



## Reinventing acquisition process of print books in university libraries

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The paper aims to find the best practices of print book procurement in select central university libraries in northern India, including getting maximum discounts and supply of ordered books, and empanelling vendors. Through online questionnaires, selected libraries' book procurement procedures have been surveyed. Further, acquisition staff were consulted, and websites were accessed to learn book procurement procedures at central universities. Data collected from select seven university libraries were recorded in Microsoft Excel worksheets, aggregated, and summarized to create consolidated datasets for analysis. It is found that five universities buy books from empanelled vendors by setting minimum and maximum discount rates on print books. Vendors are increasingly being asked for discount quotes through expressions of interest. University libraries don't seem to buy books through tendering process or through government e-market place (GeM).

**Keywords:** Print books; University library; Acquisitions; Collection development

### Introduction

India has 1043 universities where 15,03,156 teachers teach 3,85,36,359 students<sup>1</sup>. As per the UGC annual report 2020-21, 94% of central universities in India have library facility<sup>2</sup>. The libraries of central universities in India provide resources and support for teaching, learning, and research to the academic fraternity. The foundations of the libraries are laid down by their rich and balanced collection<sup>3</sup>. These libraries spend millions of rupees per year on books and magazines. To plan the spending huge sums of money on books and journals, a library committee is constituted in every academic library. Such committees comprise of professors and experts to represent various departments. They use a set procurement procedure, but not all have a print resources acquisition policy.

This study identifies procurement practices in academic libraries of central universities in north India. The study examines the process of selecting/empanelling vendors, basic empanelment requirements, library financial benefits, procurement hurdles, possibility of book procurement through Government e-Market place (GeM) and book supply. The study, through survey, librarians' interviews, and accessing university libraries' websites, attempts to trace the best practices on procurement procedures adopted by the libraries.

### Review of literature

Reading habits affect resource demand<sup>4</sup>. Print books used to be the dominant library collection<sup>5,6</sup>. Libraries are expected to have a collection development policy, patterns, and processes for smooth procurement<sup>7</sup>. From the library's perspective, these book selection principles "the best books to the largest number at the least cost' and 'right book to the right reader at the right time'" given by Dewey<sup>8</sup> and Drury<sup>9</sup> respectively need to be followed. However, it's difficult to deliver the right book at right time at fair price but technological innovations like e-books and ease of sharing them can help in this scenario.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes when the budget is available, the required books are not available in the market. This affects quality of library collection. The library staff lacks expertise in all subjects, so their participation in book selection is ineffective<sup>7</sup>. Insufficient involvement of users, subject experts, and faculties hamper book selection. In most Indian universities, book purchases are based on the recommendations and approval of head of department, library committee and the competent authority<sup>7</sup>.

Library staff, library committees, and other users select documents for university libraries. The faculty selects books from book reviews available online, lists of other institutions' new book acquisitions, publishers' ads (catalogues, flyers, newsletters, etc.),

publishers' and bookstores' newsletters<sup>10</sup>. After half a year, funds are allocated, and the budget expires if not spent. Academic institutions are required to follow a competitive procurement process, with different approaches depending on the expectations or requirements of the academic community<sup>11</sup>.

A method of floating open expression of interest for vendors to supply print book to libraries on fixed terms & conditions is a good method for librarians. Vendors applying to the expression of interest have links with publishers to get books supplied<sup>12</sup>. Various control mechanisms could be applied to vendors to check their performance, such as service comparison, monitoring, and delivery time to get value for money, quality services, and faster delivery<sup>13</sup>.

Both libraries and vendors need each other<sup>14</sup>. The agreement on discount offered by vendors be made clear before releasing any order and to avoid any difficult consequences later<sup>15</sup>. It will help vendors to wholeheartedly work for organization. The previous research discussed the procurement procedure, principles of selection, budget etc. but discount rates, vendor empanelment and complete delivery techniques have not been widely discussed by researchers. The present study will explore empanelment procedure of vendors and library expectations like maximum discount and delivery by surveying these components of book procurement procedure in select university libraries.

### Objective of the study

- To understand book procurement procedure particularly buying print books, analysing, and recommending a procurement procedure, empanelling book vendors, getting maximum discount and supply of books in selected north Indian university libraries.

### Methods

Existing best practices of book procurement procedures were identified from literature. Further, online questionnaire survey was carried out to collate best practices in print book procurement of seven

selected libraries of central universities in north India (Table 1).

