Chapter 17
Information and Communication Technology Tools in Language Learning Classroom: Developing Metacognitive Skills and Its Social Ramifications

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Abstract This chapter focuses on some of the crucial pragmatic concerns associated with a group of passive, non-interactive, and non-performing ESL (English as Second Language) learners (our target learners) in multi-lingual classrooms. It broadly investigates the ways in which metacognitive skills (Flavell JH, Am Psychol 34:906–911, 1979) of the identified group of language learners are developed through certain task-based activities and by the usage of information and communication technology (ICT) tools. The chapter describes those language-learning strategies that modern smart technology supports and helps the learners to develop individual autonomy. The learners' autonomy facilitates the process of self-regulated learning. The subject learners are B. Tech students from two institutions in India, one is Adamas University (Kolkata) and the other is Indian Institute of Information Technology (Guwahati). The chapter follows a combination of experimental, descriptive, and analytical methods to formulate its observations and arguments. From the learners' responses to different task-based activities aimed to enhance their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, that were conducted twice—without and with ICT tools—the chapter deduces that ICT-based language teaching empowers the target learners, offers them alternative strategies to claim their space within the educational fold, and articulates their self and aspirations. This model, for further results, may be specifically tested across Indian classrooms on learners belonging to marginalized sections of India. The chapter is divided in the following sections—first, it situates the problem that challenged the authors intellectually; the second section highlights the research gap in the existing ICT-based language

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learning literature and poses the research questions; the operative relationship between ICT tools and critical thinking is discussed in the third section; in the fourth section, we propose metacognition as an effective language learning strategy; finally, the fifth section states the implication of the current research.

Keywords Language learning · ICT · University students · Critical thinking · Metacognition

1 Introduction: The Problem at Hand

This chapter emerges from the recently encountered challenges by both the authors while teaching courses titled as "Communication Skills Practical" and "Professional Communication" at Adamas University, and "English" at IIIT-G to heterogeneous learners specializing in technical education. All of these courses are oriented toward the Teaching of English as Second Language Acquisition (TESLA). The chapter investigates into the language learning strategies that technology supports and helps the learners to develop self-regulated learning.

There are numerous challenges that both learners and educators face with TESLA especially in the context of the education system in India where the classrooms are filled with heterogeneous learners. The heterogeneous learners in India are composed of multi-lingual and multi-cultural students who belong to diverse social categories such as gender, religion, and caste, and also to different economic strata. They hail from a curious mix of different and sometimes largely uneven educative institutional cultures. Further, they display varying levels of competence in language communication in general, and English language communication in specific. Altogether, they reflect and embody the complex differential phenomenological histories within the ambit of education.

It may be noted that due to the varying intensities of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the teaching-learning mechanism at both the institutions at that time was being conducted in the virtual mode through the usage of Information and Communication Technology–based tools. Apart from immediate challenges that threatened continuous seamless teaching-learning processes, such as, the digital divide, disparate and incommensurate life conditions at homes, the authors faced daunting tasks of being unable to reach out and communicate with a group of students who remained inert during the class sessions. The conventional strategies of attempting to ensure their participation in most of the learning, assessment, and evaluation procedures proved futile.

While the authors had received feeble responses from the target learners in a number of task-based activities, it was a "story-telling task" that struck chords with the learners. During the "story-telling task" (assessing coherence and cohesion of ideas among the learners) that was conducted twice—without and with information

and communication technology (ICT) tools—it was observed that during the former, the target learners showed memory failure, difficulties in mapping contexts and events, lack of comprehension about the text generated by the previous participants, and that culminated in the overall failure to understand the text narrative. However, later when the same task was executed with image cards, and power point presentation over a Learning Management System (LMS) platform, the target learners could successfully fulfill the assigned tasks. During self-assessment, they unanimously chose visual perception as a stimulus that facilitated in understanding, remembering, analyzing, applying, and creating their knowledge level. It was the first time that the learners not only participated in the activity, but were also actively engaged in self-assessment and evaluation processes. They finally opened up and started regularly articulating themselves in the teaching-learning sessions.

The above instance and the outcomes that it generated actually led the authors to furthermore dwell on the relational aspects of ICT tools in inducing the metacognitive faculties of the target learners. It has been found that ICT-based language teaching meta-cognitively empowers the target learners, offers them alternative strategies to claim their space within the educational fold, articulates their self and aspirations.

