

The use of exit tickets and learning journals in promoting reflection in young EFL learners

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Abstract

Exit tickets and learning journals are classroom tools that prompt end-of-lesson reflection. Exit tickets are brief, low-stakes prompts completed at lesson close to recall key ideas and self-evaluate; learning journals provide short written space across lessons for reflection and simple goal setting. This study examines how these tools facilitate self-reflection and relate to early signs of metacognitive self-regulation and learner autonomy among young Indonesian EFL learners. A qualitative-dominant, embedded mixed-methods design within a participatory action research (PAR) framework was implemented in a primary EFL classroom. Data comprised student written reflections (exit tickets, learning journals), classroom field notes, and participation/completion records; simple descriptive counts supported the qualitative analysis. The tools were treated as metacognitive prompts for planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Findings show that exit tickets promoted immediate, end-of-lesson reflection and were easier for students to complete, whereas learning journals supported self-assessment and short goal setting across lessons. Reflection depth was often uneven, influenced by task complexity, linguistic load, and unfamiliarity with terms or platforms; field notes recorded confusion when instructions were unclear, and engagement dipped during an asynchronous session. Repeated use fostered procedural self-regulation, evidenced by faster, more independent completion. Implications include using short, clear, visual prompts with brief modeling, simplifying journal templates, and aligning prompts tightly with lesson content to deepen reflection and strengthen early autonomy in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *autonomy; exit tickets; learning journals; reflection; young learners*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers increasingly use exit tickets and learning journals to prompt end-of-lesson reflection in young EFL classrooms. Exit tickets offer brief, low-stakes prompts that help learners recall key ideas and evaluate their performance immediately, while learning journals provide a short space for written reflection and simple goal setting across lessons. These classroom tools apply self-reflection as a structured process of reviewing one's learning and identifying strengths and areas for improvement (Herrera et al., 2022; Panadero et al.,

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2017). Yet evidence on how such tools function for young Indonesian EFL learners and how they can be adapted to their developmental and language needs remains limited.

In this study, exit tickets and learning journals are treated as metacognitive prompts that support the core strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Moshman, 2018; Reinders, 2016). Within this cycle, evaluating is where self-reflection plays a central role, as learners assess the effectiveness of their strategies and outcomes. Regular engagement with these prompts can build metacognitive awareness and foster learner autonomy, understood as the ability to set learning goals, choose appropriate resources, monitor progress, and reflect independently, thereby increasing ownership and motivation in learning (Fedj & Bouhass Benaissi, 2018; Holec, 1981; Kim, 2023; Little, 2022; Liu & Brantmeier, 2019; Salsya & Amalia, 2022).

In the context of young EFL learners, autonomy is considered essential for fostering lifelong learning skills (Maneepakhathorn, 2023; Wawrzyniak-Śliwska, 2017). Autonomous learners are typically more resilient and adaptable, demonstrating the ability to manage challenges and maintain focus on their goals (Garrido Sánchez, 2017; Panadero et al., 2017). Research consistently links learner autonomy with increased motivation and improved learning outcomes (Azatova, 2021). To cultivate autonomy in young learners, instructional practices must include structured support for goal setting, progress monitoring, and self-evaluation (Ahmed, 2019; Ziemińska, 2023).

In response to this, reflective tools such as exit tickets and learning journals have been increasingly integrated into language classrooms to promote both metacognitive engagement and learner autonomy, supporting students' gradual shift from teacher-led instruction to self-regulated learning (Kim, 2023; Vuong, Nguyen Huu Anh & Le, Nguyen Thi Khanh, 2021). Exit tickets, typically completed at the end of a lesson, require learners to summarize what they have understood, identify challenges, and pose questions. These brief, low-pressure activities encourage purposeful reflection while providing teachers with timely insights into student learning (Cravo, 2018; Fifer, 2019; Izor, 2019; Patka et al., 2016). Research shows that exit tickets enhance critical thinking (Patka et al., 2016), improve classroom engagement (Garrido Sánchez, 2017), and are particularly suitable for young learners due to their simplicity, adaptability, and minimal time demands (Fifer, 2019; Sulistyó & Lutviana, 2024).

Learning journals allow learners to record their thoughts, challenges, and progress, encouraging deep reflection (Demera Macías & Fajardo Dack, 2023; Diaz, 2015; Pleschová, 2020). By encouraging learners to track progress, identify challenges, and set personal learning goals these tools promote sustained engagement with metacognitive processes (Ahmed, 2019; Vuong, Nguyen Huu Anh & Le, Nguyen Thi Khanh, 2021). Research suggests that learning journals enhance self-regulation and metacognitive skills, supporting greater learner autonomy (Chinpakdee, 2022; Fifer, 2019.; Guaygua Mejía et al., 2024).

