

# E-TEXTBOOKS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH COOPERATION

FinELib pilot project summary report



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## **Background and objectives**

Compared to many other countries, university libraries and the libraries of universities of applied sciences in Finland are particularly significant for providing students with study-related books. The availability of textbooks is particularly vital right before examinations, at which time there might be insufficient amount of printed copies available to meet demand. Many libraries would like to purchase textbooks primarily as e-books, but there is a lack of Finnish textbooks available in electronic format. If libraries have managed to purchase e-books, they may be subject to strict limitations as to how many users may access them simultaneously.

Finnish teachers and students have already quite a lot of experience of e-textbooks. The majority of teachers (78%) and students (77%) who responded to the National Library's e-book survey<sup>1</sup> have read study-related e-books. More than half (65%) of teachers have used e-books in teaching, and a fifth of respondents often use e-books as part of their teaching.

FinELib is a consortium of Finnish universities, universities of applied sciences, research institutes and public libraries, whose mission is to ensure and improve the availability of electronic materials in its member organisations. In spring 2014, the consortium launched a project aimed at increasing the availability of Finnish e-books at institutes of higher education using pricing models suitable for libraries and increasing publishers' awareness of e-books. The e-textbook project surveyed the libraries' need for e-book licenses, assessed the ability of publishers and platform providers to provide such licenses, and gathered information on students' and teachers' experiences of using e-books. In addition, licensing models were piloted to address the shortage of textbooks by providing several users with simultaneous access to e-books. The project was coordinated by the National Library of Finland.

## **Planning and implementation of the pilot project**

The National Library's FinELib office implemented the textbook project in cooperation with the member organisations of the FinELib consortium. The university libraries and libraries of universities of applied sciences which participated in the project group listed Finnish textbooks that they would be interested in piloting in electronic format. Based on these wish lists, four publishers were selected, and several rounds of discussions were held with them regarding the prerequisites for participating in the project. The discussions were used as a basis for assessing whether the publishers were interested in participating in the pilot project, which textbooks could be included in the pilot and what kind of licensing models the publishers could use for providing e-textbooks to libraries. After these discussions, all four publishers – Edita Publishing, Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press, PS-kustannus and Vastapaino – agreed to participate in the pilot.

Ellibs Ltd was selected as the e-book platform provider for the duration of the pilot. Nearly all Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences use Ellibs Ltd's e-book platform. In

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<sup>1</sup> Mikkonen & Peltonen: E-Book Survey for Higher Education Students and Teachers in Finland. National Library of Finland, 2016. [https://www.kiwi.fi/display/finelib/Project%3A+E-textbooks+for+Finnish+HE?preview=/57247727/73466920/FinELib\\_ebook\\_survey\\_HE\\_final.pdf](https://www.kiwi.fi/display/finelib/Project%3A+E-textbooks+for+Finnish+HE?preview=/57247727/73466920/FinELib_ebook_survey_HE_final.pdf)

addition, Ellibs Ltd was able to implement several different licensing models on a relatively tight schedule.

During the one year pilot in the 2015–2016 academic year, two licensing models were tested: simultaneous user licenses and loan token packages. In the simultaneous user model, libraries purchased a license with which a set number of users (1/3/5/20/50) could access one textbook simultaneously. In the loan token model, the library purchased a set number of loan tokens (25/50/100/200/400) that were used up as the books were accessed. Loan token model had no limitations on how many users could simultaneously read one book, but once the loan tokens were used up, the book could no longer be accessed. The maximum duration of the licenses was until the end of the pilot period.

One objective of the pilot was to gain information on how the availability of e-books affects the acquisition and use of printed books. The effect on acquisitions of printed books could not, however, be studied, as libraries had already purchased printed copies of some of the titles included in the pilot; moreover, the pilot period was too short for this purpose. However, a small-scale library survey was conducted to provide an overview of changes in the use of printed books. The body of materials examined was small, but it would appear that the introduction of e-books increased the number of loans per title. In approximately half of the cases, the availability of e-books did not decrease the number of times printed copies were loaned; instead, the number of loans increased or remained the same. In the long term, however, this situation may be affected by changes in the libraries' selection of materials, i.e., libraries shifting primarily to offering e-books rather than printed copies, and customers becoming used to using e-books.

## **The primary results of the project**

### **1. Institutes of higher education gained access to more Finnish e-textbooks**

For institutes of higher education, the key result of the e-textbook project was that they gained access to a more extensive selection of necessary Finnish e-textbooks. Publishers also felt that the main benefit of the project was making more Finnish scholarly literature available to libraries in electronic format.

A total of 250 e-book titles published by Edita, Gaudeamus, Vastapaino and PS-kustannus were included in the pilot. The titles focused on social sciences, the humanities, psychology and education. Key methodological literature was also included. A little less than half of the titles were available in EPUB format, while the rest were in PDF format.

The increased number of both e-book loans and users shows that there is great demand at higher education institutes for the e-textbooks included in the pilot. Through the pilot, e-book loans on the Ellibs platform almost doubled at participating institutes. In addition, the number of users registered on the Ellibs platform doubled during the pilot. The titles included in the pilot were loaned a total of 33,375 times during the one-year pilot period.

