

**RICeST<sup>[1]</sup>: ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT,  
AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF. JAFAR MEHRAD**

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**Question 16: How was RICeST's budget provided?**

For the first time in 1993, the third year of activity, Regional Information Center for Science and Technology like other Iran's governmental organizations was approved to get an independent budget which was about 1800 million Rials. At this time, Prof. Moe'in and Prof. Ali Salehi, Professor of Sharif University of Technology and a member of RICeST's high council, proposed the idea of taking a loan from Islamic Development Bank (IDB) -based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia- through holding a meeting in Sharif University of Technology. It should be noted that at that time, IDB's authorities were in Tehran in response to the invitation of Sharif University of Technology which was to take a loan from the bank, too. In that meeting, both RICeST and Sharif University of Technology introduced their programs and finally could receive their loans. Since each dollar cost 70 Rials at that time, taking a loan of 15 million dollars with long time repayments was a great help to RICeST. Afterwards, RICeST could order a lot of journals. Then, Internet lines were not available in Iran and so we at RICeST prepared and put a list of journals in our Bulletin Board Services (BBS). This matter which happened after the imposed war was like an explosion in the scientific society and universities which had started their scientific activities at a fairly accepted speed and were in need of more information support. So, plenty of information demands were delivered to RICeST.

Current budget of RICeST is provided through 3 sources:

1. Government public credits.
2. Revenues produced by providing information services and holding workshops.
3. Cooperation with universities, executive organizations and even UNESCO in carrying out research projects.

It should be noted that RICEST has used the 3<sup>rd</sup> so-called source on carrying out the research works related to the project of “Developing and Making Use of Communications and Information Technologies” for many times. These projects are implemented by an extra finance other than the usual budget allocated to RICEST. In this regard, we have already proposed many valuable projects which will provide RICEST with significant credits.

In addition to the mentioned sources, we use the centralized budgets authorized by the Vice Chancellor of Plan and Development of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

**Question 17: How does RICEST divide its budget between the traditional resources and the electronic ones?**

In order to answer this question, it should be considered that there are differences between the materials and sources available at RICEST and those of centers such as IRAN DOC. In other words, since the establishment, RICEST has been to purchase both printed and electronic resources simultaneously in the case of which these two kinds of resources are now developed parallel to each other.

Therefore, the national purse allocated to RICEST has been used to make a core collection in the fields of science and technology. Now, RICEST is considered as a center at which all journals of science and engineering are available. Such a core collection of printed and electronic journals was set up aiming at creating a national place for getting access to these valuable sources and then becoming independent from foreign information centers such as British Library. Since the chief condition for this independence is to possess these sources in our country, RICEST dedicates most of its budget to purchase printed materials, transforms them into electronic ones and then makes them available at its databases. This trend provides users with the opportunity for searching the bibliographic information, content list and abstracts, asking for original articles and receiving documents based on RICEST’s document delivery services.

**Question 18: What is RICEST’s policy on dividing budget to purchase each kind of information resources such as journals, books, etc.?**

As you know, journals could be ordered just once a year before the end of Christian year or exactly in the first days of new year. Considering the fact that the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology provides RICEST annually with about one million dollars to purchase scientific journals, this information center dedicates about one million and 600 thousand dollars to purchase non-Farsi journals each year.

But there are different trends towards purchasing books. In this regard, at first, the catalogues sent by creditable publishers will be handed to the members of scientific council and the Library and Information Science experts of RICeST. As the RICeST's scientific council is made up of outstanding professors from different majors of Shiraz University and this point that Shiraz University as a top higher education university covers more than 3000 students in various majors, it could be considered as a model and sample of other universities of Iran, and therefore, the viewpoints of these professors working in the university could be considered as the ideas of whole universities of Iran.

It is not necessary to purchase books at special careers but it could be done at any time needed. It should be noted that although RICeST has collected journals in art, humanities and social sciences since two years ago, purchasing books of these majors is not intended yet. Anyway, after delivering books to RICeST, our colleagues process and make them ready to be used by applicants. Nevertheless, because of the limited physical space of RICeST, the books are not put in shelves and have to be temporarily kept in the warehouse until the new building of RICeST is built.

**Question 19: What is RICeST's policy on need analysis and collection development?**

The scientific council of RICeST works in this regard. This council constitutes of the chief full professors of Shiraz University in different scientific and technical fields. Selecting and evaluating journals before ordering process are of the responsibilities of this council. The members of the council should assess their scientific majors to inform RICeST of the information needs of the students and academics. In this way, using the specialized viewpoints of the subject specialists, we can analyze the needs and precisely increase our resources in RICeST. In addition to access to the viewpoints of the scientific council, RICeST has established a database entitled "Information Need Analysis" which is accessible through RICeST's website. Therefore, RICeST contacts with different educational groups of universities and research centers such as administrative organizations and the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education and provides them with IDs and Passwords for access to this database. Then, research centers and universities send their requests to RICeST. After deleting repeated requests, RICeST orders the real needs of the applicants. On the other hand, this collection of lists sent to RICeST's Information Need Analysis database could be considered as a national list of needed journals. In this regard, RICeST is to do its 2007 purchase based on the information needs declared by the scientific society of the country.

