

Vendor Management Practices in Academic Library Procurement

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Abstract

Vendor management is a critical but often undervalued dimension of academic library procurement. Effective engagement with book vendors, subscription agents, and e-resource providers directly determines the quality, timeliness, and cost-efficiency of library collection development. The present paper conceptually examines vendor management practices in the context of academic library procurement, with particular reference to the Indian academic library environment. Drawing upon existing literature, procurement frameworks, and institutional practices, the paper identifies the key components of vendor management including vendor identification and empanelment, contract negotiation, performance evaluation, relationship management, and compliance with government procurement norms and discusses each in a stepwise, practical framework. The paper further examines the types of vendors engaged by academic libraries, the criteria for their evaluation, the lifecycle of vendor management, and the major challenges that confront librarians in managing vendor relationships effectively. Specific inferences are drawn at each step to provide actionable guidance for practising librarians and procurement administrators. The paper concludes that the adoption of structured, technology-supported vendor management practices is essential for academic libraries to maximise the value of their procurement budgets, ensure collection quality, and sustain productive long-term relationships with the commercial information sector.

Keywords: Vendor Management, Academic Library Procurement, Collection Development, Subscription Management, Library Acquisition.

I. Introduction

Procurement in academic libraries encompasses a wide spectrum of activities directed at identifying, selecting, acquiring, and maintaining the information resources necessary to support

the teaching, learning, and research functions of an institution. In an era of escalating journal subscription costs, shrinking library budgets, expanding digital content markets, and increasingly complex vendor ecosystems, the management of vendor relationships has assumed strategic importance that extends well beyond the transactional mechanics of order placement and invoice settlement.

Vendor management, in the library context, may be broadly defined as the set of policies, processes, and practices through which a library plans, executes, monitors, and evaluates its commercial relationships with book suppliers, periodical subscription agents, database aggregators, and other information providers. The objective of vendor management is to ensure that the library obtains the right resources at the right price, at the right time, and under terms that protect its institutional interests and comply with applicable regulatory requirements.

In the Indian academic library environment, vendor management is shaped by a distinctive set of contextual factors. Public universities and government-funded colleges are obligated to follow the General Financial Rules (GFR, 2017) and government procurement guidelines, including, since 2016, the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal for certain categories of procurement. The National Library Mission, INFLIBNET's e-Shodh Sindhu consortium, and NBHM grant conditions impose additional compliance requirements on recipient libraries. At the same time, the rapid growth of the Indian academic publishing market, the proliferation of e-resource providers, and the increasing complexity of licensing agreements have placed new demands on the vendor management competencies of academic librarians.

Despite its practical significance, vendor management has received relatively limited systematic attention in the Indian library and information science literature. Most studies have focused on specific aspects such as vendor performance evaluation or e-resource procurement, without offering an integrated conceptual framework applicable to the full vendor management lifecycle. The present paper seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive, stepwise treatment of vendor management practices in academic library procurement.

1.1 Concept of Vendor Management Practices in Academic Library Procurement

Vendor management in academic library procurement refers to the structured and strategic management of the entire relationship between a library and its commercial suppliers of information resources whether print or electronic, domestic or foreign, direct publishers,

subscription agents, or distributors. It encompasses every stage of the procurement cycle, from the initial identification and empanelment of eligible vendors through to performance review, contract renewal, and, where necessary, vendor replacement.

The concept is rooted in broader supply chain management theory, where 'vendor management' describes the processes, organisations use to control costs, drive service excellence, and mitigate risks to gain increased value from their vendors (Benton, 2014). When applied to the academic library context, the concept acquires additional dimensions that reflect the unique characteristics of the library procurement environment: the public goods nature of library resources, the regulatory constraints of government procurement rules, the intellectual property dimensions of licensing, and the professional and ethical responsibilities of librarians as stewards of public funds.

Key to understanding vendor management in academic libraries is the distinction between transactional procurement the one-time or ad hoc purchase of individual titles or resources and strategic vendor management, which involves building sustained, structured, and mutually beneficial relationships with a portfolio of vendors aligned with the library's long-term collection development goals. The latter approach is increasingly advocated in the professional literature as the appropriate model for larger academic libraries with significant annual acquisition budgets (Chadwell, 2011; Emery & Stone, 2013).

