Article

Solutions for Independent Goal Setting and Implementation of Primary School Students Fostering the Competence of Learning to Learn

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Abstract: The paper analyzes what personal goals primary school pupils are able to set on their own and how they achieve them in their decision-making process, thereby developing competence in learning to learn. In this work, the reader will be able to get acquainted with the theoretically grounded concept of the development of competence in learning and the possibilities of developing this competence in primary schools. In addition, it provides practical tools for the quality development of students' learning competence, where students not only set personal goals and plan the steps to achieve them but also reflect on their experiences. An action research study analyzed the content of students' (N = 50) personal learning diaries, discussing the students' learning goals and the choices they make to achieve them and reflecting on the efforts made, and results were obtained in the development of the competence to learn. Based on the study findings, it is evident that fourth-grade students exhibit distinct patterns in individual goal setting, action-planning, and reflection processes. The analysis presented in this paper analyzes the general highlights and overarching themes and provides specific instances of goals, activity tasks, and reflections, offering insight into the cognitive processes of fourth-graders and their perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of learning.

Keywords: independent goal setting and implementation; competence of learning to learn; primary school students

1. Introduction

In the modern education system, a crucial role is played by the ability to acquire the competence of learning to learn. It is one of the most essential skills for students to successfully overcome everyday life challenges and solve various problems by applying their experience to new situations [1]. In European education policy, as outlined in documents by the European Commission (2018) [2] and the European Council (2018) [3] focusing on the aspects of developing core competencies, the learning-to-learn competence is given special importance due to the rapidly changing world. Global changes encourage continuous learning and adaptability and the ability to cope with new challenges and make necessary decisions [4,5]. Therefore, this competence helps prepare students not only to learn but also to continually update their knowledge and enhance their skills throughout their lives [6,7].

Metacognition, as the ability to constantly improve, analyze one's own learning process, and reflect on acquired experiences, becomes crucial in the modern world [8]. Learning to learn helps in continually adapting and improving and enabling critical thinking, evaluation, and reevaluation. It involves checking information from reliable sources and making informed decisions, for example, when a student independently creates a text. Additionally, it involves the ability to reflectively and critically analyze the content of one's work [9]. Metacognition is linked to the reflection of the learning process, contemplating existing knowledge (phenomena awareness), determining where the individual acquired knowledge, assessing the reliability of the information, and thinking about how to verify the necessary information and ensure where, when, and how to use it [2]. All of these are

complex thinking procedures that develop as individuals become aware of strategies to perform certain actions. For this reason, students need to be taught the decision-making skills of setting independent personal goals from the early stages of primary school.

Learning to learn, often referred to as metacognition, involves a variety of cognitive processes related to monitoring, controlling, and regulating one's own learning activities. Metacognition involves not only understanding how to learn but also understanding one's own learning processes and strategies. It includes the ability to set goals, plan, and implement strategies, monitor progress, and evaluate results. At its core, learning to learn is about developing a reflective and active approach to learning [8,9].

Metacognition is closely related to learning to learn but is not synonymous with it. While metacognition focuses on understanding and regulating one's own cognitive processes, learning to learn encompasses not only metacognitive skills but also broader aspects of learning competence such as self-efficacy, motivation, and self-regulation. Therefore, while metacognition is an essential component of learning to learn, it encompasses a broader set of skills and attitudes that contribute to effective learning [8,9].

It Is widely acknowledged that the competence of learning to learn is crucial for students' academic success and lifelong learning. However, there remains a notable gap in research concerning the analysis of students' learning goals, particularly in the context of primary education. It is imperative to scientifically substantiate the assumptions underlying personal goals and learning to learn. Exploring how students' articulate learning objectives can contribute to the development of learning-to-learn competence in primary school settings. This gap underscores the need for further investigation and empirical studies to better understand the interplay between personal goals and the fostering of learning-to-learn competence among primary school pupils. In order for pupils to be able to set personal goals, base their educational practice on these goals, and reflect on their experiences, it is essential for educators to create the conditions and the right school environment to support this development.

Research Objectives

First, we theoretically substantiated the concept of fostering the competence of learning to learn and its development opportunities in primary classes, the relationship between learning to learn and learning strategies, and paradigms of self-directed and self-regulated learning.

Secondly, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of students' personal diaries, discussing the learning goals they set for themselves and the decisions they make in implementing them while developing the competence of learning to learn.

2. Background

2.1. Expression of the Competence of Learning to Learn in the Context of Lithuanian General Education Programs

For many years, the competence of learning to learn in Lithuania has been recognized as a separate and highly significant competence [10]. In the updated document, the Lithuanian Primary education general programs (2022) [11] have reclassified learning to learn as one component of cognitive competence. Cognitive competence is defined as the understanding of any subject matter while learning to learn is described as the contemplation of learning within this content. Learning to learn is defined as the ability to construct and connect knowledge from various areas, create a coherent worldview, describe the world using language, images, symbols, mathematical, and other means, and critically reflect considering learning objectives, understanding the societal context of learning to learn [12].

