



The importance of assessing supplier performance to achieve value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu Natal

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigates the importance of supplier performance in achieving value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu Natal, identifying challenges and recommending strategic improvements. The research objectives are to determine the Impact of supplier performance focusing on the quality of service, to evaluate service quality and consistency components, to assess the effectiveness of current procurement policies in the appointment of a suitable supplier, to assess the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage through effective selection and performance management processes. The study reveals critical challenges of ineffective procurement policies, inadequate supplier evaluation, and limited technology integration. The study proposes a centralized supplier management system, automated supplier database management, performance tracking and evaluation metrics, collaborative partnerships with suppliers, and a computerized supplier engagement platform. The qualitative method approach helps the study investigate the current state of supplier performance management at UKZN, revealing significant challenges that hinder effective service delivery. The study's key findings indicate ineffective procurement policies and procedures, inadequate supplier evaluation and selection processes, limited technology integration and automation, insufficient performance tracking and evaluation metrics, and inadequate supplier collaboration. The study proposes a robust framework for enhancing supplier management, including developing centralized supplier management systems, implementing automated supplier database management, establishing performance tracking and evaluation metrics, fostering collaborative partnerships with suppliers, and integrating technology-enabled supplier engagement platforms. Effectively implementing this strategy will enhance supplier relationships, improve procurement efficiency, reduce supply chain risks, and increase competitiveness. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on supplier management, providing actionable insights for UKZN and similar organizations seeking to optimize their procurement processes and improve service quality. UKZN's procurement department should develop and implement a centralized supplier management system; management should conduct regular training and capacity-building programs for procurement staff and foster a collaborative relationship with suppliers.

**Keywords:** Supplier Management, Service Quality, Procurement, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Supply Chain Management, Strategic Partnerships.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The intensified competition in domestic and foreign markets has forced higher education institutions to find new sources of competitive advantage (Trunina, et al., 2021). The rise in market competition has allowed students options to choose their preferred institution to enroll for their professional studies. Various authors acknowledge that universities now operate like entrepreneurial businesses to achieve this competitive advantage. It is, therefore, essential to assess the impact of a supplier's performance, as this directly impacts the university's competitiveness. Supplier performance also plays a critical role in achieving value for money and customer satisfaction in public institutions such as the University of KwaZulu Natal. This, therefore, creates a need for effective supplier performance management in optimizing public institutions' procurement processes, as it directly impacts the quality of goods and services provided to end-users. As procurement functions, we recognize that our suppliers are vital partners in delivering exceptional educational experiences. Research has shown that suppliers' operational efficiency can significantly impact our performance outcomes (Kim & Swink, 2021). Our institutions have witnessed how effective project management and supply coordination can drive innovation and improve organizational performance (Hartati, et al., 2025). These insights highlight the critical role that suppliers and supply chain management play in driving operational efficiency across various sectors. The procurement processes at UKZN must prioritize suppliers who demonstrate high reliability, quality, and responsiveness to foster a competitive advantage in higher education. The alignment of supplier performance and the institution's strategic goals is crucial for attaining a sustainable procurement that supports academic excellence and customer satisfaction. Therefore, UKZN must understand the importance of supplier performance to ensure that the procurement processes deliver value for money and maintain a high standard of customer satisfaction.

### **1.2. Background and Rationale**

#### **1.2.1. Rationale behind the study**

The suppliers' performance assessment is crucial in supply chain management, particularly in an institution like the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). The effectiveness of the supplier's performance directly influences the university's ability to deliver quality service, impacting the institution's reputation and customer satisfaction. The study aims to investigate the relationship between supplier performance and the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) competitive advantage, focusing on the end-user's perceptions of value for money. This study aims to find the impact of effective supplier performance assessment and management on enhancing UKZN's procurement policies, quality standards, and supplier relationships and its subsequent influence on the university's competitiveness in the higher education sector.

Pursuing value for money (VfM) in public procurement is not merely a technical exercise but a complex social process that affects the lives of individuals and communities (Malacina, et al., 2022). Researchers often focus on the technical aspects of VfM, such as cost-benefit analysis and efficiency metrics. However, procurement decisions impact people's well-being, livelihoods, and access to essential services.

For instance, a study by Malacina et al. (2022) highlights the importance of considering the implications of procurement decisions socially and environmentally. The authors argue that VfM must be redefined to incorporate the values and concerns of citizens and stakeholders rather than simply focusing on cost savings (Sonnichsen & Clement, 2020).

Similarly, Sönnichsen and Clement (2020) emphasize the need for circular procurement practices prioritizing sustainability and social responsibility. They contend that procurement professionals are crucial in promoting sustainable development and reducing social inequality.

The human element is also at the forefront of recent VfM models, which incorporate public participation and ensure that procurement decisions align with community needs and expectations (Jianfeng, et al., 2022). Procurement professionals can create value extending far beyond the bottom line, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and just society by engaging with citizens and stakeholders.

Quality standards are critical in maintaining the integrity of the institution. The university's reputation hinges on its ability to provide high-quality resources and support systems. Poor supplier performance can lead to substandard service and materials, compromising the educational outcome of the university. Organizations should be proactive in monitoring supplier performance to mitigate supply chain risks, effective supplier relationship management and continuous monitoring are crucial in identifying potential supply risk and implementing proactive strategies (Rao & Goldsby, 2022). Discussing the acceptable quality standards with end users at UKZN can enhance communication between the end users and the procurement unit, fostering a collaborative environment. This collaboration is essential in ensuring that risks are identified and proactive measures are in place to prevent potential issues from escalating into larger problems.

Long-term relationships with suppliers can yield fruitful benefits for UKZN. Long-term relationships can foster trust and collaboration, leading to supplier innovation and responsiveness. UKZN can cultivate supplier relationships that align with its strategic goals. Establishing and implementing metrics to measure supplier performance can provide UKZN with a tool to identify high-performing suppliers and address underperforming suppliers. This tool can enhance the supplier base of UKZN and contribute to the overall competitiveness.

Assessing supplier performance at UKZN is essential in achieving value for money and customer satisfaction. Engaging end users in this study can help the University review its procurement policies,

enhance quality standards, build strong supplier relationships, and secure a competitive advantage in the higher education sector.

### **1.2.2. Problem Statements**

The University of KwaZulu Natal has experienced delays in infrastructure projects and the supply of various goods and services due to poor supplier performance. Some of the delays have led to the cancellation of contracts. Public procurement processes intended to boost service delivery can often hinder effective supplier relationships and promote transactional rather than strategic relationships. This leads to high escalation costs associated with infrastructure projects, significantly impacting the speed and quality of infrastructure service delivery (Ngcobo & Conradie, 2024). The University must address these challenges to enhance its overall service delivery.

The quality of the supplier's products and services has a direct effect on the reputation of the University. UKZN is committed to excellence in education, and this is undermined when it relies on sub-standard quality from suppliers and necessitates the reevaluation of procurement policies and strategies. It is important to mitigate risks, ensure continuity in essential services, and ensure sustainable procurement in the institution (Bhutto, et al., 2024).

There's a variability in the end user's perceptions regarding the 'value for money' and the goods and services the University procures. The engagement of end users to discuss their supplier experience is essential to align procurement policies and strategies with the organizational needs, ensuring that the needs and quality standards are met. Engagement of end-users positively relates to end-user satisfaction, when the customers are satisfied with the procurement process, they are more likely to use the procured product (Anin, et al., 2022).

With the identified current problems at the University, the current procurement policies and strategies may not adequately address the challenges posed by supplier performance issues at UKZN. The study indicates a need for proactive engagement with role players in procurement, procurement personnel, and stakeholders to remain vital in developing effective procurement strategies and policies. The collaboration of these groups can ensure that the University can proactively detect and respond to emerging supplier performance challenges.

Establishing long-term supplier relationships is critical at UKZN to improve the quality of its supplier base. Successful partnerships between organizations and suppliers lead to better communication, trust, and improved performance outcomes (Vaka, 2024). Engaging stakeholders to address these challenges will enable UKZN to improve its procurement processes, strategies, and policies, enhance supplier performance, and improve its competitive advantage.

### **1.3. Research Context**

#### **1.3.1. Research Objectives**

- i. To investigate the impact of supplier performance on service quality and customer satisfaction at the University.
- ii. To identify areas for improvement in supplier performance and procurement policies.
- iii. To assess the effectiveness of current procurement policies in selecting suitable suppliers.
- iv. To examine the relationship between supplier performance and the University's competitive advantage.

#### **1.3.2. Research Questions**

- i. How does supplier performance affect service quality and customer satisfaction at the University?
- ii. How can supplier performance and procurement policies be improved to enhance service quality and competitiveness?
- iii. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current procurement policies when selecting suitable suppliers?
- iv. To what extent does supplier performance contribute to the University's competitive advantage?

### **1.4. Literature Review**

Effective supplier performance evaluation is crucial for achieving organizational success, value for money, and customer satisfaction in the public sector higher education. However, complex procurement processes and supplier relationships pose a challenge. This literature review aims to analyze current theories and studies on supplier performance evaluation, identify gaps in existing research, and provide a theoretical foundation for this study. This chapter explores the theoretical foundations of supplier performance evaluations, including institutional theory, conceptual theory, and theoretical framework. The review examines supplier evaluation systems; metrics, multi-criteria decision-making models; the Impact of supplier attributes on procurement performance; the interrelationships between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction; application of the balanced scorecard approach, PESTLE analysis, and theory of change management. The literature review lays the groundwork for understanding the complexities of supplier performance evaluation in the public sector, informing the development of effective strategies to enhance organizational success, value for money, and customer satisfaction.

## **1.5. Methodology and Limitations**

### **1.5.1. Research Methodology**

The chapter outlines a qualitative framework grounded in interpretivism to explore critical aspects of supplier performance's influence on service quality and customer satisfaction while recognizing its methodological limitations. The chapter sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of how supplier performance impacts service quality and customer satisfaction through qualitative methodologies rooted in interpretivist philosophy. The aim is to contribute valuable insights that inform procurement strategies and enhance organizational effectiveness in delivering superior customer service.

#### **1.5.1.1. Research design**

The study will employ a qualitative research design based on the interpretivism philosophy. The research design enables an understanding of the impact of supplier performance on service quality and customer satisfaction. The design is well suited for examining the complex issues of the University-sounding supplier performance, as it provides rich and detailed data that allows the researcher to probe a more profound level that quantitative methods may overlook. The rationale behind selecting the qualitative methodology is based on the inductive approach, which encapsulates the theory construction and the plausibility of generating meanings during the data collection exercise.

#### **1.5.1.2. Data collection techniques**

Qualitative research collects and analyses non-numerical data to explore human experiences, behaviors, and attitudes (Oranga & Matere, 2023). The study focuses on supplier performance in achieving value for money and satisfied customers within the University of KwaZulu Natal. The researcher will conduct Semi-structured interviews with procurement officials, end-user representatives, project managers, budget holders, senior managers, and role players involved in the procurement process, selection of suppliers, and monitoring of supplier performance. The study undertakes empirical data from the respondents. The study population is approximately forty (40) personnel with a minimum of three years in the decision-making portfolio. A purposive sampling procedure was considered to solicit respondents based on their insights, expertise, and experience. The sample size was based on 12 (twelve) respondents who are involved in procurement portfolio decision-making. The recruitment was guided by informed consent and communication directed to the targeted participants facilitated through a telephone call and physical interaction to set up an appointment and introduction of the study. The targeted participants were those with three years minimum work experience in procurement and those with an NQF 7 who are familiar with a procurement portfolio. The exclusion was personnel with less than three years of experience and not at the decision-making level. The secondary sources were publicly available on web-based portals such as the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) and Supply Chain Management Regulations. E.g., Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPFA).

### **1.5.1.3. Trustworthiness of data**

Reflexive thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke, emphasizes the active role of the researcher and the importance of reflexivity in shaping the analysis (Roseveare, 2023). This approach involves several stages: data familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, refinement, and writing (Roseveare, 2023). This will also be complemented by identifying patterns and categories within the empirical data collected from study participants. The qualitative data will be explored through themes related to value for money assessment, perceptions of supplier performance, expected quality standards, and Impact and experience on project timelines and service delivery.

### **1.5.1.4. Data Analysis**

The thematic analysis will include reading through data transcripts from recorded interviews, identifying recurring ideas and generating codes, searching for themes by collating codes into nuanced categories, reviewing themes against the dataset, and defining themes clearly before reporting any findings (Roseveare, 2023). The analysis will include identifying patterns that emerge from collected data concerning the supplier's performance impact on the operations of the University. Synthesizing findings into actionable insights that inform procurement policy and procurement strategy improvements.

## **1.5.2. Limitations of the Study**

The study includes a limited number of departments in the University that may not reflect the Impact of supplier's poor performance across the University, a small biased sample can limit the generalization of findings. Different stakeholders may have different perceptions about value for money and customer satisfaction, and this subjectivity can introduce bias into the assessment and create difficulty in drawing objective conclusions about supplier performance.

Time constraints may limit data collection and analysis; there might not be sufficient time to gather and analyze data this can overlook crucial factors that influence supplier performance and customer satisfaction. Limitations in available data and lack of transparency from stakeholders interviewed can lead to erroneous conclusions. Conflict of interest from stakeholders arising from the personal relationships they have with suppliers can compromise the objectivity of the data collected.

This study focuses on internal stakeholders, excluding suppliers, resulting in one-sided evaluations and conclusions. By only considering internal factors, the analysis and results will overlook external influences on supplier performance, some of which are beyond the control of the contracted supplier and the University. These external variables are worth consideration for future research; however, they can be difficult to assess, and isolate certain factors that contribute to value for money and customer satisfaction.

## 1.6. Structure and outline of the study

**Chapter One** provided a comprehensive overview of the study regarding the significance of supplier performance in achieving value for money and customer satisfaction at the University of KwaZulu Natal. The introduction outlines the importance of effective supplier management within the educational institution. The rationale emphasizes and motivates the need for the study by emphasizing how improved supplier performance can improve service delivery and enhanced cost-effectiveness. The problem statement highlights the challenges facing the University in supplier relationships and performance. The objectives aim to explore these challenges and propose solutions. The research questions were formulated to guide the investigation, while the limitations highlighted potential constraints affecting the study outcomes. The methodology outlined the techniques for data collection and analysis while ensuring the reliability and validity of data. The structure finally details how the chapters will build upon this foundational review.

**Chapter two** lays the foundation for subsequent chapters, providing a theoretical framework for the study and informing the research design. The study reviews the existing literature on supplier performance evaluation and includes a review of conceptual, theoretical, and institutional theories underlying supplier performance. The study further identified various supplier evaluation systems and models. Key findings identified by this study include gaps to be considered for future studies.

**Chapter Three** outlines the research design, methods, and procedures used to investigate the Impact of supplier performance in achieving value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Key aspects include the research design: qualitative approach; sampling strategy: purposive and stratified sampling; data collection: interviews and documentary analysis; data analysis, thematic analysis research instruments, questionnaires, and interview guides.

**Chapter Four** presents the findings, analyzing data collected from interviews and documentary analysis. Key results include supplier management challenges: Ineffective procurement policies, inadequate supplier evaluation, and limited technology integration; Service quality gaps: Delays, defects, and inefficient communication; a correlation between supplier management and service quality and themes emerging from interviews: Collaboration, communication, and capacity building.

**Chapter Five** summarizes the study's findings, implications, and recommendations. Key aspects include a summary of key findings, implications for practice, policy, and future research, UKZN's supplier management improvement, limitations of the study, and avenues for future research and contribution to the body of knowledge on supplier management and service quality.

## 1.7. Chapter Summary

The studies provided an overview of the study, outlining the rationale, objectives, and context. The discussion centered on the significance of supplier performance evaluation in the public sector,

specifically in higher education institutions. The research problem highlighted the existing gaps in the study, the research objectives, the hypothesis, the research limitations, the scope, and the methodology. The key aspects of the study include examining the supplier attributes and impact on procurement performance, the interrelationship between value for money, customer satisfaction, and value for money, focusing on developing a theoretical framework for supplier performance evaluation. The study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the best tools, practices, and systems of supplier performance evaluation in higher education institutions, developing theoretical frameworks for supplier performance evaluation, and contributing to policy and practices in the public sector, specifically higher education institutions.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Procurement is a critical component in the public sector to ensure organizational success. An effective performance evaluation system is essential in achieving value for money, organizational goals, and customer satisfaction. There are various challenges within the complexity of supplier relationships and procurement processes. The literature review aims to analyse the current theory and studies on supplier performance evaluation, identify gaps in existing studies, and provide a theoretical foundation for the study. The chapter provides an overview of the theoretical foundations of supplier performance evaluation, focusing on institutional theory, conceptual theory, and theoretical frameworks. The study explores various supplier evaluation systems, metrics, and multi-criteria decision-making models. The chapter examines the Impact of supplier attributes on procurement performance, the interrelationship between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction, the application of the balanced scorecard approach, PESTLE analysis, and the change management theory.

