

## **Oxford Learner's Bookshelf: An e-book reader application for extensive reading**

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The Oxford Learner's Bookshelf is an e-book reader application that was created in response to emerging trends in educational technology. To better understand the context of this application, this article will begin by discussing how the recent developments in educational technology have impacted second language (L2) reading methods and materials. Over the past decade, L2 reading has become more widespread, personalized, and autonomous with the development of educational technology. According to Liaw and English (2017), the types of technology that have greatly shaped this transformation include self-developed and commercial courseware, online activities, and computer-mediated communications (CMC).

Self-developed and commercial courseware are online language learning tools designed for a specific course or group of learners. Self-developed courseware includes components like vocabulary annotation, multimedia glosses, and intelligent tutoring systems (ITS), which emulate human tutors by providing services typified by article recommendations. Commercial courseware refers to self-study packages containing lessons, activities, tests, and learning materials developed by companies (Liaw & English, 2017).

Online activities utilize “digital scaffolding tools, such as dictionaries, annotations, glosses, concordances, reading-level classification tools, speech synthesis/recognition technology, and mobile devices” (Liaw & English, 2017, p. 67). CMC technologies make use of a variety of tools, systems, and applications to facilitate collaborative learning (Liaw & English, 2017). Commonly used CMC technologies include email, chat (text, audio, video), and social media (Chun, Smith, & Kern, 2016).

With the development of language learning technology, e-books, enhanced e-books with multimedia features (Ryu, 2017), and digital textbooks have started to incorporate CMC technologies and are increasingly being used as courseware and online activity components. This trend led Cote and Milliner (2014) to identify several challenges and benefits of using e-books for L2 reading. There are challenges concerning fatigue (e.g., eye strain), distractions (e.g., phone calls, push notifications), claims of slower reading speed, and continued attachment to traditional paper books. The benefits include the multimedia, accessibility, feedback, and customization features (e.g., font size, screen layout), which have led to the increased reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and reading motivation. Moreover, Cote and Milliner (2014) believe that “all of these factors can be exploited to foster student interest in reading extensively” (p. 982).

Extensive reading (ER) is “an approach to the teaching and learning second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence” (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. viii). This approach is based on the rationale that reading is a skill that must be practiced like speaking, driving, and cooking (Bamford, 1984; Bamford & Day, 1997). With consistent practice, the *ER bookstrap hypothesis* states that initial positive ER experiences will lead to continued ER experiences resulting in increased reading proficiency and motivation (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 30).

Day and Bamford (2002) recommend a variety of easy reading materials that are well within the “learners’ reading competence” and “reading comfort zone” (p. 137). More specifically, Bamford (1984) stated that graded readers, which he defined as “short books of fiction and non-fiction which are graded structurally and lexically” (p. 218), “are ideally suited for extensive reading” (p. 219). Although ER reading materials are not limited to graded readers, these simplified texts are often used because they allow learners to read without difficulty, which prevent learners from becoming frustrated and giving up on L2 reading (Waring, 1997).

### **How to Use Oxford Learner's Bookshelf**

Many of the graded readers published by Oxford University Press (OUP) are now available as e-books through the Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application. The Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application is available to use on smartphones, tablets, computer desktops, and online. The application can be downloaded from the Oxford Learner's Bookshelf homepage ([www.oxfordlearnersbookshelf.com](http://www.oxfordlearnersbookshelf.com)), the Apple App Store, or the Google Play Store. According to the application homepage, the main purposes of this application are (a) to provide quick access to a wide variety of e-books including graded readers for all ages and proficiency levels, and (b) to create more enhanced, enjoyable, and interactive reading experiences by incorporating additional features. These features include playing video- and audio-recordings, practicing pronunciation, completing interactive activities, marking the text, and utilizing a cloud-based system.

Prior to accessing the e-books, OUP encourages users to determine their appropriate reading level by using their application called *How Good is Your English?* (only available on Mac platforms) (see Figure 1) or their online Oxford Bookworms and Dominoes Level Tests (<https://elt.oup.com/student/readersleveltest/>).

After downloading the Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application, there is an in-app purchase page that allows readers to directly purchase and download course books, graded readers, graded reader activities, dictionaries, and grammar handbooks (see Figure 2). For the graded readers, there are several different types including the *Dolphin Readers*, *Read and Discover*, *Read and Imagine*, *Classic*, *Dominoes*, and *Bookworms* series. Additionally, there are collections and subscriptions that can be purchased online like the Oxford Graded Readers Digital Library Individual Pack which includes one-year access to 100 fiction and non-fiction Bookworm e-books from all levels.