The competence of learning to learn encompasses not only skills but also attitudes, values, and beliefs that promote effectiveness, flexibility, self-regulation, and self-awareness. It allows an individual not only to learn but also to apply acquired knowledge and skills effectively in different contextual environments. Learning to learn is developed in the long

term, evolving as a child grows. In the document "Competence and child development description" (2021) [12], learning to learn is divided into two crucial areas: reflection on the learning process and thinking about thinking (metacognition) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Signs of the development of the learning-to-learn competence in primary school students according to age [12].

Age	Reflection on the Learning Process	Thinking about Thinking (Metacognition)
Up to 6 years old	Learns from their activities, tries again if unsuccessful. Learns from mistakes: corrects them after making errors. The child is able to cooperate with peers to achieve a common goal.	Identifies intentions, adjusts actions in the process, compares initial intentions with the final result. Reflects on the decision-making process: specifies where, when, and under what circumstances acquired certain knowledge.
Ages 6–8	Recognizes the learning experience, repeats known and new information as the primary memorization strategy. Plans, monitors, and evaluates their activities, their results, and compares them with experience. Understands another person's point of view; understands that different points of view can arise from different people different people do not have access to the same information.	Describes what they are thinking about, provides reasons. Perceives the significance of various factors in the cognitive process.
Ages 9–10	Distinguishes between teaching and learning. Attempts to independently group and reorganize information for better memorization. Breaks down complex tasks into steps, plans the optimal sequence of their completion. Independently plans activities, sets priorities, and determines the sequence of task completion. They see rules as agreements necessary for the common good and can negotiate and follow them when working in a small group.	Distinguishes between belief and theoretical thinking. Recognizes the importance of cause in explaining a phenomenon. Applies the repetition strategy more effectively. Focuses attention on one activity for up to an hour if it is non-monotonous and does not require constant intense thinking.
Ages 11–12	Evaluates the use of memory in acquiring knowledge. Actively seeks to connect new information with existing knowledge. Can perceive and take into account the alternative viewpoints of several other people, as well as the perceptions of social groups can understand the views of social groups and reflect on situations from different social and cultural perspectives.	Associates new information with existing knowledge. Aims to memorize information, effectively applies information organization strategies.

The data from Table 1 suggest that learning to learn is a process that primarily focuses on self-awareness as a learner, motivation to learn, setting learning goals, learning strategies, and collaboration with other students. In describing the content of all subjects, the authors of the programs had to integrate elements of the learning-to-learn competence, as competencies are developed based on the subjects taught.

2.2. Assumptions for the Development of the Learning-to-Learn Competence in Primary School Students

Learning to learn is described as the ability to organize one's learning and effectively manage information and time [2]. This ability involves understanding one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and overcoming obstacles. According to Caena and Stringher (2020) [1], learning to learn means knowing one's learning preferences, planning the learning process where an individual knows what needs to be achieved to learn the desired content, and having knowledge of what has been learned. To develop these skills in students, it is necessary to establish assessment criteria for tasks and base result analysis on them. Throughout the educational process, both the process and the result should be analyzed. It is crucial to be prepared to start learning together with others and take responsibility.

The learning-to-learn competence involves a profound understanding of specific content during the educational process and can help critically perceive assumptions, rules, and

social expectations that influence people's cognitive experience, thinking, emotions, and behavior during the learning process. The expression of the learning-to-learn competence encompasses aspects of self-regulation, autonomy, and independent learning. Considering these aspects, it is essential to adjust educational practices, providing students with the opportunity not only to learn and complete assignments but also to reflect on their learning experiences. Students should be encouraged to explore the reasons why they can learn certain things and not others [13]. In the author's opinion, learning to learn forms a proper and qualitative readiness for lifelong learning and adapting to changing conditions. To achieve this, it is crucial to consider the individual needs of each learner.

Self-regulated learning is a multi-component, cyclical learning process in which an individual actively controls their learning by applying various strategies and tactics to effectively learn, understand, and improve their skills. This learning approach relies on the learner's initiative, responsibility for their learning, and the ability to properly organize and manage the learning process. All of this involves cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational systems, behavior, and adaptation to different learning situations to achieve personal goals [14,15]. In the context of learning to learn, self-regulation is defined as the way in which learners systematically activate and maintain cognition, motivation, and behavior to achieve their goals in learning various subjects. Self-regulation, along with metacognition, constitutes a crucial area of learning to learn, encompassing many essential elements of personality (see Table 2).

Table 2. Components of Learning to Learn [2,13,16–19].

Learning to Learn Component	Characteristics of the Component
Self-awareness and self-esteem skills	recognizes, identifies, and manages emotions, behaves according to values; recognizes personal traits and seeks external assistance; strives for personal and academic goals
Empathy, social awareness, and building positive interpersonal relationships	recognizes and responds to the emotions of others; recognizes individual and group similarities and differences; effectively uses communication skills for efficient communication; can constructively prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts
Responsible decision-making and behaviour considering consequences	makes decisions considering safety, ethical, and societal factors; applies responsible decision-making skills in everyday academic and social situations; contributes to the well-being of family, school, and community
Metacognition	can think about their thinking, has self-confidence, adapts to changing conditions, learning content, team members, and context—sets goals, knows how to learn best, and uses creativity; thinks critically

In Table 2, one of the components of learning to learn is highlighted as metacognition, which is significant in fostering other components, as only by being able to think about one's cognitive aspects can each individual recognize and manage emotions. Metacognition is defined as knowledge about cognition, the ability to control and direct it (planning, monitoring, and evaluation), and metacognitive experience. Metacognitive experience can help sustain motivation, resilience, and perseverance, avoid distractions, and mitigate encountered obstacles. In the educational process, to develop these student abilities, it is necessary to create activities that encourage reflective situations, allowing learners to delve deeper into the learning process.

