# "I actually picked up a physics textbook:" Complexities of the Freedom Principle in Extensive Reading

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Much attention has been devoted to Extensive Reading (ER) to better understand its pedagogical effects on language learners. In this study, we focus on the teaching principles of ER and call for a re-visitation of the Freedom principle ("Learners choose what they want to read") that has been frequently used by practitioners and researchers of ER. Based on the focus group data collected from enthusiastic readers who participated in ER as a classroom activity and read beyond the designated class goal, we examined how these students chose what they wanted to read in an English-for-Academic-Purposes (EAP) context. The findings suggest that the Freedom principle, while allowing student autonomy, incurs complications in the implementation of ER. Students may experience frustration if given a limited choice of books, providing support for the Freedom principle. However, as students freely choose their books, the activities they engage in may become incompatible with other ER principles. Drawing on the focus group data, we will discuss the details of such complexities and conclude with pedagogical implications.

**Key words**：extensive reading, teaching principles of extensive reading, Freedom Principle, EAP

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Extensive reading (ER) has been practiced and researched in various second language (L2) contexts for more than fifty years, reporting numerous positive results that are not restricted to only L2 reading development (e.g., Al-Homoud & Alsalloum, 2012; Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012; Yamashita, 2008) but extend to vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Nation, 2015; Suk, 2017; Webb & Chang, 2015), writing development (e.g., Lee & Schallert, 2016; Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016), grammar learning (e.g., Lee, Schallert, & Kim, 2015; Song & Sardegna, 2014), change in affect (Mikami, 2017; Rodrigo, Greenberg, & Segal, 2014; Yamashita, 2013) and more (see also Jeon & Day, 2016; Nakanishi, 2015, and Annotated Bibliography of Works on Extensive Reading in a Second Language [http://erfoundation.org/bib/bibliocats.php]).

To maximize these benefits, Day and Bamford (1998, 2002) proposed 10 principles that define the core features of ER and act as a guideline for practitioners of this approach (see references in Day's 2015 appendix). Out of these principles, one of the most widely cited but often questioned is the Freedom principle, which suggests that when participating in ER, learners should be allowed to choose their own books. Many have exercised this principle in respect of the learner's autonomy and individuality, yet how learners themselves perceive the Freedom principle has not received much empirical attention. The present study, therefore, aims to shed light on the learner's own experiences of the Freedom principle by analyzing focus group data, and especially from the more enthusiastic end of readers participating in ER from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context. In what follows, we will first provide an overview of Day and Bamford's (2002) 10 principles for ER, and then discuss the significance of examining the Freedom Principle in particular.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. Ten Principles of Extensive Reading

The 10 principles that Day and Bamford (2002, pp. 137–140) posited are the following:

1.  The reading material is easy
2.  A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available
3.  Learners choose what they want to read
4.  Learners read as much as possible
5.  The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding

6. Reading is its own rewards
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower
8. Reading is individual and silent
9. Teachers orient and guide their students
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader

Day and Bamford provided this list so that teachers can examine their beliefs about reading and ER and use the principles as their teaching guide. In fact, Day (2015) examined 44 reports of ER programs to seek what principles educators use and how they utilize these principles when conducting ER in their own classrooms and other educational contexts. As a result, Day found that "the top three core principles" (p. 298) most used in the ER programs were: (a) *learners choose what they want to read* (38/44), (b) *learners read as much as possible* (36/44), and (c) *a variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available* (35/44). Although the principles should be "guidelines rather than commandments" (Macalister, 2015, p. 126), these three principles are most valued by ER practitioners, and it is these principles that differentiate ER from other reading approaches such as intensive reading and grammar translation. In fact, ER programs that adhered to five principles–(a) The reading material is easy, (b) learners choose what they want to read, (c) learners read as much as possible, (d) reading is individual and silent, (e) teachers orient and guide their students)–resulted in greater gains of L2 reading proficiency than other traditional reading approaches (Jeon & Day, 2015, p. 302).