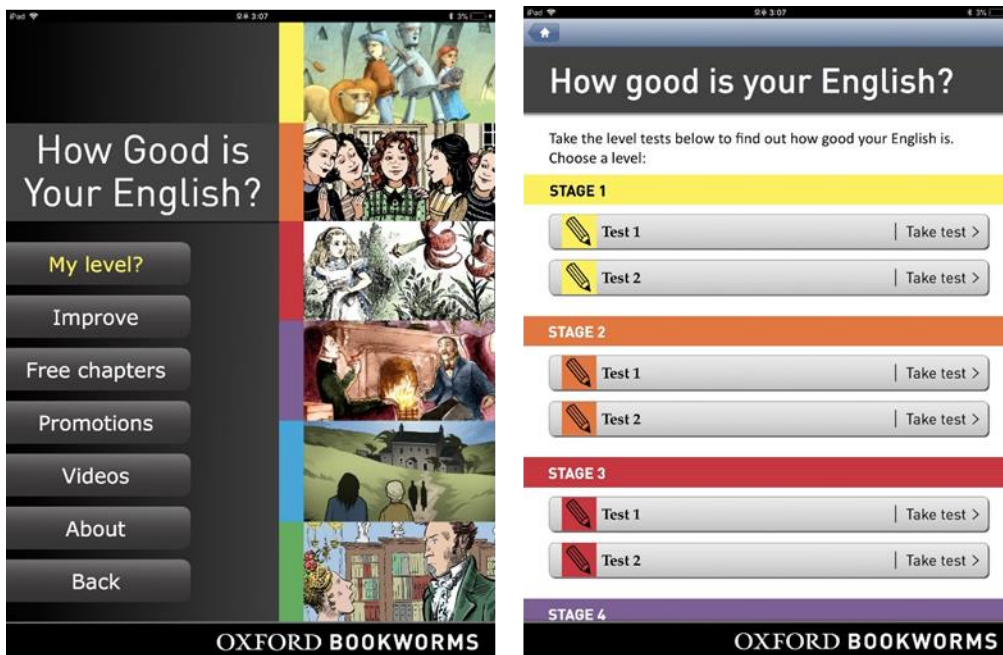


Figure 1. How Good is Your English? application pages from the Apple Store

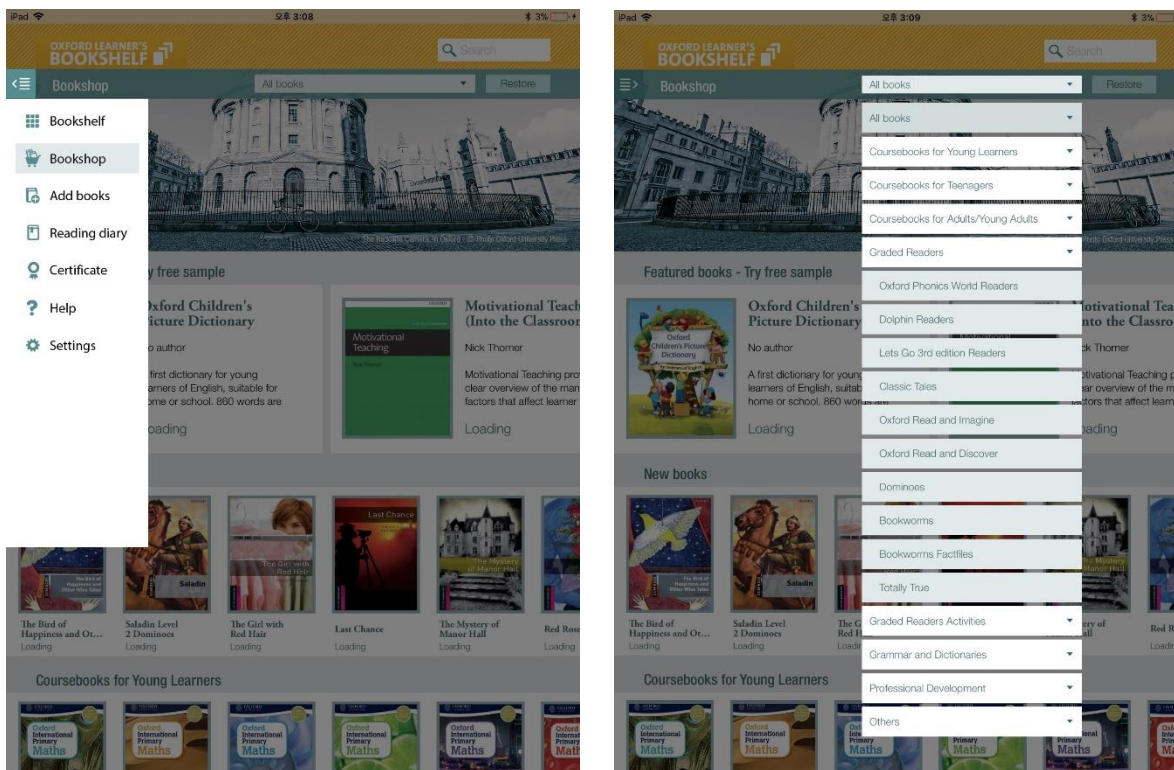


Figure 2. Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application in-app purchase pages from the Apple Store

## Evaluation

One of the advantages of this application is the accessibility, which allows users to easily download, log into their account, and sync their e-book purchases across platforms and operating systems. Even if readers do not own an electronic device, they can access their personal account and read e-books online. Moreover, the