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A document delivery service for foreign scholarly journals: the experiences of South Korea

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to describe the current status and usage trends of a new document delivery service (DDS) for foreign scholarly journals in Korea.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 2010 to 2016 for the number of foreign journal subscriptions held by Foreign Research Information Centers (FRICs), number of FRIC DDS requests, the amount of government funds spent on the subscriptions, etc.

Findings – There has been an increase in the number of foreign journal subscriptions and DDS transactions by FRICs, especially in the fields of science, technology and medicine.

Originality/value – The DDS project in this study offers a useful example of collaboration between the government and academic libraries to provide research communities with foreign scholarly journals.

Keywords Academic libraries, Resource sharing, Document delivery service, Foreign journals, Library network, Republic of Korea

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the quantity and cost of scholarly journals have increased tremendously, whereas the budgets of libraries have remained the same or have even decreased. As a result, many academic libraries have difficulty ensuring users' access to the latest scholarly research. Researchers in developing countries and in least developed countries have been particularly affected by a disparity in access to the subscription content (UNESCO, 2015). The so-called "serials crisis" in developing countries is largely attributed to the high cost of foreign journals. When library budgets are cut, foreign journals are frequent targets for cancellation. To mitigate this problem, libraries have tried to strengthen document delivery services (DDSs) at regional, national and international levels.

In Korea, a new resource-sharing project was initiated in 2006. Since then, the project has addressed the problems of acquiring expensive foreign scholarly journals and making them available to research communities. The project has been very successful, as shown by the fact that it contributed to the recent growth of DDS usage in Korea (Oh and Lee, 2015). This study aims to describe the current status and usage trends of the project, which serves as a useful example of a

collaboration between the government and academic libraries to widen users' access to foreign scholarly journals.

Overview of the Foreign Research Information Center project

In 2006, the Korean Ministry of Education (MOE) launched Project FRIC. The project had two goals:

- 1 to create and maintain a distributed and shared collection of foreign scholarly journals in academic libraries; and
- 2 to establish an infrastructure for a new DDS that would improve users' access to the journals.

As shown in Figure 1, the FRIC project consists of four partners, each with a different role: MOE, Korea Education and Research Information Service (KERIS), FRICs and university libraries.

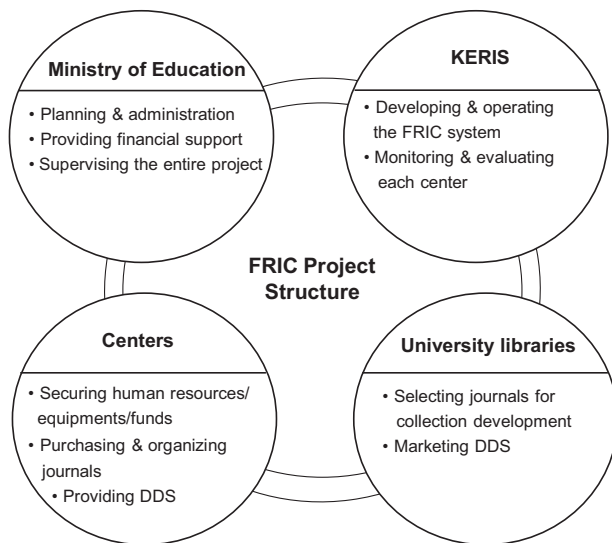
MOE is responsible for the project's overall operation and strategic planning. One of the MOE's contributions is to provide matching funds for FRICs' journal subscriptions. Each university designated as an FRIC purchases foreign scholarly journals and provides DDS in its specialist area. Currently, there are ten FRICs functioning, and they constitute a network for cooperative acquisition. Initially, in 2006, one university was chosen as an FRIC, and it operated as a pilot for three years. After six more universities were added in 2009, the project moved to a full-scale operation. Two more universities were added in 2011, and one more university was added in 2013. Table I lists the universities and

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Figure 1 The FRIC project structure**Table I** A list of FRICs

