



**Enhancing Learner Self-Awareness and  
Autonomy through Self- and Peer Assessment in the  
Primary English as a Foreign Language Classroom**

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*Dedication*

*For my grandmother, who believed in it more than anyone.*

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# **Enhancing Learner Self-Awareness and Autonomy through Self- and Peer Assessment in the Primary English as a Foreign Language**

## **Classroom**

**Bruno Pinto**

### **ABSTRACT**

This action research investigates how learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy in the primary English classroom. Conducted with twenty-two 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in a Lisbon state school, the study implemented structured assessment routines and reflective practices to create a learning environment where feedback and reflection work in tandem to foster self-awareness and autonomy.

Student learning journals served as the primary data collection tool, encouraging students to systematically reflect on their learning experiences by identifying achievements and challenges. The journal entries were analysed using a coding system that categorized reflections into four key areas: Self-Awareness (SA), Autonomy (AU), Teacher Feedback (TF), and Peer Feedback (PF), each with subcategories to capture nuances in students' reflections. Within the Self-Awareness category, entries were further classified as focusing on successes or challenges.

The findings indicate that students were more inclined to reflect on their successes (56.5%) than on their challenges (29.2%). Specific reflections were more frequent than general ones, with specific successes (37.8%) and challenges (26.1%) outweighing their general counterparts (18.7% and 3.0%, respectively). This suggests a growing sense of self-awareness, as learners articulated particular aspects of their learning.

Reflections related to autonomy accounted for 23.3% of all entries, with learning goals (AU1) being the most prominent subcategory (19.7%). In contrast, reflection on self-regulation (AU3) and connections to previous learning (AU2) were less frequent (1.0% and 1.8%, respectively), suggesting that while autonomy was emerging, students' ability to express self-regulatory behaviours and learning strategies was still developing.

Mentions of teacher and peer feedback were relatively low, with direct references to teacher feedback in only 0.6% of entries and peer feedback in 0.9%. Notwithstanding, indirect references to teacher feedback appeared in 4.4% of entries, and 17 out of 22 students mentioned feedback at least once, indicating that feedback, even when not explicitly cited, influenced learners' reflections.

The analysis of journal entries over time indicated a slight improvement in the way students integrated feedback, especially following the introduction of peer assessment. This points to the potential of using learning journals, along with teacher and peer feedback, to gradually support student engagement and reflective thinking.

Ultimately, this study highlights the value of learning journals as tools for cultivating self-awareness and autonomy in young learners. When supported by timely and constructive feedback, journaling can foster a reflective classroom culture where learners actively monitor their progress, take ownership of their learning, and gradually develop greater independence.

**KEYWORDS:** Self-Awareness, Learner Autonomy, Self-assessment, Peer assessment, Teacher feedback, Peer feedback

# **Promover a Autoconsciência e a Autonomia dos Alunos através da Autoavaliação e da Avaliação pelos Pares no Ensino Primário de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira**

**Bruno Pinto**

## **RESUMO**

Este relatório de estágio explora de que forma os diários de aprendizagem, apoiados pelo feedback do professor e dos pares, promovem a autoconsciência e a autonomia dos alunos no ensino do Inglês no 1.º ciclo. Realizado com vinte e dois alunos do 4.º ano numa escola pública de Lisboa, o estudo implementou rotinas de avaliação estruturadas e práticas reflexivas com o objetivo de criar um ambiente de aprendizagem onde o feedback e a reflexão trabalham em conjunto para fomentar a autoconsciência e a autonomia.

Os diários de aprendizagem dos alunos constituíram o principal instrumento de recolha de dados, incentivando os alunos a refletirem sistematicamente sobre as suas experiências de aprendizagem, identificando conquistas e desafios. As entradas nos diários foram analisadas através de um sistema de codificação que categorizou as reflexões em quatro áreas-chave: Autoconsciência (SA), Autonomia (AU), Feedback do Professor (TF) e Feedback dos Pares (PF), cada uma com subcategorias para captar nuances nas reflexões dos alunos. Na categoria Autoconsciência, as entradas foram ainda classificadas consoante o foco em sucessos ou desafios.

Os resultados indicam que os alunos demonstraram maior tendência para refletir sobre os seus sucessos (56,5%) do que sobre os seus desafios (29,2%). As reflexões específicas foram mais frequentes do que as gerais, com sucessos específicos (37,8%) e desafios específicos (26,1%) a superarem os seus equivalentes gerais (18,7% e 3,0%, respetivamente). Estes dados sugerem um desenvolvimento crescente da autoconsciência, uma vez que os alunos identificaram aspetos concretos da sua aprendizagem.

As reflexões relacionadas com a autonomia representaram 23,3% do total das entradas, destacando-se os objetivos de aprendizagem (AU1) como a subcategoria mais expressiva (19,7%). Em contraste, as reflexões sobre autorregulação (AU3) e ligações a aprendizagens anteriores (AU2) foram menos frequentes (1,0% e 1,8%, respetivamente), sugerindo que, embora a autonomia estivesse a emergir, a capacidade dos alunos para expressar comportamentos autorreguladores e estratégias de aprendizagem ainda se encontrava em desenvolvimento.

As menções ao feedback do professor e dos pares foram relativamente reduzidas, com referências diretas ao feedback do professor em apenas 0,6% das entradas e ao feedback dos pares em 0,9%. No entanto, referências indiretas ao feedback do professor surgiram em 4,4% das entradas, sendo que 17 dos 22 alunos mencionaram o feedback pelo menos uma vez, o que indica que, mesmo quando não citado explicitamente, o feedback influenciou as reflexões dos alunos.

A análise das entradas dos diários ao longo do tempo revelou uma ligeira melhoria na forma como os alunos integraram o feedback, especialmente após a introdução da avaliação pelos pares. Isto reflete o potencial do uso dos diários de aprendizagem, em conjunto com o feedback do professor e dos pares, para apoiar progressivamente o envolvimento dos alunos e o desenvolvimento do pensamento reflexivo.

Em suma, este estudo destaca o valor dos diários de aprendizagem como ferramentas para cultivar a autoconsciência e a autonomia nos alunos. Quando apoiada por feedback oportuno e construtivo, esta prática pode fomentar uma cultura de sala de aula reflexiva, na qual os alunos monitorizam ativamente o seu progresso, assumem responsabilidade pela sua aprendizagem e desenvolvem, gradualmente, uma maior independência.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Autoconsciência, Autonomia do Aluno, Autoavaliação, Avaliação pelos pares, Feedback do professor, Feedback dos pares

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# Introduction

## 1. Background to the study

Teaching young children extends far beyond passing on knowledge. It involves educating the ‘whole child’ and supporting their growth into confident, self-sufficient individuals. A teacher’s primary goal should be to create a safe, encouraging, and engaging learning environment where students can systematically reflect on their learning in a structured way. This approach fosters learner agency – the ability to act purposefully and reflectively in language learning (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Reflection and agency are deeply connected. When learners engage in structured reflection, such as through a learning journal, they assess what worked and what did not, recognize challenges, allowing them to take an active role in their learning rather than passively following instructions. This process strengthens their decision-making skills, builds confidence, and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. Over time, this agency lays the groundwork for autonomy, as learners gradually assume greater responsibility for their learning process. While young learners may not yet exhibit the same level of independence as older students, fostering agency through structured reflection helps them take their first steps toward autonomy (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015; Leslie, 2020).

Clearly defining learning expectations and encouraging reflection enhances engagement and self-awareness – both essential for developing autonomy. When students understand *why* they are engaging in certain activities and reflect on *how* they have learned, they gain clarity about their learning process. This understanding boosts their confidence and motivation (Leslie, 2020).

