

# E-books as Digital Learning Resources in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

Advances in educational technology have prompted higher education institutions to make adjustments to their learning systems, including the adoption of e-books as learning resources. This study analyzes how e-books are used as digital learning resources in higher education institutions using qualitative methods through a systematic literature review approach. The focus of this research includes the following sub-topics: 1. the conception of e-books as learning resources in higher education institutions. 2. The characteristics of e-books as learning resources, and 3. The relevance of e-books to learning needs in higher education institutions. The concept of e-books as digital resources is an evolution of traditional printed books that are transformative by integrating various multimedia elements with PDF, EPUB, or MOBI formats that enable cross-platform compatibility and ease of distribution via the internet. E-books occupy a highly strategic position within the learning resources ecosystem because their nature allows for real-time updates. The characteristics of e-books as learning resources include portability, interactivity, and flexibility. The relevance of e-books to learning needs in higher education is demonstrated by their alignment with students' learning styles such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic as well as students' tendency to use mobile devices. With these characteristics, e-books serve as a learning medium that addresses various challenges in traditional classroom instruction. Their presence is central and significant in enhancing digital systems and the quality of learning in higher education.

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## Introduction

Digital transformation has revolutionized the global higher education landscape by making digital learning a cornerstone of the information age. Higher education today integrates technology to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of learning, with open educational resources such as free online materials enabling students from diverse backgrounds to engage in self-directed learning. Similarly, blended learning which combines in-person instruction with digital components has become the norm, facilitating more dynamic interaction between faculty and students (Novia Wahyuni et al., 2022). These developments are driven by technological advancements such as e-learning platforms and mobile devices, which enable personalized learning tailored to individual needs.

Theoretically, the role of e-books in this ecosystem is an expression of the democratization of knowledge, where e-books serve not only as tools for storing information but also as interactive media that support active learning. This reflects a shift from traditional educational models toward more inclusive and adaptive approaches, preparing students for the challenges of a digital-based workplace (Farikha Ningsih, 2024).

In this context, digital learning offers the greatest flexibility in terms of time and place, allowing students to access materials at any time, thereby overcoming geographical and social barriers. Open educational resources, such as online repositories, have expanded the reach of higher education, enabling international collaboration and cross-cultural exchange of ideas (Suhada et al., 2025). The theoretical significance of e-books lies in their ability to support constructivist pedagogy, where students can construct knowledge through active exploration. This transformation not only accelerates curriculum innovation but also challenges higher education institutions to adapt to the needs of the digital generation.

Constructivist pedagogy positions students as active agents who construct knowledge through experience, reflection, and interaction with the learning environment. In the context of digital learning, e-books serve as resources that support independent exploration through the presentation of flexible, interactive, and easily accessible content. The use of e-books enables the development of deeper conceptual understanding tailored to students' individual needs and learning pace. In addition to improving information accessibility, e-books also support the application of constructivist principles through the integration of multimedia, hyperlinks, and reflective activities that encourage students' cognitive engagement. The presence of these interactive features enables the learning process to take place collaboratively and contextually. Thus, e-books not only function as a medium for delivering content but also as a tool for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Digital learning facilitates differentiated instruction, allowing instructors to tailor content to students' learning styles, such as through learning analytics. Open educational resources support the principle of equity, reduce education costs, and promote social inclusion (Sandika, 2023). From a theoretical perspective, e-books represent the evolution of learning media, combining text, multimedia, and interactivity to create an immersive experience. This indicates that higher education is no longer confined to physical classrooms but extends into the global digital ecosystem.

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Global data from international organizations underscore the urgency of e-books in the digital learning ecosystem. UNESCO indicates that more than 1.5 billion adults lack basic digital literacy skills, so e-books as open-access resources can bridge this gap through easy and affordable access. The OECD reports an increase in the adoption of educational technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, with e-books supporting digital pedagogy that enables effective distance learning (Khusna, et al., 2025). The World Bank, in 2022, highlighted that investment in digital resources can improve educational outcomes in developing countries, where e-books facilitate the democratization of knowledge access without geographical barriers. This data positions e-books as a key component in technology-supported learning for interactive and personalized engagement with content (Simarmata, 2024).

These reports further reveal that e-books contribute to technology-supported learning through features such as instant search and digital annotation, which enhance study efficiency. UNESCO highlights the role of e-books in fostering lifelong learning, while the OECD demonstrates a positive correlation between e-book usage and increased motivation among learners, such as college students. The World Bank recommends integrating e-books into synchronized learning to bridge the digital divide, particularly in remote areas (Prayogi & Gunarto, 2022). Overall, this data affirms the position of e-books as a tool for democratization that provides equal opportunities without economic or social discrimination.

