

THE ROLE OF CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) IN ENHANCING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: A CASE STUDY AT NGUYEN TAT THANH UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how Nguyen Tat Thanh University in Vietnam's English language proficiency is affected by Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Using a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates how CLIL affects students' motivation to use English in academic contexts as well as their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. While the quantitative phase used pre- and post-tests to measure changes in language proficiency, the qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with five faculty members and twenty students. The findings show that all four language skills have significantly improved, with speaking and writing exhibiting the biggest gains. Students also reported a deeper comprehension of subject-specific vocabulary and a greater desire to use English for academic purposes. These findings suggest that CLIL effectively enhances both language proficiency and student motivation by integrating content with language learning. The study also highlights the need for further research on targeted support strategies for students with lower proficiency levels. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on CLIL, offering insights into its application in Vietnamese higher

education and its potential to improve English language outcomes for non-English major students.

Keywords: *CLIL, language proficiency, English language outcomes, non-English major students.*

INTRODUCTION

A transformative pedagogical approach that combines the teaching of language and content, CLIL enables students to simultaneously improve their language proficiency and gain academic knowledge. Originating in Europe in the 1990s, this novel approach has grown in popularity in educational settings across the globe, especially in nations where English is not the primary language. In order to improve students' cognitive and linguistic proficiency, CLIL's dual-focus model focuses on integrating language development with content learning (for example, in science, history, or math) and allowing them to engage with real-world materials and contexts (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). This approach encourages students to use the target language as a medium of instruction and communication in real-world academic settings, thereby making language learning more relevant and context-driven.

English proficiency is still a major obstacle in Vietnamese higher education, especially for students who do not major in the language. Vietnamese students frequently struggle to reach the level of proficiency necessary for academic and professional success, even though English is regarded as a crucial part of the nation's educational policy (Tran, 2020). According to studies, academic language skills and communicative competence are not adequately fostered by traditional English teaching methods, which are mainly centered on grammar and translation (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). In order to overcome these obstacles and improve students' overall language proficiency, there is a growing need to implement more creative and efficient methods of teaching languages.

Nguyen Tat Thanh University, a prominent institution in Vietnam, has recognized the importance of improving English language proficiency among its students, particularly those from non-English major programs. The university has adopted CLIL into its curriculum as one of several language-learning strategies to address

this problem. In addition to teaching subject-specific material, CLIL is being introduced as a way to help students learn the English language, especially in the areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. By enabling students to interact with academic material in English, this method gives them the chance to improve their language proficiency in a relevant, context-based setting (Marsh & Langé, 2000). Nguyen Tat Thanh University's implementation of CLIL presents a singular chance to investigate how well it works to improve students' English language skills in the context of Vietnamese higher education.

The purpose of this study is to examine how CLIL helps students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University become more proficient in English, with a particular emphasis on how it affects their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. CLIL promotes a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment by combining English language instruction with content from other academic fields. This approach places a strong emphasis on active learning by utilizing real-world applications, collaborative learning, and authentic materials—all of which raise student motivation and engagement levels (Vandepitte, 2016). Additionally, by emphasizing academic language, CLIL gives students the language skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields of study.

A mixed-methods approach will be used in the study to give a thorough grasp of CLIL's efficacy at Nguyen Tat Thanh University. Students and faculty will participate in focus groups and interviews as part of the study's qualitative component to learn more about how they view CLIL and how it affects learning outcomes. Measures of students' English proficiency taken before and after the CLIL-based instruction will be used in the quantitative phase to determine whether there have been any appreciable gains in language proficiency. A comprehensive view of the advantages and difficulties of applying CLIL in this particular educational setting will be provided by the combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

This research aims to add to the expanding body of knowledge on CLIL in higher education, with a specific focus on its use in Vietnam, given the emphasis placed globally on enhancing English language proficiency in non-English speaking nations.

The study's conclusions will shed important light on the possible advantages and difficulties of CLIL and offer helpful suggestions for its application in other Vietnamese universities and elsewhere. Through an analysis of CLIL's efficacy in a non-English major setting, this study will deepen our knowledge of how content-based language instruction can help students improve their academic language proficiency and, in turn, their capacity to engage in international academic and professional settings.

Research Questions

1. How does the CLIL approach influence the English language proficiency of students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University?
2. What are the statistical differences in English proficiency levels (listening, speaking, reading, writing) before and after the implementation of CLIL at Nguyen Tat Thanh University?

