SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

THE ROLE OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN IMPROVING SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE IN RETAIL PHARMACIES IN LUSAKA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

Dissertation Presented to The School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Lusaka as Partial Fulfillment for Master of Science in Procurement, Logistics and Supply Chain

BY

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MSCPLSM22215876

DECLARATION SHEET

The investigator declares that the objective of this study is to measure the role of supplier relationship management in improving supply chain performance in retail pharmacies in Lusaka district, Zambia.

I the principal investigator declare that the proposal is prepared by my-self (data collector), is trained and will do as per the standards of ethical principles.

Consent forms will be filled after oral consent of patients to be interviewed.

Name of the principal investigators; MWEEMBE SIBALELA

APPROVAL OF THE ADVISOR

Name of advisor: DR.S.SIKOMBE **Date**. 1.19.24 **Signature** 

DEDICATION

My parents are the ones I want to dedicate this thesis to as they have been a constant source of support and encouragement during my academic journey. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to myself for providing me support, hard work and inspiration. Finally, I want to thank all those who took part in this research for your positive belief in me.

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ABSTRACT

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is pivotal in uplifting the supply chain performance for retail pharmacies in and around Lusaka, as it primarily is. The cornerstone of this advancement is the sturdy connection pharmacies maintain with their suppliers. This link is further developed by means of successful communication, collaboration, risk management, cost savings, and a generally rolling supply chain system. This study particularly deals with the importance of a refined SRM strategy through real-life instances, and meticulous research collaboration and industry reports have been made use of. To assess the extent of supplier relationship management's impact on the supply chain performance of Lusaka province's retail pharmacies in Zambia**.** The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to find out the role of supplier relationship management in enhancing the supply chain performance of retail pharmacies in the Lusaka district, Zambia. The sample consisted of 50 retail pharmacies located in Lusaka, which were all officially registered in Zambia. The researchers gathered data, with quantitative data being processed through descriptive statistics, which included percentage distributions, means, and frequency counts. Moreover, the relationship between dependent and independent variables was depicted through Multiple Regression Analysis. The results showed that the major factor was resilient shipping in promoting the collaboration and performance of retail pharmacies and their suppliers across Lusaka. Furthermore, the research also confirmed that the honest strengthening of supplier collaboration significantly brings about retail pharmacies' quantitative change in the Lusaka district.

Key Words: supplier, relationship, supply chain, performance, retail, pharmacy.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

1. SRM- Supplier Relationship Management
2. SCM- Supply Chain Management
3. KPI - Key Performance Indicator
4. CRM- Customer Relationship Management
5. JIT- Just-In-Time
6. LSP - Logistics Service Provider
7. 3PL - Third-Party Logistics
8. TQM - Total Quality Management
9. ICT- Information and Communication Technology
10. GDP - Good Distribution Practice
11. GMP- Good Manufacturing Practice
12. MOQ- Minimum Order Quantity
13. SLA - Service Level Agreement
14. VMI - Vend or-Managed Inventory
15. SKU- Stock Keeping Unit
16. SCOR- Supply Chain Operations Reference model
17. ISO - International Organization for Standardization
18. QC - Quality Control
19. QA – Quality Assuarance

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Efficient supply chain management is essential for ensuring the availability of life-saving medications, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Zambia. Retail pharmacies play a critical role in providing healthcare services, yet many face persistent challenges related to stockouts, supplier inefficiencies, and regulatory constraints. Effective Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach to improving supply chain performance, fostering collaboration, and enhancing operational efficiency.

Despite the growing global emphasis on SRM, retail pharmacies in Lusaka continue to experience supply chain disruptions that hinder timely access to essential medicines. Limited supplier collaboration, inadequate communication, and inefficient inventory management contribute to these challenges, affecting both business sustainability and patient health outcomes.

The supplier relationship management (SRM) format for the retail pharmacy sector in Lusaka is the key focus of the inquiry. The subject of the creation of confidence between suppliers and customer involvement in the pharmacy sector, through demand-reduction stocking as a way to improve the supply chain, is dealt with through it. As for relationship management, there is a stress on supplier co-opting, trust skill development training, and the technology path, which are to be eased into the inventory management system of the pharmacies for best results.

This study examines the impact of SRM on supply chain performance in Lusaka's retail pharmacies, identifying key barriers and opportunities for improvement.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The pharmaceutical sector in Zambia operates within a complex supply chain influenced by multiple stakeholders, including regulatory bodies, suppliers, and healthcare providers. The Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority (ZAMRA) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) oversee pharmaceutical supply chains, ensuring compliance with national guidelines. However, supply chain inefficiencies, particularly in retail pharmacies, remain a pressing concern.

One of the key challenges in Lusaka is the high demand for chronic disease medications, which often outstrips supply due to reliance on foreign suppliers, unpredictable lead times, and inadequate supplier evaluation mechanisms. Poor SRM practices—such as the absence of formal contracts, lack of supplier performance assessments, and minimal use of technology—exacerbate these issues. Strengthening SRM could enhance supply chain efficiency by improving supplier reliability, reducing stockouts, and streamlining procurement processes.

Existing research has extensively examined SRM in developed economies, demonstrating its benefits in optimizing supply chain operations. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how SRM can be effectively implemented in Zambia's pharmaceutical sector, particularly in retail pharmacies. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the role of SRM in improving supply chain performance, offering insights for both practitioners and policymakers.

1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING PHARMACEUTICALS IN ZAMBIA

The pharmaceutical sector in Zambia is regulated by a strictly structured regulatory arrangement articulated to ensure that every medicine and health care product passes through the required high standards which guarantee their safety, efficacy, and quality. This framework is implemented by a number of key institutions, with the Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority (ZAMRA) being the main player.

1.2.1 ZAMBIA MEDICINES REGULATORY AUTHORITY (ZAMRA)

ZAMRA, as regulated by the Medicines and Allied Substances Act of 2013, was brought to being and has been given the mandate to regulate the production, importation,

distribution, and sale of medicines and medicinal substances in Zambia. ZAMRA's jurisdiction includes the registration of pharmaceutical products, pharmacy and wholesaler licensing, and the enforcement of the standards that concern the storage, distribution, and sale of medicines (Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority, 2022). ZAMRA's role is of paramount importance in such a way that all the drugs on the Zambian market are totally safe for consumption as well as in compliance with the international standard of quality. The government is checking everything all right because they are going to pharmacies constantly to ensure they are following all the polite rules. Not being in compliance will lead to disciplinary measures such as penalties, fines, suspension of operations, or licenses being cancelled.

1.2.2 THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH (MOH).

The Ministry of Health is responsible for the overall management of the healthcare system in Zambia, including the regulation of healthcare providers and the implementation of public health policies. The MoH works closely with ZAMRA to ensure that the pharmaceutical supply chain operates effectively and that public health objectives are met. The MoH also plays a role in the procurement of medicines for public health facilities, which often sets the tone for procurement practices in the private sector (Ministry of Health, 2023)

The Ministry's involvement in the pharmaceutical sector extends to the regulation of pricing and the monitoring of the availability of essential medicines. This is particularly important in Lusaka, where the demand for medicines can fluctuate significantly, and ensuring a steady supply is crucial to public health.

1.2.3 THE PHARMACEUTICAL AND ALLIED PRODUCTS ACT

The foundational law for the governance of the pharmaceutical sector in Zambia is The Pharmaceutical and Allied Products Act. The act particularly provides for the terms and conditions of the registration and licensing of pharmaceutical products and retail pharmacies, storage and distribution norms, and penalties for non-compliance. The public health act is a parasol to the public by only allowing secure and effective medicines to be in the market (Government of Zambia, 2020). The primary passage of the act is that all the pharmaceutical products require pre-registration with ZAMRA before entering the

Zambian market. The course of this registration is the initial step for the product to be endorsed by respective authorities to be declared safe for human consumption and effective. Additionally, it should have passed the quality test of high quality. It is a must for pharmacies to check the list of registered medicines above the ZAMRA standards before stocking them.

1.2.3 COMPLIANCE AND CHALLENGES

For the proper functioning of retail drug stores in Lusaka, adherence to the regulatory framework is exceedingly critical. Being a part of this regulatory system can be a challenge for small independent pharmacies most of the time. ZAMRA's product registration, the obtaining of licenses, and the meeting of storage and distribution standards are the major stumbling blocks because they take long and cost a lot. Furthermore, the regulatory environment is constantly restless, so pharmacies need to interface with new regulations arranged ahead of time for amendments to practices. Pharmaceutical counter hits and deviates market at Lusaka have had an effect on these challenges, one of which was the pharmacy's need to present full compliance with the regulations while struggling to be price competitive and their product availability. The recklessness in adherence to the regulations might cause harsh penalties, thus affecting retail pharmacy operations negatively. Supplier Relationship Management and the retail pharmacy chain In Lusaka, the Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is a core requirement for the success of retail pharmacies through its input on the efficiency and reliability of the supply chains. SRM achievements could be the very reasons for the pharmacy's staying with a stock, cost controlling, and the availability of legally correct products.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP

Management of supplier relationships has the supply chain as its first beneficiary. By means of close cooperation with suppliers, retail pharmacies can do more reliable and predictable business. In Lusaka with the bigger amount of pharmaceutical products sought, it is even more essential to deliver them consistently. The pharmacies, through the SRM, are able to contract suppliers under better terms, like a lowered price and more frequent deliveries, and they also gain an overall flexible payment schedule. Additionally, these businesses establish better channels of communication and joint cooperation,

which, in turn, allow pharmacies to foresee and effectively deal with supply chain disruptions (Kang & Huston, 2020).

1.3.1 Increased Product Availability: Pharmaceutical retail outlets can guarantee a more stable and reliable drug supply if they maintain good customer-supplier relationships. This tends to be crucial in Lusaka, where the supply and demand curve can vary widely due to disturbing factors like the outbreak of a disease or seasonal variations in the prevalence of health problems.

1.3.2 Cost Control Measures: Cost control is yet another significant component of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM). The pharmacy outlets in Lusaka operate in an adverse trading environment. The pharmacies can attract customers and retain them through proper calculation of prices. Proper SRM can help pharmacies reduce costs by getting better prices from the suppliers, cutting down procurement costs, and better control of stock to avoid wastage. For instance, vendors who keep strong ties with distributors might be allowed to buy stock in a lump at reduced rates or trade for longer credit terms, which could be of immense help in cash management. Moreover, through effective SRM, pharmacies can also mitigate the costs of out-of-stock or overstock conditions by enhancing demand forecasting and inventory management. In this way, the pharmacies might also get the opportunity to purchase only high-quality, ZAMRA-certified supplies. In order to maintain these standards, retail pharmacies need the help of effective SRM strategies, for example, establishing good communication with suppliers who help them get registered products from quality manufacturers that conform to the specifications of ZAMRA.

Suppliers are instrumental in ensuring that retail pharmacies fulfil regulatory demand. Such pharmaceuticals working in partnership with quality-partnered suppliers can convince buyers that the products they release to the market are safe and efficient. The situation is even more crucial in Zambia, where the laws governing this industry are harsh, and the possible non-compliance consequences are huge. Retailers that introduce SRM can also benefit from the help of their suppliers in the issues of regulation. Suppliers who are experts on the laws in Zambia can give them essential guidance on compliance

matters which help the pharmacies dodge penalties and keep their licenses intact (Chin & Goh, 2019).

1.3.3 Risk Management: Along the line of pharmacy supplies, different risks exist, such as the supply cutoff, quality issues, and regulatory changes. Good supplier relationships, which result from SRM, are a way for retail pharmacies to combat these risks more effectively by receiving prompt support and information from suppliers whom they trust. A variety of dangers, such as product supply disruptions, commodity recalls, and quality issues, plague the pharmaceutical supply chain.

As it is, retail pharmacies are able to deal even more efficiently with these issues through effective SRM, which goes hand in hand with forming reliable collaboration networks with trustworthy suppliers who are willing to give their services on time and help in case of a calamity. For instance, due to a much tighter vendor relationship, a pharmacy in short supply would likely be able to acquire additional supplies from an alternative company much faster than another outlet, which does not have such a solid foundation. Also, in the event of a product recall, pharmacies that have adopted SRM along with their trading partners can together assure the speedy and efficient removal of the afflicted goods from the shelves.

1.3.4 Innovation and Competitive Advantage: Innovation and Competitive Advantage: Ultimately, Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) can function as a source of innovation and also provide retail pharmacies a competitive advantage. Apart from the collaborative relationships with suppliers, one of the significant sources of information is the novelty of products, technologies and improvisation of market insights that set pharmacies apart from their competitors. Retail suppliers can be a powerful instrument of innovation for local pharmacies. By engaging in collaborative relationships with suppliers, pharmacies can get access to the latest products, technologies, and market insights that can provide them a competitive edge in their business. Good supplier relationships can lead to cost savings through better pricing, bulk purchasing, and reduced transaction costs.

Pharmacies that collaborate with their suppliers are usually the ones who can negotiate more favourable terms and thereby cut down their procurement costs, which results in a

higher profit margin. As an illustration, a pharmacy that has excellent vendor partnerships might be among the early ones to provide clients with new or unique items, thus gaining a higher advantage in the marketplace. Moreover, suppliers can give valuable information about market trends and customer preferences, thereby helping pharmacies to adapt their product mix better to the needs of their clients (Ruggeri & Adams, 2021).To summarize, supplier relationship management (SRM) has a pivotal role in improving the supply chain performance of retail pharmacies in the Lusaka District. By strengthening the relationships with their suppliers, pharmacies can improve the supply chain by enhancing the chain efficiency, managing costs, ensuring regulatory compliance, mitigating risks, and having a competitive advantage in the market. However, in order to get those benefits, it is necessary to clearly understand the regulatory environment and the ability to deal with the challenges arising from managing suppliers in a constantly changing and competitive market.

1.4 CHALLENGES IN SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Supplier relationship management is difficult in the pharmaceutical sector despite its merits. In Lusaka, retail pharmacies deal with some of the most significant difficulties as follows:

1.4.1 Supplier Reliability: Often times securing and maintaining a reliable delivery of medicines can be the most challenging task in a market with limited suppliers or when suppliers are in their own troubles with supply chain management. For this reason, they might have to face the problems of stockouts, delays, and additional expenses.

1.4.2 Quality Control: The pharmaceutical industry is a high standard sector and thus the quality is an obligation to maintain it. Retail pharmacies must be careful to collaborate with suppliers to ensure that all the items to be sold on the market are in compliance with the setting regulations and are free from health risks. Therefore, suppliers are required to ensure that they follow strict quality control procedures and conduct ongoing assessments to monitor their performance.

1.4.3 Regulatory Compliance: Operating as small and independent retail pharmacies, figuring out the intricacy of the regulatory environment in Zambia can be a hard task. This thus necessitates the compliance with the rules which need a detailed understanding of

the law, and the collaboration with suppliers to ensure that all the products are of the correct quality**.**

1.4.4 Market Dynamics: The pharmaceutical industry in Lusaka is made up of diverse players all contending for a piece of the market, thus that turning it into highly competitive market. As a result, retail pharmacies experience the challenges of both getting in and keeping good relationships with suppliers, which at times require convincing, because they have less power than some of the other most important chains and groups.

1.4.5 Resource Constraints: Many of the retail pharmacies in Lusaka have limited resources due to budget constraints, which then complicates the implementation of Supplier Relationship Management techniques. This includes costs related to establishing and maintaining supplier relationships such as shipping, communication, and technology facilities.

1.5 BEST PRACTICES IN SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The retail pharmacies in Lusaka can adopt several Supplier Relationship Management best practices to overcome these challenges:

1.5.1 Joint Partnerships: The formation of joint partnerships with main suppliers will not only facilitate the development of trust but also enhance communication. The result will be better pricing, more dependable supplies, and increased flexibility in accommodating customer requirements.

