

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Usability and instructional concerns in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)

Chukwuma Livinus Ndububa*

The National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria

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Received: 12 November 2024**Accepted:** 18 January 2025**Published:** 5 March 2025**Abstract**

The different functions, objectives, and postulations of learning resources mean some users need guidance to use them effectively. This study examined the usability of the OALD, one of the most popular learners' dictionaries, to understand the difficulty it poses to user access and how it supports learner instruction. The investigation, made from an instructor's point of view, aimed to assess the OALD's standards for lexical accuracy and organization, examine the editorial processes for consistency in entries, and investigate cross-platform variations in features and content presentation. Framed in Norman (2013) User-Centered Design Theory (UCDT), the study used a comparative qualitative method to analyze 26 purposively sampled datasets of the OALD, stratified into 7 themes. All versions were considered, but digital ones were sampled. Findings revealed many incorrect examples accompanying lemma descriptions, several inaccurate word descriptions, spelled-out alphabetic ordering, article-ignoring alphabetization, and bibliographic alphabetization. Orthographic errors, such as wrong punctuation, were identified. All versions do not contain identical content; for instance, print and app versions use syllable-break markers to aid pronunciation, while the web version omits them. These findings establish the need for instructor guidance in adopting and using English dictionaries in language teaching. Dictionary makers, especially OALD staff, will find them helpful in preparing future editions and updating the app and web versions. While this study focused on lexical entries from usability and instructional standpoints, future studies may examine phonetic representations, etymological accuracy, graphical consistency across platforms, or other gaps identified here.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers recognize the need for continuous training and exposure to meet the growing demands of effective teaching. Some invest in further education, while others, limited by finances or opportunities, rely on books to expand their knowledge—all in pursuit of professional growth. Every teacher makes efforts, one way or another, to achieve pedagogical goals. While institutional objectives may guide them, many also set personal goals to advance their careers. In formal education—especially when non-native teachers instruct English learners—teachers often study the subject deeply and return equipped to guide their students. This requires a constant search for effective materials and methods tailored to learners' needs. Teachers are leaders and should stay ahead of their learners. Advancing in knowledge helps them see the path forward and guide their students. For example, Takahashi et al. (2021, p. 7) note about the tenth

edition of the OALD, "We lost around 100 words and meanings connected with language learning/teaching, grammar, linguistics, and related fields". Facilitators who are not committed to study and research would not know this, but those who are making their work more effective.

While using instructional materials, teachers carefully review and assess their suitability and application. If the materials are books, especially dictionaries, they are examined for accessibility and instructional value. Language teaching requires constant attention to developments in the language. As Carley and Mees (2017) note, "English orthography (i.e., spelling) is notoriously unreliable." For this alone, teachers must stay alert and keep track of changes. Teachers ensure that the content is appropriate and will not mislead or confuse learners. This is especially important when dealing with dictionaries, which should go beyond mere word lists. According to Thompson (2017), "A

*corresponding author: Chukwuma Livinus Ndububa

†email:nou234303430@noun.edu.ng

lexicon should be a scientific linguistic study of the vocabulary of the language, not just an exercise in the translation of words along with freely-worded commentary...the benefits to be gained are a heightened understanding and appreciation of the literature and documents of the language".

Some books have disappointed teachers who failed to review them thoroughly. Relying solely on public opinion or praise can be misleading. Books widely considered flawless may discourage critical examination, and if a book with errors escapes the teacher's scrutiny, students risk absorbing faulty knowledge. According to Shulist, Proctor, and Oman-Reagan (2016), "people rarely question the authority of dictionaries, and the Oxford University Press name carries particular weight". Dictionaries, often held in high regard, can seem beyond question. However, their authority should not shield them from critique, especially when different editions vary in approach and sometimes contain errors. Ndububa (2025a) advises: "As words evolve in meaning over time, lexicographers must carefully update word lists, considering spelling, definitions, usage, pronunciation, and variations." As Shulist et al. (2016) also observes, "dictionaries are typically viewed as being value-neutral. But they are just as steeped in culture and prejudice as the rest of the world—and they have the power to shape what we see as normal".

According to Shulist et al. (2016), "Oxford's authority takes on the additional force in a world where the dictionary isn't just a heavy, cumbersome tome but an easily accessed app automatically downloaded onto smartphones and tablets." In light of this, the present study examines how the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) holds up under teacher review and how its usability affects English language instruction. Though respected and widely used by non-native learners, the OALD is not above examination. This research evaluates it from a teacher's perspective for instructional use rather than a student's perspective. The objectives of this study are:

- To critically assess the OALD's standards for lexical accuracy and organization.
- To examine the editorial processes for maintaining consistency in the OALD's entries.
- To investigate cross-platform variations in OALD's features and content presentation.

This study is a bold, corrective one targeting the OALD—for the users and makers. The users include teachers and students. Teachers will identify key aspects to consider when using the OALD in class, while students, aware of its strengths and weaknesses, will learn to use it more effectively on their own. Some teachers tend to recommend

books based on popularity, but these findings emphasize the need to evaluate learning materials carefully. For the OALD lexicographers, the study points out areas for improvement, especially with a new edition approaching.

The OALD is selected as the most popular and respected learner's dictionary. This reputation is further emphasized by the observation of Shulist et al. (2016) that "Oxford Dictionaries provides the default dictionary used in iOS and Android operating systems and by Apple and Google apps. The press also produces the leading historical dictionary of the English language, the OED". Instructors will, through this study, see the concerns surrounding the OALD, while students will understand its usability from an instructor's perspective. The OALD's lexicographers will also see areas needing improvement in future editions for more effective use by the intended users.