Implementing reflection tools among young EFL learners present specific challenges. Younger learners often struggle with metacognitive activities due to their developmental factors and limited prior experience with reflection (Ahmed,

2019; Fifer, 2019), and sustaining engagement over time can be difficult (Branigan & Donaldson, 2019). Although exit tickets and learning journals are widely recognized as supportive of metacognitive development, few studies have compared their effectiveness, feasibility, or adaptability for young learners (Garrido Sánchez, 2017; Izor, 2019). Existing studies largely examine self-assessment or journals in isolation, often with older learners or digital/product-based tasks—for example, university students’ reflective journals (Sudirman et al., 2021), digital reflective journals and email (Silvani et al., 2024), and video project-based reflection (Sulistyo & Lutviana, 2024). Work with teachers tends to address reflective thinking and teaching styles rather than child-focused tool design (Dwi & Fithriani, 2024). Research with children does exist, such as on-task vs. off-task self-assessment in young learners’ writing (Dewi & Trisna, 2021), but head-to-head comparisons of exit tickets and learning journals for primary-age EFL learners remain rare. Moreover, few studies evaluate practicality, student preference, or design features (prompt clarity, visual scaffolds, writing load), or consider delivery mode (face-to-face vs. asynchronous) in teacher-centred Indonesian classrooms.

To address this gap, this present study examines how exit tickets and learning journals facilitate reflection among young Indonesian EFL learners and how these reflections relate to early signs of metacognitive self-regulation and learner autonomy. Guided by the central research question—How do these tools promote self-reflection and autonomy among young Indonesian EFL learners?—the study compares the tools’ practicality and student preferences and analyzes the types and depth of reflections elicited in a primary classroom, with attention to contextual factors that shape implementation.

METHOD

Research Design

As part of a larger research project, this study employed a qualitative-dominant, embedded mixed-methods design within a participatory action research (PAR) framework (see Cornish et al., 2023; McTaggart, 1991). The research investigated how exit tickets and learning journals promote reflective practice and learner autonomy among young English as EFL learners. This study draws primarily on data from one of the four phases of the PAR project, during which metacognitive strategies were implemented through classroom instruction guided by the ‘Plan Do Review’ reflective framework (Hohmann et al., 2008, as cited in Ellis, 2016, p.32; see Figure 1).

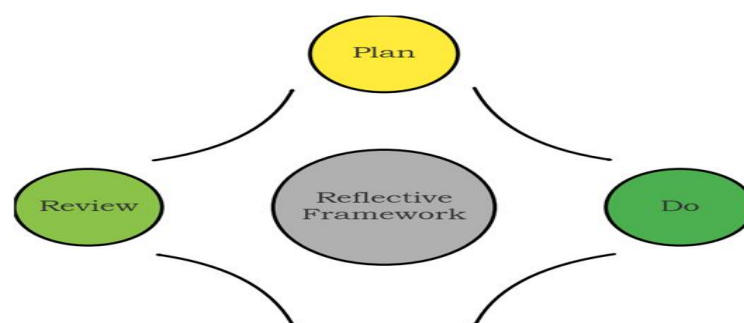


Figure 1. The ‘Plan Do Review’ reflective framework

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Participants

This study was conducted at a university-affiliated primary school in Indonesia. The school and participants were purposefully selected for their relevance to metacognitive strategy instruction in a primary EFL context. An English for Young Learners (EYL) teacher collaborated as co-designer, integrating exit tickets and learning journals into regular lessons. Participants included 18 fourth-grade students (aged 10–11) from a bilingual program, selected based on parental consent and willingness to participate. The students attended a Habituation class, offering three additional hours of English per week and following a curriculum designed by the university's language center. While most sessions were face-to-face, some were conducted via Zoom due to scheduling or external constraints. Prior to data collection, all participants were briefed on their rights, and informed consent was obtained from students and guardians. The study followed institutional ethical guidelines, including protections for research involving minors.

Procedures

Before the intervention, the researcher and teacher collaboratively developed lesson plans and reflective tools, including exit tickets and learning journals, integrating metacognitive strategies suitable for young learners. The teacher retained flexibility in classroom activities while aligning the metacognitive strategies with the instructional goals. The intervention was based on the 'Plan Do Review' learning cycle, with exit tickets and learning journals employed during the Review stage to support reflection. After the intervention, the researcher and teacher jointly evaluated the process to refine reflection prompts and lesson timing for improved clarity and effectiveness.

Intervention Tools

Exit tickets were brief, structured reflection forms used at the end of each lesson cycle. They combined simple self-assessment tasks—like ticking, coloring, or drawing emojis (e.g., “I did very well”)—with short written prompts such as “Today I learned...” or “I need more help with...”. Administered across six cycles, they encouraged immediate and routine reflection, with a design focused on simplicity to support young EFL learners and promote procedural autonomy.

Learning journals were more detailed tools completed periodically, typically after a unit or chapter. They included structured prompts aligned with three reflection stages: recalling content (“What have I learned?”), evaluating performance (“How well did I do?”), and setting goals (“What do I need to do next?”). Students responded with short sentences or keywords, self-rated their efforts, and identified areas for improvement. Integrated into the 'Review' phase of the 'Plan Do Review' learning cycle, the journals aimed to deepen metacognitive engagement.