2 Research Questions and Research Gap

This chapter stems from a common concern of the authors for learners who appear passive and inert during classroom-based teaching-learning sessions. Thus, the research question or problem that the chapter engages with is fundamentally practical in orientation. It aims to explore ways of ensuring increasing involvement in the teaching-learning process through the usage of ICT to achieve maximum participation of the target learners. Therefore, the chapter focuses on some of the crucial pragmatic concerns associated with a group of passive, non-interactive, and non-performing ESL (English as Second Language) learners (our target learners) in multi-lingual classrooms. It broadly investigates the ways in which metacognitive skills (Flavell, 1979) of the identified group of language learners are developed through certain task-based activities and by the usage of ICT tools.

The problem compelled the authors to ponder and introspect on the theoretical and practical-pedagogical formulations in the field of TESLA which interacts heavily and regularly with the domain of ICT in language learning. It appears that the philosophical-theoretical debates on the role of ICT in the language learning domain (Warschauer, 2002; Thorne & May, 2008; Widodo et al., 2017; Pasternak, 2020), and the practical-pedagogical challenges involved therein (Chambers et al., 2004; Kenning, 2007; Calderon, 2020), have hitherto remained focused solely on motivated learners. Motivated learners are those who regularly interact, engage actively in tasks and activities given by the educator in the classroom and outside, take the assessments seriously to score or fare reasonably or comparatively well, and thus are able to achieve either all or most of the learning objectives. The levels of competence in any subject for the motivated learners also tend to remain high. However,

the passive, non-interactive, and non-performing learners (our target learners) in the classroom have remained discursively excluded from the foci of the researchers. As a result, there is a dearth of academic literatures on how to enable the inert learners to be more active. Thus, it was an imperative for both the authors to turn their attention toward the latter—both in terms of pedagogic practice and situating the specific pedagogic experiences in the backdrop of theoretical approaches toward education. It is probably a no brainer that for the authors, the immediate challenge was to devise pedagogic strategies and make sincere repeated attempts at involving the target learners to engage in the everyday institutional educative process for obvious reasons. It was only much later that the idea of publishing the experimental findings, observations, and conclusions seemed important to be shared with the larger academic fraternity.

3 Information and Communication Technology–Based Education and Enhancement of Critical Thinking

ICTs are defined as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage information" (Tinio, 2003). ICT tools and services include "web based and non-web based resources" (Alkamel & Chouthaiwale, 2018)—Internet dependent digital platforms that function as knowledge repository outlets belong to the former whereas devices like computers, mobile phones, tablets, and broadcasting technologies like radio and television, among others, belong to the latter.

With rapid strides in the global technical and digital advancements, newer ways, avenues, and modes of learning have emerged. ICT services and tools have assumed the formal incorporation into what is understood to be smart education that thrives on modern existing and emergent technologies of customized learning. The new smart technology enables education to be more learner-centric, where the learner can exercise principal choices in the elaborate knowledge acquisition procedure, and secure autonomy to take responsibility of the learning process. As a result, the learner emerges as a key agent in the field of education.

Through the meeting of individuated requirements or customized formations, smart technology provides several alternatives in terms of knowledge sources for prospective learners to engage in learning activities. Consequently, it increases the learners' participation and also promises ample scope for the learners and the learning process to be interactive. Thus, ICT-based smart education has transformed the landscape of education by replacing the erstwhile lecture based and the teacher-centric process of knowledge exchange. With the sole focus on the learner, smart education seems to provide the former with increased motivation. Two contrasting features appear to operate simultaneously in this field—one, fragmentation of knowledge and atomized individualization of the learner, and two, assembly of fragmented knowledge to generate an impression of a "holistic" view of knowledge

content, and cultivation of academic solidarity by "interpellation" (Althusser, 1970) of the learners within crystallized communities. ICT as a support for smart education provides several benefits, such as easy access to reading and other study materials, continuation of learning outside the classroom space, and online discussion forums, which enable teachers and learners to render the study process more flexible and focus on the principle of individualization based on different interests, levels of competence and expertise, and needs.

Apart from the pedagogic advantages offered by ICT-mediated instruction, the faculty of critical thinking can be developed as learners engage with tools, discuss, experiment, collaborate, make decisions, and solve problems using various tools (McGuiness, 1999; Wright, 2010). Moreover, in ICT-mediated learning, the control on the entire learning process consisting of aims and objectives of a particular lesson, the specific kind or sort of information and knowledge that needs to be accessed, the time factor as to when it would be accessed, the utilization of the information-data-knowledge, securing the outcomes of the learning, and qualitative and quantitative assessment and evaluation of the learning rests on the learner. ICT-mediated education establishes a self-regulated learning process, where the learners are aware of what, why, and how they are learning. Technology-based learning (in particular, e-learning) enables the teaching-learning process to be more flexible as it takes into consideration the needs of different learners depending upon their levels of competence—basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. They can plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process. The minute constitutive process adds on to the critical thinking capacity of the learner in this case.