Reflective practices – complemented by cognitive strategies like summarizing, note-taking, and mnemonics, as well as metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and regulating learning – help learners develop deeper insights into their progress. Over time, these practices support learners in becoming more effective planners and self-directed individuals (Benson, 2012).

The teacher’s role in this process is indispensable. Effective guidance not only awakens learners’ awareness of their learning processes but also enables them to articulate their learning purposefully and meaningfully (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Encouraging structured reflection requires a teacher to adopt a learner-centred pedagogy, which fosters both student autonomy and the teacher's own reflective practice, creating a mutually beneficial dynamic. As Leslie (2020) observes, integrating 'learning to learn' into teaching enhances learner motivation, helping them become agents of their own journey while making the process more meaningful and enjoyable for both learners and teachers.

Teacher and peer feedback play a crucial role in this process creating a dynamic and responsive classroom environment that supports lifelong learning (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). When students receive constructive feedback, they gain deeper insights into their progress and areas for improvement. This interaction strengthens their ability to reflect critically on their learning, paving the way for self-awareness and autonomy (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015; Leslie, 2020). Learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, thus provide a structured way for students to engage in reflective learning, helping them become more independent and self-aware.

## **2. How did the idea originate?**

The inspiration for this action research project stems from my observations during my practicum, where I saw firsthand the transformative power of structured reflection. Observing children naturally reflect on their learning, provide feedback, and collaborate with peers was eye-opening. Their willingness to assess their own performance and offer constructive insights to one another fascinated me and sparked my curiosity. While initially focusing on self- and peer assessment, I soon realized that learning journals emerged as my most valuable data collection tool, becoming the foundation of my study, offering a tangible record of students' reflections, struggles, and progress over time. These journals not only allowed me to track individual growth but also provided insight into how students were interpreting and responding to my feedback. Through their reflections, I observed students gradually taking ownership of their learning, articulating their strengths, challenges, and strategies with increasing clarity. This evolution underscored the transformative potential of structured reflection and teacher feedback in fostering self-awareness and autonomy.

In my previous teaching practice, I had limited time with students and lacked specialized training in fostering a reflective classroom environment. At the time, I was unaware of the strategies and tools I would later encounter in the *Teaching English to*

*Young Children* course, which significantly expanded my understanding of how assessment, feedback, and reflective practices can empower learners to take ownership of their learning.

These realizations, combined with my practicum experiences, reinforced my belief in the importance of equipping young learners with the skills to reflect systematically. I observed students gradually taking ownership of their learning, articulating their strengths, challenges, and strategies with increasing clarity. Their reflections highlighted how teacher and peer feedback shaped their self-awareness and autonomy. This became my mission as a reflective professional – to guide learners toward developing self-awareness and autonomy through structured reflection and meaningful feedback.

### **3. Aims of the research**

Motivated by these experiences and further enriched by my Master's studies, I chose to focus my action research project on how learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy. My goal was to create a classroom environment where structured reflection and feedback empower learners to take an active role in their learning (Fernandes, 2022).

I aimed to explore how using learning journals enhances students' ability to critically assess their learning, recognize their strengths and challenges, and develop greater independence. A key aspect of my study was to examine the role of teacher and peer feedback in guiding students' reflections and fostering a deeper understanding of their learning processes, ultimately leading to a richer and more meaningful learning experience.

My research sought to answer the question: *How do learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy?* It was important to me to investigate how structured reflection and feedback can enhance engagement, motivation, self-awareness, and growth toward autonomy.

# **1 Literature review**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This literature review explores how learning journals, when supported by teacher and peer feedback, foster learner self-awareness and autonomy in the primary English as a Foreign Language classroom. The discussion first defines learner self-awareness and autonomy, before considering the role of formative assessment practices – particularly self- and peer assessment – in supporting them. The review focuses on how these assessment methods, with an emphasis on reflective journaling and feedback, extend beyond traditional assessment to shape active learning, enabling students to become more reflective and independent learners (Oxford, 2003).

## **1.2 Formative assessment as a gateway to self-awareness and autonomy**

According to Jang (2014), language assessment fulfils a pedagogical role by being intentionally integrated into instruction. This integration allows teachers to gather insights into learners' language development, informing lesson planning and offering targeted guidance. Assessment is crucial for diagnosing learners' achievements and areas for improvement. It also helps determine whether progress has been made and whether the learning objectives have been met, enabling the refinement of future planning (Mourão, 2016). In this way, assessment plays a key role in monitoring both students' learning and the teacher's effectiveness. Substantial research supports the idea that assessment should be primarily informal and ongoing, rather than rely heavily on formal assessment, and that a range of methods should be adopted (McKay, 2006; Ioannou-Georgio & Pavlou, 2003).

Notwithstanding, despite the benefits of formative assessment, many teachers continue to rely heavily on summative approaches, particularly standardized tests and final exams, even in primary English education. This approach provides only a snapshot of learners' progress, typically at the end of a school term, prioritizing final results over ongoing development and individual effort. By excessively relying on summative approaches, which often reinforce failure, teachers risk a negative impact on learner motivation and engagement (Black et al., 2003). While summative assessment is often an

unreliable measure of achievement and does little to foster active engagement with the learning process, it remains prevalent in many educational systems, including Portuguese state schools (Moreira et al., 2021).

By contrast, formative assessment encourages learners to engage more deeply with their learning, leading to increased self-regulation and autonomy (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). It also provides teachers with valuable insights to tailor instruction to learners' needs. Despite its clear advantages, research shows that formative practices remain underused in Portuguese primary classrooms. Moreira et al. (2021) found that observation grids, for example, are primarily used for summative assessment of oral production rather than as tools for continuous learning. Similarly, self-assessment is often treated as a measure of student behaviour rather than a meaningful reflection on learning. Peer assessment, despite its potential to develop collaboration and metacognitive skills, is also rarely implemented, and learning journals – powerful tools for active reflection – are seldom incorporated into assessment routines.

### **1.3 Learner self-awareness**

Learner self-awareness is a key component of the umbrella term metacognitive awareness and is integral to the broader concept of 'learning to learn.' It involves helping learners develop a clear understanding of *what* they are doing and *why*, enabling them to gain insight into their learning processes. This includes not only recognizing what they are learning but also understanding *how* they learn and approaching learning with intention (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Research demonstrates that even very young learners possess a significant degree of metacognitive knowledge, which can be nurtured and developed through intentional support (Fisher, 1998). In the context of language learning, self-awareness specifically refers to an individual's understanding of themselves as a language learner. To cultivate this, educators should adopt teaching strategies that encourage systematic reflection, enabling learners to become increasingly autonomous over time (Oxford, 2003). Reflection can take various forms, such as discussing learning experiences, identifying patterns, and evaluating progress. As Ellis and Ibrahim (2015) observe, asking targeted questions on their learning experiences is a powerful way to help learners articulate their thoughts meaningfully and purposefully, fostering deeper self-awareness.

The teacher plays a pivotal role in fostering learner self-awareness, acting as a guide and catalyst for growth (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Teachers can support children in understanding their unique learning profiles, preferences, and motivations while also helping them identify external factors that influence their progress. Through personalized guidance, teachers can encourage learners to set achievable goals, which not only provide direction but also enhance motivation and confidence when achieved (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Explicit instruction of language learning strategies is another essential component of developing self-awareness (Dam, 1995; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). By equipping learners with practical tools and strategies, educators empower them to analyze their own learning processes, adapt their approaches when needed, and grow into independent and intentional learners. This deliberate focus on strategy instruction lays the groundwork for sustained metacognitive growth, ultimately fostering a lifelong capacity for learning and reflection (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Learner self-awareness is a crucial precondition for developing autonomy in learning. As students transition from passively receiving instruction to actively and purposefully engaging with their learning process, they start to take true ownership of their educational journey.