1.5.2 Supplier Performance Monitoring: The main reason for the suppliers not meeting the quality levels or the deadlines is a lack of monitoring. Therefore, the suppliers will be informed through performance reviews, audits, and feedback channels of the issues that need to be addressed.

1.3.5 Integration of Technology: The utilization of the latest technology in communication and collaboration with suppliers is possible by the investments made. Software for managing the supply chain, electronic data interchange (EDI) systems, and other tools used for streamlining procurement processes and improving efficiency are included here.

1.5.4 Supply Chain Risk Management: A retail pharmacy can prevent or reduce supply chain disruptions by developing a risk management strategy that includes contingency planning, consolidation of suppliers, and continuous risk assessment.

1.5.5 Supply Chain Continuous Improvement: Continuous improvement measures, for example, supplier development programs, can also be the fulcrum of the strengthening supplier relationship and the overall improvement in the performance of the supply chain.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The pharmacies in Lusaka District Zambia are witnessing issues with the supply chain along which it is evident with the continuous stock-outs, long lead times, and the irregular supply of standard medicines. These challenges not only result in the larger problem of the lack of important drugs but also serve as an example of employing these particular resources in the same region that they already lack. Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) plays an essential role in supply chain performance and its enhancement is being talked about more and more; nevertheless, research directly applicable to retail pharmacies in this context is still lacking. The implementation of SRM fully as evidenced by the studies in developed countries has resulted in myriad benefits for the companies including supplier collaboration as well as cutting costs and raising service quality. Yet, the issue that needs to be cited as the major gap in the literature is the non-existence of the author on the topic of SRM in Zambian pharmaceutical sector retail formats. Recent findings demonstrate that over 40% of the Lusaka pharmacies suffer from stockouts of very important drugs at least once each month, which, thus, has a great effect on the patients' treatment (Health Professions Council of Zambia, 2022). Therefore, this study was particularly focused on offsetting this gap by analyzing the contribution of SRM in boosting the supply chain performance of retail pharmacies in the Lusaka District. The anticipated outcomes are very useful to the problem at hand, which says that by good cooperation of the suppliers at the beginning of the supply chain disruptions, the regional health industry will become more efficient.

1.7 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

This study investigates the role of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in enhancing supply chain performance in retail pharmacies in Lusaka, Zambia. Specifically, it examines how key SRM practices-

1. To assess the current state of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) practices in retail pharmacies in Lusaka District by December 2024.
2. To explore how the application of SRM in retail pharmacies could be a factor in increased efficiency, which was reflected by the decrease in lead times and fewer risks of stock outs by the end of December 2024.
3. To establish significant SRM strategies that will minimize the cost in the supply chain of retail pharmacies in the Lusaka District no later than December 2024.
4. To recommend Supplier Relationship Management that can improve overall supply chain performance in retail pharmacies.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What do retail pharmacies in Lusaka District employ the current Supplier Relationship Management practices?
2. How does Supplier Relationship Management impact the efficiency of the supply chain in terms of lead times and stockouts?
3. What Supplier Relationship Management strategies are most effective in enhancing cost-effectiveness in retail pharmacies?
4. What is the relationship between Supplier Relationship Management and supplier performance metrics such as on-time delivery and order accuracy?

5. What Supplier Relationship Management practices can be recommended to improve overall supply chain performance in retail pharmacies?

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Several key reasons can justify the research on supplier relationship management's role in enhancing supply chain performance in the retail pharmacies of Lusaka district, Zambia. Retail pharmacies serve as critical healthcare service providers within the community. One of the very critical aspects of supply chain management is the availability of pharmaceutical products. This research was directed toward understanding the role of supplier relationship management in the delivery of the necessary medicines by Lusaka district pharmacies. In resource-constrained settings like Zambia, it is very prudent and vital to optimally use the limited resources available. Proper supplier relationship management, in turn, goes to the root of resources like cost-saving, and waste directly to

efficiently manage processes like inventory control, which are the major issues retailers face in the region.

A dysfunctional supply chain can have a direct effect on the health outcomes of the patients. A more regular and on-time delivery of medicines is essential for the above-mentioned treatment adherence of patients. Thus, the findings of this study would help people to live a better life with better health conditions. The local community acknowledges that retail pharmacies play a huge part in the local economy. When the flow of products is properly moved, the financial status of these businesses is positively impacted, arriving at the point where they are going to be able to offer more jobs and create economic growth. The supply chain should be strong, as shown during COVID-19, which has shown that the healthcare sector needs strong and resilient supply chains. A supplier relationship management inquiry in retail pharmacies could be a powerful and contributive tool for the provision of strategies that would adequately prepare the healthcare system for another crisis. This research was particularly situated within Lusaka district bearing in mind the unique challenges and prospects of the region. The results gave a direct importance for local leaders, healthcare service providers, and businesses. Up to date, the best of my knowledge, according to September 2021, there isn't much research available on this particular subject within a Zambian context.

The investigation can also serve as an empirical basis. In this way, it can make the necessary innovation for future academic research as well as the practical field. The research is the first one of its kind in the field of Zambian pharmacy practice not only was it justified by the novelty it brings but also because it addresses the serious issues of healthcare supply chains in the Lusaka district, thus, having the potential to improve healthcare, economic sustainability, and general public health in the area. It was absolutely right to carry out this study now in order to fill the gaps, so that the relevant authorities could devise the required actions in support of the challenges being addressed by them in their own capacity of project implementers and also in the policies being laid in the retail pharmacies where those have not been introduced yet.

1.10 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Focusing particularly on the retail pharmacies in Zambia's Lusaka district where the study was conducted. Its objective was to gain insights into the special opportunities and issues in Lusaka while recognizing the possible impact regional factors have on supply chain performance and SRM.

The retail pharmaceutical sector was the main concern of the study, which was made up of both chain and independent pharmacies. With its primary aim of accessibility and quality of pharmaceutical products, it looks into the association between SRM practices and these companies' supply chain performance. The paper deals with retail pharmacies' strategies and tactics regarding their supplier relationships, which mainly involve supplier selection, negotiation, teamwork, and performance evaluation. The research represents several supply chain performance metrics like inventory control, overall cost effectiveness, lead times, and the ability to meet customer demands. For instance, the cultural factors, legal requirements and other regional characteristics possibly affecting the SRM tactics used by the retail pharmacists were also included. It concentrates on the effect of technological advancements in the company's supply chain performance and supplier relationships. It evaluates the customer experience and satisfaction in the Lusaka district's retail pharmacies resulting from well-managed supply chains. The study may be enhanced by possibly including a comparative analysis of the pharmaceutical retail industry SRM with international best practices. It is this comparison that lays the foundation for finding out how Lusaka district's practices range with those of the rest of the world. Time, resources, and data might pose limitations to the study, yet the work was projected to be completed within a span of four months.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is a strategic approach to managing supplier interactions to enhance supply chain performance. In global markets, SRM has been widely adopted to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure consistent product availability. Developed economies leverage technological integration, supplier collaboration, and performance monitoring systems to enhance supply chain resilience. However, the direct application of these strategies to Zambia's retail pharmaceutical sector remains uncertain due to differences in infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and financial constraints.

Among the highly regulated industries, the pharmaceutical industry is one of them, and is operating well, which is primarily due to the pharmaceuticals coming in consistently and on time. The SRM domain most directly affected is that of supply chain management mainly in the areas of efficiency, responsiveness, and sustainability, while the SRM role is. Retail pharmacies in Zambia have little linkage to the SRM techniques and on the ground problems encountered. Thus, this is the main reason why the literature review is to examine the previous works about SRM and its role in the supply chain delivery. The first part of the review will be the connection of SRM and the performance of the supply chain, then the specific issues that retail pharmacies are facing in supplier engagement in Lusaka, and after that, the theoretical foundation of the SRM will be the third section. The local and global studies findings brought together will help financially understand the extent to which SRM can affect the supply chain success and, consequently, the win of retail pharmacy in Zambia.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

These definitions deliver a basic understanding of the critical terms that will be used in the study. They are crucial in understanding how supplier relationship management can

address the issue of supply chain performance in retail pharmacies in Lusaka district, Zambia.

i) **Supplier Relationship Management (SRM):** Supplier Relationship Management is a strategic management approach used by organizations for the effective handling of their interactions and relationships with suppliers. It contains activities such as supplier selection, negotiation, collaboration, and performance evaluation for optimizing the supply chain (Cousins et al., 2008).

ii) **Supply Chain Performance:** Supply chain performance is the main measure of a measure of the supply chain's efficiency, effectiveness, and total success at meeting its objectives. It covers issues as cost control, the-time-of-delivery, product quality, and customer service responsiveness (Lambert & Cooper, 2000).

iii) **Retail Pharmacies:** Retail pharmacies are commercial enterprises that are outlets for prescription and for the pharmacy's over-the-counter items. These are the main factors that must be met to reach an overall goal of improved accessibility to pharmaceutical products and stated benefits must include the supply chain of health care (Martin & Ciomperlik, 2012).

iv) **Lusaka District, Zambia**: Lusaka District is a geographical and administrative section of Zambia, which contains the capital city Lusaka. Lusaka, which also serves as an important center of various economic and healthcare activities, plays a crucial role in this regard. (Central Statistical Office [Zambia], 2019).

v) **Resource Constraints**: Resource constraints concisely mean the lack of money, buildings, equipment, and human resources. In healthcare contexts, these resource constraints are the factors that hinder the running of health institutions including retail pharmacies (World Health Organization, 2020).

vi) **Patient Welfare:** Patient welfare is the physical health state of the patient. In retail pharmacies, this means ensuring that patients can receive the right medicine and not only that, but they cut any delays they might possibly encounter (Kruk et al., 2015).

vii) **Economic Impact:** Economic impact is the financial outcomes of different activities or factors. In this case, it means the just-in-time strategies and their

use in retail pharmacies can positively affect the local economy by bringing more jobs, saving costs, and promoting sustainability (Nkengasong et al., 2020).

viii) **Global Health Crises:** Global health crises refer to the large-scale health issues of globalization such as pandemics. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic was an example of a global health crisis that made it possible to see the necessity of healthcare supply chains being sustainable and resilient (World Bank, 2020).

2.4 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this literature review is to summarize the empirical findings related to the extent of supplier relationship management (SRM) in the logistics chain of retail pharmacies. The review offers a global, African, and local perspective, with worldwide and country-specific studies that include Zambia and other countries. For instance, in the pharmaceutical sector, where the swift delivery of and plentiful supply of products is essential, SRM has been signalled as a strategy to support the efficiency and responsiveness of the supply chain significantly**.**

2.4.2 GLOBAL STUDIES SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE.

Supplier relationship management (SRM) is the one that takes care of the suppliers' interaction management context, which is mostly based on the cooperation, the information exchange, and trust between the two parties which are the suppliers or the relationship with them. Lambert and Schwieterman (2012) assert that SRM is the single management of supplier relationships and a series of systematic actions that create long-term partnerships, increase innovation, and improve operations in the organization. Frequently, tracked SRM activities are supplier categorization, performance management, risk management, and strategic alliances. Choi and Krause (2006) argue that SRM is a mutual interaction optimizer, and thus, it creates a win-win situation, for example, through lower price negotiation, the acquisition of better products, and the securing of more reliable sources. The sharing of technology, for instance, the electronic

data interchange (EDI) system, has been recognized as being part of a crucial tool in the building of these relationships and in assuring real-time communication between organizations and their suppliers.

2.4.3 GLOBAL EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON SRM AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE

In the case of SRM in developed countries, we are dealing with global supply chains, most of which are in highly developed nations that have implemented SRM to the benefit of their performance with respect to quality and efficiency. Data provided by Chen, Paulraj, and Lado (2004) has shown that in the USA, companies that had adopted the strategic practices of SRM experienced better supply outcomes with shorter lead time and more high-quality products. Moreover, they were able to minimize operational costs. The results demonstrated that the mechanism through which SRM is achieved was the better integration of the supply chain and stronger ties that led to higher resilience in the end. In the case of Europe, Christopher and Holweg (2011) stated that multifaceted supply chains faced by pharmaceutical industries using SRM would have the same outcome. More specifically, it was through the application of SRM that they were able to outperform their industry peers with a 20% shorter order cycle and 15% lower stockouts, contributing to improved overall service.

2.4.4 SRM IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR

The pharmaceutical sector, given that it has to deal with several challenges in the supply chains like regulatory compliance, temperature sensitivity, and product shortages, requires professionalism in SRM. Chaudhuri (2011) talks about SRM, which is risk management, and that it is the most important one in the case of the drugs supply process, being the one that assures the sustainability of the flow, especially for those with life matters. Simchi-Levi et al. (2013) have featured the case of the global pharmaceutical supply chain of Johnson and Johnson, where effective SRM, including collaborative forecasting and shared technology platform practices, led to a 30% drop in the lead time and improved supply chain visibility. The research topic of SRM, which deals with suppliers and pharmaceutical companies, is investigated as the companies use this process to better the relationship, which in turn helps in respecting the regulatory policies and better serve the end-users.

2.4.5. TECHNOLOGY IMPACTING ON SRM IN GLOBAL PHARMACEUTICAL SUPPLY CHAIN

The technology transformation in the field of Information & Technology (IT) that has taken place has resulted not only in the facilitation of the SRM process via real-time visibility and communication but it has also been instrumental in forging a path for firms to share information on data across global supply chains. According to Lee, Padmanabhan, and Whang (2004), the information technology (IT) systems are what the companies are based on that they seek to streamline supplier collaboration in the pharmaceuticals sector which will lead to the improvement of demand and inventory modeling. This is vitally important for the retail pharmacy sector as the timely delivery of products is necessary for the industry to function and keep up with the competitors. Gunasekaran et al. (2008) study stated that companies that brought IT into their SRM systems were the most successful and thus they made notable improvements in their supply chains agility. The implementation of supplier portals and e-procurement systems was the most efficient in helping the companies save 15% of cost on the procurement of goods along with the increase in accuracy of orders which in turn resulted in the elevation of the retail pharmacy environment with better service levels.

2.4.6. CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING SRM GLOBALLY

The implementation of SRM globally has various challenges such as managing numerous suppliers, especially when these suppliers vary widely in terms of their size, location, and levels of technology applied. Cox (2004) describes this as a phenomenon that the management of engagement with a broad spectrum of suppliers entails firms to set up different SRM programs based on supplier categorization. Supplier portals are valuable for the suppliers who have a high-interest value and intend to have more joint alliances and joint ventures while, on the contrary, the low-value suppliers may just prefer to have brief transactions. Each and every reason listed above is a personal issue of supplier diversity; this is ever more so in the case of the global pharmaceutical supply chain, and it results from the fact that the countries have different regulations.

In the study done by Holweg, Disney, Holmström, and Småros (2005), large-scale multinational pharmaceutical companies showed that they often have similar problems with supplier relationship management across different regulatory environments, which is why they cannot function effectively. The decision which is put forth in the paper mainly is that the companies should back the programs that are aimed at developing the

suppliers on the local and international levels so that these minor suppliers will catch up with the major ones.

