Promoting learner autonomy in young learners: Self-assessment as a means to develop more independent primary learners of English as a foreign language

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Relatório de Estágio de Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico

Março, 2022

Relatório de Estágio apresentado para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre no Mestrado em ensino de inglês no 1º ciclo do ensino básico realizado sob a orientação científica de Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie e do Professor Doutor Carlos Ceia.

Acknowledgements

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at examining the effectiveness of self-assessment in promoting autonomy in young learners, guided by the following research question: In what way(s) does self-assessment contribute to an increase in autonomy in young learners? The participants were a class of twenty-five 4th year students of English as a foreign language, who participated in the research during the first term of the school year, a period of approximately 2 months and a half. Small scale classroom based action research was conducted, and the methodology consisted of both quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection. These were questionnaires, a teaching journal, exit tickets and a self-assessment worksheet. Traffic lights for self-assessment and reflective summary to practice reflection were also used as day-to-day practice. Over time, students demonstrated an increasing ability to reflect and self-assess, by being more and more specific when identifying their strengths and weaknesses, which are signs of increasing learner autonomy. However, results also showed that, at the end of the research, more students felt like self-assessment did not help them recognize mistakes nor improve as learners. More students also admitted to feeling a bit stressed when self-assessing and less students liked to self-assess, by the end of the term. Providing more feedback and offering suggestions on how to overcome the obstacles and weaknesses identified by students might have been valuable to counter these results. Lastly, the study reiterates the role of the teacher in helping students reflect, reminding the purpose of the practices and tools, giving success criteria and overall guiding students, as promoting learner autonomy is not a synonym of self-instruction.

KEYWORDS: autonomy, learner autonomy, self-assessment, reflection, young learners, learning goals, English as a foreign language.

Note: Throughout this report, the terms self-directedness and self-regulation are used as synonyms for autonomy.

Promovendo autonomia do aluno nas crianças: A autoavaliação como um meio para desenvolver estudantes mais independentes de inglês língua estrangeira no ensino primário

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RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo era analisar a eficácia da autoavaliação na promoção de autonomia nas crianças, e a investigação guiou-se pela seguinte questão: De que forma(s) é que a autoavaliação contribui para o aumento de autonomia nas crianças? Neste estudo participou uma turma de 25 alunos de Inglês língua estrangeira no 4.º ano escolar, durante um período de aproximadamente 2 meses e meio no primeiro período do ano letivo. Foi realizada uma investigação-ação de pequena escala, cuja metodologia consistiu em instrumentos de recolha de dados ambos quantitativos e qualitativos. Estes foram questionários, um diário da docente, bilhetes de saída para autoavaliação, e uma ficha de autoavaliação. O semáforo de autoavaliação e o sumário de reflexão para praticar a reflexão com os alunos também foram usados como práticas regulares. Ao longo do tempo, os alunos demonstraram uma habilidade crescente de reflexão e autoavaliação, sendo cada vez mais específicos ao identificarem os seus pontos fortes e pontos fracos, o que são sinais de aumento de autonomia. No entanto, os resultados demonstram também que, no final do estudo, mais alunos sentiam que a autoavaliação não os ajudava a reconhecer error nem melhorar como alunos. Mais alunos admitiram também que se sentiam um pouco stressados quando faziam a sua autoavaliação e menos alunos gostavam de fazer a sua autoavaliação. Dar mais feedback e oferecer sugestões sobre como ultrapassar os obstáculos e fragilidades identificadas pelos alunos poderia ter sido de valor para combater estes resultados. Por último, o estudo reitera o papel do professor em ajudar os alunos a refletir, a relembrar o propósito das práticas e dos materiais usados, a fornecer critérios para o sucesso, e, no geral, a guiar os alunos, uma vez que promover autonomia nos alunos não é sinónimo de auto-instrução.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: autonomy, learner autonomy, self-assessment, reflection, young learners, learning goals, inglês língua estrangeira.

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Introduction

1. Background to the study

Autonomy, as the "process of 'authoring' or 'shaping' one's own life" (Benson, 2012, p. 32) is part of human nature and it is crucial in a student's life, as it allows students to be involved in their own learning process and move in the direction of their objectives. Promoting independence in young learners while learning a foreign language is both helping them become autonomous learners and helping them learn the foreign language itself. Little (2007) suggests precisely this, affirming that "the development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency are not only mutually supporting but fully integrated with each other" (p. 14). So, autonomy can and should be developed among learners - language learners included – since, according to Little (2003), an autonomous student's learning is more efficient and effective because he takes his learning in a more personal and focused way. Yet, the fact that autonomy can also be promoted among young learners is often not considered. Although one might believe that primary children are too young to begin this process of becoming more independent by thinking about their learning and reflecting about themselves as learners, Ellis & Ibrahim (2015) advocate that "even very young children can be brought to reflect on their learning in a conscious way" (p. 13), and this reflection upon our own learning is crucial in the process of becoming more autonomous. My purpose is to understand how self-assessment, which "is based on the learner's developed capacity to reflect on his or her own knowledge, skills and achievement" (Little & Perclová, 2001, p. 57), has an impact on promoting autonomy in young learners.

2. Why this topic of work?

Since the beginning of my practice during the time where I was a trainee, self-assessment always appeared to me like something done in a very superficial way. I am conscious of the fact that in a "normal" teaching context it is very hard to find the time to dedicate to other things aside from teaching the contents on the school syllabus, especially as an English teacher with two hours a week with each class. This being said, I started to think: How can the use of self-assessment activities be increased in class? Would children be able to consciously self-assess? How much support would the teacher have to offer? Are these children even able to critically think about themselves as language learners? After reading more about self-assessment and reflection, I started to wonder about the impact it

could have in promoting more independent learners. I decided to dedicate my research to this subject, implementing it on young primary language learners.

3. Aims of my research

According to Burns (2010), action research has "the purpose of solving a problem or improving the teaching/learning process" (p. 5). The research question that guides my study is: In what way(s) does self-assessment contribute to an increase in autonomy in young learners? My main aim is to understand how self-assessment can promote autonomy in young learners. In parallel, it is also important to understand how reflection and self-assessment can be fostered in the classroom, on a regular basis, and the impact they have in children's learning. In other words, this research has the aim of investigating if self-assessment can improve the learning process of young learners by promoting autonomy.

This report is organized in two chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the literature review, where literature and studies related to the topic and concepts of my research are reviewed critically. Chapter 2 is the action research, which organizes all information regarding the context, methodology used, findings, and discusses the results and conclusions of this study.

1. Review of the literature

1.1. Introduction

This literature review is organised by thematic sections related to the most important concepts and practices of my research, the first one being *Autonomy*, which contains subsections called *Learner autonomy* and *Language learner autonomy*. The other three sections are, respectively, entitled *Self-assessment*, *Reflection* and *Learning goals*, with a brief conclusion at the end related to the purposes of my own research and how this literature will help me answer the question I posed: In what way(s) does self-assessment contribute to an increase in autonomy in young learners?

1.2. Autonomy

The first step in understanding how to promote autonomy in the classroom is to know exactly what autonomy is. According to Benson (2012), autonomy is a "process of 'authoring' or 'shaping' one's own life" that is intrinsic to the human condition, but that must be "acquired and maintained over the course of a lifetime" (p. 32). Little (2007) affirms that human beings are autonomous by nature, as well as proactive and persistent in "following the agendas we set for ourselves" (p. 17). Benson (2012) also supports the idea of personal autonomy being directly connected with autonomy in learning, and, in turn, with autonomy in language learning. Hence, the author stresses the role of education in teaching autonomy, since autonomy is something that students must learn.

1.2.1. Learner autonomy

Researchers have been debating learner autonomy and trying to define it for a long time. Holec (Holec 1981, cited in Benson, 2007, p. 22) firstly defined learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". This means that students can develop an ability to take an active role in their learning, which also means that this ability must be developed at school. However, if young learners are capable and willing of developing such an ability is a different matter. Little (2007) and Benson (2012) agree with the notion that it can be difficult to try to promote autonomy in young learners, since they are often accustomed to a passive role that, traditionally, educational institutions support, constraining autonomy behaviours which could lead students to being more autonomous in their personal life as well as their life as learners. Accordingly, research on this topic carried out by Inozu (2011) in a Turkish school but with older students of English as a foreign

language, concluded that students are, indeed, not used to having a very active role in the classroom, and, moreover, do not "find autonomy comfortable as it challenge[s] their passive role in learning" (p. 529).