2.3. The Relationship between the Learning-to-Learn Competence and Learning Strategies

The application of learning strategies helps the learner achieve the desired outcome in the chosen direction. However, understanding the strategies does not guarantee that an individual comprehends their advantages and knows when and how to use them appropriately. Proficiency in strategies is crucial as it motivates individuals to use the learned strategy, understanding how it works and the benefits it provides to the individual, considering their personal and social learning needs [20]. To successfully cultivate learning-to-learn competence, students must understand that learning is not just memorization and

recall of information but also involves the application of knowledge in new contexts, which can be achieved through appropriately chosen learning strategies [21,22]. Students can use learning strategies by selecting them based on their learning needs. Certain types of learning strategy categories are distinguished [23,24]:

1. Surface learning strategies are related to acquiring knowledge, memorization, and meeting task requirements. These strategies are applied for the purpose of primary knowledge acquisition and information selection.
2. Deep learning strategies are more associated with deeper learning, involving understanding, analysis, critical thinking, holistic information processing, and connecting with previous knowledge. In order to acquire deep learning strategies, students may transition from surface strategies and often use these strategies interchangeably to achieve learning goals [24].
3. Transfer strategies reflect how the learner can adjust strategies for different contexts, i.e., cultivate independent action and learning abilities [24].

Learning to learn must be understood as a tool that helps more effectively internalize the content of all learning subjects. It is like a key that opens doors to better understanding, absorption, and creative use of all learning materials. Learning to learn is not just a list of skills that automatically improve learning outcomes. Students themselves must strive to become lifelong learners. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the need to develop a pedagogy of learning in which students not only acquire facts and information but also learn to find, use, and critically evaluate information, as well as develop skills in specific areas of knowledge.

2.4. Independent and Self-Directed Learning Paradigms

Independent or autonomous self-directed learning is the contemporary didactic goal. Democratic societies have gradually placed individual autonomy as the highest value and lever for emancipation [25]. However, the question of how much teachers enable students to learn independently is constantly raised [26]. The extent and timing of a teacher providing autonomy to students depend on pedagogical details, facial expressions, and gestures, which are sometimes even challenging to identify and notice, as well as the relationship with students and mutual trust [26]. Additionally, independent learning is sometimes misunderstood as the student's individual work, performing activities alone, without the involvement of others [27]. Such a definition contradicts today's culture of life, where the learner must not only be able to perform certain activities but also share that ability with others, i.e., be a social member of the community [25,26].

One of the ways to foster students' self-directed learning skills is through collaboration [28–31], as it enhances children's ability to act and create knowledge themselves. Collaborative social sharing practices in schools allow students to acquire a significant amount of knowledge by solving problems, constructing, and transforming what is common. Collaboratively, students create joint products such as exhibitions, publications, posters, brochures, etc. Presenting and discussing such works together raises questions and increases the value of what has been created [28]. Then, the class group of students becomes the audience. It also allows students to help each other, learn to collaborate, and participate in discussions or debates by presenting ideas and arguing various points [26,28–31]. When a collaborative atmosphere that supports teamwork skills is created, children can assess their abilities and acknowledge that under such conditions, they can work and learn new things [29,30]. A study conducted in Lithuania, where primary school students learned by collaborating for half the school year, showed that children are capable of working in groups and collaborating, as they willingly listen to others, explain, and help if needed. Moreover, most students do not get bored when working in a group; they are interested in collaborative work [29,30]. These skills create conditions for developing the concept of self-directed education, but in primary classes, it is necessary to do this regularly for students to develop strong skills in this area.

In a broad sense, self-directed learning describes a process in which individuals, with or without the assistance of others, take the initiative to identify their learning needs, formulate learning objectives, determine human and material learning resources, choose and implement appropriate learning strategies, and assess learning outcomes [32]. Self-directed learning means that students take initiative and responsibility for their learning, providing learners with the freedom and autonomy to choose what, why, how, and where to learn [33]. Individuals engaged in self-directed learning have a greater ability to adapt to changing social and contextual conditions [32], feel more empowered to take action, and are more likely to achieve self-realization.

The field of self-regulation is developed by applying time management, self-control, and help-seeking strategies. For an individual to choose appropriate strategies, they reflect on specific subject matter knowledge and elements of the educational process, such as how they were learning [9]. To ensure quality feedback explaining students' experience in the self-regulation domain, it is crucial to pose very specific questions related to the learning of specific content. In this way, learners can precisely reflect on their activity process and outcomes [9]. Furthermore, in such cases, learners can evaluate their specific progress in that area [34].

In summary, independent learning refers to a directed learning process for elementary school students, where teachers act as assistants or consultants, and students themselves are responsible for searching for solutions and activities agreed upon in advance, such as tasks. Teachers become partners and mentors, providing support and opportunities for students to thoroughly explore specific elements of the subject matter. Independent learning encourages students to find answers to problematic questions that need to be solved, questions that need to be answered, and subjects that need to be analyzed and improved.