The study focuses only on the tenth edition, the latest. It considers the print, web, and app versions. The mobile versions are included because they support lower image resolutions, unlike the desktop view. Although the study investigates editorial oversights, it limits itself to lexical, structural, and formatting issues—excluding phonetic representations. All examined aspects could be captured for analysis; non-physical features and secondary datasets are not considered. The investigation is made from a teacher's perspective, reviewing the dictionary before instructional use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Editorial Integrity in Publishing and Lexicography

Editing a manuscript is an essential part of the publication process. Before any work is ready for public view, the writer must be confident in its presentation. Writers who value other perspectives often invite proofreaders and critics to identify possible flaws. Editing, therefore, is not only a demanding task that requires resources and skilled individuals—it is also a commendable skill. According to Pittman (2018), becoming an editor, especially a dictionary editor, "doesn't necessarily mean studying words or literature in school." Every message intended for an audience undergoes mental or physical editing, depending on the form. Speakers edit their utterances mentally, while writers revise their texts.

Interaction Design Foundation - IDF (2016) affirms, "Your design team should include professionals from multiple disciplines." The importance of editing explains why publishing houses engage multiple editors with diverse abilities and perspectives. As Zgusta (1971) notes, "the usual situation is that there is a staff of workers, the most important members of which are the editors, or the sub-

editors grouped around one or two (chief) editor(s)." Lexicographic editors are part of this team. While certain qualities make someone suitable for lexicographic editing, there are also guiding rules and principles. According to Ndububa (2025a), "the making of dictionaries follows structured processes guided by lexicographic principles." Referring to large projects like the OALD, Zgusta (1971) explains: "The main work of the editors is the construction of entries. This work (as all other lexicographic tasks) should be governed not if by explicit rules, then at least by agreed-upon principles". Editors work within the ethics, policies, and goals of their publishing houses. Due to the importance of their role, many publishers train and regularly update their editors. Pittman (2018) quotes Peter Sokolowski, who said, "Merriam-Webster used to have an editorial program that required its staffers to read an hour a day." He also told Huff-Post that "as editors, his team members who work on the online and print versions of the dictionary, take on a lot of reading." This shows how seriously publishers take the task of keeping editors informed to prevent misrepresentation of content or standards.

While editorial output may sometimes contain human errors, such issues are promptly addressed. Thompson (2017) states, "Given the scale of time and resources required to complete a large dictionary, inconsistency of method and style of presentation are understandable even under the watchful eye of the most vigilant of editors." However, Clarivate (2022) warns that "when false or erroneous results are published and later retracted it is not only a waste of resources, but it also threatens trust in the scientific process and scholarly publication record." A publisher's editing style earns the trust of its audience. Editorial integrity—consisting of accuracy, consistency, accountability, and transparency—is something every publisher strives to maintain. Still, Thompson (2017) observes that "editors sometimes work without being able to describe with any precision the theory of what they are doing."

Editorial integrity is especially crucial in the work of OALD lexicographers, as the monolingual learners' dictionary is a trusted authority in English. Shulist et al. (2016) observe that "many of the online commenters defending Oxford Dictionaries' work relied upon a 'descriptivist ethos.'" From data collection to dictionary compilation, printing, and publishing, editors are responsible for maintaining both their integrity and that of the dictionary. Fuertes-Olivera and Tarp (2014) describe the pre-compilation stage of lexicographic editing as involving "deciding on potential users in a specific context or situation... detecting lexicographically relevant information needs among potential users, and...

deciding to set up a lexicographical project to satisfy their needs". Thompson (2017) adds that "senses need to be correctly identified and then presented according to a layout and wording that is rigorously governed by identical principles in every similar case."

After compilation, Fuertes-Olivera and Tarp (2014) recommend that "lexicographers must put the dictionary at the users' disposal, observe how it works, and check whether or not those consulting it are satisfied." According to Ndububa (2025a), "Identifying and correcting phonological and lexical inconsistencies must be an ongoing lexicographic process". These steps support the achievement of editorial integrity, which every dictionary must uphold to maintain lexicographic authority. Zgusta (1971) encourages practices like rotated reading and group discussions among editors or sub-editors, leading to "the mutual adjustment of the editors to problems and decisions on questions which are not covered by rules or explicitly stated principles."

This conceptual framework underpins the study's pursuit of its first and second research objectives.

Ensuring Fidelity Across Instructional Mediums

Understandably, lexicographers create dictionaries for specific audiences and purposes. Each type of dictionary is made available in print, e-book, app, and web formats, all carrying duplicate content. The goal of offering these formats is not to reach different users but to serve the same users with varying access needs or preferences. For example, a learner's dictionary is for learners, and the e-book or app version simply lets learners carry the dictionary on their digital devices. The web version is for learners with internet access who may not have a print copy.

Though the features of each format may vary, the content remains the same. Entries are replicated across all formats, even if user interaction with each differs. Lexicographers ensure this replication to maintain fidelity, which means consistent and reliable content presentation across platforms—excluding the digital features not possible in print. A dictionary must earn the users' trust by offering identical content across all formats.

Dziemianko (2017) thoroughly discusses the features of electronic dictionaries, including apps, e-books, and web versions. Ndububa (2025a) states that "digital versions with engaging graphical features complement hard copies, which are less portable. However, digital versions should faithfully reflect the content of printed editions". While print versions are updated only when reprinted, digital versions are easily upgradable. However, app updates require user permission, while web versions can be updated di-

rectly by lexicographers. According to Ndububa (2025a), "print editions remain unchanged until their next release. If mobile dictionary apps mirror online versions, regular synchronization should be ensured".

Users dislike discovering that the web version has new entries, the print version does not, or that the app version does not reflect updates even after being updated. When users across platforms encounter different content, it leads to conflicting experiences. A lack of consistency discourages continued use and reflects poorly on the lexicographers. Clarivate (2022) links such problems to "lack of awareness and training in research and publication ethics...as there has traditionally been little structured training available".