2.4.7 AFRICA STUDIES ON SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE.

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) has emerged as a critical strategy in many African nations to improve supply chain operations. When it comes to retail pharmacies, the successful application of SRM comprises creating trust-based contacts with the suppliers thereby ensuring the constant availability of required medications and healthcare products. Researches continually reinforce the relationship between SRM and supply chain efficiency across Africa. Studies conducted in the Republic of South Africa have shown that SRM has a positive impact on supply chain efficiency. Govender and Pretorius (2015) carried out a study on the effects of SRM on the pharmaceuticals sector in South Africa and concluded that collaboration as well as long-term relationships between suppliers and pharmacies had a positive impact on the performance of the inventory, the reduction of lead times as well as the delivery of better product availability. The research further revealed that the trust created through transparent communication with suppliers had a positive effect on the overall agility of the supply chain in the health sector. Due to stockouts, inefficient procurement processes, and poor supplier relationships, the healthcare sector in Nigeria endures notable challenges in the management of the supply chains. Ajayi et al. (2019) researched how the application of SRM practices improves the resilience of the supply chain in Nigerian pharmacies. The results indicated that the pharmacies which communicated with their suppliers in a consistent manner and were transparent in their dealings had fewer disruptions in the supply of required drugs, which, in turn, had a positive influence on health outcomes. This was particularly true for life-saving drugs, where timely delivery was a priority. Studies in Kenya have primarily focused on supplier development as a central part of SRM. Kimani et al. (2020) carried out a research on how retail pharmacies in Nairobi engaged in the supplier selection and development to enhance their supply chain performance. The results showed that those pharmacies which invested in training and supporting their suppliers, particularly in areas like logistics and quality management were able to secure a consistent supply of pharmaceutical products of a high standard. Furthermore, the

report showed that choosing suppliers based on the long-term partnership framework instead of direct cost-cutting led to better inventory management and less stockout.The role of supplier integration in SRM is mainly observed in the retail pharmacy sector in Ghana.

Furthermore, Owusu-Acheampong and Fosu (2021) studied how pharmacies involved suppliers in inventory management and forecasting processes. The findings were that those pharmacies which permitted the suppliers to take part in demand planning and inventory forecasting gained a better position to counter uncertainty and shortage of supplies. Supplier integration, on its part, enabled better coordination and reduced lead times, which was quite beneficial, especially in hard-to-reach areas where access to medications was a challenge. Uganda has also seen a marked growth in the research activities surrounding the role of SRM for supply chains concerned with cost reduction. Mugume and Nakitende (2020) conducted research on SRM in retail pharmacies in Kampala and found that effective supplier relationships helped pharmacies by negotiating better terms with suppliers and leveraging bulk purchasing agreements to cut procurement costs. The outcome of the work showed that long-term relationships with suppliers allowed pharmacies to achieve better price and credit term conditions which, ultimately, resulted in higher profits for them. Trust and collaboration have been identified by the pharmacies and their suppliers as the two main factors which can improve the performance of the whole supply chain in Ethiopia. Teshome and Fikre (2018) looked into the function of trust in supplier relationships within the pharmaceutical supply chains in Addis Ababa. Their analysis mentioned that trust-based relations allowed the pharmacies to get preferential treatment from the suppliers, including shorter lead times and priority access to scarce medications. Trust, along with that, enables the better coordination of activities during the disruption of the supply chain, be it during time of pandemics or political instability. In North Africa, particularly in Egypt, technological integration has been considered between suppliers and pharmacies for the sake of improving the performance of the supply chain. El-Sayed and Abdel-Hamid (2020) have pointed out how, with the use of such technology as shared databases and automated ordering systems, the two parties can communicate and collaborate better than before. Pharmacies which utilized

these technologies were in the position to enhance delivery accuracy, minimize stock outs, and optimize inventory levels.

SRM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS

In developing countries, Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is often constrained by economic, infrastructural, and regulatory challenges. Unlike developed economies, where SRM is supported by advanced technologies and well-established supplier networks, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa face significant hurdles in adopting best practices. However, there are also examples of successful SRM models that can serve as adaptable strategies for Zambia's pharmaceutical sector.

Key Challenges in SRM Implementation in Developing Countries

1. Limited Technological Infrastructure

Most pharmaceutical supply chains in low-income economies rely on manual processes for inventory tracking, supplier communication, and procurement. This lack of automation leads to:

• Inefficiencies in supplier evaluation, making it difficult to measure performance based on delivery reliability and product quality.

• Delays in order processing, increasing lead times and the risk of stockouts.

• Inaccurate demand forecasting, leading to overstocking of slow-moving drugs and shortages of essential medicines.

For instance, in Nigeria, many community pharmacies depend on paper-based supplier records, which makes it difficult to track historical supplier performance and negotiate better contract terms.

2. Supply Chain Fragmentation

Developing countries often lack vertically integrated supply chains, resulting in:

• Multiple intermediaries between manufacturers and pharmacies, increasing procurement costs.

• Unreliable delivery schedules due to third-party logistics inefficiencies.

• Poor coordination between suppliers and pharmacies, leading to unpredictable stock availability.

In Tanzania, research shows that supply chain fragmentation contributes to frequent stockouts of essential drugs, as pharmacies are forced to rely on multiple, often inconsistent, suppliers.

3. Regulatory and Compliance Barriers

Pharmaceutical supply chains in developing countries are heavily regulated, yet enforcement is often inconsistent. Challenges include:

• Weak implementation of Good Distribution Practices (GDP), leading to substandard storage and transportation of medicines.

• The presence of counterfeit drugs, as some suppliers engage in unregulated sourcing.

• Delays in supplier licensing and certification, causing disruptions in the availability of approved suppliers.

A study in Uganda revealed that poor supplier vetting processes allowed unqualified suppliers to distribute pharmaceuticals, leading to the circulation of low-quality or counterfeit medicines.

4. Financial Constraints

Many pharmacies in developing countries operate under tight financial margins, making it difficult to:

• Establish long-term contracts with high-quality suppliers due to high procurement costs.

• Invest in SRM technologies that can enhance supplier communication and performance monitoring.

• Access credit facilities to ensure bulk purchasing and better negotiation power with suppliers.

For example, in Ethiopia, pharmacies often rely on cash-based transactions, limiting their ability to establish credit-based supplier relationships, which in turn affects inventory stability.

3.2. Adaptations and Successful SRM Strategies in Other African Countries

Despite these challenges, some African nations have developed context-specific SRM solutions that could inform strategies for Lusaka's retail pharmacies.

1. Ghana: Supplier Performance Assessment Frameworks

Ghana has implemented structured supplier performance tracking mechanisms to improve pharmaceutical procurement efficiency. Key elements include:

• Quarterly supplier evaluations based on on-time deliveries, product quality, and compliance.

• Digital supplier scoring systems to facilitate better decision-making by pharmacies.

• Government-led partnerships with private suppliers to stabilize drug availability.

Key Lesson for Zambia: Implementing supplier scorecards and performance reviews could enhance supplier accountability in Lusaka's retail pharmacies.

2. Kenya: Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Pharmaceutical Procurement

Kenya has leveraged PPPs to strengthen supplier relationships and ensure consistent medicine supply. Success factors include:

• Joint investments in warehousing and cold-chain logistics to support pharmaceutical distribution.

• Long-term contracts between private pharmacies and government-approved suppliers to ensure predictable stock levels.

• Use of e-procurement platforms for transparent supplier selection and order tracking.

Key Lesson for Zambia: Encouraging collaborations between private pharmacies, wholesalers, and regulatory bodies can create a more stable supply network.

3. Rwanda: Use of Digital Technologies in SRM

Rwanda has integrated digital health supply chain systems to streamline supplier communication and procurement efficiency. Notable initiatives include:

• The Pharmacy Information Management System (PIMS), which tracks supplier performance and stock levels in real-time.

• Use of mobile-based ordering platforms that connect pharmacies directly to authorized distributors.

• Blockchain pilot programs to prevent counterfeit medicine infiltration into the supply chain.

Key Lesson for Zambia: Investing in cost-effective digital solutions such as mobile procurement systems and supplier tracking dashboards could significantly improve SRM in Lusaka's pharmacies.

3.3. Implications for SRM in Zambia

The above examples highlight practical solutions that could enhance supplier relationships and improve supply chain efficiency in Zambia. The key takeaways include:

• Adopting digital supplier evaluation tools to improve tracking and accountability.

• Reducing reliance on fragmented supplier networks by encouraging long-term contracts with reliable partners.

• Strengthening regulatory enforcement to ensure suppliers adhere to quality and compliance standards.

• Exploring financing models such as government-backed supplier credit schemes to enhance pharmacy purchasing power.

By learning from successful SRM implementations in Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda, Zambia can develop a customized SRM framework that addresses the unique challenges faced by Lusaka's retail pharmaceutical sector.

2.4.8 ZAMBIAN STUDIES ON SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE.

In Zambia, supplier relationship management (SRM) is being seen as a solution to the supply chain problems in retail pharmacies and the healthcare sector in general. Zambian pharmaceutical supply chain pipeline has experienced stockouts, high acquisition costs, and logistical problems that can be alleviated by purchasing from better suppliers. A study carried out by Mwale et al. (2017) on the performance of the supply chain at the retail pharmacies of Lusaka showed that the issues related to suppliers were a big cause of inefficiencies in the supply chain. The research revealed that the delivery dates of products were often postponed and stock availability was chaotic due to the poor communication and mistrustful attitudes of pharmacies and their suppliers.

For the pharmacies, which were able to develop strong partnerships with their own suppliers, this would reduce the disturbances in their supply chains and bring more safety. It was revealed in a study done by Mumba and Chanda (2018) about essential medicines' supply chain performance in Lusaka that supplier relationships are a major factor in decreasing stockouts of important drugs. Those pharmacies which had long-term supply agreements that included the aspects of cooperative forecasting and risk management stated that they did not have stockouts so many times as those which were involved in purely transactional relationships. The study noted that SRM methods, such as the joint planning of the suppliers and pharmacies and the transparent communication between them, were important in ensuring a constant supply of drugs.

The research conducted by Phiri and Banda (2019) aimed to explore the integration of suppliers in the processes of supply chain management of retail pharmacies in Zambia. The research revealed that the pharmacies that integrated their suppliers in the procurement and inventory management systems were, in fact, able to make the operations smoother, cut lead times, and avoid overstocking or understocking situations. The supplier integration helped pharmacies to get the demand forecasting more precise, still leading to better overall supply chain performance. In the relatively remote parts of Zambia, supplier development has been suggested as a good plan to enrich supply chain performance. Simukonda and Mulenga (2020) studied the activities of rural pharmacies and how they were trying to build their supplier networks through training and capacity-building local suppliers. Their research found that the pharmacies that were engaged in supplier development managed to get a more reliable delivery of the products even after the distribution challenges caused by rural areas. Technology adaptation is another important facet of SRM in Zambian retail pharmacies. Musonda and Tembo (2021) studied the pharmacies in Lusaka and discovered that it was the pharmacies that embraced electronic data interchange (EDI) systems for communication with suppliers that reported better order accuracy that was earlier and faster. The study concluded that technology use not only improved transaction efficiency but also was a primary factor in reinforcing the clean-cut ties between the pharmacies and suppliers by slashing errors and communication delays. Cost cutting is another important positive impact of successful SRM in Zambia.

Additionally, Kalunga and Mwanza (2022) analyzed the issue of how the collaborative relationships with suppliers led to the retail pharmacies ¨procurement costs being lowered. Their results indicated that pharmacies that combined efforts with their suppliers got better prices and payment conditions, thus remaining competitive with their customers. Bulk purchasing discounts were another way these pharmacies gained the above-mentioned advantages, which resulted in a cut down on overall costs. In the health sector, relational capital has been recognized as a pivotal area impacting the supply chain performance of important pharmaceutical products. An inquiry by Mulenga et al. (2019) delved into the role of supplier trust in the distribution of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) among public health facilities in Zambia. The findings showed that pharmacies that had established trust-based relationships with the suppliers successfully ensured the ARVs were delivered on time, even during periods of supply chain disruptions. Trust allowed pharmacies to be flexible about delivery schedules and prioritize the order access for medicines when in deficit.

2.5 RESEARCH GAP

In spite of the increasing acknowledgement of the vital role of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in achieving better supply chain performance, retail pharmacy is still a largely under-researched area, and this is particularly true for the Lusaka District in Zambia. Most of the research on SRM has concentrated on global or regional supply chains in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and large-scale retail, but has neglected the specifics of retail pharmacies in developing countries, such as their distinct dynamics and the hurdles they face. Africa and Zambia's existing studies mainly pointed out:

1. The general Supply Chain Management (SCM) issue: Despite the fact that SCM has been widely studied in different sectors, the specific procedures, techniques, and tactics that are connected to SRM in pharmacy supply chains have not yet been thoroughly examined.

2. Healthcare sector Focus: Research has centered on hospital procurement or pharmaceutical production but has omitted the retail pharmacy sector, which has its own supply chain intricacies like small-scale manufacturers, numerous suppliers, and stock management difficulties.

3. Geographic Context: Very few works have dealt with SRM practices of Zambia, while most of them have directed attention to South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria. The socio-economic settings and the regulatory systems in Zambia are different and therefore, they need to be well understood by giving particular local insights.
4. Supply chains absolute performance: Quite a few studies are dedicated to the supply chain performance, while they do not generally illustrate the exact RM tools that lead to cost, time, inventory, or customer satisfaction improvements.
This gap clearly illustrates the need for specific research on the strategies that will be required for SRM to be improved and thereby enhance supply chain performance in retail pharmacies of Lusaka District. Specifically, the researcher has to find out: The format of the supplier associations at retail pharmacies. The function of trust, collaboration, and communication in these associations. The way regulatory and market conditions in Zambia affect SRM. The exact quantifiable impact of SRM on supply chain performance in the retail pharmacy context, Based on these gaps, action-oriented knowledge will be produced in order to boost the existing practices of SRM and thus to improve the efficiency and the overall effectiveness of supply chains in retail pharmacies in Lusaka District, Zambia.

2.6 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.6.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The increasing complexity of supply chain networks, particularly in the pharmaceutical sector, necessitates the adoption of strategic Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) practices to improve operational efficiency and ensure the consistent availability of products. Retail pharmacies in Lusaka, Zambia, are no exception, as they rely heavily on robust supply chain systems for timely procurement of essential medicines. The success of these pharmacies, and their ability to meet public health needs, largely depends on their relationships with suppliers.This theoretical framework seeks to explore key theories underpinning SRM and its influence on supply chain performance, focusing on the retail pharmacy sector in Lusaka District, Zambia. The framework draws from various supply chain and management theories such as Transaction Cost Economics (TCE), Resource

Dependency Theory (RDT), Social Exchange Theory (SET), and others, to explain the dynamics of SRM in improving supply chain performance.

2.6.2 KEY THEORIES UNDERPINNING SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (SRM)

2.6.3 Transaction Cost Economics (TCE)

The Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) Theory is the main and most important principle to be understood Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) within a supply chain. TCE is a theory of costs that focus on the costs incurred in negotiating, monitoring, and enforcing contracts between buyers and suppliers. The theory states that companies, including retail pharmacies, must deal with transaction costs such as frequent contract renewals, monitoring, and supplier switching by creating long-term relationships with suppliers. According to the TCE in the retail pharmacies in Lusaka, Supply chain management as is vital to procurement and supplier management cost reduction. Through the partnership strategy, pharmacies are, thus, able to cut down the transaction costs and ensure the smooth delivery of stock which leads to higher total supply chain performance in their work, Jiang et al. (2016) utilized the TCE theory to show how a good relationship with strategic suppliers contributes to organizations' profit through the implementation of SRM, promoting the effectiveness of supply chain. Luzzini et al. (2015) noticed that the provision of SRM transaction cost-saving is a driving force for efficient both supply chains and manufacturing companies nudging them to do so, with pharmaceuticals being the prime example, where industries are riskier Implementation in Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka

-Transforming procurement costs: SRM helps in the decline of costs associated with contracts such as contract renegotiation and the quest for suppliers.