In order to develop critical thinking skills and analytical skills, the learning environment needs to be conducive and learner friendly. ICT tools like various learning applications, different types of software, videos, images, audio files, power point presentations, among others, simulate a "constructivist" classroom wherein the learners can engage in long-term learning processes, constructing their own learning by asking questions and finding better approaches to solve the problems. The ICT-mediated classroom makes the learning process more interesting as ideas and information can be presented in different forms such as images, video clips, audio clips, tables, graphs, and even multimedia. The emergence of the World Wide Web associated with Internet has compelled stakeholders within the academia to invent new forms of learning that would add significantly to the creation of learner's autonomy and its enhancement as well. As noted by Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) "Learners can take all the decisions concerning their learning: determining targets and objectives, choosing contents and materials, selecting methods and techniques, organizing their learning and assessing their progress."

Considering that this work focuses solely on English as Second Language Acquisition (ESLA) and TESLA, it may be claimed that ICT provides the language learners the opportunity of real-life exposure to the technical and socio-cultural aspects of language communication by giving them an insight into those who speak the target language as their native language. For example, through digital platforms such as emails (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.), social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat, Face Time, professional networking sites such as

LinkedIn, and other video conferencing applications such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Cisco Webex platforms to name a few, language learners can interact with native speakers and this enables them to understand the communicative culture of the target language speakers.[1] That in turn facilitates the language learning process for non-native speakers. ICT tools such as interactive whiteboards, power point presentations, video clips, and images provide stimulating visual aids as a productive strategy to support the comprehending, understanding, and using of the target language in real contexts.

In ICT-mediated learning, the learners have freedom to access information and control their own learning speed. It makes the language learners aware of the whole learning process. The learners can consciously adopt preferable language learning strategies as per their need. This further intends to establish a more action/outcome-based learning.

Language learners choose to operationalize thoughts & actions in carrying out multiple tasks beginning with rudimentary learning to advanced linguistic performance (Cohen, 1996).

While using technology to plan their learning goals and outcomes, the learner becomes aware of one's own cognitive process, which further inculcates self-regulation of learning objectives and active monitoring of the learning process. Thus, the arena of language learning and knowledge acquisition gets invested with neural vectors with the predominant intersection of a complex network involving cognitive, supra-cognitive, and metacognitive practices for the fulfillment of broader goals.

4 Metacognition as a Language Learning Strategy

The strategies adopted during the course of English Language Acquisition for L2 learners began to get academic attention from the mid-1970s (see Anderson, 1991, 2002; Cohen, 1998; Hosenfeld, 1978; Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 1990). Learning strategies are techniques for understanding, remembering, using information that are consciously controlled by the learner (Pressley & McCormick, 1995; Oxford, 1990). Language learning strategies involve direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies; indirect strategies include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies, as mentioned in Taxonomies of Language Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990). Zhang and Goh (2006) state that those learners who are equipped with metacognitive skills are able to plan their learning in advance, monitor it during the task performance, and evaluate their learning after the task accomplishment. Such forms of metacognitive skills cause shifts in the learning process to a more

[1] Globally renowned institutions offer specific courses for prospective learners who can access them from any part of the world. Some of these courses are also digitally archived in streaming platforms such as YouTube.

outcome based and learner-centric one, where the learner through an active agency takes the responsibility of his/her learning methods. These kinds of strategies involve thinking about learning processes, planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. Metacognitive strategies are found (in the literature of language learning strategies) to be more effective than other learning strategies. The language acquisition proceeds at a faster rate as the learner self-regulates the learning process (Anderson, 2002).

Papaleontiou-Louca (2003) states that metacognition means cognition about cognition. If cognition involves perceiving, understanding, conceptualizing, and remembering, then metacognition involves thinking critically about one's own perceiving, understanding, conceptualizing, and remembering. It further involves reflection upon one's own action. Metacognition helps in monitoring one's own learning process through four stages (as noted by Flavell, 1979): (i) metacognitive knowledge, (ii) metacognitive experiences, (iii) goals (or tasks), and (iv) actions (or strategies). Flavell (1979) redefined metacognition as individuals' information and awareness about their own cognition.

Metacognition can be understood in two levels: metacognitive awareness and metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive awareness is the learners' knowledge about their learning, while metacognitive strategies refer to learners' regulation and management of their learning which encompasses a wide range of activities: selecting the most useful strategies for a particular task; planning, monitoring, regulation, and evaluation of learning (Schraw et al., 2006).