Data Collection

The intervention was conducted over a seven-week period, during which exit tickets and learning journals were systematically introduced and integrated into eighteen regular English lessons. The first week focused on introducing the reflective tools and familiarizing students with their format and purpose (see Table 1). Exit tickets were administered frequently, typically at the end of each lesson cycle across six cycles within this period, allowing for continuous

collection of immediate reflection data. Learning journals were used periodically during the Review stage of selected lessons to encourage more detailed reflection. Key milestones included the initial co-design and preparation of tools before the intervention, the consistent application of exit tickets and journals during weeks two to six, and a final joint reflection by the researcher and teacher after week seven to evaluate the process and inform refinements.

Table 1. Reflective tools used during the intervention (Table by Authors)

Cycles	Sessions	Reflective tools	Topics
Cycle 1	Sessions 1-6	Exit tickets 1-5 Learning journal 1	At the Zoo
Cycle 2	Sessions 1-3	Exit tickets 6-7 Learning journal 2	Telephoning
Cycle 3	Sessions 1-3	Exit tickets 8-9 Learning journal 3	Festival
Cycle 4	Sessions 1-2	Exit ticket 10 Learning journal 4	Yummy cake
Cycle 5	Sessions 1-2	Exit ticket 11 Learning journal 5*	Natural disaster
Cycle 6	Sessions 1-2	Exit ticket 12 Learning journal 6	Stop, drop, roll!

**not implemented, asynchronous session*

The tools were introduced through clear explanations and demonstrations, modeling how to complete both exit tickets and learning journals in the initial lessons. The teacher facilitated the intervention by distributing materials, guiding students through prompts, and monitoring completion. Ongoing support was provided to address students' varied language proficiency and limited experience with reflection. Based on classroom observations and feedback, adjustments were made—such as simplifying prompts and modifying review time—to improve clarity and fit instructional constraints. These iterative changes aimed to enhance engagement and ensure the tools were accessible and meaningful for young EFL learners.

Data Analysis

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze student responses from exit tickets and learning journals. Quantitatively, student engagement was measured by tracking completion rates, participation levels, and the frequency of self-assessment indicators (e.g., emoji ratings) across six instructional cycles. For learning journals, predefined reflection choices and recurring themes in goal-setting were counted to identify patterns in self-perception and engagement.

Qualitative analysis involved thematic coding of students' written reflections in response to prompts such as "What have I learned?", "How well did I do?", and "What do I need to do next?". These responses were examined for indicators of metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy, such as self-monitoring, planning, and reflective depth. Field notes and observations further contextualized students' behaviors, challenges, and levels of independence.

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Data were compared across cycles to trace changes over time. Differences across task formats (e.g., ticking, drawing, writing) and learning modes (in-person vs. asynchronous) were also explored to assess their impact on reflection quality and metacognitive development.

RESULTS

The study found that both exit tickets and learning journals were effective in promoting reflection among young EFL learners. Exit tickets provided immediate opportunities for students to consolidate their understanding of lesson content, while learning journals facilitated deeper, more structured reflections. Both tools helped students articulate their learning experiences and identify areas for improvement.

Effectiveness of Exit Tickets in Promoting Metacognitive Reflection *Promotion of Immediate Reflection*

The implementation of exit tickets served as a structured metacognitive intervention effectively fostering immediate reflection among young EFL learners. Analysis of students' responses across six instructional cycles indicated a consistent ability among learners to articulate core lesson content, signifying an emerging capacity for self-reflection.

Figure 2 illustrates the content students recalled from the lessons they reflected on. Responses were generally adequate, with many students recalling main topics such as "The zoo," "animals," and "greeting card," or key activities like "how to use Canva" and "play guess the drawing." Some responses were less specific, including terms like "lesson" or "nothing," indicating varying levels of engagement with the salient learning points. Notably, one student (Student 11) left a prompt blank on an exit ticket, reflecting occasional disengagement. Overall, students demonstrated the ability to recall information and express preferences, although the depth of reflection varied. Observational notes also indicated some confusion among students, particularly regarding the term "keyword," confirming challenges in understanding specific prompts.

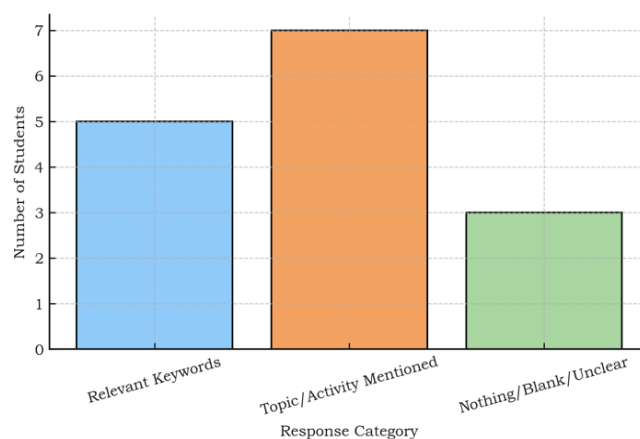


Figure 2. Students' responses on early exit tickets

While reflection depth often remained descriptive and surface-level, certain exit ticket prompts, including "Today I learned," "What I liked," and "Keywords I learned," facilitated varied degrees of detail. By the fifth cycle (Exit Ticket 11), several learners were notably adept at identifying specific vocabulary and explicitly articulating learning needs, exemplified by students who indicated specific areas for improvement, such as "subtitle" (Student 4) and "listening" (Student 6). Such observations indicate incremental development in learners' metacognitive monitoring and self-evaluation capabilities over time. Figure 3 depicts students' responses to the exit ticket in Cycle 5.