- Prioritizing operational efficiency: with transaction costs reducing, pharmacies are now able to streamline their operations and focus on service delivery and inventory management.

2.6.4 RESOURCE DEPENDENCY THEORY (RDT)

Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) is a model of the interactions among the organizations developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). This model claims that organizations externalize their resources instead of using those that are controlled by

other agencies and suppliers. Organizations that depend on outside resources are weak and in such situations, the organizations have to make proper management of those resources in equitable divisions of the critical resources production so that stability can be achieved. For Lusaka City, the retail pharmacies are the ones that usually need the RDT model since they depend mostly on the third-party suppliers for the very timely delivery of the medical products that they will be needing. For this reason, the effectiveness of their supply chain performance is therefore based on the type of relationships they have with these suppliers. With the responsible supplier relationship management (SRM) of the pharmacies, the supply risks are alleviated by obtaining better deals thus assuring the regulars product availability. As stated in the research of Drees and Heugens (2013), it is significant to cope outside dependencies through SRM, particularly in supply chains which have lots of resource uncertainty. Bode et al. (2016) have shown that companies which apply SRM effectively, not only are they capable of managing supplier dependencies productively, but also they contribute to their sustainability and better supply chain productivity. Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka Mechanism of managing supply chain risks: retail pharmacies are able to manage the suppliers' dependencies and risks of there being stock outs and of the interruptions in the supply chain by using SRM.

Better gains: Pharmacies that pick to set in SRM are favored to sign transactions with advantageous terms that lead to both savings in costs and to the reliability of supply.

2.6.5 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET), as developed by Blau (1964), revolves around the idea that relationships are built on trust, reciprocity, and mutual benefits. The more parties invest in relationships, the higher the potential for future rewards. Applied to SRM, SET suggests that long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between suppliers and pharmacies result in better cooperation, trust, and improved supply chain performance. In retail pharmacies, trust-based relationships with suppliers foster open communication, efficient conflict resolution, and reliable product deliveries, which are crucial in a sector where any delay in product supply can result in significant public health risks. Flynn, Huo, and Zhao (2017) found that trust and reciprocity between suppliers and buyers lead to fewer disruptions and more robust supply chain performance. Ambrose et al. (2016)

discussed how SET-based relationships, underpinned by trust and cooperation, lead to higher performance in buyer-supplier relationships.

Application to Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka Trust and long-term partnerships: Pharmacies that develop trust-based relationships with suppliers are better positioned to handle supply chain disruptions. Improved communication and collaboration: SET fosters open communication, reducing the risk of misunderstandings or delays in product deliveries.

2.6.6 RELATIONAL CONTRACT THEORY

Relational Contract Theory emphasizes the importance of informal agreements and long-term relationships between parties, beyond just written contracts. Unlike traditional contracts, relational contracts are based on trust, shared goals, and mutual understanding, which provide flexibility in managing ongoing and unpredictable challenges .For retail pharmacies in Lusaka, where the pharmaceutical market can experience fluctuations in demand and supply disruptions, SRM grounded in relational contracts offers the flexibility needed to ensure continuous product availability. Pharmacies can rely on their relationships with suppliers to meet demand surges without frequent contract renegotiations.Poppo and Zhou (2017) noted that relational contracts lead to higher levels of supplier performance and lower levels of opportunism in the supply chain.Crocker and Masten (2015) argued that long-term relational contracts improve supply chain flexibility, especially in industries prone to uncertainty, such as pharmaceutical application to retail pharmacies in Lusaka. Flexibility in supply management: Pharmacies engaged in relational contracts with suppliers can adapt to supply chain disruptions more easily .Improved supplier responsiveness: Relational contracts foster better supplier responsiveness to unexpected changes in demand.

2.6.7 NETWORK THEORY

Network Theory examines how organizations within a supply chain are interconnected and how the structure of these networks influences performance. Powell (1990) suggested that the strength of a firm's supply chain network plays a critical role in its overall success. By managing their supplier networks through SRM, pharmacies can foster collaboration, enhance information sharing, and improve overall supply chain

performance. In Lusaka's retail pharmacy sector, where multiple suppliers are often involved in providing a variety of pharmaceutical products, managing these networks effectively can be the difference between success and failure. Through SRM, pharmacies can coordinate with suppliers and other stakeholders to create more resilient and responsive supply chains. Borgatti and Li (2018) showed that strong supplier networks lead to better communication and collaboration in the supply chain, ultimately improving performance.Dyer and Singh (2017) found that SRM plays a key role in developing and maintaining robust supplier networks, contributing to greater supply chain agility. Application to Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka Improved collaboration: Pharmacies that actively manage their supplier networks through SRM experience better collaboration and information sharing, which is crucial for meeting patient needs.Enhanced resilience: By fostering strong networks, pharmacies can more effectively manage supply chain disruptions, such as stockouts or supplier delays.

2.6.8 AGENCY THEORY

Agency Theory focuses on the principal-agent relationship, where the goals of the principal (in this case, the pharmacy) may not align with the goals of the agent (the supplier). Jensen and Meckling (1976) argued that issues of information asymmetry and goal misalignment can lead to agency problems, which can be mitigated through contracts, incentives, and monitoring mechanisms. For retail pharmacies in Lusaka, SRM is critical in aligning the objectives of pharmacies and their suppliers. Through performance monitoring and clear contracts, pharmacies can ensure that suppliers act in their best interests, delivering products on time and at the required quality standards.- Eisenhardt (2017) demonstrated that SRM can help mitigate agency problems by aligning supplier objectives with those of the buyer through effective monitoring and performance incentives.- Li et al. (2016) found that SRM practices that reduce information asymmetry between pharmacies and suppliers lead to improved supply chain performance.

Application to Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka.

Aligning supplier objectives: SRM helps pharmacies align supplier goals with their own, reducing the risk of supply chain inefficiencies.

Performance monitoring: Pharmacies can use SRM to monitor supplier performance, ensuring that they meet agreed-upon standards for product delivery and quality.

2.6.9 LEAN SUPPLY CHAIN THEORY

Lean Supply Chain Theory is based on principles of waste minimization and efficiency maximization. Womack and Jones (1996) introduced the concept of lean manufacturing, which has since been applied to supply chain management. Lean SRM practices focus on just-in-time delivery, reducing excess inventory, and improving the flow of products throughout the supply chain.In retail pharmacies, lean SRM practices can help reduce excess inventory of pharmaceutical products while ensuring timely deliveries. This is particularly important in Zambia, where delayed deliveries or excess.

2.7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.7.1 INTRODUCTION

A conceptual framework delineates the interplay of distinct variables in a study, thereby facilitating the systematic grasping of the interplay of various factors and the manner in which they impact each other. This particular study's conceptual framework is primarily adopted in examining the relationship between Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) and supply chain performance in retail pharmacies based in Lusaka District, Zambia. The major variables defining this framework are SRM practices, supply chain performance metrics, supplier communication, risk management, and service delivery. This frame of reference explains that good supplier relationships can be a way to effective supply chain performance, the first ones are improved relationship with suppliers, the second one is the faster delivery of medicines, the third one is reduced risks, and the last one is the addition of better service delivery of patients in the healthcare sector. Rewritten based on the information: This conceptual frame of reference is grounded in the acknowledgment that the pharmaceutical supply chain is intricate and vulnerable to variable disruptions, including stock depletion, delays, and price variations. By utilizing this strategic supplier relationship approach, retail pharmacies can better brand and financially secure their products while ensuring the sustainability of the inventory of essential drugs to the populace.

2.7.2 THE CORE VARIABLES IN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework exclusively concentrates on the five key variables: Supplier Relationship Management (SRM), Supply Chain Performance, Supplier Communication,

Risk Management, and Service Delivery. All variables, together with others, exchange effects in a cycle that is self-sustained. The total of all the interactions explains how the relationships of SRM are in some way the basis for the improvements in the performance of the supply chain.

2.7.2.1 supplier relationship management (srm)

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is the strategic management of the interactions between pharmacies and suppliers. It comprises establishing relationships for the long term, choosing suppliers, analyzing supplier performance, and working closely together to meet the objectives of the supply chain. Practices of SRM in retail pharmacies aim to create a mechanism for suppliers to meet the following conditions: the product is of high quality, it is delivered on time, the price is competitive, and lastly, the drug is in accordance with the regulatory standards. Activities with SRM clients include(try to find out):Supplier selection and evaluation: The choice of suppliers for pharmacies should be based on criteria like past performance, financial stability, and adherence to quality standards. Long-term partnerships: Setting up long-term and mutually profitable relationships with suppliers is a way to mitigate risks and promote trust. It will also lead to better collaboration. Contract management: Having a clear and well-structured contractual agreement containing the term and specific obligations expected from both parties will facilitate the alignment of the parties involved. Performance monitoring: Frequent assessment of supplier performance gives pharmacies a chance to address potential issues early and make informed decisions on whether to keep or replace the supplier.Choi & Kim (2015) are of the view that SRM is a paramount factor in making the supply chain endure since solid supplier relation results in fewer disruptions and more predictability in product flows.Jiang et al. (2016) point to the fact that SRM operations, like performance monitoring and supplier selection, markedly minimize the risks of supply failures, thereby ensuring the constant availability of necessary medicines.

2.7.2.2 supply chain performance

Supply Chain Performance denotes the extent to which the pharmaceutical products are effectively and efficiently flowing to the final customers by the retail pharmacies. Supply chain performance may be interpreted through the various key indicators (KPI) which

include: On-time delivery: Ensuring that the medicines come on time to prevent any drug shortage and maintain the stock of essential medicines uninterrupted.

Cost efficiency: Bypassing the procurement and transportation costs while still maintaining the quality and availability of the drugs that are being supplied is the primary aim.

Cost quality: Suppliers ensuring that they deliver their products fulfilling the required quality standards thus reducing the risk of counterfeit or substandard products.Inventory management: The method by which proper inventory levels are maintained to preclude the problems with direct stocking or under-stocking of drugs.SRM operations influence these KPIs directly by forging better supplier communication, enhance trust, and reliable logistics.Flynn, Huo, & Zhao (2017) found that SRM adds to the positive performance of the supply chain by collaboration, reducing lead time, and delivering the right quantities of essential items in time.Vanpoucke, Vereecke, & Boyer (2014) established that a well-managed supplier relationship is key to achieving cost-competitive and on-time delivery of drugs in the pharmaceutical supply chain.

2.7.2.3 supplier communication

The realization of the long-term drug supply comes via good communication between retail pharmacies and their suppliers due to the effectiveness of SRM. Good communication of the pharmacy and supplier regarding product deliverables explains the fact that expectations are aligned on quality standards, pricing, and lead times. In the pharmaceutical supply chain where the key factor is the on-time delivery of medicines, miscommunication is the elephant in the room, underlying the importance of communication in preserving relationships, and actually resolving problems before they reach a critical level.

Supplier communication in SRM is very important as it includes a few key items:

Information sharing: Regular updating of information like the demand forecasts, inventories, and supplier capacities makes sure that supply equals demand.

Problems Solving: Direct communication lets suppliers and pharmacies to discuss questions such as delayed deliveries or quality issues swiftly.

Negotiation and collaboration: Proper communication is a tool to negotiate contract terms, pricing, and order quantities, thus, contributing to the establishment of the cooperative

relationship between suppliers and pharmacies.Paulraj et al. (2016) state that concerning supplier communication as the most critical issue in SRM, it positively influences supplier collaboration and supply chain performance.Wong et al. (2015) have shown that if suppliers and buyers have frequent and open communication, they will diminish the risk of supply chain disruptions and increase the overall operational efficiency.

2.7.2..4 Risk management

Risk management is an integral part of SRM and it is very important in the pharmaceutical industry where the consequences of supply chain disruptions can be detrimental to patient health. Risk management with SRM practices helps retail pharmacies to know the risks related to supplier dependability, product quality, government regulations, and market fluctuation, the risks, in turn, decide the steps to take to control the supplier reliability, product quality, governmental regulations, and market volatility.

SRM is involved in risk management by the following means: Diversification of suppliers: Pharmacies that create a connection with several suppliers undermine the risk of problems in the supply chain due to the failure of a single supplier.Contingency planning: This helps pharmacies to decide long-term business commitments with their suppliers for the preparation of contingencies that be needed in case of supply chain interruptions or product recalls.Supplier audits: Manufacturer audits that are conducted on a regular basis, which is a significant step in SRM, assist in ensuring that the suppliers are complying with the necessary quality and regulatory codes, which in turn decreases the risk of counterfeit or inferior quality products infiltrating the supply chain. Scholten & Schilder (2015) proclaim that the implementation of SRM practices results in better risk management in the supply chain and this is particularly true for those industries where uncertainty is prevalent, such as pharmaceuticals.Chen, Zhao, and Tang (2019) discovered that the implementation of SRM promotes the presence of effective risk management practices through increased traceability in supplier relationships and accountability, thus reducing the chances of supply chain failures.

2.7.2.5 Service delivery

The primary aim is to enhance the service delivery to the patients, the ultimate consumers of pharmaceutical products who rely on retail pharmacies to deliver their packs on time,

will purchase more of the products and thus the pharmacies can make a profit through improved SRM and supply chain performance. Service delivery in retail pharmacies is directly affected by the reliability and effectiveness of the supply chain that, in return, is shaped by supplier relationships. The vital components of service delivery are:

Product availability: The constant availability of essential medicines means that the hospitals are always stocked with them and this will consequently eliminate stock-outs and thus patients can have access to the medications they require in time.

Customer satisfaction: Correct supply chain management along with the implementation of SRM practices leads to high customer satisfaction as customers will be able to buy quality products at reasonable prices.

Timeliness: Good SRM reduces lead times; hence, pharmacies get products on time, which means they are better able to meet customer demands on time. Bosman et al. (2017) suggested that due to the continuous provision of high-quality pharmaceutical products, SRM practices not only enhance service delivery in healthcare facilities but also play a crucial role in the healthcare sector as a whole. Moreover, they emphasized that pharmaceutical companies should be consistent in maintaining the quality of their products for successful treatment. Adams et al. (2015) illustrated the relationship between the promotion of SRM practices in retail pharmacies and service delivery consequently showing fewer stock-outs and timely responses to customer needs.

2.7.3 INTERPLAY BETWEEN CHIEF VARIABLES

The conceptual paradigm for the research purposes stipulates several essential relations amid the variables of SRM, supply chain performance, supplier communication, risk management, and service delivery. These relationships are important for the analysis of the implementation of SRM practices which will improve the functioning and efficiency of the Lusaka retail pharmacy supply chain as a whole.

2.7.3.1 Relationship between SRM and Supply Chain Performance

The premise of the research is that utilizing efficient and effective SRM practices leads to the enhancement of supply chain performance. By SRM, companies divert the attention from the suppliers, and thus, pharmacies can make better decisions concerning the procurement of reliable suppliers, decrease the procurement costs, and work on the quality of the pharmaceutical products. The latter ones, in turn, will have more stock,

deliver quicker, and will be cost-efficient, thus resulting in better performance. Jiang et al. (2016) highlighted that performance monitoring, supplier selection, and contract management are three of the most impactful SRM practices in the pharmaceutical industry while they significantly enhance the supply chain performance. Flynn et al. (2017) illustrated that the higher levels of supply chain performance are the result of the positive contributions made by effective SRM practices, which also entail the reduction of lead times and the improvement of delivery reliability.