3. Materials and Methods

Empirical Research Strategy, the Context of the School, and the Students and Teachers Involved in the Study

Context of the School. The study was conducted in a private school in one of the major cities in Lithuania. This school implements the national primary education program and, at the same time, works according to a specialized engineering program, where engineering education, STEAM, and targeted application of information technologies are integrated. Therefore, part of the educational process is organized based on integrated education content, combining the content of several subjects. Emphasis is placed on competency-based education. Classes have up to 18 students, which is optimal for quality learning, with greater attention given to individual learning needs, differentiation, and individualization based on students' abilities and needs.

This school was chosen for the study because the teachers have created certain tools for personal progress monitoring for students so that children can observe their progress, reflect, and analyze how well they are achieving their goals. One such tool for personal progress monitoring is the "Student Diary". In this school, students start filling out their diaries from the 3rd grade (from the age of 9). The purpose of the student diary is for students to monitor their learning process and results, evaluate themselves according to agreed criteria, set personal goals, reflect, and write down tasks to be completed at home. The student diary has been used in the school for two years. The use of the "Student Diary" method is not common practice in all Lithuanian schools. It is therefore important to analyze the experience of this school on the basis of a scientific study in order to determine the experiences of using this method.

For the study, 50 diaries of fourth-grade students were selected. The students already have experience filling out these diaries as they have been doing this work every week for the past two years.

Teacher Context. For the study, primary school teachers were selected who worked with the 4th-grade students who participated in the study (see Table 3).

Table 3. The information about the teachers who participated in the study.

Teachers	Qualification	The Total Work Experience in the School	Work Experience at the Researched School
T1	Qualification of the primary school teacher	21 years	3 years
T2	Qualification of the primary school teacher	2 years	2 years
T3	Qualification of the primary school teacher	8 years	3 years
T4	Qualification of the primary school teacher	12 years	3 years

In Table 3, the experience of primary school teachers in this school is up to 4 years. The teachers had completed their studies in primary education at one of the universities in Lithuania.

Research sample, duration, and procedure. The research context was the 4th grade, and a convenient sample was used. Fifty students participated in the study.

Research ethics. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles. Parents provided individual consent for the analysis of students' diaries and for children to be interviewed by researchers. Confidentiality requirements were adhered to. Students were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and had the option to decline participation without any consequences. The study was approved by the Didactics Research Cluster researchers in May 2023, according to the procedure established by the Education Academy of Vytautas Magnus University. This research was conducted in Lithuania. Data are presented by translating participants' responses into English. The study was conducted in the summer of 2023, from June to August.

Stage I. The data were collected by conducting activity analysis, examining individual student diaries, and organizing research data into thematic groups identified from the research findings.

Action research is a qualitative research methodology considered democratic, fair, and liberating and encourages an understanding of life contexts [35]. Through action research, individual feelings, attitudes, and work models are revealed without control or manipulation, but rather through observation and analysis. Participants actively engage in making informed decisions at all stages of the educational process. The main goal of action research is to explore social change, with the ultimate goal achieved through specific actions (or activities). Additionally, action research allows for the identification of emerging problems and their solutions [36,37].

In our study, the content of student diaries was analyzed to understand how students set personal goals, reflect on their implementation methods and achieved results, and anticipate future learning expectations. This system allows for the development and deepening of the components of the learning-to-learn competence.

1. Setting long-term goals, anticipating tasks to achieve the goal, and reflecting at the end of the semester. At the beginning of the school year, students set a long-term goal that they aim to achieve over the entire semester (see Figure 1).
   Primary school students set one goal, while older students set one or two goals. As seen in Figure 1, students specify their personal qualities that could help achieve the set goal. They also identify individuals, things, or tools that could assist in reaching the goal and outline tasks they will undertake to achieve the goal.
   At the end of the semester, students self-assess, describe how they fared in achieving the goal, and share their opinions on what worked or did not work (see Figure 2).

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE FIRST SEMESTER

My learning and personal development goals:

    1.

    2.

What are the strengths that will help me achieve my goals?

_____

What can help me achieve my goals?

_____

 What steps will I take to achieve my goals?

_____

Figure 1. Personal development plan template.

EVALUATION OF PERSONAL PROGRESS FOR THE 1st SEMESTER

1. IMPROVEMENT GOAL:

    I succeeded because...

     I failed to achieve because...

     I need to improve...

Figure 2. Example of personal progress assessment form.

In Figure 2, we can see that after analyzing what succeeded and what did not, students set further expectations, i.e., what to do next in this area. They plan what to improve further. This fosters deep learning and requires long-term systematic efforts to achieve profound learning goals.

2.   Setting and reflecting on students' weekly goals: At the beginning of each week, students set a goal they aim to achieve during the week. The goal is recorded in the diary at the beginning of the week (see Figure 3). At the end of the week, students reflect on their progress toward the goal.

My weekly goal:

_____

Figure 3. Student's weekly goal recording.