Vendor management practices in this context encompass: (a) vendor identification, screening, and empanelment; (b) request for proposal (RFP) and tender processes; (c) contract negotiation and management; (d) order management and delivery tracking; (e) invoice and payment management; (f) performance monitoring and evaluation; (g) relationship management and communication; and (h) risk management, compliance, and vendor exit planning. Table 1 below summarises the key components of vendor management and their relevance to academic library procurement.

Table 1: Key Components of Vendor Management in Academic Library Procurement

| S.No | Component | Description | Relevance to Academic Libraries |
|------|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Vendor Identification & Selection | Systematic process of identifying potential vendors, evaluating their | Ensures procurement of quality materials from reliable |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| | | credentials, financial stability, and service capacity. | publishers/distributors; minimises supply risk. |
| 2 | Contract Negotiation & Management | Establishing terms of supply, pricing, discount structures, delivery timelines, and penalty clauses through formal agreements. | Protects library budgets; ensures consistent supply of subscribed resources at agreed prices. |
| 3 | Performance Monitoring & Evaluation | Ongoing assessment of vendor delivery accuracy, fill rates, invoice accuracy, and responsiveness to complaints. | Enables evidence-based vendor retention or replacement; improves procurement efficiency. |
| 4 | Relationship Management | Cultivating long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with key vendors through communication, feedback, and strategic engagement. | Facilitates preferential pricing, advance catalogues, and priority service for high-demand materials. |
| 5 | Invoice & Payment Management | Systematic handling of invoices, reconciliation of supply against orders, and timely payment processing. | Prevents budget overruns; maintains good vendor relations; reduces disputes. |
| 6 | Risk Management | Identifying and mitigating supply-side risks including vendor insolvency, title cancellations, and currency fluctuations (for foreign subscriptions). | Critical for libraries with large journal subscription portfolios and foreign currency commitments. |
| 7 | Technology Integration | Use of integrated library systems (ILS), Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), and vendor portals for order management and data exchange. | Reduces manual processing; improves order accuracy; enables real-time tracking of procurement status. |

1.2 Need and Scope of the Study

The need for a systematic examination of vendor management practices in academic library procurement arises from several convergent pressures in the contemporary library environment. First, the sustained escalation of journal subscription prices averaging 5–7 per cent annually according to Library Journal's annual periodical price survey has made cost-effective vendor

management a financial necessity rather than an administrative convenience for academic libraries (Van Orsdel & Born, 2009). Second, the transition from print to electronic resources has fundamentally altered the vendor landscape, introducing new types of providers, new contractual relationships (licences rather than ownership), and new technical dependencies that require specialised management competencies.

Third, in the Indian context, the introduction of the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal and the revised General Financial Rules (GFR, 2017) have imposed new compliance requirements on government-funded academic libraries, creating an urgent need for practitioners to understand and adapt their procurement processes. Fourth, the growth of library consortia particularly INFLIBNET's e-Shodh Sindhu has introduced a new layer of vendor management at the national level, with implications for individual institutional procurement strategies. Fifth, accreditation frameworks such as NAAC and NBA now include library resource adequacy and procurement efficiency as assessment criteria, creating institutional incentives for the adoption of best-practice vendor management.

The scope of the present paper is confined to vendor management practices in the context of academic library procurement in India, with primary reference to university and college libraries. The paper adopts a conceptual and analytical approach, drawing on national and international literature, government procurement guidelines, and established library procurement frameworks. It does not undertake an empirical survey of specific institutions but provides a generalisable framework applicable across the spectrum of Indian academic libraries. Special provision and price discount vendor practices in research libraries and special collections are beyond the scope of the current discussion.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The following two objectives guide the present paper:

1. To conceptually examine the key components, processes, and best practices of vendor management in academic library procurement through a stepwise analytical framework, with particular reference to the Indian academic library context.
2. To identify the major challenges confronting academic librarians in managing vendor relationships and to suggest evidence-based strategies for overcoming these challenges and improving procurement outcomes.

II. Review of Literature

A systematic review of the existing literature was undertaken to identify key theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and practitioner insights relevant to vendor management in academic library procurement. The following eight works, all published prior to 2019, were found to be of direct relevance.

1. Perdue and Van Fleet (1999)

Though slightly older, the contribution of Perdue, J. and Van Fleet, J. A. on 'Borrow or Buy? Cost Effective Delivery of Monographs published in *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery and Information Supply* remains foundational for understanding vendor selection in relation to the buy-vs-borrow decision framework. The paper developed a cost model for comparing vendor supply against interlibrary loan as alternative procurement strategies, a framework that continues to inform collection development thinking.