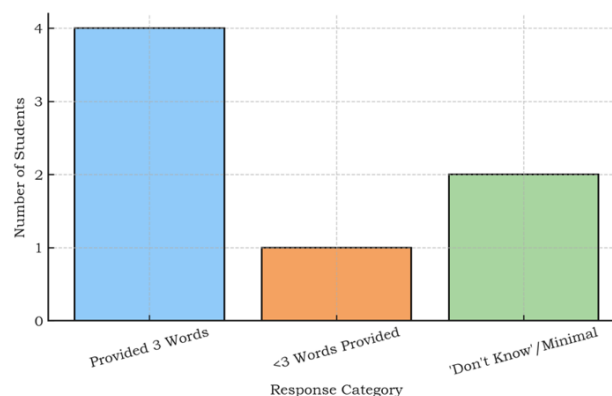


Figure 3. Students' responses on later exit tickets

Students actively personalized their exit ticket responses beyond mere task completion. Modifications included affirmations ("yes," "ofc"), circling self-assessment statements (e.g., Student 17 repeatedly circling "I did very well"), and drawing emojis or symbols to convey emotional and cognitive engagement. The consistency of Student 17 circling "I did very well" is a strong indicator of using the tool for self-affirmation. Writing 'yes' or using checkmarks might also indicate a simplification strategy when drawing or coloring the exit ticket felt tedious. Field notes also captured moments when students discussed the reflection prompts themselves (e.g., Student 1 and Student 2 discussing emoji interpretations in Exit Ticket 6), suggesting an emerging meta-awareness of both the reflective task and its purpose in their learning process. This shows that they were consciously engaging with the tool, rather than simply completing it passively.

Student Feedback and Engagement

Overall student feedback, combined with observational field data, highlighted positive perceptions of the exit ticket strategy, evidenced by high participation and return rates (98.17%) across sessions. Face-to-face sessions recorded nearly full participation, emphasizing the practicality and acceptability of exit tickets in young learner contexts. Such consistently high engagement underscores the exit tickets' viability as routine metacognitive tools within classroom instruction (Izor, 2019).

Figure 4 shows the participation and completion rates of students utilizing the exit ticket. Participation numbers varied per session (ranging from 9 to 17 students), likely due to attendance fluctuations rather than unwillingness to participate. Students consistently engaged with the task of

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completing and returning the exit tickets in face-to-face settings. The asynchronous format presented a barrier to completion for some.

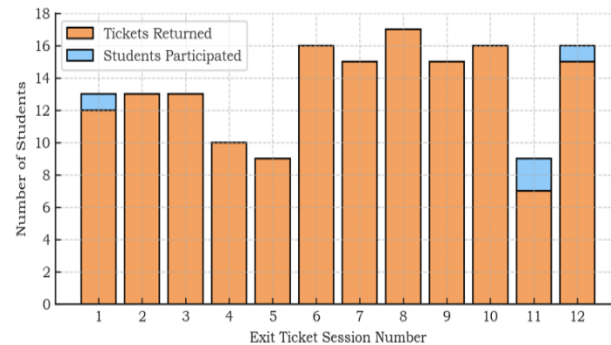


Figure 4. Students' participation and completion rate

Figure 5 illustrates the trend in self-assessment profiles over sessions. Learners demonstrated variable comfort levels with different exit ticket formats. Simple tasks, such as ticking boxes and coloring or circling emojis, were broadly favored due to their ease and familiarity, maintaining sustained engagement. However, later cycles introducing more cognitively demanding tasks—specifically, drawing emojis—yielded mixed results, characterized by hesitation, confusion, or superficial engagement. Field observations during cycles including Exit Ticket 8, Exit Ticket 10, and Exit Ticket 12 documented numerous instances where learners defaulted to simpler responses (coloring or circling), suggesting these tasks required clearer instructions or a simpler design for optimal engagement.