Center	Subject area
Yonsei University	Clinical medicine (Med)
Seoul National University	Natural science (NS)
Chonbuk National University	Agriculture and animal science (Agr)
Korea University	Humanities (Hum)
Pusan National University	Technical science (Tech)
Kyungpook National University	Electronic engineering and computer science (EE/CS)
Kangwon University	Biotechnology (BioTech)
Ewha Womans University	Education, sociology & arts (Soc)
Chungnam National University	Public administration and business administration (Pub/Biz)
Gyeongsang National University	Environmental engineering and energy (Env/Eng)

their specialized subject areas. The leading body in this project is KERIS, a government agency aimed at improving national research competitiveness through the distribution of scholarly resources. One of KERIS's missions is to establish an infrastructure to foster a large-scale cooperative network of academic libraries (Oh and Lee, 2015), such as the Research Information Sharing Service (RISS), which is explained in detail below. In the FRIC project, KERIS is responsible for technical support, including developing the FRIC information system, which allows users to search the centers' holdings. Another important KERIS' task is monitoring and evaluating individual centers' performance. University libraries, including those not affiliated with any FRIC, offer input on which journals to acquire and perform marketing activities for the DDS.

Document delivery service process

The FRIC portal site allows for integrated searches across the ten centers' libraries (Figure 2). The site's information retrieval system helps users find which center subscribes to a particular journal.

A user could also locate a journal of interest and/or request a document by contacting a specific center directly (direct supply method) or by using one of the three existing online research information services – RISS, National Digital Science Links (NDSL) and MEDical Digital Library Information System (MEDLIS). RISS serves 574 member institutions, including nearly all four-year universities in Korea, by providing Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Services (ILL/DDS) and a national union catalog of academic libraries [1]. NDSL, operated by the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI), provides total services for science and technology information with more than 60,000 journals and 200,000 proceedings (Yoo, 2010) [2]. One of its member services is the NDSL information delivery service. MEDLIS is another service operated by the Korean Medical Library Association (KMLA) [3]. KMLA shares resources among its 173 members, including university medical libraries, hospital libraries, pharmaceutical company libraries and others. RISS and NDSL are open to all individual users, even those who are not affiliated with a member institution, whereas MEDLIS only serves member institutions.

To request a document, a user first visits the website of one of the research information services. For example, Figure 3 shows a screenshot of the document request page in RISS. In this example, a user sees that a needed journal is held by four university libraries, one of which is an FRIC, and he/she requests a document from the center holding the journal. After the user's library obtains the document from the center, the library delivers it to the user.

Statistics

Number of foreign journals subscribed to Foreign Research Information Centers

The ten centers currently subscribe to a total of 34,587 foreign journal titles, over 80 per cent of which are in the science, technology or medicine (STM) disciplines (Table II). Although the percentage has slightly decreased over the years, the FRIC project is still focused on STM journals. Among the individual subject areas, "technical science" is the most common, accounting for 48 per cent of the total journals. Another notable trend is that journal subscriptions in the biotechnology area have seen the highest increase, demonstrating the rising demand from researchers in this field.

Funds supported by the Korean Ministry of Education

Since 2010, Korean MOE's matching funds for foreign scholarly journals have totaled \$2.5m. As shown in Table III, Korean MOE's spending shows a slight upward trend, as the number of journal subscriptions has increased over the years. The highest spending areas are "natural science", "biotechnology" and "technical science". Considering the number of journal titles in each area, biotechnology journals are the most expensive.