### **2.2. MACRO Context**

The literature review explores the role of supplier performance in three global case studies: The University of Melbourne (Australia), the University of California System (USA), and the University College London (UK). By examining these institutions, we can draw parallels and contrasts, highlighting the best practices and strategies relevant to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. At the University of Melbourne, they monitor supplier performance closely through a structured procurement process that emphasizes transparency and accountability. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are employed to evaluate suppliers regularly. For instance, they assess delivery times, product quality, and compliance with contractual obligations (Melbourne, 2022). This rigorous approach at the University of Melbourne ensures that only high-performing suppliers are retained, maximizing value for money. The University of California system implemented a supplier evaluation framework that gathers feedback from end users, students, and faculty. Integrating customer experience into their assessment criteria ensures that suppliers meet their contractual obligations and contribute positively to customer satisfaction. This holistic approach fosters long-term partnerships with suppliers who demonstrate consistent performance (Williams, 2021). In contrast, The University College London adopts a collaborative approach with its suppliers by engaging in joint initiatives and building innovation and sustainability in their supply chain. The UCL initiative enhances supplier commitment and aligns supplier goals with the University goals by involving suppliers in strategic planning sessions. The collaboration has led to greater stakeholder satisfaction and improved service delivery outcomes (London, 2024).

When comparing these studies, various themes have emerged regarding how different universities manage supplier performance: Performance metrics, a similarity between the University of Melbourne

and The University of California proves that they use quantitative metrics for supplier evaluation. UCL emphasizes quantitative engagement through collaboration with stakeholders. UC uses a stakeholder involvement strategy not implemented by Melbourne and UCL; they utilize end-user feedback for a supplier evaluation approach. UCL highlights innovation strategy as a core component of supplier relationships, which is less pronounced by UC and Melbourne. All three universities recognize and practice sustainability however, UCL actively leads through supplier collaboration. Although all three universities value long-term relationships with suppliers, UCL's approach fosters a profound partnership through shared objectives with suppliers. The comparative analysis reveals commonalities across global studies between higher educational institutions regarding their procurement practices; however, uniqueness tailored to the institution can yield significant benefits.

### **2.2.1. PESTLE Analysis**

The literature review explores the conceptual theory surrounding supplier performance through PESTLE analysis, an acronym for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental factors. By examining these dimensions, we can understand how they affect value for money and customer satisfaction, including how they influence supplier performance.

#### **PESTLE analysis framework**

**Political factors** – Government policies and political stability impact supplier performance. In South Africa, public institutions like UKZN are guided by public procurement legislation when engaging with suppliers. Adherence to the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA) ensures that local suppliers are prioritized in procurement, while this can improve community relations, it can limit options for high-quality goods (Khan, et al., 2020). This political landscape necessitates UKZN evaluate suppliers to ensure VFM.

**Economic factors** – The pricing strategies and operational capabilities are directly influenced by economic conditions. The fluctuating South African rand impacts import costs for educational materials and technology (Chikanda, et al., 2019). UKZN needs to assess suppliers' costs and ability to deliver quality products amidst economic volatility. A recent study highlights that effective supplier management can mitigate risks associated with economic downturns by fostering long-term partnerships that provide stability (Khamis, et al., 2021).

**Social factors** – The social dynamics within the University community affect perceptions of supplier performance. Stakeholder engagement is crucial, students and faculty often have expectations regarding service delivery (Ngwenya & Moyo, 2022). For example, suppliers' failure to meet these expectations, such as timely delivery of examination materials, can lead to dissatisfaction among students and academic staff, thereby impacting overall customer satisfaction at UKZN.

**Technological/Digitalization /factors** – The rapid change and advancement in technology necessitates that suppliers remain innovative to meet educational needs effectively. UKZN’s reliance on digital platforms for learning means that suppliers must provide cutting-edge technology solutions (Khamis, et al., 2021). Failure to do so can lead to reduced value for money and diminish the educational experience for students. UKZN can incorporate Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) into the technological factors, as it highlights the importance of digitalization and innovation in supplier management. ERP systems can be useful in automated procurement processes, monitoring supplier performance, contract management, tracking deliveries, alerts on potential performance deviations, risk mitigation, and document sharing with suppliers.

**Legal /Regulatory factors** – Compliance with legal standards is essential in maintaining good supplier relationships. Universities must ensure that their suppliers adhere to regulations concerning labor laws and product safety standards (Khan, et al., 2020). Non-compliance with UKZN suppliers can lead to reputational damage and potential legal ramifications for the University.

**Environmental factors** – Increasing awareness around sustainability has led universities like UKZN to prioritize environmentally friendly practices in procurement processes. Suppliers demonstrating commitment to sustainable practices align with institutional values and enhance customer satisfaction among environmentally conscious stakeholders (Dube & Ndlovu, 2021).

Recent studies have reinforced the importance of effective supplier management in achieving VFM and customer satisfaction within higher education institutions. A recent study emphasizes the need for universities to adopt strategic sourcing practices that consider all PESTLE factors when evaluating suppliers (Chikanda, et al., 2019). Some argue that stakeholder engagement in procurement decisions leads to better alignment between supplier offerings and institutional needs (Ngwenya & Moyo, 2022). Further Research indicates a direct correlation between vigorous supplier performance metrics and enhanced student satisfaction rates at universities across South Africa (Khamis, et al., 2021). By considering political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors in their procurement strategies, UKZN can foster strong supplier relationships and contribute positively to the mission of the University.

## **2.3. MESO Context**

### **2.3.1. Legislative and Regulatory Analysis**

The institutional theory provides a framework for understanding how institutions influence the behaviour of organizations, including public institutions like universities. Institutional policies, goals, product knowledge, and supplier relationships in higher education institutions significantly influence buying behaviour (Khattak, et al., 2021). Institutional theory can help explain how regulatory frameworks and societal expectations impact procurement practices in the context of higher education

in South Africa. The University of KwaZulu Natal has to navigate these institutional pressures to ensure compliance with public procurement policies and legislations while striving for efficiency and effectiveness in operations.

Public procurement in South Africa is governed by various legislative frameworks such as the Constitution of South Africa, The Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PFMA), the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA) aimed at promoting good governance and value for money (VFM) in the spending of public funds. The PFMA and PPPFA are the key pieces of legislation guiding the procurement processes within public institutions (Treasury, 2017). These legislations outline the importance of competitive bid processes and fair and equitable treatment of suppliers. For UKZN to ensure compliance with public procurement regulations and achieve its strategic goals, it must develop a mechanism for evaluating supplier performance.

Supplier performance is critical in determining value for money in the public sector. VFM can be seen from measuring effectiveness and efficiency (Lombi, et al., 2022). At UKZN, this means a selection of suppliers who can deliver high-quality goods and services at a competitive price, at the right time and meeting deadlines. Research indicates that strong supplier relationship management contributes positively to performance outcomes. Collaboration between UKZN and its suppliers can improve business performance (Nwachukwu & Hieu, 2021). Fostering good relationships with suppliers is therefore critical to achieve VFM. The interplay between customer satisfaction, public procurement legislations in South Africa, and supplier performance management practices at UKZN highlights the importance of strategic procurement decisions within higher education institutions. A collective focus on these areas can assist UKZN in achieving VFM, enhancing student satisfaction, and contributing to its goals as a leading educational institution.

### 2.3.2. Definition of Key Terms

For clarity and consistency, the following terms related to the study and supply chain are defined:

- **Supplier performance:** Evaluation of cost, quality, delivery, and service (Monckza, et al., 2015).
- **Value for Money (VFM):** achievement of optimal benefits from procurement activities considering cost, quality, and delivery.
- **Service Quality:** Meeting customer expectations through reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.
- **Procurement:** Acquiring goods, works and services
- **Supplier Selection:** Process of choosing suitable suppliers using a predetermined criterion.
- **Performance management:** Monitoring and improvement of supplier performance.
- **Supply Chain Management:** coordination and management of supply chain activities.

- **Competitive advantage:** Unique benefits gained through effective supplier selection and performance management.
- **Customer satisfaction:** Meeting or exceeding customer expectations.
- **Quality of service:** Meeting specified standards, reliability, and consistency.
- **Operational efficiency:** Effective use of resources to achieve organizational goals.

These definitions provide a foundation for understanding the supplier value chain and its relationship with operational efficiency and value creation.

## 2.4. Micro Context

### 2.4.1. The Procurement Value Chain Elucidation

The procurement value chain is a critical framework that outlines the stages involved in acquiring goods, works, and services in the context of public procurement in South Africa. This breakdown includes three primary stages: Sourcing, Selection, and contracting. Each stage plays an essential role in ensuring that the University achieves value for money and maintains high levels of customer satisfaction.

- **Sourcing:** involves identifying the potential suppliers who can supply the required goods or services. This stage includes market Research, assessing the market conditions, understanding the supplier capabilities, determining the best procurement strategies suitable for the required need, drawing up specifications, and setting the evaluation criteria and sourcing methods, for example, single source or multiple sourcing. This is an important stage as it lays the foundation for the next stages by ensuring that only qualified suppliers are considered. Market risk assessment is critical to identify potential risks such as supply chain disruptions and geographical affecting availability.
- **Selection:** the main focus of the selection stage is evaluating and choosing suppliers based on criteria set in stage one. This includes sending out invitations for proposals or bids, bid evaluation, conducting supplier assessments, and negotiating contract terms. Ensuring that factors such as price, quality, delivery time, and compliance with regulations are considered during this stage (Mokhahlane & Monyane, 2023). A rigorous process in this stage can help mitigate the risk associated with supplier performance and ensure alignment with organizational goals. Risk assessment tools in the selection phase can help identify potential issues such as the supplier's past performance history and financial stability.
- **Contracting:** this stage formalizes the relationship between the organization and the supplier through legally binding agreements. This stage involves drawing a contract outlining the terms of service, delivery schedules, project plans and timelines, and performance metrics. Contracts should also include clauses that address potential risks such as breach of contract or failure to deliver (Khan, et al., 2023). It's critical to incorporate risk mitigation strategies in this stage, such as penalty clauses for non-performance or alternative sources of supply should the main supplier fail to deliver.

Understanding procurement value sourcing, selection, contracting, and emphasizing risk management and supplier performance is essential for institutions like UKZN to achieve the organizations' strategic objective. Recent studies emphasize that effective procurement enhances operational efficiency and impacts institutional success.

#### **2.4.2. The Balanced Score Card**

In the educational landscape, universities increasingly recognize the significance of supplier performance in achieving value for money and ensuring customer satisfaction. Universities, including the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), rely on suppliers to provide the goods and services necessary for their operations and to support their academic missions. The literature review explores the conceptual framework of the Balanced Scorecard approach as it relates to supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction. The Balanced Scorecard was developed by Kaplan and Norton in 1992; it's a strategic management tool that translates an organization's strategic objectives into a set of performance measures across four perspectives: financial, customer, internal business process, learning, and growth. The framework allows a holistic approach to organizational performance assessment rather than focusing solely on cost performance.

**Financial Perspective** – Effective supplier performance management at UKZN can lead to cost savings and improved efficiency and compliance (Mogere & Otuyah, 2021). Evaluating suppliers based on pricing structures and delivery reliability, UKZN can ensure maximum value from procurement activities.

**Customer Perspective** – this perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the needs of stakeholders, students, staff, and faculty at UKZN. Suppliers who continually meet or exceed expectations contribute to customer satisfaction. Student satisfaction can be influenced by the customer-focused attitude of suppliers and staff (Govender, et al., 2022).

**Internal Business Process** – This perspective focuses on optimizing internal operations related to supplier management. Efficient procurement processes can enhance collaboration with suppliers, leading to a better quality of products and services (Bothra & Sonawane, 2024). The key performance indicators (KPI) for suppliers' performance can help UKZN monitor their contribution effectively.

**Learning and Growth** – Continuous improvement in higher educational institutions is vital for maintaining a competitive advantage. Fostering relationships with high-performing suppliers drives innovation (Bothra & Sonawane, 2024). Training role players in the procurement process ensures they acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for effective supplier evaluation.

Recent studies highlighted the evolving nature of supplier relationships in higher education institution contexts. One study emphasizes that a collaborative relationship leads to enhanced collaboration with suppliers and enhances innovation capabilities within universities (Jain, et al., 2024). Further Research

suggests that integrating sustainability criteria into supplier selection processes improves environmental outcomes and aligns with institutional values to enhance customer satisfaction (Kuo, et al., 2020). A comparative study reveals that universities that apply the BSC frameworks report higher levels of customer satisfaction compared to employing traditional financial metrics. These studies emphasize the relevance of a balanced approach when assessing supplier performance. Applying the balanced scorecard framework at UKZN can provide a balanced approach and a comprehensive framework for evaluating supplier contributions across multiple dimensions.

## **2.5. Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the complex relationships between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). This framework integrates various theoretical perspectives and models, including the Resource-Based View, Service-Quality Model, Total Quality Management, and Stakeholder Theory, factors influencing supplier performance and its impact on the university's operational efficiency and effectiveness. By examining the interrelationships between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction, this conceptual framework provides a foundation for developing effective strategies to enhance supplier management practices and improve educational outcomes at UKZN.

### **2.5.1. Supplier Performance Evaluation Systems**

Supplier performance evaluation is a systematic approach to assessing suppliers based on various criteria such as quality, delivery time, cost, and service (Kumar & Raghavan, 2019). The primary goal is to ensure suppliers meet organizational requirements while maintaining quality standards and providing value for money (Lynes & Carls, 2012). Effective evaluation systems enable organizations to:

**Monitor supplier performance** – Continuous of suppliers enables organizations to track supplier compliance with established standards and expectations. Studies emphasize that regular assessments can help identify deviations from expected performance levels and ensure timely interventions (Cadden, et al., 2013).

**Identify areas of improvement** – Continuous monitoring and evaluation of supplier performance provides insights into areas where suppliers might need support or enhancement. Recent research highlights that systematic evaluation can highlight weaknesses in the supplier's operations or delivery, informing targeted improvement initiatives (Zsidisin, 2020).

**Develop strategic partnerships** – Building long-term supplier relationships with high-performing suppliers provides a mutual benefit, such as innovation and cost savings. Effective evaluation systems

facilitate identifying strategic partners aligned with the strategic goals of the organization fostering collaborative relationships and driving supply chain excellence (Wang, et al., 2020).

**Manage risks** – Supplier performance evaluations are essential in risk management as they identify potential vulnerabilities within the supply chains. Understanding supplier capabilities helps organizations mitigate risks associated with supply disruptions or quality failures (Hallikas, et al., 2017).

Recent studies have expanded on these concepts by integrating new technologies and methodologies into supplier performance evaluations. Digital tools have emerged as vital components in modern evaluation frameworks, allowing for real-time data collection and analysis (Kumar, et al., 2022). The technological advancement approach allows for a more accurate insight into suppliers' performance metrics provided by technological advancements, which enhance decision-making processes related to supplier selection and management. There's an emphasis on aligning supplier capabilities with organizational objectives beyond traditional metrics like cost and quality alone. Research by Chae and Poirier highlights the significance of strategic alignment in achieving competitive advantages through effective supply chain management practices. Studies have shown a growing trend towards sustainability in supplier evaluations. Several organizations prioritise environmental impact and social responsibility in their business assessments (Zsidisin, et al., 2020). This reflects the broader role played by suppliers in contributing to the sustainable development goals. Recent studies underscore the need for educational institutions like UKZN to incorporate technological advancements in their evaluation frameworks, sustainability factors, and strategic alignment considerations.

### **2.5.2. Supplier Performance Metrics**

Supplier performance metrics are essential for organizations to assess their supplier's effectiveness. Commonly used metrics include on-time delivery rates, defect rates, responsiveness to inquiries, and overall cost-effectiveness (Wang, et al., 2020). These metrics provide the basis for evaluating supplier contribution to organizational goals. Implementing a set of supplier performance metrics at UKZN will allow for continuous improvement and a monitoring tool for supplier performance. The measure of delivery metrics can help identify a potential bottleneck and disruptions that may affect service delivery for end customers (Kembro, et al., 2017). Combining qualitative techniques, such as supplier innovation capabilities, enhances the evaluation process (Schiele, 2017). The suppliers' quality measure is one of the metrics that can be used to measure supplier performance. The metrics measure the overall reliability and the quality of the products or services delivered by your suppliers. The metrics ensure that the products and services delivered by the supplier meet the organization's quality standards. Based on the scorecards, high-performing suppliers can be identified and prioritized in the supplier selection process. Suppliers who supply poor quality can be identified for close monitoring and improvements of

replacements. The purpose is to minimize defects, maintain the integrity of the product, minimize defects, and enhance customer satisfaction. Commonly utilized supplier performance metrics include:



**Figure 2. 1 Essential KPIs for Measuring Procurement Performance. Source: (Gergely, 2024).**

**Product defect** – this KPI measures the percentage of substandard products from a supplier compared to the total units inspected. High defect rates can reflect poor-quality control processes within the supplier’s operations, leading to high costs of rework and replacements (Tummala, et al., 2018). The quality rate measure is critical for identifying potential defects in the supply chain. Constantly tracking and measuring the different suppliers' defect rates and breaking them down allows the organization insight into each supplier’s performance, helps the organization to take corrective action, and improves customer satisfaction. For UKZN, it is crucial to maintain high-quality standards of educational resources to ensure student and staff satisfaction and to protect the institution's reputation.