Empirical findings indicate that e-books contribute to increased intrinsic motivation, suggesting a correlation between e-book use and better academic outcomes. A dominant trend involves analyzing the impact on learning outcomes, where e-books enable differentiated instruction for students with special needs. This trend underscores the potential of e-books in supporting inclusive pedagogy, where students can access materials in adapted formats (Annur et al., 2025). Overall, these findings confirm that e-books, as digital resources, are not only efficient but also transformative, prompting further research to optimize their integration into higher education.

Previous research has provided valuable insights, yet significant gaps remain in our comprehensive understanding of the role of e-books in higher education. Previous studies have generally focused on technical aspects, such as platform effectiveness, which have not yet addressed the integration of e-books into a broader pedagogical framework, such as alignment with social learning theory. The relevance of e-books in this context lies in their ability to support collaborative and adaptive learning, which has not yet been deeply explored. This gap includes analysis of the long-term impact of e-books on students' cognitive skills, as well as ethical challenges such as data privacy in the use of interactive e-books.

Practically speaking, addressing this gap is crucial for improving educational practices, as e-books can enhance access for institutions with limited resources. A strong argument for bridging this gap lies in the potential of e-books to promote educational equity, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to participate optimally. Without exploring this area, the aspects of emotional interaction and project-based learning in e-books are neglected, thereby hindering curriculum innovation. Practically, this contribution will empower faculty to design more effective materials, ensuring that higher education is not only responsive to technology but also inclusive and sustainable.

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The connection between these theories and the role of e-books as learning resources lies in their ability to facilitate connected and adaptive learning. Connectivism views e-books as platforms for knowledge networks that open up opportunities for students to learn from global sources. Constructivism emphasizes the role of e-books in building knowledge through exploration, while media richness theory ensures effective e-book design to enhance retention. The rationale for selecting this perspective is to provide systematic guidance in literature review, identifying patterns and gaps with precision. This framework enables an in-depth analysis of how to transform e-books into educational practice and ensures that findings are not only descriptive but also theoretically robust.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic literature review on e-books as digital learning resources in higher education, focusing on the main research question: How do e-books contribute as digital learning resources in higher education? This includes their conception, characteristics, and relevance as digital learning resources in higher education.

Specifically, the research objectives are formulated to address research gaps by integrating empirical and theoretical findings, thereby enabling a comprehensive analysis of the impact of e-books on student learning outcomes and preferences. The research questions are systematically designed to explore practical dimensions, such as the implementation of e-books in blended curricula, and their effectiveness for instructors and policymakers. Its theoretical contributions include the development of a model for integrating e-books within connectivism theory, while its practical contributions encompass recommendations for educational institutions to enhance accessibility and effectiveness.

Finally, this study aims to provide an in-depth synthesis, emphasizing methodological contributions through a systematic approach that integrates the latest literature from various disciplines. Explicit research questions guide the exploration of how e-books facilitate inclusive and adaptive learning, ensuring their relevance to current challenges in higher education. This alignment strengthens the validity of the findings, allowing for contextual generalization. Practical contributions include guidelines for instructors in designing interactive e-book materials, while the methodological contribution lies in a developmental analytical framework for literature review in the field of digital education.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize and critically analyze existing knowledge regarding the utilization of e-books as digital learning resources in higher education. The SLR method was selected to ensure a systematic, transparent, and rigorous process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant scholarly literature, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The review process consisted of four main stages: topic identification, literature search, data screening, and data synthesis. Literature was retrieved from Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Garuda, and Neliti using the keywords “e-books,” “digital learning resources,” “higher education,” “educational technology,” and “learning innovation.” To ensure relevance and quality, inclusion criteria were established, namely: (1) publications focusing on e-book implementation in educational contexts, particularly higher education; (2) articles published