2. Safley (2006)

Safley, E. published 'Demand for E-books in an Academic Library' in the *Journal of Library Administration*. While primarily focused on e-book demand patterns, the paper contained a significant discussion of the vendor relationship management challenges specific to e-book procurement including platform instability, title withdrawal risks, and the complexity of multi-vendor licence management. The paper's analysis of vendor risk in the digital supply chain remains pertinent.

3. Pomerantz (2010)

Pomerantz, S. published 'Negotiating Licenses for Digital Resources' in the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*. The paper examined the negotiation of licence agreements for electronic databases and e-journal packages, emphasising the importance of understanding key licence clauses including interlibrary loan permissions, perpetual access rights, and walk-in user provisions before finalising contracts with e-resource vendors.

4. Chadwell (2011)

Chadwell, F. A. published a practitioner-focused article titled 'What's Next for Collection Management and Managers? Vendor Relations in Collection Management'. The author argued that the strategic management of vendor relationships rather than purely transactional procurement was increasingly central to the work of collection managers. The paper emphasised the importance of partnership-based approaches to vendor engagement, noting that libraries which invest in structured vendor communication and performance feedback obtain better service quality and more competitive pricing.

5. Emery and Stone (2013)

Emery, J. and Stone, G. published 'Vendor Management' as part of their widely-cited open-access monograph *Techniques for Electronic Resource Management (TERMS)* (Library Technology Reports, Vol. 49, No. 2). The chapter provided a comprehensive lifecycle framework for managing electronic resource vendors, covering vendor selection, contract negotiation, performance monitoring, and relationship management. The TERMS framework has been widely adopted as a best-practice model for e-resource vendor management in academic libraries.

6. Hulsey (2013)

Hulsey, R. published 'Working with Book Vendors' in *Library Resources and Technical Services (LRTS)*. The paper offered a practical guide to managing relationships with book vendors from the perspective of technical services librarians, covering order management, vendor performance measurement, return and claims procedures, and the negotiation of value-added services such as shelf-ready processing and cataloguing data.

7. Anderson (2014)

Anderson, R. published 'Can't Buy Us Love: The Declining Importance of Library Books and the Rising Importance of Special Collections' in *ITHAKA S+R Issue Brief* (2013), but the vendor management implications were most fully discussed in his 2014 contribution to *Against the Grain* (Vol. 26, No. 3). The discussion examined the changing nature of library-vendor relationships in the context of the shift from print to digital, noting that vendors were

increasingly required to demonstrate value-added services beyond basic supply including data analytics, usage reporting, and discovery integration.

8. Dore (2015)

Dore, M. G. published 'Evaluating Vendor Services and Resources: A User Perspective' in *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*. The study examined the criteria used by academic librarians to evaluate electronic resource vendors and found that responsiveness, transparency of licensing, quality of MARC records supplied, and the reliability of usage statistics were the most important evaluation criteria, alongside pricing. The paper highlighted the increasing importance of soft skills and relationship quality in vendor evaluation.

9. Filson (2018)

Filson (2018) highlighted that academic libraries increasingly adopted systematic collection management and vendor coordination practices to improve procurement efficiency. The research emphasized the importance of vendor reliability, pricing transparency, timely delivery, and electronic resource accessibility in academic libraries. Effective vendor relationships were found to support better acquisition decisions and strengthen collection development strategies in higher education institutions. The study also stressed continuous communication between librarians and suppliers for sustainable procurement management in digital environments.

10. Kamath, G., Naik, R., & Shiva Prasad, H. C. (2018).

Vendor management practices in academic library procurement play a crucial role in ensuring smooth acquisition workflows and maintaining quality information resources. Academic libraries depend on vendors for print and electronic materials, subscription services, licensing support, and technical assistance. Effective procurement requires vendor evaluation based on cost, delivery performance, customer service, and compliance with institutional policies. Strong vendor-library collaboration improves accountability and enhances access to scholarly resources needed for teaching and research activities

The foregoing review establishes that vendor management in academic library procurement is a well-recognised area of professional and scholarly concern internationally. Key themes emerging from the literature include the strategic importance of relationship-based vendor management, the complexity of electronic resource and licence management, the centrality of performance

evaluation, and the need for librarians to develop sophisticated procurement competencies. The Indian academic library context introduces additional dimensions particularly government procurement compliance that are not always addressed in the Western literature, underscoring the need for India-specific frameworks and analyses.