**On-time delivery** – the timely delivery metric is a crucial metric that assesses whether suppliers meet the delivery time and planned project timelines. Delays in the delivery can disrupt the activities and functioning of the University and negatively impact the students and staff experiences at UKZN. Monitoring delivery performance helps identify suppliers who constantly meet delivery times and those requiring improvement (Koh, et al., 2017).

**Responsiveness to issues** – this metric measures the supplier’s ability to meet the customers' changing demands and specifications over time. In an educational institution where the requirements may change significantly, such as changes in student enrolment and course offerings, responsive and flexible suppliers can enhance the efficiency at UKZN (Choi & Krause, 2016).

**Customer satisfaction surveys** – these metrics source customer feedback on supplier’s performance and assess the consistency of suppliers’ performance over time. A reliable supplier consistently meets

quality standards, delivery schedules, and cost expectations and contributes positively to the procurement strategy of UKZN.

### **2.5.3. Multi-Criteria Decision-Making Models**

Effective supplier performance monitoring is critical to determine the value for money and customer satisfaction in the procurement process of an organization like the University of KwaZulu Natal. To effectively monitor and evaluate supplier performance, the Multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) models have been developed to provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating supplier performance. Organizations use these models to assess suppliers based on multiple attributes that align with their strategic objectives. This section explores several MCDM techniques, including the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT), Simple Additive Weighting (SAW), Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Situations (TOPSIS), and Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA).

**Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)** – It facilitates decision-making by breaking down complex problems into simpler components, the model prioritizes criteria and evaluates supplier performance based on weighted scores (Kumar, et al., 2021). At UKZN, the AHP can monitor performance by ranking suppliers based on vast performance metrics such as quality, cost, delivery time, and service reliability. Weights are assigned to each criterion according to its importance. Recent studies have highlighted its ability to incorporate qualitative and quantitative data into the decision-making process, demonstrating its effectiveness in procurement (Kumar, et al., 2021). The study results show that the AHP is an effective method for supplier selection.

**Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT)** – The approach offered by the theory assesses supplier performance by aggregating multiple attributes into a single utility value. This method allows for trade-offs between attributes; it is useful when dealing with conflicting objectives. At UKZN, the theory can facilitate a better understanding of supplier performance by considering how well the supplier meets the diverse requirements while maximizing the overall utility. Recent applications of MAUT in supply chain management have shown its potential to enhance decisions on quality through systematic evaluation of supplier capabilities (Zhang, et al., 2022). The theory evaluates suppliers based on quality, delivery, and cost criteria. The results of the study demonstrate the effectiveness of MAUT in supplier evaluation.

**Simple Additive Weighting (SAW)** – One of the most straightforward methods involves assigning weights to various criteria based on their importance and calculating a weighted sum of each supplier. This method can oversimplify complex decisions and omit to account for interactions among criteria.

**Technique for order preference by similarity to ideal solutions (TOPSIS)** – This method ranks alternatives based on their distance from the real solution, minimizing a negative distance from the real

solution. This method is ideal for UKZN as it presents how each supplier performs with the real solution. Recent studies indicate that TOPSIS can balance qualitative and quantitative factors in supplier assessment, which makes it suitable for educational institutions facing procurement challenges (Kahraman, et al., 2020).

**Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA)** – This method is non-parametric and used to evaluate the efficiency of decision-making units based on multiple inputs and outputs that do not require explicit functional forms. A recent study utilized DEA to assess the efficiency of universities regarding Research output versus funding input, demonstrating its applicability in the context of universities (Liu, et al., 2023).

Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) models in various fields. For example, an infrastructure project risk assessment employed AHP and TOPSIS, highlighting the efficacy despite subjective biases in AHP (Kumar, et al., 2022). In Healthcare, MAUT was promising but faced criticism due to its complexity in utility function development (Aghdaie, et al., 2020). A comparative study of SAW and DEA revealed a vigorous efficiency assessment in operational contexts with multiple outputs (Wang, et al., 2020). Each MCDM model boasts unique strengths suited to specific contexts alongside inherent weaknesses that must be considered. Effective MCDM models demand careful consideration of problem complexity, data availability, stakeholder preferences, and decision-making levels required to ensure optimal decision outcomes.

#### **2.5.4. Impact of Supplier Attributes**

The relationship between supplier attributes and procurement performance can be elucidated in various frameworks. In this context, supplier attributes such as reliability, quality of goods and services, responsiveness, and communication are essential components that influence procurement performance.

**Quality** – The quality of products and services directly impacts the institutions' performance and effectiveness. Suppliers who deliver high-quality products and services contribute to better educational facilities and services for the University. Poor-quality inputs can increase costs, waste, and rework (Kumar, et al., 2022).

**Reliability** – relates to the supplier's reliability in timely delivery and maintaining service levels. A reliable supplier minimises the disruptions in the operations of the University, thereby enhancing overall efficiency (Monckza, et al., 2015). It's often measured by key performance indicators such as on-time delivery.

**Responsiveness** – The quality of the supplier's customer service and speed in responding to customer queries significantly impact procurement performance (Gosling, et al., 2020). A responsive supplier can adapt quickly to customers' changing needs and emergencies within the University setting (Sodhi, et al., 2021). This flexibility is crucial for maintaining the uninterrupted activities of the University, such

as ensuring the timely delivery of crucial Research equipment, supporting academic programs, providing quality service to staff, students, and faculty, and managing budget constraints and resource allocations.

**Communication** – Effective communication between the supplier and the procurement team improves trust and fosters collaboration. Open and transparent communication channels enable seamless problem-solving and drive innovation in supply chain processes (Bals, et al., 2020). Strong communication with suppliers at UKZN can lead to improved supplier relationships and better alignment with the goals of the University.

**Cost-effectiveness** - Cost is a significant factor in the selection of suppliers; however, it should not overshadow other critical factors such as quality and reliability. Recent studies emphasize that an overemphasis on cost can compromise the quality of goods and services, ultimately affecting customer satisfaction (Wang, et al., 2020). A balanced approach that considers multiple factors ensures optimal supplier selection.

Supplier performance significantly influences the performance of the procurement function at the University of KwaZulu Natal by affecting customer satisfaction and value for money. Understanding how the various performance attributes of suppliers affect procurement functions helps the institution to make informed decisions when selecting a supplier. Prioritizing quality, reliability, responsiveness, communication, and cost-effectiveness, UKZN can enhance its operational efficiency and meet customer expectations.

### **2.5.5. The interrelationship between supplier performance, value, and customer satisfaction**

Universities are recognising the importance of supplier performance as a critical factor in achieving value for money and customer satisfaction in the educational sector. This literature review explores the theories surrounding value-for-money customer satisfaction and supplier performance in the context of higher education with a focus on the University of KwaZulu Natal. Recent studies have provided insights into these studies and how effective supplier management can enhance educational outcomes.

**Supplier performance** – refers to the supplier’s ability to meet or exceed its contractual obligations on quality, cost, and service. Effective supplier performance management is essential for organizations to enhance their operational efficiency and competitiveness (Monckza, et al., 2015). For educational institutions like UKZN, where various goods and services are procured, supplier performance directly impacts the University’s ability to deliver quality services. Recent studies agree that vigorous supplier relationships can improve service delivery in an educational institution (Kauffman, et al., 2022). This aligns with earlier studies, which indicate that strong supplier partnerships contribute significantly to overall institutional effectiveness (Monczka, et al., 2015).

**Value for money** encompasses not only cost-effectiveness but also quality and service delivery. To achieve value for money, Universities must ensure that every rand spent contributes positively to the educational outcomes while satisfying customer expectations. A recent study argues that value for money in institutions is linked to strategic procurement practices prioritizing long-term relationships with suppliers over short-term cost savings (Kauffman, et al., 2022). This suggests a holistic evaluation of suppliers beyond mere financial metrics.

**Customer satisfaction** pertains to the satisfaction of students, staff, and faculty with the services and facilities of the University. “It results from comparing expected and perceived service levels” (Sahin, et al., 2019). Maintaining high customer satisfaction at UKZN influences the student retention rate, the institution’s reputation, and overall success. A recent study indicates a direct correlation between effective supplier performance and enhanced student satisfaction levels at universities (Kauffman, et al., 2022). Student experience at UKZN can be improved by ensuring suppliers deliver high-quality services.

The relationship between suppliers and supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction can be understood through several theoretical lenses, such as the Resource-Based View and Service-Quality Model, as discussed in 2.4. below.

**Total Quality Management (TQM)** – TQM principles promote continuous improvements in the overall organizational processes, including procurement processes, and emphasize stakeholder involvement (Sallis, 2020). UKZN can enhance student satisfaction and achieve value for money by strengthening relationships with suppliers who adhere to TQM principles.

**The stakeholder theory** – suggests that organizations must consider all stakeholder’s interests, including students, in their operational strategies (Mitchell, et al., 2019). UKZN can enhance student satisfaction and achieve value for money by prioritizing supplier performance that aligns with stakeholder needs.

Supplier performance plays a crucial role in ensuring customer satisfaction and value for money, adopting strategic frameworks like the RBV and TQM alongside service quality dimensions in models like SERVQUAL, the institution can achieve value for money while enhancing the student's overall experience in the University.

## **2.6. Theoretical Frameworks**

This chapter presents the theoretical frameworks that underpin the analysis of supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter provide a complex relationship between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction. The frameworks explored include the Theory of Change Management, Resource-Based View Theory, Systems Theory Framework, SERVQUAL

Model, and the application of matrices such as the Kraljic Matrix and Mendelow's Matrix. These theoretical frameworks offer insights into the factors influencing supplier performance and its impact on the organization's goals, a basis for developing effective strategies to enhance supplier management practices and improve educational outcomes at UKZN.

### **2.6.1. Theory of Change Management**

This literature review explores the conceptual theory of change management related to performance management and value for money, drawing on various scholarly sources to provide a comprehensive understanding. Change management refers to a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from the current state to a future desired state. It encompasses methods and manners in which a company describes and implements change within its internal and external processes (Kotter, 1996). Effective change management can lead to improved relationships with suppliers, better negotiation outcomes, and ultimately enhanced customer satisfaction in the context of supplier performance. Suppliers are the integral stakeholders in the organizations' supply chain management. Lewin's change management model includes three stages: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. Organizations must first prepare for change by recognizing the need for improvement in supplier performance (Burnes, 2004). For example, UKZN can identify inefficiencies in its procurement processes that hinder value for money. UKZN can enhance changes that enhance supplier relationships by applying Lewin's model and ensuring better supplier collaboration.

Recent studies have effectively highlighted the importance of key performance indicators in assessing supplier effectiveness. Research by Cousins et al. (2019) illustrates how universities can implement KPIs related to costs, quality, and delivery timelines. Monitoring these KPIs regularly through change management practices at UKZN can ensure that suppliers meet their contractual obligations. When suppliers are performing well, delivering quality services on time contributes to fewer disruptions in the activities of the University.

Recent studies have underscored the evolving nature of supply chain dynamics in higher education institutions. A recent study highlights how universities adopt digital tools for real-time monitoring of supplier performance metrics (Mena, et al., 2013). This technology shift aligns with change management theories and advocates for agile and responsive organizational practices.

### **2.6.2. Resource-Based View Theory**

The RBV assumes that organizations can achieve a competitive advantage by leveraging their resources with suppliers. Effective supplier performance is essential for educational institutions, including the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Resource-Based View Theory in this literature review is explored to determine how effective supplier management can enhance the institutions' performance. The RBV theory by Wernerfelt (1983) emphasized that organizations' unique resources can be used to create value

for the organization. These resources may include strategic partnerships with suppliers and quality control management, recent studies have emphasized how organizations can use supplier relationships as a resource to improve operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Supplier relationships as a strategic resource can be a source of competitive advantage when characterized by trust, commitment, and mutual benefit (Wu, et al., 2020). Establishing a strong relationship with suppliers at the University of KwaZulu Natal can improve product quality and service delivery. This can align with RVB's assertion that valuable resources must be rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, through strong supplier relationships, this can be possible. The purpose of applying the Resource-Based View is to create value for the University stakeholders, students, and staff members. Ensuring that suppliers align with the University's strategy can achieve customer satisfaction, and improve service delivery while optimizing costs, ensuring that suppliers align with the University's strategy.

Adopting a resource-based view approach at UKZN can enable the institution to strategically assess supplier performance and consider how these relationships contribute to the long-term competitive advantage and enhanced value delivery.

### **2.6.3. Systems Theory Framework**

The analysis employs systems theory to explore the interrelationships between value for money, supplier performance, and customer satisfaction. According to systems theory, organizations are conceptualized as complex entities comprising interdependent components that interact and coordinate to accomplish a shared objective, ensuring a holistic and integrated approach to understanding organizational dynamics. The University of KwaZulu Natal can view the procurement system as a complex network involving suppliers, end-users, project managers, University departments, colleges, and procurement staff. Each component ensures that goods and services are procured effectively and efficiently.

**Supplier performance** – encompasses various metrics such as the quality of goods and services, delivery timelines, after-sales customer service, and cost-effectiveness. High-performing suppliers contribute positively to the overall procurement system by providing reliable products that meet or exceed expectations (Monczka, et al., 2015).

**Value for money** – Achieving value for money is about obtaining the best outcome with the available resources. It requires a balance between costs, quality, and service delivery. Effective supplier performance directly influences this balance; poor performance can lead to increased costs due to poor quality of goods or services and delays (Van Weele, 2018).

**Customer satisfaction** – In an academic environment like UKZN, customer satisfaction is critical. University students expect quality educational resources that enhance their learning experience and a

comfortable campus life. When suppliers perform well by delivering high-quality goods and services on time, student satisfaction increases (Santos & Rossetto, 2020).

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of supplier performance in achieving value for money within educational institutions. Gatobu highlights that strategic partnerships with suppliers can enhance innovation and responsiveness to institutional needs and emphasizes how effective supplier management services can improve the University's service delivery (Gatobu, 2020). Gatobu (2020) suggests that universities should include qualitative assessments alongside quantitative metrics, thus adopting a holistic approach towards supplier evaluation. Other studies found that integrating technology into procurement processes improves communication and streamlines operations (Cousins, et al., 2019). Research has shown that training procurement staff on supplier relationship management leads to better negotiation outcomes and supplier performance (Van Weele, 2018). All these studies emphasize the importance of strategic supplier management in organizations and their supply chains. Organizations are encouraged to foster collaborations with their suppliers, enhance visibility in their supply chains, and effectively integrate their operations to meet customer demands and improve overall organizational performance.

#### **2.6.4. SERVQUAL Model**

The Service Quality - SERVQUAL Model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in the 1980s, is a widely recognized framework for assessing quality in various sectors, including higher education institutions. The model identifies five (5) key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions are the basis for evaluating the gap between customer perceptions and expectations of actual service delivered (Parasuraman, et al., 1988).

In higher education institutions like the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), the application of the model has been instrumental in understanding student satisfaction and service quality. The University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) staff acknowledges the necessity for enhanced service quality to distinguish the institution from its competitors and attract prospective students (Chaguluka, et al., 2018). This study aligns with the findings by (Alves & Vieira, 2020), who argue that measuring service quality can improve student experiences and institutional reputation. Supplier performance is relevant in achieving value for money in the higher education sector, where the institution relies on suppliers for services ranging from infrastructure maintenance, construction, and catering to IT services. Effective management of suppliers can directly influence the satisfaction of staff and students. This aligns with findings by (Oliveira & Ferreira, 2019) who demonstrated that supplier relationship management positively impacts service quality and student satisfaction.

## The components of SERVQUAL

**Reliability** – the ability to deliver the service dependably and accurately as promised. At UKZN, the institution must supply student material, infrastructure, and services to meet academic standards. The tool can measure the supplier’s reliability in honoring the expected quality of goods and services.

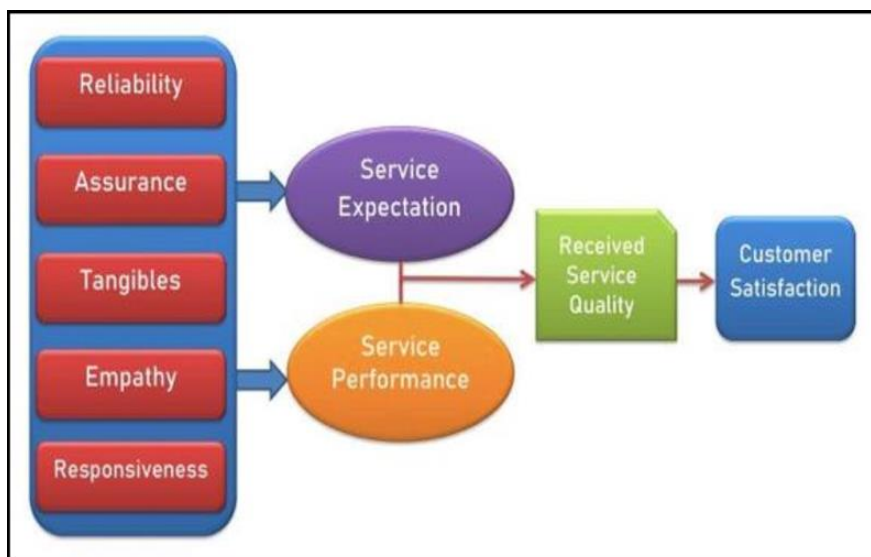
**Assurance** – The employees’ ability, knowledge, and courtesy to inspire trust and confidence. Suppliers who allocate knowledgeable staff to manage the University’s accounts and projects can enhance the students and staff’s trust in the University’s services. The tool can ensure supplier assurance through performance monitoring and contractual compliance.