The project also encouraged publishers to continue to offer new e-book titles to libraries after the pilot period, thanks to the positive feedback from libraries regarding the processes and models

developed during the pilot. Other Finnish publishers can also utilise the experiences gained and models developed during the pilot to improve their own e-book selections for libraries.

## 2. E-book licensing models suitable for textbooks were developed

Publishers and libraries considered that the pricing models included in the project were largely successful. Both publishers and libraries felt that it was good to include different licensing models that each organisation could test independently.

Although the piloted models failed to offer unlimited simultaneous access to e-textbooks as the libraries had hoped, they facilitate the use of e-textbooks in situations where several users need access to e-books at the same time. The libraries were also able to select a suitable licensing model for each title and to assess the overall costs of the acquisition by examining the use of the title in question.

The temporary nature of the piloted e-textbook licenses was considered a problem, because such short term licenses could not be used to purchase permanent electronic copies of textbooks for the library collections. Several librarians felt that the piloted e-textbooks were quite expensive compared to printed copies. If books must be licensed for one year at a time for a repeating annual fee, the overall cost of individual textbooks may become unreasonably high. The pilot demonstrated that libraries not only require short term licenses, but they also need long-term licenses valid for several years.

## 3. The usability of e-books was improved

The National Library's FinELib office collected user experiences of e-books from students and teachers at universities and universities of applied sciences<sup>2</sup> during the pilot. According to students and teachers, e-books have many benefits compared to printed materials. The majority of teachers and students feel that e-books facilitate students' studies. The introduction of e-books has also improved the availability of materials needed for teaching and studying. E-books can be accessed by multiple readers at once, they facilitate distance learning and e-pedagogy and they can usually be accessed quicker than printed textbooks.

However, users reported several problems they have encountered with e-books. As regards the piloted e-books, downloading the titles to personal workstations using Adobe software was often perceived as difficult. In the pilot, downloading problems could be avoided by reading the books in a browser window, but this was problematic as well because reading books in browser windows may be slow or the connection may be lost. In the pilot, e-books were accessed using IP identification but the e-book service required users also to create personal user accounts, which was considered difficult.

The e-book survey for users also yielded general feedback on the usability of e-books in the e-book services purchased by institutes of higher education. In several e-book services, browsing through books and navigating within texts is considered difficult, and there are shortcomings in tables of contents, page numbering and image quality. Users would like to be able to add notes and

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<sup>2</sup> Mikkonen & Peltonen: E-Book Survey for Higher Education Students and Teachers in Finland. National Library of Finland, 2016. [https://www.kiwi.fi/display/finelib/Project%3AE-textbooks+for+Finnish+HE?preview=/57247727/73466920/FinELib\\_ebook\\_survey\\_HE\\_final.pdf](https://www.kiwi.fi/display/finelib/Project%3AE-textbooks+for+Finnish+HE?preview=/57247727/73466920/FinELib_ebook_survey_HE_final.pdf)

other markings to e-books. Reading e-books also involves ergonomic issues that worsen the reading experience compared to printed texts.

The feedback from libraries and e-book users was reported to the platform service provider which made some improvements regarding the accessibility and usability of the lending platform.

Libraries were mainly satisfied with the e-textbook acquisition process during the pilot. Ordering books using the user interface was technically effortless and books became available immediately after purchase. However, e-book usability problems caused an increased need for supervision and guidance in libraries. In addition, the increasingly diverse access options, such as reading books in a browser and downloading titles to personal workstations, resulted in libraries receiving more customer requests for assistance.

#### 4. Finnish publishers' awareness of e-books increased

The FinELib e-textbook project showed to the publishers that there is a real need for e-textbooks at higher education institutes. The project also demonstrated that cooperation between libraries, publishers and e-book platform providers can significantly advance the provision of e-books to libraries.

The publishers considered it an advantage to be able to use a fixed-term pilot project to test what kind of licensing models would be suitable for e-textbooks licensing. The pilot included both publishers that already offered e-books to libraries and a publisher that was still in the process of starting its e-book production. For this publisher, the opportunity to gain experience in offering e-books to libraries in a fixed-term pilot was a significant incentive for launching its e-book production.

The publishers considered the opportunity to discuss e-book preferences with libraries in the course of the project to be particularly essential. Discussions and meetings between the different parties were especially required during the early stages of the project in order to reconcile the participants' respective views. The publishers received feedback from libraries about practical issues pertaining to the use and acquisition of electronic materials, such as e-book formats, license periods and pricing. In addition, as the project progressed, libraries increasingly contacted publishers on their own initiative.

The project also provided the publishers with useful information on students' and teachers' experiences and wishes regarding e-books. User's desire to have access to a greater number of e-books will hopefully encourage publishers to expand their e-book production and improve the ability of libraries to provide higher education institutions with more electronic textbooks in the future.

Additional information on the project:

<https://www.kiwi.fi/display/finelib/Project%3A+E-textbooks+for+Finnish+HE>

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Additional information on the FinELib consortium: <https://www.kiwi.fi/display/finelib/In+English>