Number of document delivery service requests filled by Foreign Research Information Centers

Table IV shows the number of DDS requests filled by FRICs during the period from 2011 to 2015. In 2015, the ten centers processed 78,311 requests. This is a significant increase from

Figure 2 The FRIC search system

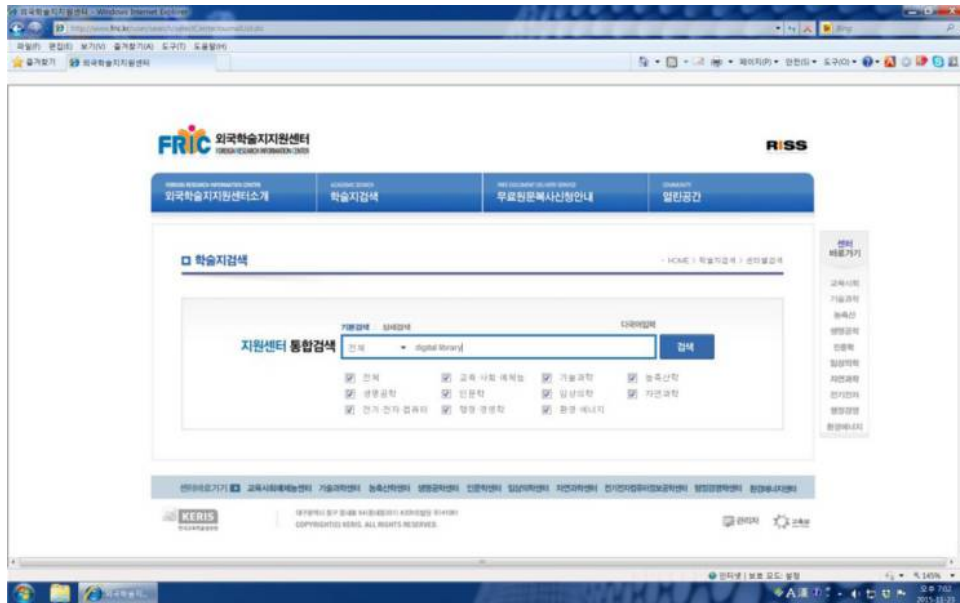
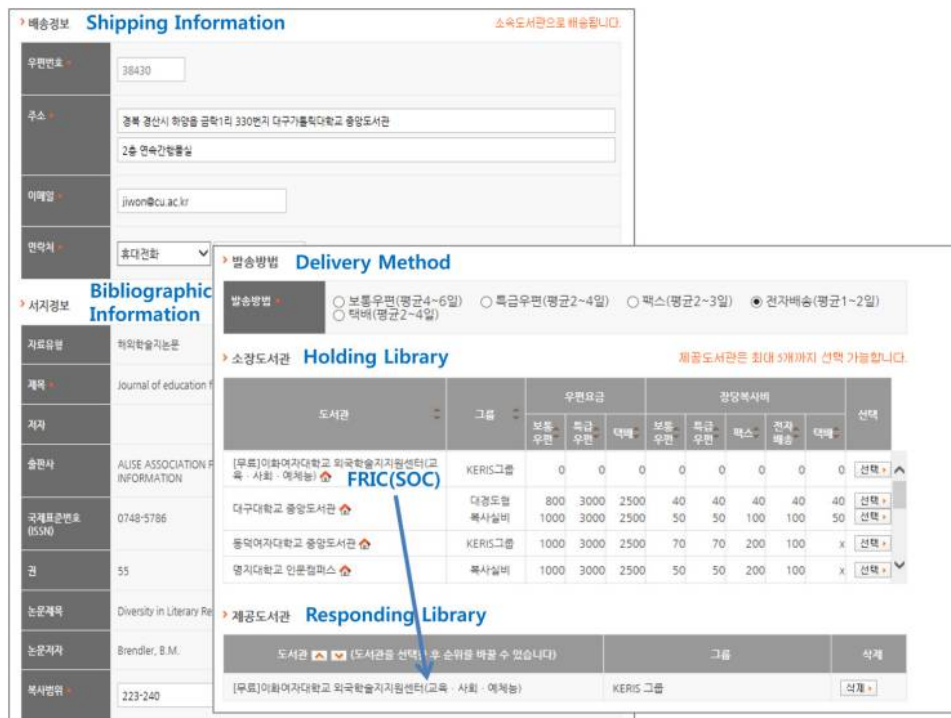


Figure 3 Document request page in RISS



2011, when eight centers processed less than 35,000 requests. Notably, the most active transactions have been in the medical field. Apparently, smaller university and hospital libraries that cannot afford expensive medical journals rely heavily on the center. The second most active subject area is “education, sociology and arts”. Its broad scope seems to encourage researchers from various fields to use the service. Subject areas with a narrower scope (e.g. environmental engineering and energy) tend to have relatively low transaction volumes.

