

THE NATIVE LANGUAGE UNIVERSITY DIGITAL TEXTBOOK COLLECTION PILOT PROJECT

Liisi Lembinen

¹Tartu University Library, University of Tartu
W. Struve 1, Tartu, Estonia
e-mail: liisi.lembinen@ut.ee

Abstract

Tartu University Library's native language university digital book collection (Ebrary platform) began in November 2008. The main purpose of the collection is to provide university students and professors with an alternative method to find necessary study materials in their native language through the Internet. Students do not need to worry about the lack of materials in libraries or bookstores. Professors can be sure that the students will come prepared and are well equipped. In addition, the option to submit feedback provides professors with a tool to amend previously published titles for the second edition. The long-term goal is to provide professors with a better understanding and basis for their rights and opportunities as authors.

Keywords: digital textbooks; native language; university textbooks; Ebrary collection.

1. Introduction. Need for a change in the Estonian textbook market

For years, students and professors in Estonian universities have been using foreign language textbooks for teaching subjects in universities. These textbooks are written by foreigners and do not take into consideration the uniqueness of specific countries and nationalities. Professors who decide to write and publish Estonian textbooks encounter a number of problems: funding for publishing and the uncertainty and small size of the Estonian textbook market. As a result, the prices of books can be quite high for an average university student and the amount of released issues cover only part of the actual need of active university students.

Tartu University Library covers 20% of the book requirements for each course at the University of Tartu, which means that 80% of the students either have to

wait in the library line or buy their own copy, which tend to be sold out about two years after publishing. Taking into consideration the obvious need of the market, finances, and innovation, Tartu University Library decided to find a digital solution to this problem.

2. Methodology. Finding a suitable digital solution and textbook submission model

In 2008 a survey among students who used electronic sources for studying showed that e-books were the second most used academic resource. Compared to the year before, the rise was 22%. According on this survey, 51% of students use electronic books often or very often [1]. Knowing the need, but being uncertain of the popularity of options offered at the Tartu University Library, various options of how to provide Estonian language textbooks to students of Tartu University were discussed. The possibility of building a separate platform was abandoned due to time constraints and financial considerations. Finally, a contract for a collection in the Ebrary platform [2] was signed in November, 2008.

In the Ebrary platform books are displayed page-by-page; users cannot download the book to their computers in any form. It is possible to ban copy and paste as well as printing options. Tartu University Library collection is available only in the computer network of the campus or through university credentials.

Professors of the University of Tartu are offered the opportunity to submit their published and unpublished textbooks to the Ebrary platform. Submitting professors are asked to fill out a questionnaire, where they identify general information about the published textbook, printing and copy and paste restrictions, along with other comments. All textbooks are to be submitted in PDF format. The digital textbook coordinator fills out metadata information and submits the information and textbook to Ebrary for publishing. In the event of unpublished textbooks, the Tartu University Library applies for an electronic ISBN for the authors. In addition, all information about published textbooks is sent to ETIS (Estonian Research Information System), which collects "information on research and development institutions, researchers, research projects and various research results" [3].

The students of the University of Tartu can access the textbooks within the university's network or outside it by entering their university username and password. Students have an opportunity to send feedback about any book to the Tartu University Library. The Library will forward the feedback to professors who can use this information in order to improve the following edition of the textbook.

3. Discussion. Challenges of the pilot project

At the inception of this project, we were unsure how popular it would be among professors of the University of Tartu. Tartu University Library was aware that students are probably more eager to adopt digital textbooks than professors. As other researchers have observed as well, the professors are the ones who need to be convinced in using digital textbooks and other e-course materials. "One of the remaining key barriers to the adoption of digital course materials is the willingness of faculty members to adopt them" [4]. Despite that, there were two reasons why the library decided to initiate the project: 1) feedback had been positive; the professors assured the necessity of this digital option; 2) University of Tartu has used Study Information System for years, where among other options, professors can upload their own course materials. Based on previous research and experience of other universities, like University of Iowa during their Virtual Hospital project [5], we did expect to encounter similar ownership problems: who does the copyright belong to, how can university receive the right to use textbooks digitally, and what kind of agreement should be signed with authors. Initial feedback was positive and encouraged us to initiate the project. We were uncertain how the system would function in practice; however, some of the problems that we expected have not occurred or they have been easily resolved.

- Professors were very interested in submitting their textbooks into the system; however, each of them wanted a personal approach. Mass emailing did not bring any results;
- We expected that professors would like to receive financial bonuses in order to submit their textbooks, but on the contrary, they are more interested that their students have access to the materials they need, and are not looking for financial profit.

At the same time, we came across some challenges that needed to be solved in order to enhance the system.

- Estonian professors are very protective of their copyrights. Many of them ban printing and copying of the book. While it is understandable that professors want to protect their rights, it is challenging to keep track of different requested ban options. The Ebrary team was very helpful in this area and meeting all specific requests was tried. While this is manageable with a small volume of submissions, it is probably not recommended for libraries that deal with hundreds of textbooks per week or month;
- Time of professors – it is very time-consuming to receive information, files, and questionnaires back from professors;
- Another challenge is getting textbook digital versions. Some of the books were produced a few years ago and authors do not have these files or the files are

not in PDF format. This adds an additional workload to the information technology staff of the Tartu University Library;

- Negotiations with publishing companies took more time and effort than initially expected. Publishing companies are protecting their rights and files;
- Due to the complaisance of professors, we did not have a chance to develop a well working financial compensation system, which at some point might become necessary;
- At the moment our feedback system is in the form of emailing, which meets our current usage level. It may become necessary to develop a new system for feedback submission based on demand.

4. Goals for the future

The first few months showed some problem areas, which need to be addressed in order to call this project a success.

- A faster and more suitable submission system for professors;
- Unified printing and copy and paste scheme;
- Copyright contracts with publishing companies and authors;
- Well established feedback submission method;
- The development of an unambiguous payment model for those titles which are not donated to the collection;
- The increment of the amount of submitted titles;
- Finding of alternative ways to increase the amount of registered users (possibly pay users), with options, e.g. printing for a small fee [6];
- The long-term goal is to provide professors with a better understanding and basis for their rights and opportunities as authors;
- Training on copyright law for both library staff as well as professors of the University of Tartu is necessary.

5. Conclusion

Tartu University Library saw a need for an easily accessible Estonian language textbook system. In order to achieve that, in November 2008, we started a native language digital textbook pilot project. Positive feedback from professors at the University of Tartu was encouraging and led the library to believe that this project is necessary. Currently, participants of this project are professors and students of Tartu University, who are the only groups with access rights. Digital textbooks are

uploaded to the Ebrary collection, which Tartu University Library is subscribing to. The project is significant because it is the first digital textbook collection on this scale in the Estonian language.

The final conclusion about the success and usefulness of the native language university textbook collection pilot project can be drawn after the first year of operation.

Notes and References

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