**Tangibles** – Refers to the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, and personnel. In the context of UKZN, this refers to the conditions of lecture rooms, libraries, labs, and Research facilities, which contribute to the overall staff and student satisfaction. The tool can maintain tangibles through regular assessment of supplier facilities and equipment.

**Empathy** – is the individualized care and attention to customers. Suppliers who understand the University’s requirements can tailor their services accordingly and enhance customer satisfaction. The tool can be used to foster empathy through personalized communication and support.

**Responsiveness** – measures the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Performing suppliers at UKZN can enhance customer experience by addressing issues quickly and efficiently. The tool can assess the supplier’s responsiveness to customer needs and queries.

## The SERVQUAL Model



**Figure 2. 2 Five (5) Dimensions of service quality – SERVQUAL Model Source: (Singh, et al., 2023)**

Suppliers should align their performance with these service quality dimensions to achieve value for money at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. UKZN can regularly assess supplier performance against these criteria using a survey or feedback based on SERVQUAL principles to identify areas of improvement. For instance, when students perceive a gap in the University infrastructure and facilities the supplier provides, this can lead to dissatisfaction. Regular training of staff can enhance reliability and assurance. Establishing clear communication channels between suppliers and the University can improve responsiveness. By focusing on these dimensions through continuous feedback and evaluation involving suppliers and end users, UKZN can ensure that it exceeds expectations, enhancing customer satisfaction.

The SERVQUAL model provides a vigorous framework for assessing and improving service quality with educational institutions like the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The University can achieve value for money while achieving higher levels of customer satisfaction by focusing on supplier performance and implementing targeted strategies to enhance service delivery.

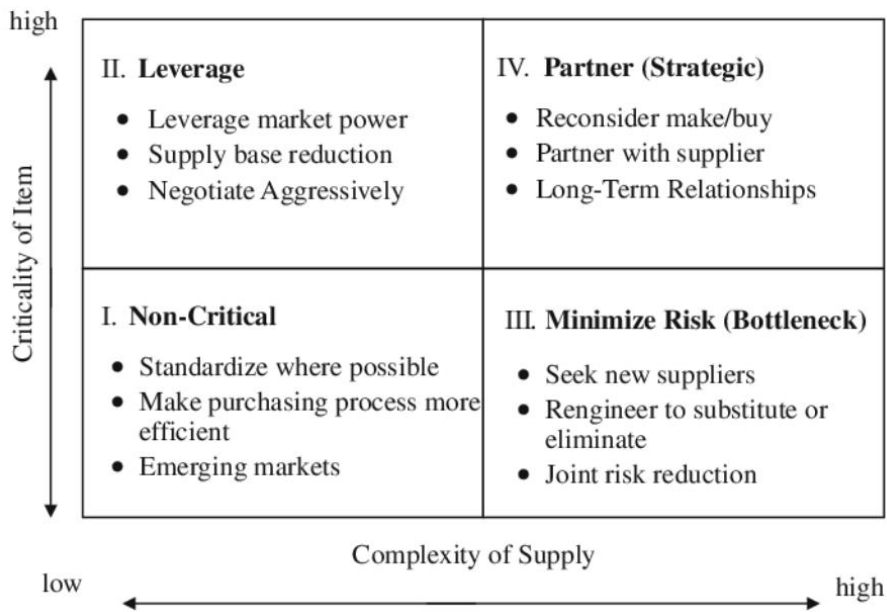
#### **2.6.5. Application of Matrix in supplier performance**

Supplier performance management involves assessing suppliers based on various criteria such as quality, cost, delivery time, and service. This literature review will explore different metrics that can be applied at UKZN to assess and evaluate supplier's performance and their importance in the organization. The metrics include the Kraljic Matrix and Mendelow's Matrix.

##### **I. Applying the Kraljic Matrix**

Different management strategies are required in each category to optimize supplier performance and achieve value for money. This matrix classifies suppliers into four categories: strategic items, bottleneck items, leverage items, and non-critical items.

**Figure 2. Strategic Sourcing Matrix. Adapted for Kraljic (1983)**



**Figure 2. 3 Kraljic Strategic Sourcing Matrix. Source: (Hwakins, et al., 2011).**

**Strategic items** – relates to high-value items that significantly impact the organization’s operations. In the context of UKZN, strategic suppliers might include those providing essential academic resources and technological services that directly affect teaching and learning outcomes, such as digital learning platforms like Wiley or Pearson. Partnering with a leading technology provider can lead to customized software that improves students' engagement in online courses. Effective collaboration with these suppliers can lead to innovations that enhance educational quality (Bals, et al., 2020).

**Bottleneck items** – bottlenecks are critical products but have limited availability. For example, “if UKZN relies on a specific vendor for the supply of laboratory equipment not widely available from other sources in the market, this requires careful relationship management to avoid disruptions in Research activities” (Monckza, et al., 2015). Ensuring timely procurement and deliveries from these suppliers is crucial to maintaining Research timelines and project deliverables.

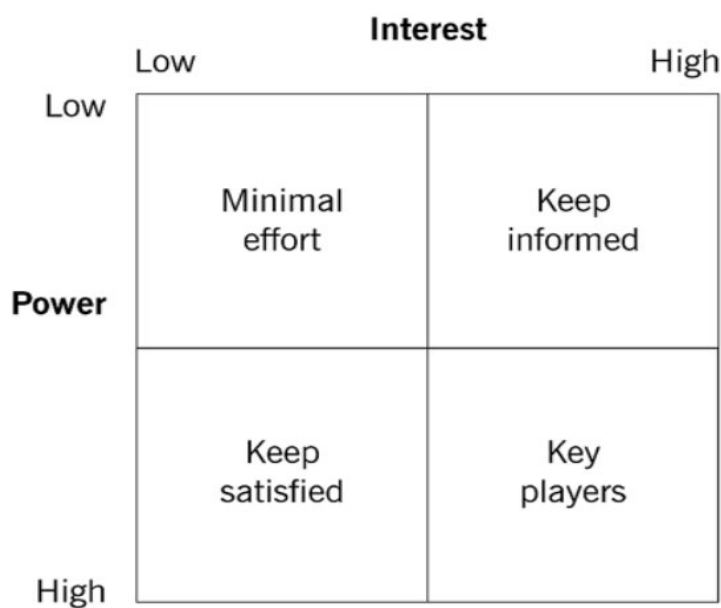
**Leverage items** – relates to low-risk but high-value purchases where UKZN can negotiate favorable terms due to multiple available suppliers. For example, general maintenance services or office supplies can be sourced from various vendors, allowing UKZN to leverage competition among suppliers to achieve cost savings (Wouters, et al., 2019). Engaging multiple suppliers for campus catering services through a competitive bid process, allowing UKZN to obtain competitive quotes while ensuring quality food for students and staff.

**Non-critical items** – this criterion represents low-value purchases with minimal impact on operations. This could include everyday consumables like stationery and cleaning material at UKZN sourced from local vendors such as Makro or Walton’s stationery. While these items may not require extensive management efforts, timely delivery is still critical to the operational efficiency of the University (Teller, et al., 2019). Streamlining non-critical item purchases can help free up resources and redirect to more strategic items.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of supplier performance in achieving organizational goals across functions. One study highlights the effectiveness of supplier collaborations improves innovation and service delivery in higher education institutions (Hald & Ellegaard, 2019). Recent Research also indicates that strong supplier relationships positively influence customer satisfaction by ensuring consistent quality and reliability (Zhao, et al., 2020). At UKZN, leveraging insights from these studies informs strategies for enhancing and aligning supplier performance management practices with the objectives of the University. Fostering long-term relationships with suppliers who provide key academic resources could improve access to materials that benefit students and faculty. The University can optimize its procurement process and institutional performance by applying the Kraljic Matrix framework to categorize suppliers effectively and develop partnerships with key vendors.

**II. Applying Mendelow’s Matrix.**

The literature review explores the importance of supplier performance at UKZN through the lens of Mendelow’s Matrix, which categorizes stakeholders based on their power and interest levels. Applying this matrix can help identify key suppliers that impact value delivery and customer satisfaction.



**Figure 2. 4 The Mendelow Framework. Source (ACCAGlobal, 2024)**

At UKZN, suppliers can be classified as follows:

**High power/ High interest**—These are critical suppliers whose performance impacts the university's performance. For example, IT service providers are 'critical' in maintaining technological infrastructure that supports both the university's support functions and academic functions.

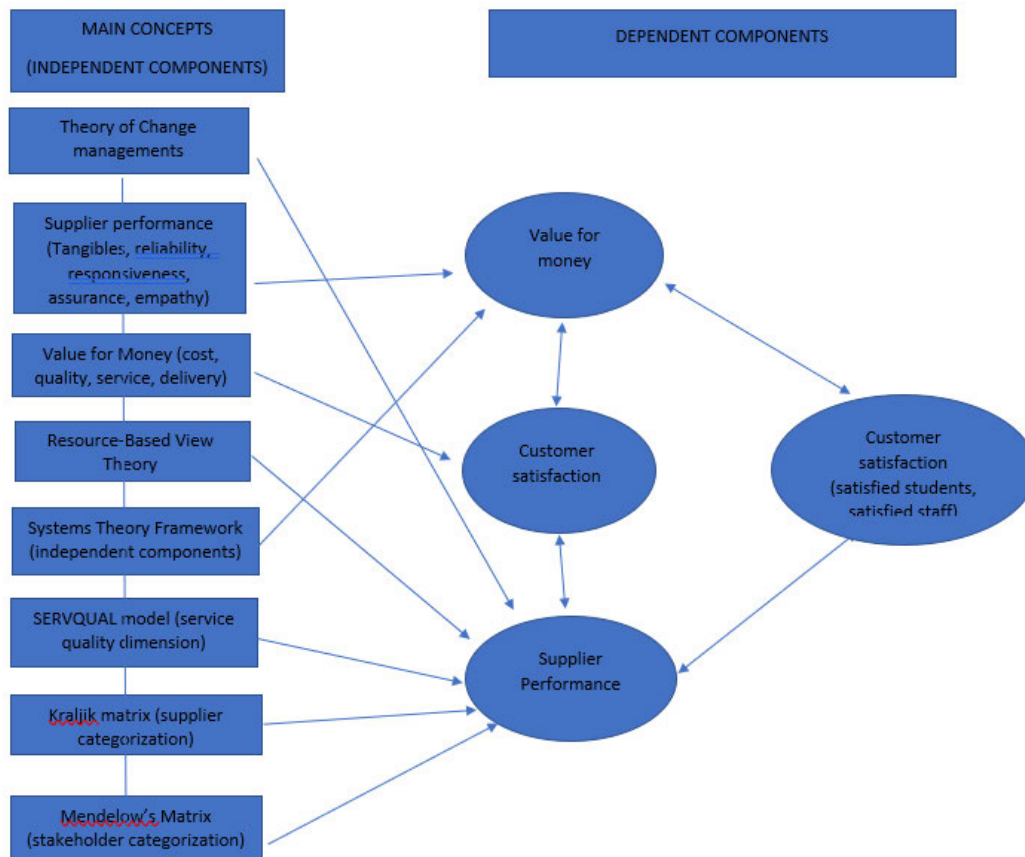
**High power/ Low interest** – suppliers in this category are not engaged in the operations but have significant influence. An example can be manufacturers of specialized equipment, such as Thermo Fisher Scientific, that supply laboratory equipment for Research purposes. These suppliers have a significant impact because their specialized equipment is crucial for research output, and they do not require frequent interaction with University staff beyond the procurement process.

**Low power/ High interest** – These suppliers don't have much power to influence but are crucial for specific services. For example, local catering companies may not have the bargaining power, but their performance impacts student and staff satisfaction during campus events.

**Low power/ Low interest** – the suppliers in this category have minimal impact on the performance of the University operations. Stationery suppliers fit this category, while necessary for daily operations, but their performance does not significantly affect the overall value.

By understanding these categories, UKZN can prioritize its supplier management strategies to enhance value for money and customer satisfaction. A recent study highlights that universities increasingly rely on strategic partnerships with suppliers to innovate service delivery models that impact the student experience (Zhao, et al., 2020). Implementing technologies that monitor supplier performance at UKZN can facilitate real-time assessments of supplier contributions towards achieving value for money. By applying Mendelow's Matrix as an analytical tool, UKZN can strategically manage its supplier relationships based on their level of power and interest.

## 2.7. The Integrated Theoretical Framework



**Figure 2. 5 The Integrated Theoretical Framework illustrates the complex relationships between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).**

This framework integrates various theoretical perspectives, including the Theory of Change Management, Resource-Based View Theory, Systems Theory Framework, SERVQUAL Model, Kraljic Matrix, and Mendelow's Matrix. The framework highlights the critical role of supplier performance in achieving value for money and customer satisfaction. Effective supplier management ensures that contractual obligations are met, delivers quality goods and services, and provides excellent customer service.

The framework also emphasizes adopting a system-thinking approach to understanding the interdependencies between various system components. By recognizing these interdependencies, UKZN can develop targeted strategies to enhance supplier performance, improve value for money, and increase customer satisfaction.

Overall, the Integrated Theoretical Framework provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction

at UKZN. This framework can inform the development of effective strategies and interventions to improve supplier management practices and achieve better outcomes for the university.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Supplier performance is critical for achieving value for money and customer satisfaction.
- Effective supplier management is essential in ensuring that contractual obligations are met.
- The systems thinking approach is necessary for understanding the interdependencies between different components.
- Targeted strategies can be developed to enhance supplier performance, improve value for money, and increase customer satisfaction.

### **2.8. Chapter Summary**

The study reviewed existing literature on supplier performance evaluation, providing a detailed understanding of the theoretical foundations centered on institutional and conceptual theory on supplier performance evaluation. The various supplier performance evaluation systems, the impact of supplier attributes on procurement performance, the theoretical frameworks, including the balanced scorecard application on supplier performance, PESTLE analysis, and the change management theory. Key findings were identified: the importance of supplier performance evaluation in achieving organizational goals, the need for various approaches to supplier performance evaluation, and the interdependence between supplier performance, value for money, and customer satisfaction. Gaps were identified in the literature review, including the limited studies of supplier performance evaluation in the public sector and the insufficient exploration of the impact of supplier attributes on procurement performance.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study to investigate the procurement practice at various colleges and departments in the University of KwaZulu Natal. The chapter provided an overview of the Research design, participants, data collection methods, instruments, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and limitations.

### **3.2. Research Approach and Design**

This study adopted a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological design, to explore the experiences and perspectives of procurement staff and role players. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the meanings attributed to their experiences (Manning & Davies, 2020). Phenomenology seeks to “uncover the underlying meaning of experiences and explore the phenomenon essence” (Braun, et al., 2020).

In terms of research design, this study employs an exploratory research design. This design is suitable for this study as it aims to gain a deeper understanding of the procurement practices and experiences of personnel within the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The exploratory design allows for an in-depth examination of the research topic, which is particularly useful when there is limited existing research on the subject (Saunders, et al., 2020). This design also enables the identification of patterns, themes, and relationships that may not have been apparent through other research designs.

The exploratory design is justified by this study's objectives, which seek to explore the end-user and procurement personnel's experiences and perceptions of value for money, supplier performance, and procurement policies. The design allows for a flexible and iterative approach to data collection and analysis, for gaining a deeper insight into the complex phenomena being studied.

The study's design is informed by the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, emphasizing Intentionality, focusing on the participant's experiences and perspectives; subjectivity, acknowledging the personal and nature of participants' experiences; and contextuality, considering each participant's social and cultural context. The study aims to contribute to the development of effective practices and policies.

### **3.3. Research Questions**

The study addresses the following Research questions:

- i. How does supplier performance affect service quality and customer satisfaction at the University?
- ii. How can supplier performance and procurement policies be improved to enhance service quality and competitiveness?

- iii. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current procurement policies when selecting suitable suppliers?
- iv. To what extent does supplier performance contribute to the University's competitive advantage?