#### **1.4 Learner autonomy**

Learner autonomy refers to learners' ability to take charge of their own learning, developing the skills, strategies, and attitudes necessary to maintain progress and sustain motivation over time. As Ellis and Ibrahim (2015) emphasize, fostering learner autonomy is central to encouraging lifelong learning and creativity. They highlight the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning, where learners and teachers engage in a dynamic process of collaboration and mutual growth. Little (2003) further elaborates that learner autonomy requires learners to be fully involved in key aspects of their education, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning and performance. It also involves helping learners cultivate a critical perspective on their learning process and empowering them to become active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Benson, 2012).

By encouraging reflection, teachers help students develop self-awareness, which serves as the foundation for autonomy (Little, 1991). Although children often feel uncomfortable with high levels of autonomy due to their accustomed passive role, empowering learners with greater control can significantly enhance their self-regulation

skills, ultimately boosting intrinsic motivation and confidence. Transitioning from the traditional authoritative "sage on the stage" role to that of a "guide on the side" may initially present challenges (Gardner, 2000), but when the teacher renounces full control, they can support learners effectively while still providing the necessary guidance, as self-instruction at such a young age is impossible in primary education (Little, 2003).

In practical terms, fostering autonomy involves equipping learners with the tools to set meaningful goals, reflect on their progress, and make necessary adjustments to enhance their learning outcomes. This process encourages students to take ownership of their learning journey. By valuing young learners as co-creators of their educational experiences, the teacher fosters an environment that nurtures independence, self-awareness, and the capacity for lifelong learning, enabling students to reflect critically on their work and that of their peers (Bryant & Carless, 2010).

## **1.5 Learning journals as tools for reflective practice**

Learning journals are a valuable tool for fostering reflective practice and developing learner self-awareness. They allow learners to record their thoughts, feelings, and learning experiences. As Moon (2006) observes, journals support learners in making sense of their learning by encouraging them to reflect critically, helping develop metacognitive awareness. They encourage learners to articulate both their successes and challenges, as well as think about how they can improve.

Although journaling can be challenging for young learners due to their developing literacy skills, this difficulty can be minimized through appropriate scaffolding. Fernandes (2022) highlights the importance of structuring reflection in primary education, using prompts, visuals, and supportive feedback to help learners engage in meaningful reflection. When supported by the teacher, the learning journal becomes a space where learners can meaningfully reflect on their learning.

In this sense, learning journals are not only reflective tools but also dialogic ones. They provide a space for teacher–student interaction where learners' voices are acknowledged. As learners get used to reflecting on their learning experiences, they begin to see reflection as a natural part of learning. Fernandes (2022) emphasizes that when reflection is integrated in the classroom, learners begin to take greater ownership of their learning and feel more confident identifying areas for improvement.

As Moon (2006) observes, journaling allows learners to process not only what they have learned, but also how they felt during the learning process, allowing for deeper personal and emotional connections to their experiences. Learning journals, thus, provide a safe space for expression. They support learners in understanding their own development and help teachers respond more thoughtfully to their learners' needs. When supported by timely and constructive feedback, learning journals can become powerful tools for cultivating self-awareness and fostering the gradual development of learner autonomy.

## **1.6 Teacher feedback**

Teacher feedback serves as a guiding force that enables learners to reflect on and enhance their learning processes. Ellis and Ibrahim (2015) highlight that the teacher acts as a creator of optimal learning and teaching conditions, providing guidance and interventions that encourage learners to engage deeply with their educational experiences.

An effective teacher fosters opportunities for reflection, such as through a reflective summary at the end of lessons. These summaries guide learners to articulate their thoughts and identify achievements, difficulties, and areas for improvement. Feedback can take various forms, including verbal comments, written notes, or formative assessments, and may be delivered in the learner's mother tongue or the target language depending on the context. Its effectiveness is maximized when it is specific, aligned with the learner's current understanding, and delivered in a timely manner. High-quality feedback stimulates reflective thinking, helping students develop enhanced self-regulation strategies.

Learning journals are particularly valuable in this process, as they help students recognize what and how they have learned, as well as areas needing improvement (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Personalized notes based on individual learning journal entries further enhance this feedback loop, addressing each student's specific needs and fostering a deeper connection between teacher and learner. Teachers can explain to learners that strategies discussed in class are transferable across subject areas, reinforcing the interconnectedness of learning within the broader curriculum (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Teacher feedback not only supports individual development but also enhances the teacher's own reflective practice, creating a dynamic and responsive classroom environment that challenges assumptions related to teaching and learning. Systematically

recording observations in a teaching journal further allows teachers to tailor feedback to meet individual learner needs, enabling continuous improvement in teaching practices (Burns, 2010).

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This literature review has explored how learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy. Through formative assessment combined with reflective practices such as journaling, students gain valuable insights into their learning processes, which empowers them to take greater ownership of their educational journey. Teacher feedback plays an essential role in guiding this reflection and helping students refine their learning strategies. Ultimately, the goal of this action research is to examine the transformative potential of structured reflection, supported by teacher and peer feedback, in fostering learner self-awareness and autonomy.

## 2 The action research

This action research project aimed to explore the question: *How do learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy?* While the initial focus of my research was on self- and peer assessment, it became evident over time that learning journals were not merely a tool for data collection – they became the heart of the research. Initially, I had designed observation grids to be used during peer oral interactions. Although I conducted regular observations and systematically applied the grids to assess learners' performance and provide whole-class feedback, the data yielded no new insights. Learners, already familiar with the traffic lights tool from the previous year, were consistently accurate in their self-assessments, which confirmed my own observations. As a result, the grids did not reveal significant developments over time.

In contrast, the learning journals provided far richer and more meaningful data. Originally intended as just one of several data sources, they became the core of the research. Through their entries, students engaged with feedback, identified personal strengths and challenges, and gradually assumed greater responsibility for their learning. The journals offered deeper insights into the evolving nature of learner self-awareness and autonomy – insights the observation grids did not capture. This shift in focus ultimately led me to revise my research question to better reflect the central role the journals came to play.

### 2.1 Context

This action research project was conducted in a primary school in the suburbs of Lisbon with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class of twenty-two students (11 boys and 11 girls), aged 8 to 9. The students came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, reflecting the local community's varied economic situations. The class included two nationalities: 19 Portuguese and 3 Brazilian students, all of whom were native Portuguese speakers.

The students exhibited a range of language abilities. Some demonstrated strong comprehension skills and independence, completing tasks with minimal errors and often serving as role models for their peers. Others struggled with language comprehension and written accuracy, requiring additional support to maintain focus and follow instructions.

Among the participants, two students had diagnosed specific educational needs, while four others benefitted from *Medidas Universais* (Decreto-Lei n.º 54/2018).

The study took place in a state school where English is introduced in the third grade, with students attending two one-hour lessons per week. My cooperating teacher adopted a learner-centred pedagogy, emphasizing peer interaction through speaking pairwork activities. This approach encouraged active participation, enhanced speaking skills, and fostered collaboration, creating a dynamic classroom atmosphere that supported language development (Leslie, 2021).

The Portuguese curriculum for teaching English in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, follows the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) and lessons align with level A1 of the CEFR. As defined in the official guidelines of *Aprendizagens Essenciais* (DGE, 2018), a communicative, student-centred approach was adopted, with a major focus on listening and speaking skills. The coursebook *Start the Magic!* and its accompanying activity book (Silva & Costa, 2023) were used during lessons and complemented by peer interaction and information-gap-activities.