In the case of ESLA, the setting of the primary goal from a particular lesson, that is in turn based on the immediate task at hand, and the practical actions that are required to achieve that goal need to be decided in advance. The learners, who adopt metacognitive strategies, while setting the goal, have to consider the following:

- The goal has to be specific
- The goal has to be quantifiable or measurable
- The goal has to be attainable
- Therefore, the goal has to be realistic
- The goal has to be time-bound

Hence, it is implied that metacognitive strategies in language learning requires conceptual and practical clarity. It has to pass through careful planning and continuous assessment and evaluation of the total process itself. For an L2 learner, the metacognitive skills, "the conscious control processes such as planning, monitoring of the progress of processing, effort allocation, strategy use and regulation of cognition" (Papaleontiou-Louca, 2003) are of supreme importance.

Practitioners of TESLA advocate a number of context-dependent metacognitive conventions and strategies for successful concretization of learning objectives, aims, and goals. In 2021, during an online faculty development program conducted by the Amity University (Tashkent), one of the speakers, Shravasti Chakravarti, cited situational examples such as, if an L2 learner wished to improve on the possessed competence in writing skills, then s/he could practice 15 min of free writing daily for a duration of 1 month. Similarly, if the learner wanted to effectively boost

the confidence level, then s/he could practice speaking for a month by standing in front of a mirror so as to critically observe and chart the changes in the body language. What may be understand from these examples is that there is an imperative for the learner to have knowledge about what the tasks enumerated above as sample specimens entail and how they may be performed so that the results can translate into desirable outcomes. Such understanding however further raises key critical philosophical questions regarding the conflicts between Chomsky's Universalist paradigm that is heavily influenced by Kantian philosophy of Enlightenment and the British Empiricist philosophy. While the former argues for the hitherto availability of metacognitive knowledge within the learners minds from pre-existing metacognitive experiences, the latter envisages the idea of the learners' minds being primarily empty slates or (the tabula-rasa).[2] Extrinsic thoughts, knowledge, and experiences shape the metacognitive abilities in them by the constitutive formation of impressions.

The digital era has reconfigured the earlier formal ways of acquiring, nurturing, and practicing cognitive as well as metacognitive skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The print technology was earlier historically essential in exposing learners right from their infancy to the four enlisted ways of acquiring the cognitive and metacognitive skills. These ways have been subsumed and accommodated within the ambits of the new digital technology in the contemporary times. As part of language learning processes, ICT tools and services play key roles in constituting assistive frameworks that fundamentally help learners, especially the passive, non-interactive, and inert ones,[3] to develop metacognitive skills. This is evident from the observations and data spanning a period of 6 months to a year, as available with the authors on account of their practical experiences in teaching.

The subject learners in this case are students from technical fields, engaged in B. Tech courses in two academic institutes of India—one is Adamas University (Kolkata) and the other is Indian Institute of Information Technology (Guwahati) (IIIT-G). For the study, B. Tech students of Adamas University Kolkata and IIIT-G have been considered. At the former, the learners are offered communicative English courses in two consecutive semesters whereas at IIIT-G the course is offered only for a semester.[4] The primary goal for providing such courses is to improve the verbal English Language proficiency of the learners and the courses involve mostly listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW skill-set) training practices through providing the learners exposure to Indian and global audio content from an eclectic mix of sources such as TED Talks, news clips, interviews, panel discussions, group discussions, role plays, debates, oral presentations, pronunciation practice, voice

[2] The given debate is beyond the scope of this work.

[3] There could be multiple reasons for the said inertness but the scope of the work does not include dwelling on the matter, except for a brief observational comment that there is a predominant lack in cultural continuity with knowledge content and materials that fall under the purview of the print technology.

[4] The courses are titled as "Communication Skills Practical" and "Professional Communication" at Adamas University in consecutive semesters, and "English" at IIIT-G

and accent training, writing exercises in the form of creative pieces, and technical reports (journalistic writing, content writing, company reports, etc.) among others.

To show how ICT helps in nurturing metacognitive skills of language learners, the authors have taken into account four task-based language learning activities—covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills—that we have implemented in the communicative English classes at our respective institutes. Now, we will discuss these tasks by describing what they entailed, noting our observations regarding the performance of the learners, takeaways from them, and finally drawing summary conclusions from the entire experience of the learners. The first task which we will discuss is a story-telling task.

