**Original Article**

# E-Catalog and Regional Budget Politics: Transparency and Accountability in Bungo Regency 2023

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**Abstract:**

This study aims to analyze the implementation of e-catalog in enhancing transparency of regional government spending, identify various inhibiting factors, and formulate optimization strategies within the General Affairs Section of the Bungo Regency Regional Secretariat in 2023. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach through observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews, utilizing the interactive data analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. Findings reveal that e-catalog significantly contributes to budget transparency by providing open procurement information, facilitating easy access to supplier data, and establishing digital audit trails that bolster accountability. However, its implementation remains suboptimal due to system disruptions, limited information technology infrastructure, low local supplier participation, and gaps in procurement personnel competencies. The regional government has implemented several improvement measures, including human resource capacity building, enhancement of IT facilities, socialization of LKPP regulations, development of digital-based procurement standard operating procedures, and strengthening of internal oversight mechanisms. This research affirms that e-catalog utilization serves as a strategic instrument for achieving more transparent, accountable, and efficient procurement governance at the local government level.

**Keywords:** e-catalog, transparency, regional spending, procurement, local government.

## Introduction

Government Procurement of Goods and Services (PBJP) represents a strategic arena in local government administration, directly linked to public service effectiveness, budget efficiency, and political accountability. Within the framework of budget politics, PBJP transcends mere technocratic instruments, serving as a space for state resource distribution vulnerable to power interventions, local patronage, and corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN). Therefore, transparency in procurement processes

forms a critical foundation for strengthening local government integrity, ensuring budget allocations align with public interests, and mitigating frequent deviations in this sector. Aligned with information technology advancements, many countries adopt digital procurement systems to minimize discretionary power among political and bureaucratic actors while enhancing public trust in government spending processes (Rahman, Liao, & Park, 2022).

Indonesia's procurement reforms underscore national efforts to address classic budget politics issues through digitalization. The launch of the Electronic Procurement System (SPSE), General Procurement Plan Information System (SIRUP), and e-catalog limits opaque negotiation spaces among executives, suppliers, and local elites. Among these systems, e-catalog holds a strategic position by directly determining prices, specifications, suppliers, and monitorable real-time transaction patterns. Politically, e-catalog functions as a control mechanism that restricts informal interventions and reduces information asymmetry in local government spending processes (Amin, Rahim, & Hong, 2021).

The urgency of spending transparency intensifies given the massive scale of PBJP budgets. LKPP (2023) records the national PBJP value exceeding Rp1,100 trillion, positioning this sector as the epicenter of budget politics deviation risks. Through e-catalog, the government seeks to curb discretionary power, expand public information access, and ensure spending decisions rely on objective data and standard prices rather than elite preferences. However, various studies indicate that this system's success hinges on bureaucratic readiness, actor capacity, and local political structures influencing implementation (Asamoah, Osei, & Agyei-Mensah, 2020; Muhammed & Reni, 2023).

This phenomenon manifests clearly in Bungo Regency. Preliminary findings indicate that although e-catalog utilization has increased significantly since 2022, its effectiveness remains suboptimal. The limited number of local suppliers reduces competition and choice variability, forcing some spending needs into longer, politically vulnerable non-catalog mechanisms. Disparities in PBJ human resource competencies, limited technological literacy, and unreliable information networks exacerbate implementation barriers. Not all procurement officials understand the budget politics logic behind e-catalog use, leaving spending decisions susceptible to personal preferences and informal pressures. This condition demonstrates that digital reforms do not automatically alter actor behavior when power structures and bureaucratic culture remain unsupportive.

From a governance perspective, e-catalog success depends not solely on regulatory and technological tools but on the extent of local governments' political commitment to transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Karjalainen, Kemppainen, and Mikkola (2019) emphasize that e-catalog systems impact significantly only with robust information system integration, effective internal oversight mechanisms, and organizational cultures open to change. In contexts like Bungo, these challenges intensify due to local interest dynamics, dependencies on specific suppliers, and varying actor interpretations of PBJP regulations.