Regarding this theme, some misconceptions must be approached. Little (2003) argues that learner autonomy is often wrongly confused with self-instruction. Now, especially dealing with young learners, self-instruction could never be possible. Promoting autonomous learners "does not exactly mean that students should be autonomous in their learning at all times in all situations" (Benson, 2012, p. 33). Rather, it is promoted by "offering students authentic experiences of autonomy in the teaching and learning process" (p. 33). Jang (2014) emphasizes the role of the teacher in guiding the learners to success, going back to the idea that, although autonomy is naturally present in humans, it is also taught in order to develop more independent learners. Accordingly, Najeeb (2013) also accentuates the role of the teacher in supporting the already existent sense of autonomy present in young learners, by giving them the tools and providing the classroom environment for its progressive development.

1.2.2. Language learner autonomy

Benson (2012) asserts language learner autonomy is entailed in learner autonomy, given learning is a social process mediated by language, and because self-expression and autonomy in language use are part of personal autonomy. Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2007) defined autonomy in relation to language learning as "[t]he competence to develop as self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation" (p. 1), which goes hand in hand with Benson's assertions, about the importance of being autonomous as a language learner and user. There is also a relation between the development of language learner autonomy and target language proficiency confirmed by Little (2007), who states "the development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency are not only mutually supporting but fully integrated with each other" (p. 14). Theory says that the involvement of learners in the management of their learning will sustain their intrinsic motivation, given they can direct their learning into things they are more interested in (Ellis & Ibrahim 2015, p. 22), and through strategies better suited for them. A similar argument in favour of language learner autonomy can be

found in Little (2007), which states learners who are autonomous will be learners who feel more motivated and fulfilled.

1.3. Self-assessment

Klenowski (1995) presents a definition of self-assessment as "the evaluation or judgement of 'the worth' of one's performance and the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses with a view to improving one's learning outcomes" (p. 146). Another definition of self-assessment is that "[s]elf-assessment is based on the learner's developed capacity to reflect on his or her own knowledge, skills and achievement" (Little & Perclová, 2001, p. 57), which highlights reflection as a key component in self-assessment.

Cameron (2001) points out several benefits that self-assessment brings for young learners (p. 235), including learners being more involved in their learning and being better prepared to continue learning outside the classroom, all signs of autonomy. But the notion that this isn't an immediate result of self-assessment is important, as this means knowing that taking responsibility for one's learning is a gradual process. Moreover, as suggested by Cameron (2001), although self-assessment can be a part of learning from the start, its results will most likely be observed at later stages. This means that immediate major changes in students' self-directedness will most likely not be observed, especially working with young learners, but it can be a first step into promoting more autonomy in these learners' futures.

Thus, self-assessment has the potential to increase students' autonomy in learning, but research on this topic is scarcer for younger learners due to the misconception that children are not capable of thinking and being accurate about their performance and learning. It is known that students in primary school do not show the metacognitive ability that, for example, older students do to properly reflect and self-assess, but this ability can start to be developed soon with young learners. However, Ellis & Ibrahim (2015) state that children can be confused with activities such as self-assessment and other activities related to learning to learn, and may not understand the purpose of these activities, which is why the teacher has a crucial role in informing the children about the purpose of these activities and how learners can succeed when performing them.

In theory, self-assessment can help children get a better understanding of what and how they are learning, as well as to monitor their progress as learners by identifying their strengths and weaknesses and knowing what to do to overcome those weaknesses (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Despite this, Ross (2006) raises awareness to the fact that self-assessment

can also have a negative impact, which can lead to students setting unrealistic goals, being unmotivated, exerting low effort, and making excuses for performance. Research conducted by Butler & Lee (2010) on a group of 254 young students of English as a foreign language between 11 and 12 years old in South Korea showed that the implemented self-assessment "had some marginal but positive effects on the students' foreign language learning and their confidence" (p. 27), but neither self-directedness or autonomy were mentioned. This research also demonstrated that the context in which students and teachers were immersed had a great impact on the outcomes of the research, and on the effectiveness of self-assessment.

On another perspective, Jang (2014) concludes that younger and lower-proficient learners usually have a more positive notion about their performance when doing self-assessment, but, as they grow older and acquire a higher level of language proficiency, as well as a more realistic understanding of their abilities, they tend to be harsher with themselves while doing their self-assessment. The development of metacognitive awareness has a big role here. Young learners are still developing their metacognitive awareness, which is why they are generally more optimistic, as well as less accurate when self-reflecting and self-assessing their efforts and achievements in language learning, while older students already have the capacity to look at these in a more realistic way, which might affect their motivation to become more autonomous. In fact, increasing autonomy can have very positive effects on young learners such as motivating them to be better and overcome their difficulties, but the notion about these difficulties can also have the opposite effect of discouragement and getting students unmotivated, although, as stated above, this tends to happen at later stages in the language learner's life.

1.4. Reflection

Reflection means "thinking about something in a conscious and focused way" (Little & Perclová, 2001, p. 45), and must be encouraged, on a regular basis, inside the classroom. Returning to the issue of learners being able, or not, to reflect and be critical upon their learning, Ellis & Ibrahim (2015) advocate that even young children can be brought to reflect upon their learning in a conscious way.

Reflection is a crucial part of my research, considering students must reflect in order to self-assess. Arter, Chappuis, Chappuis & Stiggins (2007) state that self-reflection, as something imperative for self-assessment, allows students to notice their strengths, which

can show students how far they have come and, in turn, motivates students to go further. Hence, this practice is helpful for learners to become more aware about their language learning process and to become more independent (Cameron, 2001). Students can "reflect on the content of learning, upon how they learn as well as to reflect on their own performance throughout a lesson and their contribution to the class" (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002, p. 56). Reflection and self-assessment go hand in hand, in the sense that "self-assessment is one of the inescapable outcomes of effective reflection" (Little & Perclová, 2001, p. 53). In agreement, Ellis & Ibrahim (2015) affirm that "self-assessment [is] about encouraging children to reflect on and make judgements about their (…) learning" (p. 16). In other words, in order to successfully and more accurately self-assess, students need to reflect upon themselves, their performance and their learning, and then draw conclusions from that reflection. But can reflection, aside from helping in the act of self-assessment, also enhance learning? Earl (2006) confirms it can, stating that when learners are encouraged to reflect about their learning and review their experiences of learning, their learning can be enhanced.

1.5. Learning goals

Setting goals can be and should be a subsequent step of self-assessment. In a chapter dedicated to goal setting, Cameron (2001) asserts that "[b]eing able to set realistic and useful goals for one's own language learning is one of the skills of autonomous learners and is part of the cycle that links self-assessment to learning" (p. 237), suggesting that this is also something young learners are able to do, with the necessary help from the teacher. Setting goals can be something done regularly in the classroom, but something learners can only do if they reflect about and assess their own learning (Little and Perclová, 2001). After evaluating students' strengths and weaknesses regarding a particular topic or activity, students are more able to make corrections upon the weaknesses identified. As suggested by Earl (2006), by engaging in a habit of reflection and self-assessment, learners are able to monitor their learning along the way, take action upon some weaknesses they identified, and, consequently, develop a positive view about challenging themselves as to be better learners.

1.6. Conclusion

Reviewing the literature leads back to the main question I am posing in my research: In what way(s) does self-assessment contribute to an increase in autonomy in young

learners? The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of self-assessment in students' self-directedness. Firstly, I aim to understand if self-assessment does, in fact, promote autonomy, then see if and how the methods I implemented had a positive effect in promoting autonomy, how learners responded to the methods implemented and see if there would be possibly more effective ways of developing self-assessment and reflection skills. Moreover, to see if students were able to take action after their self-assessment, as a result of identifying aspects to improve was also something of interest for my research. The literature reviewed here touches on concepts and theories crucial to answer these questions, considering it offers definitions, prospects, possible outcomes for my research and different views and research results related to my topic which can serve as terms of comparison with my own results and conclusions.