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within the last five years; and (3) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and research reports available in full text. Studies that were unrelated to the research objectives, duplicated, or lacked sufficient methodological information were excluded. Following the screening process, the selected literature was organized and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis involved data reduction, categorization, thematic coding, and synthesis to identify recurring patterns, major themes, and conceptual trends concerning the role, characteristics, and relevance of e-books in higher education learning. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the review employed source triangulation, systematic documentation of the selection process, and cross-validation of findings across multiple studies. The synthesized results were subsequently interpreted to develop a comprehensive understanding of how e-books function as digital learning resources and contribute to contemporary higher education practices.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The research findings outlined in this section include: the concept of e-books as a learning resource in higher education, the characteristics of e-books as a learning resource, and the relevance of e-books to learning in higher education. An e-book, or electronic book, is defined as a textbook in digital form, digital reading material, or a book in the form of a digital publication that can be accessed via electronic devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones, offering content in the form of text, images, and multimedia in an interactive format (Sunu, 2025). This concept originated as an evolution of the traditional printed book model, which required readers to access it directly. Unlike e-books, their existence allows readers to access them without physical or location-based limitations such as weight or volume and often includes features like search functions, annotations, and hyperlinks that enhance the reading experience (Mufit et al., 2022).

In the context of education, e-books do not merely replicate the content of traditional printed books in text form but also present it in innovative formats, such as video and audio, making them more flexible, dynamic, and adaptable to modern learning needs. As a digital collection, e-books can be categorized by format such as PDF, EPUB, or MOBI enabling cross-platform compatibility and easy distribution via the internet (Siti Julaiha Hsb., 2024).

Research shows that e-books represent a paradigm shift from a static learning model to an interactive one, where users can interact with content in real time, including automatic updates and offline access (Suhada et al., 2025). This makes e-books a highly flexible medium that can be tailored to individual preferences, such as font size or night reading mode, thereby supporting inclusivity in educational access.

E-books occupy a strategic position as a digital learning resource in the information technology era, where their role extends beyond merely complementing but is replacing printed books in an increasingly digitized academic environment (Jalin Toya, 2023). As a learning resource, e-books offer advantages in terms of accessibility, as they can be downloaded and read anytime, anywhere, without limitations of time or location. This facilitates learning for students who frequently relocate or engage in distance learning through online or remote systems.

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Research shows that e-books support learning through features such as quick search and bookmarking, which allow students to navigate content efficiently. This contrasts with printed books, which require manual, page-by-page searching. Furthermore, the role of e-books as digital learning resources is strengthened by their ability to integrate multimedia such as videos and interactive simulations, making learning materials more engaging and effective compared to static textbooks (Mufit et al., 2022). In the context of higher education, e-books can facilitate collaboration through sharing platforms, where students can access the same materials simultaneously, thereby supporting collaborative learning models.

E-books are positioned as a more cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternative learning resource, reducing the need for paper and physical distribution. Furthermore, e-books hold a strong and strategic position within the digital learning resource ecosystem due to their ability to be updated in real time, ensuring that information remains current and relevant to the latest scientific developments (Khusna et al., 2025). Empirical research shows that college students prefer e-books for tasks requiring quick references, as features such as hyperlinks and annotations enable deeper and more personalized learning.

Thus, e-books not only complement but also transform traditional learning resources into more adaptive and interactive tools. E-books play a vital role in supporting the learning process in higher education by improving access to instructional materials, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to learn without geographical or economic barriers. In this context, e-books facilitate distance learning and blended learning, where instructors can integrate e-books into platforms such as Moodle or Canvas, allowing students to access resources synchronously (Simarmata, et al., 2024).

Research indicates that the use of e-books in higher education increases student participation in class discussions, as their interactive features encourage independent exploration and collaboration. Additionally, the role of e-books in the learning process is strengthened by their ability to support differentiated instruction, where instructors can tailor e-book content to individual student needs, such as providing simplified versions or versions in additional languages (Khusna et al., 2025). This has proven effective in improving learning outcomes, particularly for students with special needs, as e-books allow for adjustments such as text-to-speech or zoom functions.

In a university setting, e-books also support formative assessment through integrated annotation and quiz features, which help instructors monitor student progress in real time. Furthermore, e-books contribute to the development of 21st-century skills, such as digital literacy and critical thinking, by providing content that encourages interactive analysis and interdisciplinary research. Longitudinal research indicates that students who use e-books in learning demonstrate improved information retention and learning motivation, due to their engaging format, which reduces fatigue and enhances engagement (Karwanto et al., 2022). Thus, e-books serve not only as supportive tools but also as catalysts for pedagogical innovation in higher education. As digital entities, e-books have become a vital component of higher education, particularly as learning resources that facilitate accessibility and pedagogical innovation. Key characteristics of e-books include portability, instant accessibility, and ease of

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content updates, making them more efficient than traditional printed books for college students (Agriani et al., 2025).

