractor, substandard work would require additional economic and costly rectifications. Both undermine the integrity and quality of construction projects.

Another very common unethical practice is bid rigging, which reduces the competitiveness of any

procurement process, resulting in higher project costs and reduced innovation, while contracts are wrongly awarded to preferred contractors instead of a merit-based selection. Strategies for detection and prevention against the rigging of bids are therefore extremely important in ensuring fairness and encouraging competition. Ethical improprieties also cause time and cost overruns. This is due to poor project management, problems with resource allocation, contract complications, and legal troubles that unethical behavior causes lead to project delays and cost escalations.

Table 4 *Impacts of ethical improprieties during the procurement stage*

Impacts	ARI	Rank
Bid-rigging is one unethical strategy where competing parties conspire to manipulate the bidding process to ensure a predetermined winner during the procurement process.	0.87	4
Unethical practices can prolong a culture of bribery and corruption.	0.92	1
Collusion is unethical when companies coordinate their bids to keep prices high, resulting in high construction costs.	0.82	8
Ethical improprieties can lead to unfair conduct during the procurement stage.	0.84	6
Fraud at the procurement stage of the construction industry is a significant ethical impropriety that can have much further effects.	0.88	3
Project owners suffer financial losses as a result of overbilling where project budgets are jeopardized when contractors exaggerate their bills.	0.83	7
Ethical improprieties can increase the risk of project failure.	0.83	7
Ethical improprieties can cause delays and cost overruns.	0.85	5
Unethical practices can damage the reputation of the construction company, contractors, and government agencies involved in the project.	0.89	2
Unethical practices during procurement can lead to the selection of unqualified contractors resulting in lower quality of work for the project.	0.88	3
Ethical improprieties can increase the risk of litigation and disputes between parties involved in the project.	0.85	5

Unethical procurement practice encourages the risk of litigation and disputes between parties involved in the project. Such violations damage business-legal relations and undermine the pace of projects, which adds to financial and operational problems.

Ethical improprieties also can lead to unfair conduct during the procurement stage. Biased decision-making and discrimination can disrupt the competitive environment, limiting opportunities for other competent contractors. According to Shah & Alotaibi (2017) noted that overbilling and several studies by Odukoya et al. (2023); Mat Ya'acob et al. (2022) also mentioned that risk of project failures result in budget overrun, financial losses for building owners, and loss of precious resources. These results create dire economic and social consequences.

Finally, colluding with business stakeholders to hold up prices is highly unethical. This undercuts the dynamics of the market by setting off inefficient resource allocation and higher construction costs, which go on to burden owners of the projects and society as well.

In conclusion, this simply analyses the impact, which inherently is serious unethical practices at the procurement stage in the Malaysian construction industry. The promotion of bribery and corruption, issues of reputational damage, jeopardizing organizational finances, and poor project performance are serious concerns that warrant serious responses. These include the implementation of effective ethical provisions and control mechanisms, clear procedures, and the structuring of an effective anti-corruption image. Addressing these questions will help mitigate the negative impacts of unethical practices, thus improving both performance and public perception of the industry.

4.3 The Preventive Measures to Overcome Ethical Improprieties During Procurement Stage in the Construction Industry

This study has discovered the preventive measures to overcome ethical improprieties during the procurement stage in the construction industry. Referring to Table 5, through data analysis using ARI, some of the preventive measures to overcome unethical behavior have been discovered. The highest-ranked preventive measures are strict enforcement of the penalties and guarantee of legal enforcement including imprisonment for corruption-related crimes Penalties such as fining, suspension, and blacklisting are severe enough to help eliminate the

previous unethical actions because the stakes of the unethical behavior will be as high or higher than they are for honest behavior.

