The staff of the Georg Eckert Institute research library regularly survey and analyse the needs of the research community. Recently this has revealed an increasing interest in non-European textbooks, a demand that the research library is able to accommodate ever more satisfactorily. Since the end of 2014 the library has been affiliated with the “Specialised Information Service (FID) for Educational Science and Educational Research”, a consortium which is being sponsored for three years by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The research library is planning to expand the sustainable supply of specialist literature and information, independent of location, in cooperation with its consortium partners: the German Institute for International Educational Research (DIPF) and its Information Center for Education (IZB) located in Frankfurt am Main as well as its Research Library for the History of Education (BBF) in Berlin, and the university libraries of the Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg and the Humboldt University of Berlin. The library’s two principle roles within the consortium are to intensify the acquisition of non-European textbooks and to develop a concept that will secure access to international digital textbooks.

With the funds provided by the DFG for the “FID for Educational Science and Educational Research” the GEI library will be able to optimise its collection of source material for global educational media research. The expansion of the non-European collection will focus primarily on obtaining textbooks from sub-Saharan Africa as well as from the Middle East and East Asia. This will create a substantial collection for textbook research with an emphasis on non-European societies undergoing transformation and on Muslim countries. Source material from these regions has proved difficult to access in the past and acquisition may still prove challenging. The countries in question often have insufficient supply to meet their own domestic needs. The existence of a bookshop is not a certainty, even in many larger cities. In addition to these challenges, many countries, such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Malawi and Mozambique consider textbooks to be national property, not intended to be delivered abroad.

In the past the research library has profited from personal contacts with guest professors, visiting academics and Georg Eckert Institute fellowship holders in the expansion of its non-European collection. The research library hopes to intensify this method of procurement. However, in order to secure the long-term expansion of the non-European collection a sustainable acquisition structure will be vital. To this end we will determine the procurement systems in place in libraries whose collections have a regional focus. Initial approaches have been successfully made to the Frankfurt am Main University Library, whose collection focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, and the Halle University and Regional Library, which collects source material and academic literature from many countries including Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The library team are also attempting to foster procurement options through related non-European research institutes as well as cultural and educational organisations. The libraries of the Goethe Institute have excellent regional connections and we are currently exploring the possibility of gaining them as a partner in matters of acquisition.

In addition to procuring non-European source material we will also be improving the search options within these collections. In 2014 the research library team successfully catalogued inventory items with Cyrillic titles, in their original script. In August 2015 we joined forces with an external service provider in order to catalogue new materials in other non-Latin alphabets, in their original scripts. This includes textbook titles as well as academic literature in scripts such as Korean, Burmese or Armenian, which can now be searched for in the original.

Through its efforts to procure non-European textbooks and the ongoing cataloguing of texts in original script the research library is furthering the FID aim of improving access to source materi-
al and research literature in the fields of the educational sciences and research. It is also making a contribution to the internationalisation of research within those fields by virtue of its role in the planned expansion of the German Education Portal (Fachportal Pädagogik) and the German Education Index (FIS Bildung Literaturdatenbank). As a preliminary step in this process access has been granted to the bibliographic data of current foreign publications (the majority in English, followed by Italian) that was not previously available at any German library. An ordering and delivery system has been developed that should ensure quicker and more straightforward access to the literature than has traditionally been possible through interlibrary loans. It will also be possible to order literature whose bibliographic data is not listed in the databases.

The services offered by the “FID for Educational Science and Educational Research” prioritise the provision of electronic media and digital information and provide rapid trans-regional access to required source material. Researchers are encouraged to take advantage of the FID service of digitising literature in the public domain and making it available “on demand”, and are requested to submit their requests to the GEI research library. By using the infrastructure and workflows developed for GEI-Digital, digitisation requests from the copyright free collections of the research library can be realised quickly and efficiently.

The research library is, however, still unlikely to be able to secure wider academic access to textbooks that are already available internationally in digital format. European countries including Poland, Greece, Turkey and Hungary provide free access to digital textbooks online. This practice is even more widespread in Asian, African, Central and South American countries for example in India, Iran, South Korea, Syria, Angola, Ecuador and Venezuela. A few countries, such as the USA and Poland provide digital textbooks that are free of charge but subject to a Creative Commons Licence. The rights to reproduce and distribute such books, and consequently also the rights to make them available in the long-term to research, are somewhat nebulous. The situation is similarly complicated in the case of digital textbooks which incur fees. Licence models exist, but are solely for the regulation of teaching. Whether they provide digital textbooks free of charge or for a fee, suppliers do not make allowances for the reliance of research on long-term access to source material.

Given the complicated procurement processes involved in securing non-European textbooks, the global increase of digital resources is likely to benefit the field of comparative textbook research. It is important to secure prompt and direct access to digital textbooks and the research library is dedicated to instigating international partnerships and negotiating licensing agreements in order to achieve this goal. Within the framework of the “FID for Educational Science and Educational Research” the library is also responsible for documenting the international development of digital textbooks and is actively involved in securing rights for the long-term supply of this research resource. The market for digital textbooks will continue to grow rapidly in the future. It is, however, unlikely that printed textbooks will become obsolete within the next five years. The collection of digital textbooks at the Georg Eckert Institute will therefore continue to be expanded in parallel with the printed textbook collection. Through this sustained expansion of its international and digital inventories the research library will consolidate its central role in the field of international textbook research and will also advance research exploring the means of communication employed by digital educational media.