### 3.4. Participants

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants with the required expertise and experience in procurement decision-making. This sampling technique was justified for several reasons:

1. **Expertise and experience:** This study explored the experiences and perspectives of procurement staff and role players. Purposive sampling enabled the selection of participants with at least two years of experience in procurement decision-making, ensuring they possessed the necessary expertise to provide valuable insights. This approach is consistent with the framework for purposeful sampling, which highlights the importance of selecting participants with relevant expertise (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024).
2. **Specific population:** The study focused on procurement practices within the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive sampling facilitated the selection of participants from specific departments and portfolios, such as infrastructure, information technology, and general goods and services. This ensured the sample was representative of the population of interest. Research demonstrates the effectiveness of purposeful sampling in achieving representative samples, even in complex contexts (Campbell, et al., 2020). The study population is approximately forty (40) personnel with a minimum of three years in the decision-making portfolio.
3. **In-depth insights:** Purposive sampling enabled the selection of participants who provided rich, detailed, and contextualized data, facilitating a nuanced exploration of procurement practices and experiences within the university.
4. **Efficient use of resources:** Purposive sampling optimized resource utilization by selecting a smaller, targeted sample that accurately represented the population of interest.
5. **Flexibility and adaptability:** Purposive sampling offered flexibility in adapting the sampling strategy, further enhanced by snowball sampling. This approach allowed initial participants to refer colleagues who met the inclusion criteria, facilitating the identification of additional participants.

The following inclusion criteria were applied: Minimum experience of three years in procurement decision-making; National Qualification Framework (NQF) 7 or higher; currently employed in the University of KwaZulu Natal in the procurement office or a role player in procurement. The potential participants were identified through UKZN's procurement and finance office directory, consultation with procurement and finance management, and snowball, where initial participants referred colleagues.

Twelve participants were selected, representing various procurement portfolios: infrastructure, information technology, and general goods and services.

**Table 3. 1 Summary of participants**

<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Position Held</b>
Infrastructure	3	Senior Management 1 Project Managers 1 Finance Manager 1
Information Technology	1	Senior Management 1
General goods and services	4	Finance Managers 2 Senior Procurement Officers 2
Central Finance and procurement practitioners (mixed portfolio)	4	Senior Procurement Officers 3 Senior Management 1

The participant's demographic characteristics were:

- Age range: thirty-five (35) to fifty-five (55) years
- Gender representation: seven (7) females and five (5) males
- Experience in years: a minimum of three (3) years
- Qualifications: NQF 7 and higher

This diverse representation ensured a comprehensive understanding of procurement practices and experiences within the various colleges and departments within UKZN. The college finance staff represented the general goods and services portfolio as they procured minor goods and services for colleges. Information technology was represented by a senior manager within the directorate of information technology, referred to as Information and Communication Services (ICS). The infrastructure department was represented by its finance manager, project manager, and senior manager; this department is responsible for infrastructure procurement in the university. The Central Finance and Procurement is responsible for University-wide procurement and financial matters.

The sample size consisted of 12 respondents involved in procurement portfolio decision-making. This sample size was deemed sufficient for a qualitative study, enabling in-depth exploration and saturation of themes. Empirical studies suggest that saturation can be reached with 9-17 interviews or 4-8 focus groups for homogeneous populations and narrow objectives (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). In this study, a sample size of 12 balances the need for achieving data saturation and managing the resources required for data collection and analysis. The recruitment process was guided by informed consent, and

communication was directed to the targeted participants through telephone calls and physical interactions to set up appointments and introduce the study.

The decision to exclude a pilot study from this research design was deliberate and informed by several factors. Given the time-sensitive nature of this study, conducting a pilot study would have imposed significant time constraints, potentially compromising the quality and depth of the main study. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of this research, which aimed to gain a deeper understanding of procurement practices at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, did not necessitate a pilot study. With a robust research design and methodology, the researcher was confident that the main study would yield valuable insights, rendering a pilot study unnecessary.

### **3.5. Data Collection**

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method (Saunders & Rojon, 2019). Semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth exploration of participants (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). This structure allows for a balance between guided questions and the flexibility to explore topics emerging during the interview, enabling Researchers to gather rich qualitative data. Interviews were carried out online via Microsoft Teams to ensure participants' convenience. The choice of online was particularly relevant in light of recent global events that necessitated remote interactions, allowing for broader participation without geographical constraints. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, allowing participants to share their comprehensive experiences. This duration was deemed fit to allow participants ample time to deliberate and elaborate on their thoughts regarding the topic of the study. Participants received a consent form, a schedule of interview questions, and the gatekeeper letter before the interview. The Researcher informed the participants about the study's topic, purpose, and role, as well as how their information would be used, which was a crucial step in the process. The informed consent process is a fundamental ethical requirement in Qualitative Research. The interview questions were guided by various sources, such as the literature review, which provided insights from existing literature, shaping the questions to ensure that they were relevant and grounded in previous Research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interview questions were also guided by the questions posed by the study, ensuring that all areas of inquiry were covered (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Inputs from experts in Research design were considered when refining the interview questions, enhancing their validity and reliability.

### **3.6. Research Instruments**

In this qualitative study, the interview schedule was used as the instrument to collect data, the schedule provided a meaningful structure and guided the process to ensure meaningful conversations. The guide consisted of open-ended questions, enabling participants to provide detailed and meaningful responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2019). The interview schedule was divided into various sections: Section A, demographics relating to age, gender, experience, and current position, and Section B, interview

questions subdivided into three sections: supplier performance, procurement policies, and supplier selection process. To ensure data quality throughout the interview process, the interview sessions were recorded and transcribed, this allowed for the preservation and accurate presentation of participants' responses. The transcripts were checked against the audio recording for correctness. Participants were allowed to review and verify their responses.

### **3.7. Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis is a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data. A thematic approach was used in this study; this method is used when facilitated by software such as NVIVO to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data. The process is vigorous and ensures the rigor and validity of the findings. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method that focuses on identifying, analysing, and patterns within data. It minimally organizes and describes the dataset in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVIVO enhances the process by providing tools for visualizing, coding, and sorting data.

#### **3.7.1. Coding Procedures**

**Data familiarization** – The Researcher/s familiarised themselves with data collected from various sources, such as the interview questions. This initial phase is crucial as it allows the Researcher to understand the context. Familiarisation involved reading the transcripts, noting initial impressions, and identifying repetitive themes.

**Code development** – following the familiarisation step, the Researcher engaged in code development through inductive reasoning. The process involved generating initial codes that capture key concepts or themes emerging from data without pre-conceived categories. Codes were descriptive, summarizing what was present in the data. NVIVO was used to assist in organizing these codes systematically and manually.

**Theme identification** – Once the themes were identified, they were grouped into potential themes. This stage considers how different codes relate to one another and how they can be categorized into meanings or experiences amongst participants.

**Theme refinement** – The researcher revisited the identified themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data's essence. This involved merging similar themes and discarding those that don't hold sufficient weight based on the evidence presented.

#### **3.7.2. Data Analysis Steps**

The analysis of qualitative data followed the following structured steps:

**Data reduction** – this involved condensing extensive qualitative information into manageable segments through categorization and coding. This helps streamline analysis and focus on relevant data while discarding extraneous information.

**Data display** – after reduction, the findings were displayed in table format.

**Verification of data** – To ensure that the interpretation aligns with the participant’s perception, verification methods such as verifying the documented information with the participant at the end of the interview were conducted. This ensures validity and reliability in qualitative research. Triangulation of various data sources was maintained to ensure the trustworthiness of data, enhancing robustness by allowing for cross-verification among different perspectives within the study.

### **3.8. Ethical Consideration**

The study purposefully employed selected participants with experience and expertise in procurement decision-making (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The gatekeeper letter from the University of KwaZulu Natal and the ethical clearance from the ethics committee were obtained before any primary data was collected. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each participant. The participant's confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through pseudonyms of participant data, limited access to participant information, and secure storage of interview recordings and transcripts. The researcher addressed ethical issues by obtaining written and signed consent from participants, ensuring their confidentiality through secure data storage, and informing them of their right to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, the researcher guaranteed that all data would be stored safely for five years before disposal. The study aimed to provide valuable insights into complexes of procurement practices within UKZN by selecting participants with experience and expertise in procurement decision-making.

### **3.9. Chapter Summary**

The chapter outlined the Research Design employed to investigate procurement practices at the University of KwaZulu Natal. A qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological design, was adopted to explore the experiences and perspectives of procurement staff and other role players. The comprehensive methodology employed a vigorous and trustworthy exploration of the Research questions.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the study's findings with the existing knowledge on supplier management, procurement policies, and competitive advantage. The chapter's analysis reveals a consensus among the study's findings and the literature review, highlighting the critical role of effective supplier management in achieving organizational goals. The chapter is organized around three main themes, dominant and sub-themes per objective; each theme is integrated with the relevant literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study's challenges, findings, and implications for practice and policy. The chapter's analysis provides a foundation for the conclusion and recommendations presented in the next chapter, insights into the strategic importance of supplier performance management, and its impact on organizational competitiveness are offered.

**Table 4. 1 Demographics of Participants**

Participant	Age	Gender	Procurement Role & Position	Education background	Number of years at UKZN
1	40-50	Female	Direct Practitioner	Degree	6 years
2	40-50	Male	Direct Finance manager	Honours	12 years
3	30-40	Female	Direct Practitioner	Honours	8 years
4	40-50	Male	Direct Practitioner	Degree	2 years
5	30-40	Male	Indirect Practitioner	Honours	6 years
6	30-40	Female	Direct Manager	Honours	2 years
7	40-50	Female	Direct Practitioner	Degree	24 years
8	40-50	Male	Indirect Director	Honours	5 years
9	50 -60	Male	Indirect Manager	Masters	15 years
10	30-40	Female	Direct Practitioner	Honours	7 years

11	30-40	Male	Indirect Director	Honours	4 years
12	30-40	Female	Direct Director	Masters	7 years

## 4.2. Data Presentation and Discussion

### 4.2.1. Objective 1: To identify the impact of supplier’s performance focusing on the quality of service provided to the University.

The thematic and coding analyses were applied, and the following themes and findings were identified:

#### **Dominant Theme #1: Accountability and monitoring**

The theme relates to ensuring that suppliers are held responsible for their performance and monitoring their progress to achieve desired outcomes. The interview with procurement role players at UKZN revealed findings relating to accountability and monitoring. The participants emphasized that regular evaluations and feedback mechanisms are crucial for supplier accountability, monitoring the sites and quality control ensures suppliers meet expected standards, and that clear communication channels facilitate effective monitoring and issue resolution.

Participant Number 12, a director, stated, *“We need to hold suppliers accountable for their deliverables. If they're not meeting standards, we need to address it promptly.”*

Participant # 9 supported the statement by emphasizing, *“Regular evaluations and feedback are essential to ensure suppliers are meeting our expectations. It's not just about checking boxes, but about improving performance.”*

Participant #7 also highlighted that *“On-site monitoring helps us identify potential issues early. It's crucial for ensuring quality and timely delivery.”*

It is essential to establish open, transparent, and efficient communication pathways between stakeholders; this ensures seamless information exchange. Efficient communication facilitates effective monitoring and resolution of issues; it enhances supplier performance and accountability, reduces conflicts and errors, and fosters trust and collaborative problem-solving.

As mentioned by Participant #7, *“Clear communication channels are vital for resolving issues quickly. Suppliers must know what's expected of them.”*

Respondent #8 supported the statement, adding, *“Regular updates and open communication help us identify potential issues before they escalate.”*

### **Sub-theme #1.1. Performance Measurement**

The evaluation of supplier performance is crucial to ensure that suppliers meet expectations, supplier performance can be measured using a scorecard system, outcome-based metrics, and regular progress tracking. The participants emphasized the importance of these measurement tools.

Participant #9 stated, *“Outcome-based measurement helps us focus on what matters. It's not just about checking boxes, but about achieving results.”* emphasized that *“Scorecard systems provide a comprehensive view of supplier performance. We can identify areas for improvement and make data-driven decisions.”*

Participant #12 commented from a director's perspective, *“Measuring performance against clear KPIs ensures suppliers are held accountable. It's essential for achieving our organizational goals.”*

### **Dominant theme #2: Capacity building and resources**

Ensuring sufficient resources and tools to effectively manage supplier relationships, such as resources for project management, adequate staffing for effective management, and training and development programs for suppliers and staff.

Participant #11 emphasized from the project management perspective, *“Ensuring client resources for project monitoring is crucial. It helps us track progress and address issues promptly.”* Further stating that *“Adequate staffing is essential for effective management. We need the right people with the right skills.”*

Participant #10, from the procurement practitioner's perspective, added, *“Training and development programs are vital for supplier development. We need to invest in our suppliers' growth.”*

### **Sub-theme #2.1: Supplier Development**

The development is crucial for improving supplier performance and fostering long-term relationships. Participants emphasized the importance of supplier onboarding processes, capacity-building programs, and feedback for improvement.

Participant #7 stated, *“Onboarding processes are vital for setting suppliers up for success. It's essential for establishing clear expectations.”*

Participant #10 emphasized that *“Capacity building programs help suppliers improve their capabilities. We need to invest in their growth.”*

Participant # 12 stated, *“Feedback for improvement is critical. Suppliers need to know where they're falling short and how to improve.”*

Participant #11 stated, *“Supplier development is key to achieving our organizational goals. We need to prioritize their growth.”*

Participant #9 echoed that *“Continuous improvement is essential for supplier development. We need to encourage suppliers to strive for excellence.”*

**Dominant theme #3: Collaboration and communication**, participants emphasized the importance of end-user and supplier engagement, inter-departmental collaboration, and transparent communication channels.

Participant #10 emphasized the importance of end-user and supplier engagement by stating, *“End-user and supplier engagement is critical. We need to work together to achieve common goals.”* Participant #9 echoed, *“Collaboration between end-users and suppliers fosters mutual understanding and trust.”*

Interdepartmental collaboration is crucial, supported by participant # 8, stated, *“Inter-departmental collaboration helps us share knowledge and expertise. It streamlines our processes.”* Participant # 11 also emphasized the importance of stating, *“Internal collaboration ensures alignment and consistency in supplier management.”*

Participant # 7 stated, *“Transparent communication channels are essential. Suppliers need to know what's expected of them.”* Participant # 12 echoed, *“Clear communication prevents misunderstandings and ensures seamless issue resolution.”*

### **Sub-theme #3.1: Risk management**

It is crucial to ensure effective risk management to minimize potential threats and ensure supplier relationship continuity. Participants emphasized the importance of identifying risks, mitigating risks through proactive measures, and establishing contingency plans.

Participant # 11 stated, *“Identifying potential risks upfront helps us prepare for the unexpected. It's essential for protecting our interests.”* Emphasizes that *“Mitigating risks through proactive measures saves time and resources in the long run.”*

Participant # 9 emphasized that *“Establishing contingency plans ensures we're prepared for any eventuality. It's critical for business continuity.”*

Participant # 12 added, *“Risk management is an ongoing process. We need to continuously monitor and assess potential risks.”*

Participant # 7 stated, *“Effective risk management fosters trust and confidence in supplier relationships.”*

## **Dominant theme #5: Cost and Value**

It is the evaluation of suppliers' pricing and overall value proposition. This theme assesses the suppliers' pricing strategies, cost-effectiveness, and overall value proposition. Participants emphasized the importance of cost-effectiveness and price competitiveness.

### **Sub-theme #5.1: Cost Effectiveness**

It is the optimal use of resources to achieve the desired outcome. This sub-theme focuses on the evaluation of suppliers' pricing strategies and cost-effectiveness.

Participant # 11 stated, ".....the second important factor is cost. Is the cost relevant to what was specified and also compare that to what was delivered?"

Participant# 12: "The value for money – did we pay the right prices for the goods or services rendered."

## **Dominant theme #6: Supplier Relationships and Capacity**

It evaluates the suppliers' capacity to establish and maintain effective relationships. The theme encompasses assessments of suppliers' relationships, capacity, and the ability to meet the University's requirements. It includes evaluations of suppliers' communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, as well as their resources, expertise, and scalability.

### **Sub-theme #6.1: Supplier Capacity**

This theme relates to the supplier's ability to deliver products or services, expertise, and scalability. The theme evaluates the suppliers' capacity to meet demand, including Resources: financial, human, technological, and infrastructure capabilities; Expertise: technical knowledge, skills, and experience; Scalability, the ability to increase or decrease production/output as needed.

Participant # 6 stated: "*Capacity... resources, qualification, human capital. That means the person should be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary resources to deliver.*"

Participant # 8 emphasized that: "*Warranties are important after the product has been delivered. Should anything not go according to contract terms.*"

### **Sub-theme 6.2: Supplier Relationships**

It relates to the quality of the relationship between the University and its suppliers. This sub-theme assesses the effectiveness of suppliers' communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities, including Communication, clarity, transparency, and responsiveness. Collaboration: willingness to work together, share information, and resolve issues; Problem-solving: ability to address and resolve conflicts or disputes.

Participant # 6 stated that: *“Relationship building and strengthening. Any relationship is strengthened by communication.”*

Participant # 9 believed that: *“If you are assured that if you go back to the supplier, they're able to accommodate you. You know it's a good quality of service, prompt service.”*

### **Integration with literature review**

The relationship between supplier performance and the quality of service is a critical area of study in supply chain management and service delivery. Various theoretical frameworks provide insights into how supplier performance can influence service quality, while empirical studies offer evidence supporting these theories.