Users accept that platform-specific features may differ. These differences often guide preferences. As Dziemianko (2017) points out, "Audio and video are possible only in the electronic medium, whereas text and pictures are allowed both in print and the electronic medium." Some users prefer print, while others prefer digital. Kipfer (2015) notes print offers mental engagement "by simply finding the word in an alphabetical book, which keeps your spelling gene working." Hallet (2019) adds that "if you look up a word, you will often find another interesting vocabulary on the same page, encouraging further research."

Some users choose the app, others the web. Some prefer e-books, while others prefer print. Regardless of preference, the content of a dictionary aimed at a specific audience should be the same across all formats. Consistency in entries, including lemmas, senses, classifications, definitions, and phonetic forms, is essential. The layout should remain consistent while maintaining user familiarity, including signature design elements like color. Pictorial descriptions should appear across platforms. If space constraints require removing visuals, this should be noted to avoid user confusion.

Fidelity can also be compromised if a dictionary strays from its principles—such deviation can appear across all platforms. When updates are rolled out simultaneously, all users enjoy a unified experience of the dictionary, no matter the format they use.

Instructional Design for Usability and Effective Learning

Communication with oneself or another aims to pass a message. This message makes an impact, which equals instructing the recipient or audience. As Ndububa (2025b) affirms, "Dictionaries, as written works, follow this principle." While instructors aim to be far-reaching and engaging, they make their tools and methods effective and suitable. Hence, the

beneficiaries of the methods find them usable. For a user-centric design, Kazi (2023) notes the following steps: "understand the user, define the problem, generate ideas, evaluate the ideas, and refine the design." Noting one of the essential elements of user-centered design, Institute ((n.d.)) asks, "Is the language easy for users to understand?". Usability is the aim of instructional methods and approaches. An instructor might mean well, but if they are not offering something for learners' utility, all the effort becomes wasteful. As Indalecio (2018), explains, "You may think you have accounted for all the possible issues, and you may think you know exactly how the user will interact with your content, but chances are you have made some mistakes, and the user will find them."

Instructors can prevent possible errors when they can observe how learners engage with what has been shared. Indalecio (2018) notes, "Usability testing will help highlight what you have missed and allow you to fix issues before they become a major problem and impact learning outcomes." For instance, instructors can take out things the learners do not find valuable and sort out aspects that might throw them off—like problems with how they (the learners) move through the material or how certain features work. Indalecio (2018) further notes, "We have to keep in mind who we are creating for, and we have to be able to view things through the user's eyes to create anything of value." Understanding the audience's experience helps the instructor focus time and resources on what truly matters to them, increasing engagement and improving program delivery.

As Norman (2013) notes, "Human-centered design is a design philosophy. It means starting with a good understanding of people and the needs that the design is intended to meet". Thus, to design one's instruction to make it usable and impactful, the designer, having gained adequate experience and confidence in their expertise, must consider the user and user situation. Tailoring instruction is a natural approach and not just a strategy. As Ononye (2021) assert, "In providing closer experience to real situations, instructional material enhances acquisition and retention of factual information." Mehlenbacher (2002) also notes that "it is important to acknowledge that all instruction, whether online or conventional, involves interaction." Ononye (2021) further note that "any teaching and learning situation is made up of people of varied characteristics, levels of understanding, local background, attitude, and interest." All learners do not operate on the same academic level or pace, nor do they learn effectively with the same tools or approaches. As Toshio, Mutalib, and Abdul-Salam (2015) observe, "There is a strong international trend towards developing education

structures to become a more inclusive system."

According to Gladkiy (2022), "to design in a user-centric way, identify those who'll use your product, what they'll use it for, and the conditions under which they'll use it." This is what dictionary makers must always consider. They design instruction for learners and must have the situation of the learners at heart. As Heuberger (2017) highlights, "Learners' dictionaries show various unique features and...provide detailed information on grammar and usage, making them useful for language production". The editorial integrity of the work and its fidelity across all of its mediums and versions must be evaluated by the instructor, who tests its usability. Hence, considering the class of learners or users, the dictionary must satisfy the expectations of the teacher who understands the users' abilities (Vallejo, 2019). The usability of a suitable dictionary depends on the fact that when it is used by students under no teacher's supervision, there will be no misleading element in its content. Such a dictionary is deemed reliable by the teacher. For this reliability, Jackson (2002) recommends the use of a large and diverse corpus for dictionaries makers.

Empirical Review

Takahashi (2021) made a brilliant analysis of the tenth edition of the OALD, comparing it with the ninth edition. At some points, they also referenced earlier or other editions. The study focused primarily on the print versions, although it briefly touched on the online and app versions. Takahashi (2021)note, "We focus our attention primarily on OALD10's print version and its preceding editions. Its digital versions are referred to whenever necessary" (2021, p. 2). The study made many findings about the errors, inconsistencies, and omissions in the tenth edition of the OALD. Most aspects of the dictionary were investigated, ranging from formatting, structuring, definitions, examples, grammar, promotion to higher ranks and demotion to lower ranks of words, phrases, and idioms, to deletion and redundancies of entries. For some findings, they note that the OALD10 "places special emphasis on the importance of academic vocabulary" (p. 100) and "the editors seem to regard structural replaceability as well as semantic equivalence as the necessary condition of synonymy" (p. 76).

Advising the producers of the OALD against ignoring basic elements on the assumption that learners would already understand them, Takahashi (2021)advise, "It may be true that the advanced learner, the target of the dictionary, is already sure to have such knowledge, but it is advisable for the dictionary, as a reference work, to systematically describe and present the facts about the language" (p. 9).

While Takahashi et al.'s study is related to the current study, they focused primarily on the print edition, which they also noted lacks some content found in other versions. This research gap renders their study unreliable, as most aspects of the different versions of the OALD were not investigated. That gap is filled by the current research.