III. Methodology

The present paper adopts a conceptual and analytical research methodology. The study is based on a systematic review of the secondary literature including peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, conference papers, government procurement guidelines, and policy documents published up to 2018. The review was conducted through targeted searches of major bibliographic databases including LISTA (Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts), JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using the search terms 'vendor management', 'library procurement', 'academic library acquisitions', 'book vendor evaluation', 'e-resource procurement', and 'library vendor relations'.

In addition to the published literature, the paper draws upon the General Financial Rules (GFR) of the Government of India (2017), the INFLIBNET e-Shodh Sindhu consortium guidelines, the NAAC assessment framework, and the operational frameworks of the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal all of which are directly relevant to procurement practice in Indian academic libraries.

The analytical framework employed in Section IV is structured around a stepwise model of the vendor management lifecycle, from pre-procurement planning through to post-supply performance evaluation. This lifecycle model is derived from a synthesis of the TERMS framework (Emery & Stone, 2013), the vendor management components identified by Chadwell (2011), and standard procurement process models drawn from supply chain management theory. Inferences are drawn at each step on the basis of the literature reviewed and the authors' own analysis of the Indian academic library context.

Since the paper is conceptual in nature, it does not employ quantitative methods or involve primary data collection. The validity of the conceptual framework presented is grounded in its fidelity to the established literature and its applicability to the documented realities of academic library procurement in India.

IV. Concept and Discussion: Vendor Management Practices – A Stepwise Analysis

The following section presents a stepwise discussion of vendor management practices in academic library procurement. Five conceptual tables are presented and discussed in sequence, each addressing a distinct dimension of vendor management. An inference is drawn at the conclusion of each step.

Step 1: Understanding Vendor Types and Their Relevance to Academic Library Procurement

The first step in developing an effective vendor management strategy is to understand the taxonomy of vendors engaged in academic library procurement and the distinct characteristics, strengths, and risks associated with each type. Academic libraries typically engage with five main categories of vendors: direct publishers, subscription agents, book vendors/distributors, online aggregators, and government/institutional suppliers. Table 2 below presents these vendor types with illustrative examples and their respective characteristics in the Indian context.

Table 2: Types of Vendors in Academic Library Procurement

| S.No | Vendor Type | Examples | Characteristics & Suitability |
|------|-----------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Publishers (Direct) | Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, Oxford University Press, Sage Publications | Direct supply of titles; competitive pricing on large orders; journal subscription management. Best for large academic libraries with dedicated acquisition budgets. |
| 2 | Subscription Agents | EBSCO Subscription Services, Swets (prior to closure), Harrassowitz | Consolidate journal subscriptions across multiple publishers; provide single-invoice service; issue renewal reminders. Essential for managing large periodical collections. |
| 3 | Book Vendors / Distributors | B.K. Publishers & Distributors, CBS Publishers, New Book Company, Variety Books (India) | Supply books from multiple publishers through a single channel; offer subject-specialist approval plans and standing orders. Suitable for domestic acquisitions in Indian academic libraries. |
| 4 | Online Aggregators | Amazon, Flipkart | Provide access to large aggregated |

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|---|---|---|--|
| | | (academic segment), ProQuest, EBSCO Discovery Service | collections of e-books and e-journals; flexible pricing models (PDA, EBA). Growing relevance for digital collection development. |
| 5 | Government & Institutional Suppliers | NBHM approved vendors, INFLIBNET empanelled agencies, GeM portal vendors (post-2016) | Supply through government procurement channels; mandatory for publicly funded institutions; compliance with GFR 2017 norms. Obligatory for Central/State University libraries. |

Inference: The diversity of vendor types available to academic libraries reflects the complexity of the contemporary information marketplace. Effective vendor management requires that libraries maintain a diversified vendor portfolio rather than concentrating all procurement with a single supplier. Each vendor type serves distinct procurement needs, and the optimal strategy involves strategic allocation of procurement across vendor categories based on resource type, budget availability, and institutional regulatory requirements. In the Indian public university context, government procurement portals such as GeM must be factored into the vendor selection strategy, even where the range of available materials may be more limited than in the open market.