## **2.2 Methodology**

### **2.2.1 Action Research**

This small-scale action research project was conducted over approximately two and a half months during the first term of the 2024-25 school year, following a mixed-methods approach. As Burns (2010) observes, action research involves critically and systematically examining teaching methods while maintaining a questioning mindset to identify areas for improvement. In this process, the teacher assumes the role of researcher, investigating issues in depth, exploring alternatives, and refining teaching strategies. The “action” in action research refers to the deliberate effort to address challenges and enhance classroom practices through systematic reflection and data collection, rather than relying on assumptions or conjecture (Burns, 2010).

This approach follows a reflective research cycle of planning, taking action, observing outcomes, and reflecting on findings. By providing a structured means of examining classroom challenges, action research helps bridge the gap between theory and practice (Burns, 2010).

Since the study involved collecting data on individual learners, obtaining consent was essential. I prepared consent letters for the school cluster director (Appendix A),

parents/carers (Appendix B), and learners (Appendix C). These letters outlined the aims of the research, procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation. During one of my first lessons, I explained the study to the learners, encouraged questions, and reassured them that participation was entirely optional. After addressing their questions, I handed out the consent forms, which they signed before taking them home for their parents/carers to read and sign, returning them in the following lessons. The learners displayed genuine curiosity about the research and engaged positively from the outset.

### **2.2.2 Implementing reflective routines**

To establish a strong foundation for self-awareness and autonomy, I implemented reflection-based routines from the start. These routines were designed to systematically provide opportunities for reflection and feedback.

To support this, each lesson followed a five-step reflective framework:

- (1) Making learning objectives explicit at the start of the lesson.
- (2) Presenting success criteria for the upcoming pairwork activity.
- (3) Managing self-/peer assessment based on the success criteria after the activity.
- (4) Conducting a reflective summary at the end of the lesson.
- (5) Encouraging writing individual learning journal entries at the end of the lesson.

At the start of the lesson, learning objectives were made explicit and visible on a PowerPoint slide, read aloud and briefly discussed to help students understand what they were expected to achieve. This process clarified expectations and promoted transparency.

Throughout the project, collaborative information gap or survey-based speaking activities were designed to foster meaningful peer interactions. These encouraged the use of authentic language and required learners to rely on their partner's verbal instructions to achieve a shared objective. They promoted fluency and reinforced the focus on meaning, even when the tasks were more controlled, such as those involving pre-set mini cards. Overall, these peer interaction activities, enriched with information gap elements, helped create a dynamic learning environment that actively engaged students in their language development.

The implemented speaking activities fell into the following categories:

### ***Information gap activities***

These activities required learners to communicate in order to complete sentences, identify missing information, or reconstruct full ideas. For example, activities related to time and routines required learners to exchange information using structures like “I get up at...” or “I go to bed at...”, practising time expressions such as “a quarter past/to” and “half past”. Each student held only part of the information, which encouraged active listening and meaningful interaction.

### ***Survey-based activities***

Activities such as those related to personal information and birthdays involved learners circulating the classroom to ask and answer questions such as “What’s your name?”, “How old are you?”, “Where are you from?”, and “When is your birthday?”. These activities promoted fluency.

### ***Guessing games and matching activities***

Activities such as those involving places at school, daily routines, and nationalities involved structured guessing or matching based on visual prompts or hidden information. Learners used yes/no questions or chunks such as “Where is...?” or “Is it the...?” to identify locations, routines, or countries. These games provided an enjoyable environment for language use.

### ***Collaborative activities involving reading and writing***

Activities such as partner dictation and running dictation added the reading and writing skills to oral communication. In both, learners had to read aloud or recall written content and communicate it clearly to a partner, who then transcribed it. This required careful pronunciation, listening, and cooperation.

### ***Show and tell***

In a show and tell activity, learners presented their self-puzzles, using a series of chunks to describe themselves (e.g., “My name is...”, “My best friends are...”). This activity encouraged ownership of language and provided an authentic purpose for communication.

To support learners in understanding what successful performance looked like, I carefully modelled these activities, highlighting key linguistic (e.g., vocabulary, language chunks) and collaborative aspects (e.g., turn-taking, mutual help). Before pairwork, I introduced success criteria that emphasized not only linguistic accuracy but also cooperation and effective communication. While some remained consistent (e.g., “Speak English,” “Use my turn/your turn,” “Help your friend”), others were tailored to the specific language being practiced, such as “What words are we going to use?”. These criteria were displayed on a PowerPoint slide during the activity for easy reference.

After the activities, learners reflected on their performance by responding to yes/no questions aligned with the success criteria, e.g., “Did you use English?”, “Did you help your friend?”. They self-assessed using the traffic lights tool from Teacher’s Pet (n.d.) (Appendix D), a simple but effective aid that provided a visual and accessible way for young learners to develop self-awareness in a stress-free format. Each colour corresponds to a statement: “I can do this.” (red), “I’m getting there.” (yellow), and “I need help!” (green). Because it focuses on the learning process rather than results, this tool scaffolds reflection and helps learners recognize their strengths and areas for improvement.

At the end of each lesson, I conducted a whole-class reflective summary. I guided students through prompts such as “Which activity did you like the most?”, “What was easy for you?”, and “What did you find challenging?”. These discussions laid the groundwork for individual written reflections in their learning journals (Appendix E), further reinforcing self-awareness and autonomy. Over time, these journal entries became a key space for personal reflection. When supported by personalised written responses, the journals encouraged learners to monitor their development, celebrate their successes, and identify areas for improvement, all of which are essential for building learner autonomy.

Through the consistent use of these routines, the learning journal evolved into a central tool for scaffolding metacognitive reflection, empowering students to take ownership of their learning process.

### **2.2.3 Using peer and teacher feedback to support reflective journaling**

To support the development of learner self-awareness, I encouraged learners to carefully reflect on their performance after each collaborative activity by considering

what went well, what made them feel confident, and what they found challenging. Initially, these reflections were guided through self-assessment using the traffic lights tool, which helped learners reflect on their performance. As learners became more comfortable with the process, I introduced opportunities for peer feedback as a natural extension of their reflective practice.

After pairwork activities, learners first used the traffic lights tool for self-assessment, then provided oral feedback to their peers. To scaffold this, I introduced sentence starters and a feedback checklist (Appendix F) to guide their comments and keep them focused on meaningful, constructive feedback. Referencing the established success criteria ensured clarity and consistency, while modelling the process helped create a supportive and collaborative classroom culture where feedback was framed as an opportunity for growth rather than judgment.

Importantly, I encouraged learners to reflect on the feedback they received – from peers and from me – when writing their journal entries. These written reflections allowed them to make sense of both their experiences and the feedback they had given and received, further deepening their self-awareness. Throughout the lesson, I made a concerted effort to provide timely feedback, both after the activities and during the reflective summary at the end of the lesson. I shared observations with learners, praising their efforts and highlighting areas for improvement as needed. In doing so, I sought to cultivate a reflective classroom environment where feedback and journaling worked together to foster autonomy and encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning (Oxford, 2003).

#### **2.2.4 Data collection**

##### ***Learning journals***

At the end of most lessons, the twenty-two students independently recorded their reflections in their mother tongue (Portuguese), guided by three key questions:

- 1) What did you find easy or difficult?*
- 2) Which activity helped you the most?*
- 3) What do you think you need to practice more?*

I reviewed the journals and provided personalized written feedback whenever possible, typically after two or three entries. Depending on the learner's reflections, I

acknowledged achievements, helped them identify areas for improvement more clearly, and suggested strategies to support their learning.

