

An Introspective Analysis of Hassan Zrizi's Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook



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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a comprehensive review of Dr. Hassan Zrizi's textbook, *Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook* (2018). The textbook is designed to enhance students' strategic interaction with English-language media, particularly newspapers and magazines. Emphasizing the alignment of theoretical principles with practical classroom applications, the book is noteworthy for its meticulously selected sources, which aim to stimulate critical inquiry and challenge students' comprehension skills. This resource serves as a practical guide for both learners and educators, providing a valuable tool for effective reading comprehension in EFL contexts.

KEYWORDS: Reading Comprehension, EFL Students, English-Language Media, Pedagogical Applications, Critical Inquiry, Strategic Interaction

The present paper will undertake a review of the book by Doctor Professor Hassan ZRIZI, namely *Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook*. This educational material, intended for use by students, has been meticulously prepared by the author and published by the Laboratory of Education, Languages and Cultures in 2018. It serves as an invaluable complement to the author's previous work, *Aspects of Moroccan Culture* (2017), published in the field of Literary and Cultural Studies. The textbooks add value to the learning process of EFL/ESL students. They are perceptive pedagogical initiatives that aim to enhance the ability of university students to use textual interaction in a strategic way.

The objective of this textbook is to equip EFL learners with the fundamental tools required for effective comprehension of English-language newspapers and magazines. As the author asserts, the sources utilized in the textbook have been meticulously selected "to stimulate our students' critical inquiry and challenge their comprehension of texts."¹ This distinguishes the book as a pragmatic resource, comprising a series of activities designed to facilitate comprehension and analysis through targeted inquiries. Consequently, educators must ensure that theoretical principles are aligned with practical applications and that instructional content is tailored to students' learning styles.

The initial reception of Doctor Hassan ZRIZI's inaugural textbook by the student body evinces a proclivity towards positive attitudes pertaining to the acquisition of cultural knowledge. A series of activities designed to foster empowerment and facilitate cultural exploration were made available to students within the classroom setting. The students were instructed in the skills required to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction in the writing process, as well as to differentiate between materials that contain opinions and those that report facts. The judicious application of cultural competence was perceived as beneficial to EFL learning by students in my classes, as evidenced by the feedback provided. Additionally, the students posited that instruction in the target language and culture should be integrated in EFL classes.

In light of the rising cultural diversity of the global population, there is a growing demand for individuals to possess intercultural competence, particularly among language learners. This is how the author's textbooks were developed. These teaching resources facilitate students' acquisition of cultural knowledge within the classroom setting, thereby equipping them with the skills necessary to serve as effective orators and mediators in international communication and interaction.

Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook serves two distinct purposes. It can be approached from a theoretical perspective, as a text within the field of Cultural Studies, and also as a practical guide to developing reading literacy skills, techniques, and strategies. The textbook is comprised of fifteen texts, which, as the author specifies in the

¹ Hassan Zrizi, *Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook*, Publications of the Education, Languages and Cultures Laboratory, School of Humanities, Mohammedia, 2018, p. 1.

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Foreword, correspond to "a fifteen-week-semester."² The compiled sources assume the form of a media corpus, representing a collection of press material dating back to the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Despite being composed in the 1990s, as the author indicates:

They would serve as substantial means to make students confront texts with different levels of difficulties and interests and incite them to update their knowledge and discuss issues in the light of the current historical, social and cultural ramifications.³

The textbook draws upon a range of esteemed periodicals, including *The Guardian Weekly*, *Dr. Laura Perspective*⁴, *Newsweek*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New York Times*, *The Gazette (Montreal)*, and *The Economist*, to provide a diverse array of sources. The texts are accompanied by interactive reading and conversation activities, which are tailored to the students' core needs. These activities include vocabulary, paraphrasing, comprehension questions, précis, writing, and discussion. The author's primary objective is to facilitate student engagement with the material in a manner that encourages self-sufficiency.⁵

In terms of cognitive processes, surveys indicate that students can more rapidly acquire information through reading than through listening. Furthermore, reading is a crucial aspect of learners' educational performance, as it enables them to bridge the gaps in their comprehension of listening activities.

