

South Korea: We're Spending \$2 Billion To Put Our Textbooks on Tablet PCs by 2015. What Are You Doing?



South Korea is spending \$2B to switch to digital textbooks by 2015.

In a bold move towards digitizing education, South Korea's Ministry of Education Science and Technology has announced it is spending 2.2 trillion Wan (\$2 billion USD) over the next four years, to convert its schools from classic paper textbooks to new digital versions on tablet PCs. The adoption of tablet based reading will also be accompanied by WiFi and cloud computing systems in schools. South Korean students can look forward to enjoying their new digital textbooks complete with multimedia presentations,

interactive documents (like FAQs), and all the other trappings of modern digital education. If ultimately successful in evolving its classrooms, the rest of the world may soon follow in Korea's footsteps.

While there's been no announcement as to which tablet computer will become the new standard in Korean classrooms, it would be surprising if a model from South Korea-based tech giant Samsung (such as the Galaxy) wasn't at least one of the options presented to students. It does seem that most students will be responsible for the purchasing of the new computer, though **Chosun Ilbo** reports that there will be free tablets for low income families. Educational content such as the textbook, sample exercises, instruction videos, etc, will be available through downloads. Those students who cannot come into school for health reasons could likely attend through virtual classrooms.

Schools will be able to select which digital books they wish their students to use from a huge central repository provided by the Korean Education and Research Information Service (part of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology). The majority of the \$2 billion spent in this project is likely to go towards the development of that central hub of content. We're likely talking about thousands of new books with dozens of auxiliary pieces of content for each, plus all the student/teacher generated

FAQs, forums, and comment threads that will accompany their use in each classroom. It's a massive project that will be a huge investment for the nation. It really blows my mind that Korea plans on accomplishing so much in just a few years.

"It will be up to schools to decide which digital textbooks to choose for students in what year in what subject. We don't expect the shift to digital textbooks to be difficult as students today are very accustomed to the digital environment."

— South Korean Ministry of Education, reported by Chosun Ilbo 2011

I shouldn't be surprised by the push for digital textbooks in the hands of South Korean students by 2015. This is the same country that is looking to put a **robot in every kindergarten classroom by 2013**. The Ministry of Education is clearly hoping to launch itself to the forefront of the technological curve, and perhaps to the head of the global class so to speak. In the international race to produce the next best generation of scientific innovators, countries that make technological investments in education, as South Korea plans to do, are likely to jump to the lead.

Which should be a strong encouragement for the United States to make a similar switch to digital education. Despite **small pilot programs to replace textbooks with tablets**, the US has done relatively little overall to push their classrooms into the 21st century, but there are many ways such a change could be introduced. I applaud South Korea's efforts to convert textbooks to a digital medium, but the \$2 billion may be better spent on **trashing textbooks altogether in favor of a more dynamically structured format**. We've seen some truly inspiring takes on modernizing education, including the **Khan Academy's focus on video instruction and online practice**, and students everywhere may soon be reaping their benefits.



Tablets like the Kno can accurately replicate a paper textbook in a digital format. But if that's South Korea's only goal, they're doing it wrong. We need to focus less on getting rid of paper, and more on videos, links, and adaptability. That's the true power of digital education.

South Korea has been at the forefront of bringing advanced technology into the classrooms. Their plans for digitizing massive amounts of textbooks serves not only as a good example for the rest of world, it could actually enable poorer nations to do the same. The software and techniques piloted by South Korea could be adopted else-

where and help the entire world approach education in a new way. 2015 is coming up relatively soon, but it can't get here early enough.

[image credit: Yonhap via Chosun Ilbo, Kno]

[source: [Chosun Ilbo](#)]