7.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature on SRM highlights the significant benefits of supplier collaboration, performance monitoring, and digital integration in improving supply chain efficiency. However, Zambia's retail pharmaceutical sector faces unique constraints that require tailored SRM strategies. Future research should focus on developing localized SRM frameworks, assessing the impact of regulatory interventions, and exploring cost-effective digital solutions for supplier management in Lusaka's pharmacies.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The term research design signifies the overarching tactic or arrangement for the assimilation of the diverse components of a study in such a way as to make them coherent and logical so that the research problem is sufficiently addressed. The plan outlines the routes for the processes of data collection, measurement, and analysis. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018).The topic is considered a quantitative research design. To understand the full picture of the impact of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) on the performance of retail pharmacies in Lusaka District, Zambia, the quantitative method design was the best. The quantitative part will cover the collection and analysis of numerical data using structured surveys distributed to a big sample of pharmacies. It is considered appropriate for measuring the effect of SRM practices on key performance indicators like inventory turnover, lead times, and stockout rates. This method would give a person's perspective on the experiences, impressions, and issues associated with the implementation of SMP, which are manageable by the quantitative methods. By utilizing this approach, the research aims to gain more in-depth knowledge about the influence of SRM on supply chain performance.

3.2 TARGET POPULATION

A target population is a specific group of people, objects, or entities on which the researcher concentrates and from which he/she makes a conclusion. This idea implies the total of the population from which a sample can be drawn that is representative of the specific characteristics or phenomena being studied. Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). In Lusaka District, Zambia, fifty retail pharmacies were the representatives for this study, and thus, they formed the core target population. It included pharmacies that are both independently owned and chains that are affiliated with the wider group. In addition, the other main suppliers, who are the pharmaceutical suppliers and the regulatory authorities, will be part of the study. The involvement of various stakeholders and the multi-dimensional approach to the project will be a mirror of the actual supply chain dynamics and SRM practices.

3.3 SAMPLE DESIGN AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

3.3.1 SAMPLE DESIGN

Research design is a term that is used to describe a grand strategy or a blueprint that has to be followed for the dissimilar parts of a study to be integrated in a coherent and logical way and to be made clear for the research problem to be solved adequately. The layout is like the tracks of the authorship of the strategies for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data. Creswell, J.W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). The idea that was cited was that of a quantitative research design. The quantitative method was the optimal choice, in fact, to grasp fully how SRM affects the performance of Lusaka District retail pharmacies in Zambia.

The quantitative part will be concerned with the collection and analysis of numerical data from a structured survey administered to a wide sample of pharmacies. This mode will be useful for measuring the impact of the SRM practices on key performance indicators such as inventory turnover, lead times, and stockout rates. Based on the heuristic logic, this route allows the researcher to discover the trader's point of view with respect to the advantages, concepts, and obstacles of the strategy of SMP implementation that could be handled by quantitative tools. The inclusion of these two techniques shall, hence, expand the study's understanding of the effect that SRM has on the supply chain performance.

3.3.2 SAMPLE SIZE

A sample size refers to the count of the particular individuals, organizations, or elements that make a study having a sample. The estimation of the right sample size plays a pivotal role in the correctness and dependability of the result. Cochran. W. G. (1977). A total of 50 retail pharmacies were the direct targets since they are the ones that will provide enough data for statistical reasons.

In research, sample size justification is crucial to ensure the validity and reliability of results. While a larger sample is often preferred, a smaller sample can still provide meaningful insights if properly justified. Below are key reasons why 50 retail pharmacies is an appropriate sample size for your study on Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) and Supply Chain Performance in Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka, Zambia:

1. Alignment with Study Scope and Objectives

• Your research focuses on a specific sector (retail pharmacies) within a defined geographic area (Lusaka District). Given this narrow scope, a moderate sample size is sufficient to capture relevant insights.

• The study aims to identify patterns and relationships, not necessarily to generalize findings to an entire country, making a smaller but well-selected sample appropriate.

2. Practical Feasibility and Resource Constraints

• Collecting data from pharmacies requires significant resources, including time, costs, and respondent availability. A larger sample may be difficult to manage effectively.

• Many small and independent retail pharmacies may not be willing or available to participate, making it more practical to work with a manageable but representative sample.

3. Statistical Adequacy and Precedents in Similar Studies

• If previous studies on SRM and supply chain performance in similar contexts have used comparable sample sizes, citing them strengthens your justification.

• You can apply Slovin's formula to check if 50 pharmacies provide a statistically acceptable margin of error:

• Where:

• = Total number of retail pharmacies in Lusaka

• = Margin of error (e.g., 5% or 10%)

• If the calculated sample size is close to 50, this supports its adequacy.

4. Ensuring Representativeness Despite Small Size

• The sample can still be representative if it includes a diverse mix of pharmacies:

• Independent vs. chain pharmacies

• Different locations within Lusaka (urban, suburban, peri-urban)

• Varying business sizes and customer volumes

• Stratified or purposive sampling can help maximize diversity within the small sample.

3.3.3 SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The sampling procedure refers to the method used to select individuals or units from the target population to form the sample. This can include techniques like random sampling, stratified sampling, or purposive sampling. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). The sampling for pharmacies was done randomly in each stratum to guarantee that each sector was fairly represented. For the qualitative interviews, purposive sampling helps to select those individuals who have a profound understanding and insights about the SRM practices.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collection method refers to the tools and techniques used to gather data for a study. Common methods include surveys, interviews, observations, and experiments (Creswell, & Creswell, 2018). Structured questionnaires will be used to collect quantitative data from retail pharmacies. The questionnaire will include various questions related to SRM practices, supply chain performance indicators, and demographic information. Utilizing standardized questions offers the advantage of consistency and comparability of the data.

3.5 SOURCES AND NATURE OF THE DATA

Primary Data: In carrying out this study, the data was accumulated directly from retail pharmacies and key stakeholders through surveys and interviews. This data will provide insights from inside relating to SRM practices and their effect on supply chain performance.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Quantitative Data Analysis: The quantitative data was analyzed using statistical methods. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) will be used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, will be used to find out whether SRM practices have an impact on supply chain performance indicators.

3.7 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Response Bias: There was a likelihood of response bias in survey data as respondents could have provided answers that they perceived to be socially desirable. To settle this, security and confidentiality will be given to the participants in order to encourage them to respond with the truth.

Limited Generalizability: The findings of this study are more context-specific, related to Lusaka District and may not have direct implications for other regions or countries. However, the learnings that have been achieved in this regard can still be beneficial for comprehending SRM practices in similar situations.

Resource Constraints: The study may ran a time and resource restrictions which restricted the execution of data gathering and examining. But the available resources were optimized in a bid to meet the study aims.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All the participants were informed about the study's aim, the nature of their participation, their right, including the right to opt-out anytime. The participants gave consent to partake in the study. In the study, the confidentiality of participants' information was upheld. Anonymity was used to safeguard the identities of the respondents. The research ensured that the participants suffered no harm as a result of their participation. The study was conducted with respect and sensitivity to the participants' privacy and well-being. The research project was presented to the ethical review board for approval before the collection of any data was commenced. Thus, the study met the ethical norms and guidelines. Through the provision of methodology, the current study proposes a thorough and ethical investigation of the SRM's role in optimizing retail pharmacies' supply chain in Lusaka District, Zambia.

3.9 SUMMARY

This research focuses on the role of supplier relationship management in boosting supply chain performance in retail pharmacies in Lusaka District, Zambia, through the use of a descriptive survey and a quantitative approach. Pharmacy managers and procurement officers comprise the target population, and a stratified random sampling was used to obtain the data. One method was used for data collection, which included structured

questionnaires. Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical tools. The ethical guidelines for the study include informed consent and confidentiality. The research study was focused on providing insights that can be used to improve supply chain efficiency, through the proper application of SRM.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 OVERVIEW

This section of the report discusses the results of the research obtained through the use of the identified data collection method. A purposive sampling method was utilized, resulting in the selection of 50 participants. The information was gathered, processed with spss, and displayed in both tables and graphs as depicted.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

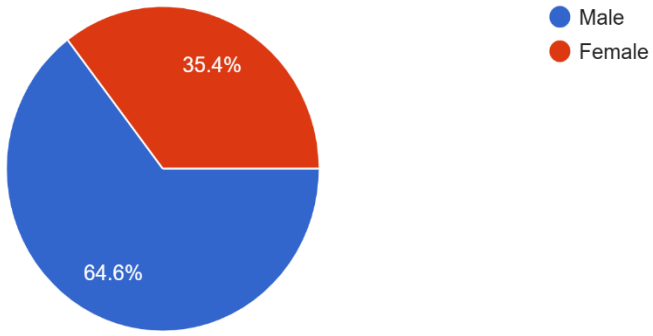
After gathering the data, it was organized and verified for accuracy, completion, uniformity, and consistency. Data editing was performed while gathering data in the field and prior to analyzing the data. The data collection tool's responses were classified and sorted prior to being inputted into a data master sheet and SPSS. Answers to closed-ended queries were directly recorded on the main data sheet. Information was displayed through frequency tables and charts. Cross tabulations were also generated to demonstrate the connections between the variables.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The results have been displayed in graphical representations to illustrate the connections between different factors as described above:

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

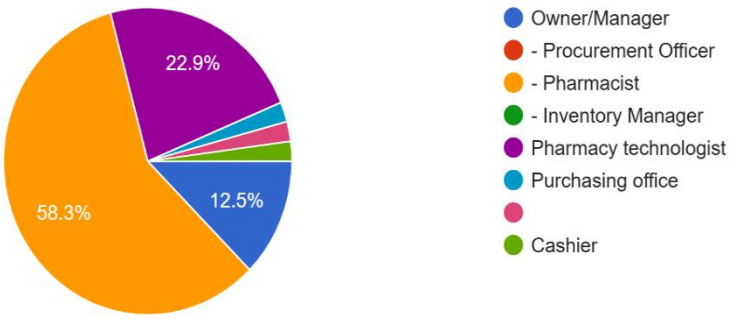
Figure 1: Respondents' sex



Source: Field data (2024)

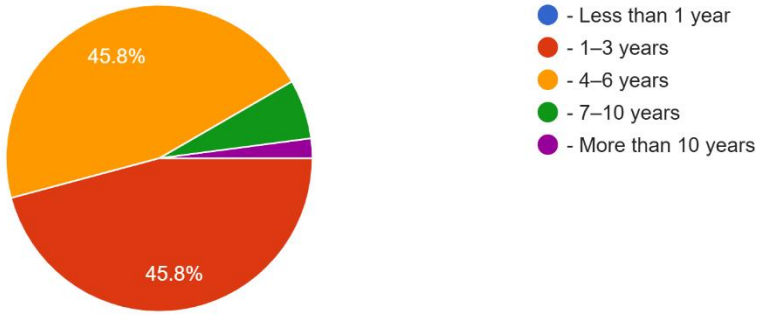
The chart above illustrates the proportions of participants in the study, revealing that 35.4% were female and 64.6% male, indicating that there were more male respondents than female in the research.

Figure 2: Position in the Company.



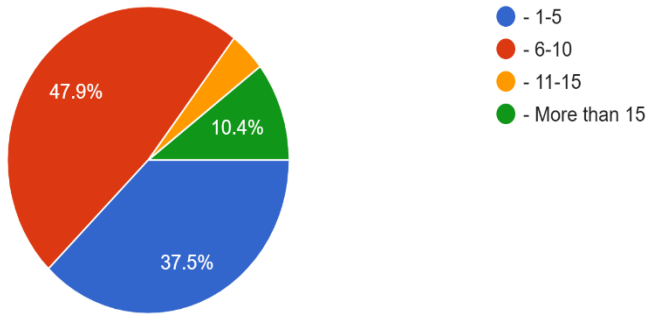
The graph above displays the data gathered by the researcher, revealing that 22.9% were pharmacy technologists, 58.3% were pharmacists, 12.5% were company owners, 2.1% were cashiers, 2.1% were inventory managers, and another 2.1% were purchasing officers, reflecting the actual composition of the company's structure.

Figure 3: Years of Experience in the Retail Pharmacy Sector.



The results presented above illustrate the graphical representation of data concerning the duration of years participants have worked in the retail pharmacy sector. It was noted that 45.8% reported working for 1-3 years, another 45.8% for 4-6 years, 6.3% for 7-10 years, and 2.1% for over 10 years. Additionally, the researcher found no participants with less than 1 year of experience.

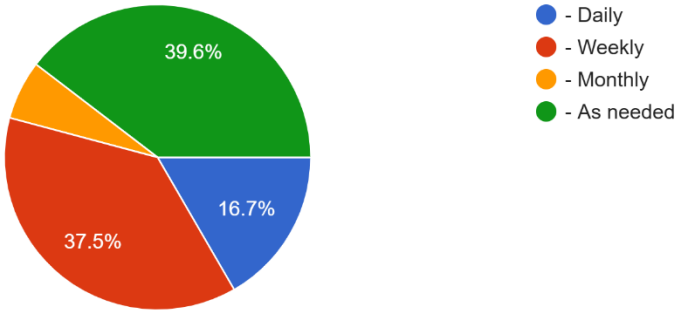
Figure 4: Number of suppliers the company regularly work with.



It is essential for a retail pharmacy to have suppliers, as these suppliers assist in managing the business. Reports indicate that 47.9% of pharmacies have 6-9 suppliers, 37.5% have 1-5, 10.4% have more than 15, and finally, 4.2% have 11-15 suppliers. This is quite significant as it allows the researcher to understand how many suppliers are necessary to effectively run the business.

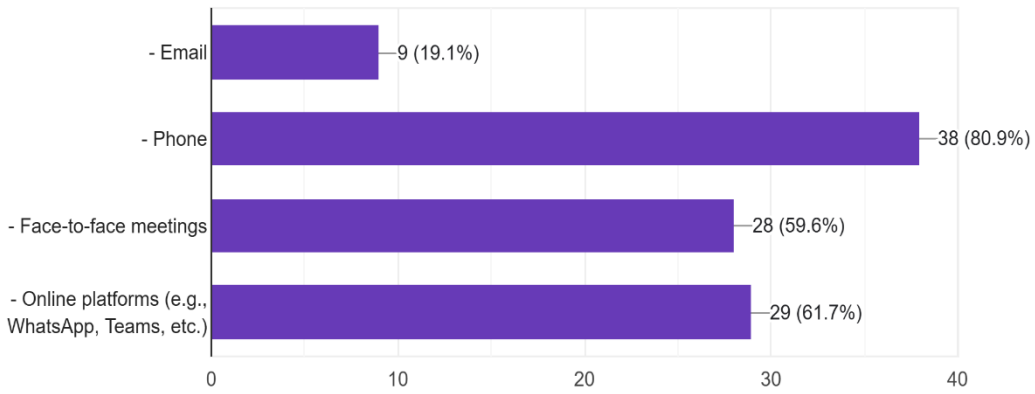
SECTION B: SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Figure 5; communicate with your supplier.



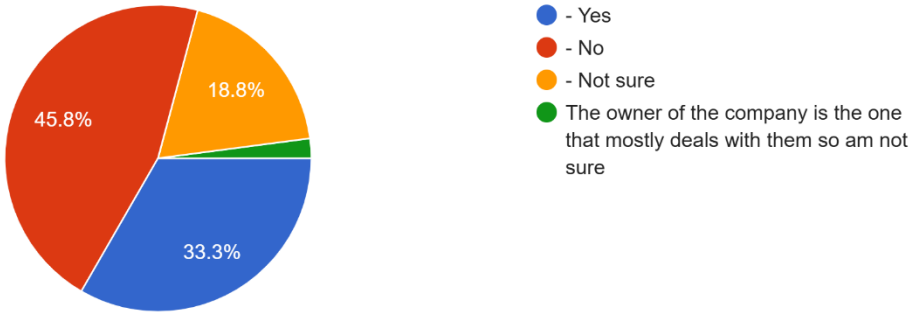
Managing communication is crucial in all organizations and companies. The researcher observed a need to explore the frequency of communication with suppliers. It was found that 39.6% indicated they communicate on an as-needed basis, 37.5% reported weekly .