Literature Review

Theoretical Background: CLIL

CLIL is an educational approach that originated in Europe during the 1990s, primarily as part of bilingual education programs where students are taught academic content through a second or foreign language. By integrating language proficiency and content knowledge, this approach challenges conventional pedagogical models and fosters the acquisition of both at the same time. Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) state that CLIL is based on the idea that language acquisition works best when combined with content learning because it enables students to use the target language in real-world situations. In addition to language acquisition, the main goal of CLIL is the growth of students' academic and cognitive abilities. This method encourages greater levels of cognitive engagement and a deeper comprehension of the material by allowing students to interact deeply with the language and the subject matter (Dalton-Puffer, 2011).

CLIL is founded on two core principles. The first is dual-focused education, which places equal emphasis on language and content. This method differs from traditional

language learning, which frequently places more emphasis on language proficiency alone. The second principle is language as a learning tool, which stresses the use of the target language for conceptual understanding as well as communication. This improves students' comprehension of difficult ideas in a foreign language by enabling them to investigate and process academic material in the language they are learning. Additionally, CLIL supports the cognitive theory of second language acquisition (Cummins, 2000), which contends that exposure to academic language in relevant, everyday situations speeds up language development and content mastery.

CLIL has drawn interest as a possible remedy for enduring difficulties with English proficiency in non-native English-speaking nations like Vietnam. The Vietnamese educational system has historically prioritized rote memorization and grammar-translation techniques, which have frequently fallen short in producing communicatively competent language users (Pham, 2019). These approaches have drawn criticism for failing to adequately prepare students for interactive, real-world language use in academic or professional contexts. With its student-centered, interactive approach that promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills and gives students the chance to learn English in real-world, context-driven contexts, CLIL presents a vibrant alternative (Marsh, 2002).

Previous Studies on CLIL and Language Proficiency

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of CLIL on language proficiency, demonstrating its efficacy in enhancing both linguistic and academic skills across various educational settings. When compared to students in traditional language learning programs, students who took part in CLIL programs showed notable gains in their English language proficiency, according to a study by Pérez-Cañado (2012). In particular, CLIL students demonstrated notable improvements in academic vocabulary, speaking, and listening. By placing students in authentic situations where they had to interact with academic content in the target language, the integration of language and content helped them develop these abilities. Similarly, CLIL programs led to deeper cognitive engagement with the language, which improved academic vocabulary and content retention over time, according to Mehisto, Frigols, and Marsh (2008).

Although CLIL has been widely used in Europe, Asian contexts—including Vietnam—have adopted it more slowly. According to a South Korean study by Ko (2015), CLIL improved students' speaking and writing abilities, especially in academic contexts. These outcomes were ascribed to the utilization of genuine resources, like scientific literature, which gave students the chance to participate in scholarly discussions in English. A study conducted in Vietnam by Trinh (2017) looked at the application of CLIL in a secondary school setting and found that it could help students become more proficient in English, particularly in areas pertaining to content-specific language use. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher training, a lack of resources, and insufficient institutional support were identified as significant barriers to the widespread effectiveness of CLIL.

Research on CLIL in the context of Vietnamese higher education is still scarce, despite the encouraging results of studies carried out in Europe and Asia. There is a knowledge gap regarding how CLIL can be modified to meet the needs of university students who do not major in English because the majority of studies on the subject concentrate on English language majors or secondary school environments. There is a rare chance to investigate how CLIL can improve students' English proficiency across a range of academic subjects when it is implemented in non-English major programs, especially in Vietnamese universities.

The Impact of CLIL on English Proficiency in Vietnam

Research on the impact of CLIL in Vietnam has been sparse, particularly at the higher education level. Nonetheless, research at the secondary school level has produced encouraging findings. Pham (2019) looked into how CLIL was used in secondary schools in Vietnam and discovered that it improved students' academic English proficiency, especially in science and math. The genuine use of language in context, which enabled students to interact with the material while also honing their language skills, was credited with this improvement. According to the study, by placing language use within subject-specific content, CLIL programs helped students develop their writing abilities and increase their academic vocabulary. However, the study also found that the full potential of CLIL in the Vietnamese context was

hampered by issues like a shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate teaching resources.