2. The action research

2.1. Context

A group of 25 (twenty-five) 4th year students, 14 boys and 11 girls from a state school in Parede, in Cascais, participated in this study. The children were between 8 and 9 years old, the large majority being 9 years old. Most of the learners were Portuguese, with the exception of three Brazilian children. Portuguese was the students' first language. One of the learners stood out from the others when speaking English, due to the fact that he lived in Australia for a while. There were 4 special educational needs students. In general, this was a very capable group of students, they were interested in the subject and many proved to be very skilful and competent. These learners had two hours of English per week, one hour each class, which was on Mondays and Wednesdays.

The school had several useful classroom resources, such as an interactive board, a writing board, a computer with access to the internet, printed flashcards, books, a printer, and materials needed for any craft work. The 4th grade English coursebook adopted for this class was *Smiles* (Dooley & Evans, 2016). The coursebook was complemented with other activities and materials from various other sources. Most of the content and topics for the first term were from the unit preceding unit 1. In agreement with this year's English *Aprendizagens essenciais* (DGE, 2018), listening and speaking skills were prioritized, and reading and writing skills were, usually, worked on before completing a particular topic, after listening and speaking skills were competent. Overall, activities were chosen and organized in a way that permitted meaningful and purposeful communication, in a learner centred approach. In relation to learner autonomy and self-reflection, the *Aprendizagens essenciais* (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2018) for this year suggested that learners must be able to set learning goals with the guidance of the teacher, to participate in activities of reflection and discussion about the activities carried out during the lesson and their purpose, as well as to do simple activities of self and peer assessment. The *Perfil do aluno* (Martins et al., 2017) also mentions personal development and autonomy, stressing the importance of processes which develop motivation, self-regulation, decision making, initiative and reflection in learners.

2.2. Obtaining consent

Consent was requested from the school director [Appendix A], the parents [Appendix B] and the students themselves [Appendix C], before starting the action research.

The children were made aware of what was going to happen during the term in relation to my research. A PowerPoint was used to explain the study to the children, its aims, what tools would be used in order to collect data, and other practices that would be implemented during the term. Students also had an opportunity to ask questions and clarify any doubts about the study. Only then the children's consent forms [Appendix C] were handed out and filled out with the guidance of the teacher, and the reassurance that the children's participation was completely voluntary. The information in both the children's consent forms and the PowerPoint was presented in a child-friendly and colourful manner, appealing to children their age. The students were excited to choose a code name for the study, as I explained their identity would not be public.

All the 25 students agreed to participate in the study, and delivered their legal guardians' permissions, which means I had consent to include all 25 students in the study. Even so, I decided to exclude one of the students from the research, due to his absence in many lessons.

2.3. Methodology

Classroom-based action research was the methodology used to collect data for this study. Burns (2010) describes action research as "a very valuable way to extend our teaching skills and gain more understanding of ourselves as teachers, our classrooms and our students" (p.1). Burns (2010) also explains that action research is important because it allows the teacher to subject practices to questioning, and then search and develop new ideas to bring about changes in areas that the teacher feels could be improved. This means that the teacher can be a researcher as well, and thus come up with solutions for gaps found in her teaching. When the gaps are identified, the teacher develops an action plan in order to investigate possible solutions for those problems, and analyse the outcomes to finally reach conclusions.

In this action research project, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data, namely questionnaires, the teacher's journal, exit tickets and self-assessment on oral presentation forms. Following the steps of action research that Burns (2010) describes, the first stage of the action research was planning, during September, when classes were merely observed and time was dedicated to establishing a positive relationship with the students. The second stage was during the rest of the term, from October to December. At this stage, the action plan was carried out and its outcomes were observed.

The last stage involved analysing the collected data and reflecting upon the results of the action research.

2.3.1. Classroom practices

Success criteria were given before introducing any self-assessment tools, and learners were reminded of it whenever necessary. Butler (2016) states, self-assessment "should be designed in such a way that learners can understand the goals of the tasks" (p. 305), to then be able to self-reflect. Success criteria was given by providing examples of successful self-assessment. For example, before introducing the exit tickets, students were shown how to use them and what to do before filling them: think about the activities we did during the lesson, think about something they were good at and one thing they felt more difficulty in, it could be anything, writing a word, saying a word, memorizing something, working with a friend, etc. During the course of the lessons, whenever I noticed students were not being specific enough, I reminded them of this process again.

Strategic questioning, as a tool for inviting students to think, encourage observation and create answers (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015), by also developing students' thinking skills, was used, on a regular basis and especially during reflection, as a guide for students' self-reflection. As will be mentioned later in the report, it was used with some students while filling their exit tickets as well, in order to help them locate their strengths and difficulties each lesson.

Feedback was provided, mostly, on the oral presentations, as a guide for students to do their self-assessment, mentioning voice levels, posture, preparation and pronunciation. As is mentioned later in the report, I believe more feedback should have been provided, especially after the students used their traffic lights and filled the exit tickets, mentioning solutions to the problems or weaknesses the students could identify. More about feedback will be mentioned on following sections of this report.

2.3.1.1.Encouraging reflection

Reflection moments were fostered in almost every lesson. These refer to moments when reflection upon activities were encouraged. Usually, this reflection happened at the end of the lessons, when teacher and students went over the activities done in that lesson, looking at the lesson topics on the board, which were written at the beginning of the lesson. Brewster, Ellis & Girard (2002) argue that asking children questions that encourage

observation and invite inquiry, as well as providing opportunities for recapping, revising and reviewing are both valuable for encouraging active reflection. This was the purpose of the reflective summary. When starting the term, it was made a routine that, by the end of the lesson, we ticked everything we did on the lesson topics, before the students wrote it on their notebooks. While doing this, the reflection procedure was guided by the teacher, who asked questions related to the type of activities done, how the students worked, what skills they used during each activity, and which activity the students preferred and why. Each of these questions was generally accompanied by gestures, which helped convey meaning. This process of reflection can "help pupils understand what they have been learning and why, it helps pupils perceive progress and helps them understand what they do and don't know so they can identify what to revise" (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002, p. 63). Some data from these reflection moments was collected by writing students' comments or teacher's thoughts about these on the teaching journal.

2.3.1.2.Self-assessment

Regarding the use of self-assessment, it was used in various formats, including self-assessment sheets based on the students' oral presentations [Appendix C], traffic lights which were used at the end of each lesson [Appendix D], and the exit tickets which students filled at the end of the lessons as well [Appendix E]. These materials had the purpose of asking young learners to assess how well they did on the activities, to help them see their progress and identify what steps they should take next.

The traffic lights (inspired on Teacher's Pet, n.d.) was a material the children started to use at the beginning of the term, at the end of the lessons. It was explained that this was part of their self-assessment. I thought it had great use for my research, since it implies reflection and self-assessment. It requires children to reflect upon their performance during the lesson and how comfortable they were with the language practiced, only then to choose and raise one of the traffic lights: green is for *I can do this!* which means students are very comfortable with the language; yellow is for *I am getting there!*, which means students have to dedicate a bit more time to practicing the language; and red is for *I need help!*, which means students are not comfortable with the language and need help to get there. The teacher's journal has some comments related to the use of the traffic lights, which can be seen in the results section.

2.3.2. Data collection tools

2.3.2.1.Questionnaires

Two questionnaires [Appendix G] were done during the term, one at the beginning and one at the end. The use of L2 in the questionnaires would have been confusing for the children, which is why they were written in L1. The questionnaires were identical, and the reason for this was to be able to compare the students' answers in the first and second questionnaire, and understand if, how, and why some answers had changed. Both questionnaires had 9 statements to which the students had to colour the smiley face that expressed their feelings and opinions towards self-assessment, by deciding between three options. Accordingly, Bell (2007) suggests that three or four answering options available is preferable for children younger than 11 years old, considering that survey research should merely be used with children from age 7. At the end of the questionnaires, I included an unfinished sentence, which students had to complete by writing what they thought. Dornyei (2003) mentions the value "open-format" items can have in a questionnaire, by explaining these "[permit] greater freedom of expression (…)" and they "(…) can provide a far greater "richness" than fully quantitative data" (p. 47).