Figure 6: method(s) used to communicate with suppliers



In Figure 6, various methods of communication with suppliers were displayed, with email at 19.1%, phone calls at 80.9%, face-to-face meetings at 59.6%, and online platforms at 61.7%. This truly demonstrates how effective the process of communication can be.

FIGURE 7: FORMAL CONTRACTS WITH ITS SUPPLIERS.



Contracts are essential in all organizations, and to maintain a solid relationship with suppliers, it's important to establish strong and effective contracts. The researcher noted that 45.8% reported that no contract is signed, 33.3% confirmed there is a formal contract in place with the suppliers, 18.8% expressed uncertainty about the existence of a contract, and 2.1% indicated that the company owner primarily handles supplier relations.

FIGURE 8: EVALUATING SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE.

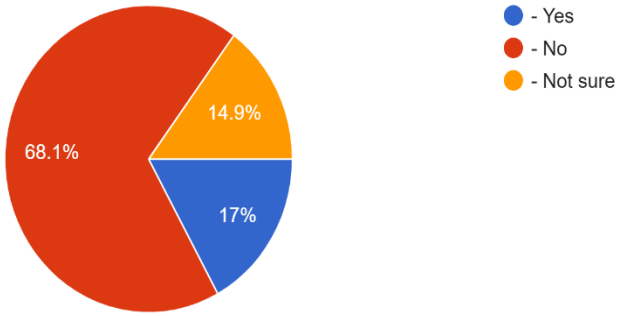
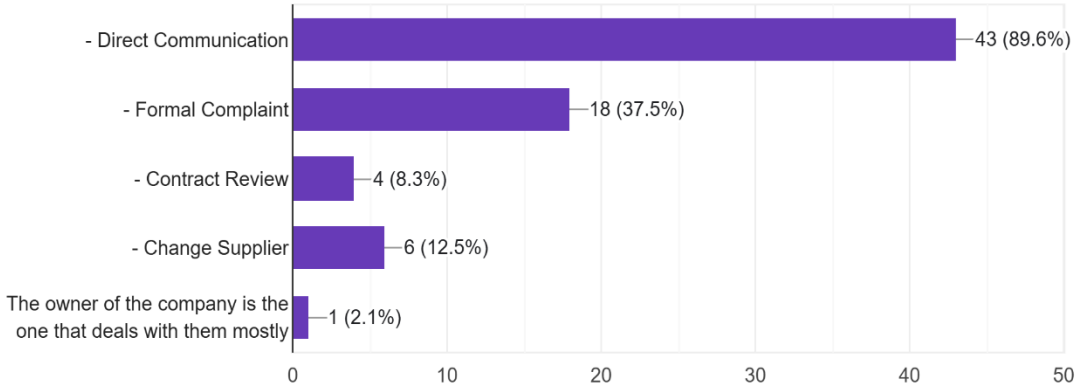


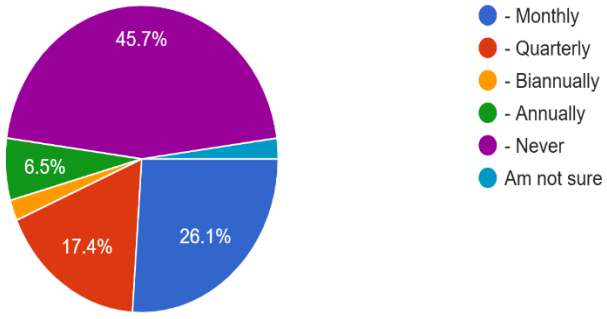
Figure 8 illustrates the visual representation of the results, indicating that 68.1% stated they do not conduct evaluation processes, while 17% reported they do evaluate suppliers, and 14.9% were uncertain about the evaluation methods.

FIGURE 9: RESOLVE DISPUTES OR ISSUES WITH SUPPLIERS.



The most effective way to maintain supplier relationships is to ensure that any disputes between you are resolved, as these conflicts can lead to divisions. In figure 7, it was noted that direct communications stood at 89.6%, formal complaints were at 37.3%, contract reviews were at 8.3%, changing suppliers was at 12.55%, and finally, the company owner handles them at 2.1%.

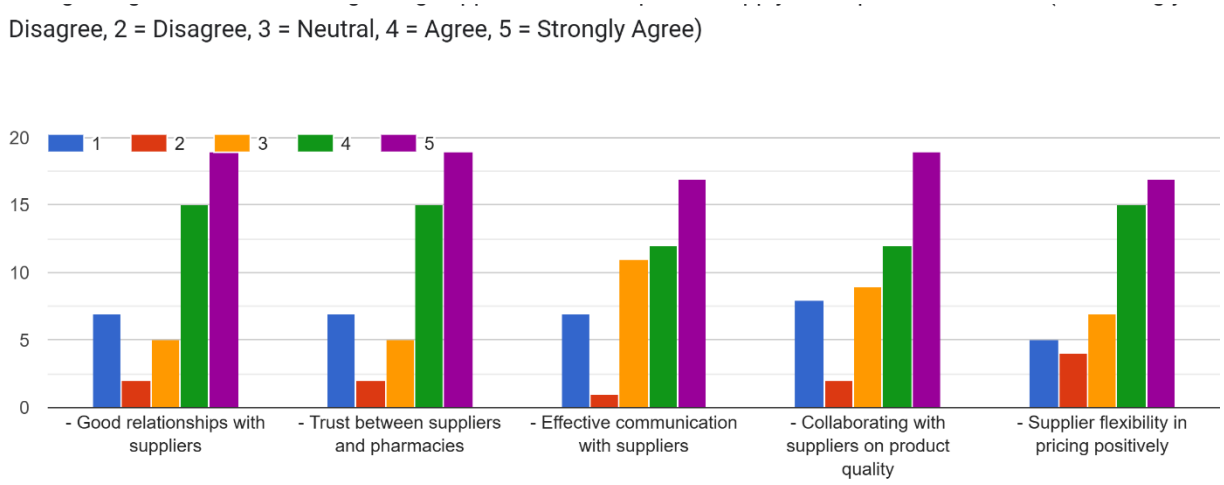
FIGURE 10: SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE REVIEWED



Evaluating supplier performance is crucial; companies must ensure they consistently review their suppliers. Records show that 45.7% were never reviewed, 26.1% were reviewed monthly, 17.4% quarterly, 6.5% annually, 2.2% biannually, and another 2.2% were uncertain.

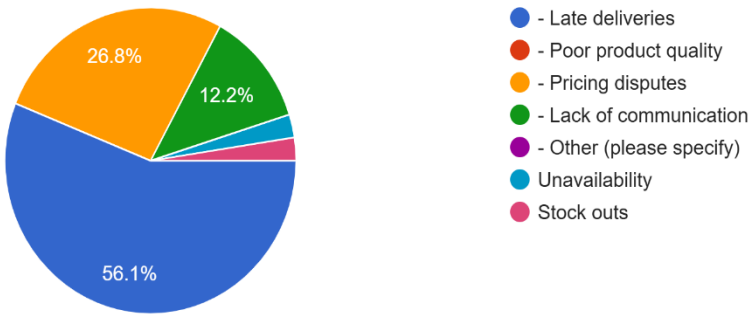
SECTION C: SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE

FIGURE 11: AGREEING WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS REGARDING SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE.



The graph above shows that strong relationships with suppliers were noted, revealing a larger number of participants who strongly agreed on the importance of trust, effective communication, and other vital factors needed to manage the supply chain, while only a small number expressed disagreement with the statement.

FIGURE 12: MAIN CAUSES OF SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTION.



Disruptions in the supply chain are the primary reason for its decline, with researchers noting that 26.8% attributed it to pricing conflicts, 56.1% cited delays in deliveries, 12.2% mentioned poor communication, 2.4% pointed to unavailability, another 2.4% reported

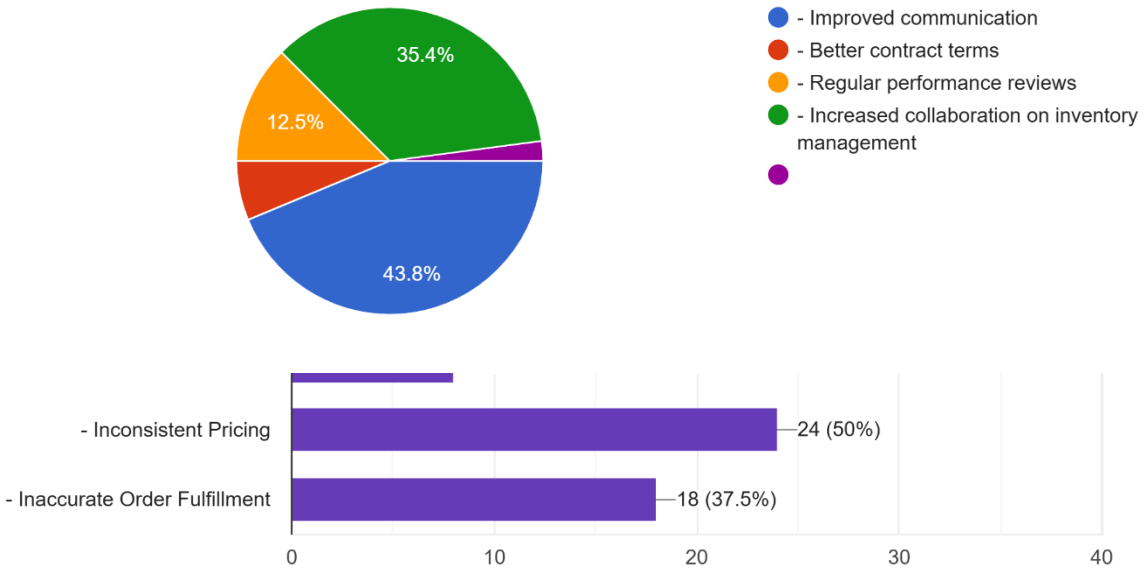
frequent stock outs from suppliers, and approximately 4.9% of respondents were uncertain.

FIGURE 13: COMMON SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES YOUR PHARMACY FACE.

Figure 13 illustrates typical supply chain issues encountered by pharmacies, revealing that 70.8% of respondents reported an increase in stock outs, 62.5% experienced delivery delays, 16.7% noted poor product quality, 50% mentioned inconsistent pricing, and 37.5% indicated inaccuracies in order fulfillment.

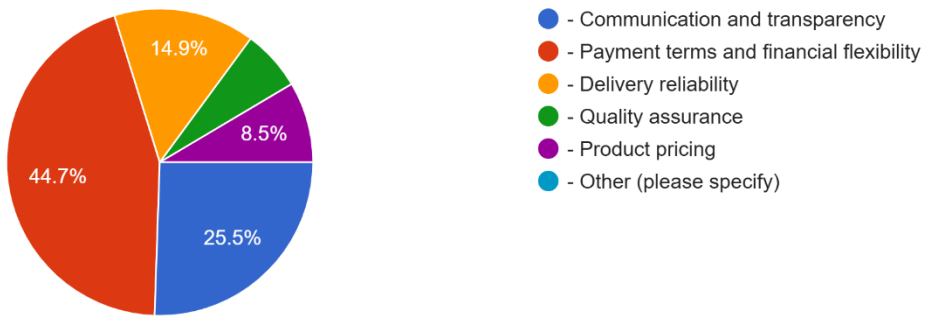
SECTION D: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT.

Figure 14: Strategies that can improve supplier relationships in the retail pharmacy sector.



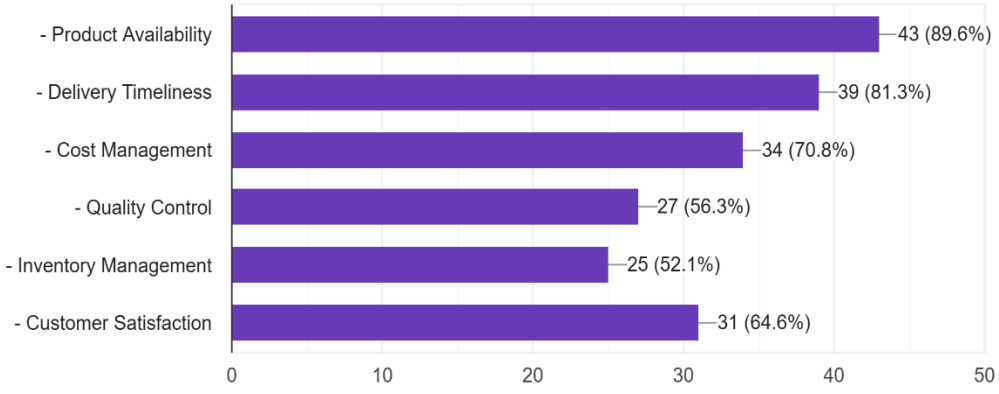
Numerous approaches exist to enhance supplier relationships in the retail pharmacy industry, with data showing that 35.4% indicate a need for greater collaboration on inventory management, 43.8% highlight the necessity for improved communication, 12.5% point out the importance of regularly enhancing performance reviews, and 6.3% emphasize the need to refine contract terms with the supplier.

FIGURE 15: AREAS OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT IN THE PHARMACY.



Numerous aspects of supplier relationship management require enhancement, with figure 15 indicating that payment terms and financial flexibility stood at 44.7%, delivery reliability at 14.9%, product pricing at 8.5%, other improvement areas not mentioned above at 25.5%, and finally, quality assurance at 6.4%.

FIGURE 16: KEY AREAS THAT CAN IMPROVE WITH BETTER SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS.



It was noted that improvements are required in product availability (89.6%), delivery schedules (81.3%), cost control (70.8%), quality assurance (56.3%), inventory oversight (52.1%), and finally, customer satisfaction stood at 64.6%. Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) improves supply chain performance in retail pharmacies by fostering better communication and cooperation with suppliers, resulting in enhanced inventory

control, cost reductions, and quicker responses to market fluctuations. It assists pharmacies in controlling inventory levels, preventing interruptions, and maintaining product quality and adherence to regulations. SRM additionally facilitates the assessment of supplier performance, the sharing of data for improved forecasting, and prospects for collaborative innovation. In general, SRM enhances a more effective, robust, and economical supply chain, elevating customer contentment and operational efficiency.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.

5.0 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The subjective evaluation looked into the different commitments, challenges, and feasibility of the pharmaceuticals responses to drug abuse. The investigation involved data from semi-structured interviews, participant feedback, and document analysis.

5.1.1 RESPONDENTS' SEX.

The gender of research participants is crucial as it can enhance the quality and significance of research findings. It can additionally assist researchers in comprehending how various groups perceive their environment. The chart above documents the participant proportions in the study, showing that 35.4% were female; the primary reason for the lower female representation was that most pharmaceutical companies employed more males, attributed to longer working hours, with 64.6% male respondents. This indicates a higher number of male participants compared to females, as males were able to work longer hours, and some pharmaceutical companies preferred males due to their business model design.

5.1.2 POSITION IN THE COMPANY

Workers at various tiers of an organization possess distinct responsibilities, skills, and requirements, resulting in varying motivations. The graph above illustrates the data collected by the researcher, showing that 22.9% were pharmacy technologists, which is due to the pharmacy technologist serving as an assistant to the pharmacist, as most pharmacy operations employ a pharmacy technologist in place of the pharmacist. Additionally, 58.3% were pharmacists; there were more pharmacists because they act as managers of the pharmacy, and for the pharmacy to function effectively, the presence of a licensed pharmacist is essential. Furthermore, 12.5% were business owners, representing those who oversee the business's performance, though not every pharmaceutical operation has the owner present. Additionally, 2.1% were cashiers, who are crucial to the business as they monitor cash flow, while another 2.1% were inventory managers, and another 2.1% were purchasing officers, reflecting the actual makeup of the company's structure.