Some ER scholars, however, problematized how certain practitioners take the principles as an almost religious quality and believe that any deviations from these are unsuitable for ER (see e.g., Robb, 2015; and the April and October 2015 discussion forum issues on ER in *Reading in a Foreign Language Journal*). As a way to deal with these concerns, Waring and McLean (2015) refined the definition of ER to clearly determine whether a practice or research design can be called as ER. Waring and McLean suggested that the core elements of ER are the following: "(a) fluent, sustained comprehension of text as meaning-focused input; (b) large volume of material; (c) reading over extended periods of time; and (d) texts that are longer, requiring comprehension at the discourse level" (p. 165). Other characteristics, including those associated with the 10 principles (e.g., The reading is enjoyable, for pleasure or not; The degree of freedom to select texts), were dismissed as non-core elements of ER programs.

As such, the re-visitation of the principles questions their role in implementing and researching ER. The ongoing controversies indicate that it is difficult to decide (and to know the rationale behind) what elements or principles to include (or pay more attention to) under the ER framework. As one solution, one field of ER research is increasingly focusing on the students' experiences rather than prescribing researcher or teacher-driven definitions of ER.

These studies have produced findings that illuminate new issues about ER principles such as concerning reading motivation issues (e.g., de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok, 2013; Judge, 2011; Ro, 2018; Takase, 2007), text difficulties (e.g., Arnold, 2009; Shen, 2008; Uden, Schmitt, & Schmitt, 2014), and involvement of post-reading activities of ER (Green, 2005; Robb, 2015; Song & Sardegna, 2014).

To start to fill these gaps, we examine what EAP students say about the Freedom principle in a focus group setting. To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet focused on the students' perceptions of having agency or freedom in choosing what books to read. The Freedom principle seems to be one of the most referred (Day, 2003, 2015; Jeon & Day, 2015) but also one of the most controversial criteria that characterize ER (Waring & McLean, 2015). Previous studies (Park & Ro, 2015; Tabata-Sandom, 2017) report few evaluative comments on how students talk about the Freedom principle in a brief manner. As such, the principle become relevant in understanding students' perception towards ER experiences, and for that reason, more discussion is in need. Also, there is a lack of ER studies that zoom into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts. The implementation of the principle becomes even more complex in an EAP context because, as noted by Ro (2018), ER principles do not always meet with the university's reading guidelines that value persistent reading with or without pleasure, freedom in choosing books, and more. Although ER studies found positive student responses (Macalister, 2008) and gains (Park, 2016) from experiencing ER in EAP contexts, the studies in the field have not yet investigated the choices that EAP students make while experiencing ER.

## 2.2. The Freedom Principle of ER

A starting point for discussing the Freedom principle is to define what it suggests. According to Day and Bamford (1998, 2002), the principle allows the learners to choose their own books to read and to participate in ER activities. It also suggests learners to freely stop reading any book that they find to be too difficult or not interesting. Learners' individuality, independence, preference, and autonomy need to be respected as ER takes a learner-centered approach and, according to Yamashita (2015), such autonomy can be achieved through "encouragement to choose what they read and, possibly, where and when" (p. 174).

As mentioned above, the Freedom principle is not only one of the top principles for implementing ER as suggested by Day (2003, 2015) but also the most referred principle by other researchers for defining and implementing ER in various educational contexts. The idea to let students have such freedom in choosing their own books links to the idea that "the purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure" (Macalister, 2015, p. 123). It is from this "pleasure reading" perspective that the students are expected to become motivated and thus

read more, improving their reading fluency and other language abilities (see also Yamashita, 2015). Stoller (2015) also noted that giving students choices in what they read can enhance their engagement and motivation in reading. For instance, Judge (2011) reported how some high school students in Japan appreciated the autonomy provided by ER's autonomy: "One thing like about [ER] is that I am free to choose books by myself. One thing I don't like about [IR] is that I am forced to read something which I am not interested" (p. 174). Similarly, Takase (2007) also found that the freedom to choose where and what they read had some positive effects on Japanese high school students' motivation to read in L2. In fact, as noted by Park and Ro (2015) and Tabata-Sandom (2017), even university students in academic contexts appreciate having freedom in choosing their own reading materials. For instance, some students liked how they were able to choose and read what they already read in their native language as it lessened their anxiety in participating in a post-reading activity (Park & Ro, 2015).