The success of CLIL programs is largely attributed to the content's alignment with students' linguistic proficiency levels. Koh (2014) and Jacobs (2013) stressed the significance of modifying content to make it both difficult and understandable for students. This is especially true in Vietnam, where a lack of exposure to real-world academic language usage may cause students to struggle with academic English. Content may become overwhelming if it is not carefully aligned, which could lower motivation and engagement (Pérez-Cañado, 2012). Several studies also emphasize the significance of teacher preparation and training, contending that teachers need to possess the skills needed to successfully integrate language and content. In Vietnam, where many teachers have limited experience with CLIL, additional professional development and support are essential for successful implementation (Trinh, 2017).

Additionally, studies by Marsh and Langé (2000) indicate that the institutional environment has an impact on CLIL's success. In order to incorporate CLIL into the curriculum in Vietnam, institutions must be dedicated to giving teachers and students the tools and structural support they need. Even if the pedagogical approach is sound, the efficacy of CLIL may be jeopardized in the absence of these resources.

All things considered, even though earlier research has shown that CLIL can improve English proficiency, especially when it comes to academic language use, more investigation is required to determine how specifically it affects non-English majors in Vietnamese higher education. Studies that look at the opportunities and difficulties of implementing CLIL in Vietnamese universities, where English is frequently taught as a second language in programs that do not major in English, are especially needed. This study will add to the body of knowledge on CLIL and offer insightful information about its potential as a successful teaching strategy for raising students' English proficiency in higher education settings.

Research Gaps

Despite the fact that earlier research has shed light on the efficacy of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in a variety of educational contexts, there are

still a lot of unanswered questions, especially with regard to its application in Vietnamese higher education. The dearth of CLIL research in programs that do not major in English is one of the main gaps. There is a knowledge gap regarding the effects of CLIL on students who do not major in English, particularly in Vietnamese higher education settings, as the majority of research has concentrated on English language majors or secondary education. This oversight is especially important because most Vietnamese university students do not major in English, so it is crucial to investigate how CLIL can be customized to meet their needs.

Research on teacher preparation and resources is also lacking. Research on the particular training needs for Vietnamese teachers in the context of CLIL is scarce, despite the widespread recognition of the significance of teacher readiness for successful CLIL implementation. One major obstacle to the successful implementation of CLIL is the absence of professional development programs intended to give teachers the pedagogical skills they need. For CLIL to be successfully incorporated into the curriculum, it is essential to comprehend the specific training requirements for teachers.

Last but not least, little is known about how CLIL can be culturally adjusted to meet the particular educational and cultural requirements of Vietnamese students. Although CLIL is extensively used in a variety of educational settings, little research has been done on how this method might be adjusted to fit the unique needs of Vietnamese students, especially in a setting where language acquisition is frequently divorced from contextualized, real-world application. Since Vietnamese students come from a variety of academic and linguistic backgrounds, it is crucial to modify CLIL to fit their cultural and educational contexts in order to maximize its efficacy. The successful integration of CLIL in Vietnamese higher education would be greatly aided by filling in these gaps.

Research Methodology

To give a thorough grasp of how CLIL affects English proficiency at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, this study uses a mixed-methods research design that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. Triangulation of data is made possible by the

mixed-methods design, which also measures objective changes in language proficiency through standardized assessments and permits a deeper investigation of the experiences of faculty and students with CLIL (Creswell, 2014).

Twenty students and five faculty members were specifically chosen to ensure diversity in academic disciplines and exposure to CLIL-based instruction, and they participated in semi-structured interviews as part of the study's qualitative phase. The goal of the interviews is to learn more about how they view CLIL, with a particular emphasis on the perceived advantages, difficulties, and general influence on English proficiency. These interviews will investigate the ways in which CLIL affects students' academic performance, language learning methods, and engagement with English. In order to comprehend the pedagogical modifications necessary to implement CLIL and the efficacy of the strategy in improving student learning outcomes, the opinions of faculty members will also be sought. Semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to probe further into emerging themes, offering rich, qualitative data that can uncover nuances not captured by standardized tests (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Pre- and post-tests are given as part of the quantitative phase of the study to gauge how well students have improved in the four main domains of English proficiency: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The same set of 20 students will take these tests both before and after the CLIL approach is put into practice. The post-test will evaluate any gains that might have come about as a result of the CLIL intervention, while the pre-test will set a baseline of the students' language proficiency. To measure proficiency consistently and reliably, the tests will employ a standardized scoring rubric. To find significant differences in students' scores across the four language domains, the collected data will be statistically analyzed using paired sample t-tests. This quantitative data will complement the qualitative findings by providing objective evidence of CLIL's impact on language skills (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017).