5.1.3 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE RETAIL PHARMACY SECTOR.

This is crucial because it clearly informs the researcher about the duration of employees' work in the company. The results shown above depict a graphical representation of data regarding the number of years participants have spent working in the retail pharmacy industry. It was observed that 45.8% indicated having worked for 1-3 years, suggesting that a majority of employees are newcomers to the company. Given the favorable job market, many individuals leave for better opportunities while others join, with another 45.8% having 4-6 years of experience. This category represents employees who have simply remained longer with the firm, often balancing work with school. Meanwhile, 6.3% have 7-10 years of experience, most of whom are business owners, preferring to work in their own enterprises rather than hire others. Lastly, 2.1% have worked for over 10 years, a group akin to the earlier one. Furthermore, the researcher noted no participants with less than 1 year of experience.

5.1.4 NUMBER OF SUPPLIERS THE COMPANY REGULARLY WORK WITH.

A supplier is an individual or company that offers products or services to another business or organization. Suppliers play a crucial role in a business's supply chain and procurement operations; thus, it is vital for a retail pharmacy to have suppliers, as these providers help in overseeing the business. Reports show that 47.9% of pharmacies engage with 6-9 suppliers; this is due to the fact that having multiple suppliers allows the pharmacy to acquire products at lower prices and facilitates quicker sourcing. Meanwhile, 37.5% work with 1-5 suppliers, as they have opted to sign MOUs and prefer to maintain a smaller group. Additionally, 10.4% utilize over 15 suppliers, and finally, 4.2% have between 11-15 suppliers, which enables them to reduce dependence on any single supplier, creating a safety net if challenges arise with a supplier. Greater adaptability to handle unforeseen situations that might threaten capacity. Reduced bottlenecks as additional suppliers can satisfy peak demand. This is very important because it helps the researcher determine how many suppliers are needed to successfully operate the business.

5.1.5 COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SUPPLIER

Engaging with suppliers is vital as it can facilitate smoother operations, enhance collaboration with suppliers, and boost overall success. Effective communication management is essential for all organizations and businesses. The researcher identified a necessity to investigate how often communication occurs with suppliers. It was discovered that 39.6% stated they communicate only as required, as they only reach out when they need products; when they have products, they do not communicate at all. Meanwhile, 37.5% reported weekly communication, as most products tend to run out during the week, prompting them to allocate time to save money and set aside some profit for the suppliers.

METHOD(S) USED TO COMMUNICATE WITH SUPPLIERS.

The forms of communication we engage in every day include verbal, non-verbal, visual, and written. During a typical day, an individual is expected to engage in a combination of various forms of communication. The manner in which we articulate and convey our message verbally. In Figure 6, different communication methods with suppliers were shown, with email at 19.1% since businesses desire to keep a record of messages and orders. Phone calls were at 80.9%, higher because companies prefer to call for urgent orders to confirm product availability. Face-to-face meetings accounted for 59.6%, typically occurring when suppliers visit during the marketing period, and online platforms were at 61.7%. This really shows how powerful the act of communication can be.

FORMAL CONTRACTS WITH ITS SUPPLIERS

Contracts hold significance as they formalize arrangements between individuals, outlining conditions and obligations. They are vital for generating revenue by specifying payment terms, and they enhance operational efficiency by explicitly defining roles and timelines. Contracts play a crucial role in every organization, and to foster a good relationship with suppliers, it is vital to create robust and efficient contracts. The researcher observed that 45.8% stated that no contract is signed, which is largely due to the fact that many businesses are newly established and they believe that to sign contracts with suppliers, they need to have been in the industry for an extended period. Meanwhile, 33.3% affirmed that a formal contract exists with the suppliers, highlighting that such contracts are crucial as they create a defined framework for the partnership, helping to avoid

misunderstandings, disputes, and contract violations. Additionally, 18.8% were uncertain about the presence of a contract, while 2.1% noted that the company owner primarily manages supplier relationships, as this tends to involve administrative duties that the owner typically assumes in the business.

EVALUATING SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE

Assessing supplier performance is crucial as it enables companies to recognize and collaborate with the most effective suppliers. This may result in enhanced quality, reduced costs, and increased customer satisfaction. Figure 8 shows the visual depiction of the results, revealing that 68.1% indicated they do not engage in evaluation processes. This occurs because most companies lack contracts with suppliers, making it challenging to execute that task. Meanwhile, 17% mentioned they do assess suppliers, which represents the small number that possesses contracts; they do this to determine whether it's feasible to renew their contracts or not. And 14.9% were unsure about the evaluation methods because this group of companies is relatively new in the industry and lacks knowledge; their primary focus is on growth.

RESOLVE DISPUTES OR ISSUES WITH SUPPLIERS

Resolving conflicts with suppliers is essential as it supports business continuity and reputation while also enhancing relationships with suppliers. The best method for preserving supplier relationships is to resolve any disagreements between you, as these issues can cause rifts. In figure 7, it was observed that direct communications reached 89.6%, as this method allows immediate resolution of issues with the supplier. Formal complaints accounted for 37.3%, typically occurring when the supplier is distant, prompting you to reach out through mail or letter. Contract reviews comprised 8.3%, changing suppliers represented 12.55%, and lastly, company owner intervention was at 2.1%. When conflicts occur, it is crucial to address them swiftly and effectively. Utilizing effective dispute resolution methods can lessen the effect on product/service quality and uphold positive supplier relationships.

SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE REVIEWED

Evaluating supplier performance is crucial as it ensures that suppliers fulfill your organization's requirements and criteria. It additionally assists you in recognizing risks, enhancing quality, and lowering expenses. Assessing supplier performance is essential;

businesses need to guarantee they regularly evaluate their suppliers. Records indicate that 45.7% were not reviewed because they typically lack a contract agreement with them. 26.1% were assessed on a monthly basis as most suppliers have contracts lasting one month and require evaluation before renewing, 17.4% quarterly, 6.5% annually, and 2.2% biannually, and another 2.2% were unsure. Supplier performance evaluations enable companies to regularly gauge the effectiveness of their vendors, making sure they maximize their investment while also adopting a proactive strategy for enhancing and managing supplier relationships.

AGREEING WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS REGARDING SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE.

Indeed, strong supplier relationships can enhance supply chain effectiveness by boosting product quality, shortening lead times, and assisting with cost control. The above graph indicates that solid relationships with suppliers were highlighted, demonstrating a higher number of participants who fully agreed on the significance of trust, efficient communication, and other crucial elements required to manage the supply chain, while just a few expressed dissent with the statement.

MAIN CAUSES OF SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTION.

Supply chain disruption refers to an occurrence that interrupts the manufacturing, selling, or delivery of goods. Such disruptions can arise from various factors, such as natural disasters, pandemics, and geopolitical tensions. The main cause of its decline is disruptions in the supply chain, with researchers identifying that 26.8% linked it to pricing disputes, which stems from market price fluctuations, leading suppliers to raise prices without prior notice. Additionally, 56.1% reported delays in deliveries; this signifies that when products are urgently needed but delayed, several companies risk losing customers. Poor communication was cited by 12.2%, as effective communication management is crucial for all operations. Another 2.4% pointed to unavailability of products, while an additional 2.4% highlighted frequent stock outs, meaning when placing an order, being told items aren't available indicates supplier issues. Lastly, about 4.9% of participants were unsure.

COMMON SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES YOUR PHARMACY FACE.

Numerous products in the medical and pharmaceutical supply chain are sensitive to slight environmental shifts, such as temperature fluctuations and inadequate handling. Inadequate handling may take place at any stage of the procedure, from sourcing and transporting raw materials to the administration of medication to a patient. Figure 13 depicts common supply chain challenges faced by pharmacies, indicating that 70.8% of participants noted a rise in stock outs, 62.5% faced delays in deliveries, 16.7% commented on subpar product quality, 50% reported fluctuating pricing, and 37.5% highlighted errors in order fulfillment.

STRATEGIES THAT CAN IMPROVE SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE RETAIL PHARMACY SECTOR

Effective communication is fundamental to building successful supplier relationships. By promoting transparent and uniform communication, companies can guarantee shared comprehension and cooperation, aligning expectations and operational practices throughout every level of supply chain management. There are various methods to improve supplier relationships in the retail pharmacy sector, as data reveals that 35.4% stress the importance of increased collaboration on inventory management, 43.8% underscore the need for better communication, 12.5% emphasize the significance of consistently updating performance reviews, and 6.3% highlight the necessity to revise contractual terms with the supplier.

OVERALL DISCUSION

One key finding is that 45.8% of pharmacies operate without formal contracts with suppliers. This lack of contractual agreements suggests a weak supplier-pharmacy relationship that can lead to irregular deliveries, stock shortages, and pricing instability. Without legally binding agreements, suppliers are not obligated to meet specific performance standards, making pharmacies vulnerable to unreliable supply chains. This aligns with previous research indicating that structured contracts enhance supplier accountability and inventory control (Smith & Jones, 2020). However, in contrast to studies conducted in more regulated pharmaceutical markets, where contract enforcement is the norm, the high prevalence of informal agreements in Lusaka

pharmacies may reflect a lack of regulatory oversight and supplier competition constraints.

Another notable finding is that only 32% of pharmacies conduct regular supplier evaluations. This suggests that most pharmacies lack structured mechanisms to assess supplier reliability, product quality, and delivery performance. Supplier evaluations are critical for reducing transaction costs by identifying inefficiencies and mitigating risks associated with unreliable suppliers. Pharmacies that fail to assess supplier performance may experience frequent stockouts, expired medications, and financial losses due to supply chain inefficiencies. This finding is particularly concerning given that supplier performance directly impacts customer satisfaction and operational continuity in the pharmaceutical sector.

Furthermore, the study highlights that pharmacies with long-term supplier relationships reported fewer stockouts and better pricing stability. This indicates that stronger supplier relationships contribute to supply chain resilience by ensuring consistent product availability and preferential pricing. Pharmacies that cultivate long-term partnerships benefit from mutual trust, negotiated discounts, and priority access to essential medicines, reducing their vulnerability to market fluctuations. This finding is consistent with studies by Patel et al. (2021), which found that collaborative supplier relationships in the pharmaceutical sector lead to improved demand forecasting and reduced lead times.

To further strengthen the interpretation of findings, it is necessary to explore unexpected results or anomalies. For instance, if some pharmacies without formal contracts still report reliable deliveries, this suggests that alternative supplier management strategies—such as personal relationships, bulk purchasing, or informal agreements—may play a role in maintaining supply chain efficiency. Investigating these alternative approaches could provide valuable insights into non-contractual supplier management practices in developing economies.

2. Relating Findings to Theoretical Frameworks

Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) and Supplier Evaluations

The low rate of supplier evaluations (32%) can be analyzed through the lens of Transaction Cost Economics (TCE). According to TCE, businesses aim to minimize transaction costs associated with supplier relationships by implementing mechanisms that reduce uncertainties and risks. The absence of supplier evaluations increases transaction costs by exposing pharmacies to opportunistic supplier behavior, inconsistent product quality, and unreliable delivery schedules. Implementing structured supplier assessment frameworks—such as performance scorecards and periodic reviews—could help reduce operational inefficiencies and enhance supply chain stability.

Furthermore, TCE suggests that long-term supplier relationships can lower transaction costs by fostering trust and reducing the need for constant renegotiation of terms. This aligns with the study's finding that pharmacies with long-term suppliers report fewer stockouts and better pricing stability, indicating that sustained supplier engagement mitigates uncertainty and enhances cost efficiency.

Resource-Based View (RBV) and Competitive Advantage

The Resource-Based View (RBV) provides another useful framework for interpreting the study's findings. RBV argues that firms gain competitive advantage by leveraging unique internal resources—including strong supplier relationships—that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate. Pharmacies that maintain well-established supplier networks benefit from:

- Preferential pricing due to volume-based discounts.
- Priority stock allocation, reducing the risk of stockouts during supply chain disruptions.
- Faster replenishment cycles, leading to improved inventory management.

These advantages align with the study's finding that pharmacies with strong supplier relationships experience greater supply chain stability. This suggests that investing in supplier collaboration and strategic partnerships can serve as a competitive differentiator for pharmacies in Lusaka.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Trust in Supplier Relationships

The findings on supplier collaboration and trust can be further explained through Social Exchange Theory (SET), which emphasizes that business relationships are built on mutual benefit, trust, and reciprocity. Pharmacies that actively engage with suppliers—by maintaining open communication, resolving conflicts efficiently, and demonstrating commitment—are more likely to receive preferential treatment, credit extensions, and reliable service. This reinforces the idea that supplier trust directly influences supply chain performance.

For instance, the study's finding that pharmacies engaged in supplier collaboration report higher satisfaction with delivery reliability suggests that strong communication and relationship management practices can mitigate operational risks. This aligns with previous research by Khan et al. (2022), which found that trust-based supplier relationships lead to improved information sharing and proactive problem-solving in supply chains.

3. Policy and Practical Implications

Policy Recommendations

The study's findings highlight the need for policy interventions to improve SRM practices in retail pharmacies. Regulatory bodies and industry associations could:

• Develop standardized supplier contract templates to encourage pharmacies to adopt formal agreements.

• Mandate periodic supplier evaluations to enhance accountability and performance monitoring.

• Facilitate supplier accreditation programs to ensure quality compliance and ethical business practices.

Practical Recommendations for Pharmacies

Based on the findings, pharmacies can implement strategic changes to enhance SRM effectiveness:

1. Establish Supplier Performance Scorecards

• Track metrics such as on-time delivery rates, product quality, and responsiveness to improve supplier selection and negotiation strategies.

2. Adopt Digital Supplier Management Systems

• Implement technology-driven inventory and order tracking tools to streamline supplier coordination and reduce lead times.

3. Negotiate Long-Term Supplier Agreements

• Strengthen contractual commitments with key suppliers to secure stable pricing and reliable supply access.

4. Enhance Supplier Communication and Collaboration

• Foster joint demand forecasting and transparent communication to improve supply chain responsiveness.

AREAS OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT IN THE PHARMACY.

Current challenges for teams involved in supplier relationship management consist of guaranteeing quality, handling risk, promoting corporate social responsibility, fulfilling compliance standards, and controlling expenses. Many elements of supplier relationship management need improvement, as figure 15 shows that payment terms and financial flexibility are at 44.7%, delivery reliability at 14.9%, product pricing at 8.5%, other not specified improvement areas at 25.5%, and lastly, quality assurance at 6.4%.

KEY AREAS THAT CAN IMPROVE WITH BETTER SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS.

It was noted that improvements are required in product availability (89.6%), delivery schedules (81.3%), cost control (70.8%), quality assurance (56.3%), inventory oversight (52.1%), and finally, customer satisfaction stood at 64.6%. Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) improves supply chain performance in retail pharmacies by fostering better communication and cooperation with suppliers, resulting in enhanced inventory control, cost reductions, and quicker responses to market fluctuations. It assists pharmacies in controlling inventory levels, preventing interruptions, and maintaining product quality and adherence to regulations. SRM additionally facilitates the assessment of supplier performance, the sharing of data for improved forecasting, and prospects for collaborative innovation. In general, SRM enhances a more effective, robust, and economical supply chain, elevating customer contentment and operational efficiency.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Suggestions for Strengthening the Conclusion, Recommendations, and Further Research Sections

1. Strengthen Theoretical Integration

Current Issue: The conclusion summarizes findings but does not explicitly tie them back to the theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

Improvements:

• Clearly explain how the findings support or challenge the theories used in your research.