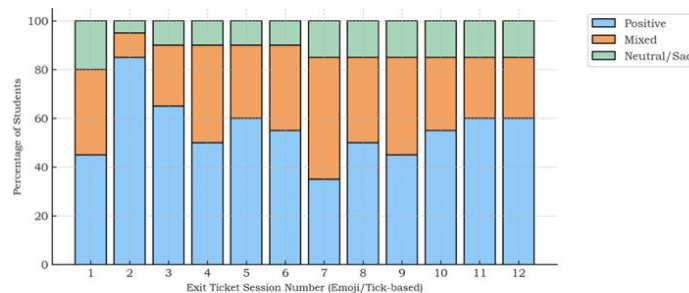


Figure 5. Trend in self-assessment profiles over sessions

Throughout the sessions, certain learners consistently exhibited high enthusiasm and procedural autonomy. For example, Student 2 frequently demonstrated proactive behaviors, including requesting exit tickets independently (verbally saying “I want Exit Ticket!”) and promptly completing the tasks, demonstrating increased learner autonomy. Similarly, Student 1 was frequently observed independently obtaining and completing exit tickets. In contrast, individual variability was evident; students such as Student 10 and Student 4 occasionally displayed confusion and reduced engagement, reinforcing the need for differentiated scaffolding within metacognitive interventions.

Qualitative observational notes indicated that clear instructions and the socially interactive nature of classroom contexts positively impacted student engagement. While most students engaged well with these tasks, some hesitated

or misunderstood instructions, particularly with emoji-related activities, suggesting the importance of clear guidance. Conversely, the single asynchronous session (Exit Ticket 11), conducted via Word and Google Docs without interactive features, had lower completion rates and less enthusiasm. Students' reflections during this session included minimal or negative comments, such as Student 2's dissatisfaction, clearly illustrating the critical role of instructional clarity and interactive classroom settings in metacognitive reflection tasks (Azatova, 2021).

Effectiveness of Learning Journals in Promoting Reflection

Depth of Reflection

The analysis of learning journals completed by young EFL learners across multiple sessions reveals that these journals provided a structured scaffold for promoting ongoing reflection. Consistent with prior research indicating that learning journals facilitate metacognitive awareness by encouraging students to articulate their learning (Abrouq, 2024; Diaz, 2015), students in this study identified central lesson topics such as “telephone,” “zoo,” “stop, drop, roll,” “cake,” and “greeting card”. For instance, one learner summarized a lesson on fire safety succinctly as “stop, drop, roll,” reflecting a recognition of key safety strategies (see Figure 6).

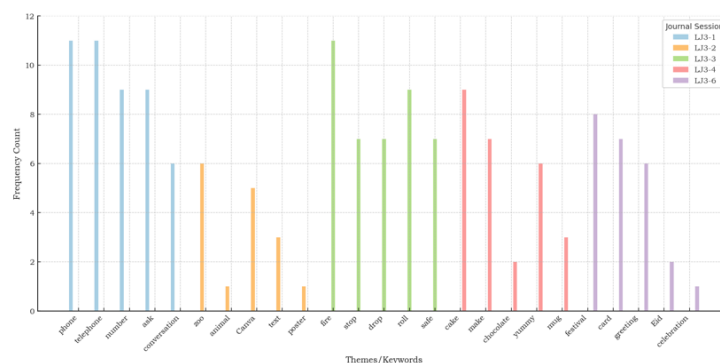


Figure 6. Frequency of reflection themes per journal session

Many responses consisted of keywords or short phrases—e.g., “make greeting card,” or simply “animals”, which aligns with findings from (Craig et al., 2020) emphasizing that younger learners or EFL students may initially engage with reflection at a surface descriptive level due to developmental and language constraints. However, some students demonstrated more elaborated engagement, such as one student who wrote, “How to make chocolate cake in a mug,” illustrating the potential for deeper cognitive processing when learners connect personally with the content. This variation in reflective depth indicates that while learning journals can elicit metacognitive engagement, the extent of this engagement is variable among young learners.

Despite these instances, no clear progression toward deeper or more analytical reflection was evident over time, indicating that without explicit instructional support, the depth of journal reflections may not progress beyond superficial level. The responses maintained a relatively consistent level of

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simplicity, with occasional repetition of phrases possibly attributable to peer influence or shared understanding of the task. The Padlet-based session of Learning Journal 4 particularly displayed repetition and similarity in responses, suggesting that anonymity and digital format may have influenced the nature of reflection.

Self-assessments within the journals were predominantly positive, with “Good” (😊) ratings constituting nearly two-thirds of responses (see Figures 7 and 8).

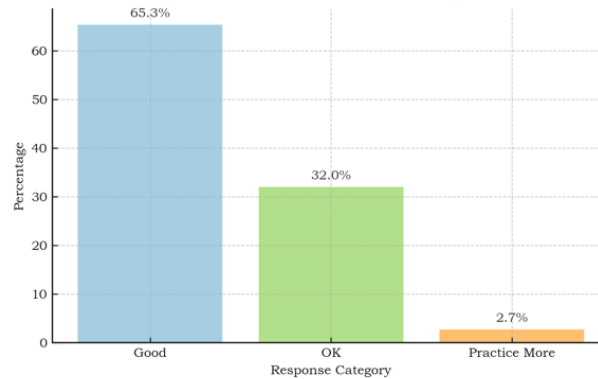


Figure 7. Overall self-assessment rating distribution

However, inconsistencies in task completion, such as circling criteria descriptions rather than using emojis, or writing affirmations (“yes”) instead of rating performance, suggest potential superficial engagement or difficulties in understanding the self-assessment format. In addition, there was no clear or consistent correlation was found between students' self-assessment ratings and the detail of their reflections or the number or type of needs identified in their planning. Students often rated themselves highly while still identifying multiple areas for improvement.