This study holds particular importance as Bungo Regency represents one of the regions with high procurement spending intensity, yet few academic studies have examined how e-catalog operates within its local budget politics realities. The gaps between norms in Presidential Regulation 16/2018 as amended by Presidential Regulation 12/2021 and field practices are evident in technical barriers, low human
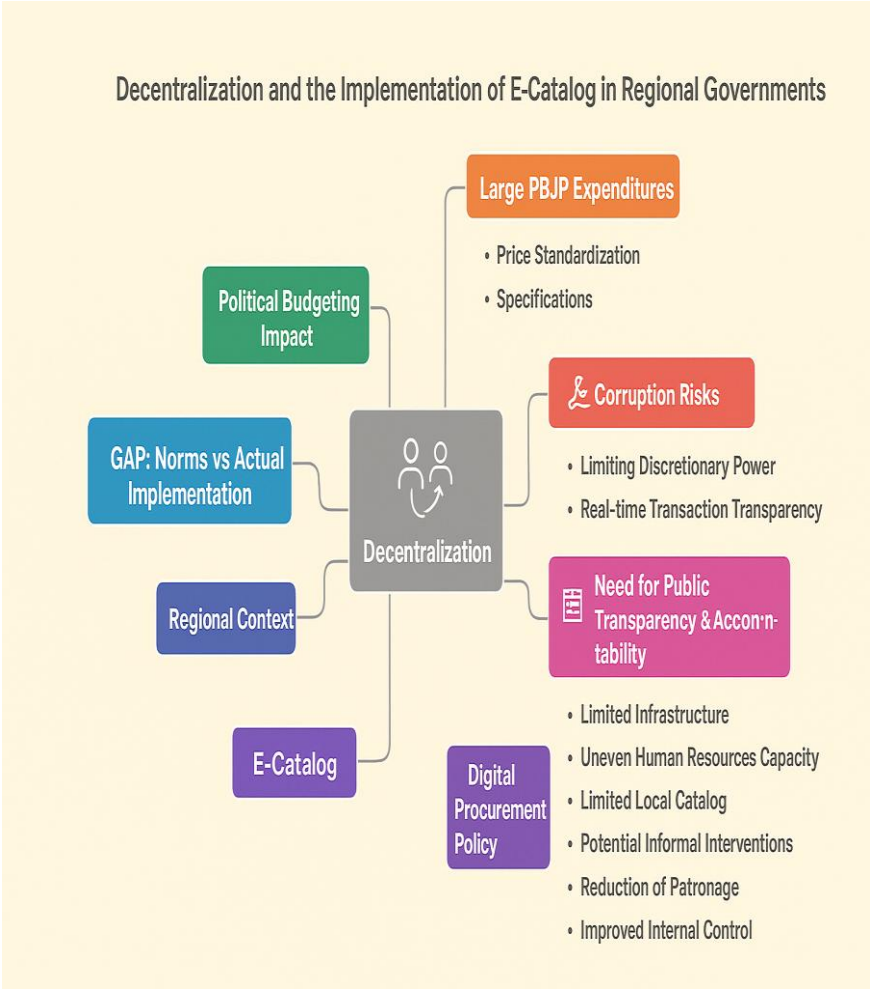
resource capacity, minimal local supplier participation, and resistance to procedural changes. These gaps demonstrate that procurement digitalization does not inherently reduce deviation risks without accompanying shifts in political incentive structures and bureaucratic capacity.

Accordingly, this research pursues the following objectives:

1. Analyzing how e-catalog influences transparency in Bungo Regency's local budget politics,
2. Identifying technical and political inhibiting factors in e-catalog utilization, and
3. Formulating e-catalog optimization strategies for the General Affairs Section of Bungo Regency Regional Secretariat to strengthen public spending accountability and efficiency.