4.1 Activity 1: Story Telling Task

One of the most conventional and well-tested activity in a language learning session for L2 learners involves the "story telling task." This task effectively teaches the significance of coherence and cohesion of ideas while speaking and listening.

In this task the learners in the classroom were arranged and distributed in small groups. Members of each group had to create and construct stories. This task was conducted twice—first without the usage of any ICT tools and services, and then in the second instance, it was conducted by using ICT tools and services. During the first time, the different groups of learners were asked to choose themes of stories on their own by consulting the group members. There was a strict restriction on the usage of Internet in order to search for prospective topics. Once the learners had agreed upon a specific theme, they were asked to build a story or plot based on the agreed theme. During the story-telling session, a learner was required to utter a few sentences following what the previous learner had said.

We noticed that the learners had difficulty in understanding, remembering, and using the information that the immediate previous participant had articulated. In most cases, the learners failed to identify the context in which the story or plot had originated. Further, they failed to mentally map the events narrated in the story. Later on, the restrictions on the usage of ICT tools and services were withdrawn. The learners were asked to collectively collaborate in groups on the story telling task by using ICT tools, services, and features. In order to come up with the stories, the learners were provided with the freedom to use audio-video clips, image cards, and power point presentations, among other ICT tools.

In the next class, we noticed that one group of students prepared a power point presentation, wherein each member had their thoughts written down on each slide accompanied by images. They orally presented their story with the support of images, whereby the images were ordered sequentially following the storyline. The second group presented their story by displaying moving images, and the third group played the silent video clips in the background when each of the members illustrated their ideas, eventually creating a story. This entire process becomes interesting to observe while reflecting on the fact that images and video clips helped the

learners to understand, remember, contextualize the theme of the story better, and enunciate the story in a linear narrative format, which otherwise had been deemed difficult for them.

At the end of the task, the learners were given a worksheet where a number of reasons were pointed out for failing to perform the task without ICT tools, and for successfully executing it with the support of the ICT tools. The learners were asked to choose the reasons for the same as per their understanding of the task. We noticed that they unanimously chose visual perception as one of the abilities that helped them in understanding, remembering, analyzing, applying, and creating their knowledge level.

What we can derive from this observation is that ICT-based language teaching makes the learners aware of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they have and do not have, and this helps them to strategically use those skills that they have to develop the skills that they do not have. Like in the story-telling task, the learners could develop their creative thinking skills (which they did not have) with the help of visual perception (which they have).

4.2 Activity 2: Reading Comprehension

Prof. Paul Gunashekar (2021) during the same faculty development program (mentioned earlier in the chapter) points out the following reasons for reading: (i) Reading is a means of extending our command of the language concerned; (ii) reading contributes most to self-dependence in learning; and (iii) reading should be valued not only as an educational tool but as a source of enjoyment.

For the reading exercise, we had chosen digital texts, which includes read aloud (synthetic text to speech) programs. The read aloud feature breaks the entire text into understandable chunks as the speed of the audio clip can be controlled. This also helps the learners to identify the key arguments of the text quite quickly and easily. This happens because the read aloud program supports the learners' understanding of the word image with the sound image, which further leads to the formation of sense of the text. On the other hand, silent reading involves only understanding the shape of the word image and forming sense out of that shape, which not only complicates but also delays the process of understanding the text.

We also chose texts which had illustrations as visual images capture the reader's attention and help him to interpret the written words better. By providing such texts to the learner, we expected two outcomes. The first was that the learners would make use of existing schemas while reading the words given in the text and the second was that the illustrations would help in modifying the existing schemas. For example, when the learners read the following text without the illustration, they had the following misinterpretations of the text. First, they thought that the driver and the conductor had separate identities (supports their pre-existing knowledge of the society they live in), second, they thought that the driver and the conductor were both males (again supporting their pre-existing knowledge), and they failed to identify the reference of the "she" in the second paragraph.

"The bus conductor careered along and ended up in the hedge. Several passengers were hurt. The driver was questioned by the police."

"She was later congratulated on her quick thinking and skillful handling of the bus when the brakes failed."

We presented this text in slide show. In the next slide, when the story was again presented with the illustration, the students could identify that the "she" was the bus conductor, who was also the driver. The illustration acted as a stimulus to modify their background knowledge.

Later, when we asked the students to bring reading texts of their own choice to the class, most of them brought digital comics which are accompanied with illustrations and they have in-built read aloud programs. The reasons that the learners gave for choosing e-comics and e-graphic fictions as texts are stated in the following text:

i. Digital texts are easy to access and can be shared with others in no time over technologically aided platforms, like WhatsApp, Facebook page, Messenger, e-mails, and LMS platforms (CANVAS and Microsoft Teams).
ii. Comics and graphic fictions bring humor in the reading process, which they otherwise think is a monotonous activity.
iii. Small chunks of languages are used in comics and graphic fictions, which helps in easier comprehension.
iv. Encourages imagination to think beyond the narration.