Accountability and Monitoring dominant theme link to Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory: The theme emphasizes the importance of monitoring supplier performance, which aligns with RBV's focus on leveraging resources and capabilities to achieve competitive advantage. The theme also links to the Systems Theory Framework: The theme highlights the need for clear communication channels and feedback mechanisms, consistent with Systems Theory's emphasis on interdependence and feedback loops.

Capacity building and resources dominant theme link to Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory: The theme emphasizes the importance of investing in supplier development programs, which aligns with RBV's focus on building and leveraging resources and capabilities. The theme further links to the SERVQUAL Model: The theme highlights the importance of supplier capacity and resources in delivering high-quality services, consistent with SERVQUAL's emphasis on reliability and responsiveness.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

**Supplier Performance Evaluation** (Zhao, et al., 2020): This framework underscores the organisations' necessity to conduct a regular supplier evaluation. Zhao states that systematic assessments and feedback mechanisms are essential for identifying areas where suppliers may be underperforming. Organizations can foster better supplier relationships, and enhance service quality by implementing structured evaluation processes. The emphasis on continuous feedback allows for timely interventions and rectification of issues before they escalate.

**Balanced Scorecard Approach** (Kaplan & Norton, 1996); **recently supported by** (Chen, et al., 2021): Kaplan and Norton's Balanced Scorecard provides a comprehensive framework for measuring organizational performance beyond traditional financial metrics. It advocates outcome-based metrics for assessing various performance dimensions, including customer satisfaction and internal processes.

Chen et al. (2021) further support this approach by demonstrating how organizations that employ balanced scorecards experience improved strategic alignment and operational efficiency, correlating with enhanced service quality.

**SERVQUAL Model** (Parasuraman, et al., 1988) **recently supported by** (Brunner-Sperdin & Dant, 2020): The SERVQUAL model identifies five key dimensions; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; that collectively define service quality. This model is particularly relevant when evaluating how supplier performance impacts service delivery. Brunner-Sperdin and Dant (2020) reinforce the relevance of SERVQUAL in contemporary settings by illustrating its application in assessing customer perceptions across various industries, thereby confirming its enduring significance in understanding service quality dynamics.

### **Empirical Studies**

(Bals, et al., 2020): Bals emphasizes the critical role that clear communication plays in fostering effective supplier relationships. The study suggests that transparent communication enhances collaboration and ensures that both parties have aligned expectations regarding performance standards and service delivery outcomes.

(Hald & Ellegaard, 2019): Hald's study highlights the importance of supplier development programs in improving supplier performance. By investing in training and resources for suppliers, organizations can enhance their capabilities and ensure they meet or exceed the quality standards necessary for optimal service delivery.

(Sallis, 2020): Sallis stresses the strategic importance of continuous improvement within supplier relationships to enhance overall service quality. He argues that organizations should adopt a proactive approach to supplier management by regularly reviewing performance metrics and engaging in joint improvement initiatives.

The literature indicates a strong correlation between effective supplier performance management and improved quality of service. Theoretical frameworks such as Supplier Performance Evaluation, Balanced Scorecard Approach, and SERVQUAL provide foundational insights into this relationship, empirical studies reinforce these concepts by highlighting practical strategies such as communication enhancement, supplier development programs, and continuous improvement initiatives.

#### **4.2.2. Objective 2: To evaluate service quality and consistency components.**

Based on the participant's statements and themes there were various findings relating to objective two, such as the importance of objective evaluation criteria in ensuring transparency and fairness in supplier selection, verifying the supplier's experience in ensuring that they possess the required expertise; participants prioritized the quality of workmanship; the importance of suppliers ability to meet institutional requirements and emphasized the importance of standardizing the evaluation criteria and

verification processes that can improve supplier selection. The following dominant theme and sub-themes are imaged from the participant's comments.

### **Dominant theme #1: Supplier evaluation and selection criteria**

The theme encompasses assessing and selecting suppliers based on predetermined criteria to ensure that they meet the requirements of UKZN.

#### **Sub-theme #1.1: Objective evaluation criteria**

This relates to using standardized, unbiased criteria to evaluate suppliers, ensuring fairness and transparency. Participant# 12 stated, *“I think it is our functional criteria that need to be designed in such a way that the qualifying suppliers are those that meet our required level of service or that have the required expertise to fulfill our requirements.”*

#### **Sub-theme #1.2: Verification of experience and project history**

The theme relates to confirming suppliers and their experience, and project history to ensure they have the necessary expertise. Participant 5 stated, *“Verifying experience and project history is crucial, we can have reference letters, but we must also validate that reference.”* Participant 11 also emphasized that *“If the project team can go and physically verify sites/projects, we’ve had another University physically verifying our facilities when a contractor has listed us as a client for previous work, to verify and ensure that the work was done and completed accordingly”*

#### **Sub-them #1.3: Quality of workmanship and products**

The theme relates to ensuring suppliers provide high-quality products and services at UKZN. Participant 9 stated, *“I would like to deal with somebody where I know I'm expecting a certain quality level, not substandard product and services.”*

### **Dominant theme #4: Quality and Performance**

It is the degree to which suppliers deliver high-quality products or services that meet the University's requirements. This theme evaluates the suppliers' ability to provide goods or services that meet specifications, standards, and expectations. It includes assessments of goods/service quality, delivery performance, and overall satisfaction.

#### **Sub-theme #4.1: Product/Service Quality**

It is the extent to which a product or service meets its intended purpose, specifications, and quality standards. The focus is on the product or service, including its features, functionality, and overall quality. The participants emphasized the importance of suppliers' quality performance in meeting the University requirements and customer satisfaction.

Participant # 9 stated: *“Obviously if you're paying a fair price for goods and services, a market-related price, you want to be given a certain level of quality, be it goods or services. You know, you don't want to purchase items that are only last a certain period and they break or unable to perform and complete what they were purchased for.”*

Participant # 11 thought: *“For me, the first one would be quality. Is the product that has been delivered what was specified or what was requested?”*

Participant #12 also confirmed that: *“As a customer you want to be satisfied with the quality of the goods delivered or service rendered.”*

### **Integration with literature review**

The need for objective evaluation criteria is underscored by several established frameworks in the literature, including the SERVQUAL Model, Kraljic Matrix, and Mendelow’s Matrix.

The dominant theme of supplier evaluation and selection criteria links to the SERVQUAL Model: The theme emphasizes the importance of objective evaluation criteria, which aligns with SERVQUAL's emphasis on tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The theme also links to the Kraljic Matrix as it highlights the importance of considering multiple supplier evaluation criteria, consistent with Kraljic's emphasis on categorizing suppliers based on their importance and complexity. The dominant theme of quality and performance is linked to the Systems Theory Framework: The theme emphasizes the importance of feedback loops and continuous improvement, consistent with Systems Theory's emphasis on interdependence and feedback loops.

SERVQUAL Model identifies five service quality dimensions —tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Among these dimensions, reliability, and assurance are particularly pertinent to supplier evaluation as they focus on the consistency of service delivery and the trustworthiness of suppliers. The emphasis on objective evaluation criteria aligns with these dimensions ensuring that assessments are based on measurable performance indicators rather than subjective perceptions. The model emphasizes the importance of objective evaluation criteria in assessing service quality through the SERVQUAL model development.

Kraljic Matrix: introduces a strategic approach to supplier selection through his matrix that categorizes items based on their importance to the business and supply risk. The strategic item category within this matrix highlights the necessity for objective evaluation criteria to make informed decisions about which suppliers to engage with based on their ability to meet specific needs reliably.

Mendelow’s Matrix: This framework focuses on understanding stakeholder power and interest levels in decision-making processes. It emphasizes that organizations must objectively assess suppliers’ influence and capabilities to ensure alignment with organizational goals.

These frameworks collectively support that objective evaluation criteria are essential for effective supplier selection and management, ultimately contributing to enhanced service quality. These foundational works provide a vigorous basis for understanding how objective evaluation criteria can enhance supplier selection processes and overall service quality.

#### **4.2.3. Objective 3: To investigate the effectiveness of current procurement policies in the appointment of a suitable supplier.**

This objective is crucial in ensuring that the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) adopts a systematic and transparent approach to supplier selection, aligning with its strategy. The findings of this study reveal three dominant themes related to procurement policies and supplier management: Policy Effectiveness and Clarity, Supplier Selection and Performance, and Supplier Management and Relations.

##### **Dominant theme #1: Policy effectiveness and clarity**

This theme highlights the importance of clear, consistent, and regularly reviewed procurement policies in ensuring effective supplier selection in the procurement processes. Two sub-themes emerged from this dominant theme upon the engagement participants: the need for clear and consistent policy application and policy review and revision.

##### **Sub-theme #1.1: Need for clear and consistent policy application**

The sub-theme relates to the necessity for well-defined and consistently applied procurement policies to guide supplier selection. Participants emphasized the need for clear policies to prevent ambiguity and ensure fairness in supplier selection. Participant# 5: *“We need policies that are clear and consistent, so everyone knows what's expected.”*

##### **Sub-theme #1.2: Policy review and revision**

Regular review and revision of procurement policies to ensure alignment with organizational objectives. Participants stressed the importance of regularly reviewing policies to adapt to changing organizational needs. Participant#3: *“Policies should be reviewed regularly to ensure they're still relevant and effective.”*

##### **Dominant theme #2: Supplier selection and performance**

This theme focuses on the critical aspects of supplier selection and performance management: effective supplier evaluation criteria; addressing poor supplier performance, supplier development, and support.

### **Sub-theme #2.1: Effective supplier evaluation criteria**

The use of comprehensive and relevant criteria to evaluate supplier suitability. Participants highlighted the importance of considering factors beyond price, such as quality and reliability. Participant# 2: *“We need to look beyond price and consider the supplier's reputation and quality of service.”*

### **Sub-theme #2.2: Addressing poor supplier performance**

Strategies for managing and improving poor supplier performance. Participants emphasized the need for regular monitoring and constructive feedback. Participant#1: *“We should have a system in place to address poor performance and provide feedback to suppliers.”*

### **Sub-theme #2.3: Supplier development and support**

Initiatives to support and develop suppliers, enhancing their performance. Participants suggested providing training and resources to suppliers. Participant#4: *“We should provide training and support to help suppliers improve their performance.”*

## **Dominant theme #3: Supplier Management and Relations**

This theme explores the importance of effective supplier management and relationships. Three sub-themes emerged from the dominant theme: building relationships with suppliers, managing supplier expectations, and supplier communication.

### **Sub-theme #3.1: Building relationships with suppliers**

Fosters collaborative relationships with suppliers. Participants emphasized the value of building trust and open communication. Participant# 6: *“Building relationships with suppliers helps us understand their needs and improve service delivery.”*

### **Sub-theme #3.2: Managing supplier expectations**

Communicating expectations and requirements to suppliers. Participants highlighted the importance of setting clear expectations. *Quote: “We need to communicate our expectations to suppliers to avoid misunderstandings.”* (Participant 5)

### **Sub-theme # 3.3: Supplier communication**

Effective communication with suppliers to ensure seamless service delivery. Participants stressed the importance of regular communication. Participant# 3: *“Regular communication with suppliers helps resolve issues promptly.”*

These themes and sub-themes provide a foundation for understanding the effectiveness of current procurement policies in appointing suitable suppliers and highlight areas for improvement.

## **Integration with literature review**

The policy effectiveness and clarity dominant theme links to Institutional Theory, it emphasizes the importance of clear and consistent policy application, which aligns with Institutional Theory's focus on the role of institutions and policies in shaping organizational behaviour. The effectiveness of procurement policies in the suitable suppliers' appointments is a critical area of investigation, particularly within higher education institutions. The literature suggests that clear and consistent application of procurement policies significantly influences supplier selection and performance outcomes. (Kauffman, et al., 2022) Concur with sub-theme #1.1. Emphasizing strategic procurement practices should prioritize long-term relationships with suppliers to achieve optimal supplier performance. When procurement policies lack clarity or consistency, it can confuse stakeholders involved in the selection process, ultimately hindering the University's ability to appoint suitable suppliers. In addition, a well-defined policy framework allows for better communication of expectations between universities and their suppliers. It ensures that all parties understand the criteria for selection, evaluation metrics, and performance standards. As such, universities must create transparent procurement policies that facilitate informed decision-making and promote accountability.

In support of sub-theme #1.1. regular procurement policy review is vital to ensure alignment with organizational goals and changing market dynamics. (Cousins, et al., 2019) argue that implementing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to costs, quality, and delivery timelines is essential for measuring supplier performance effectively. By establishing KPIs within the procurement framework, universities can systematically assess supplier capabilities against predefined benchmarks. Moreover, continuous policy assessment allows institutions to adapt their procurement strategies in response to evolving needs or challenges in supplier management. For instance, if a University identifies recurring issues with a particular supplier regarding delivery timelines or product quality, it may need to revise its selection criteria or explore alternative sourcing options.

In support of sub-theme #2.1. 'effective supplier evaluation criteria,' multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) models are essential for comprehensive supplier evaluation. These models allow organizations to assess potential suppliers based on various criteria, including cost, quality, delivery time, and service capabilities. Kraljic's Matrix approach emphasizes that not all suppliers should be treated equally; instead, it advocates for a differentiated strategy where high-value and complex suppliers receive more attention and resources. This categorization aids firms in prioritizing their supplier management efforts, ensuring that they focus on relationships that can significantly impact their operational success. Organizations can tailor their procurement strategies to manage risks and leverage opportunities by classifying suppliers.

Regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms are critical for improving supplier performance. Monczka (2015) highlights that high-performing suppliers contribute positively to the procurement system by enhancing product quality, reducing costs, and improving delivery times. Organizations can address poor performance by establishing clear metrics and engaging in continuous dialogue with suppliers. This literature review supports sub-theme #2.2. in terms of dealing with poor supplier performance. Implementing systematic performance reviews allows businesses to identify areas where suppliers may be underperforming and provide an opportunity for corrective action. Feedback loops help to rectify issues and foster a culture of accountability among suppliers, leading to improved outcomes over time.

Collaborative relationships between buyers and suppliers are crucial for enhancing supplier performance. Hald K.S. (2019) supports sub-theme #2.3. 'supplier development and support,' collaboration can lead to improved innovation and service delivery by fostering an environment where both parties work towards common goals. Supplier development initiatives may include training programs, joint product development projects, or shared technological advancements to build capabilities within the supplier's organization. These collaborative efforts strengthen the relationship and ensure suppliers are better equipped to meet evolving market demands. The themes outlined above align with existing literature on procurement policies by emphasizing the importance of structured evaluation criteria (Sub-theme #2.1), proactive management of supplier performance (Sub-theme #2.2), and fostering collaborative relationships (Sub-theme #2.3). These elements create a vigorous framework for selecting suitable suppliers who can contribute positively to an organization's procurement objectives.

Supplier management and relations are critical components of procurement policies, as they directly influence the effectiveness of supplier selection and overall organizational performance. Various theories in the literature review support sub-them #3.1. 'building relationships with suppliers', the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory puts forward that organizations can achieve competitive advantage through strategic management of resources, including relationships with suppliers. According to Wu (2020), establishing strategic partnerships with suppliers enhances operational efficiency and significantly boosts customer satisfaction. The RBV emphasizes that firms should leverage their unique capabilities and resources to foster long-term relationships with suppliers, leading to improved innovation, reduced costs, and enhanced service delivery. By nurturing these partnerships, the University can create a collaborative environment that facilitates knowledge sharing and joint problem-solving, ultimately leading to better procurement outcomes.

The Systems Theory Framework provides a lens through which the interdependencies between various stakeholders in the supply chain can be understood. Van Weele (2018) highlights that effective supplier performance is crucial for achieving value for money in procurement processes. In support of sub-them

#3.2. this framework suggests that organizations must recognize the interconnected nature of their operations with those of their suppliers; thus, managing supplier expectations becomes essential. Clear communication regarding performance metrics, quality standards, and delivery timelines helps align supplier capabilities with organizational goals.

The SERVQUAL Model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) is critical for assessing service quality in supplier relationships. This model identifies five key dimensions by focusing on these dimensions, organizations can enhance their interactions with suppliers, ensuring that both parties have a clear understanding of expectations and deliverables. The theory supports sub-theme #3.5. Effective communication fosters trust and transparency in supplier relationships, which is vital for collaboration. The integrated theories, such as the Resource-Based View Theory, Systems Theory Framework, and SERVQUAL Model, provide a comprehensive understanding of how strategic partnerships can be built, expectations managed effectively, and communication optimized within supplier relationships.

#### **4.2.4. Objective 4: To assess the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage through effective selection and performance management processes in the University.**

Objective 4 focuses on assessing the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage through effective selection and performance management processes in the University. The themes that emerged from the participant responses highlight the challenges and opportunities in supplier management, emphasizing the need for improved database management, performance tracking, centralization, collaboration, automation, and technology integration.

#### **Dominant Theme #1: Limitations of Current Supplier Management**

Limitations of current supplier management refer to the inefficiencies and shortcomings in the existing supplier management processes that hinder the University's ability to establish a competitive advantage. Effective supplier management is critical for organizations to achieve their goals. However, limitations in current supplier management processes can lead to inefficiencies, increased costs, and reduced competitiveness.