The main purposes of these questionnaires were to, firstly, understand the learners' feelings towards English, secondly to see what learners thought about self-assessment and if they understood how to do it, thirdly to understand how they felt about self-assessment (if it helped them or not, and how it made them feel), and then to see if they acted upon their known weaknesses in English. Finally, the open sentence was to get students to think about why we self-assess. With the help of the teacher and with all doubts being clarified, the students filled the questionnaire. The results obtained from the questionnaires were organized in a table and analysed quantitatively. Regarding the open statement which students completed, I looked for common themes in which to classify the students' answers.

2.3.2.2.Self-assessment sheet after oral presentation

During the term, students prepared an oral presentation about an English speaking country of their choosing, after this content was learned. The students registered their name and date they would present on a poster, with the help of the teacher so that students were evenly distributed throughout the lessons. Approximately 3-4 children presented each lesson. The student who presented went to the front of the class, usually with a guide or a PowerPoint prepared.

After each student's oral presentation we had a brief discussion with the whole class, in which we discussed what the presentation was about, I asked some questions to check if students were paying attention and then we discussed what was good and what was not so good about the presentation, as a form of feedback. Only then did the student fill the self-assessment sheet, considering what we had discussed. I also regularly provided students with success criteria for their oral presentations, mainly mentioning posture, voice levels, the importance of previous preparation and the use of simple language students were familiar with, so that they could refrain from reading too much. This means students knew what was expected of them, and I believe this helped them do their self-assessment, as well as identify what could be improved.

The self-assessment sheet [Appendix D] was used only in one moment during the term, right after each learner's oral presentation. The objectives of this sheet were to see how capable and conscious students were to assess their own performance in an oral presentation, and how capable they were to identify weaknesses and possible improvements for future oral presentations. It included incomplete statements related to preparation, voice, posture and pronunciation, which students completed by painting the smiley face which expressed their opinion, or by circling the word they thought most adequate regarding their oral presentation. At the end of the sheet, there was an open question regarding how the students could improve, which is connected to setting goals for a next oral presentation. A second oral presentation was planned but was not possible to carry out during the term.

2.3.2.3.Exit tickets

The exit tickets [Appendix F] (inspired on Twinkl, n.d.) started to be used in the beginning of November and were filled almost every lesson until the end of the term. For my research, the main goal of the exit tickets was to notice if students were becoming able to identify their particular strengths and weaknesses each lesson.

Each student had to write one thing he/she did well or he/she learned that lesson, and one thing he/she still needed to work on or read up on. Specific examples were given on how to fill the exit tickets, by scaffolding some students into saying what they did well or learned that day, and what they felt more difficulty in that day. Thus, students knew what was expected of them. The young learners filled the exit tickets after we reflected upon the lesson and activities, after they used traffic lights, and before they tidied up. They were allowed to write in L1. Since the exit tickets were used as data collection tools, I looked for

common themes on the young learners' answers and organized them in a table, using percentages to present the results.

2.3.2.4. Teaching journal

I wrote on my teaching journal on a daily basis, reflecting upon the lesson and registering anything of value to my research. Moon (2006) describes a learning journal as a "vehicle for reflection" (p. 1), which can offer a sense of orientation or guidance to our learning. The journal was very helpful, not only to learn from my experiences as a trainee teacher, by integrating a reflective component to those experiences, but also to organize elements related to my research. As Moon (2006) explains, there are various purposes for journal writing, but mine was mainly used to enhance reflective practice and to support planning and progress in my research. The journal was analysed by looking for comments which were pertinent for my research and supported any of my affirmations regarding the results of my research. All the data on reflection and the use of traffic lights, which were recorded by written comments, can be found on the teaching journal.

2.4. Results

In this section, the results of my action research will be presented, analysing the data collected from the different tools used with the purpose of answering my research question: In what way(s) does self-assessment contribute to an increase in autonomy in young learners? In the first subsection, the first questionnaire and second questionnaire will be analysed, which had the main purpose of getting to know how students felt about self-assessment and their opinion about its importance at the beginning and then at the end of the research. Other subsections include the comments collected from my teaching journal in relation to the practices implemented, such as reflection and the use of traffic lights, followed by the exit tickets and, lastly, the self-assessment sheet that followed students' oral presentation.

2.4.1. Questionnaires

The first methodology implemented after the letters of consent were gathered and students were informed about my research was the first questionnaire [Appendix G], filled on the 3rd of November. The second questionnaire [Appendix G], filled on the 15th of December, was the last data tool used. As I've previously mentioned, the first and second questionnaires were identical, since the purpose was to compare students' answers at the

beginning and at the end of the research. These were important to, essentially, understand the young learners' awareness regarding how to do their self-assessment and its importance, as well as understand how it made them feel.

Before analysing the tables, it is important to mention that in the past, the students had done self-assessment in this subject in the traditional way, at the end of a unit by ticking boxes or colouring faces on "can do" statements, related to the content and skills practiced on that particular unit. In addition, at this stage of the term, the students had already been using the traffic lights, which is a self-assessment tool. The following table presents the students' answers to both questionnaires one and two. 24 questionnaires were analysed for this data. On this table, if the addition of percentages does not add up to 100%, that means not all students responded to that question, leaving it blank or unclear. This happened, for example, in question 6.

Table 1

Students' responses to the first and second questionnaires

Questions	First questionnaire: students' answers (%) N=24			Second questionnaire: students' answers (%) N=24		
	Agree	More or less agree	Don't agree	Agree	More or less agree	Don't agree
1. I like English	58 (14)	38 (9)	4 (1)	67 (16)	29 (7)	4 (1)
2. I can recognize the mistakes I make in English	38 (9)	58 (14)	4 (1)	42 (10)	50 (12)	8 (2)
3. I know how to self-assess	79 (19)	17 (4)	4 (1)	88 (21)	8 (2)	4 (1)
4. I like to do my self-assessment	88 (21)	8 (2)	4 (1)	75 (18)	25 (6)	0 (0)
5. I think self-assessment helps me understand what I can improve	54 (13)	38 (9)	8 (2)	67 (16)	17 (4)	13 (3)
6. For me, self-assessment:						
is stressful	4 (1)	13 (3)	75 (18)	8 (2)	25 (6)	67 (16)
helps me improve	46 (11)	42 (10)	13 (3)	67 (16)	17 (4)	17 (4)
doesn't help me at all	4 (1)	17 (4)	71 (17)	4 (1)	17 (4)	75 (18)

7. When I know I have a difficulty in English, I try to overcome it	58 (14)	17 (4)	21 (5)	75 (18)	13 (3)	8 (2)

Open sentence 8. In my opinion, we self-assess because…	First questionnaire: Students' answers (%) N=24	Second questionnaire: Students' answers (%) N=24
The teacher needs us to do it to help us/ to assess us	17 (4)	33 (8)
It helps us understand what we can improve and/or what we are good at	33 (8)	42 (10)
It helps us learn English/ to improve our English (speaking, reading or writing)	17 (4)	17 (4)
I don't know/blank	29 (7)	4 (1)
Unclear	4 (1)	4 (1)

Comparing the first and second questionnaires, we can see that, over time, the number of students who liked English slightly increased. Although I was expecting a more noticeable increase, given activities carried out during our lessons were planned in order to be fun and interesting for the students, these numbers were still satisfactory. Although the number of students who affirm to being able to recognize the mistakes made in English increased, so did the number of students who say they cannot recognize them. I now understand how that is a very difficult question to ask young learners, and, in fact, any learner. Especially considering the fact feedback was not sufficiently provided for students to be able to recognize mistakes. In turn, I could have asked if students could recognize some weaknesses, which, provided I scaffolded students and offered regular feedback during the term, the answers may have been different. Instead, we can see how the answers on the second question did not diverge significantly between the first and second questionnaire. I also wanted to know how familiar students were with self-assessment, and if they enjoyed doing their self-assessment, to which the large majority of learners gave a positive response in the first questionnaire. This means that students were, in general, familiar with self-assessment and liked doing it. Although self-assessment was carried this

term in different ways than students were used to, at least they had the foundations for doing so.