Ndububa (2025b) also made a thorough analysis of notable Oxford dictionaries, including the OALD. Although the study focused on challenges in teaching English speech sounds to non-natives, it did not concentrate much on the OALD, having also investigated dictionaries like the Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford Dictionary of English, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Collins Dictionary, and Cambridge English Plus. Based on Sweller's (1988) Cognitive Load Theory and Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Theory and using a pre-experimental comparative qualitative research design, the study purposively stratified 27 screenshots of selected dictionaries and found that popular slant strokes, straight strokes, and round brackets are used by different dictionaries to enclose phonemes. Other ways of marking stress and non-correspondence between the entry patterns of various versions of some dictionaries were also discovered.

In all, Ndububa (2025b) concluded that "dictionaries serve different lexicographic purposes and target specific users, so some lexicographic features are pedagogically intentional rather than errors." Although Ndububa (2025b) study is closely related to the current research, Ndububa assessed various notable British dictionaries to discover the difficulties encountered by non-natives when using them. While Ndububa (2025b) paid less attention to the OALD and none to the lexical or formatting aspects of it—a gap that may have influenced the study's findings—this study focuses entirely on the OALD and those neglected aspects.

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed in Norman (2013) User-Centered Design Theory (UCDT), which posits that products and services should be designed around the user and their situation. This means considering the user's needs when providing a service or product. Norman (2013) describes this as "an approach that puts human needs, capabilities, and behavior first, then designs to accommodate those needs, capabilities, and ways of behaving." User-centric design prevents mistakes that waste resources or damage a designer's reputation. From a humanistic perspective, Tanovic (2024) advise designers to "empathize with users, stay aware of their pain points, and try to match their mental models—how they think about your product in their mind."

When dictionary makers adopt this approach, they focus on accessibility and effectiveness, ultimately improving usability, efficiency, and user experience. Kazi (2023) notes that user-centered design "...is a way of designing products and services that are easy to use, efficient, and enjoyable".

Dictionaries created for specific user situations align with Gladkiy (2022) view that lexicographic strategy "begins with human beings and ends with solutions tailored to their individual needs." A learner's dictionary, like the OALD, should be informed by the understanding that "comes about primarily through observation, for people themselves are often unaware of their true needs, even unaware of the difficulties they are encountering" (Norman, 2013; Jam, Singh, Ng, & Aziz, 2016). The Interaction Design Foundation (IDF, 2016; Parveen, Sarwar, & Arif, 2024) further advises designers to "ensure long-term monitoring of use." The UCDT aligns closely with Bergenholtz and Tarp (2003) theory of communicative lexicography. Still, while Bergenholtz and Tarp emphasize the communicative function of a lexicographic work, a publication must first be accessible and usable before its communicative functions can be fully recognized. Tanovic (2024) stress that accessibility "ensures your product is aesthetically appealing and easy to navigate for users." Gladkiy (2022) adds, "You have to understand the people you're trying to reach, and then you begin designing from their perspective."

This study, therefore, examines the usability and effectiveness of the OALD in teaching learners, specifically from a teacher's perspective. Norman (2013) UCDT is an appropriate fit for this study not only because it can "account for most of the existing data within its domain" (Bordens & Abbott, 2002) but also because it directly addresses the research objectives.

METHODOLOGY

According to Bordens and Abbott (2002), "Choosing an appropriate research design is crucially important to the success of your project. The decisions you make at this stage...determine the quality of the conclusions you can draw from your research results". For a study that uses pictorial data to analyze discourses in a dictionary to disclose unknown information and empower research readers, a qualitative research design proves inevitable. According to Jw (2009), "qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study". An investigation that juxtaposes data to conclude must be called comparative. Hence, this study adopts a qualitative comparative research method. Data from the dictionary are purposively sampled to ad-

dress the research objectives. Print, app, and web versions of the OALD are sampled to address the third objective and reinforce decisions for the other objectives. Mobile versions of the digital data are preferred because they do not expand data like the desktop. Screenshots of the digital versions are sampled, while snapshots of the print version will be sampled when necessary. The most updated version of each dictionary is used during this study, from the print, app, to the web versions.

Where necessary, screenshots and snapshots are carefully cropped or resized but not to distort the pictorial information or inform a biased analysis. All figures were collected by the researcher. For the study, 26 sampled figures are stratified into 7 sub-categories for a tailored thematic analysis. According to Creswell (2009), this research method is "a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand". Thus, data is reasonably interpreted and analyzed and not to reflect the researcher's personal opinion but to disclose information relating to the study's objectives.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents and describes the data based on their alignment with the study's objectives. As earlier noted, the data are analyzed thematically.

How Misleading Examples Distort Lexical Understanding

Learners' dictionaries show the importance of clear descriptions and relatable examples. Because of this, lexicographers make efforts to disambiguate and simplify definitions and to provide familiar examples or usage. The following figures show how the OALD presents specific word uses or examples.

Definition of **oceanfront** noun from the Oxford
Advanced Learner's Dictionary

oceanfront noun

🔊 /əʊʃnfrɒnt/

🔊 /əʊʃnfrɒnt/

often the **oceanfront** (North American English)
(British English **seafont**)

[singular]

★ the part of a town facing the ocean

• the hotels lining the oceanfront

• an oceanfront hotel

FIGURE 1. Oceanfront

Definition of **reverend adjective** from the Oxford
Advanced Learner's Dictionary

reverend adjective

 /ˈrevərənd/

 /ˈrevərənd/

[only before noun] **Reverend**
(abbreviation **Rev.**)

★ the title of a member of the **clergy** that is also sometimes used to talk to or about one

- the Reverend Charles Dodgson
- Good morning, Reverend.