#### **Sub-theme #1.1: Inefficient Supplier Database Management**

Inefficient supplier database management refers to the inadequate or ineffective management of suppliers' information, leading to difficulties in identifying, evaluating, and selecting suitable suppliers. A well-managed supplier database is essential for efficient supplier selection and management. Inefficient database management can result in duplicated efforts, inaccurate information, and missed opportunities. Participants noted issues with supplier database management. *"UKZN doesn't have a database...using a creditor master file."* (Participant 10)

### **Sub-theme #1.2: Lack of Performance Tracking**

Lack of performance tracking refers to the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of supplier performance, making it challenging to assess their contribution to the University's competitive advantage. Performance tracking is crucial for evaluating supplier performance, identifying areas for improvement, and making informed decisions about supplier selection and retention. Participants highlighted the absence of performance tracking. “There’s *no method to record supplier performance.*” (Participant 12)

### **Dominant Theme #2: Benefits of Centralization and Collaboration**

The benefits of centralization and collaboration refer to the advantages gained from coordinating and integrating supplier management processes and partnering with other organizations. Centralization and Collaboration can improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance competitiveness.

#### **Sub-theme #2.1: Centralized Procurement**

Centralized procurement refers to consolidated procurement processes, enabling better coordination, standardization, and control. Centralized procurement can result in cost savings, improved efficiency, and enhanced supplier relationships. Participants highlighted the benefits of centralized procurement. “*Centralization of PPE purchases during Covid-19 led to savings.*” (Participant 10)

#### **Sub-theme #2.2: Collaborative Partnerships**

Collaborative partnerships refer to strategic alliances between the University and other organizations, fostering knowledge sharing, best practices, and mutual benefits. Collaborative partnerships can provide access to expertise, resources, and market intelligence, enhancing the University's competitive advantage. Participants emphasized the importance of collaborative partnerships. “*PURCO membership allows benchmarking with other institutions.*” (Participant 10)

### **Dominant Theme #3: Need for Automation and Technology Integration**

The need for automation and technology integration refers to leveraging technology to streamline, standardize, and enhance supplier management processes. Automation and technology integration can improve efficiency, reduce errors, and enhance decision-making.

#### **Sub-theme #3.1: Automated Supplier Database Management**

Automated supplier database management is the management and maintenance of an accurate, up-to-date supplier information system. Automated database management can reduce manual errors, improve data integrity, and enhance supplier selection and management. Participants noted the importance of automating supplier database management. “*Everything has to be automated.*” (participant 8)

### **Sub-theme #3.2: Technology-Enabled Supplier Engagement**

Technology-enabled supplier engagement refers to digital platforms and tools for communication, collaboration, and performance tracking. Technology-enabled supplier engagement can enhance supplier relationships, improve responsiveness, and reduce costs. Participants highlighted the potential of technology-enabled supplier engagement. *“We should use technology to engage with suppliers.”* (Participant 8)

#### **Literature Integration**

The first dominant theme identified in the literature is the limitations of current supplier management practices. This theme is crucial as it sets the foundation for understanding how ineffective supplier management can hinder a company’s ability to establish a competitive advantage. This theme aligns with (Khamis, et al., 2021), who emphasize the need for effective supplier management, highlighting that organizations often overlook the strategic importance of their suppliers. Khamis argues that organizations may face increased costs and reduced quality, affecting their competitive position in the market where there’s no supplier management framework. This perspective aligns with the idea that effective supplier management is not merely an operational necessity but a strategic requirement. (Monckza, et al., 2015), Underscores the importance of evaluating supplier performance. Monckza put forward that regular assessment and evaluation of suppliers are essential for maintaining high standards and ensuring alignment with organizational goals.

This sub-theme #1.1. focuses on one specific limitation within supplier management: inefficient database management. The sub-theme aligns with (Kumar, et al., 2021), who notes the impact of quality on procurement performance. His Research indicates that poor database management can lead to inaccurate supplier information and affect decision-making processes related to procurement. When organizations fail to maintain an up-to-date and comprehensive database of their prospective suppliers, they risk selecting sub-standard suppliers or failing to leverage existing relationships effectively.

Sub-theme #1.2. aligns with (Melbourne, 2022), highlights the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate suppliers. Melbourne’s work illustrates how KPIs are vital for measuring supplier effectiveness and aligning their outputs with organizational objectives. Without detailed tracking tools, organizations may struggle to identify underperforming suppliers or areas where improvements are needed, leading to missed opportunities for enhancing competitive advantage.

The second dominant theme relates to the benefits of centralizing supplier management functions and fostering collaborative relationships. Dominant theme#2 Aligns with (Nwachukwu & Hieu, 2021), who notes the positive impact of collaboration relationships on service delivery and innovation. Prajogo’s findings suggest that when organizations engage in collaborative partnerships with their suppliers, they can achieve greater innovation and improved service levels due to shared knowledge and resources.

This collaboration fosters an environment where both parties can work together towards common goals, enhancing overall competitiveness. This dominant theme supports UCL's case study, which demonstrates the benefits of collaborative partnerships through real-world examples. The case study illustrates how organizations that collaborate over transactional relationships tend to experience better outcomes in terms of efficiency and innovation. Such evidence reinforces Prajogo's assertions regarding collaboration's role in driving competitive advantage through enhanced service delivery.

Sub-theme #2.1. aligns with (Van Weele, 2018), who highlights the importance of supplier performance in achieving value for money. Van Weele argues that centralized procurement allows organizations to consolidate their purchasing power, thereby negotiating better terms and prices with suppliers. By centralizing procurement functions, companies can leverage their entire supply base, contributing to overall cost savings and improved quality. This perspective reinforces the idea that centralized procurement is not just about efficiency, it is also about maximizing the strategic value derived from suppliers.

Dominant theme#3 aligns with (Mena, et al., 2013), who emphasizes digital tools for real-time monitoring of supplier performance metrics. Mena's study indicates that technology enables organizations to track supplier performance continuously rather than relying on periodic assessments. This real-time monitoring allows businesses to respond swiftly to emerging issues, ensuring that suppliers meet established performance standards consistently. The ability to access up-to-date information on supplier performance metrics fosters a proactive approach to supplier management; this is essential for maintaining competitive advantage. The theme is supported by (Zhao, et al., 2020), who emphasizes the importance of technology-enabled supplier engagement. Zhao argues that effective engagement with suppliers through digital platforms should lead to enhanced collaboration and communication. Automated engagement builds stronger relationships with their suppliers, facilitating better alignment of goals and expectations. This collaborative approach also drives innovation within the supply chain.

Sub-theme #3.2. aligns with (Gatobu, 2020), who highlights the importance of strategic partnerships with suppliers driven by technology. Gatobu's work illustrates how technology can enhance communication channels between organizations and their suppliers, fostering a collaborative environment where both parties can share insights and innovations more freely. This partnership approach is essential in today's dynamic markets, where agility and responsiveness are key drivers of success and competitive advantage.

The limitations of current supplier management as a dominant theme link to the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory: The theme emphasizes the importance of leveraging resources and capabilities to achieve competitive advantage, consistent with RBV's emphasis on building and leveraging resources and capabilities. This theme also links to the systems theory framework: The theme highlights the

importance of interdependence and feedback loops, consistent with Systems Theory's emphasis on interdependence and feedback loops.

The benefits of centralization and collaboration as a dominant theme link to Institutional Theory: The theme emphasizes the importance of collaborative partnerships, which aligns with Institutional Theory's focus on the role of institutions and policies in shaping organizational behavior. The theme also links to the SERVQUAL Model: The theme highlights the importance of building relationships with suppliers, consistent with SERVQUAL's emphasis on empathy and responsiveness.

The literature review in chapter two has revealed a critical consensus among various studies regarding the need for organizations to adopt centralized procurement practices while integrating automation and technology into their supplier management processes. These themes collectively emphasize how such strategies significantly contribute to achieving a competitive advantage through improved supplier performance, enhanced collaboration, and efficient data management. Furthermore, the review highlights significant limitations and benefits associated with supplier management, emphasizing that improved supplier selection and performance management practices are essential for establishing a competitive advantage within an organization's industry.

**Table 4. 2 Summary of objectives**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Linked Model/Theory</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Objective 1	Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability and monitoring</li> <li>• Leveraging resources and capabilities for competitive advantage</li> </ul>
Objective 1	Systems Theory Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability and monitoring</li> <li>• Interdependence and feedback loops for effective supplier management</li> </ul>
Objective 1	SERVQUAL Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building and resources</li> <li>• Building relationships with suppliers for enhanced service quality</li> </ul>
Objective 2	SERVQUAL Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplier evaluation and selection criteria</li> <li>• Objective evaluation criteria for assessing service quality</li> </ul>

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Linked Model/Theory</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Objective 2	Kraljic Matrix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplier evaluation and selection criteria</li> <li>• Multi-criteria decision-making models for comprehensive supplier evaluation</li> </ul>
Objective 3	Institutional Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy effectiveness and clarity</li> <li>• Collaborative partnerships for achieving competitive advantage</li> </ul>
Objective 3	Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplier management and relations</li> <li>• Leveraging resources and capabilities for competitive advantage</li> </ul>
Objective 3	Systems Theory Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplier management and relations</li> <li>• Interdependence and feedback loops for effective supplier management</li> </ul>
Objective 4	Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitations of current supplier management</li> <li>• Leveraging resources and capabilities for competitive advantage</li> </ul>
Objective 4	Systems Theory Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitations of current supplier management</li> <li>• Interdependence and feedback loops for effective supplier management</li> </ul>
Objective 4	Institutional Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of centralization and collaboration</li> <li>• Collaborative partnerships for achieving competitive advantage</li> </ul>
Objective 4	SERVQUAL Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of centralization and collaboration</li> <li>• Building relationships with suppliers for enhanced service quality</li> </ul>
Objective 4	Automation and Technology Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for automation and technology integration</li> <li>• Digital tools for real-time monitoring and technology-enabled supplier engagement</li> </ul>

### **4.3. Chapter Summary**

The chapter demonstrated various findings from the twelve sample of participants that were interviewed, sixteen (16) dominant themes and thirty sub-themes were selected from the samples per objective. The dominant themes and sub-themes revealed a consensus among various studies discussed in chapter two. The identified themes and findings pave a foundation for conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study, which aimed to investigate the impact of supplier performance to achieve value for money and satisfy end customers, the study evaluated the components of service quality and consistency, assessed the effectiveness of procurement policies, and examined the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The chapter summarizes the key findings, highlights the study implications, and provides actionable recommendations for improving supplier performance management practices at UKZN. The chapter also identifies avenues for future research, acknowledging the study's limitations and suggesting opportunities for further investigation.

### **5.2. Study Consolidation of Findings**

#### **5.2.1. Objective 1**

*Objective 1: To identify the impact of supplier's performance focusing on the quality of service delivered to the University.*

The relationship between supplier performance and service quality is critical, particularly in educational institutions like the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The effectiveness of suppliers directly influences the quality of services provided to students, faculty, and staff. This analysis explores key findings related to supplier performance and its impact on service quality, supported by relevant literature.

The findings of this study highlighted the significance of six dominant themes in ensuring effective supplier performance: Accountability and Monitoring, Capacity Building and Resources, Collaboration and Communication, Quality and Performance, Cost and Value, and Supplier Relationships and Capacity. These results align with the literature review, which emphasizes the importance of strategic supplier selection (Kraljic, 1983), supplier development (Hald & Ellegaard, 2019), and continuous improvement (Bals, et al., 2020). The SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman, et al., 1988) supports the findings on the importance of reliability, responsiveness, and assurance in service quality. The emphasis on accountability and monitoring resonates with the Balanced Scorecard Approach (Kaplan & Norton, 1996), which advocates for outcome-based metrics. Empirical studies (Sallis, 2020) (Brunner-Sperdin & Dant, 2020); confirm the significance of clear communication, supplier development, and continuous improvement in enhancing supplier performance.

Several key challenges resonated from the study that must be addressed for effective supplier performance management. These include ensuring accountability and monitoring supplier performance to guarantee adherence to standards. Additionally, building capacity and resources is crucial for effective supplier management. Collaboration and communication with suppliers are essential to prevent misunderstandings and resolve issues promptly. Maintaining quality and performance standards

is vital to ensure service delivery excellence. Furthermore, managing costs and achieving value for money is critical in supplier selection. Developing and maintaining effective supplier relationships requires ongoing efforts and strategic engagement. Addressing these challenges is important in optimizing supplier performance and achieving organizational goals.

Effective supplier performance evaluation is critical for achieving the goals of the organization. Key takeaways from this objective are that supplier performance evaluation requires accountability and monitoring mechanisms; capacity building and resource development enhance supplier performance; collaboration and communication foster effective supplier relationships; quality and performance standards ensure service delivery excellence; cost-effectiveness and value for money are essential in supplier selection and that strategic relationships with key suppliers drive long-term success. Implementing these insights in the organization can help optimize supplier performance, mitigate risks, and achieve organizational objectives.

### **5.2.2. Objective 2**

*Objective 2: To evaluate service quality and consistency component.*

The findings of this study highlight the significance of objective evaluation criteria, verification of experience and project history, and quality of workmanship and products in ensuring service quality and consistency. The emphasis on objective evaluation criteria resonates with the Balanced Scorecard Approach (Kaplan & Norton, 1996), which advocates for outcome-based metrics. Empirical studies (Bals, et al., 2020) (Hald & Ellegaard, 2019) support clear communication, supplier development, and continuous improvement in enhancing supplier performance.

Challenges to Effective Supplier Performance Evaluation at UKZN include subjective Evaluation Criteria, the lack of objective metrics leads to biased assessments; Insufficient Data - limited access to supplier performance data hinders evaluation; poor Communication - inadequate communication with suppliers leads to misunderstandings; Inadequate Training- lack of training for procurement staff impacts evaluation effectiveness; Inefficient Processes - manual processes and lack of automation hinder evaluation efficiency. By acknowledging the challenges and implementing best practices, UKZN can optimize supplier performance evaluation, drive service quality, and achieve organizational success. Well-designed procurement policies and practices ensure supplier performance, ultimately driving organizational support.

### **5.2.3. Objective 3**

*Objective 3: To investigate the effectiveness of current procurement policies in appointing a suitable supplier.*

The findings of this study highlight the importance of clear, consistent, and regularly reviewed procurement policies in ensuring effective supplier selection. Three dominant themes emerged: Policy Effectiveness and Clarity, Supplier Selection and Performance, and Supplier Management and

Relations. The study's results support existing literature on the significance of structured evaluation criteria, proactive management of supplier performance, and fostering collaborative relationships. The Resource-Based View Theory, Systems Theory Framework, and SERVQUAL Model provide a comprehensive understanding of strategic partnerships, effective expectation management, and optimized communication in supplier relationships.

The study on objective three, procurement policies in supplier selection at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), revealed several challenges. These include a lack of clarity and consistency in procurement policies, inadequate supplier evaluation criteria, and ineffective communication and expectation management in supplier relationships. Additionally, limited supplier development initiatives and support, insufficient policy review and revision, and inadequate performance measurement tools and metrics hinder effective supplier selection. Poor relationship management also leads to mistrust and conflict, further complicating the procurement process. These challenges underscore the need for clear policies, effective evaluation criteria, collaborative relationships, and ongoing improvement initiatives to optimize supplier selection and drive organizational success.

#### **5.2.4. Objective 4**

*Objective 4: To assess the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage through effective selection and performance management processes in the University.*

The study revealed three dominant themes: Limitations of Current Supplier Management - Inefficient database management and lack of performance tracking hinder supplier management; Benefits of Centralization and Collaboration - centralized procurement and collaborative partnerships enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improve competitiveness; Need for Automation and Technology Integration - automated supplier database management and technology-enabled supplier engagement improve efficiency and decision-making. The findings are supported by existing literature: Limitations of Current Supplier Management (Khamis, et al., 2021) (Kumar & Raghavan, 2019) that emphasizes the importance of effective supplier management. Benefits of Centralization and Collaboration: (Prajogo 2012) (van Weele, 2018) highlight the advantages of centralized procurement and collaborative partnerships. Need for Automation and Technology Integration: (Mena, et al., 2013) & (Zhao, et al., 2020) stress the importance of automation and technology in supplier management. The study's findings and literature review support highlight the need for organizations to address limitations in supplier management, implement centralized procurement and collaborative partnerships, and leverage automation and technology integration.

The study revealed several challenges facing the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) supplier management processes. Key among these is inefficient supplier database management, lacking accurate and up-to-date information, and inadequate performance tracking mechanisms. Additionally, limited centralization and collaboration hinder coordination and knowledge sharing. The absence of sufficient

automation and technology integration exacerbates manual errors and inefficiencies. Furthermore, inadequate supplier evaluation and selection processes impede the University's ability to identify and partner with suitable suppliers. These challenges undermine UKZN's capacity to optimize supplier relationships, leading to inefficiencies, increased costs, and reduced competitiveness. Addressing these challenges is crucial to enhancing supplier management and driving organizational success.