The answers to the third statement in the second questionnaire indicate that, overall, students felt more confident in doing their self-assessment. The numbers in question 5 show that some students did not feel like self-assessment was something fun or interesting anymore. This was surprising, since I thought self-assessment to be a fun moment for them, when they could use different materials as well as share their thoughts about themselves as learners. Students were also more certain if self-assessment could help them or not, since the number of students who answered "more or less agree" decreased. More students stated self-assessment helped them understand what they could improve, but this also happened with the number of students who said they did not agree with the statement. This may happen because, when students completed the second questionnaire, they had a better understanding of self-assessment and what it involves, so their answers were more realistic than on the first questionnaire. Nonetheless, although some answered self-assessment did not help them understand what they could improve, their exit tickets showed the contrary. Such results will be shown in a following section. The answers on statement 6 were very intriguing, given the number of students who felt stressed or more or less stressed when doing their self-assessment slightly increased from the first to the second questionnaire, against my expectations. I think this has to do with the fact that many students felt like their self-assessment was done for the teacher, instead of being a tool for themselves to benefit from, which can be observed on their answers to the open sentence. However, the increase of the number of students who acknowledged self-assessment helped them improve was significant. The numbers also show that students made an effort to surpass the difficulties they identified, given a striking 75% of learners said they tried to overcome their difficulties, compared to the 58% who did in the first questionnaire. Still, 8% of students seem to not feel the motivation to do so. Benson (2007) states that "it is motivation that precedes autonomy" (p.29), and this means that if students do not have the motivation to learn, they cannot become autonomous learners. Giving students more control and or choice, over the type of activities done during the term could have helped them become more motivated, as they would feel more responsible and in control over the existence of an "interesting" or "fun" component in those activities that usually motivates young learners, and more responsible for the successful outcome of that activity.

Regarding the open question, the first positive conclusion is that the percentage of students who did not know what to answer decreased drastically. This is a result of the fact they had the opportunity to experience self-assessment, thus now they were more certain of what to answer. From the first to the second questionnaire there was also an increase in the number of students who felt like self-assessment helped them identify what they were good at and what they could improve. However, what most surprised me was that there was a significant increase in the percentage of students who thought self-assessment was important for the teacher, instead of being important for them. If the young learners thought that they were doing self-assessment for the teacher's use, this can justify the fact that more students felt stressed when self-assessing, by the end of the research. Although learners were regularly reminded of the purpose of the self-assessment tools we used, it is legitimate that they think the teacher needed these to know the students' understanding of what was taught each lesson, in order to help them in what they needed. In fact, this can be one of the uses of student self-assessment by the teacher.

2.4.2. Teaching jornal

2.4.2.1.Reflective summary

The reflective summary is a practice I had been implementing since becoming a trainee, given it is a valuable moment to get students thinking about what, how and why certain activities were carried out, which ultimately helps them become more aware of what they were best at and where they could improve.

> This lesson confirmed that reflection is crucial before asking students to do their self-assessment. Going through the lesson topics and getting students to think about the activities, skills used and how they worked definitely helps the students to do their self-assessment using the traffic lights and exit tickets, since they have everything done during the lesson more mentally present. (Teaching journal, 24nd November, 2021)

This was a decisive practice in order to help students successfully self-assess and identify their strengths and weaknesses each lesson. In lessons when time was not sufficient to do the reflective summary or it was done very superficially and students were still asked to do their self-assessment, their ability to do so slightly decreased, and students showed more difficulty in identifying their strengths and weaknesses that lesson when using the exit tickets. For example, reflection was done very superficially on the 15th of November due to

lack of time. On tables 2 and 3 present on the section dedicated to the exit tickets, we can see that the percentage of students who were not able to respond on the exit tickets, or mentioned something unrelated to that lesson or something unspecific were higher than in any other day.

> Time was not sufficient to carry out reflection today. Students started filling the exit tickets as it's part of their routine now, so I let them. They seemed less able to answer them compared to the previous lesson, even though I reminded their purpose and how to use them. Answers were, overall, very general. (Teaching journal, 15th November, 2021)

2.4.2.2. Traffic lights

As previously stated, students used their traffic lights to self-assess their performance and level of comfort regarding the specific contents of each lesson. This tool was used almost every lesson. When the exit tickets were introduced, the traffic lights preceded them, so that students could first reflect about their learning each lesson first in a general way, and then in a more specific way. Since the first lessons using the traffic lights, students demonstrated some self-awareness:

> Most students show a certain level of self-awareness. Weaker students are usually harsher when using their traffic lights, while stronger and most participant students tend to show the green light when displaying their traffic lights. (Teaching journal, 11th October, 2021)

Despite this self-awareness, students showed the red light very rarely, which is normal with children this age, who are more optimistic in comparison with older students. Some students could also feel embarrassed of showing the red light, or even the yellow, since I noticed students looked at each other's traffic lights when it was time to use them.

> Today I reminded that there are no right or wrong answers when using the traffic lights, and that students must try to be honest. At least Isa and Lua waited for other students to answer before they did. I believe this is because some students might be a bit judgemental when looking at other students' answers. (Teaching journal, 18th October, 2021)

However, this was not a major issue, as, with more practice, students became more accustomed to using the traffic lights, and more confident when using it.

Isa displayed her green traffic light today, which is unusual. Although she is very shy and a weaker student, she did very well during the kahoot activity and was participative. She was aware of how positive that was and looked proud when showing her green light. (Teaching journal, 8th November, 2021)

The traffic lights, which appeared to be the students' favourite tool for self-assessment, became a very important part of the ending of our lessons. Students were always excited to use it. Its seemed to be not only fun for the students, but also a tool that compelled them to self-reflect and analyse their behaviour, participation, and overall understanding of the lesson.

Today we did not have time to use the traffic lights and exit tickets. Students seemed disappointed by this, as some were already prepared to use their traffic lights, and when I explained we would not use them, almost in unison they muttered a disappointed "ooooh". (Teaching journal, 6th December)

2.4.3. Exit tickets

The exit tickets started to be used by students in the beginning of November. After the first lessons using the exit tickets, and as I analysed students' answers, I noticed some issues:

I must regularly remind the purpose of the exit tickets and give examples on how to complete them. I can see students often copy something random from the lesson topics, as well as write things related to content from previous lessons. (Teaching journal, 29th November, 2021)

Since the purpose of the exit tickets was to reflect on strengths and difficulties felt in each lesson, I had to regularly remind students of this. The lesson topics remained on the board until the end of the lesson, and I am convinced a few students sometimes copied something random from it due to comments such as "oral presentations" as one thing that student did well/learned today, when that student had not presented that day. This must have to do with the fact that students were eager to go outside play, and simply wanted to do it as fast as possible. When I noticed this happening, I tried to help the student reflect in a meaningful way. Something I could have done to improve the use of the exit tickets, would have been to involve students in the selection of the exit tickets, since involving students in the process of choosing materials might have made them feel more responsible for its successful use (Little & Perclová, 2001).

Apart from informing my instruction, the exit tickets, if used consistently, could help the students see progress as well. When having a look at the exit tickets after the lessons, I looked for shared weaknesses the students identified, and tried to provide feedback on them next lesson, or opportunities for students to surpass those difficulties. For example, on a lesson when numbers were learned and students did some sums, some learners confessed they had to work on doing sums in English, so that was what we practiced more the following lesson. However, this was not done every lesson.

Tables 2 and 3 shows the students' answers on the exit tickets, on one thing they did well or learned that day, and on one thing they still needed to work on or read up on. I analysed the exit tickets and picked common themes on the students' answers.