Also, as noted by Arnold (2009), "what to read has almost become a political issue among reading practitioners" (p. 243). Although the debate has mostly focused on authentic versus graded (simplified) materials, the studies have shown that reading pleasure had more to do with the difficulties of texts. In fact, one participant of Uden et al.'s (2014) study stopped reading a particular book not because it was difficult but because she found the issues in the book made her feel uncomfortable. Also, Arnold (2009) found that her participants preferred reading authentic texts than simplified versions and argued that learner choice instead of teacher selection provided them with a sense of ownership, which fostered their independence and motivation in reading. Overall, the literatures in the field argue that students should be able to choose the materials they want to read (see also Chiang, 2016; Lee, 2007).

At the same time, however, some ER specialists limit learner choice due to poor-resourced environments or to provide post-reading activities that are based on the same reading text (Macalister, 2015). In other words, although the Freedom principle is generally recognized as one of the classic features of ER, some practitioners—depending on their resources or pedagogical goals—may purposely or sometimes unintentionally avoid following the principle.

The question, then, is: What is the role of the Freedom principle in an EAP context? Do students value such freedom, or do they prefer focusing on a text that is selected by the teacher? Does the principle really motivate them to read more? To begin to fill this gap, this study focuses on a group of avid readers and investigates their perception of the principle in relevance to the classroom library, book selection and book types, as well as the availability and accessibility of reading resources. Our purpose here is to inform teachers about the readers' perceptions about this principle and to initiate a discussion on its role in an EAP context. Drawing on focus group data collected from ER participants, the findings of this

study will shed new light the role of ER principles and its pedagogical implications in an EAP context.

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1. Participants

The participants in this study are four international university students who were taking the same intermediate academic writing course in the United States: Sam was a 26-year-old Finnish male student who had been studying English over 10 years; Kevin was a 24-year-old Korean male exchange student who had been studying English for 14 years; Pam was a 25-year-old Chilean female student who had been studying English for 15 years; and Val was a 22-year-old Icelandic female student who had been studying English for 11 years. The names given here are all pseudonyms. The students were placed into the intermediate writing course after they had taken the placement tests administered by the university.

Prior to the class, they had never experienced ER in a classroom setting. The four participants, who read the most in the class, were recruited for a focus group talk by the second author to discuss their active engagement with ER on the last day of instruction. It goes without saying that finding an effective way of reading is important particularly to those who have not yet developed good reading habits. We chose the avid readers for the study because we wanted to better understand their perception towards reading and the reasons for their successful reading behaviors. The students were compensated with a gift card for their participation.

### 3.2. Research Context

The general aim of the course was to develop students' both general and academic writing abilities to help them better transit to an academic community. ER with associated post-reading activities (writing and discussion) were implemented to boost students' sight vocabulary and writing fluency as well as to help them develop good reading and writing habits. These goals and the methods of doing ER (i.e., of choosing books what they want to read and reading in a large amount for the purpose of pleasure) were explained and reminded to the students throughout the semester.

The course consisted of 21 students, and most of them were either Freshman or exchange students from abroad. The teacher, on the other hand, was a PhD student in the field of Second Language Studies who had more than four years of teaching experience and is an expert in ER both in teaching and as a topic of research. The class met twice a week for 75

minutes throughout a 16 weeklong semester. The teacher allocated 20 minutes of each class time for ER. The students were instructed to choose a book from the 258 books (219 graded readers and 39 young readers) that was made available by the teacher unless they already had a book that they could read in class for 15 minutes. The topics and genres of the books varied, which included both fictions (e.g., romance, suspense, mystery) and nonfictions (e.g., biography, history). If the students did not find any book that interested them, they were also allowed to bring their own books. In this sense, the teacher could be seen as adopting the Freedom principle.

Throughout the semester, the teacher consistently guided and monitored the students' self-selection of materials by asking the students their reasons for choosing certain books and suggesting what books to read. She also shared her own experiences with some of the books that she read. In addition, the teacher suggested that the students continue reading the self-selected book for about 1 to 2 hours a week outside of class. For those who completed the suggested reading amount throughout the semester (one book per week) earned an extra course credit of two points.

For the last five minutes of in-class ER, students were asked to talk about what they recorded on their ER writing homework assignments, which was 15% of the total course grade. The writing homework was assigned to the students each meeting as a post-reading activity, which required them to respond to a topic that was provided by the teacher each week (e.g., "Choose characters in the book that you either liked or disliked, and explain why"). This writing homework was designed to keep a record of the books and aid the students' writing fluency development.