### **5.3. Study Recommendations**

#### **5.3.1. Objective 1 Recommendation**

To enhance supplier performance evaluation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) with a focus on the quality of service provided, the following recommendations are included: Fostering collaborative relationships, establishing clear quality standards, conducting regular performance evaluations, reviewing procurement policies, establishing supplier development standards, development of effective communication guidelines and ensuring accountability mechanisms.

- **Fostering Collaborative Relationships:** Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is crucial for organizations to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and foster innovation (Bothra & Sonawane, 2024). Encourage partnerships between UKZN and its suppliers based on collaboration rather than transactional interactions to promote open communication, trust, and mutual benefits, such as developing supplier relationship management (SRM) programs and establishing joint planning and goal-setting processes.
- **Establishment of Clear Quality Standards:** Define specific quality benchmarks that suppliers must adhere to, ensuring consistency in service delivery, ensuring clear specifications are communicated to suppliers, setting performance targets for suppliers, conducting quality audits, and implementing a corrective action process.
- **Conducting Regular Performance Evaluations:** Implement systematic assessments of supplier performance to monitor compliance with established standards and identify areas for improvement, such as conducting quarterly or annual assessments, establishing a feedback mechanism, identifying areas of improvement, and awarding performance-based incentives. Regular performance evaluations are crucial for effective supplier management in supply chains. These assessments help monitor compliance with standards and identify areas for improvement (Dania, et al., 2023).
- **Review of Procurement Policies:** Update procurement policies to reflect best practices in supplier management and performance evaluation.
- **Establish Supplier Development Standards:** Create guidelines that outline expectations for supplier growth and development that align with UKZN's objectives. UKZN can implement training and capacity-building initiatives for its suppliers, provide mentorship programs to

small suppliers, and offer joint improvement programs and certification programs for suppliers who have achieved the set goals.

- **Development of Effective Communication Guidelines:** Formulate protocols for communication between UKZN and suppliers to facilitate transparency and responsiveness, such as conducting regular meetings with suppliers, conducting joint planning meetings and setting goals with suppliers, collaborative problem solving, set criteria for supplier selection such as rotation systems, supplier recognition and rewards for best performers.
- **Ensuring Accountability Mechanisms:** Reinforce mechanisms that hold suppliers accountable for their performance outcomes, such as implementation of supplier's scorecard system tracking the supplier's responsiveness, delivery times, and quality, conducting regular supplier audits, establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) and setting clear consequences of non-compliance.

By implementing these recommendations, UKZN can optimize supplier performance, mitigate risks associated with supply chain disruptions, and achieve its objectives related to service quality, ultimately leading to enhanced organizational success.

### **5.3.2. Objective 2 Recommendation**

Enhancing supplier performance evaluation: UKZN should develop and implement robust evaluation criteria, verify suppliers' experience, and prioritize quality workmanship. Policymakers should establish evaluation standards, develop supplier development guidelines, and ensure accountability mechanisms.

- **Develop and implement robust evaluation criteria:** Use balanced scorecards to assess suppliers. Include key performance indicators (KPIs) such as delivery time, quality, and cost. Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance. UKZN can develop a supplier evaluation framework with weighted criteria, including quality (30%), delivery (25%), and cost (20%).
- **Verify suppliers' experience** by conducting reference checks, reviewing suppliers' project history and success stories, assess suppliers' certifications and industry credentials. Suppliers provide case studies and references from previous clients.
- **Prioritize quality workmanship:** Establish clear quality standards, conduct regular site/work inspections, and implement corrective action processes for non-compliance, such as implementing a total quality management (TQM) system to ensure suppliers meet set quality standards.
- **Establish evaluation standards:** develop industry-wide evaluation frameworks, establish clear criteria for supplier selection, and ensure transparency in the evaluation processes. Supplier governance, including transparency in supplier selection and effective conflict resolution, has a positive effect on procurement function performance (Musyoka, et al., 2024)

- Develop supplier development guidelines: Create training programs for suppliers, provide mentorship opportunities to suppliers, and offer capacity-building initiatives such as launching a supplier development program that provides training to suppliers of the University on quality management. Supplier performance can be improved through effective communication, cooperation, and commitment to supplier development programs (Benton, et al., 2020).
- Ensure accountability mechanisms by implementing supplier performance monitoring systems, conducting regular audits, and establishing consequences for non-compliance.

By implementing these recommendations, UKZN can optimize supplier performance and improve selection processes while mitigating risks associated with supply chain disruptions and achieving its objectives related to service quality and consistency, ultimately leading to enhanced organizational success.

### **5.3.3. Objective 3 Recommendation**

“To enhance the effectiveness of procurement policies in supplier selection,” several key recommendations have been identified. Based on the findings of this study, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) must develop and implement clear, consistent, and regularly reviewed procurement policies, establish effective supplier evaluation criteria, and foster collaborative relationships with suppliers. The recommendations outline strategic actions for practice and policy improvements, to optimize supplier selection, ensure alignment with organizational objectives, and promote mutually beneficial relationships with suppliers.

- Develop and implement clear, consistent procurement policies by establishing a centralized policy manual, ensuring accessibility and transparency, and conducting a regular review and update of policies. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) should ensure that the policy manual is reviewed and updated annually or before the annual review is due. Procurement policies, competitive bidding, negotiation, and supplier relationship management can positively impact organisational performance (Emmanuel, et al., 2021).
- Establish effective supplier evaluation criteria: adopt a balanced scorecard to measure performance, consider quality, cost, delivery, and service, and ensure criteria alignment with organizational objectives. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) can develop a supplier evaluation framework with weighted criteria, including quality (%), cost (%), and delivery (%), ensuring that performance is measured.
- Foster collaborative relationships with suppliers: By conducting regular communication meetings with joint planning and goal-setting, collaborative problem-solving with suppliers. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) can establish quarterly business review meetings with key suppliers to discuss performance and opportunities.

- Review and revise procurement policies regularly: Establish a policy review committee, ensure stakeholder engagement, and incorporate best practices. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) should establish a procurement policy review committee and conduct bi-annually meetings to review and revise the policies.
- Establish standards for supplier evaluation: By developing evaluation frameworks, ensuring consistency, and communicating standards to suppliers. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) should formulate a standardized supplier evaluation framework communicated to all suppliers.
- Develop guidelines for supplier development by providing training and support to suppliers, encouraging capacity building of suppliers in the organization, and fostering long-term supplier relationships. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) can launch a supplier development program and provide training and mentorship to local suppliers. Supporting local suppliers includes deliberate procurement of goods and services from local suppliers with competitive costs (Tshabalala, 2021).

The recommendations will enhance procurement efficiency, transparency, and accountability, ultimately contributing to UKZN's operational success.

#### **5.3.4. Objective 4 Recommendation**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) faces significant challenges in its supplier management processes, hindering its ability to establish a competitive advantage. The study recommends strategic improvements to enhance supplier management efficiency, effectiveness, and relationships. The following five recommendations are proposed: Develop a centralized supplier management system; Implement automated supplier database management; Establish performance tracking and evaluation metrics; Foster collaborative partnerships with suppliers; Integrate technology-enabled supplier engagement platforms.

- Develop a centralized supplier management system by consolidating supplier information and processes, ensuring accessibility, transparency, and accountability, and enhancing coordination and control. This can be achieved by implementing a cloud-based supplier management platform to centralize supplier data and streamline communication
- Implement automated supplier database management: Utilizing technology for accurate and up-to-date supplier information, reducing manual errors and improving data integrity, enhancing supplier selection and management. This can be achieved by utilizing supplier information management (SIM) software to automate supplier data management.
- Establish performance tracking and evaluation metrics by developing key performance indicators (KPIs) for supplier evaluation, regularly monitoring and assessing supplier performance, Inform supplier selection and retention decisions. Examples of tracking supplier

performance using KPIs: delivery timeline (95% on-time delivery), quality standards (98% defect-free products), communication responsiveness (98% defect-free products), and communication responsiveness (90% response rate within 24 hours).

- Foster collaborative partnerships with suppliers by developing strategic relationships with key suppliers, encouraging knowledge sharing and best practices, and enhancing innovation and service delivery. This can be achieved by establishing quarterly business review meetings with top suppliers to discuss performance, opportunities, and collaborative initiatives.
- Integrate technology-enabled supplier engagement platforms: When leveraging digital platforms for communication and collaboration, enhancing responsiveness and issue resolutions, and improving supplier relationships and performance. For example, a supplier portal for real-time communication, document sharing, and issue tracking. Adopting cloud-based platforms and advanced analytics transforms supplier collaboration and performance, enhancing efficiency, transparency, and strategic alignment in the supply chains (Hugo, 2024).

These recommendations are designed to address the challenges identified in the study, aligning with best practices and industry benchmarks. The recommendations will enhance UKZN's supplier management capabilities, driving organizational success and competitiveness.

#### **5.4. Contribution to the body of knowledge**

This study contributes to the academic body of knowledge in four significant ways:

**Theoretical Contribution:** the study provides new insights into supplier management and performance evaluation, enhancing understanding of supplier relationship management, performance evaluation criteria, quality management, and procurement policy development.

**Practical Contribution:** the study offers actionable recommendations for the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's (UKZN's) supplier management, including developing centralized supplier management systems, implementing automated supplier database management, and establishing performance tracking and evaluation metrics, fostering collaborative partnerships with suppliers.

**Policy Contribution:** The study informs procurement policy development for the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), highlighting the importance of clear and consistent policies, the need for regular policy review and revision, the role of evaluation standards in supplier selection

**Interdisciplinary Contribution:** The study bridges gaps between - supply chain management, organizational performance, procurement policy, and quality management.

By contributing to the academic body of knowledge, this study advances the understanding of effective supplier management practices, informing theory and practice in the field.

## **5.5. Managerial implications of the study**

The study's findings have been aligned with six departments to ensure effective supplier management:

- **Internal Audit:** The role will involve conducting regular audits, evaluating supplier management, and identifying risks.
- **Procurement:** Develop strategic plans, establish quality standards, evaluate suppliers, and maintain an automated centralized database system.
- **Internal Communication Services (IT):** Implement digital platforms, enhance data analytics, and provide system support to the automated centralized database.
- **Infrastructure and Maintenance:** Ensure quality standards, collaborate with procurement, and develop maintenance strategies.
- **Legal Services:** Review policies and contracts, provide legal guidance on contracts and partnerships, and develop risk management strategies.
- **Executive Management:** For implementation, management should Provide strategic direction, ensure alignment, oversee implementation, and allocate resources.
- **Cross-Functional Collaboration:** Establish a cross-functional team to drive the strategy, foster inter-departmental collaboration, ensure communication and information sharing, and develop integrated solutions

The organization can ensure effective supplier management, improve procurement processes, and achieve strategic objectives by aligning managerial implications with departments.

## **5.6. Future-related studies**

While this study contributes to understanding supplier performance evaluation, it has several limitations. These limitations include the single-case study design, which focuses on one educational institution (UKZN), and a limited sample size that excludes key stakeholders, such as students and academic heads, and only considers procurement role players. Future studies should consider multiple case studies involving various universities and diverse stakeholder perspectives, such as heads of faculties and students. Future Research studies can include investigating the impact of supplier development programs, analysing the effectiveness of performance measurement tools, and examining the relationship between supplier relationships and service quality.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the critical role of supplier performance management in achieving value for money, customer satisfaction, and organizational competitiveness at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The findings highlight the importance of effective supplier evaluation, procurement policy development, and supplier relationship management in optimizing procurement processes. The study's recommendations provide a roadmap for improving supplier performance

management practices at UKZN, emphasizing the need for a centralized supplier management system, automated supplier database management, and performance tracking and evaluation metrics. The study's contributions to the body of knowledge include a profound understanding of supplier performance management in the public sector, particularly in higher education institutions. The Research informs theory and practice, providing insights into the complexities of supplier relationships and procurement processes. The findings and recommendations have implications for policymakers, procurement practitioners, and scholars, highlighting the strategic importance of supplier performance management in achieving organizational goals. This study underscores the need for a proactive and strategic approach to supplier performance management, prioritising collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. By adopting these strategies, UKZN can enhance its procurement processes, achieve value for money, and maintain a competitive advantage in the higher education sector. Future Research should continue to explore the intricacies of supplier performance management, examining the impact of emerging trends and technologies on procurement practices and organizational success.

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## ANNEXURE A

### DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

#### DURATION OF THE INTERVIEW: 45 MINUTES

Student Name: Khumbuzile Kunene (student number 222563057)

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Number \_\_\_\_\_

**PROJECT TITLE:** The importance of assessing supplier performance to achieve value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu Natal

The study aims to determine the importance of assessing supplier performance to achieve value for money and customer satisfaction at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

#### **The research objectives include:**

- 1.3.1. To identify the impact of supplier's performance focusing on the quality of service provided to the University.
- 1.3.2. To evaluate service quality and consistency components.
- 1.3.3. To investigate the effectiveness of current procurement policies in the appointment of a suitable supplier.
- 1.3.4. To assess the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage through effective selection and performance management processes in the university.

#### **The questions identified to guide the study were identified as follows:**

- 1.4.1. What is the impact of supplier performance on achieving customer satisfaction in the university in terms of service quality components?
- 1.4.2. What are the challenges of supplier performance on components of service quality and consistency in the university?
- 1.4.3. How efficient are the current procurement policies in the selection of suitable suppliers?
- 1.4.4. How does the supplier contribute to establishing a competitive advantage for the university?

(Please tick with X in the appropriate box)

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Age in years	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	70-80	80-90
Gender	Male			Female		
Race	African	Indian	Colored	White		
Educational background	Senior Certificate	Diploma	Degree	Honours	Masters	PHD
Job level	Practitioner	Supervisor	Middle Management	Senior management	Executive management	
Procurement role. Direct/ Indirect	Department/ Faculty		Service length at UKZN			

**SECTION B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE KWAZULU NATAL UNIVERSITY**

1. To identify the Impact of supplier’s performance, focusing on the quality of service provided to the University.

1.1. In your opinion, how can the institution improve supplier performance management?

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 .....  
 .....

1.2. What specific metrics KPIs do you think are most important for evaluating supplier performance?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

2. To evaluate the service quality and consistency components.

2.1. In your opinion, which factors should be considered when selecting a supplier?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

2.2. In your opinion, which area of the supplier selection process should be improved?

.....  
.....  
.....

3. To investigate the effectiveness of current procurement policies in the appointment of a suitable supplier

3.1. In your opinion, do you think the current policies assist with the selection of the most suitable supplier?

.....  
.....  
.....

3.2. How do you think the university's procurement policies can be improved to better align with supplier performance expectations?

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.....

4. To assess the supplier's contribution to establishing a competitive advantage for the organization through performance.

4.1. In your opinion, do you think the current supplier base is assisting the University to gain a competitive advantage in the industry?

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.....  
.....

4.2. Can you describe any successful initiatives or strategies the university has implemented to foster innovation or collaboration with suppliers?

.....  
.....  
.....

## ANNEXURE: B



### Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

My name is **Khumbuzile Zazile Kunene (222057563)**. I am a Masters candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Business Westville Campus. The title of my research is: **The Importance of Supplier Performance to achieve value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu Natal**. The aim of the study is to explore the relationship between the competitive advantage of UKZN and the supplier performance focusing on the end user's perceptions of value for money to shape the procurement policies. I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The interview will take about (*how long?*).
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed of by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures)

I can be contacted at: the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville Campus, Durban. Email [kunenek@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:kunenek@ukzn.ac.za) Cell: [REDACTED]

My supervisor is Dr T Ngwenya who is located at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership Westville Campus, Durban of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email [ngwenyat2@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ngwenyat2@ukzn.ac.za) Phone number: 031 260 9111

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows: Ms Phumelele Ximba, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za), Phone number +27312603587.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

## DECLARATION

I..... *(full names of participant)* hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

## ANNEXURE: C



26 August 2024

**Khumbuzile Zazile Kunene (222057563)**  
Grad School of Bus & Leadership  
Westville Campus

Dear KZ Kunene,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007368/2024

Project title: The importance of assessing supplier performance to achieve value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 12 July 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

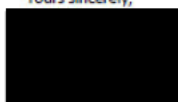
Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 26 August 2025.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)**  
/nng

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## ANNEXURE D



22 June 2024

Khumbuzile Kunene (SN 222057563)  
Graduate School of Business and Leadership  
College of Law and Management Studies  
Westville Campus UKZN  
Email: [222057563@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:222057563@stu.ukzn.ac.za) [kunenek@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:kunenek@ukzn.ac.za) [ngwenyat2@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ngwenyat2@ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Khumbuzile

### RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"The importance of assessing supplier performance to achieve value for money and satisfied customers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal."*

It is noted that you will be proceeding as follows:

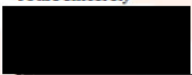
- Requesting various internal role players to participate in a semi-structured interview, and
- Gathering secondary data from various Regulatory Documents and / or reports generated for and/or during the procurement process.

Please ensure that the following appears on your request to interview and / or notice/ interview questionnaire:

- The Ethical clearance number;
- The title and details of the research & the researcher and supervisors name;
- A Consent form attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- Gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

  
Dr K Cleland  
Registrar

### Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa  
Telephones: +27 1031 260 7971 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za) Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

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