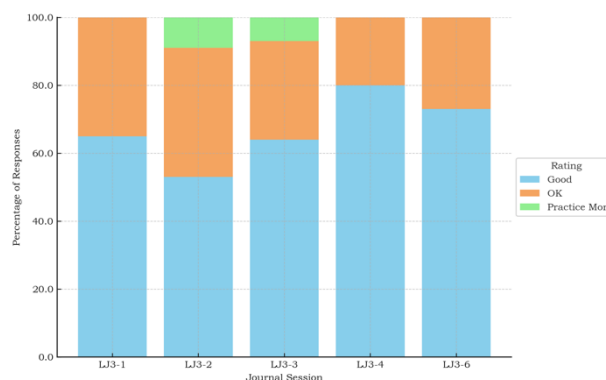


Figure 8. Self-assessment rating distribution per journal session

The planning component (“What do I need to do next?”) elicited practical, learner-centered goals (see Figure 9), such as “focus more while listening,” “learn spelling,” and “read instructions carefully.” For example, one student

wrote, “I need to learn spelling better,” highlighting self-awareness of specific learning needs. Such goal-setting behaviors are foundational to learner autonomy and indicate emerging self-regulatory capacities. Yet, the variability in the relevance and specificity of “other” responses (ranging from strategic plans like “ask number” to off-topic or unclear remarks such as “idk” “Let’s play Roblox!!”) reflects uneven metacognitive engagement and motivational challenges.

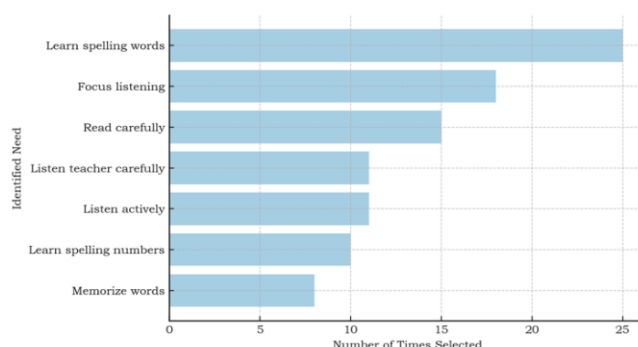


Figure 9. Frequency of top identified needs for improvement

Challenges Faced

Several challenges constrained the effectiveness of learning journals as metacognitive tools. Field notes revealed student confusion and uneven engagement, especially with digital platforms like Padlet and Canva, supporting previous research highlighting the role of technological familiarity in successful reflection activities (Silvani, et al., 2024). For example, Student 10 required considerable teacher and peer assistance, indicating ongoing dependence on external scaffolding and limited autonomous reflective behavior.

Firstly, environmental factors such as time pressure, classroom distractions, and unclear instructions further complicated students’ ability to engage deeply with reflective tasks. Some learners appeared rushed or distracted, producing minimal or fragmented entries that limited the richness of metacognitive data. The anonymity inherent in the Padlet session complicated teacher assessment of individual contributions, possibly reducing accountability and effort.

Secondly, linguistic limitations were notable, with common EFL spelling errors (e.g., “telephon,” “frens”, and “fevtifal”) reducing students’ ability to articulate more complex metacognitive ideas, likely contributing to the predominance of simple descriptive responses. This linguistic limitation may have restricted learners’ capacity to engage with abstract metacognitive concepts such as nuanced self-assessment or strategic planning.

Furthermore, the absence of a clear developmental trend in reflection depth or autonomy indicators across the intervention period suggests that learning journals, without explicit and continuous pedagogical supports, may be insufficient alone to promote sustained metacognitive growth (Slezak et al., 2019) in young EFL learners.

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Comparison Between Exit Tickets and Learning Journals

Students demonstrated distinct preferences between exit tickets and learning journals, influenced primarily by ease of use and task demands. Exit tickets were generally favored due to their brevity and simplicity, enabling quick completion at the lesson's end. The structured format—often involving ticking, coloring, or brief written responses—aligned well with students' limited attention spans and classroom routines. For instance, one student (Student 2) was observed actively requesting exit tickets, suggesting that the tool's simplicity encouraged proactive engagement. This finding supports prior research indicating that concise metacognitive prompts are effective in sustaining young learners' motivation (Proust et al., 2025).

In contrast, learning journals required longer writing and more extensive self-assessment, which many students found challenging. The additional time needed, approximately 10 minutes per session, and the cognitive effort involved sometimes resulted in rushed or superficial entries, especially when students used unfamiliar digital platforms such as Padlet and Canva. For example, Student 10 frequently required peer and teacher assistance to complete journal tasks, reflecting difficulties in independent engagement. The cognitive demands of the task may limit its initial appeal and practicality, particularly for younger or less proficient learners who often struggle to sustain written reflection (Fifer, 2019) without clear instructional support.