## 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this article comes from a 30-minute videotape of a focus group conducted and moderated by the second author. As noted by Jung (2015), "When focus groups are chosen, the standard reason for doing so is that participants interact with other experts on the focal topic" (p. vi). Whereas individual interviews are constrained by an asymmetrical relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and are primarily driven by the researcher's pre-formulated questions (Kasper, 2012), focus groups can be more diplomatic in that they allow participants to have the freedom to share their expertise and knowledge without being restricted to one researcher-driven agenda, and it is the participants themselves that collaboratively agree and consolidate the relevancies of a topic (Puchta & Potter, 2004). Galloway (2011) also argues that focus groups provide an interactional space for the participants to freely exchange, agree, and disagree with others which at the end, often leads to validating shared experiences and arriving at a collective opinion (see also Jung & Ro, 2019).

Taking into consideration these benefits, the present study used focus groups to investigate common experiences that are shared by enthusiastic readers who read beyond the designated class goal. In observing the focus group discussions, our aim was to reveal how avid readers deal with the freedom principle of ER. In the process of jointly constructing intersubjective meaning through multi-party interaction, the participants display their understandings to one other, and hence, to the analyst. In this way, we as analysts can trace the ways through which the participants make sense to each other and draw understandings and meanings of their shared ER experiences. By taking this interactional approach in analyzing focus group talk, we aim to examine how the participants' assessments and perceptions of ER and the Freedom principle are talked into being.

In this study, the focus group was held in a seminar room in a school library. The participants were asked to have an open discussion of their experiences with ER and their reasons for reading various books throughout the semester. During this discussion, book selection became one of the central topics and was found to have implications for the Freedom principle. Five excerpts were selected for deeper analysis because they represented the students' respective reader identities as well as their evaluative stances toward the amount of choice that they had while experiencing ER in the EAP course. All excerpts were transcribed according to Jefferson's (2004) conventions to reliably represent the interactional details of the original talk as closely as possible (see Appendix for details). Then, each excerpt was analyzed line by line to closely examine how the participants locally constructed their ER experiences, their selection of books, and their reader identities.

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Restricted Choice Leading to New Interests and Sources of Pleasure

The Prior to Excerpt 1, the moderator asked whether the participants liked extensive reading. In response, Sam mentioned the issue of book selection, which led to a discussion about the teacher's use of graded readers that were made available in class. The students viewed this in-class library as having a limited variety of topics and reading materials – hence, falling short in fulfilling the Freedom principle. Nonetheless, in what we see below, the students report on the perceived benefits of having a restricted choice.

Excerpt 1

175   SAM:    mm it those books were some:thing that if I go to
176              library↓ (0.5) I would never pick (.)

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```
177   MOD:   u[m
178   SAM:    [pick up them.
179   MOD:   yeah[:↓
180   SAM:        [°>in the library<.° =
181   SAM:   =but when they are there, (0.6) try out:↓ (.) some mm-
182          some new stuff.
183          (2.5)
184   SAM:   °(and) (0.6) yeah↓ >I thought I at least< (.) I liked
185          them.°
186   MOD:   was it you:↑ just (0.5) chose it or:↓ (.) did (0.4)
187   SAM:   ah::↓
188   MOD:   [somebody:↓
189   SAM:   [I did read pretty much every biography (.) £provided.£
190          hh [.ts::
191   MOD:      [o:↑kay.
192   SAM:   hh:↓
193          (.)
194   PAM:   h↓
195   KEV:   umm::↓
196          (0.4)
197   MOD:   °okay↓ interesting.°
198          (1.6)
199   KEV:   yeah:↓ (0.6) those are not (.) those are not the books
200          when we go library and pic- pick up.
201          (.)
202   SAM:   [no:↓
203   KEV:   [>they are just stand in like de:sk and↓< (.) we could
204          .tsu: (.) we could choo:se those things, (.) because (.)
205          I think because they were (.) there↓ (0.4) [like in the
206   SAM:                                               [yeah:↓
207   KEV:   class.
208          (0.4)
209   MOD:   mm:[:↑
210   KEV:      [I don't go library to pick up those kind of books↓
211          cause it (.) looks- like- I don't know:↓ like (0.6)
212   MOD:   hh[h
213   KEV:     [ea:sy books,
214   MOD:   [ah ha:↓
215   KEV:   [and: (0.5) oh (.) I::↓ (.) kin- >I kind of< (.) pick the
216          books that are like that intrigues me¿
217   MOD:   uh [huh
218   KEV:      [like (.) academically or: like [I don't know like
219   MOD:                                       [oh::
220   VAL:   [yeah:↓
```