Thus, this research provides both academic and practical contributions in understanding how digital procurement reforms interact with local budget politics, and the extent to which e-catalog strengthens transparent, responsive, and accountable governance.

Figure 1. Decentralization and the Implementation of E-Catalogs in Regional Governments



**Decentralization and the Implementation of E-Catalog in Regional Governments**

- Political Budgeting Impact
- Large PBJP Expenditures
  - Price Standardization
  - Specifications
- GAP: Norms vs Actual Implementation
- Decentralization
- Corruption Risks
  - Limiting Discretionary Power
  - Real-time Transaction Transparency
- Regional Context
- Need for Public Transparency & Accon·n-tability
- E-Catalog
- Digital Procurement Policy
  - Limited Infrastructure
  - Uneven Human Resources Capacity
  - Limited Local Catalog
  - Potential Informal Interventions
  - Reduction of Patronage
  - Improved Internal Control

## Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand how e-catalog operates within local budget politics contexts, particularly in goods/services procurement processes at the General Affairs Section of Bungo Regency Regional

Secretariat. The qualitative approach was selected because it captures power dynamics, inter-actor interactions, and socio-administrative contexts influencing e-catalog use as a transparency and budget accountability instrument. Digital policy research in the public sector cannot be understood solely through quantitative data but requires an interpretive approach examining relationships between technology, organizations, and political/bureaucratic actor behaviors (Rahman, Liao, & Park, 2022). This approach enables uncovering how spending decisions, supplier selection processes, and digitalization responses are shaped by formal and informal structures in local budget politics.

The study was conducted in April–May 2024 at the General Affairs Section of Bungo Regency Regional Secretariat. This location was purposively selected as it sits at the heart of local government operational spending processes and directly engages with e-catalog utilization. Within budget politics contexts, this section represents a strategic nexus where spending decisions, supplier access, and internal control mechanisms intersect. Informants were selected via purposive sampling, encompassing key actors in procurement arenas such as the General Affairs Head, Commitment Making Officials (PPK), e-catalog operators, technical procurement staff, and registered electronic catalog suppliers. Snowball sampling was employed as needed to identify additional actors with informal influence or substantive procurement insights.

Data collection involved in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews explored informants' understandings of e-catalog practices, technical barriers, inter-actor power relations, and the extent to which digital systems influence budget transparency and political accountability. The semi-structured format allowed probing issues like bureaucratic resistance, supplier preferences, or informal interventions (Amin, Rahim, & Hong, 2021). Field observations examined actual work practices, IT facility conditions, inter-actor communication flows, and network stability during ordering. Observations provided empirical evidence of gaps between formal regulations and field procurement practices (Asamoah, Osei, & Agyei-Mensah, 2020). Documentation included General Procurement Plans (RUP), PBJ reports, electronic contracts, LKPP guidelines, internal minutes, and regulations such as Presidential Regulation 16/2018 as amended by 12/2021, strengthening findings with measurable administrative data (OECD, 2020).

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. This model remains relevant for budget politics and digital administration research, enabling iterative and reflective interpretation (Muhammed & Reni, 2023). During reduction, data were categorized into themes like regulatory/political controls, actor readiness, technical barriers, supplier interest dynamics, and improvement strategies. Data were then presented descriptively to identify patterns, inter-actor relationships, and political consequences of digital procurement. Conclusions were iteratively drawn and verified for analytical consistency and depth.

Data credibility was maintained through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation compared information from PPKs, e-catalog operators, section heads, and suppliers. Method triangulation combined interviews, observations, and documentation for accuracy. Additionally, member checking involved informants confirming researcher interpretations, ensuring findings credibly reflect empirical realities (Iqbal, Sutanto, & Nugroho, 2022).

Through this descriptive qualitative approach, rigorous triangulation, and

systematic analysis, the study provides deep insights into e-catalog operations within local budget politics arenas and its contributions to transparency and accountability in public spending management.