In Figure 3, we can see that students are given complete freedom to choose the area in which they want to achieve personal progress during the week. So, taking into account the content and activities they will be learning and analyzing their specific situation and skills, students set this goal. It is important that at the end of the week, the student reflects and writes in their diary how well they succeeded in achieving this goal (see Figure 4).
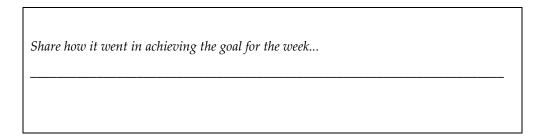
> *Share how it went in achieving the goal for the week...*
>
> _____
>

Figure 4. Student's weekly goal achievement reflection form example.

In Figure 4, we can see that the student can reflect on and contemplate the results and the process of the set goal. Additionally, they can write whether they partially or fully achieved the goal.

3. Student's self-assessment of the learning-to-learn competency. In the student's diary, they evaluate their learning-to-learn competency twice (at the end of the first semester (January) and at the end of the second semester (June)) by answering 7 statements on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 means completely unsuccessful and 10 means completely successful): I reflect on my learning, identifying what helps and hinders my learning.

    When starting to learn something, I set learning goals.

    When I need new information, I know how to find reliable sources.

    I understand why I am learning.

    If something is not working,I look for alternative learning methods.

    I create a schedule to remember, organize, and plan my activities.

    I identify successes and failures.

Stage II. In order to further deepen the obtained data and their analysis, a semi-structured interview [38–40] was conducted with students and class teachers in October 2023. Teachers shared additional context details and insights into the goals and reflections set by students. The teachers whose diaries we studied were asked to describe how they help students set goals, what challenges they face, and how students succeed in reflection. These data provide authentic examples of teachers' experiences, offer additional context details, and reveal teachers' insights into the goals and reflections set by students, enriching and complementing the research results and analysis on the topic.

During the interviews with students, researchers explored why students chose specific goals, what factors influenced them, and how they evaluated their own efforts to achieve the planned results. In the course of semi-structured interviews, researchers have the opportunity to collect a detailed and deep dataset that allows for qualitative analysis. All 4 teachers who worked with the students whose diaries were analyzed participated in the interviews. Researchers can understand not only the goals and results themselves but also the processes and challenges faced by both teachers and students. All 50 students whose diaries were analyzed by the researchers were interviewed. Such an integrative approach can contribute to a more accurate and comprehensive interpretation and understanding of the research results.

Due to the limited scope of the article, we will provide an analysis only of long-term goals and their implementation reflections.

4. Results

4.1. Setting Long-Term Goals for Students, Anticipating Tasks to Achieve the Goal, and Reflecting at the End of the Semester

To become a proficient self-directed learner, one needs to be able to identify their learning needs, create their learning goals, determine their learning resources, and assess and apply appropriate learning strategies [41,42]. Goal setting is more than a definition; it is a process. Goals are anticipated desired outcomes or specific tasks that learners aim

for. These goals can be short-term or long-term, and they may vary in complexity and importance [43].

Analysis of students' set long-term goals. In analyzing the collected data, researchers grouped the long-term goals set by students according to subject areas. This can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' long-term (semester) goals by subject areas.

The Goal Is Related to Learning a Specific Subject				Goals Related to Social, Emotional, and Health Education Competencies			Goal Related to Teaching/Learning Strategies
Lithuanian Language	Mathematic	Foreign Language	Other	Personal Qualities	Emotions and Feelings	Healthy Lifestyle	
N = 14	N = 7	N = 1	N = 2	N = 8	N = 5	N = 7	N = 6

We observe that the majority of students (N = 24) set long-term goals related to the learning of specific subjects, such as Lithuanian language (native language) (N = 14), mathematics (N = 7), and learning a foreign language (N = 1), and two students set a goal applicable to learning all subjects. Another group of goals is related to social, emotional, and health competence. In addition, students set goals to improve their personal qualities (N = 8) and emotions and feelings (N = 5) and develop skills for a healthy lifestyle (N = 7). It is important to note that some students plan to develop learning strategies (N = 6). This indicates that children are not only thinking about the content of the subject but also about how to learn it.

Goals related to learning a specific subject. Most goals related to learning a specific subject are set by students to improve specific areas of Lithuanian language and mathematics subjects. In Tables 5 and 6, we review the subject areas that students marked when setting their goals.

Table 5. Students' learning goals related to the learning of Lithuanian language, broken down by areas of linguistic skills.

Areas of Lithuanian Language Subject			
Goals related to learning grammar rules	Goals related to improving correct spelling/writing in a diary	Goals related to improving reading skills and comprehension of texts	Goals covering all areas of learning
N = 4	N = 3	N = 5	N = 2

Table 6. The categorization of students' learning goals related to learning the subject of mathematics according to areas of mathematical skills.

Areas of the Mathematics Subject			
Learning Multiplication	Action Calculation	Textual Problem Solving	Goals Encompassing All Areas of Learning
N = 3	N = 1	N = 1	N = 2

The data presented in Table 5 indicate that students set goals related to improving reading skills and comprehension (N = 5) such as "*understand the message revealed in the text*", "*improve reading skills*", "*read 10 books*", "*learn to read well*", and "*read more books*". Writing is as important a skill as reading. In primary education, students must learn to apply most writing rules to develop correct language writing skills [11]. Students set goals related to learning language rules, such as "*start a sentence with a capital letter*", "*learn to write in Lithuanian*", "*understand where to write long and nasal letters*", and "*grammar rules*". Three

students identified a goal for improving elegant writing. In grades 1–2, students strive to write as neatly as possible, but in later grades, students' handwriting changes. Although the students participating in the study are in the 4th grade and their handwriting is still forming, students face the problem of writing incorrect letters, and their handwriting can be difficult to read. Two students set a goal that is common to language education, "*improve the Lithuanian language*" and "*strive to deepen knowledge of the Lithuanian language*". It can be assumed that the language skills of these students are lower, making it difficult for them to identify a specific area in which they see the need to improve their language skills.