Number of document delivery service requests filled by the service type

Table V shows the number of DDS requests filled by FRICs, depending on the service type. As mentioned above, users can order copies of documents through one of the existing online research information services or by contacting a center directly. Users not accustomed to using the online research information services or those affiliated with one of the FRICs tend to prefer the direct supply method. Among online

Table II Number of foreign journals subscribed to FRICs

Subject	2012	2013	2014	2015
Med	417	446	467	492
NS	1,965	2,380	2,443	2,461
Agr	505	538	642	660
Hum	1,743	1,814	1,895	2,038
Tech	16,397	16,479	16,505	16,520
EE/CS	6,450	6,509	6,539	6,544
BioTech	542	1,427	1,562	1,675
Soc	1,273	2,089	2,298	2,364
Pub/Biz	1,169	1,326	1,363	1,491
Env/Eng	–	–	298	342
Sum	30,461	33,008	34,102	34,587

Table III Funds supported by MOE (value presented in UD\$1,000)^a

Subject	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
BioTech	288	275	279	288	296	296	296
EE/CS	198	192	288	282	292	292	292
Hum	165	165	203	210	210	210	206
Tech	288	284	292	294	296	292	296
NS	288	297	297	294	288	296	296
Med	255	267	267	255	259	255	259
Agr	198	200	189	201	198	198	198
Soc	–	–	206	255	255	255	251
Pub/Biz	–	–	206	206	206	206	206
Env/Eng	–	–	–	206	206	206	206
Sum	1,680	1,680	2,227	2,491	2,506	2,506	2,506

Note: ^aThe original values have been converted from Korean won to US dollars (1\$ = 1,215 Won as of January 2016).

Table IV Number of DDS requests filled by FRICs

Subject	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Med	18,571	20,636	22,993	20,303	21,933
NS	5,056	6,191	8,580	9,721	10,126
Agr	1,740	1,882	2,331	2,520	3,181
Hum	2,345	3,474	5,937	6,873	6,169
Tech	2,728	4,638	4,914	4,338	4,721
EE/CS	1,738	1,527	2,250	2,135	2,368
BioTech	1,803	3,061	8,582	9,913	10,784
Soc	84	5,827	10,466	11,679	12,819
Pub/Biz	–	1,699	3,284	3,046	3,750
Env/Eng	–	–	–	408	2,460
Sum	34,065	48,905	69,337	70,936	78,311
Monthly average	2,838	4,052	5,778	5,911	6,525

Table V Number of FRIC DDS requests filled by service type

Service type	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
RISS	10,338	18,747	33,272	37,899	39,520
NDSL	5,520	9,053	12,502	11,433	14,114
MEDLIS	10,857	10,441	12,533	10,249	14,357
Direct supply	7,350	10,664	11,030	11,355	10,320
Sum	34,065	48,905	69,337	70,936	78,311

research information services, RISS is the most popular. In 2015, over 50 per cent of all FRIC DDS transactions were performed through RISS.

Over the past few years, the number of FRIC DDS transactions through RISS has increased dramatically (Figure 4). There are two factors that may be primarily responsible for this increase. First, RISS serves a large number of member institutions, whereas MEDLIS serves a relatively limited group of medicine-focused member institutions. Second, in 2009, KERIS developed new e-DDS software called dCube (Lee, 2013). The new software improved the turnaround time for document delivery, and as a result, boosted the use of RISS DDS (Oh and Lee, 2015).