```
221   KEV:   [something like that¿ but↓ (0.4) those kind of books are
222           not that kind of book, but it's really easy to read: and
223           (0.5) >that was really helpful,< I mean like for the
224           reading like (.) fastly and so °that° in that way so (.)
225           I think it's really good to provide books in the class:↓
226           (.)
227   MOD:   oh.
228   KEV:   (to): that we can choose: from it.
```

Firstly, Sam characterizes the graded readers as books that *I would never pick up in the library* (lines 176, 179, 180) to which Kevin provides an alignment (lines 199-200). The adverb *never* initially places graded readers in a negative light, and these books are constructed as *easy books* (line 213) that the students would not voluntarily pick. They are also ones that generally do not fall under their book selection criteria: these books do not *intrigue* them (line 216) nor do they find them academically interesting (line 218). That is, the students are constructing graded readers as books that would not typically fit their current academic goals and interests for reading.

Yet, prefaced with a disjunctive marker *but* (line 181), Sam claims that an advantage of having books available in class is that it led him to discover *new stuff* (line 182). He marks a favorable stance towards the activity, *at least I liked them* (lines 184-185), suggesting that one minimal gain from ER was that it was pleasurable. He details his engagement in ER by emphasizing that he read almost *every biography* (line 189). Kevin, similarly, provides a positive aspect of graded readers. Whereas being easy books was initially mentioned as a feature that did not fit his selection criteria (lines 210-211, 212), the experience of reading graded readers made him realize that easy books were helpful in terms of promoting reading fluency (lines 222-224).

Excerpt 1 shows that these students were given the freedom to choose their own books, but within the limits of an in-class library. In such a context, students viewed the graded readers as having a restricted scope and consisting of books ordinarily out of their typical selection criteria. On the other hand, the students also noted certain gains in that they were led to discover new interests, sources of pleasure, and potential gains for L2 reading. These comments are in line with Arnold (2009) and Ro's (2018) studies in that certain students enjoy choosing their own books and appreciate being introduced to new books that they can read for pleasure.

## 4.2. Need for a Wider Variety of Reading Materials

Whereas Excerpt 1 resulted from a conversation about the benefits of ER, Excerpt 2 deals with the other side: what the students did *not* like about ER. The first response came from

Sam and centered, once again, on the issue of book selection. Unlike Excerpt 1, where he focused on the benefits of the in-class library, he first puts forward a complaint that has to do with the limited number and variety of reading materials.

Excerpt 2

```
519   MOD:   okay↓ (0.4) what about the things that: (0.7) that (.)
520          you know (0.8) that (0.6) you didn't like about reading↓
521          (0.8) did you have any?
522          (1.5)
523   SAM:   not really.
524          (0.4)
525   MOD:   mm↓
526   SAM:   ah in the end (.) I: I found a bit hard to find
527          interesting £books anymore.£
528   KEV:   °mh[m↓°
529   PAM:        [°yeah I [did [that.°
530   MOD:             [ah::↓
531   SAM:                  [because I pretty much read it all the
532          (0.4) at least the topics that interested me.
533   MOD:   uh huh.
534   SAM:   or (0.4) I know: there was couple (.) I wanted to read:↓
535          (.) but they were (.) all the time (.) with other
536          people.
537   SAM:   [hh
538   MOD:   [ah:↓ [(.) so you had to wait.
539   PAM:         [yes:: yes:↓
540   SAM:   yeah.
```

After the moderator's question (lines 519-521), Sam's initial response indicates that there is nothing that he dislikes (line 523). After a 0.4-second pause (line 524) and the moderator's minimal response (line 525), however, Sam launches a turn that marks one negative aspect about the course's ER: he could no longer find interesting books (lines 526-527). We see the other students providing agreement – Kevin aligning with a minimal acknowledgment *mhm ↓* (line 528) and Pam saying *yeah I did that* in an overlapping turn (line 529). Sam elaborates with an extreme case formulation *I pretty much read it all* (line 531), and then qualifies it by saying *at least the topics that interested me* (line 532). He also notes on the difficulty of having to wait for books that he wanted to read but were already taken by other classmates (lines 534-536). Here, Sam is hearable of constructing himself as an enthusiastic reader that reads a lot, and thereby one that is justifiable for making a complaint about the in-class library. He has the motivation to read further, but it is because of the limitations

posed by the in-class library that he cannot proceed. Later, when the moderator asks the students for areas of improvement, Val emphasizes this point once again.

Excerpt 3