discounted cost of the graded reader collections and subscriptions make e-books more economically accessible. Other advantages include the audio-recordings, glossaries (with pronunciation recordings), supplementary reading questions, marking tools, and the reading diary. Whenever readers finish an e-book, the reading diary is automatically updated to show how many books and words they read and how much time they spent reading (see Figure 3).

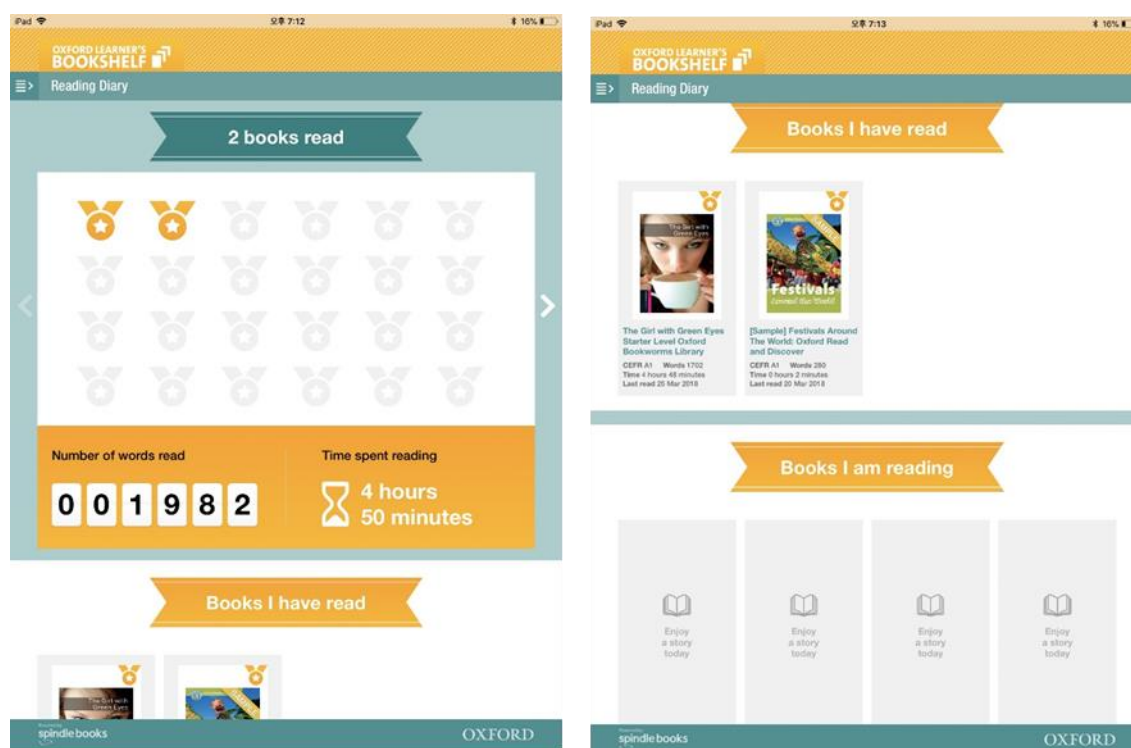


Figure 3. Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application reading diary pages from the Apple Store