Step 2: Establishing Vendor Evaluation Criteria

A fundamental prerequisite for effective vendor management is the establishment of clear, objective, and consistently applied criteria for vendor evaluation. Evaluation criteria serve two functions: they guide the initial selection and empanelment of vendors, and they provide the basis for ongoing performance monitoring and contract renewal decisions. Table 3 presents a set of eight evaluation criteria, together with their relative weights and measurement indicators, appropriate for use by academic libraries in the Indian context.

Table 3: Vendor Evaluation Criteria for Academic Library Procurement

| S.No | Evaluation Criterion | Description / Measurement Indicator | Weight (%) | Score (Max 5) |
|------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|----|---|
| 1 | Supply Fill Rate | Percentage of ordered titles supplied within agreed delivery window | 20 | 5 |
| 2 | Title Accuracy | Degree to which supplied items match ordered specifications (ISBN, edition, binding) | 15 | 5 |
| 3 | Invoice Accuracy | Correctness of pricing, discount application, and billing details | 15 | 5 |
| 4 | Discount Structure | Competitiveness of trade discounts offered on different categories of materials | 15 | 5 |
| 5 | Delivery Timeliness | Average time from order placement to delivery (measured in days) | 10 | 5 |
| 6 | Value-Added Services | Availability of MARC records, shelf-ready processing, approval plans, and online ordering portals | 10 | 5 |
| 7 | Customer Service & Responsiveness | Quality and speed of response to complaints, queries, and return requests | 10 | 5 |
| 8 | Financial Stability | Evidence of vendor financial soundness and continuity of service | 5 | 5 |

Inference: Supply fill rate and title accuracy together account for 35 per cent of the weighted evaluation score, reflecting their primacy as determinants of procurement effectiveness. Libraries should establish minimum acceptable thresholds for these criteria a fill rate below 85 per cent, for instance, should trigger a formal performance improvement notice. The significant weight assigned to value-added services (10%) reflects the growing importance of MARC records, shelf-ready processing, and digital ordering portals as efficiency-enhancing services that reduce the downstream workload of technical services staff. Indian academic libraries should formalise their vendor evaluation processes and conduct annual ratings to ensure that procurement decisions are evidence-based rather than based on historical habit or personal relationships.

Step 3: The Vendor Management Lifecycle

Vendor management in academic library procurement is best understood as a cyclical process rather than a linear sequence of discrete transactions. Table 4 presents a seven-stage vendor management lifecycle model, adapted from the TERMS framework (Emery & Stone, 2013) and

the procurement cycle analysis of Chadwell (2011), and contextualised for the Indian academic library environment.

Table 4: The Vendor Management Lifecycle in Academic Library Procurement

| Stage | Phase Name | Key Activities | Recommended Best Practices |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Pre-Procurement Planning | Budget allocation; needs assessment; market survey; drafting procurement specifications; preparing approved vendor list (AVL) | Conduct annual collection review; align procurement with accreditation norms (NAAC, NBA); prepare vendor empanelment criteria in advance. |
| 2 | Vendor Identification & Empanelment | Inviting vendor applications; document verification; financial and trade reference checks; field visits; finalising AVL | Issue open tender/Expression of Interest (EOI); verify GST registration, PAN, and bank details; obtain sample title lists. |
| 3 | Order Placement | Selection of titles; preparation of purchase orders (POs); despatch of POs to empanelled vendors; acknowledgement of POs | Use ILS-based acquisition module for PO generation; retain digital copies; specify edition, ISBN, and required delivery date. |
| 4 | Supply & Delivery Management | Receipt of supplies; physical verification of items against PO; reporting shortages, damages, and wrong supplies | Appoint a receiving committee; maintain goods receipt notes (GRN); return unacceptable items with written reasons within 7 days. |
| 5 | Invoice Processing & Payment | Invoice scrutiny; three-way matching (PO, GRN, invoice); processing of bills for payment; GST compliance | Ensure invoices match PO quantities and agreed prices; file GST returns promptly; clear bills within 30 days to maintain vendor confidence. |
| 6 | Performance Evaluation | Quarterly/annual assessment of fill rate, delivery time, invoice accuracy, and service quality; formal vendor rating exercise | Use a standardised scorecard; share results with vendors; use ratings to determine renewal of empanelment or contract. |
| 7 | Relationship & Contract Review | Annual contract review meetings; feedback exchange; renegotiation of terms; decision on contract renewal or vendor replacement | Document all communications; maintain a vendor relationship log; use competitive benchmarking during renegotiation. |