From Table 6, we can see that students find it important to learn the multiplication table, aiming for good results in multiplication learning, mastering the multiplication table well, and learning it perfectly. These goals are set because, in the early grades, students learn multiplication. They need to not only understand it but also be able to apply it in solving calculation tasks. One student set a goal for arithmetic calculation, wanting to "*learn to calculate more complex operations*" and another for solving word problems, aiming to "*better understand word problems*". Two students set a goal that encompasses all areas of mathematics learning, wanting to "*improve results in math class*" and "*learn math better*".

There were also goals related to social, emotional, and health competence. Emotional and social competence encompasses areas such as the ability to recognize and regulate emotions, make responsible decisions, and effectively manage interpersonal relationships. For students participating in the study, the improvement of these competencies is crucial. Some students set goals related to the improvement of personal qualities (Table 7), emotions and feelings (Table 8), and the pursuit of a healthier lifestyle (Table 9).

Table 7. Distribution of students' set goals related to personal qualities by area.

Areas of Personal Qualities				
Critical Thinking	Activity	Diligence	Courage	To Be the Smartest
N = 1	N = 1	N = 1	N = 2	N = 1

Table 8. Classification of students' goals related to emotions and feelings by areas.

Areas of Emotions and Feelings		
Learn to Recognize and Express Emotions	Manage Anger	Understand Emotions
N = 3	N = 1	N = 1

Table 9. The distribution of students' set goals related to a healthy lifestyle, according to the areas.

Areas of a Healthy Lifestyle			
Sport	Healthy Eating	Active Leisure	Goal Covering All Areas
N = 4	N = 1	N = 1	N = 1

From Table 7 data, it can be seen that two students set goals related to courage, such as "*expressing opinions more clearly and boldly*" and "*not being afraid to make mistakes*". Students set goals related to personal development, such as critical thinking "*learning to think critically*", being active in class "*participating more actively in lessons*", diligence in tasks "*being more attentive*", and the desire to be the smartest "*being one of the smartest students in the class*". Students are able to understand which personal qualities they need to improve and where they encounter problems if these qualities are lacking.

From the data presented in Table 8, we can see that a small percentage of 4th-grade students associate their long-term goals with a desire to learn to recognize emotions and feelings (N = 5). Three students want to "*learn what emotions are and how to recognize them*", "*name the felt emotions*", and "*understand my emotions*". One student sets a goal to "*learn to control anger*" while another student wants to "*learn to understand their feelings*".

The data from Table 9 show that some students are concerned about a healthy lifestyle. Four students set goals related to sports activities and their achievements, such as "*participate in a chess tournament*", "*learn to do a backward somersault*", "*learn tricks with a scooter*", and "*develop regular exercise habits at home*". One student sets goals for promoting healthy eating habits "*eat less sweets*" and promoting active leisure time "*spend more time outdoors*". Another student set a goal covering all competence areas "*I want to improve my healthy lifestyle*". The Competence development description document (2021) [12] emphasizes that students should value health as one of the essential values determining personal and societal well-being and quality of life. They should also take care of their health through physical activity, understanding the importance of healthy eating for well-being, and choosing health-friendly food products.

An important aspect is that students set goals related to learning strategies—seeking various ways to improve learning and learn more effectively (Table 10).

Table 10. Classification of students' set goals related to learning strategies by areas.

Areas of Learning Strategies		
Time Management	Seeking Suitable Ways to Learn	Setting Goals
N = 3	N = 2	N = 1

From Table 10 data, for students (N = 3), time planning is important, such as "*planning their learning time*" and "*completing tasks on time*" (N = 2). Two students find it important to find suitable learning methods, such as "*when facing a learning problem, try to understand why I'm struggling*" and "*when things aren't going well, look for another way to learn*". One student emphasizes the goal-setting process, stating "*before starting to study—set goals*".

4.2. The Students' Anticipated Tasks to Achieve Their Long-Term Goal

Fourth-grade students still lack sufficient planning skills to systematically anticipate tasks to achieve their goals. In order to achieve a goal, students plan one or several tasks as steps toward the goal (see Table 11).

Table 11. Number of tasks planned by students to achieve the goal.