FIGURE 2. Reverend

- 2 ★  [only before noun] completely different in nature or direction

SYNONYM **opposite**

- *contrary advice/opinions/arguments*
- *The contrary view is that prison provides an excellent education—in crime.*

Extra Examples

- *Despite all the contrary evidence, they still believed that the Earth was flat.*
- *My own experience is completely contrary.*

FIGURE 3. Contrary

In Fig 1, the web version of the OALD shows its entry for ‘oceanfront’, which is a nominal item. However, in the second example of using the word, which reads ‘an oceanfront gate’, the word is not used as a noun but as an adjective. According to the English grammatical function of nouns, when two nouns appear together primarily as a compound word, the first one modifies the last one. Thus, in the phrase ‘an oceanfront hotel’, ‘hotel’ is the noun while ‘oceanfront’ is adjectival or a modifier which cannot be said to be a noun.

This function of the word goes against its use in the example and distorts both the word’s meaning and word class.

In Fig 2, showing the web version of the OALD, ‘reverend’ is labelled an adjective, but in the second example showing its use, “Good morning, Reverend”, it is used as a noun. ‘Reverend’ in the example is a title and a noun grammatically functioning as a word of direct address and not an adjective. Therefore, the use of ‘reverend’ in the example as an adject

tive is wrong, especially because it is a nominal form of address.

In Fig 3, the use of ‘contrary’ is stated to be ‘only before noun’ which is as an attributive adjective. Still, the word is instead used as a predicative adjective—coming after a noun—in the second example showing the word use. This does not only show lexicographic oversight but a tendency to mislead the learners.

Distorted Representations of Word Meaning and Usage

Learners rely a lot on dictionaries for help with word meanings, pronunciation, usage, and other purposes. Because of this, learners who are not very exposed take in all the information a dictionary gives without question, since they hold these works of lexicography in high regard and depend on them. The pictures below show examples of how the OALD gives wrong meanings and usage of words.

Definition of **sincere adjective** from the Oxford
Advanced Learner's Dictionary

sincere adjective

 B2

 /sɪnˈsɪə(r)/

 /sɪnˈsɪr/

(superlative **sincerest**, no comparative)

- 1 ★  B2 (of feelings, beliefs or behaviour) showing what you really think or feel

FIGURE 4. Sincere

Definition of **helluva** from the Oxford Advanced
Learner's Dictionary

helluva

 /ˈheləvə/

 /ˈheləvə/

★
hell

Definitions on the go

Look up any word in the dictionary offline,

FIGURE 5. Helluva



FIGURE 6. Panties

In Fig 4, the OALD shows that the adjective 'sincere' has no comparative form but gives its superlative. This is incorrect, based on how 'sincere' is used. Both 'sincerer' and 'more sincere' are valid comparative forms, though 'more sincere' is commonly used. For reference, the Oxford Dictionary of English (ODE) lists 'sincerer' as the comparative form of 'sincere'.

In Fig 5, the meaning 'hell' given for the lemma 'helluva' is both incomplete and wrong. 'Helluva' is an informal form of 'hell of a...'. This reflects poorly on the lexicographers and also misleads dictionary users.

In Fig 6, the mobile app version of the OALD correctly identifies 'panties' as North American English and 'knickers' as British English, but in the idiom section below, 'get your knickers in a twist', which is British English at least because it contains the word 'knickers', is wrongly labelled North American English, just like 'get your panties in a bunch', which is North American English and correctly labelled. Hopefully, the developers fix this in the app's next update.

The Redundancy of Double-Entry Lemmas

Repetition of ideas or entries is not found in carefully done work. It shows not only a shallow understanding of a topic or project but also poor editing or proofreading, as seen in some lexicographic works. This reflects Jackson (2002) view that "Some dictionaries, notably those for learners, have dispensed with the traditional tightly packed entry and have, for example, used a new line for each sense of a headword or dispensed with abbreviation". A dictionary meant to teach advanced learners and save space or resources should use cross-referencing instead of giving two or more entries of lemmas, definitions, and sample sentences. The following are examples of such redundancies in the OALD.

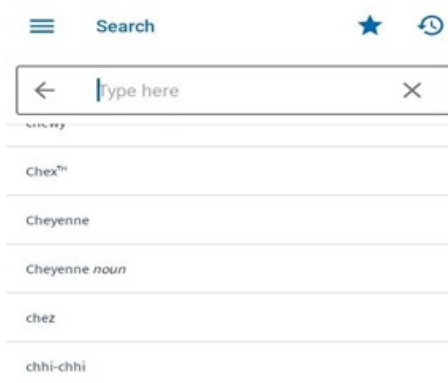


FIGURE 7. Cheyenne—1



FIGURE 8. Cheyenne—2



FIGURE 9. Cheyenne—3

In Fig 7, the word 'Cheyenne' appears twice in the OALD, both times as a noun, although only one instance is marked with the label 'noun'. In Fig 8, the instance labelled 'noun' is presented along with its definition and related information. In Fig 9, the other example of the word 'Cheyenne', which is not labelled 'noun', presents the same information—'the capital of the US state of Wyoming'—as seen in the second sense of the word in Fig 8. The entry displayed in Fig 9 is wasteful and redundant because it is already covered in Fig 8. The entry in image 9 is justifiable only if the second sense of the word in Fig 8 is removed.