The learning journals were analysed from two perspectives:

1. To examine the nature of the teacher feedback provided.
2. To understand whether teacher and peer feedback fostered learner self-awareness and autonomy over time.

For the first aspect, I systematically reviewed my comments, identifying recurring patterns. which are presented below. For the second, I applied a coding system with four categories to individual journal entries: Self-Awareness (SA), Autonomy (AU), Teacher Feedback (TF), and Peer Feedback (PF). This categorization allowed me to determine if and to what extent learners' reflections demonstrated self-awareness and autonomy. The results are presented as percentages, showing the proportion of reflections that fall into each category. Furthermore, I documented whether and how frequently students incorporated the feedback they received into their reflections.

## **2.3 Results**

As a firm believer in the power of fostering a classroom environment where reflection and constructive feedback go hand in hand, I implemented the aforementioned structured routines and reflective activities to help me answer my research question: *How do learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy?*

As my research progressed, I found that the student learning journal emerged as my most valuable data collection tool. It became the foundation of my study, offering a tangible record of students' reflections, struggles, and progress over time. These journals not only allowed me to track individual growth but also provided insight into how students were interpreting and responding to my feedback. Through their reflections, I observed students gradually taking ownership of their learning, articulating their strengths, challenges, and strategies with increasing clarity. This evolution underscored the transformative potential of structured reflection and teacher feedback in fostering self-awareness and autonomy.

To explore how feedback impacted learners' self-awareness and autonomy, I analysed their learning journal entries, which provided insights into the influence of feedback.

### 2.3.1 Learning journals

The student learning journal consisted of three structured questions and an open-ended prompt: (1) *What did you find easy or difficult?* (2) *Which activity helped you the most?* (3) *What do you think you need to practice more?* (4) *Write anything you want about the lesson here.*

With twenty-two learners contributing four comments per journal entry, I collected a total of 892 comments for analysis. To examine how these reflections contributed to self-awareness and autonomy over time, and how my feedback supported this process, I applied a coding system with four categories to individual entries: Self-Awareness (SA), Autonomy (AU), Teacher Feedback (TF), and Peer Feedback (PF). Each category included subcodes to specify the nature of the reflections. Notably, within the Self-Awareness category, reflections were distinguished between those highlighting successes and those addressing challenges (Table 1). Since there were no instances of indirect references to peer feedback, I did not include a code for it. The examples below are the English translations of the learners' original responses in Portuguese.

**Table 1: Categories for the learning journal comments.**

Code	Explanation	Example
SA1-SU	General reflection on success	"I thought everything was very easy."
SA1-CH	General reflection on challenges	"There were some things I didn't know so well."
SA2-SU	Specific reflection on success	"The activity that helped me the most was pairwork."
SA2-CH	Specific reflection on challenges	"I found it difficult that we had to memorize."
AU1	Identification of learning goals	"I need to practice speaking and telling the time more."

<b>AU2</b>	Connections to previous learning	“One thing I wanted to say is that I had read the book <i>Room on the Broom</i> .”
<b>AU3</b>	Evidence of self-regulation	“They all helped me reflect!!”/ “Now I find ordinal numbers easy because I studied.”
<b>AU-LJ</b>	Direct reference to the learning journal	“I also liked [the learning journal] because I had the opportunity to communicate with the teacher about my mistakes.”
<b>TF1</b>	Direct reference to teacher feedback	“English, and teacher Bruno, I am watching movies and cartoons like you said.”
<b>TF2</b>	Indirect reference to teacher feedback	“I loved the learning [journals] because they answered my questions.”
<b>PF1</b>	Direct reference to a peer or a peer’s feedback	“According to my classmate, I need to improve my creativity.”

To prepare the data, I transcribed the learners’ handwritten responses onto a spreadsheet to allow me to categorize each of them. As I reviewed the responses, I noticed that many required dual coding, particularly longer reflections that combined general and specific successes and/or challenges. Assigning categories proved challenging due to the large volume of data that required careful revision. Notwithstanding, this coding system was highly effective in organizing, analysing, and interpreting the data. Table 2 shows the percentage of comments related to self-awareness.

### *Self-awareness*

**Table 2: Comments related to self-awareness.**

<b>SA1-SU</b>	<b>SA1-CH</b>	<b>SA2-SU</b>	<b>SA2-CH</b>
18.7%	3.0%	37.8%	26.1%

Successes accounted for the majority of responses, with general successes (SA1-SU) making up 18.7% and specific successes (SA2-SU) comprising 37.8%, resulting in a combined 56.5% of success-related reflections. In contrast, challenge-related responses were less frequent, with general challenges (SA1-CH) representing only 3.0% and specific challenges (SA2-CH) accounting for 26.1%, totalling 29.2%. This distribution suggests that learners reflected more on their successes (56.5%) than on their challenges (29.2%).

Within these categories, learners provided more detailed reflections on specific successes (37.8%) than on general ones (18.7%). A similar pattern emerged in their discussion of challenges, where specific challenges (26.1%) were far more common than general ones (3.0%). This indicates that learners tended to focus on particular difficulties rather than making broad statements.

The predominance of specific reflections across both successes and challenges (63.9%) suggests that learners demonstrated a growing sense of self-awareness. They were not only able to recognize what they did well but also to pinpoint specific areas where they faced difficulties, reflecting a meaningful engagement with their learning process.

### ***Autonomy***

Table 3 shows the percentage of comments related to autonomy, which could be identified in 23.3% of all entries:

**Table 3: Comments related to autonomy.**

<b>AU1</b>	<b>AU2</b>	<b>AU3</b>	<b>AU-LJ</b>
19.7%	1.8%	1.0%	0.8%

Reflections related to Autonomy in terms of learning goals (AU1) account for 19.7% of the total, making it the most prominent category. This is largely due to the automatic elicitation of AU1-related responses by question 3 in the learning journals (*What do you think you need to practice more?*), which naturally prompted learners to identify their own learning goals. Students consistently engaged with this question, demonstrating an awareness of their areas for improvement.

In contrast, reflections on Autonomy in terms of connections to previous learning (AU2) make up only 1.8%, while those related to Autonomy in terms of self-regulation (AU3) account for 1.0%. Furthermore, reflections categorized under Autonomy – Learning Journals (AU-LJ) constitute 0.8%. Although AU2, AU3, and AU-LJ reflections were comparatively less frequent, they indicate some degree of autonomy, as they were not directly elicited by any specific question. Instead, these comments emerged organically from students' independent reflections.

### ***The impact of teacher and peer feedback***

Mentions of feedback in the learning journals were relatively infrequent. Direct references to teacher feedback appeared in just 0.6% of responses, while indirect references accounted for 4.4%. Although this suggests that teacher feedback may have played a role in shaping student reflections, it was not a prominent feature in their written responses. References to peers or peer feedback were slightly more common than direct mentions of teacher feedback, appearing in 0.9% of responses, though still in low numbers overall.

While these figures suggest limited explicit engagement with feedback, it is worth noting that 17 out of 22 students referred to either teacher or peer feedback at least once across their reflections. However, these instances were scattered and often brief, with only five students making no reference to feedback at all. Most references to teacher feedback were found in responses to Question 3 (*What do you think you need to practice more?*), which accounted for 27 mentions. This question also elicited two mentions of peer feedback. Questions 1 (*What did you find easy or difficult?*) and 2 (*Which activity helped you the most?*) received fewer mentions of teacher feedback (six each), with Question 2 including a single reference to peer feedback. The open-ended prompt (*Write anything you want about the lesson here.*) generated slightly more references to peer feedback (five mentions) and eight to teacher feedback.