Table 5 *Prevention measures to overcome ethical improprieties during the procurement stage*

Prevention Measures	ARI	Rank
Comprehensive ethical guidelines and codes of conduct that clearly define acceptable behavior and ethical standards	0.86	3
Secure and anonymous channels for the protection of whistleblowers to report unethical practices without any fear.	0.88	2
Establish independent bodies to oversee and audit procurement activities regularly and ensure compliance with ethical standards.	0.85	4
Strict penalties for individuals and companies found guilty of ethical improprieties, including fines, suspension, and blacklisting.	0.90	1
Utilize e-procurement systems to increase transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption by making all procurement processes and documents publicly accessible.	0.86	3
Compulsory for bidders to sign an " <i>Akuan Pembida</i> ", a declaration of honesty and integrity, during the tendering process.	0.84	5
Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the importance of ethics in procurement.	0.82	6
Senior management must demonstrate a strong commitment to ethical behavior and implement programs to foster an ethical culture within organizations.	0.86	3
Ensure rigorous enforcement, including jail time for corruption can serve as a strong deterrent.	0.90	1
Regularly attend related training on ethical standards and anti-corruption measures.	0.85	4

In the same way, adherence to laws and the use of imprisonment show the relevance of a strong legal framework and functional judicial systems to fight corruption. These measures show clear attitudes of intolerance to unethical behaviors and at the same time, they show the severe repercussions that are in store for practicing such behaviors. The anonymity of whistleblowers through safe reporting facilities is also important. This is because offering the whistleblower legal and safe means to report such practices is a major boost to the determination of such misconduct and is a major support to compliance. This protection assists in reducing the fear of castigation and encourages people to report critical information.

Another precondition is the steady enhancement of ethical activeness programs and codes of conduct, adoption of e-procurement strategies and policies, and high-degree commitment to integrity from the top management. Setting out clear ethics and professional expectations means that all the stakeholders understand what is expected from them. It is important to understand that e-procurement systems improve the transparency and accountability of procurement instances and thus decrease cases of corruption. Executives' adherence to the principles of business ethics also creates a desire within the organization to adhere to the principles of business ethics among the top managers and other organizational members.

In addition to the formation of independent bodies for supervision and monitoring of procurement functions from time to time and for the education of other stakeholders in matters of ethical standards and anti-corruption, more frequently. External monitoring helps in the observation and direction of the ethical benchmarks to be followed and the immediate rectifications in case they are infringed. On-going training brings the stakeholders up to date on ethical standards and appraises them on issues of concern regarding ethical practices as mentioned in several studies by Mohd Nordin et al. (2023) and Lynn et al. (2022).

Furthermore, while submitting their bids, the bidders are legally bound to sign an '*Akuan Pembida*' commonly known as the Declaration of Honesty and Integrity thus encouraging ethical practices. This legal statement assures transparency of prospective contractors' behavior and plans in the procurement process, thus increasing the credibility of the procurement process. Lastly, information sharing and education of the public by law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations support the formation of a society that is knowledgeable and insists on ethical practices. People can help to encourage organizations to perform ethically correct actions and help to be responsible.

5. Conclusion

Ethical improprieties in the Malaysian construction industry impact it in numerous ways and across various areas, such as operations, finance, image, and people, via project delays and compromised quality, inflated costs and losses, eroded and damaged trust and reputations, and negative perceptions of society and threats to community safety. Therefore, to solve these problems, it can be concluded that applying complex remedies can only solve ethical improprieties in the context of the construction industry in Malaysia. The enhancement of severe consequences, sound legal compliance, whistleblower shield, ethical norms' establishment, e-procurement system, commitment from the managerial level, organ independence, recurrent training, declaration of integrity, and the awareness system all form an ideal approach. These measures are crucial in the fight against corruption and to promote the integrity of this industry as well as performance.

Also, one measure that received much support was the requirement to sign for an "Akuan Pembida", an integrity pledge by bidders. This endeavor was given very favorable scores, which translated into the notion by many of the specific respondents that this measure could prevent unethical behavior since the bidders are required to sign an ethical pledge. High agreement was also obtained on the use of good and ethical leadership by the senior management as a patient safety improvement strategy. The best thing about ethical practice is that when top organizational executives.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: Siti Zahidah Md Yusuf, the student, conducted the **research, including designing the questionnaire, collecting data, and performing the initial analysis.** Zainab Mohamad Zainordin, the supervisor, **assisted in data interpretation, provided critical revisions to the methodology, contributed to the development of solutions, and prepared the final version of the manuscript.** Zarina Alias and Nurul Asra Abd Rahman provided **technical expertise and reviewed the manuscript.** Each author played a key role in the completion of the study.*

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