These characteristics are supported by empirical studies analyzing student preferences, in which e-books are viewed as tools that facilitate independent and collaborative learning. Furthermore, it is noted that e-books, as a digital medium, enable the integration of learning theories with technology, thereby enhancing knowledge retention in academic settings (Anisa Nurapipah et al., 2025). From 2020 to 2025, sources highlighting the role of e-books consistently interpret them as an evolution of printed books adapted to the needs of modern education, as evidenced by various meta-analyses on e-books, which found that e-books contribute to improved learning outcomes through digital accessibility (Zen et al., 2023).

The flexibility of e-books is one of their key advantages in a higher education context, as they allow students to study in various locations without geographical constraints. Several findings indicate that this flexibility includes the ability to read on mobile devices, digital annotation, and cross-device synchronization, which enhance student learning productivity. It is further explained how e-books support mobile learning, enabling integration with a busy class schedule and part-time work requirements. A longitudinal study indicates that the flexibility of e-books contributes to reduced educational costs, as students can access materials without repeatedly purchasing physical books (Supriyanto, 2024). At the same time, this research consistently emphasizes that this flexibility not only facilitates individual learning but also supports blended learning models in higher education.

The interactivity of e-books makes them a dynamic tool for active learning in higher education, with features such as hyperlinks, multimedia, and interactive elements that enhance the engagement of students, faculty, and staff. It is suggested that this interactivity enables simulations, interactive quizzes, and real-time discussions, which enrich the learning experience compared to static traditional printed books (Susanti et al., 2022). Recent technological advancements in education have at least provided significant practical opportunities regarding how e-books can integrate multimedia elements such as videos and animations to reinforce understanding of complex concepts. On the other hand, it is noted that the interactivity of e-books enhances motivation and learning outcomes through content personalization, such as adaptation based on student responses. Various sources confirm that e-book interactivity supports constructivist pedagogy, where students actively construct knowledge through digital interaction (Pratiwie, 2024).

Overall, the characteristics of e-books including their portability, flexibility, and interactivity indicate that e-books are an effective and efficient learning resource in higher education, although challenges such as limited internet access and students' preference for printed books still need to be addressed. E-books enhance learning efficiency by combining digital advantages, but their implementation requires adequate infrastructure support, such as internet access and hardware like computers and smartphones. It is noted that e-books drive the transformation of academic practices, including educational collaboration at regional and global levels through open access (Susanti et al., 2022). Current technological advancements, such as AI, enable e-books as learning resources to be better tailored to individual needs,

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thereby strengthening their function and role as educational tools of the future (Agriani et al., 2025).

This study demonstrates that, holistically, the characteristics of e-books as learning resources in higher education not only change how students access information but also enhance the quality of education through innovation. Future research could focus on the long-term impact of e-books on students' digital literacy, ensuring that this technology continues to evolve in tandem with the educational needs of higher education institutions.

In the context of higher education, e-books have great potential to meet learning needs, especially in the digital age. One finding indicates that Generation Z students, born after 1997, prefer digital formats due to their ease of access and interactivity (Mulyani & Wahyudin, 2025). Studies show that 78% of college students in the United States feel that e-books are better suited to their mobile and multitasking lifestyles than print books. This is supported by survey data showing a 45% increase in e-book usage during the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscores the flexibility of access.

The suitability of e-books for student characteristics is a crucial point, especially given the diversity of generations and social backgrounds. Today's college students tend to prefer content accessible via mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, which aligns with their digital lifestyles (Rahmadi et al., 2018). Interactive e-books incorporating multimedia elements like videos and quizzes increase student engagement by up to 60% compared to static books. This occurs because Millennial and Generation Z students are more responsive to gamification and personalization elements, which help address the learning motivation issues that frequently arise in academic settings (Dzikri, 2023).

The research findings presented in this study are the result of a review of several relevant literature sources. A summary of the relevant literature is provided in the following table.