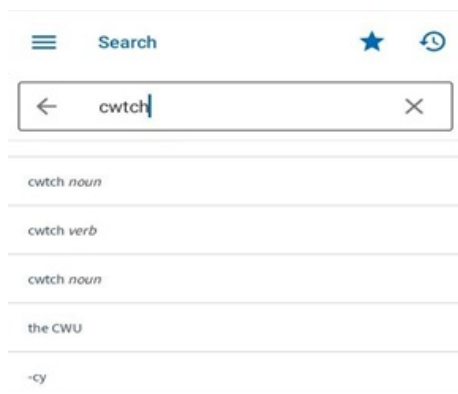


FIGURE 10. Cwtch

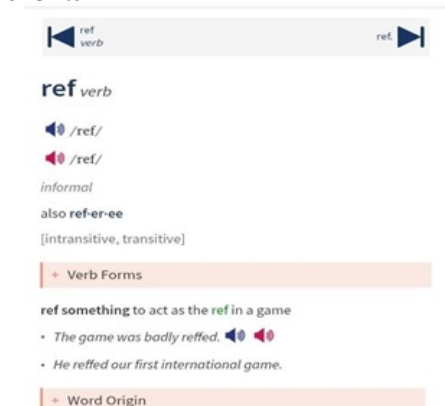


FIGURE 11. Ref—1

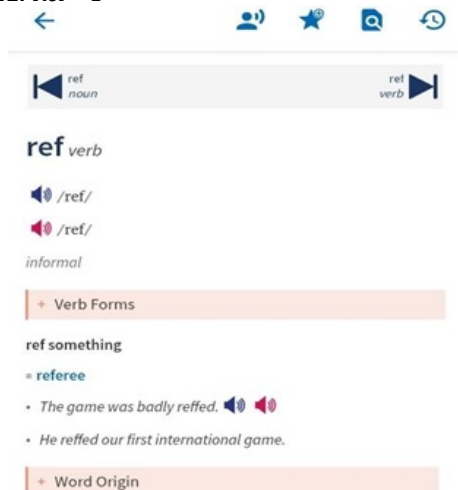


FIGURE 12. Ref—2

In Fig 10, the word 'cwtch' appears twice as a noun in the OALD, and both entries are precisely the same in definitions and related information. This is another case of redundancy where one entry would be sufficient. In fig 11, the verb form of 'ref' and all necessary information about it are shown. In Fig 12, the same verb form of 'ref' is shown with the exact transcription, collocation guide, and sample sentences. The entry in Fig 12 is therefore redundant, since the entry in Fig 11 contains more information, including a variant spelling, an indication that it is both transitive and intransitive, and further explanation of the collocation.

The Pattern of Lemma Ordering in the OALD

Organisation is a clear feature of dictionaries. It helps in locating entries and enhances the aesthetic features of the dictionaries. Organisation of entries is especially evident in the alphabetization of dictionary entries. Fuertes-Olivera (2017) notes that, "Compared to a dictionary with a straight-alphabetical ordering, difficulty of access is increased in a dictionary with a niched ordering and even more in a dictionary with a nested ordering". The pattern for ordering OALD's lemmas is shown below.

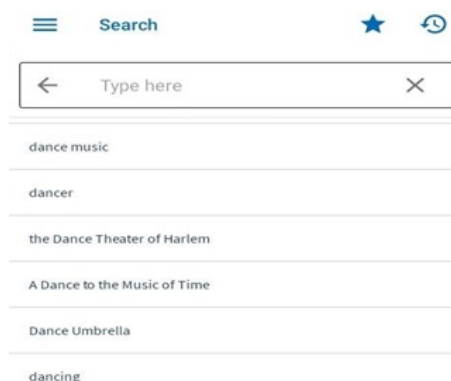


FIGURE 13. Article-ignoring

In Fig 13, the section of the OALD for words starting with 'D' is shown, and there appear to be oversights. Counting from top to bottom, 'dance music' is followed by 'dancer', which is correct. 'The dance theatre of Harlem' comes next, followed by 'A dance to the music of time'. 'Dance umbrella' and 'dancing' follow in that order. Based on alphabetization, it appears that the articles 'the' and 'a' are ignored. The alphabetization considers the first word following the articles, as seen in non-filing or article-ignoring alphabetization.

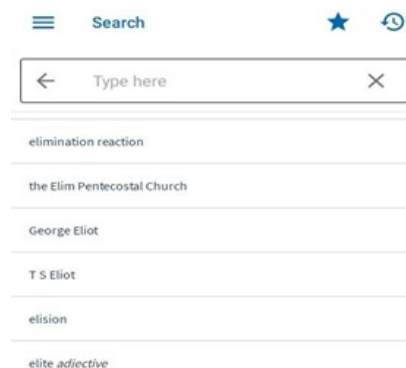


FIGURE 14. Misalphabetization

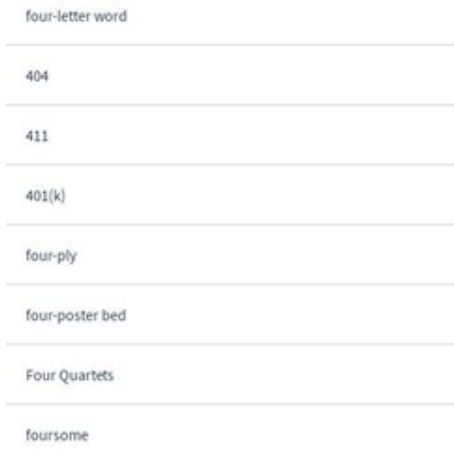


FIGURE 15. Spelled-out Ordering

In Fig 14, the section for words starting with 'E' is shown. The definite article 'the' is again ignored. Another aspect of lexicographic alphabetization is evident: 'George Eliot' and 'T. S. Eliot' appear in a manner suggesting that bibliographic alphabetization, used for listing authors, is applied. However, the entries are not arranged in the reverse, surname-first format of bibliographies to assist users. Users are seemingly expected to understand this themselves. In Fig 15, the section of the OALD for words starting with 'F' is clearly shown—all numeric lemmas in the section begin with 'F' when spelled. Based on the ordering, spelled-out lexicographic ordering appears to be applied, whereby numerals and symbols are arranged according to their spelling rather than their structure.