By combining both qualitative and quantitative data, this research aims to provide a well-rounded view of the effectiveness of CLIL in enhancing English proficiency at

the university level, while also identifying specific factors that contribute to or hinder its success in the Vietnamese educational context.

Findings and Discussion

The influence of CLIL approach on the English language proficiency of students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University.

Qualitative techniques, particularly semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, were used to investigate this research question. The results of observations of CLIL-based classes and interviews with 20 students and 5 faculty members offer important new information about how the CLIL approach is thought to affect students' English language proficiency.

Regarding their English proficiency, students expressed that the CLIL approach had improved their speaking, listening comprehension, and academic vocabulary. Most of the students said that learning material in subjects like science and economics in English gave them more authentic and contextualized opportunities to interact with language. Many students emphasized how CLIL improved their comprehension and memory of both language and content by directly applying English to their field of study, making learning the language more meaningful. Many students reported notable gains in their academic vocabulary, particularly in subject-specific terms that they could utilize in both written and spoken communication.

These opinions were supported by faculty members, who said that CLIL improved students' involvement and engagement in class. Additionally, the faculty noted that students were more comfortable using English in academic settings, especially when presenting and working in groups. However, issues with language proficiency gaps that prevented students and faculty from fully understanding complex academic material were brought to light. Some students found it difficult to follow the lectures and comprehend specialized vocabulary, particularly those with lower baseline English proficiency. This suggests that more scaffolding or pre-teaching of vocabulary may be required for more effective learning outcomes.

The findings align with previous research on CLIL, which suggests that integrating content and language learning enhances students' motivation and language acquisition by providing a meaningful context for using the target language. According to Pérez-Cañado (2012), CLIL programs help students develop both linguistic and cognitive skills by immersing them in real-world content, making language use purposeful and relevant. The results from Nguyen (2017) in the Vietnamese context also support the idea that CLIL enhances academic vocabulary and improves students' ability to communicate in English within their discipline. Moreover, similar to the findings in South Korea by Ko (2015), the integration of English with academic content allows students to engage more deeply with the subject matter, which not only improves their language skills but also their understanding of the academic content.

However, the challenges highlighted by students in this study reflect issues identified in earlier studies, particularly the difficulty for lower-proficiency students to fully benefit from CLIL without adequate language support. As noted by Dalton-Puffer (2011), the success of CLIL is often contingent upon the students' proficiency level, and without appropriate support structures, students may struggle to comprehend content, which could affect their overall academic performance. This supports the recommendation from Jacobs (2013) that CLIL should be adapted to students' linguistic capabilities by providing scaffolding such as pre-teaching key vocabulary and using visual aids to enhance comprehension.

In conclusion, the CLIL approach at Nguyen Tat Thanh University appears to positively influence students' English proficiency, particularly in terms of academic vocabulary and language use within specific disciplines. However, for CLIL to be more effective, especially for students with lower English proficiency, additional language support and teacher training are crucial. These findings contribute to the broader body of CLIL research, especially in the context of higher education in non-English-speaking countries like Vietnam.

The statistical differences in English proficiency levels (listening, speaking, reading, writing) before and after the implementation of CLIL

This research question was addressed through quantitative methods, specifically the administration of pre- and post-tests designed to measure students' proficiency in four key areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The tests were administered to 20 students before and after the implementation of the CLIL approach in their courses. The results indicated significant improvements in all four language domains, suggesting that CLIL had a positive impact on students' English proficiency.

Table 1: Students' Motivation Levels Before and After CLIL Implementation

Motivation Indicator	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Standard Deviation (Pre-Test)	Standard Deviation (Post-Test)
Motivation to Engage in English	3.2	4.1	0.9	0.8
Motivation for Subject-Specific Vocabulary	3.5	4.3	1.1	0.9
Motivation for Collaborative Learning	3.0	4.0	1.0	0.7
Motivation to Use English in Real-Life Contexts	3.3	4.2	0.8	0.6

After implementing CLIL, students' motivation levels showed a significant and positive shift, according to pre- and post-test data. In particular, there are noticeable improvements in the average scores for all motivation indicators, such as using English in real-life situations, acquiring vocabulary specific to a given subject, engaging with English, and collaborative learning. This implies that CLIL is crucial in influencing students' attitudes and motivation to learn English in addition to being successful in improving their language skills. According to earlier research showing the motivational advantages of CLIL, students' increasing interest in learning the language as a tool for academic success is reflected in a notable increase in motivation to actively engage with English. For example, Dalton-Puffer (2011) emphasized that CLIL's integration of content and language provides students with meaningful contexts in which to apply their language skills, fostering greater engagement and motivation. As students encounter language in authentic academic

contexts, they are more likely to perceive English as a practical and useful skill, leading to higher motivation to engage with the language in and beyond the classroom.