Proportion of foreign journal titles in Foreign Research Information Centers out of those in Research Information Sharing Service

In recent years, the proportion of foreign scholarly journal titles held by FRICs out of all of the journals in RISS has increased (Table VI). In 2015, the 574 RISS member institutions held 124,164 foreign journal titles, and of those, over 27 per cent of them were held by FRICs. According to a 2015 survey conducted by KERIS, 115 university libraries cancelled their subscriptions to a total of 712 journals in 2014. KERIS sees this phenomenon as a positive economic impact of the FRIC project.

Proportion of Foreign Research Information Center document delivery service requests out of Research Information Sharing Service document delivery service requests

Since 2010, there has been a surprisingly sharp escalation in the proportion of FRIC DDS requests for foreign scholarly journals out of all RISS DDS requests (Table VII). In 2015, nearly 90 per cent of DDS requests placed through RISS were sent to FRICs. This testifies that FRICs are now major sources of foreign scholarly journals in Korea.

Figure 4 Number of FRIC DDS requests filled by service type

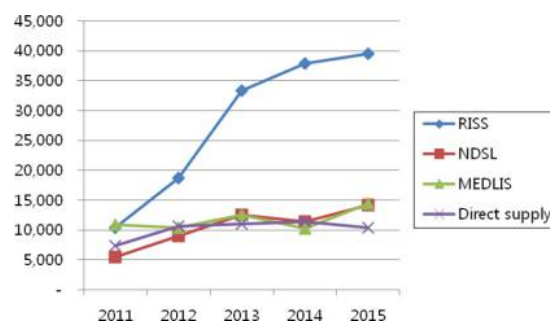


Table VI Proportion of foreign journal titles in FRICs out of those in RISS

Proportion	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
RISS	117,486	123,627	123,816	123,981	124,164
FRIC	21,944	30,461	32,547	34,102	34,524
Proportion (%)	19	24.6	26.3	27.5	27.8

Table VII Proportion of FRIC DDS requests out of RISS DDS requests

Proportion	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
RISS	20,470	30,945	36,191	52,729	45,333	44,554
FRIC	3,545	10,338	18,747	33,272	37,899	39,520
Proportion (%)	17.3	33.4	51.8	63.1	83.6	88.7

Conclusion and future plans

In developing countries, many researchers are often excluded from access to expensive foreign scholarly journals. To solve this problem, a DDS supported by FRICs was activated in Korea in 2006, and it has continued to serve researchers across the country. The increasing trends in the volume of FRIC DDS transactions, as well as in the number of foreign journal subscriptions by FRICs, demonstrate the dominant position of FRICs in DDS for foreign scholarly journals in the country. To sustain and improve the so-far successful project in the long term, the four partners of the project are making consistent efforts as follows:

- First, MOE is planning to add new universities to the FRIC program to increase the availability of foreign scholarly journals covering more diverse subjects. Currently, some subject areas are too broad in scope (e.g. “education, sociology & arts” and “nature science”). It would be desirable to break down the broad subject areas into narrower ones and allow new centers to take charge of them. A main challenge has been securing sufficient funding for journal subscriptions for the new universities.
- Second, KERIS has evaluated the individual centers’ performance annually to highlight the areas where efforts might be improved in the future. By gathering feedback from the centers, KERIS will modify their evaluation criteria to assess the centers in a more comprehensive and qualitative way.
- Third, some centers recently started online subject guides based on their specialties. Following their positive experience, other centers are also planning to

develop subject-specialized services to better use their collections.

The DDS provided by FRICs has become a vital service for researchers to keep track of the latest research developments. Korea’s experience with this project provides insight into how the government and academic libraries can collaborate to provide academia with an effective DDS for foreign scholarly journals.

Notes

- 1 See www.riss.kr/for%20information%20on%20RISS
- 2 See <http://scholar.ndsl.kr/index.do/for%20information%20on%20NDSL>
- 3 See www.medlis.kr/index.do/for%20information%20on%20MEDLIS

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