With the advancement of the ICT-integrated education system, more interactive and collaborative language learning environments have come into existence. Learner's autonomy can be created through ICT-mediated education. An autonomous learner is assumed to take control over his learning management, cognitive process, and learning content. Control over the cognitive process consists of attention or awareness and reflection upon one's learning process. Learning content means learning situations in which learners have the right to make decisions about their learning. A learner can be called autonomous if he can set learning goals; select appropriate learning strategies to achieve those goals; select appropriate materials and tools to initiate the learning process; and finally, can reflect upon the learning process and performance.

4.3 Activity 3: Listening Exercises

Listening skills account a relatively understated arena of focus in language learning classrooms, although its requirement and significance are both of supreme importance. This is not exactly the excerpt but the essence of a conversation back in the year 2019, between a faculty member of a University in India who was conducting faculty recruitment interviews for the institution and one of the authors of this work. For our classes devoted to enabling the learners to a wide variety of narratives ranging from the domain of creative to technical information and knowledge, the teachers had designed a listening activity whereby they handed out audio content across

topics such as sports, entertainment and culture, educational content belonging to the domain of science and technology, hard news such as national and global politics, from a wide array of websites and digital streaming platforms.

On one such occasion, learners were asked to consult the Internet and come up with material and content in the context of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia. The authors had mandated that these materials and content needed to emerge from Indian and global sources for the benefit of the learners in terms of getting an opportunity to listen to the English diction of India as well as the ones prevalent in some of the Western countries such as Britain, United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and others. The immediate task for the learners was to listen to the audio content, note the words that are spoken in the context, categorize the key words into different grammatical categories, comprehend the affective implications of these categories, make an effort into charting a genealogy of commonly used vocabulary amidst the context of wars, understand the point of view of various stakeholders and groups associated with the war as per the information and knowledge sources, secure an insight into the perceptive reception of war itself from socio-political, economic, cultural, and psychological perspectives. Therefore, apart from technicalities associated with listening skills, cultural communication also plays an important role here. The learners were also asked to prepare a pool of words and expressions that were either foreign to them, or the ones whose meanings were not clear to them.

This task was handled differently by the multiple clusters of learners—those who possessed impressions about the history of the conflict could actually well follow the technical instructions of noting down key words and terminologies that are popularly used in media discourse. They were able to classify these words and terms into the various grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, among others. Moreover, they could smoothly delineate the mental landscapes associated with the affective impact that these words, terminologies, and the grammatical categories overall had cast. From that the general majoritarian moods, senses, sentiments, emotions, feelings, and solidarity emerged quite clearly. It is perhaps quite easily comprehendible that these learners could well articulate the various angular perspectives regarding a war-like situation in general, and in the case of Ukraine and Russia's conflict to be specific. They could without any hindrance express concerns over the human costs of a war in general and the specific topic as well. In fact, they had cited supplementary content that they had consumed in different popular social media platforms. Such clear and deft handling of the instructions given to them along with the careful organization of the mandatory consultation of both nationally and globally produced content was definitely impressive. However, the interesting approach to the entire task was adopted by those who were either not at all acquainted or not that well versed with the given subject.

Due to some reason, may be out of peer pressure or on seeing some of the abovementioned students' clusters, there were sections who also wanted to contribute to the fulfilling of the tasks. The latter quickly realized that they could not cognize the said topic as such and therefore identified the predominant lacunae in the knowledge gap or information gap between the event and their regular sense of learning self. They formulated a strategy of referring to the Indian content at first as that

would be positing them and the material content in a plane of similarity—cultural familiarity stemming from a shared sense of belonging. The learners therefore listened carefully to the content from India, mostly a couple of times, and tried to locate the unfamiliar territories and arenas at the beginning. Instead of focusing on what they knew or on pre-existing sets of information, data, and knowledge, they tried to consider words and expressions that they were unfamiliar with. In some of the cases, globally used key terms such as the NATO and some of the abbreviated forms of various agencies and organizations operating within the ambits of the United Nations were noted. Next, they consulted the globally produced knowledge material and content in order to compare their available knowledge pools. A crucial challenge that lay at that moment was deciphering the English diction and pronunciation. That was definitely a major hassle for these groups that they tried to negotiate with by reducing the pace of the audio and video speeches. Some of the learners tried to read the transcript by switching on the options for subtitles while focusing on the listening activity. Thus, on realizing that the voices, accents, diction, and pronunciation of English in the globally produced knowledge material and content was not familiar to the Indian ears, the learners proceeded to reduce the gap by making attempts of listening and reading simultaneously. Words, terminologies, and expressions that the learners failed to identify on listening, were effectively attempted to be read so that the final meaning was not completely lost on them. The learners adopted every strategy available so that they could understand the audio and video content. This was the technical negotiation that these learners felt could be strategized upon to draw a more comprehensive meaning and not remain in complete lurch with regards to the content.