MS Excel was used to record data from seven university libraries. Further, the data of each university is aggregated and summarized by creating consolidated datasets like agencies/vendors for procuring books, method of book purchasing, mode of empanelment, processing fee, setting discount rates, setting an upper limit of the amount of purchase order (PO) to a particular vendor, selecting a vendor to release PO from empanelled vendors; setting best terms and conditions of purchase order i.e. preferred mode of book, preference of edition, considering edition and reprint same and conversion rate for foreign currency are presented.

Acquisition staffs in the different universities were consulted through Google Meet to learn the book procurement procedures at these universities. The acquisition staffs were asked open-ended questions about book procurement. Procedures at various universities were also obtained from their websites.

### Analysis and findings

The data have been analysed and presented in Tables 2 and 3. The Table 2 presents the outcomes of analysed data regarding book procurement procedures in each undertaken central university whereas Table 3 displays book procurement procedures undertaken by the central universities.

It is seen that four of the seven universities buy books from vendors and three universities from both vendors and publishers. It illustrates that publishers alone aren't given purchase orders, but book vendors are needed to procure books. Further, the present study found that six universities release purchase orders to empanelled vendors and one university to non-empanelled vendors. In university libraries, books are not procured through tender. Furthermore, four academic institutions still use offline mode to empanel vendors, while two universities use the online form. In this case, one university does not empanel vendors. Whereas four university libraries

Table 1 — Respondent universities

Sl. no.	University	Location	University Website
1	Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India	<a href="https://www.bbau.ac.in/">https://www.bbau.ac.in/</a>
2	Central University of Haryana	Mahendergarh, Haryana, India	<a href="https://www.cuh.ac.in/">https://www.cuh.ac.in/</a>
3	Central University of Jammu	Jammu, India	<a href="https://www.cujammu.ac.in/">https://www.cujammu.ac.in/</a>
4	Central University of Kashmir	Kashmir, India	<a href="https://www.cukashmir.ac.in/">https://www.cukashmir.ac.in/</a>
5	Central University of Rajasthan	Ajmer, Rajasthan, India	<a href="https://www.curaj.ac.in/">https://www.curaj.ac.in/</a>
6	Jawaharlal Nehru University	New Delhi, India	<a href="https://www.jnu.ac.in/">https://www.jnu.ac.in/</a>
7	University of Delhi	New Delhi, India	<a href="http://www.du.ac.in/">http://www.du.ac.in/</a>

Table 2 — Book procurement procedures in each undertaken central university

University Name Processes	Category/Options	BBAU	CUH	CUJ	CUK	CURAJ	JNU	DU
Agency for procuring books	Vendors & publishers	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	-	-
	Book vendors	-	Y	-	-	-	Y	Y
Method of book purchasing	Empanelled vendors	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y
	Non empanelled vendors	-	-	-	-	-	Y	-
Mode of empanelment of book vendors	Physical form	Y	-	Y	Y	-	NA	Y
	Online mode	-	Y	-	-	Y	-	-
Processing fee for empanelment	Yes	Y	-	Y	Y	-	-	Y
	No	-	N	-	-	N	N	-
Duration of empanelment	1 year	-	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y
	2 years	Y	-	-	Y	-	-	-
	3 years	-	-	Y	-	-	-	-
Setting discount rates	Set min. & max. discount	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y	-
	Through EoI	-	Y	Y	-	-	-	Y
Setting upper limit of amount of supply order	Yes	Y	Y	-	-	-	-	-
	No	-	-	N	N	N	N	N
Preferred type/mode of book	Paperback	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Hardbound	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Consideration of edition & reprint same	Yes	-	Y	-	-	Y	Y	Y
	No	N	-	N	N	-	-	-
Selecting vendor for supply order	General vendor	Y	-	Y	-	Y	-	-
	Subject specific vendor	-	Y	-	Y	-	Y	Y
Conversion rate for foreign currency	RBI rate	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	-	-
	GOC rate	-	-	-	Y	-	Y	Y

(Note: BBAU- Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow; CUH- Central University of Haryana; CUJammu - Central University of Jammu, Jammu; CUK - Central University of Kashmir, Kashmir; CURAJ- Central University of Rajasthan, Ajmer; JNU - Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; DU - University of Delhi, New Delhi. EoI - Expression of Interest; GOC – Goods Office Committee; RBI – Reserve Bank of India; Y- Yes; N- No.; NA – Not applicable;)

charge book vendors a fee for EoI application to apply for empanelment, while the remaining two universities do it for free.