Erroneous Structural Entries

Erroneous entries are numerous in the OALD. These errors occur in structure, graphic outlook, or dictionary layout. Some of them are shown as follows:



FIGURE 16. Sammy Jr Davis

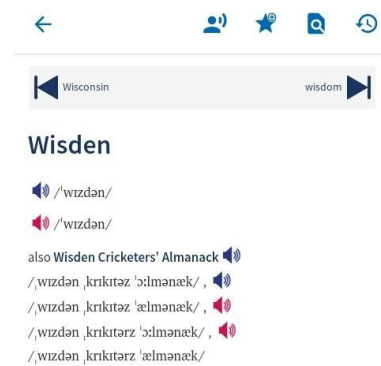


FIGURE 17. Wisden

In Fig 16, the ordering of the name 'Sammy Jr Davis'—which should appear as 'Sammy Davis Jr'—is distorted. Although the phonemic transcription shows correct ordering, the parts of the name are wrongly arranged. In Fig 17, the pronunciation icons, typically placed beside the words they represent, are improperly positioned. The user may not understand which pronunciation each icon corresponds to. The speaker is left to assume which icon is for which word. This is not a proper lexicographic action in a learner's dictionary.

Ill-Defined Terms and Conceptually Weak Framework

The need for a correct and unambiguous lexicographic definition cannot be overemphasized. The same applies to a lexicographic reflection of real-world language use in spoken proficiency and writing conventions. This section presents some incorrect definitions, word use, and punctuation.



FIGURE 18. An

In Fig 18, the definition for the lemma, 'an', is misleading to the presumed user of the OALD, a learner. Stating that 'an' means 'a' might suggest to a learner that they are interchangeable, whereas they are not. Definitions are assumed to mean exactly what the lemma represents. Hence, the word and article 'an' is poorly defined and misleading.

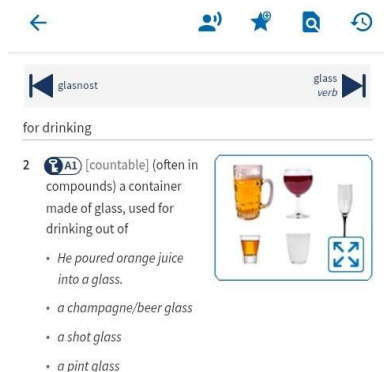


FIGURE 19. Glass

In Fig 19, the definition of the second sense of glass is shown as “a container made of glass, used for drinking out of”. This is stylistically awkward and grammatically informal for a lexicographic definition meant for learners; and “used for drinking out of” ends with a preposition, which is typically avoided in formal definitions. It lacks the conciseness and polish expected in dictionary entries. A more natural and standard version would be “a container made of glass, used for drinking”, “a glass container used for drinking liquids”, or “a drinking vessel made of glass”.

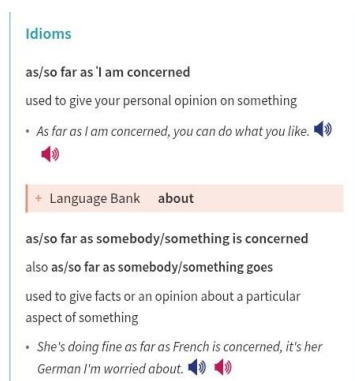


FIGURE 20. Concerned

In Fig 20, in the illustrations for how to use ‘concerned’, the last example reads: “She’s doing fine as far as French is concerned, it’s her German I’m worried about.” The expression is accurate and natural in informal spoken English. It conveys a contrast between the subject’s performance in two languages. However, from a formal grammar perspective, it is a comma splice, as it joins two independent clauses with a comma. A grammatically accurate version would be “She’s doing fine as far as French is concerned; it’s her German I’m worried about” or “She’s doing fine as far as French is concerned. It’s her German I’m worried about”. Since dictionaries also guide learners on punctuation use, the sample sentence is misleading with its wrongly applied comma midway.

Ensuring Uniform Content Presentation Across Multiple Platforms

The dependence of learners on a dictionary is driven by the dictionary’s apparent flawless and consistency in representing meaning and its lexicographic principles. This consistency also includes having duplicate entries in all dictionary versions. Below, inconsistencies in content uniformity across platforms of the OALD are minimally represented.



FIGURE 21. Thikadar—App

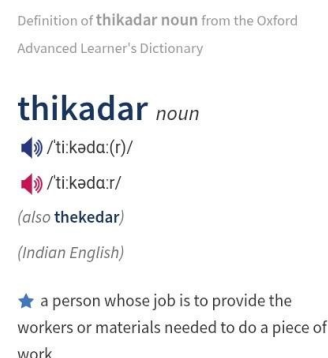


FIGURE 22. Thikadar—Web

In Fig 21, the OALD has no phonemic transcription for ‘thikadar’ in the app version, but in Fig 22 showing the web version, the phonemic representation of the word is provided. In Fig 21, the app version uses a syllable-break marker—the dot in-between the word—to show how the word could be divided into syllables during pronunciation. The syllable-break marker is not shown in Fig 22—the web version.

Definition of **patient zero** noun from the Oxford
Advanced Learner's Dictionary

patient zero *noun*

 /ˌpeɪʃnt ˈziərəʊ/

 /ˌpeɪʃnt ˈziərəʊ/

[singular]

usually used without *a*

(especially US English)

★ the first person to be **infected** with a particular disease

FIGURE 23. Patient Zero—W

In Fig 23, the entry, ‘patient-zero’, is shown on the web version of the OALD. Still, in Fig 24 below, the app version of the OALD does not have it according to the alphabetically listed entry showing where it would have been inserted. According to information on the OALD online, the word, ‘patient-zero’, was added to the OALD in May 2020, and till the moment of this study, May 2025—five years later—the word has not been added to the app version. Updates to the app version are shown when the user updates the app, but the OALD app developers have yet to furnish the app with words like this.