Among those who were not well versed with the entire topic, there were groups of learners that had not been exposed to imagistic ideas of war. They tried to listen to the contents and materials for some time before realizing the fact that there was a significant connection gap between what they were listening to, and what knowledge they already possessed. To bridge that gap, they opted to exercise a strategy of connecting the dots by typing words such as "war," "Russia-Ukraine war," among others in order to perhaps secure some visual stimulation. They needed images, videos, and photographic materials on the thematic of modern-day warfare to be able to primarily imagine a context amidst which the topic was given to the learners for securing materials and content.

After these sets of activities, they proceeded to compile a set of items that they could not understand despite various attempts. Therefore, considering the significant gap between the knowledge materials, the historical impression of whatever was happening around the world, and the self of the learners, the learners actually made attempts to at least secure inputs in alternative forms. For example, when they could not aurally relate to the spoken words, they explored the chance of visually reading them—first silently, and then loudly to ensure cognitive registration of the word itself in their respective brains. On being allowed to consult online dictionaries, the learners proceeded to obtain the meanings of those words and expressions that were unfamiliar to them. Similarly, they referred to pictographic materials at the point of failing to assimilate the emotional affect and impact of a war-like crisis situation. The images, photographs, paintings, and videos often provide

supplementary sources of information and knowledge that probably posited these learners at the gateway of a deeper insight into the questions that were raised during the class.

Thus, it is quite evident that learners, especially the ones who are passive and inert, may be able to enhance their cognitive and metacognitive faculties by focusing on their predominant areas of weakness. It might be surmised that the ability to quickly assess one's level of knowledge is a reflection of strong metacognitive skill. In our case, we were dealing with undergraduate students but it is applicable for children as well. Blakey and Spence in their study on the metacognitive faculty and ability displayed by children opines that at the start of a research activity, children need to make conscious decisions about their knowledge. Initially they write, "What I already know about…" As children research the topic, they continue to verify, clarify and expand, or replace with more accurate information, each of their initial statements (Blakey & Spence, 1990).

In this task-based activity, these learners actually dwelt on the issue of unfamiliarity, complete lack, or little possession of what may be considered to be prior knowledge forms and realized that these obstacles had to be overcome. Hence, they proceeded along a certain trajectory to ameliorate their weaknesses. Making use of supplementary sets of information, data, and knowledge depending upon situational contexts was a strategy that they invoked to come to replace the conditions of non-familiarity. That allowed them, or rather empowered them, to think about the strengths and weaknesses of each learner, collate them in the form of clusters, and address the given issues so as to secure a successful redress of the problems. The entire phenomenological experience endowed the agency of the learner figure to evolve from a metacognitive sense of the term through the persistent response-based negotiations that had to be meted out to the given set of challenges. Thus the consistent usage of ICT tools and services and features actually facilitated the entire metacognitive journey of the learners in this case by constantly pushing and motivating them to solve the problems that they faced. Also, they had to continuously assess and evaluate not only their knowledge levels but also the available choices that would ensure a smooth progress in the fulfillment of the task-based activities. In fact, a solidarity among the learners emerged through these activities that ultimately crystallized to form bonds of friendship thereby ameliorating the competitive spirit that had earlier been noticeable among them. Thereafter, these learners actually could be observed to share class notes and other materials through interactive social media applications.

4.4 Activity 4: Writing Exercise

One of the prime skills without which language learning sessions remain incomplete for any L2 learner is the writing skill. Apart from the significance in terms of the skill set, writing tasks and activities account for a substantial portion of the grading that happens in both Adamas University (Kolkata) and IIIT-G.