Book vendors must submit the documents like the undertaking of not being banned; firm registration certificate; ID card with photo and address; list of publishers represented by the firm; list of book clients; firm PAN card; vendor profile performa; and university-signed terms and conditions etc. to complete the empanelment. As far as the empanelment period is concerned, four universities empanelled vendors for one year, two universities for two years, and the remaining one university for three years.

Libraries get discounts and there are various methods to gain maximum discounts on print books. The study found that four university libraries set minimum and maximum discount rates on print books sold by suppliers. Three universities acquired discount quotations from vendors through an expression of interest.

Five university libraries do not have an upper limit and are free to order to a single vendor. But two universities have set a limit. When setting discount categories and purchase order terms and conditions,

four of the seven libraries consider edition of the books. Four university libraries release supply orders to vendors with subject competence, and the others to general vendors. Six of the seven university libraries prefer cheaper paperback over hardbound.

To set foreign currency conversion rates, four libraries prefer the main regulatory body of banks, Reserve Bank of India in case of India and three libraries prefer Good Offices Committee (an agency of vendors/publishers in India to set conversion rates every month) that avoid foreign currency payment hurdles. It's hard for libraries to acquire most of the ordered print books from vendors, especially at the end of the fiscal year when academic institutions strive to spend their budget and suppliers run out of stock of books. It also applies because vendors don't sell single or double copies where they make less profit.

Academic libraries procure books from publishers and suppliers, so picking one out of these two is hard. For example, an academic library has more than 50 departments, and may get recommendations of books published by more than 70 publishers. Choosing publishers over vendors for supplying books is tough

Table 3 — Book procurement procedures undertaken by central universities

Processes	Category/Options	Number of Universities
Agency of procuring books	Vendors & publishers	4
	Book vendors	3
Method of book purchasing	Empanelled vendors	6
	Non empanelled vendors	1
Mode of empanelment of book vendors	Physical form	4
	Online mode	2
	NA	1
Processing fee for empanelment	Yes	4
	No	3
Duration of empanelment	1 year	4
	2 years	2
	3 years	1
Setting discount rates	Set min. & max. discount	4
	Through EoI	3
Setting upper limit of amount of supply order	Yes	2
	No	5
Preferred type/mode of book	Paperback	7
	Hardbound	0
Consideration of edition & reprint same	Yes	4
	No	3
Selecting vendor for supply order	General vendor	3
	Subject-specific vendor	4
Conversion rate for foreign currency	RBI rate	4
	GOC rate	3

(Note: EoI - Expression of Interest; GOC – Goods Office Committee; RBI – Reserve Bank of India)

and librarians choose vendors. Further, publishers avoid direct supply to university libraries, and if they do so, then they provide less discount rate than vendors. According to the output of this study as well, university libraries prefer purchasing books from vendors, not publishers. Normally, vendors are empanelled for a defined term on certain terms and conditions to supply print books in maximum numbers against a purchase order. Through an expression of interest, libraries invite vendors to provide their best discount rates.

### Conclusions

Vendors are preferred over publishers to procure books among the participating universities. In addition, tendering for book supply is not done in participating university libraries because it is not practicable and will delay book acquisition process. However, the procurement of books through government e-market place (GeM) is becoming a possibility nowadays for the central government-funded universities but it is a violation of general finance rule no. 143, which says that books are not goods and could not be tendered. Interestingly, a system of fixing the highest discount

rates by book vendors and publishers through an expression of interest (EoI) seems more adequate. However, most university libraries set minimum and maximum discount rates on print books to be supplied by empanelled vendors, while three universities get maximum discount quotes through an expression of interest from vendors.

Sending book lists to empanelled vendors to know who can quote maximum discount rate, and on comparing those quotes may result in maximum discount giving vendor and would receive supply order. Due to short period for book procurement and the necessity of quick utilization of funds, quality suffers, and to overcome this problem, libraries need to be ready well in advance by preparing a books list, checking availability with vendors, asking for a list of available books in their stock, taking early approvals, contacting publishers, involving faculty in the process, early vendor empanelment, supply orders to subject-specific empanelled vendors as per policy, and timely processing of books. Mutual understanding between libraries and vendors while keeping rules and regulations in mind would be ideal for a functional book procurement procedure.

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