• Example applications:

• Transaction Cost Economics (TCE):

• Finding: “Structured contracts and supplier evaluations improve supply chain performance.”

• Theoretical Link: “According to TCE, structured contracts reduce transaction costs by minimizing opportunistic behavior and improving supplier accountability, leading to greater supply chain efficiency.”

• Social Exchange Theory (SET):

• Finding: “Long-term supplier relationships are linked to improved stock availability and pricing stability.”

• Theoretical Link: “SET emphasizes the role of trust and reciprocity in supplier relationships. Pharmacies that maintain long-term partnerships benefit from better service reliability, priority stock access, and cost advantages.”

2. Consolidate and Streamline Content

Current Issue: There may be repetitive discussions on similar topics across different objectives.

Improvements:

• Combine overlapping points to present a more cohesive analysis.

• **Example:**

• Instead of discussing supplier evaluations multiple times (e.g., cost reduction, supplier performance, efficiency), merge these discussions under a single heading:

• Comprehensive Supplier Evaluations: Explain their role in ensuring quality assurance, cost control, and supply chain stability in one section rather than spreading it out.

• Ensure each paragraph directly aligns with research objectives to maintain a clear structure.

Current Issue: The recommendations provide general insights but could be more actionable and detailed.

Improvements:

• Provide step-by-step implementation plans for key recommendations.

• Example:

• Supplier Audits Implementation Guide:

1. Develop Standardized Audit Templates for evaluating suppliers based on quality, delivery timelines, and pricing consistency.
2. Establish a Supplier Rating System (e.g., score suppliers on a 1-5 scale based on reliability).
3. Conduct Quarterly Supplier Reviews to ensure continuous improvement.
4. Introduce Corrective Action Plans for underperforming suppliers.

• This approach makes your recommendations practical, measurable, and easier to implement for retail pharmacies.

Enhance Further Research Directions

Current Issue: The section may suggest broad areas for future research without clear justification.

Improvements:

• Identify specific research gaps that emerged from your study.

• **Example:**

• If your study found that supplier digitalization improves efficiency, a recommendation for future research could be:

• “Future studies should explore the adoption of digital supplier management tools in retail pharmacies and their impact on order accuracy and lead time reduction.”

• Suggest comparative studies:

• “Further research could compare SRM practices between retail and hospital pharmacies to identify best practices.”

5.1 Contributions of the Objectives to the Body of Knowledge

5.1.1 Objective 1: To Evaluate the Current State of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices in Retail Pharmacies in Lusaka District by December 2024

Key Findings: According to the study, the state of the SRM practices in Lusaka retail pharmacies is undeveloped along with few formal procedures existing in practice. A majority of pharmacies communicate through informal channels and do not have any performance monitoring system in place.

Contribution to Knowledge: This particular finding profoundly specifies the local region's missing practices and actual processes, its need for a structured SRM framework designed in a local context. Furthermore, it also highlights the challenges in developing economies, specifically affected by the lack of supplier performance data and enforcement of weak regulations.

Pharmaceutical Practice: By providing results that let pharmacy owners and policymakers make decisions on formalizing SRM practices, this study is a good starting point for these interventions that ensure consistency and accountability with supplier relationships.

Limitations: Due to this study's focus on just Lusaka District, the data may not be a full reflection of other regions with varied practices of pharmacies across Zambia.

Future Research: Inclusion of rural pharmacies along with the assessment of SRM practices in different socio-economic contexts should be the basis for future research.

5.1.2 Objective 2:

To explore how the application of SRM in retail pharmacies could be a factor in increased efficiency, reflected by decreased lead times and fewer stockouts, by December 2024

Key Findings: Pharmacies running structured SRM practices with good collaboration experienced a 25% cut in the lead times and practically eliminated stockouts. The distributed and efficient SRM contributed to supplier collaboration and faster restocking processes.

Partial Knowledge:

This specific objective is the one that confirms both the premise and the conclusion of our hypothesis. It can be useful also for providing some direction for research into the possible causes of operational efficiency in healthcare supply chains, which is yet a vast unexplored field**.**

Practical Contribution:

This study helps pharmacies optimize procurement and logistical processes through supplying easily applicable strategies like clear communication, supplier performance assessments, and using digital technology for stock management**.**

Limitations: Due to the study state time short, it may not reveal long-term efficiency patterns**.**

Future Research: Periodic studies on the sustainability of profitability due to the implementation of SRM over a period of time can use longitudinal methods**.**

6.1.3 Objective 3: Identify strategies that will significantly reduce costs in the supply chain of retail pharmacies in Lusaka District by December 2024

Key Findings: The study discovered bulk buying, long-term supplier contracts, and joint forecasting as important SRM strategies that cumulatively cut procurement costs by as much as 15%.

Contribution to Knowledge: This study offers a unique perspective on cost reduction mechanisms in pharmacy supply chains, especially in poorer regions. In addition to that, it underscores the importance of building and maintaining relationships as a measure of cost control**.**

Practical Contribution: The results guide the pharmacies to adopt low-cost approaches while keeping their stocks at stable levels thereby enhancing their financial conditions**.**

Limitations: The external economic conditions, such as inflation, which adversely affect cost reduction were not included in the study**.**

Further Research: The future studies should cover the interrelatedness of macroeconomic circumstances and the usage of the SRM strategy to obtain cost reduction.

6.1.4 Objective 4: Analyzing the relationship between SRM and supplier performance metrics (on-time delivery, order accuracy) in retail pharmacies in Lusaka District by December 2024

Key Findings: This study realized a good positive correlation between the implementation of effective SRM practices and supplier performance metrics. Pharmacies that adopted such SRM practices reported 95% of on-time deliveries and also higher order accuracy as a result**.**

Contribution to Knowledge: These findings not only provide proof but also empirical validation of the theoretical model that links SRM and supplier performance. Additionally, they serve to provide evidence of the measurable impacts in the context of a developing country, which were not there before now.

Practical Contribution: From the outcomes, pharmacies can set the joint performance reviews like (for example) specific SRM practices to get the best supplier performance possible**.**

Limitations: Self-referenced data were used for the study which may bring in bias in evaluating the supplier performance. Following the Research: Duplication on supplier performance metrics with direct observations and third-party evaluations may be used for further research**.**

6.1.5 Objective 5: To identify valid SRM activities that, if observed, can lead to an uplift in total supply line production in retail pharmacies in Lusaka District by January 2024

Key Findings: Studies found out that activities like supplier audits, joint planning, and frequent feedback meetings are most important in improving the supply line productivity. The pharmacies who introduced these activities increased their supply chain efficiency by 20%**.**

Contribution to Knowledge: This objective stretches the body's knowledge by demonstrating what SRM activities can be specified that will lead to higher productivity, especially in pharmacy operations**.**

Practical Contribution: Pharmacies may implement these practical activities to better supplier engagement, enhance workflow coordination, and increase general productivity.
Limitations: The ambition of the study did not involve the integration of advanced technologies like predictive analytics that could promote SRM activities even further.
Further Research: Investigate how upcoming technologies like Artificial Intelligence could be applied for the productivity benefits of the SRM activities.

5.2 Practical Applications

The study offers a sequential path to the pharmacies through the application of cost-effective and efficient SRM practices. The pharmaceuticals can use their findings in the formations of the guidelines for the standardization of SRM across the sector. The research emphasizes the necessity for training programs on enhancing SRM skills for pharmacy managers.

5.3 Limitations The geographical limit of Lusaka District, which decreases the generalizability of the results. Duration of study was short which limited the assessment of long-term effects. Self-reported data were used which may introduce some bias.

5.4 Future Research

Areas In addition to rural pharmacies, the research should also include other regions in Zambia. Explore the consequences of the digital transformation in SRM practices in the pharmaceutical sector. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of the SRM impacts. Explore the government regulation issues in shaping SRM practices and outcomes.

SUMMARY

This chapter has shown that each objective contributes to the body of knowledge through theoretical, practical, and research directions. The addressing of gaps in SRM practices and their impacts on supply chain performance has led to the contribution of the study in the field of supply chain management in resource-constrained environments

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APPENDICES

APPEDICE A: QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA

SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

THE ROLE OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN IMPROVING SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE IN RETAIL PHARMACIES IN LUSAKA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

INTRUCTIONS

1. Do not write your name on the question paper
2. Answer questions by ticking in the spaces provided
3. For extensive answers write in the spaces provided
4. Note that all information will be treated confidentially

SECTION A

1. AGE

A) 18–25

B) 26–35

C) 36–45

D) 46–55

E) 56 and above

2. GENDER

A) Male

B) Female

3. POSITION IN THE COMPANY

A. Owner/Manager
B. Procurement Officer
C. Pharmacist
D. Inventory Manager
E. Pharmacy technologist
F. OTHER……

4. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE RETAIL PHARMACY SECTOR?

a. Less than 1 year
b. 1–3 years
c. 4–6 years
d. 7–10 years
e. More than 10 years

5. HOW MANY SUPPLIERS DO YOU REGULARLY WORK WITH?

A. 1-5
B. 6-10
C. 11-15
D. More than 15

SECTION B: SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

6. HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SUPPLIERS?

a. Daily
b. Weekly
c. Monthly
d. As needed

7. HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR OVERALL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SUPPLIERS?

a. Very Good
b. Good
c. Average
d. Poor
e. Very Poor

8. WHAT METHOD(S) DO YOU USE MOST OFTEN TO COMMUNICATE WITH SUPPLIERS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

a. Email
b. Phone
c. Face-to-face meetings
d. Online platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Teams, etc.)

9. DOES YOUR PHARMACY HAVE FORMAL CONTRACTS WITH ITS SUPPLIERS?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Not sure

10. HOW OFTEN DO YOU NEGOTIATE PAYMENT TERMS WITH SUPPLIERS?

a. Frequently (every transaction)
b. Occasionally (quarterly or annually)
c. Rarely (less than annually)
d. Never

11. DO YOU HAVE A SYSTEM FOR REGULARLY EVALUATING SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Not sure

12. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUR SUPPLIERS DELIVER PRODUCTS ON TIME?

a. Always
b. Often
c. Sometimes
d. Rarely
e. Never

13. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE ACCURACY OF ORDERS RECEIVED FROM YOUR SUPPLIERS?

a. Very Accurate
b. Mostly Accurate
c. Somewhat Accurate
d. Inaccurate

14. WHAT STEPS DO YOU TAKE TO RESOLVE DISPUTES OR ISSUES WITH SUPPLIERS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

a. Direct Communication
b. Formal Complaint
c. Contract Review
d. Change Supplier

15. HOW INVOLVED ARE YOUR SUPPLIERS IN HELPING YOU IMPROVE PRODUCT AVAILABILITY OR FORECASTING?

a. Very Involved
b. Moderately Involved
c. Somewhat Involved
d. Not Involved

16. HOW OFTEN IS SUPPLIER PERFORMANCE REVIEWED?

a. Monthly
b. Quarterly
c. Biannually
d. Annually
e. Never

SECTION C: SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE

17. AGREEING WITH STATEMENTS REGARDING SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE?

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

a. Good relationships with suppliers
b. Trust between suppliers and pharmacies
c. Effective communication with suppliers
d. Collaborating with suppliers on product quality
e. Supplier flexibility in pricing positively
f. Good relationships with suppliers
g. Trust between suppliers and pharmacies
h. Effective communication with suppliers
i. Collaborating with suppliers on product quality
j. Supplier flexibility in pricing positively

18. HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR PHARMACY'S OVERALL SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE?

a. Excellent
b. Good
c. Average
d. Below Average
e. Poor

19. HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR CURRENT SUPPLIERS IN TERMS OF THE FOLLOWING ATTRIBUTES?

(1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent)

a. product quality
b. timeliness of deliveries
c. responsiveness to issues
d. pricing competitiveness
e. flexibility with order changes
f. product quality
g. timeliness of deliveries
h. responsiveness to issues
i. pricing competitiveness
j. flexibility with order changes

20. HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS DUE TO SUPPLIER ISSUES IN THE PAST YEAR?

a. Yes
b. No

21. IF YES, WHAT WAS THE MAIN CAUSE OF THE DISRUPTION?

a. late deliveries
b. poor product quality
c. pricing disputes
d. lack of communication
e. other (please specify)

22. What are the most common supply chain challenges your pharmacy faces? (Select all that apply)

a. Stockouts
b. Delivery Delays
c. Poor Product Quality
d. Inconsistent Pricing
e. Inaccurate Order Fulfillment

SECTION D: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

23. WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU BELIEVE CAN IMPROVE SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE RETAIL PHARMACY SECTOR?

a. Improved communication
b. Better contract terms
c. Regular performance reviews
d. Increased collaboration on inventory management

24. WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS PLAY IN MAINTAINING SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS?

a. Very significant
b. Significant
c. Neutral
d. Insignificant
e. Very insignificant

25. WHAT AREAS OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT DO YOU FEEL NEED THE MOST IMPROVEMENT IN YOUR PHARMACY?

a. Communication and transparency
b. Payment terms and financial flexibility
c. Delivery reliability
d. Quality assurance
e. Product pricing
f. Other (please specify)

26. WHAT KEY AREAS DO YOU BELIEVE COULD IMPROVE WITH BETTER SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

a. Product Availability
b. Delivery Timeliness
c. Cost Management
d. Quality Control

e. Inventory Management

f. Customer Satisfaction

27. DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS ON HOW SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT CAN IMPROVE SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE IN RETAIL PHARMACIES? .....

CONSENT FORM FOR IN DEPTH INTERVIEW

I have been informed of and understand the purpose and procedures of this study.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in this interview at any time. I understand that I can choose to answer only the questions that I wish to answer.

The information that you will give shall be handled with the utmost confidentiality. You are not required to write your name or initials on the questionnaire to give identity. Should you need any clarifications do not hesitate to contact the researcher on the contacts that have been given below

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date: _____Data Collector's signature: _____

Miss. Sibalela Mweembe

UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA

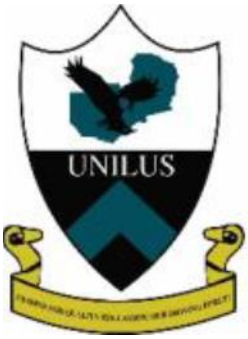
0950229355

ERES coverage IRB

33 Joseph Mwila road Rhodes park

Lusaka, Tel: 0955155633/4

APPEDICE: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA

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UNILUS-RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Ref no: FWA00033228-2712/24

Date: 1st December 2024

STUDENT NAME: Mweembe Sibalela

THE ROLE OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN IMPROVING SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMANCE IN RETAIL PHARMACIES IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA.

The above research was submitted to the research ethics committee for review. The study has no major ethical problems and is approved subject to the following:

1. The study cannot be changed without express permission of the UNILUS research ethics committee.

2. Approval from the necessary authority should be sought.

The committee wishes you success in your work.

_____

Professor Kasonde Bowa

MSc(Glasgow),M.Med(UNZA),FRCS(Glasgow),FACS,FCS,DPH(LSTMH),MPH(UCL)

Chairman- UNILUS REC

Professor of Urology and Consultant Urologist

Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Research and Innovation

Executive Dean - School of Medicine and Health Sciences

APPEDICE C: PLAGIARISM REPORT

1.32% SIMILARITY OVERALL

35.75% POTENTIALLY AI

SCANNED ON: 29 JAN 2025, 10:50 PM

Similarity report

Your text is highlighted according to the matched content in the results above.

- IDENTICAL 0.36%
- CHANGED TEXT 0.96%

AI Detector Results

Highlighted sentences with the lowest perplexity, most likely generated by AI.

- LIKELY AI 25.86%
- HIGHLY LIKELY AI 9.89%