From a practical perspective, exit tickets fit smoothly into classroom routines as a quick, habitual reflective activity. Their high completion rates and minimal disruption suggest they are sustainable and scalable for ongoing classroom use, especially with younger learners. The flexibility of exit ticket formats in this study, ranging from simple ticking to short writing, allows adaptation to different proficiency levels and lesson content, facilitating broad applicability.

Learning journals, although richer in reflective potential, demand more instructional time and teacher support to ensure meaningful engagement. Their effective use depends on clear guidance and learner familiarity with both task expectations and digital tools, which can limit their scalability in resource-constrained contexts. However, journals provide valuable qualitative insights into learners' self-monitoring and planning, supporting more individualized instructional interventions. Therefore, learning journals may be better suited to sustained, in-depth reflection integrated within comprehensive metacognitive curricula rather than isolated tasks (Chinpakdee, 2022).

Impact on Learner Autonomy

Both exit tickets and learning journals contributed to fostering learner autonomy, each in distinct ways. Exit tickets primarily supported task-related autonomy by habituating students to regular self-monitoring. Observations indicated that, over time, students required less teacher assistance and increasingly took initiative in completing exit tickets. For example, Student 1 and Student 2 independently collected exit tickets and completed them more quickly in later cycles, demonstrating improved self-management and growing confidence. These behavioral changes are consistent with Zimmerman's model

of self-regulated learning (1990, as cited in Teng, 2020), which emphasizes the role of structured routines in developing autonomous skills.

In contrast, learning journals engaged students in reflection, self-assessment, and goal setting—core components of autonomous. Several students identified specific learning needs, such as “I need to learn spelling better” (Student 7) and “I will focus more while listening” (Student 12), illustrating emerging metacognitive awareness and planning ability. However, the variability in response quality and occasional superficiality suggest that these autonomy-related behaviors were still in development, influenced by linguistic and cognitive limitations typical of young EFL learners (Fifer, 2019).

Overall, the analysis revealed differences in the depth and quality of student responses, shaped by factors such as language proficiency and task familiarity. While many reflections remained at a surface level, some students showed growing self-awareness by setting specific learning goals. Thus, learning journals served as a valuable tool for promoting sustained reflection and the gradual development of learner autonomy among young EFL learners.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support key principles of reflective thinking and learner autonomy. The use of exit tickets and learning journals provided students with structured opportunities for reflection immediately after lessons, which is essential in fostering metacognitive awareness and self-regulation (Azatova, 2021). Through regular prompts encouraging students to identify learning content, assess their performance, and plan future steps, learners displayed key behaviors such as self-monitoring, goal-setting, and planning that are fundamental to autonomy development.

Evidence of personalized engagement—such as circling affirming statements and adding notes—illustrates how these tools effectively scaffold reflective practices. Supporting this, Cravo (2018) demonstrated that strategic questioning and reflection cards help learners recognize mistakes, articulate learning strategies, and understand classroom activities’ purposes. Collectively, these findings indicate that metacognitive scaffolding encourages young EFL learners to take ownership of their learning, promoting independence in both cognitive and emotional dimensions.

These results are consistent with prior studies showing that reflection tools like exit tickets and learning journals enhance learner autonomy among young learners (Branigan & Donaldson, 2019; Diaz, 2015; Fifer, 2019; Garrido Sánchez, 2017). The high level of student engagement and positive self-assessments observed in this study further support findings that regular self-reflection can motivate learners and encourage active participation in their learning process (Taşkara & Sağlamel, 2024). However, unlike studies reporting deeper reflection over time, this research found that the depth of reflection relatively stable throughout the intervention. This consistency may be attributed to the young age and limited language proficiency of the participants, which present inherent cognitive and linguistic challenges to the development of metacognitive skills (Fifer, 2019; Li et al., 2022). In this regard, Dewi & Trisna

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(2021) emphasized the critical role of involving more capable peers or adults during self-assessment activities. Such support can guide young learners in developing better self-regulation and fostering a stronger sense of control over their own learning processes, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of reflection tools.

The challenges students faced with more complex tasks, such as drawing, also mirror previous research indicating that reflection tasks need to be age- and proficiency-appropriate to be effective (Garrido Sánchez, 2017). This highlights the importance of balancing cognitive demand with learner readiness in designing metacognitive interventions.

Practicality and Preference for Exit Tickets

Students showed a marked preference for exit tickets over learning journals, largely due to their brevity, immediacy, and low-stakes nature. Exit tickets allowed learners to reflect on their understanding of the materials taught (Basco, 2021), minimizing cognitive load and making the process manageable for young EFL learners. The straightforward format—often involving ticking boxes or brief written responses—also reduced anxiety and facilitated honest self-assessment.

From an operational standpoint, exit tickets were easier to complete and return in class, unlike learning journals that required more time, effort, or digital tools, which sometimes caused confusion or disengagement. Emotional factors, such as feeling successful and supported through quick feedback loops, likely contributed to their preference and high completion rates.