However, there are concerns regarding book selection, application layout, and usage of the additional features that need to be considered. Although the in-app purchase page allows students to conveniently purchase and download e-books, students may need help with book selection since there are numerous graded readers series with varying levels that are sometimes not clearly labeled. Another concern is the inconsistent application layout. For instance, the in-app purchase function is only available on smartphones/tablets, and students can only input answers for the reading questions on computers. Furthermore, the Oxford Graded Readers Digital Library Individual Pack uses the VitalSource Bookshelf e-reader application, which does not include the reading diary function. Students may also have difficulty using certain features, such as the

recording function for individual pronunciation practice (see Figure 4).

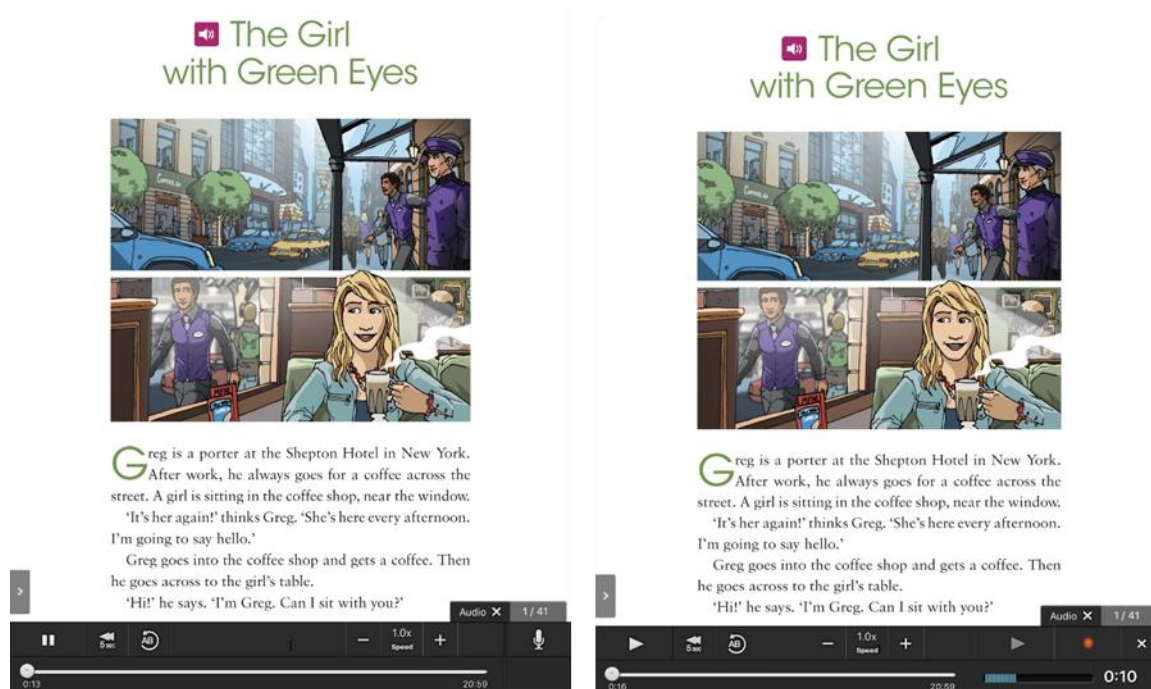


Figure 4. Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application recording function from the Apple Store

## Conclusion

With appropriate teacher guidance and feedback to address these concerns, the Oxford Learner's Bookshelf application has the potential to improve reading comprehension, increase vocabulary, and make graded readers more accessible and widespread.

In response to the rapid development of educational technology and constantly emerging language learning tools, Liaw and English (2017) emphasize the importance of remembering that the tools selected by teachers will shape their identity as an educator. Therefore, Perkins (1991) encourages teachers to creatively experiment with new tools and figure out how to utilize these tools in effective ways for L2 teaching and curriculum development. This will lead teachers to create "more intimate, supportive, learning environments" (Perkins, 1991, p. 22) that allow students to learn constructively by "engaging, grappling, and seeking to make sense of things" (Perkins, 1991, pp. 20).

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