```
651   MOD:    any other things that (0.4) maybe: (1.4) something
652           that we could improve.
653           (0.5)
654   MOD:    let's put it that way.
655           (0.6)
656   SAM:    ah [.ts:::
657   KEV         [mm:↓
658           (.)
659   SAM:    for extensive reading↓ (0.4) mm:↓
660           (1.2)
661   KEV:    mm:↓ good question::
662           (2.0)
663   SAM:    ah: (1.0) I don't really (.) find anything to improve.
664           (.)
665   MOD:    [mm↓
666   SAM:    [I like this (excer-)
667           (0.5)
668   VAL:    yeah:↓
669           (0.5)
670   SAM:    a lot.
671   PAM:    me too.
672           (.)
673   SAM:    yeah.
674           (0.6)
675   VAL:    the only thing that I dislike, (.) is that↓ (0.5) I ran
676           out of books, but that is because I read too many
677           [books.
678   MOD:    [hhh.
```

While Sam does not mention specific areas for improvement (line 663), saying that he liked the ER activity (line 666), Val initially agrees with Sam (line 668) but adds that she ran out of books (lines 675-677). Similar to Sam in the previous extract, Val constructs herself as an extraordinary student by saying that she read too many books. The problem foregrounded here is that she wanted to read more, but the limited number of books stopped her from doing so. Both Sam and Val call to attention that certain students, despite the freedom to choose their own books, may feel constraints if their choice is limited to an in-class library selected by a teacher. This conversation testifies to the cruciality of allowing a

wide range of reading materials in order to fully exercise the freedom principle. Making students choose books within a small selection may not be sufficient and, eventually, become a demotivating factor (Park & Ro, 2015). That is, an in-class library can be a starting point, but students should be able to search beyond what is being provided by the teacher.

## 4.3. More Freedom Leading to Other Reading Motives

Whereas the next focus group excerpts show how these students eventually extended their ER experiences beyond the graded reading materials. First, Val mentions a new section in the university's library, which became a useful resource for obtaining additional graded readers.

Excerpt 4

```
561   MOD:   so you guys have:↓ (.) borrowing: the books from
562          [the library?
563   VAL:   [yes↓ [(xxx)
564   MOD:        [oh:↑ (.) oh [nice.
565   SAM:                     [yeah:↓
566          (.)
567   MOD:   [nice
568   SAM:   [I did not borrow:↓ (.) £h because£ (0.4) when I finished
569          (0.7) my twentieth book↓ (.) I started read:↓ (0.4) read
570          different kind of material.
571          (0.4)
572   MOD:   ah.
573   SAM:   just uh- I read (0.7) I actually picked up a physics
574          textbook for physics for dummies: (0.4) hh
575   MOD:   hh
576   VAL:   nice
577   MOD:   for pleasure? hhh[hh
578   VAL:                    [hh
579   SAM:   only because I want to learn it (.) English terminology
580          h:↓=
581   MOD:   =okay.
582   SAM:   so: I↓ (.) I read about hundred pages.
583          (.)
584   SAM:   [(xxx)
585   MOD:   [that was volunteer, you didn't have to do that↓ [(.)
586   SAM:                                                    [ye-
587   MOD:   but you just did it.
588   SAM:   yeah:.
```