1 Task	2 Tasks	3 Tasks	4 and More Tasks
N = 15	N = 20	N = 11	N = 4

Analyzing the data from Table 11, we can see that the majority of students (N = 35) planned one or two tasks. Even 15 students chose only one task. It is worth noting that most students planned specific actions; for example, for the goal "*to learn Spanish well*", a student planned the task "*I will learn through the Duolingo app*", and for the goal "*to read 10 books*", a student planned the task "*create a list of books*". However, the vast majority of students planned more than one task to achieve their set goal. For the goal "*to write nicely*" a student planned three tasks, including a sequence of specific actions, such as "*1. I will create a plan and stick to it., 2. Mom will help check the writing., and 3. I will learn to write—cultivate patience*". For the goal "*to spend more time outdoors*", a student set three tasks: "*1. I will always go outside during breaks., 2. When I return from school, I will go outside to play with friends., and 3. On weekends, the whole family will go for a walk*". For the goal "*When things don't go well, look for another way to learn*", a student planned four tasks: "*1. I won't give up when it's hard., 2. I will read a book., 3. I will search for information on the internet., and 4. I won't cry and will focus*". When asked how well students understood the meaning of tasks to achieve their goals, teachers mentioned that *the students are only in the 4th grade, and they do not yet have enough skills to set goals. <. . .> It is challenging for them to come up with specific tasks to achieve their goals. <. . .> Usually, the tasks are of a general nature and lack specificity.*

However, from the examples, we can see that some children were able to anticipate very specific steps/stages to achieve their goals.

4.3. Analysis of Students' Reflections on How They Managed to Achieve Their Goal by the End of the Semester

The students who participated in the study pursued the set goal for the entire semester, i.e., for 5 months. At the end of the semester, the students wrote reflections by completing the sentence in their diary: "*I succeeded in achieving the goal because. . .*" or "*I failed to achieve the goal because. . .*". Analyzing the students' responses, it can be observed that, in the opinion of the majority of students, they succeeded in reaching the goal (refer to Table 11), stating reasons such as "*I improved my writing because I received praise from the teacher*", "*I really write more beautifully*", "*I learned a lot, needed to spend more time*", "*I make fewer mistakes*", "*I succeeded in speaking without offending*", "*I read and wrote a lot. Improved reading*", "*I learned a lot of math, solved more problems*", and "*I gained confidence and express my opinion all the time*".

From the data in Table 12, we see that some students (N = 9) have achieved their goals. Students also mention the reason why they did not reach the goal: "*I did not put in enough effort, I will need to continue learning*", "*there was too little time to achieve the goal*", "*there was no time to learn*", and "*I did not have time to play*".

Table 12. Distribution of students' reflections based on how they succeeded in achieving the goal.

Succeeded in Achieving	Failed to Achieve	Did Not Write a Reflection	Achieved, Partially, Need to Continue Improving
N = 34	N = 9	N = 2	N = 5

Five students note that they pursued the goal and there were results, but the goal has not been achieved as the student would like, they don't feel good about it, so the children say, "*I will need to write more*", "*I make fewer mistakes. I am still not diligent enough*", "*I don't really know how to express opinions*", and "*I succeeded a little. I trusted myself*".

From the table, we see that 34 students indicate that they have achieved the goal. Students wrote an argument and an explanation of why they believe the goal has been reached (see Table 13).

Table 13. Distribution of students' arguments for why they were able to achieve their set goal.

Categories	Number of Students	Comments Written by Students
The number of errors decreased	N = 2	I make fewer mistakes. I already make fewer mistakes.
Improved writing skills	N = 3	I definitely write more beautifully. I tried my best. I think I write more beautifully. The teacher praised me. I succeeded in improving my handwriting because I received praise from the teacher.
Improved reading skills	N = 3	I delve more into the text. I read a lot and wrote a lot. I improved my reading. I read every day. I tried and wanted to.
Improved mathematical abilities	N = 4	I studied a lot of mathematics, solved more problems. I do well on tests, and it's enough for me. I tried to learn the multiplication table at home and at school. I understand textual problems better now.
Dedicated more time to learning	N = 3	I study very often. I studied a lot; I had to spend more time. I put in a lot of time and effort. I didn't always listen well.
Student mentions that he succeeded or learned	N = 7	I learned. I succeeded. I suggested, and I succeeded. I managed to speak without offending. I succeeded. Every day, I spend an hour outside for sure. I managed to achieve 75 percent. But I learned to raise my hand and ask.
Student is happy with the achievement	N = 4	I'm glad that I achieved everything because I tried very hard to reach it. I am a little scholar. I am happy that I succeeded. I thought about what I did and I'm happy about it.

Table 13. *Cont.*

Categories	Number of Students	Comments Written by Students
Improved social, emotional, and health-related competencies	N = 6	Many friends like to play with me. I gained courage and express my opinion all the time. When I get angry, I breathe, and if necessary, I leave the classroom. I started eating less sweets. I spend more time outdoors. Better results in ice hockey because I practiced every day. I focused.
Improved digital competence	N = 2	I know how to use the internet. I did many independent tasks on the computer. I checked the conditions more than once.

Researchers categorized students' explanations into nine groups based on identified common traits. From the data in Table 13, we see that most students (N = 7) mentioned in their reflections that the goal was achieved because they managed to accomplish or learn what they aimed for, such as *"I learned"*, *"I succeeded"*, *"I suggested and succeeded"*, *"I managed to speak without hurting others"*, *"I succeeded. Every day I spend an hour outside for sure"*, *"I managed to achieve 75 percent"*, and *"but I learned to raise my hand and ask"*.