Inference: The lifecycle model reveals that vendor management is not merely a procurement function but a continuous institutional process requiring sustained attention at every stage. A common failure point in Indian academic library procurement is the absence of formal performance evaluation (Stage 6) and contract review (Stage 7), resulting in the perpetuation of underperforming vendor relationships by default. Libraries should institutionalise annual vendor review meetings and maintain documented vendor performance records as a

precondition for contract renewal. The three-way matching process in Stage 5 ensuring that the purchase order, goods receipt note, and invoice are consistent before payment is authorised is particularly important for compliance with GFR 2017 requirements and audit preparedness.

Step 4: Key Components of Vendor Management

Having established the lifecycle framework, it is instructive to examine the key components of vendor management in greater detail. Table 5 revisits the eight components introduced in Table 1 and elaborates on the specific operational practices associated with each in the context of academic library procurement in India. This step focuses on the practical implementation dimension of vendor management, addressing the question of how each component should be operationalised in institutional practice.

Table 5: Key Components of Vendor Management and Operational Practices

| S.No | Component | Description | Relevance to Academic Libraries |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Vendor Identification & Selection | Systematic process of identifying potential vendors, evaluating their credentials, financial stability, and service capacity. | Ensures procurement of quality materials from reliable publishers/distributors; minimises supply risk. |
| 2 | Contract Negotiation & Management | Establishing terms of supply, pricing, discount structures, delivery timelines, and penalty clauses through formal agreements. | Protects library budgets; ensures consistent supply of subscribed resources at agreed prices. |
| 3 | Performance Monitoring & Evaluation | Ongoing assessment of vendor delivery accuracy, fill rates, invoice accuracy, and responsiveness to complaints. | Enables evidence-based vendor retention or replacement; improves procurement efficiency. |

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|---|
| 4 | Relationship Management | Cultivating long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with key vendors through communication, feedback, and strategic engagement. | Facilitates preferential pricing, advance catalogues, and priority service for high-demand materials. |
| 5 | Invoice & Payment Management | Systematic handling of invoices, reconciliation of supply against orders, and timely payment processing. | Prevents budget overruns; maintains good vendor relations; reduces disputes. |
| 6 | Risk Management | Identifying and mitigating supply-side risks including vendor insolvency, title cancellations, and currency fluctuations (for foreign subscriptions). | Critical for libraries with large journal subscription portfolios and foreign currency commitments. |
| 7 | Technology Integration | Use of integrated library systems (ILS), Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), and vendor portals for order management and data exchange. | Reduces manual processing; improves order accuracy; enables real-time tracking of procurement status. |

Technology integration deserves special attention as an enabling component for all other vendor management activities. The use of an Integrated Library System (ILS) with a functional acquisitions modulesuch as Koha, LibSys, or SLIM21, all commonly deployed in Indian academic libraries enables systematic PO tracking, budget management, vendor performance data capture, and reporting. Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) between the library's ILS and vendor order management systems, while not yet widely adopted in Indian academic libraries, represents the next frontier in procurement efficiency.

Inference: Among the eight components of vendor management, performance monitoring and evaluation (Component 3) and technology integration (Component 7) have the greatest leverage for improving overall procurement outcomes. Libraries that invest in formal performance monitoring systems obtain measurable improvements in vendor fill rates and delivery timeliness; those that adopt ILS-based acquisitions modules reduce manual processing errors and improve budget visibility. Indian academic libraries should prioritise these two components in their institutional development plans, particularly in the context of

NAAC accreditation, which now requires demonstrable evidence of systematic library management processes.

Step 5: Challenges in Vendor Management and Mitigation Strategies

Academic library procurement is conducted in an environment characterised by resource constraints, regulatory complexity, and market volatility. Table 6 presents the major challenges confronting academic librarians in vendor management, together with their impact on procurement outcomes and suggested mitigation strategies.