Keeping in mind the point of inspiring L2 learners to institutionally, culturally, and pedagogically develop their own selfhood and agency in the language learning process, the authors at first provided a glimpse into the world of a variety of writing cultures that are in vogue at the moment. Starting with creative writing under the purview of fictional writing, to exploring techniques of purpose-based technical writing—covering journalistic reports, opinion-editorials, popular features, reviews, content writing, issue and company-based compilation of reports, academic writing—the authors made the learners aware of the intricate processes that are involved in the act of writing itself. In the next class, the learners were given the task of selecting a topic or subject of their own choice. The learners could select topics from a wide array of available options such as education, entertainment, sports, cultural matters, travel and cuisines, etc. Prosaic written items belonging to the different categories had already been exhibited in the class from various media repositories, websites, and cyber-journalism platforms. They were discussed in the classroom so that learners who are not acquainted with the culture of reading newspapers and magazines could effectively gather impressions regarding their nature and form. When the learners were instructed to choose a topic, it was totally left on the individual learners to select subjects and topics of their own interests.

The process struck chords with the learners in the classroom as they were not compelled to write on any given topic that probably did not have any appeal for them. The process resonated with them and it was observed that the learners who have been already responding to the lessons proceeded to quickly begin writing on subjects and topics of their own choice. The learners who had remained inert in many occasions were on the other hand quite slow as they were observed to take time to think about a viable topic. It seemed to emanate a condition wherein they were allowed freedom and autonomy to exercise their choices for perhaps the first time. They pondered for about 5–10 min before beginning to start the writing process.

The topics that they covered stemmed from the areas of sports, cinema, environmental concerns, and latest developments in software technology. These learners wrote slowly in contrast to the already active bunch of students. In fact they wrote a sentence or two and paused thereafter to think of the next set of sentences. The inert learners seemed to have got the confidence of being able to execute the task a little late into the class session. One of the students in fact candidly confessed of not being given an opportunity to write on a topic of his choice since the start of the educational journey. Nevertheless, they proceeded to complete the task in the space of two such sessions.

During assessment and evaluation, it was revealed that the non-inert learners committed few mistakes here and there whereas the inert ones had more of them in comparison. But what was rewarding in these evaluative and assessment-based feedback is that the latter participated with more energy and vigor as they wished to know their errors, strategies to rectify and overcome them. Consequently, a self-critical, objective metacognitive perspective began to shape in each such inert learner. It may be admitted that these ICT tools and services-enabled knowledge apparatus actually got them converted into interested, non-inert set of learners at the end of the completion of the task, and self-evaluation and assessment of their own individual performances.

The entire paraphernalia of metacognition seeps into the learners causing a fundamental shift in the selfhood of these learners. Knowledge acquisition in general and language learning to be specific becomes a smooth process once they become aware selves—they begin to notice, explain, and understand the mistakes that they make. Similarly, they are also able to point out circumstances where they emerge to be correct in their judgements. Thus, critical thinking capacity and metacognitive skills in students receive significant boost from the strategies followed by the authors in letting the students execute task-based writing activities such as the one that has been described in the preceding text.

5 Conclusion: Implication of the Study

The chapter has attempted to illustrate through practical task-based activities the key role and function of ICT tools and services in catalyzing the faculty of critical thinking and metacognition in inert, non-responsive learners in the context of ESLA classrooms at two institutions of India. The chapter has followed a descriptive-experimental-analytical framework for the moment. From the results or observations and conclusion drawn from the set of experiments, there is an implication that education in general and ESLA-TESLA to be specific should attempt to reconfigure the classroom composition by transcending the degrees of activeness and passivity shown by the learners. That would effectively ameliorate differences in the minds of the learners among themselves with regard to each other's proficiency and competence levels. The appropriate usage of ICT renders new vistas of possibilities in the academic measurements, assessments, and examination conventions followed by institutes of higher education. Based on a normative acceptance of learners who might be on the quieter side due to a variety of factors, the focus would be pointed on the learners as new ways of assessing their performances, levels of competence, and proficiency would emerge. A relook at the conventional uniform approaches toward assessments would perhaps yield effective results. Furthermore, it lays out the fact that various learners may adopt different legitimate pathways to fulfill the same objectives and achieve the same target goals.

The authors are aware that a quantitative research-based approach to the problems discussed in this chapter would be necessary for the next phase of this work. Moreover, the model of ICT tools and service-enabled facilitation in the inculcation of cultures of critical thinking and metacognition among inert, non-responsive learners in the Indian classrooms may further be explored to chart patterns of behavior exhibited by the learners from socially marginalized and subjugated groups. Spatial and temporal elements in such kinds of research problems may be often crucial. These awaited experiments and the results that they generate would hopefully be able to take this research further. The scope of the research will be extended and expanded, as and when deemed necessary, keeping in mind the questions and problems that future studies would seek to address.

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