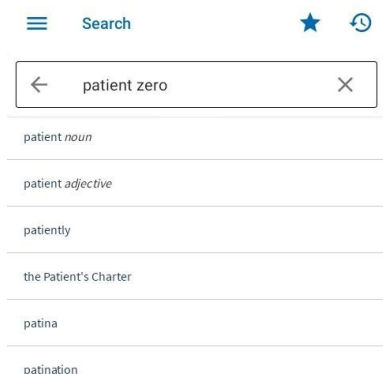


FIGURE 24. Patient Zero—A

Definition of **deep-clean** verb from the Oxford
Advanced Learner's Dictionary

deep-clean *verb*

 /ˌdiːp ˈkliːn/

 /ˌdiːp ˈkliːn/

+ Verb Forms

★ **deep-clean something** to clean something extremely carefully and completely in order to prevent the spread of **germs** and infection

FIGURE 25. Deep-clean—W

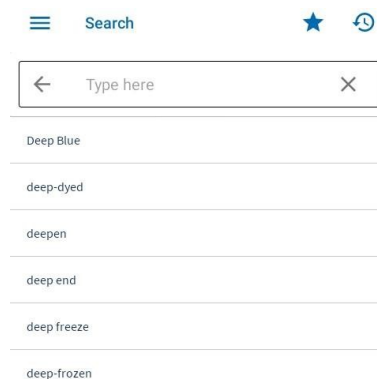


FIGURE 26. Deep-clean—A

As Fig 24 shows non-correspondence with Fig 23, Fig 25 showing the web version of the OALD also has a word, ‘deep-clean’, which is not in the app version shown in Fig 26. Deep-clean was also added to the OALD online in May 2020, but after five years, has yet to reflect in the app version of the OALD.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

From data assessment, this study found that the OALD contains many instances of incorrect examples accompanying lemma descriptions. This is contrary to this view, especially as Tarp (2017) asserts that dictionaries “assist their users with advice and instructions in order to perform various types of actions”. An entry may be identified as a noun, yet its usage example may show it as an adjective, and vice versa; similarly, an attributive adjective may be illustrated as predicative. The study also found several instances of inaccurate word descriptions in the OALD—some possibly deliberate. In contrast, others such as incorrect ordering of headword elements or structural displacements appear to be oversights by the lexicographers. It was also discovered that redundancies exist in the OALD—some entries are repeated either unintentionally or intentionally, with the latter being more common. This supports Jackson (2017) assertion that “The structure and presentation of articles in printed dictionaries are constrained by limitations on space and the need to keep the dictionary to a reasonable size and cost”. Findings also show that the OALD applies spelled-out alphabetic ordering, where numerals are alphabetized as if written in full. It uses article-ignoring alphabetization, where definite and indefinite articles preceding headwords are excluded from the ordering process.

Additionally, the OALD applies bibliographic alphabetization, although entries are not reversed as expected in such a system. Alongside lexical, formatting, and graphical misrepresentations, orthographic errors such as incorrect punctuation were also identified. Finally, not all versions of the OALD contain duplicate content. Although users can update

the app version, it does not always include newly added entries. Furthermore, while the print and app versions use syllable-break markers to aid pronunciation, the web version omits them, suggesting that it is designed for more advanced learners.

In line with the first objective and based on Norman (2013) User-Centered Design Theory, this study found that many lexical entries in the OALD are flawed in both accuracy and organization, to the point that they can mislead learners and require a teacher's intervention to guide proper use.

According to the second objective, the study revealed that the editors of the OALD are inconsistent in making entries and applying Oxford's lexicographic principles, leading to errors, misrepresentations, and inconsistencies that hinder users' access and call for a teacher's guidance. For the third objective, the study observed that the various platforms of the OALD have distinct features that should either remain unique or be consistently shared and while a student may find any version engaging, an instructor's support remains essential.

Implications of Findings

Some inaccuracies, like incorrect ordering and structural displacements, show weaknesses in editorial processes and quality control. This stresses the need for more thorough review practices and stricter editorial checks by Oxford University Press (OUP) to reduce such errors.

Redundancies in the OALD can confuse learners and weaken its credibility as a reliable linguistic resource. Editors should streamline entries to avoid repetition, and educators should help learners better understand and process the information.

The discovery that different versions of the OALD do not share the same content or features can hinder knowledge transfer across platforms, making a strong case for greater consistency in content delivery.

Furthermore, since the printed and app versions use syllable-breaking to aid pronunciation while the web version does not, learners may struggle with accurate pronunciation when using the web version. Thus, designers should

aim for uniform pronunciation guides across all platforms or clearly explain the differences to users.

Recommendations

The OALD is known for its thorough, straightforward, and accessible guide to learning English for non-native speakers. However, as this study shows, users—both instructors and learners—should not rely on its content without cross-checking with another reliable dictionary or consulting an expert. Despite its reputation, the OALD is created by humans and prone to error. While careful editorial oversight and greater accuracy are needed in future editions, educators should help students navigate these inaccuracies using other resources. This study reinforces the need for lexicographers to improve their work to maintain the trust of curious, discerning learners. There is a clear need for a consistent editorial policy and strict adherence to it to maintain credibility across entries. It is hoped that future editions or updates to the app and web versions will reflect these corrections for better user satisfaction. This would relieve instructors of the extra burden of checking dictionaries for lexicographic issues alongside their regular duties. The teacher's role in guiding the use of the OALD is crucial, suggesting that policymakers and educators should treat the OALD not as a standalone tool but as a resource to be integrated into instructional practices for learners' benefit.

Ultimately, this study investigates the OALD from a specific angle and highlights areas for future research. While it focuses on lexical entries from usability and instructional standpoints, future studies may examine other aspects such as phonetic representations, accuracy of etymologies, graphical consistency across platforms, or other gaps identified here. This study will be valuable to dedicated dictionary users, especially learners who do not recognize that lexicographic works can be flawed. Not only will the OALD's editors find this work useful, but other lexicographers too, as it draws attention to common errors and challenges users face.

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