To explore possible patterns, I also examined how these mentions were distributed across daily entries in relation to student attendance (Table 4). This offered a more nuanced view of how feedback might have influenced learners' reflections.

**Table 4: Categories in learning journal entries per lesson.**

DATE	SA-SU	SA-CH	AU	TF	PF	Learners in class	LJ Entries
30/09/2024	53%	26%	19%	1%	0%	22	88
02/10/2024	56%	30%	20%	1%	0%	21	84
07/10/2024	60%	31%	23%	7%	0%	22	88
09/10/2024	48%	39%	25%	1%	0%	21	84
16/10/2024	57%	33%	25%	1%	0%	22	88
06/11/2024	55%	31%	24%	4%	0%	21	84
13/11/2024	59%	28%	20%	3%	0%	22	88
27/11/2024	62%	25%	24%	8%	1%	21	84
09/12/2024	50%	34%	29%	14%	4%	20	80
11/12/2024	62%	22%	22%	6%	4%	17	68
16/12/2024	61%	14%	23%	11%	2%	14	56

Although teacher feedback was occasionally integrated into learners' reflections from the beginning of the project, the frequency of such mentions was generally low and varied across entries. While there appears to be a modest upward trend over time, the data remains limited and does not allow for strong conclusions. A similar pattern can be observed regarding peer feedback, which was introduced later in the process. The first explicit reference to a peer appeared on November 27th, two days after peer feedback was first introduced on November 25th. Prior to that, no students mentioned their peers in their entries.

It is also important to consider the influence of the learning journal questions. Although these questions guided students to reflect on their learning, areas for improvement, and successes, none explicitly addressed feedback. While I occasionally reminded learners during end-of-lesson reflections that they could consider their peers' feedback when writing their journal entries, the questions themselves did not prompt them to do so. The few emerging references to feedback may point to its potential role in fostering self-awareness and autonomy, but given the limited and indirect nature of the data, any conclusions remain tentative. Notwithstanding, to gain a clearer picture, this data needs to be considered in relation to the teacher feedback shared with learners over time.

### **2.3.2 Supporting learner self-awareness and autonomy through teacher feedback**

This section examines how learners engaged with feedback and how it contributed to the development of their self-awareness and autonomy. The analysis is based on their learning journal entries and highlights how feedback was received, interpreted, and acted upon by the learners.

#### ***Acknowledgement, encouragement and praise***

Learners often demonstrated a positive response to comments that acknowledged their efforts and highlighted their achievements. As feedback consistently acknowledged their reflections and encouraged their progress, learners became increasingly open in articulating their experiences and feelings about learning. One comment: “Great to know that you enjoy pairwork! [...] To improve is the road ahead” was followed by journal entries showing increased willingness to reflect on both successes and challenges. This suggests that encouragement helped learners feel more confident and more capable of commenting on their progress.

Praising learner progress also appeared to enhance self-perception. In some entries, learners explicitly recognised their improvements and used language associated with growth and learning. This evolution in tone and self-expression points to a gradual shift towards a growth mindset, displaying greater motivation and personal investment in the learning process.

#### ***Guidance and strategies for improvement***

When learners received specific guidance and strategies tailored to their needs, they often engaged with the suggestions and reflected on their outcomes. Feedback encouraging practices such as using a picture dictionary or watching a favourite movie in English with subtitles led to follow-up entries where students described having applied those ideas. One learner wrote, “I already practiced at home how to say: classroom, toilet, etc., and now I know it, easy!”, illustrating that feedback had prompted independent action.

Another student, when asked what they needed to practice more, mentioned ordinal numbers in two separate entries. After receiving supportive feedback encouraging practice on both occasions, he later wrote: “Now I find ordinal numbers easy because I studied.” indirectly confirming that the feedback had helped him take action. The same

student referred in a later entry: “I already practiced at home how to say: classroom, toilet, etc., and now I know it, easy!”, which shows that he had acted on the guidance he had received, demonstrating the power of feedback in reinforced self-awareness and autonomy.

### ***Validating challenges and reassurance***

Learners frequently identified difficulties in their journal entries, and responses that validated their struggles appeared to have a reassuring effect. These exchanges helped normalise challenges and encouraged perseverance. For instance, a learner who expressed frustration with ordinal numbers later reflected that practicing at home had helped, suggesting an evolving attitude toward overcoming learning difficulties.

Another student initially mentioned a tendency to lose patience when supporting a peer. Over time, her reflections revealed a shift in behaviour: “I used ‘my turn’ and helped my classmate.” This development suggests that feedback reinforcing values such as empathy and collaboration contributed to greater self-awareness and more constructive peer interactions.

I encouraged learners to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as obstacles. It was important to me that they felt supported and understood uncertainty is a natural part of the learning journey, and that asking for help is encouraged.

### ***Encouraging reflection and request for clarification***

Some learners initially struggled to reflect in detail, but when prompted through feedback, they gradually became more specific in their responses. Learners became better able to identify their challenges and describe their learning processes more precisely.

Over time, learners demonstrated more critical awareness of their own progress. For example, a student moved from general comments like “It was easy” to more focused observations: “I need to practice saying the words more, but I really enjoyed the lesson.” These shifts reflect a growing capacity for self-assessment and a deeper engagement with their learning journey.

### ***Responding to emotional comments and fostering connection***

The final journal prompt, which invited learners to write anything they wished about the lesson, was often used to express emotions, thoughts, or appreciation. Learners seemed to value the opportunity to share personal insights and experiences, especially

when their comments were acknowledged with warmth and sincerity. One student wrote, “I also liked [the learning journal] because I had the opportunity to communicate with the teacher about my mistakes,” highlighting the importance of feeling heard and supported.

As feedback became more personalised, learner reflections also became more detailed and self-aware. The evolving tone of these entries indicates that students were not only more comfortable expressing themselves but were also developing a stronger sense of responsibility for their learning. The dialogic nature of this feedback dynamic contributed to a reflective classroom culture, reinforcing autonomy and trust.

### **2.3.3 Evidence of feedback in the learning journal entries**

To better understand how teacher feedback promoted learner self-awareness and autonomy, I cross-referenced data from the learning journals with the identified feedback patterns. Direct references to teacher feedback (TF1) were categorized as follows: one instance fell under *Acknowledgement, encouragement, and praise*, two were related to *Guidance and strategies for improvement*, and another two were related to *Validating challenges and reassurance*. Regarding indirect references to teacher feedback (TF2), there were twenty-four instances in the *Acknowledgement, encouragement, and praise* category, eleven under *Guidance and strategies for improvement*, and four related to *Validating challenges and reassurance*.

As for direct references to a peer or their feedback (PF1), seven instances were related to *Acknowledgement, encouragement, and praise*, and one was related to *Guidance and strategies for improvement*. This single case directly referenced feedback from a peer: “*According to my colleague, I need to improve my creativity.*” All seven references to a peer involved praise, with three specifically recognizing patience – a quality I consistently emphasized in both my oral and written feedback. This was particularly relevant for learners like Raven, who initially acknowledged struggling with patience when supporting her peers: “*As soon as I try to help a classmate, I immediately lose patience with beginner mistakes.*” Over time, learners demonstrated increased patience and a greater willingness to provide constructive feedback, as evidenced by these seemingly small yet significant shifts. In a later journal entry, Raven herself noted this change: “*I used ‘my turn’ and helped my classmate.*” This progression highlights the impact of consistent encouragement, praise, and structured feedback in fostering a more supportive and collaborative learning environment (Kerr, 2020), in which learners can

assess their progress, reflect on their experiences, and take greater control of their learning – key aspects of both self-awareness and autonomy.