The practicality of exit tickets offers valuable implications for EFL pedagogy. Teachers can integrate exit tickets as quick, routine reflective tools at the end of lessons (Basco, 2021) to foster ongoing metacognitive engagement without overwhelming young learners. Well-designed exit tickets balance simplicity and meaningful reflection, supporting continuous self-assessment and timely instructional adjustment.

Role of Reflection Tools in Promoting Autonomy

The reflection tools facilitated the development of self-directed learning skills by prompting students to set goals, monitor progress, and take ownership of their learning. Examples of autonomy-related behaviors included independent completion of exit tickets, proactive requests for materials, and the ability to identify specific areas needing improvement (e.g., “focus more” or “learn spelling”). Although individual differences existed, the tools provided accessible scaffolds for practicing autonomy skills.

Empowering young learners to reflect and self-assess builds their confidence and fosters habits essential for lifelong learning. By engaging with reflection tools, students gained a sense of control and responsibility over their learning journey. The personalization of exit tickets—through affirmations and drawings—further supported affective engagement and learner autonomy.

However, this study has several limitations. The sample was small and drawn from one Indonesian primary EFL classroom, which limits generalizability. The data relied mainly on short written reflections and emoji-

based self-assessments; these may not fully capture young learners' thinking or emotions during reflection. Some students showed uneven understanding of the tasks (e.g., confusion about "keywords" or drawing emojis), and the single asynchronous session led to lower completion and less engagement. These factors may have influenced the depth and accuracy of the reflections and self-evaluations (Craig et al., 2020).

Implications for Teaching Practice

To maximize effectiveness for young learners, reflection tools such as exit tickets and learning journals should be customized to meet their developmental and language proficiency levels. Simplifying prompts and providing clear, scaffolded guidance can help learners engage more deeply with reflection tasks. For example, using visuals, simple language, and concrete examples can aid understanding and encourage participation. This approach is supported by (Palladino et al., 2025) who highlight the interaction between metacognition and emotions in learning. Their findings suggest that better metacognitive control early in the school year reduces negative emotions such as anxiety and boredom later on, thereby enhancing self-regulation. Promoting metacognitive monitoring and control in developmentally appropriate ways can therefore help young learners experience fewer negative emotions during learning, supporting more effective self-regulated learning.

Cultural and contextual factors in Indonesian EFL classrooms also need consideration. Teachers should align reflection activities with local classroom dynamics and student experiences, ensuring tasks are relevant and relatable. This contextual adaptation will support student engagement and foster meaningful reflection.

Teacher training is essential to implement reflection tools effectively (Bhatti & Nimehchisalem, 2020). Educators should develop skills in designing age-appropriate prompts, facilitating reflection, and interpreting student responses to support autonomy growth. Training should also emphasize strategies for scaffolding reflection, managing diverse learner needs, and integrating reflection tools seamlessly into lesson routines.

Professional development can enhance teachers' confidence and competence in using reflection tools, ultimately improving student outcomes. Collaborative learning among teachers to share best practices and challenges can further support effective use of metacognitive strategies in EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates how exit tickets and learning journals can promote reflective practices in young EFL learners. Exit tickets prompted immediate end-of-lesson recall and quick self-evaluation; their brevity and routine use supported regular self-monitoring. Learning journals elicited brief accounts of learning, self-assessment, and short next-step goals. Together, the tools fostered autonomy by building procedural self-regulation (faster, more independent completion), encouraging self-monitoring, and supporting ownership of learning. Students preferred exit tickets for their simplicity, while journals aided goal setting but required greater effort.

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This study offers one of the first classroom-based comparisons of exit tickets and learning journals with young Indonesian EFL learners, clarifying their distinct roles—exit tickets for immediate monitoring and journals for sustained planning. It also shows delivery-mode effects (higher engagement face-to-face; lower in asynchronous tasks) and provides design principles for age-appropriate prompts (short, visual, scaffolded). These findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive, context-specific strategies and underscore the ongoing need for teacher guidance in scaffolding reflective learning (Zhao, 2018).

Unlike studies reporting progressive deepening of reflection, depth here remained relatively stable, likely due to young age, limited language proficiency, and task demands (e.g., drawing or “keyword” prompts) that increased cognitive load. Occasional prompt–activity misalignment and unfamiliar digital tools further constrained elaboration, explaining broad participation but variable depth.

For teaching, use exit tickets routinely to build self-monitoring and simplify journals (short sections, visuals, modelled examples) to support goal setting without overload. Clear instructions, brief teacher modelling, and quick check-ins or peer support can increase accuracy and depth. Future studies should extend the time frame, include multiple schools, and employ mixed methods; compare alternative formats (audio or sticker-based reflections, scaffolded digital templates) and track links among metacognition, emotions, and autonomy across ages and proficiency levels strengthen generalizability.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Pipit Prihartanti Suharto contributed to the conceptualization of the study, methodology design, data collection and analysis, and manuscript writing. **Ika Lestari Damayanti** was responsible for writing and editing the manuscript. **Nenden Sri Lengkanawati** supervised the project and reviewed the manuscript.

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