In consideration of the aforementioned factors, the inquiries that accompany the excerpted passages in Dr. Hassan Zrizi's book, *Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook*, are structured to engage students in ways that are cognitively pertinent to their evolving capabilities. The passages equip them with the fundamental competencies to become discerning media consumers, thereby fortifying their intellectual resilience.

The textbook presents a series of recommended activities designed to enhance the comprehension and precision of English language learners in their spoken communication. Such activities facilitate comprehension, analysis, and processing of information through the formation of inferences that connect novel information with existing knowledge.

Furthermore, learners are encouraged to cross-reference authors, facts, opinions, and perspectives. In essence, the activities have been designed to enhance students' cognitive abilities, to polish the jewel of their intelligence. The term "English intelligence" is derived from the Latin *intellegere*, which translates to "understand." The term is a compound of the Latin words *inter*, meaning "between," and *legere*, meaning "to collect." In this context, intelligence can be defined as the capacity of learners to establish connections between elements that would otherwise remain distinct.

As the inference is not explicitly stated in the source text, but rather resides in the mind of the reader, and as text mining necessitates a degree of cognitive effort, the textbook's proposed activities equip students with the encoding and decoding abilities required to become adept at extracting pertinent information from textual sources.

In the current context of instant access to information, it is perhaps not surprising that even diligent students scan books rather than read them in their entirety. If mere reading—browsing and skimming—seems to be a more instinctive process than reading for a specific purpose, it can be assumed that the retrieval exercises in the textbook are designed to give students a compelling reason to read texts in depth and to answer related questions thoroughly.

If students are accustomed to scanning texts for answers rather than inferring the implications of the content, Dr. ZRIZI has made it his objective to deconstruct these habits and suggest more effortful and challenging methods instead. The efficacy of retrieval practice is contingent upon its appropriateness; the more appropriate the practice, the more beneficial it is for long-term learning. In essence, the objective is to facilitate a more natural and culturally appropriate approach to reading and thinking, rather than merely skimming.

Professor ZRIZI selected articles from the foreign press to assist Moroccan students in comprehending the nuances of English as spoken by native speakers from various regions, including Britain, North America, and Australia. This was done to facilitate effective communication and interaction with these groups.

It is of the utmost importance to contextualize the English language. The textbook illustrates the correlation between cultural understanding and reading comprehension skills, demonstrating that the process of comprehending English is far more complex than simply probing the vocabulary and expressions used. The objective is to facilitate students' exploration of the nuances and subtleties of the English language by enabling them to learn words from a specific point of view and in a manner that considers the temporal and spatial dimensions of language. In English as foreign language contexts, intercultural content is an integral component of academic subjects.

In addition to extending the range of figures included in the press, the author has also diversified the editorial stance of the media outlets in question. *The Guardian Weekly* is an independent international news magazine based in London that offers a reflective perspective on global events to a global readership. It is regarded as adopting a liberal editorial stance. Similarly, *The*

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ For several years, Laura Catherine Schlessinger published a monthly magazine, *Dr. Laura Perspective*. She was the editor, her husband was a contributing photographer, and her son was the creative consultant. The magazine has ceased publication.

⁵ *Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

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Economist is a British independent newspaper with a liberal editorial stance. Dr. Laura Perspective is a monthly magazine that was previously edited by the American conservative public personality Laura Schlessinger.

Another American magazine that is discussed in the textbook is The Atlantic Monthly. It addresses events and political issues through the lens of literary and cultural analysis. First published in 1857 in Boston, Massachusetts, it was established with the objective of advocating for the principles of equality and liberty for all. Newsweek is an American independent weekly news magazine. The New York Times has been perceived as promoting a leftist agenda. The Montreal Gazette, one of the oldest newspapers in North America, is the sole remaining English-language daily newspaper in Quebec.

The textbook under examination displays a notable degree of thematic eclecticism. The book presents a comprehensive array of contemporary issues, encompassing a diverse range of disciplines, including biology, culture, the environment, finance, and economics. The following is a brief overview of the principal ideas presented in the selected text passages.