Another group of students (N = 6) improved their social, emotional, and health competencies. They stated, "Many friends like to play with me", "I gained confidence and always express my opinion", "when I get angry, I breathe and, if necessary, leave the class", "I started eating less sweets. I spend more time outside", "better ice hockey results because I trained every day", and "I concentrate". Four students wrote that they were happy with their achievements and improved their mathematical abilities.

After reviewing all student reflections, it is evident that students still lack the skills to reflect more deeply on their goal achievements. The written arguments are brief, and we did not see a profound analysis of their own activities or actions.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The deep metacognitive abilities of primary school students who participated in the study are reflected in the choice of goals set according to subject areas. Many students participating in the study chose to improve their Lithuanian language skills (N = 14). In the early grades, children need to acquire good reading skills, which include not only reading techniques but also a deep, comprehensive understanding of the text being read, as these skills are crucial for future academic success [44,45]. Students in the early grades who lack good reading skills may experience persistent academic difficulties throughout their learning experience [46], making reading goals highly relevant for students.

Primary school is not only a place for the development of students' cognitive abilities but also a foundation for socialization, interaction with peers, and social-emotional well-being. Social, emotional, and health competencies include the ability to form friendships, communicate with others, express emotions in understanding and acceptable ways, resolve conflicts, and show empathy [12,47–49]. As a child grows and their cognitive maturity increases, so do their emotional abilities—understanding emotions and emotional regulation [50]. Social and emotional competencies are crucial for children's development [51,52], influencing their ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, successfully cope with personal and social challenges, effectively understand and manage emotions, make responsible decisions, and set and achieve positive personal and collective goals. Social-emotional learning skills impact students' academic achievements, future employability, engagement, and learning abilities [53]. Therefore, it is important for children to understand, recognize, and express their own and others' emotions and feelings.

The goal-setting theory developed by Locke and Latham (2006, 2019) [43,54] asserts that by setting clear and measurable goals, individuals are more motivated to strive for and achieve them. Setting specific and measurable goals requires more effort in pursuing the predetermined objectives. Goals should be concrete and measurable so that individuals precisely know what they are aiming for. Establishing specific goals helps students clearly

understand what they need to do to achieve them. The goal-setting theory also takes into account the complexity of the task, recognizing that more complex tasks may require longer efforts and more resources. Setting academic achievement goals is one of the most important and beneficial educational methods [43,54]. However, common encouragement from teachers for students to do their best is less effective than setting clear and strict goals [54].

The effectiveness of goal setting increases when individuals are more committed to achieving their goals, and commitment to goal pursuit is influenced by two main factors: self-efficacy and goal importance [55]. Self-regulation is a fundamental aspect of human behavior that helps successfully pursue personal goals. Self-regulation can be considered a broad term encompassing various goal-related activities, such as deciding which goal to pursue, planning how to achieve it, implementing these plans, and sometimes even giving up. Self-regulation involves various ways in which individuals change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to achieve a personal goal, including efforts to control themselves [56]. Most study participants achieved their set goal, making these results significant as they demonstrate that elementary school students are capable of analyzing their work, setting goals, and taking necessary steps/tasks to achieve them if educators pay attention to these aspects in the educational process. Upon reviewing the set tasks of those students who did not achieve their goal, we noticed that these students had set only one task to achieve the goal. We can assume that setting only one task may not be sufficient to achieve the goal. A student should plan to achieve the goal with the help of multiple tasks, as setting goals and tasks indicates the direction toward success and focuses attention on desired academic outcomes [57].

The experience of feedback is a crucial factor in predicting students' goals and determines whether they will be set and adjusted positively or negatively. This fact is supported by the study of Tolli and Schmidt (2008) [58]. Feedback serves as guidance for students on how to better pursue their goals, depending on the type, frequency, quality, and perception of feedback. Students' goals are partially influenced by their feedback experience. It is especially important to note that feedback that encourages the pursuit of personally meaningful and challenging goals can have a greater impact on achieving optimal performance. This means that when students are encouraged by feedback to pursue more advanced goals, it can lead to positive changes in their achievements. This was evident in our study, as most students reflected that they were successful in achieving their set goals because they dedicated time and effort during the activity, and educators provided additional attention and feedback during the educational process. The impact of feedback on achievements can be particularly effective when it encourages students to pursue personally more significant and challenging goals. Thus, feedback can act as a driving force, motivating students to formulate goals based on which they seek continuous growth [58].

In the case of personally challenging goals, the feedback and improvement-related information component is a significant factor. The result of this interaction can be the student's ability to better perceive their goals and direct them toward personal growth [59]. Thus, the impact of feedback on goal setting and adjustment is fundamentally related to encouraging the pursuit of more advanced and personally meaningful goals, ultimately leading to positive outcomes and learning success. Metacognitive reflection and journal writing improve students' achievements and understanding. Journals can prompt students to contemplate their beliefs, thoughts, and actions, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy and meaningful self-perception [60,61].

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has the following limitation: the findings of the study cannot be applied to the general group as a whole, as the study is qualitative. The activities identified and analyzed in the study in order to achieve the individual goals and objectives set by the pupils, and their reflection, will help other researchers and teachers to organize the development of competence in learning to learn by keeping personal diaries and by

allowing the activities to be planned, implemented, and reflected upon. Moreover, this is performed from a long-term perspective, for at least six months. A separate quantitative study would be needed to apply the findings of the study to the whole group.

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