## **2.4 Discussion and conclusion**

### **2.4.1 Challenges and reflections on implementation**

I made it a priority to introduce the student learning journal early on, aiming to establish a routine that would allow for timely recognition of both strengths and areas for improvement. Starting this routine as early as possible was crucial in helping me address my research question: *How do learning journals, supported by teacher and peer feedback, promote learner self-awareness and autonomy?*

It was encouraging to see that, even from the very beginning, learners were very enthusiastic about their journals, often asking at the start of lessons whether I would be handing them out or if I had commented on their entries. From the outset, it became clear how motivating the journals were for them.

### **2.4.2 The role of feedback in supporting self-awareness and autonomy**

Although only 0.6% of student responses explicitly mentioned teacher feedback, there were a few indirect references (4.4%) that may point to its influence. While limited in number, these instances suggest that feedback had some influence on learners' reflections, even if not overtly recognized by them.

Early on, it became clear that positive reinforcement correlated with motivation, as students expressed how feedback helped them feel more confident. For example, one student wrote: "I also liked [the learning journal] because I had the opportunity to communicate with the teacher about my mistakes." This indicates that feedback, particularly when it involved discussing mistakes constructively, had a role in supporting their confidence. In another case, a student noted: "I am watching movies and cartoons like you said," suggesting an attempt to act on teacher advice and explore English beyond the classroom. These comments hint at a connection between feedback, motivation, self-awareness and autonomy.

In terms of learners' awareness of their own progress, journal entries reflected more specific observations over time. For example, a student who initially wrote, "I

thought it was easy,” later reflected, “I need to practice saying the words more, but I really enjoyed the lesson,” in response to the same question. Another learner wrote, “I’ve already improved in helping my classmate, but now I’m no longer using my turn, your turn,” prompting me to provide targeted feedback tailored to her needs. While such moments were not widespread, they do suggest that some learners were beginning to engage more thoughtfully with their learning process, allowing for more tailored support.

### **2.4.3 Encouraging proactive learning and patience in students**

Throughout the implementation, I aimed to model patience and offer constructive feedback, hoping this might encourage similar behaviour in students. In some instances, this appeared to have a positive effect. One student, who was generally more confident, seemed to demonstrate increased patience with her partner over time. I reminded her, “I know you enjoy pairwork so much, and you’ve been helping your classmates more. Don’t forget: My turn, your turn.” In this case, timely feedback supported deeper reflection, as the student later referenced the advice she had received regarding patience and peer collaboration.

On one occasion, this same student added a journal entry on a previous lesson when learning journals had not been distributed. This was unexpected, as she was not required to do so. It highlighted her eagerness and growing sense of ownership over her learning, as she wanted to reflect on that particular lesson even though she did not have to. This action demonstrated a higher level of engagement and a proactive attitude toward her learning.

Many students expressed enthusiasm for pairwork activities, and despite some challenges with clarity of instructions and time management on my part, I consistently made an effort to acknowledge their efforts and thank them for their participation. Reinforcing patience and expressing appreciation contributed to creating a more supportive atmosphere. One student, for example, noted: “My partner was very patient with me.” Even if only evident in a few cases, such reflections suggest that some learners were acting upon the feedback they had received.

#### **2.4.4 Implications of the study**

While I knew structured assessment routines and reflective activities can significantly support students in deepening their understanding of their learning processes (Fernandes, 2022), I was unsure whether I could gather reliable data within such a short period. Balancing this with other aspects of the lesson, such as time management, pacing, and the inevitable self-doubt that arose when a lesson did not go as planned or my instructions lacked clarity. At times, learners had to rush through their journal reflections due to time constraints, which may have made it difficult for some to fully articulate their thoughts. Despite these obstacles, the opportunity to guide learners toward greater self-awareness and ownership of their learning motivated me to push forward, refining my practice to foster a classroom environment where reflection and growth could flourish.

This study sought to underscore the transformative power of assessment and feedback in nurturing learner self-awareness and autonomy. The student learning journal proved to be an incredibly effective tool for reflection, with its benefits in promoting learner agency in the primary English classroom (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). It helped me observe some signs of learners' growing self-awareness and autonomy, offering moments of reflection for both me and the students. By observing how learners engage with their learning and our feedback, we can better address their needs in a more immediate and tailored manner, setting them up for long-term success.

The experience was made even more rewarding by the group of learners who gave their best in every lesson, helping me understand how to guide them more effectively. Thanks to their efforts, I was able to clear my mind and push through moments of frustration and self-doubt. As a trainee teacher, I have gained valuable insights that will stay with me throughout my career. I have come to appreciate the importance of making learning a shared experience, where both teacher and students can learn from one another and together create a culture of mutual support and collaboration where everyone feels valued – a space where a teacher is unafraid to shift from the "sage on the stage" role to that of "guide on the side," showing learners how to be agents of their learning and that challenges are, in fact, great opportunities for growth.

#### **2.4.5 Relevance of the study**

The extremely positive response from learners toward the implemented structured assessment routines and reflective activities – in particular their learning journals – as

well as their enthusiasm for collaborative activities, show how impactful it can be to relinquish control in the primary English classroom and how these strategies can be implemented in other classrooms where teachers want to maximize learners' experience by encouraging active participation and reflection, which in turn will go a long way into fostering learner agency.

The valuable benefits of a student-centred classroom cannot be overstated, and further research is needed to explore how the strategies employed in this study can be effectively implemented in contexts where relinquishing control is more challenging. As educators of young children, we have the unique opportunity to work with the most imaginative and creative minds. It should be our goal to cultivate a primary classroom environment that nurtures these young minds and fosters their development. Longitudinal studies are essential to better understand the long-term effects of structured assessment routines and reflective activities, not only over time but across a variety of educational contexts. Furthermore, future research could explore how evolving technology can enhance and complement these practices, offering new possibilities for fostering self-awareness, autonomy, and reflection in young learners. That would be an interesting route to improve and diversify current assessment and feedback approaches.

This action research project has reaffirmed my belief in the transformative potential of reflection and feedback in the primary English classroom. By fostering a space where young learners felt safe to explore their thoughts, recognize their progress, and respond to feedback, I witnessed the emergence of self-awareness and autonomy. Although the process came with challenges, it also offered valuable insights into how children learn, grow, and begin to take ownership of their learning journeys. As I move forward in my teaching career, I will carry with me the lessons learned from this experience – the importance of patience, trust, and listening closely to what learners have to say. Above all, this study has reminded me that when we believe in our students' capacity to reflect, we empower them to see themselves not just as learners of English, but as capable, thoughtful, and independent individuals.

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## **List of tables**

**Table 1:** Categories for the learning journal comments.

**Table 2:** Comments related to self-awareness.

**Table 3:** Comments related to autonomy.

**Table 4:** Categories in learning journal entries per lesson.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Letter of consent for learners

Carta para os alunos do 4A

Olá! Sou o professor Bruno e estou muito feliz por estar contigo neste novo ano letivo. Vais aprender muitas coisas! Mas primeiro quero fazer-te um convite. Até dezembro serei o teu professor de Inglês e gostaria de te convidar a participar no estudo que estou a fazer sobre a avaliação. A minha missão será ajudar-te a perceber o que correu bem nas nossas atividades em aula e como podes melhorar para seres incrível no Inglês.

Como sabes, a autoavaliação é muito importante. Irei pedir-te que respondas a algumas perguntas no final de cada aula sobre o que achaste mais fácil, o que foi mais difícil, e o que achas que precisas praticar mais. Irei ler as tuas respostas e fazer pequenas anotações para te ajudar. Também vamos trabalhar em pares para que possas aprender com os teus colegas e para que os teus colegas aprendam contigo!