The initial text, "Educating Girls Is a Real Life-Saver," elucidates the function of education in social development. Furthermore, it elucidates the impact of female education on gender disparities.

The second text, entitled "Distance Learning Going to College by Logging On," offers an account of industry-oriented education and an analysis of the potential for e-universities to engage in productive marketing of online courses.

The third text, entitled "What If You Could Duplicate Yourself?," authored by Deborah Cohen, addresses the prevalent challenges associated with governing the familial dynamics inherent to family-owned businesses. It enumerates the obstacles that prospective entrepreneurs must surmount in order to establish a successful venture.

The fourth text, "Why Men Need Family Values" by Robert J. Samuelson, addresses the dissolution of the conventional nuclear family in the United States, the emergence of the contemporary family structure, and the resulting decline in the institution of marriage and paternal roles.

The fifth text, entitled "The Plight of the High-Status Woman," is a contribution to the emerging field of mating system studies by cultural historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. The author's groundbreaking study draws upon in-depth research and personal interviews to examine the new social configuration of dating in contemporary society, where educated women encounter difficulties in meeting the ideal partner.

The sixth text, "Africa is Collapsing into a Nightmare of Mass Illiteracy" by Victoria Brittain, establishes a correlation between poverty and illiteracy. The text elucidates the underlying factors contributing to the sub-Saharan African education system's shortcomings and elucidates the intergenerational transmission of illiteracy from uneducated women to their children.

The seventh text, entitled "Why Genital Cutting Goes On?," is a reconsideration of the right of women to undergo genital mutilation. The author, Germaine Greer, is a prominent figure in the feminist movement. Greer, a prominent figure in the feminist movement, posits that the practice is an integral aspect of the cultural identity of the society in question.

The eighth text, "Don't Shoot the Helpers of the World's Victims," by Catherine Bertini, provides a detailed account of the risks international aid workers face, including the growing threat of violence from criminal and terrorist groups.

The ninth text, "Life in a Parallel World" by Sharon Begley and Karen Springen, offers a reflection on autism spectrum disorder, encompassing its signs, symptoms, effects, and unknown origins.

The tenth text, entitled "Heavy Dose of Chronic Stress Breaks a Body Down," authored by Erica Goode, examines the impact of anxiety on physical breakdown. In particular, it highlights the physiological responses of the body to external stimuli and the psychological mechanisms employed to manage situations perceived as threatening.

The eleventh text, entitled "The Right Chemistry," is an excerpt from an empirical book on traditional nutrition and everyday life chemistry. As a chemist, Dr. Schwarcz possesses a particular aptitude for elucidating complex scientific concepts in a readily comprehensible manner.

The twelfth text, entitled "A Burning Question: Why Are Oil Prices So High?" examines the volatile nature of the oil market and its associated industrial, economic, and political implications. Among the issues addressed are the role of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in determining oil prices, the major oil-producing countries, and the primary substitutes for oil energy.

The thirteenth text, "Research Shows World's Climate On Thin Ice" by Julian Borger, addresses the complex environmental challenges posed by global warming and the strategies required to mitigate its impact and conserve natural resources.

The fourteenth text, "The Fury of Mitch," by Alan Zarembo and Brook Larmer, similarly addresses the challenges of natural catastrophes through Hurricane Mitch, which has been officially described as the Western Hemisphere's most destructive disaster.

The fifteenth text, "Paris Offers Art, Culture, Tax Write-off," by Dave Barry, assumes the form of a travelogue with the purpose of providing information about the cultural heritage of the city of Paris. This text presents an American perspective on France, offering insights into its narrative, aesthetic, cultural, and historical aspects.

In conclusion, Reading Comprehension for EFL Students: A Student's Textbook stands out as a significant resource, complementing its predecessor and effectively contributing to the enhancement of students' linguistic and cultural competencies.

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The textbook underscores the importance of engaging with English-language materials within their cultural context, such as newspapers and magazines, to foster a deeper connection in a globalized world. By aligning theoretical insights with practical applications, the book not only serves as a valuable pedagogical tool but also makes a noteworthy contribution to the academic field of EFL education.

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