Table 2

Students' answers on "One thing they did well/learned today"

Themes on students' answers on *One thing they did well/learned today*	Students' answers on days the exit tickets were filled (%)					
	8/11	15/11	17/11	22/11	24/11	29/11
Pronunciation of a word/ some words		14 (3)		5 (1)	5 (1)	10 (2)
Memorizing some vocabulary	33 (7)	5 (1)	18 (4)	20 (4)	76 (16)	60 (12)
Listening something/comprehending		9 (2)	5 (1)	5 (1)		
Speaking/saying something	33 (7)	14 (3)	14 (3)	20 (4)		5 (1)
Reading something				25 (5)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Writing something			5 (1)			
A content of that lesson. Ex: "recycling", "test", "revision", (something unspecific)	14 (3)	45 (10)	22 (5)	5 (1)		
Participating		5 (1)				5 (1)
Working in pairs/groups			9 (2)		10 (2)	5 (1)
A way of thinking related to a discussion had on that lesson			5 (1)	5 (1)		

Something unrelated to that lesson	5 (1)	9 (2)	9 (2)	10 (2)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Blank	14 (3)		14 (3)	5 (1)		5 (1)
Total number of students who answered each day	21	22	22	20	21	20

Table 3

Students' answers on "One thing they still need to work on/read up on"

Themes on students' answers on *One thing they still need to work on /read up on*	Students' answers on days the exit tickets were filled (%)					
	8-11	15-11	17-11	22-11	24-11	29-11
Pronunciation of a word/ some words			5 (1)		24 (5)	15 (3)
Memorizing some vocabulary	29 (6)	27 (6)	18 (4)	15 (3)	14 (3)	10 (2)
Listening something/comprehending	5 (1)	5 (1)				5 (1)
Speaking/saying something	24 (5)		9 (2)	15 (3)		15 (3)
Reading something	9 (2)		9 (2)	15 (3)	5 (1)	10 (2)
Writing something	5 (1)		5 (1)	10 (2)	14 (3)	
A content of that lesson. Ex: "recycling", "test", "revision", (something unspecific)	5 (1)	14 (3)	27 (6)			
Participating	5 (1)			5 (1)		
Working in pairs/groups					5 (1)	10 (2)
Something unrelated to that lesson		14 (3)	9 (2)	20 (4)	19 (4)	15 (3)
Blank/nothing/unclear	19 (4)	41 (9)	18 (4)	20 (4)	19 (4)	20 (4)
Total number of students who answered each day	21	22	22	20	21	20

As we can observe, not all 24 students who I considered for this research responded to the exit tickets everyday, either because they missed a lesson or because they had to leave

before the lesson ended. Therefore, the percentages are presented according to the number of students who answered that day, which we can verify at the end of each table.

By comparing the two tables, we can conclude that it was harder for students to identify something from each lesson that they still needed to work on, given more students either left that part unanswered or referred to something unrelated to that lesson. However, on both tables we can see that, with time, students were able to progressively be more and more specific on the strengths and weaknesses they felt during the lesson. Although the number of students who did not mention one thing they still needed to work on did not significantly decrease (Table 3), the number of students who did not mention one thing they did well/learned today (Table 2) did decrease from the first lessons using the exit tickets to the last. Again, this means that students were becoming both comfortable with this form of self-assessment and more able to identify what they learnt and what they still needed to work on. Being able to identify strengths and weaknesses independently is a form of learner autonomy. I believe that, with more time and guidance, more students would be able to determine what was their major difficulty felt in each lesson.

In general, most of the students showed an increasing ability to successfully fill the exit tickets, which usually consisted of being more and more specific about their strengths and weaknesses related to each lesson. For example, student Pennywise showed a surprising increase of self-awareness, given the fact that when he first used the exit tickets, his answer was very unspecific on one thing he did well, and he did not say one thing he still needed to work on, and on the last lesson using the exit tickets he very well identified he was good in a "speaking in pairs" activity, and still needed to work more on "spelling", which was, indeed, a weakness of his. However, there were still students who could not understand the purpose of the exit tickets, and, as the lessons progressed, they were still not able to successfully identify strengths and weaknesses. A closer monitoring of these students while filling the exit tickets could have helped, as well as using strategic questioning with them. Two more examples of students' answers that support these affirmations are provided in the following table. Most answers were translated.

Table 4

Students Glitter and Koala's answers on their exit tickets

Date	Student Glitter		Student Koala	
	One thing I did well/learned today	**One thing I still need to work on/read up on**	**One thing I did well/learned today**	**One thing I still need to work on/read up on**

8/11	"I learned new words"	"Don't know how to speak in English or how to write"	"Ordinal numbers"	"flags"
15/11	"Recycling"	---	"Ordinal numbers"	"Countries"
17/11	"Agreeing with the ideas of others"	"Learning to write faster"	"Countries"	"Recycling"
22/11	"Paying attention to others presenting"	"Voice volume"	"Countries"	"Seasons of the year"
24/11	"School subjects"	---	"Numbers"	"School subjects"
29/11	(Did not come to class this day)		"Numbers"	"Seasons of the year"

As we can see, student Glitter starts by writing very general types of comments, essentially saying she has trouble with everything. This was a student who lacked a bit of confidence and motivation in this subject, and that is perceptible in her first comments. However, on the 17th and 22nd she is clearer about what she was best at, and what was harder for her. For example, on the 17th the students were organized in groups to practice for a presentation the next lesson, so she said that she was good in "agreeing with the ideas of others", which is an important skill when working in groups where several people have different ideas. Glitter also said she needed to work on writing faster. She must have felt behind on a writing exercise we did this lesson and realized this was a weakness of hers. In contrast, although student Koala was a good student and participative, either she did not understand the purpose of the exit tickets or did not feel motivated to use them, given her answers were very general and many times unrelated to that lesson. As the table shows, she repeated the same answers on different lessons, for example, on the 17th and 22nd, but this did not fill the purpose of the exit tickets, which was to identify particular strengths and weaknesses felt each lesson.

2.4.4. Self-assessment sheet after students' oral presentation

Learners were asked to reflect upon their oral presentation, based on a sheet handed out to them [Appendix D], which they completed almost immediately after their oral presentation. The following table concerns the students' responses in the self-assessment sheet. 21 of these sheets were collected, as the remaining students did not present during the time of my research. In addition, on the second and last questions (number 2 and 6), students were allowed to mention more than one aspect.

Table 5

Students' answers on their oral presentation self-assessment sheet

Questions	Students' answers (%) N=21		
	No	So so	Yes!
1. I prepared my oral presentation	5 (1)	24 (5)	71 (15)

Questions	Students' answers (%)			
	quietly	loudly	fast	slowly
2. I spoke…	24 (5)	38 (8)	10 (2)	48 (10)

Questions	Students' answers (%)			
	Not so good	So so	Good	Very good
3. My posture was…		14 (3)	48 (10)	38 (8)
4. My English was…		19 (4)	67 (14)	14 (3)
5. I think my oral presentation was…		19 (4)	33 (7)	48 (10)

Open sentence: 6. How can I improve?	Students' answers (%)
Voice level	10 (2)
Pronunciation of some words	43 (9)
Mind state (be calmer, less nervous)	10 (2)
Speaking slower	5 (1)
Posture (looking at friends and reading less)	14 (3)
Improving reading (practicing this skill)	10 (2)
Extending the presentation (writing more)	5 (1)
Writing (avoid spelling errors)	5 (1)
Presenting without help from the teacher	5 (1)
Unspecific (ex.: "learn English"/ "improve English")	19 (4)

What the tables, and particularly the answers to the open question show in relation to learner autonomy is that the majority of learners could be specific about an aspect, or more than one aspect that could be improved in order for future oral presentations to be better, which is a sign of self-regulation. For example, student Ricudô read a lot during his presentation and mispronounced several words. Ricudô then stated on the open question "I have to improve my pronunciation and my posture". Another student, Luca, who was a bit shy and therefore spoke very quietly, stated he could improve by "Speaking louder". Yet, 19% of students were not very specific about what could be improved on their oral presentation, stating things such as "I can improve my English" or "learn English". Either these students were not sure how to explain themselves or they did not know what to answer. Strategic questioning and scaffolding could have helped them be more specific. In future practice, that is what I would have done. A second oral presentation followed by self-assessment would offer this research a better understanding of the impact this self-assessment had on learner autonomy.