Vou gravar por áudio alguns momentos para poder melhorar as aulas e te ajudar ainda mais. Mas não te preocupes, só eu irei ouvir essas gravações. Se em algum momento não quiseres continuar a participar, podes falar comigo ou com os teus pais ou encarregado de educação. Eles já sabem do meu projeto e também poderão responder a perguntas que tiveres sobre ele. Não vou usar o teu nome verdadeiro, e tudo o que escreveres será só para o meu estudo. Podes escolher um nome secreto engraçado, como o teu animal favorito ou uma personagem de um desenho animado.

Pensa bem e pinta a carinha para dizer se aceitas o convite!

Quero participar



Não quero participar



O nome que escolhi para o estudo: \_\_\_\_\_

Data:

\_\_\_\_\_

Assinatura do aluno:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Letter of consent to parents and carers

### Carta de consentimento para pais e encarregados de educação

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Bruno Pinto e serei o professor de Inglês do vosso educando durante o 1º período do presente ano letivo 2024/25. Sou aluno do Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa e estou a conduzir um estudo intitulado *Enhancing Learner Self-Awareness and Autonomy through Self- and Peer- Assessment in the Primary English as a Foreign Language Classroom* (Potenciar a Autoconsciência e a Autonomia dos Alunos através da Autoavaliação e Avaliação entre Pares no Ensino de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira no 1.º Ciclo) que resultará num relatório final de estágio.

O estudo visa promover o desenvolvimento da autonomia e autoconsciência dos alunos em relação ao seu processo de aprendizagem, através de práticas de autoavaliação e avaliação entre pares, ajudando-os a refletir sobre o seu desempenho, a identificar áreas de melhoria e a aprender a dar e receber feedback construtivo. Esta abordagem visa não só melhorar o seu desempenho na língua inglesa, mas também promover competências como a colaboração e a responsabilidade. Para garantir a qualidade e rigor da investigação, utilizarei uma combinação de ferramentas, como grelhas de observação, o diário de aprendizagem do aluno, e gravações de momentos de feedback, sempre de forma confidencial e anónima.

Venho então pedir a vossa autorização para poder incluir o vosso educando no estudo. A participação é completamente voluntária, e poderá ser interrompida a qualquer momento sem qualquer prejuízo para o aluno. Caso tenha alguma dúvida ou queira mais informações sobre o estudo, estou à sua disposição para prestar todos os esclarecimentos.

Agradeço desde já a sua colaboração e disponibilidade. Por favor, assinale a sua autorização no campo abaixo, caso concorde com a participação do seu educando neste projeto de investigação.

Lisboa, 25 de Setembro de 2024

Bruno Pinto

Professora Doutora Carolyn Elizabeth Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio FCSH, Universidade

Nova de Lisboa



Eu, \_\_\_\_\_, encarregado de educação do/a aluno/a \_\_\_\_\_, declaro que estou informado acerca dos objetivos do estudo *Enhancing Learner Self-Awareness and Autonomy through Self- and Peer- Assessment in the Primary English as a Foreign Language Classroom*, e autorizo a participação do meu educando.

Data:

Assinatura do encarregado de educação:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Letter of consent for learners

### Carta de consentimento para o Diretor do Agrupamento

Caro Diretor do Agrupamento de Escolas de Parede,

O meu nome é Bruno Pinto e estou a estagiar na Escola Básica Afonso do Paço durante o 1.º período do presente ano letivo 2024/25. Estou a concluir o Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, e, para esse efeito, estou a conduzir um projeto de investigação intitulado *Enhancing Learner Self-Awareness and Autonomy through Self- and Peer- Assessment in the Primary English as a Foreign Language Classroom* (Potenciar a Autoconsciência e a Autonomia dos Alunos através da Autoavaliação e Avaliação entre Pares no Ensino de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira no 1.º Ciclo).

O estudo decorrerá entre setembro e dezembro de 2024, durante o meu período de estágio, e, para tal, solicito a sua autorização para a recolha dos dados necessários, que serão posteriormente apresentados no relatório de estágio. A metodologia do estudo inclui observação em sala de aula, anotações em grelha de observação, gravação em áudio de momentos de feedback, bem como o uso do diário de aprendizagem do aluno. Importa ainda referir que todos os dados recolhidos serão tratados de forma confidencial, assegurando o anonimato das crianças, da instituição e do pessoal envolvido no relatório final, conforme as normas éticas de investigação.

Agradeço a sua disponibilidade para quaisquer questões que queira colocar e estou ao seu dispor para prestar esclarecimentos adicionais sobre o projeto.

Lisboa, 25 de Setembro de 2024

Bruno Pinto

Professora Doutora Carolyn Elizabeth Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio FCSH, Universidade

Nova de Lisboa



Eu, \_\_\_\_\_, diretor do Agrupamento de Escolas de Parede, declaro que fui informado dos objetivos do projeto intitulado *Enhancing Learner Self-Awareness and Autonomy through Self- and Peer- Assessment in the Primary English as a Foreign Language Classroom* (Potenciar a Autoconsciência e a Autonomia dos Alunos através da Autoavaliação e Avaliação entre Pares no Ensino de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira no 1.º Ciclo) e autorizo o estagiário Bruno Pinto a conduzir o seu projeto de investigação na Escola Básica Afonso do Paço.

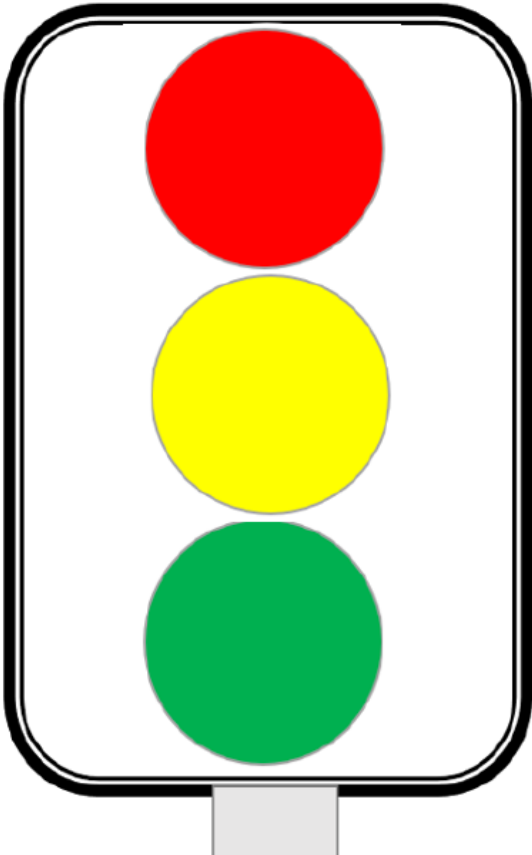
Data:

Assinatura do diretor:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D: Traffic lights tool**

	<p><b>I can do this!</b></p>
	<p><b>I am getting there!</b></p>
	<p><b>I need help!</b></p>

## Appendix E: Student learning journal

Lesson number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. O que achaste fácil ou difícil?

---

---

2. Qual foi a atividade que te ajudou mais?

---

---

3. O que achas que precisas de praticar mais?

---

---

Escreve aqui o que quiseres sobre a aula



---

---

## Appendix F: Sentence starters and checklist

- O meu amigo disse bem as palavras e as frases?
- O meu amigo falou de forma clara?
- O meu amigo respondeu corretamente?
- O meu amigo ajudou-me/ foi paciente comigo?

Gostei como tu...  
Na próxima vez, podes...