## Results

### Overview of the Implementation of E-Catalog in Bungo Regency

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the e-catalog in the General Section of the Regional Secretariat of Bungo Regency has been ongoing, but has not yet reached an optimal level. Normatively, all procurements meeting the e-purchasing criteria should be conducted through the e-catalog in accordance with Presidential Regulation (Perpres) 16/2018 and Perpres 12/2021. However, in practice, the use of the e-catalog remains limited to certain types of expenditures such as office stationery, consumable materials, and some government operational needs. Dependence on a local catalog that is still underdeveloped affects the smoothness of procurement and creates spaces for additional negotiations outside the system.

Field observations show that digital ordering mechanisms, such as product search, provider selection, purchase order (PO) creation, and transaction reporting have been functioning quite well. This system enhances traceability and information transparency, aligning with findings by Rahman, Liao, and Park (2022) regarding digital governance's contribution to public expenditure transparency. However, some regional government work units (OPDs) have yet to utilize the e-catalog evenly, resulting in the management burden still being centralized in the General Section. The digital literacy level of key actors hinders wider system adoption.

In the context of regional budget politics, this situation shows that although digital norms are available, their implementation remains highly influenced by internal capacity, actor preferences, and bureaucratic structural adaptation. The e-catalog has yet to fully function as an equalizing tool capable of reducing discretionary power in procurement.

### Transparency of Regional Government Expenditure through E-Catalog

The e-catalog plays a significant role in strengthening budget transparency. Price data, product specifications, supplier locations, and order histories are digitally recorded and cannot be altered without audit trails. This closes opportunities for price manipulation and mark-up practices commonly found in manual procurement models. This finding aligns with Asamoah, Osei, and Agyei-Mensah (2020), who state that e-procurement systems enhance integrity and openness by automatically providing transaction evidence.

From a budget politics perspective, this digitalization reduces the space for informal negotiations between procurement officials, suppliers, and other influential actors. More open access to information narrows opportunities for budget patronage and favoritism toward certain suppliers. However, in practice, some gaps remain: specification verification by the Commitment Making Officer (PPK) is not fully digital, product descriptions from suppliers are often incomplete, and certain technical documents are still prepared manually. These gaps potentially create room for subjective interpretation, allowing informal interventions.

Therefore, e-catalog transparency has not yet reached its optimum level because it depends on the quality of human resource inputs and supplier compliance,

not just on the system's design.

**Technical and Infrastructure Barriers in E-Catalog Implementation**

Research identifies four main technical barriers:

a. Internet network disruptions during working hours that hinder the digital ordering process. These delays transactions and disrupt daily procurement smoothness.

b. Limitations in ICT devices, such as low-specification computers incompatible with the e-catalog application's workload.

c. Minimal presence of local suppliers in the local catalog, making it difficult for regional work units (OPDs) to meet specific needs and often forcing a return to non-catalog mechanisms.

d. Disparities in digital competency among human resources, particularly operators and technical staff, leading to input errors and ordering delays.

These barriers demonstrate that procurement digitalization extends beyond technological issues, directly linking to budget allocation, organizational priorities, and institutional support within regional political structures.

**Non-Technical Barriers: Regulations, HR Competency, and Potential Interventions**

Beyond technical issues, non-technical barriers significantly determine the quality of e-catalog implementation.

First, staff understanding of LKPP regulations remains low. Changes in technical guidelines often lack adequate socialization, leading to incorrect application of new rules.

Second, insufficient PBJ training and certification result in uneven competencies among implementers.

Third, informal intervention opportunities persist in supplier clarification and product selection processes. While e-catalog narrows manipulation risks, the system remains susceptible to external influences when bureaucratic culture does not fully prioritize integrity.

From a budget politics perspective, these non-technical barriers demonstrate that digital systems do not automatically eradicate discretionary power practices; they merely constrain them insofar as institutional structures and organizational culture provide support.