2.5. Discussion and conclusion

2.5.1. Brief summary of the research and discussion on findings

With this study I hoped to answer the question "In what way(s) does self-assessment contribute to an increase in autonomy in young learners?". My action research was developed with a group of twenty-five 4th year students between 8 and 9 years old. It started in October and ended in December of 2021, and the main objective of the research was to understand how self-assessment could increase young learners' autonomy. I used two questionnaires, my teaching journal, exit tickets and self-assessment forms as tools for my study, including reflective practice and the use of traffic lights as regular classroom practices.

From day 1, reflection was made a routine at the end of the lesson, by using a reflective summary to get students thinking about what and how they learned. This proved to be very important to subsequently get students to self-reflect. Two identical questionnaires were completed by the students, one at the beginning of the research and one at the end. These showed that, by the end of the research, students were more familiar with self-assessment and its processes, as well as more able to recognize their own mistakes. More students also stated they tried to act upon weaknesses identified. Nonetheless, some

results from the questionnaires were surprising, given that, from the first to the second questionnaire, there was also an increase in the number of learners who felt that self-assessment did not help them recognize mistakes, and did not help them improve as learners. The number of students who affirmed liking to self-assess decreased and more students confessed to becoming a bit stressed when self-assessing. These results imply that many students might have benefited from self-assessment in the sense that it helped them identify problems in order to act upon them, but some might have felt discouraged by not seeing any results. As I suggested previously, the fact that some students felt this might have to do with the results observed from their answers to the open sentence, which shows many students thought their self-assessment was particularly important for the teacher. Something I think could have helped self-assessment be less stressful for some children as well as guide them to the understanding that this was something meant to help them, would have been to discuss some of their answers on the exit tickets with them, without mentioning names, and offer suggestions on how to overcome some obstacles. Self-assessment was done, during this term, in a very different way, as well as much more difficult and demanding on these young learners' cognitive and metacognitive skills, comparing to what they were used to. Especially dealing with young learners, it is important to recognize that self-assessment is not an easy task, and it is even more difficult if the amount of feedback is not enough, and I have recognized to being the case. However, feedback was provided, and it had the most meaningful impact on the learners' self-assessment on their oral presentation, helping students to focus on what was more problematic. In the future, and if I used the exit tickets and traffic lights again, I would provide more regular feedback on these, to help students identify what they were having problems with, as well as help them find solutions to these problems. Additionally, scaffolding the learners' understanding of self-assessment more closely during the term could have also helped them gain a better understanding of the purpose of self-assessment and how they could use it to their advantage.

Overall, the traffic lights demonstrated students' awareness about their performance and understanding about each lesson. Stronger and most participant students seemed to show the green light more often, while weaker students usually showed the yellow light. The purpose of the exit tickets was often forgotten by students, which justifies the fact that some students left blank spaces or wrote something very general and unclear. As lessons went by and reflection was fostered, and I reminded students about the exit tickets' purpose, students became more and more specific when answering, especially on one thing they did

well or learned that day. Even though students needed the teacher to insist on the purpose of the exit tickets, it is evident that learners showed more autonomy over time, by displaying a gradual increasing ability to self-assess and identify strengths and weaknesses. This is, again, an indicator of increasing autonomy. Lastly, I hoped to have time for a second oral presentation, which would have been an opportunity for me, as well as students, to see their progress. A second oral presentation would have allowed me to analyse if the students tried to improve the weaknesses identified on their oral presentation self-assessment sheet. This was not possible, but the majority of students proved to be aware of their mistakes and weaknesses when filling the sheet.

As an answer to my research question, I can say that self-assessment plays a role in promoting learner autonomy in young learners, in the way that it encourages them and gives them opportunities to locate strengths and weaknesses, which ultimately can lead to motivation and self-improvement, these being marks of self-regulation and autonomy.

2.5.2. What I learned

This research allowed me to see how important self-assessment and reflection can be for young language learners and what it can mean for their future life as learners. Being able to reflect upon oneself, locate strengths and weaknesses is crucial for self-improvement, as well as taking an active role in surpassing one's weaknesses.

Because I had a great class, my expectations were very high concerning the outcomes of this study. However, it is important to acknowledge that these are, in fact, children, and time was not nearly enough for major changes to be observed, as mentioned in the beginning of this report. Any small changes observed in my students were also small joys and discoveries for me, as not only a teacher trainee but as a teacher and researcher with my own first group of students. Although these changes were more prominently observed in some students than others, I strongly believe that, with more time, this could be observed in all students, some just need more time than others, since learner autonomy is not something that grows overnight.

2.5.3. Importance of this research for other primary classrooms

It is important to take into consideration the fact that this was research conducted in a particular context, with a particular group of students. The results of the research might vary with different classes. This being said, it was demonstrated that students showed an increasing ability to self-assess during the time of my study, and that reflection and the

increase of students' metacognition played an important role in this. The use of the exit tickets proved to be a helpful tool for learners to record their own achievements as well as weaknesses felt each lesson, and these confirmed an existing potential in increasing learner autonomy, since learners showed a gradual increasing ability in identifying specific strengths and weaknesses about themselves as language learners, which are signs of self-regulation.

The students perceived the traffic lights as a very fun self-assessment tool, which they were excited to use every lesson. It was also a tool that preceded the exit tickets for a reason: for example, if a student used the yellow light, then he must think about why he used it, what was it that he did not fully achieve yet? Then he must write that on the ticket. These self-assessment tools were also, as we can see, very adequate to use on a daily basis and could be part of the routine of any primary English class, as a means to develop reflection and self-assessment skills, and therefore gradually promote more autonomous learners, able to take an active role on their learning.

2.5.4. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Time was definitely a factor that prevented the observation of more visible results of self-assessment for promoting learner autonomy. Butler (2016) highlights the fact that "young learners are capable of monitoring their knowledge when they are provided with sufficient training" (p. 305), so time is crucial for self-monitoring and self-directedness to show signs. Now that I have finished my action research, I think it is also beneficial to consider any adjustments that could have been made, and alternatives that could have improved the collection of data and possibly the results of my study. Because open questions provide with much richer information than closed ones, I now think that the second questionnaire could have had another open question/statement asking if students believed self-assessment helped them improve. I also think I would have provided more and closer feedback to my learners, which I believe would have helped them see a bigger purpose in self-assessment, despite being aware that providing individual feedback is not an easy task. In addition, it was part of my plan to get students to have 2 opportunities for oral presentation in order to observe if the goals they set after the first oral presentation were achieved, given learning goals can be a direct outcome of self-assessment. This being said, I suggest analysing if students are able to set learning goals based on their self-assessment and analyse if those goals are achieved as an interesting topic for future researchers to study in relation to promoting learner autonomy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of consent to school director

Carta de Consentimento para o Diretor do Agrupamento

Caro Diretor do Agrupamento de Escolas de Parede,

O meu nome é Ana León e estou a estagiar na <u>Escola Básica Afonso do Paço</u> durante o 1.º período do ano letivo 2021/2022.

Pretendo completar 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. Para tal, estou a conduzir um projeto de investigação intitulado "Promoting learner autonomy in young learners: Self-assessment as a means to develop more independent primary learners of English as a foreign language" (Promovendo autonomia nas crianças: Autoavaliação como um meio para desenvolver alunos mais independentes de inglês língua estrangeira).

O projeto decorrerá entre setembro e dezembro de 2021, durante o período de estágio. Assim, venho por este meio solicitar a sua autorização para poder recolher os dados que necessito, que posteriormente serão apresentados no meu relatório final de mestrado. Entre a metodologia que será utilizada para recolher os dados estão questionários, notas escritas do professor, observação em sala de aula e uma entrevista informal entre professor e alunos, cujo áudio será gravado. **A identidade das crianças, instituição e funcionários será mantida anónima no relatório final.**

Peço que me contacte caso lhe surjam questões, estou ao seu dispor para qualquer esclarecimento.