```
589   MOD:   oh, nice:.
590          (0.8)
591   SAM:   but (0.8) yeah the the reason why I choose this book
592          (0.4) the:↓ (.) author↓ (0.4) he's pi eighchy dee in
593          mainland I don't remember which university↓
594   MOD:   mhm
595          (.)
596   SAM:   that: he wrote- he wrote the book:↓ (0.5) like thinking
597          about the readers.
598   SAM:   [hh
599   MOD:   [ah::↓
600          (0.4)
601   SAM:   so it's fairly (.) easy to read.
602          (.)
603   MOD:   [yeah:.
604   SAM:   [and you get the: (0.4) terminology.
```

Val first talks about her struggles of not having enough books to read (lines 555, 557). The lexical choices *stuck* and *force* capture her frustration, configuring Val as a reader that strives to read despite such obstacles. As a solution to the limited number of books, Val mentions the school library, from which she managed to borrow additional books (lines 552-553, 559-560). When the moderator provides a reformulation of this understanding (lines 561-562), confirming whether everyone has been borrowing books from the library, Val aligns with an affirmation (line 563).

However, Sam, counter to his initial confirmation (line 565), adds that he actually did not borrow books from the library but picked up a physics textbook instead (lines 568-570, 573-574). The moderator's question and laughter suggest the unexpected nature of this choice, as a physics book contradicts the Pleasure principle of ER (line 577). To the moderator's reaction, Sam elaborates that he had a different purpose: as the book was one that was written for "dummies," he found it easy to read (line 601), and it satisfied his needs for learning technical English terminologies (lines 579, 604). He adds that he read about 100 pages (line 582) and aligns with the moderator's interpretation in that it was a voluntary action (line 588).

A physics textbook may not generally be considered as a book that can be read for pleasure (Principle 5), nor does reading to learn English terminologies suit the ER principle of reading for its own reward (Principle 6). Yet, Sam's response shows that in search for books outside the in-class library, an academic textbook was what suited his own criteria and needs at that moment. By agentively exercising the freedom principle, and expanding his own choice of books, we see Sam realizing his own purposes for doing ER. This finding somewhat complicates the Freedom principle in that if fully exercised, it can challenge other principles.

"I actually picked up a physics textbook:" Complexities of the Freedom Principle …

Allowing student choice is one of ER's pursuit, but when exercised in an EAP context, students may choose to read for other purposes than for pleasure and may not view reading as its own reward. Their priority, instead, may be about obtaining academic English knowledge. The following excerpt illustrates this issue even further.

Excerpt 5