Table 6: Challenges in Vendor Management and Suggested Mitigation Strategies

| S.No | Challenge | Impact on Academic Library Procurement | Suggested Mitigation Strategy |
|------|--|---|--|
| 1 | Budget Constraints & Uncertain Funding | Inability to honour existing commitments; cancellation of subscriptions; poor vendor relations | Multi-year budgeting; contingency reserves; prioritisation frameworks for essential resources. |
| 2 | Vendor Consolidation & Market Monopoly | Reduced bargaining power; price escalation; risk of service disruption upon vendor exit | Maintain multiple vendors for each category; monitor market consolidation trends; engage with library consortia. |
| 3 | Delays in Supply | Disrupts timely availability of required materials; affects academic programmes | Build lead time into procurement schedules; use penalty clauses in contracts; maintain a buffer stock for core titles. |
| 4 | Currency Fluctuation (Foreign Subscriptions) | Unpredictable cost increases for foreign journal subscriptions; budget overruns | Forward budgeting with exchange rate buffers; negotiate multi-year pricing locks; prefer rupee-denominated contracts. |
| 5 | Lack of Standardised Vendor Evaluation | Inconsistent procurement quality; perpetuation of underperforming vendor relationships | Adopt formal vendor scorecard systems; link evaluation outcomes to contract renewal decisions. |
| 6 | E-Resource Licensing Complexity | Difficulty in understanding and enforcing licence terms; risk of inadvertent licence violations | Engage licence review specialists; maintain a digital licence repository; participate in consortium negotiations. |
| 7 | Compliance with Government Procurement Norms | Risk of audit objections; delays in payment clearance; vendor dissatisfaction | Maintain thorough procurement documentation; use GeM portal where mandated; conduct annual internal audits. |

Among the challenges listed in Table 6, the compliance challenge (Item 7) deserves particular emphasis in the Indian context. The GFR 2017 requires all central government institutions to justify procurement decisions, maintain prescribed documentation, and use the GeM portal for notified categories of goods and services. Academic libraries that have not adapted their procurement processes to comply with GFR 2017 are exposed to significant audit risk and potential recovery proceedings. Similarly, the licensing complexity challenge (Item 6) is increasingly critical as more academic libraries migrate from print to electronic collections: a licence that does not explicitly permit interlibrary loan, or that restricts perpetual access upon subscription cancellation, can impose significant long-term costs that may not be immediately apparent at the time of procurement.

Inference: The most significant and pervasive challenge in vendor management for Indian academic libraries is not vendor performance per se, but the institutional and regulatory context in which procurement occurs. Budget uncertainty, compliance requirements, and currency risk compound the inherent complexities of managing a diverse vendor portfolio. The most effective mitigation strategy is a proactive, well-documented procurement planning process that anticipates these challenges and builds in appropriate safeguards before procurement commitments are made. Libraries should invest in building internal procurement expertise through staff training, professional development, and engagement with networks such as CALIBER and IASLIC to develop the institutional capacity needed to navigate this complex environment effectively.

V. Conclusion

The present paper has examined vendor management practices in academic library procurement through a stepwise analytical framework encompassing vendor typology, evaluation criteria, the procurement lifecycle, key management components, and the challenges of the Indian academic library context. The analysis demonstrates that vendor management is a multi-dimensional, strategically important function that extends well beyond the transactional dimensions of order placement and payment processing.

The central argument of the paper is that academic libraries in India must transition from predominantly transactional, relationship-dependent procurement practices to structured, evidence-based vendor management systems characterised by formal evaluation criteria,

documented procurement processes, technology-supported order and budget management, and systematic performance monitoring. This transition is necessitated not only by the professional imperative to maximise the value of library procurement budgets but also by the regulatory demands of GFR 2017, the accreditation requirements of NAAC and NBA, and the escalating complexity of the electronic resource marketplace.

The stepwise framework presented in this paper covering vendor identification, evaluation, lifecycle management, operational components, and challenge mitigation provides a generalisable template that academic librarians can adapt to their specific institutional contexts. The framework is particularly relevant for university libraries, autonomous colleges, and central government-funded institutions that must navigate the intersection of professional procurement best practices and public sector procurement compliance.

Future research could usefully extend the present framework through empirical investigation of vendor management practices in a representative sample of Indian academic libraries, examining the extent to which formal vendor management processes have been adopted, the barriers to adoption, and the outcomes achieved by libraries that have implemented structured vendor management systems. Comparative analysis of vendor management practices across different categories of academic institution central universities, state universities, deemed universities, and affiliated colleges would also yield valuable insights for policy and practice.

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