Lisboa, 15 de Setembro de 2021
Ana Araújo León

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Orientadora de Estágio FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

✂ -

Eu, _____ , diretor do agrupamento de escolas de Parede, declaro que fui informado(a) dos objetivos do projeto intitulado "Promoting learner autonomy in young learners: Self-assessment as a means to develop more independent primary learners of English as a foreign language" (Promovendo autonomia nos jovens alunos: Autoavaliação como um meio para desenvolver alunos mais independentes de inglês língua estrangeira) e autorizo a estagiária a fazer o seu projeto de investigação na <u>Escola Básica Afonso do Paço</u>.

Data: Assinatura do diretor:

_____   _____

Appendix B: Letter of consent to parents

Carta de consentimento para pais e encarregados de educação

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Ana León e serei a professora de Inglês do seu educando durante o primeiro período deste ano letivo 2021/2022. Sou aluna 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. Neste ano letivo que se inicia, irei conduzir um estudo intitulado "Promoting learner autonomy in young learners: Self-assessment as a means to develop more independent primary learners of English as a foreign language" (Promovendo autonomia nas crianças: Autoavaliação como um meio para desenvolver alunos mais independentes de inglês língua estrangeira), para fazer o relatório final de estágio do Mestrado. Pretendo guiar os meus alunos a terem mais consciência acerca do seu processo de aprendizagem de inglês. A autoavaliação pode ajudá-los a perceber os aspetos positivos do seu desempenho nas atividades, e aqueles que ainda necessitam de ser trabalhados para poderem ser melhores nas próximas vezes, promovendo, assim, alunos mais motivados e envolvidos na sua aprendizagem.

Dito isto, venho pedir a vossa autorização para poder incluir o vosso educando no estudo. Este decorrerá entre os meses de setembro e dezembro de 2021, e, durante estes meses, os educandos irão realizar alguns questionários, passar por vários momentos de autoavaliação, e responder a uma entrevista informal acerca deste mesmo tópico. É importante referir que, durante esta entrevista, apenas as suas vozes serão gravadas. A participação neste estudo é voluntária, e os alunos têm a liberdade de decidir deixar de participar a qualquer momento. Além disso, os alunos permanecerão anónimos e podem escolher um nome fictício para a sua participação no estudo, uma vez que os seus nomes verdadeiros nunca serão usados. A informação recolhida estará presente no relatório final de estágio do mestrado acima referido e poderá, eventualmente, ser usada em conferências e artigos académicos.

Estou disponível para responder a qualquer questão. Agradeço que me conceda a autorização que permite participação do seu educando neste estudo o mais breve possível, para me ser possível começar a investigação.

Lisboa, 15 de Setembro de 2021

Ana Araújo León

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Eu, _____, encarregado de educação do aluno _____, declaro que estou informado acerca dos objetivos do estudo "Promoting learner autonomy in young learners: Self-assessment as a means to develop more independent primary learners of English as a foreign language", e autorizo o meu educando a participar no dito estudo.

Data:

Assinatura do encarregado de educação:

_____   _____   35

Carta de consentimento para os alunos

Olá meninos e meninas! Aqui fala a vossa professora Ana. Venho fazer-vos um convite. Como sabem, vou ser a vossa professora de Inglês durante o primeiro período (desde setembro até dezembro). Durante este tempo, vou estar a fazer um estudo sobre como a autoavaliação pode ajudar os alunos a aprender inglês. Isto significa que quero ajudar-vos a conseguirem perceber o que correu bem nas atividades que fazemos nas nossas aulas e o que podem melhorar para aprender mais inglês.

Tal como vocês, os professores também estão sempre a aprender, e é por isso que estou a fazer este estudo: para aprender mais sobre os meus alunos. Por isso, durante as nossas aulas, vamos fazer várias atividades de autoavaliação, vou tomar notas, pedir-vos para responder a alguns questionários sobre a autoavaliação, e fazer-vos umas perguntinhas. No final, vou escrever um relatório com toda a informação que recolhi.

Podes decidir se queres ou não participar neste estudo. A professora Ana não vai usar os vossos nomes verdadeiros, por isso, se quiseres, podes até escolher um outro nome que gostes! (Sê criativo! Pode ser o nome de um animal, uma personagem que gostes, de um planeta, etc). Podes também deixar de participar a qualquer momento, basta falares comigo ou com os teus pais ou encarregado de educação. Os teus pais/ encarregado de educação também já sabem sobre este estudo, por isso estás à vontade para fazer todas as perguntinhas que tiveres. Podes perguntar aos teus pais/ encarregados de educação ou a mim!

Então, queres participar neste projeto? Pinta a carinha que corresponde à tua resposta:

Quero participar	☺
Não quero participar	☹

O nome que escolhi para o estudo é: _____

Data: _____

Assinatura do aluno: _____
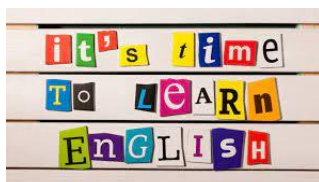
Appendix D: Oral presentation self-assessment sheet

My oral presentation

Name:
Date:

My oral presentation was about: _____

I prepared my oral presentation

	No	So so	Yes!
	☹	😐	☺

I spoke…

quietly	loudly	fast	slowly

My posture was…

Not so good	So so	Good	Very good
☹	😐	☺	☺

My English was…

Not so good	So so	Good	Very good
☹	😐	☺	☺

I think my oral presentation was…

Not so good	So so	Good	Very good
☹	😐	☺	😃
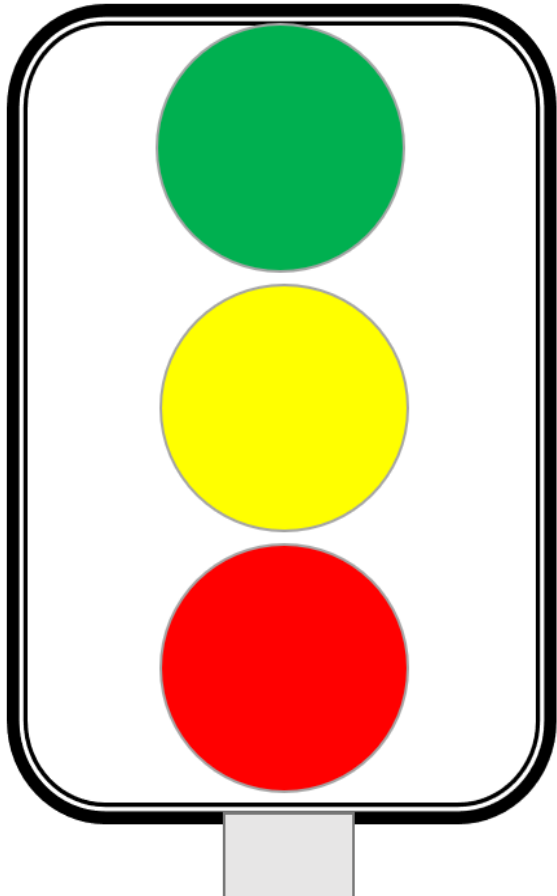
How can I improve? (you can write in Portuguese)

_____

_____

37

_____

Appendix E: Traffic lights

🟢	I can do this!
🟡	I am getting there!
🔴	I need help!

Appendix F: Exit tickets

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Exit Ticket
Name:_____
One thing I did well/learned today:
:)
One thing I still need to work on/read up on:
:|

Questionnaire

Name (a fingir!): _____ Date: _____

Pinta a carinha a lápis de acordo com a tua opinião (responde honestamente):

	Concordo	Concordo mais ou menos	Não concordo
Eu gosto de inglês	☺	😐	☹
Eu consigo reconhecer os erros que faço em inglês	☺	😐	☹
Eu sei como fazer a minha autoavaliação	☺	😐	☹
Eu gosto de fazer a minha autoavaliação	☺	😐	☹
Eu acho que a autoavaliação ajuda-me a perceber onde posso melhorar	☺	😐	☹
Para mim, a autoavaliação:	☺	😐	☹
é stressante	☺	😐	☹
ajuda-me a melhorar	☺	😐	☹
não me ajuda em nada	☺	😐	☹
Quando sei que tenho alguma dificuldade no inglês, eu tento ultrapassá-la	☺	😐	☹

Na minha opinião, nós fazemos a autoavaliação porque...

_____

_____

_____