**Question 20: How is RICeST's equipment selected and provided?**

Since I am very sensitive with regard to the RICeST's equipment, I decided not to

prepare market equipment. As you know, library shelves, especially those for journals, should have mobile boards in such a way that back issues could be put below the boards and the current issues be put on them. At that time, Constructive Jihad Organization in Shiraz had a section called “Nasr” which carried out technical works. Beautiful and standard shelves were made and delivered to RICEST by this organization. In this way, we could develop both our library and computer equipment.

**Question 21: Considering the fact that RICEST’s activities were new and there were various information resources, how did RICEST provide necessary computer software?**

Computer programming was one of interesting issues that RICEST was engaged in. At first, Dr. Majid Azarakhsh, faculty member of computer engineering of Shiraz University, was invited to RICEST as a consultant in computer affairs. However, there were some disagreements on computer programming. He said that in order to prepare the program for information storage and retrieval, availability of original information sources is necessary. On the other hand, I believed that a computer programmer could design a program by means of bibliographic information. Because of this disagreement we could not continue the cooperation. Then, we asked a M.S. student of computer engineering graduated from the Department of Engineering in Shiraz University. Using FoxPro program, he could design a simple program. So, simultaneously with purchasing books, Farsi and non-Farsi journals, RICEST’s software was prepared. In other words, since establishment, RICEST has been an electronic center and has used no traditional tools such as kardex, card cabinets, etc. in storing and retrieving information.

Pars Azarakhsh company has cooperated with RICEST in providing applicable programs since 1995. After initial investigations, RICEST bought the software costing 4000000 Rials from Pars Azarakhsh in order to store and retrieve information.

**Question 22: What was the effect of Compact Disks and Internet on the activities and performances of RICEST?**

In 1980’s, the years RICEST was established, online systems, tele-communications and access to information files were expensive. At that time, compact disk technology and Internet appeared. Compact disks had the advantage of providing databases and eternal and cheaper information services. RICEST had to pay much for connecting to foreign countries and receiving information files. Moreover, receiving same information at different times involved same expenses. In spite of the fact that the original databases in form of Compact Disks had to be bought by dealer, in comparison with the previous

systems they had a lot of advantages for RICeST and therefore they were warmly welcomed.

Following that, Internet technology appeared. At first, RICeST was connected to Internet via two lines. One was through Data Net Line and the other through connecting to Iran's scientific network the administrator of which was Iran Industrial and Scientific Research Organization. One of those two lines was supposed as a backup and used occasionally and the other line was used permanently.

**Question 23: How were RICeST's databases programmed, designed and provided?**

At first, RICeST was dependent upon the foreign information resources and databases. It was so while RICeST's mission was more prominent. However, I have been so interested in controlling Farsi information and would like to control both published and unpublished information in Iran. So, I tried to design and provide Farsi databases completely different from the previous works which had been produced in Iran. As you know, IRAN DOC began since 1969-1970 and produced most of available databases in the country. Although IRAN DOC issued its products electronically, I intended to offer especially the contents of information materials electronically.

Being familiar with the previous activities of IRAN DOC, we at RICeST began to design and produce databases in a different way. I believe that wasting budget and energy is unforgivable and as there is no end to the library and information science major, the scientists, professors and experts in this field can devise some different and new systems. Today, the difference in RICeST's approach in making electronic resources can be observed clearly in RICeST's website. As an example, it is possible in RICeST to access to the full texts of all volumes and numbers of Iranian Farsi journals through the existent Persian E-journals databases. In this way, it is also possible for user to search through the features of the articles from the journals with 20 or 30 years experience of publishing and then receive the full texts of articles electronically.

**Question 24: Would you please introduce some databases of RICeST?**

In addition to Persian E-journals database, a number of databases are designed and produced in RICeST. One of these databases is Persian E-books which presents full text documents but because of the copyright law, it is not possible to copy or download these e-books. With regard to controlling bibliographic information, RICeST has established theses and research projects databases. In spite of inputting more than 40 to 50 thousand records into this database, as there was similarity between the RICeST's Theses and Research Projects database and that of IRAN DOC, the activities were stopped. The

Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) is another important activity done in RICEST. This database covers some documents other than research projects, theses, books, journals and articles. This system is designed in such a way that the user thinks the information available in this database is comprised of journals and articles. However, this database includes some other useful documents such as pamphlets, brochures, catalogues, scientific and technical reports, and even the research projects which have not been published extensively. Although we as librarians have the responsibility for organizing and disseminating all kinds of information and scientific sources, because of the problems in preservation, organization, storing and retrieving, these kinds of documents have not been paid any specific attention by Iranian libraries and information centers. Of course, some traditional libraries used some tools for organizing and retrieving these documents. As an example, when I was working with Prof. Dayani in Law and Political Sciences College at Tehran University, documents related to the United Nations organization were kept as reports in the library. They were kept in pamphlet boxes and were delivered to the users in case of being requested. Nevertheless, there is not any limitation for access to these documents in EDMS system of RICEST and their full texts could be searched and retrieved easily. Another database available at RICEST is the electronic Atlases and Maps. It should be noted that before implementation of this database, it was necessary to be aware of the similar works of other organizations such as National Geographic Center, Gitashenasi Institute, Sabah Geographic and Drafting Institute, etc. in controlling and providing electronic information. As there was found no useful and regular activity in this regard, we decided to provide the electronic atlases and maps database. Afterwards, the atlases and maps of roads, populations, streets, cities, etc. of different countries and cities were completely gathered and implemented. Moreover, a useful search engine was designed in order to search the information of this database. Now, users can search different kinds of maps in any subject and see the results of this retrieval volume by volume.

**Question 25: What policies are adopted by RICEST with regard to the copyright law?**

Since the librarians are responsible for copyright law, it was necessary to decide how to legally disseminate the contents of journals. So the tables of contents of these journals were shown in an item entitled Current Content in the RICEST's Bulletin Board Services. In this way, the universities could access to the tables of contents of the journals using dial up system. However, these tables of contents were also distributed among the applicants through floppy disk and compact disk. It was also possible for users to receive the original article through completing the form and mentioning the title

and other features of the requested articles.

Moreover, it was necessary to consider the copyright law in designing and producing databases. For this, now all activities such as downloading, copying and using journal's articles are carried out legally and with the permission of journal's directors.

Furthermore, in order to eliminate the matter of copyright due to E-books database, RICEST opened negotiations with the Minister of Science, Research and Technology, and the Director General of Book Affairs of the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance. But unfortunately, no conclusion was reached in this regard. Since presenting and observing the texts of books is not considered against the copyright law, the system of Farsi E-books database in RICEST is designed in such a way that it is only possible to observe the full texts of books and user can not copy or download them. As you know, today it is possible to download most of E-books available at Google search engine page by page while there is no such a possibility in RICEST's E-books database.

**Question 26: What problems did you face during employing human forces?**

At that time, I was the director of the Library and Information Science group in Shiraz University and tried to recognize top B.S and M.S students of this major and invite them to work in RICEST. One of the most important problems was the official status which was supposed to be given to each employee. It was so, while I had to deal with this task in a very short time.

**Question 27: Is there any self-evaluation system in RICEST? If yes, please introduce it.**

Yes. RICEST, like other governmental organizations, has got self-evaluation system. Evaluating employees in order to allocate salary echelons is a kind of self-evaluation. Fortunately, the evaluative forms of RICEST are designed in such a way that it gives a high privilege to the employees who cooperate in scientific issues. This cooperation could be done in publishing articles and books and proposing and doing research projects, etc. Each one of these issues carries special points and RICEST has to evaluate its employees annually based on the criteria of the Management and Planning Organization.

Another self-evaluation implementing in RICEST is the evaluation of Research groups, which is different from the previous evaluation. The forms of this evaluation are provided based on twelve criteria and the five option Likert Scale.

Research groups are evaluated by their directors and the directors are, in turn, evaluated by the president of RICEST.

I believe that RICEST's services are unique with regard to the evaluation of services.

As the high rate of use of services shows, RICEST's services have been always useful for users and they do not have notable problems in this regard. Although there have not been regular assessments on user's satisfaction, the high rate of use represents the information needs on the one hand, and crowd of users shows RICEST's endeavor to meet the needs on the other hand. Combining these two factors indicates user's satisfaction of RICEST's services. Crowd of users and the expenses they pay in return for services prove this claim.

**Question 28: Please introduce some internal and external branches of RICEST?**

RICEST has many branches inside and outside Iran. Most of these branches are established in Universities. These branches are as follows:

**Branches in the country:**

Tabriz University  
Khalij Fars University  
Semnan University  
Shahrood University  
Shahrkord University  
Sahand Tabriz Industrial University  
Gilan University  
Mazandaran University  
Mohaghegh Ardebili University  
Yasooj University  
Ghazvin Islamic development organization  
Hamedan University

**Branches out of the country:**

Syria Tishreen University  
Republic of Armenia  
National Information Center of Yemen

**ENDNOTES**

1. The title of Regional Library of Science and Technology (RLST) from now on is replaced by Regional Information Center for Science and Technology (RICEST).
2. Director of Library and Information Science Department, Shahed University.
3. Professor of Library and Information Science, Mashhad Ferdowsi University.