**Local Government Strategies to Overcome Implementation Barriers**

Local government strategies to address e-catalog implementation challenges include:

a. Human resource training and certification, encompassing PBJ technical guidance and enhanced digital literacy.

b. ICT infrastructure improvements, such as new computers, increased bandwidth, and system maintenance.

c. Encouraging local suppliers to join the catalog through MSME training, administrative assistance, and registration incentives.

d. Development of digital-based procurement SOPs to clarify workflows from ordering to reporting.

e. Digital internal oversight via monitoring dashboards, routine audits, and real-time transaction tracking.

f. Active collaboration with LKPP, particularly for application updates, regulatory

clarifications, and technical mentoring.

g.  Strengthening organizational culture based on integrity and digital adaptation.

These steps demonstrate that e-catalog optimization requires a combination of political support, technical capacity, and precise internal policies.

Figure 2. E-Catalog Implementation: From Barriers to Government Response
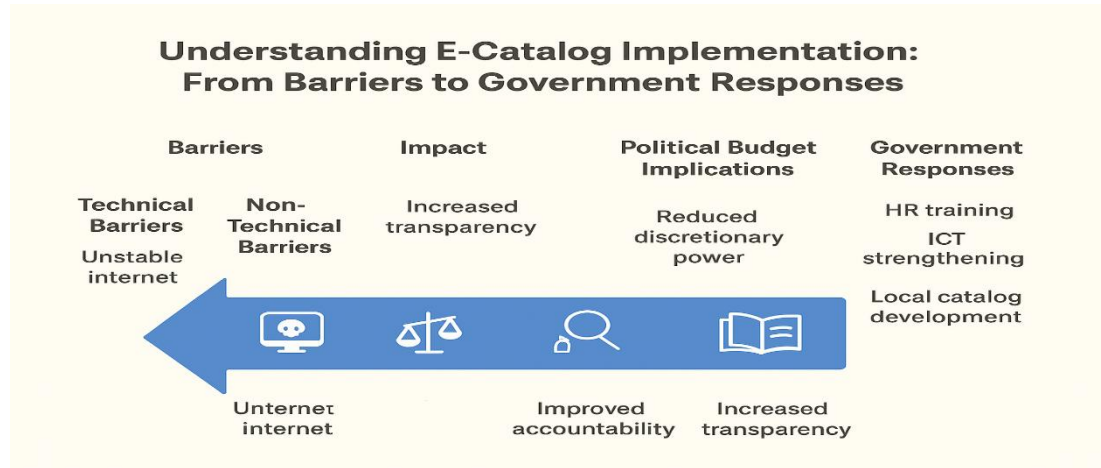


## Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of e-catalog in Bungo Regency has made a significant contribution to enhancing transparency in regional budget politics. This digital system strengthens spending traceability, limits discretionary power, and improves procurement process accountability. However, its full effectiveness remains unachieved due to prominent technical and non-technical barriers.

Institutionally, human resource capacity, infrastructure readiness, and internal regulatory quality emerge as key determinants of e-catalog success. Politically, the findings affirm that procurement digitalization can bolster budget integrity when supported by organizational commitment, an anti-corruption culture, and robust oversight.

Thus, e-catalog serves as a strategic instrument for realizing more transparent, accountable, and efficient regional budget governance, yet it requires consistent internal reforms and adequate political support.

## Suggestions

a.  Strengthening human resource capacity in procurement through continuous training, competency certification, and digital literacy programs.

b.  Enhancing information and communication technology (TIK) infrastructure as the primary prerequisite for effective e-catalog operations.

c.  Expanding the local product catalog by involving micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM) through targeted training and incentives.

d.  Improving digital standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure uniform and consistent procurement processes.

e.  Strengthening digital oversight and internal audits, including real-time transaction monitoring dashboards.

f.  Fostering strategic collaboration with the National Public Procurement Agency (LKPP) and provincial government for application updates and technical assistance.

g. Cultivating an anti-intervention organizational culture to prevent informal practices that undermine e-catalog integrity.

These recommendations underscore that e-catalog success depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on bureaucratic capacity, political commitment, and robust regional budget governance.

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