```
622   SAM:   it's a- (.) it's good way before you go to sleep.
623          (.)
624   SAM:   h:↓
625   KEV:   hh[h
626   SAM:      [maybe
627   VAL:   hh [yes
628   SAM:      [I usually read [maybe like thirty minutes
629   PAM:                      [yeah:↓ sure:↓
630   SAM:   and [then .kka:: [h (.)
631   MOD:       [you guys too?
632   PAM:                    [yeah:↓
633   MOD:   yeah↓
634          (.)
635   SAM:   yeah:↓ (0.4) becau- well↑s:↓ (.) I actually do like that
636          book: but (1.4) still it's physics so:↓
637          (.)
638   MOD:   hh
639   KEV:   h:↓
640   SAM:   you don't read it for fun for hours hh
641   MOD:   hh
642   SAM:   thirty minutes and you are already stuck hh £and thir£-
643          thirty minutes reading and then it's good way to go t- go
644          to bed.
645          (0.4)
646   MOD:   true:.
647          (0.5)
648   SAM:   °yeah:.°
650          (1.6)
```

In describing the physics book, Sam says that it puts him to sleep (line 622), and that it cannot be read for more than 30 minutes (lines 628, 642-644). These descriptions counter the Pleasure principle of ER in that the reading experience is constructed as one that you do not read for fun (line 640). Yet, Sam notes that he still likes the book (lines 635-636) and justifies that it is because of the subject, physics, that he cannot read for lengthy periods. We see here that as Sam realizes his freedom of choosing his own reading materials, ironically,

he selects a book that does not entirely suit pleasure reading nor does the experience involve *reading as much as possible* (Principle 4). Nonetheless, he attributes positive affect to the experience as his priority is not about pleasure or reading extensively, but about engaging with an academic topic and learning English terms.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated enthusiastic readers' stances toward ER in an EAP course. With book selection as the discussion topic, the students initially constructed the in-class library as a positive experience (Excerpt 1), but later attributed negative evaluations toward the limited nature of the collection (Excerpts 2-3). Having a wide variety of reading materials is a prerequisite for realizing the Freedom principle (Day & Bamford, 1998; Macalister, 2015; McQuillan, 2016). As suggested by McQuillan (2016), the best approach to having a classroom library would be to provide as many texts as possible for students to choose from. Or else, finding interesting books to read can be a struggle and even a demotivating factor that disrupts the students' ongoing engagement with ER.

As the students sought for additional books to read, they selected reading materials from the library and even chose academic textbooks. We saw that such freedom, however, led to students choosing books that were not too pleasurable, not read for their own reward, and not read for extensive periods (Excerpts 4-5). Because the priorities of EAP students can be primarily about gaining academic English knowledge, they may prefer to read 'unpleasurable' books and still attribute positive feelings to the reading experience. But in this case, can we call this ER? According to Macalister's (2015) suggestion, the content (whether it is enjoyable or not) and language level (the comprehensibility) of the reading material are core features of ER. Should we restrict the students' freedom, then, in choosing such books? Even if they view those books as suiting their current language goals and interests? If we do leave things open, would it still be beneficial for the students?

These findings suggest that the Freedom principle, while allowing student autonomy, brings forth somewhat complications in the implementation of ER, as in this EAP context. Students may choose books that are incompatible with the other ER principles – the Pleasure, Reward, and Amount of Time principles – which raises questions in the practicality and suitability of the Freedom principle. It would be naïve to claim, then, that if students are able to choose what they want to read, the full benefits of ER would be realized (see also Mori, 2015). As noted by many eminent scholars in the field (e.g., Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012), one of the central tenets of ER, for it to benefit the development of students' reading fluency, is that material should be well within the students' current

linguistic competence. If the material is too difficult, the reading could inevitably become intensive, not extensive.

These complications also raise a crucial question: Does the division of intensive reading and extensive reading, then, have clear-cut boundaries? According to the findings of this study, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive but can and do take place at all times, doing quite different things to the reading brain. In this respect, perhaps we should not treat Sam's choice of a physics textbook to read as a betrayal of ER principles, but more as a simple matter of him choosing to do another type of reading that is more intensive in nature and with a specific goal of learning technical vocabulary.

This study raises more questions than it answers, but what is clear is that if we, as teachers, want our students to read extensive amounts of texts, and optimally do it pleasurably for sustained periods, the in-class library should provide a wide variety of texts and perhaps even multiple copies of the same text for the students to choose from. And if we want to fully adhere to the Freedom principle, an in-class library cannot be the end because of its inevitably limited scope. Students should be encouraged to explore external options and obtain additional books of their own interest. This is where the teacher's role becomes crucial. As students may choose books that are higher than their level teachers, then, may need to keep track of what books the students read and provide appropriate support to help them comprehend the text and maintain their motivation for reading.

Rather than being overly concerned whether the students are strictly following ER principles or not, whether they are reading for pleasure or for expanding academic knowledge, or even for expanding their vocabulary, what seems most important is that we monitor our students' reading behaviors and moderate their activities so that they can both personalize their ER experiences and continue to enjoy and learn from reading. After all, the ER principles are not ones that are carved in stone; teachers should recognize them as aspirational goals and take a flexible, pragmatic approach when applying them to achieve the best outcomes in the prevailing circumstances. More empirical research is needed in defining the boundaries of the Freedom principle and the other principles, the variability of these boundaries according to different contexts, and the extent to which such freedom can lead to language learning benefits. It is through further investigation that ER can be optimally implemented in EAP contexts, exploring ways to maximize student autonomy, academic reading, and language development.

Applicable levels: Tertiary

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# APPENDIX
## Transcription Conventions

Based on the system developed by Jefferson (2004)

| | |
|---|---|
| , | continuing intonation |
| . | final intonation |
| ? | rising intonation |
| ¿ | raised pitch |
| ↓ | word abruptly falling intonation |
| ↑ | word abruptly rising intonation |
| wo:rd | lengthening of the previous sound |
| = | latching (no space between sound before and after) |
| [ | overlap |
| 0.7 | pause timed in tenths of seconds |
| (.) | micropause, shorter than 0.4 seconds |
| °word° | speech which is quieter than the surrounding talk |
| WORD | speech which is louder than the surrounding talk |
| Under<u>lin</u>ing | Signals vocal emphasis |
| (xxx) | Cannot be guessed |
| hhh | Aspiration (out-breaths) |
| .hhh | Inspiration (in-breaths) |
| >he said< | Quicker than surrounding talk |
| <he said> | Slower than surrounding talk |
| heh heh | Voiced laughter |
| sto(h)p | Laughter within speech |
| £ £ | Laughing voice |
| (( )) | Other details |