**Table 1. Summary of the Reference List on the Use of E-Books in Higher Education**

Author, Year	Title	Result
Gigi Prayogi, 2022	The Impact of E-Book Transformation and Digital Marketing on the Purchase Decisions of College Textbooks	The rise of e-books and digital marketing has a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. E-books appeal to consumers as collectibles. E-books are easily accessible anytime and anywhere and are simple, in line with the needs of the modern digital age. They feature an attractive layout and offer a wide variety of content to users.
Farikha septia Ningsi, 2024	The Use of E-books as a Learning Resource in the Merdeka Curriculum	<i>E-books have great potential to be used as a learning resource in the Merdeka Curriculum. E-books play a significant role in the development of students' learning systems within a hybrid model. In addition, e-books address issues related to the time and place of accessing necessary learning materials.</i>
Dedy Suhada, 2025	Literature Review: The Development and Impact of E-Book Use in the Field of Education	E-books have great potential to improve the quality of learning, but their effectiveness largely depends on the infrastructure available at educational institutions and the digital literacy of educators and students. The availability of devices is a key factor in optimizing the use of e-books at an educational institution

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Based on this literature review, ultimately, the concept, characteristics, and relevance of e-books as digital learning resources can be adapted to the learning conditions in higher education as well as to students' learning styles such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic which are crucial for effective learning in higher education. Based on Kolb's model, students with a visual learning style benefit from e-books rich in images and diagrams, while auditory learners prefer audio features (Afifah & Mulyani, 2022). On the other hand, kinesthetic learners benefit from interactive features such as annotations and simulations that support active learning.

E-books play a significant role as learning resources in higher education because they provide quick, flexible, and efficient access to scientific information. They support the academic needs of students and faculty by providing up-to-date references without the constraints of time and space. Additionally, e-books facilitate the integration of various scientific sources into the digital technology-based learning process. The relevance of e-books in higher education is increasing alongside the development of online and hybrid learning models that require the availability of digital learning resources. E-books allow students to engage in self-directed learning through systematic and interactive access to materials. With features such as search, annotation, and multimedia, e-books contribute to improving academic literacy and the effectiveness of the learning process in higher education.

Thus, logical reasoning demonstrates that e-books have great potential to promote educational equity because they provide more inclusive access to learning resources for students from diverse social, economic, and geographic backgrounds. Through their digital format, e-books can be accessed flexibly using a variety of electronic devices without the high distribution costs associated with printed books. This allows students in remote areas or with limited financial resources to still access relevant and up-to-date learning materials. Additionally, interactive features such as text size adjustment, quick search, audio, and multimedia further support diverse learning needs, including those of students with special needs. Thus, the use of e-books contributes to the creation of learning opportunities that are more equitable, participatory, and focused on ensuring equitable quality in higher education.

## Discussion

Overall, the research findings indicate that e-books are highly relevant to the learning needs of college students, particularly in the context of digital transformation. A study on e-book usage at 10 universities showed an average 15% increase in students' academic performance among those who adopted e-books as a learning resource. The key factor is their alignment with learning demands, such as schedule flexibility and accessibility, which assist students with part-time jobs or other responsibilities within their social communities.

Based on several previous research findings linked to current conditions, it is increasingly clear that e-books demonstrate high relevance to learning needs in higher education, with an emphasis on their alignment with the characteristics of digitally savvy students, diverse learning styles, and the demands of modern curricula. These findings require higher education institutions to integrate e-books into their learning strategies, with recommendations for the development of more inclusive and interactive features. Furthermore, this requires support from appropriate policies to ensure their long-term viability.

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In terms of academic demands at the university level such as a curriculum that places a strong emphasis on collaboration e-books must offer more than just a repository of text. E-books support collaborative learning through features like annotation sharing and integrated forums, which align with 21st-century competencies such as teamwork and problem-solving. In higher education, students often face a heavy course load, so e-books with quick search and automatic summary features help save time.

The use of e-books in higher education heavily depends on the availability of adequate devices, such as hardware including computers, tablets, and smartphones with stable internet connections, as well as software like e-book reader apps and integrated digital platforms. Without this infrastructure, the potential of e-books as learning tools with their various features cannot be maximized and may hinder accessibility for students and faculty.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, higher education institutions are encouraged to strengthen the integration of e-books as digital learning resources by providing adequate technological infrastructure, expanding access to digital collections, and enhancing the digital literacy competencies of both lecturers and students. Institutional policies should support the sustainable adoption of e-books through clear guidelines on technology utilization, budget allocation for digital resource development, data security protection, copyright compliance, and continuous evaluation mechanisms. In addition, lecturers should be encouraged to optimize the interactive features of e-books to create more engaging and student-centered learning experiences. Future studies are recommended to examine the effectiveness of specific e-book features, investigate factors influencing user acceptance and utilization, and evaluate the long-term impact of e-books on student learning outcomes, academic engagement, and educational quality. Such efforts will contribute to maximizing the potential of e-books as innovative, accessible, and sustainable learning resources in higher education.

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