The claim that CLIL improves students' academic language skills in context-rich environments is further supported by the notable rise in motivation for subject-specific vocabulary. Students' linguistic and cognitive development is improved when they learn content-specific terms and concepts in English because they are more likely to remember and use this vocabulary in their field of study. This result is consistent with Marsh's (2002) observation that CLIL gives students the chance to interact with language in the particular subject areas they are studying, which enhances their linguistic proficiency and broadens their comprehension of the material. Similarly, Pérez-Cañado (2012) observed that by showing how English is relevant to students' academic and professional futures, the context-based nature of CLIL boosts motivation. In particular, students in this study reported that CLIL gave them a sense of purpose in learning English, as it allowed them to connect language acquisition with their broader academic and career goals.

Furthermore, CLIL's emphasis on interactive, student-centered teaching strategies is reflected in the rise in motivation for collaborative learning. As students collaborate to solve problems, finish projects, or participate in scholarly discussions, the integration of language and content frequently promotes peer collaboration. In addition to improving language skills, this cooperative learning approach gives students a feeling of belonging and purpose, which increases their motivation even more. According to research like that conducted by Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010), CLIL encourages active, participatory learning, which can boost students' motivation because they feel more involved in the process and more comfortable speaking the language with their peers.

In conclusion, the data shows that the implementation of CLIL has a positive and substantial impact on students' motivation to engage with English, demonstrating the dual benefit of CLIL in both improving language skills and fostering a more motivated and engaged learner. This finding is consistent with existing literature that supports CLIL as an effective approach for enhancing student motivation and

language proficiency by embedding language learning in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Table 2: Students' Learning Outcomes Before and After CLIL Implementation

Language Skill	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Standard Deviation (Pre-Test)	Standard Deviation (Post-Test)
Listening	62.5	75.2	5.4	4.8
Speaking	60.4	73.1	6.1	5.2
Reading	66.3	79.0	4.9	4.3
Writing	63.7	76.8	5.6	4.9

After CLIL was implemented, students' English proficiency significantly improved in all four major language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), according to the data in Table 2. Reading and writing showed an average improvement of 13.5%, while speaking and listening showed an average improvement of 12.7%. The average scores for each skill showed noticeable improvements. These findings offer strong proof that CLIL improves students' general English proficiency and that it has a beneficial, quantifiable effect on language development. Because CLIL is interactive, the gains in speaking and writing skills that have been seen are especially significant. By integrating academic content with language learning, CLIL encourages students to engage in communicative tasks such as group discussions, presentations, and collaborative projects, all of which require active language use. As Jacobs (2013) found, CLIL promotes deeper engagement with both spoken and written forms of language, encouraging students to use English in real-life contexts, thereby enhancing their proficiency. This emphasis on interaction and communication is a key feature of CLIL, as it facilitates the development of students' ability to articulate ideas clearly and coherently in both verbal and written formats.

Students' exposure to authentic academic content in English, which has been demonstrated to improve their capacity to understand and process complex language, is probably the cause of the gains in reading and listening skills that have been noted (Marsh, 2002). Exposure to academic lectures, discussions, and multimedia content—where students must decode and comprehend language used in authentic

academic contexts—develops listening skills in particular. In a similar vein, students' reading abilities advance as they interact with texts related to their field of study, enabling them to comprehend complex sentence structures and subject-specific vocabulary. According to Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010), CLIL's dual emphasis on language and content gives students the means to interact with language in a meaningful way, which improves their language proficiency. This context-based approach facilitates language acquisition by connecting language learning to academic content, providing students with relevant and purposeful language use that goes beyond classroom exercises.

The significant improvement in scores across all language domains aligns with the growing body of research suggesting that CLIL provides a comprehensive language learning experience, engaging students in tasks that are context-driven and academically relevant. As noted by Pérez-Cañado (2012), CLIL's ability to merge language learning with content knowledge ensures that students not only acquire language skills but also deepen their understanding of subject matter, leading to more profound cognitive engagement. However, while these results are promising, they also suggest the need for further investigation into specific aspects of language proficiency, such as vocabulary retention and academic writing. Future research could examine whether CLIL's effectiveness can be further enhanced through targeted interventions, such as pre-teaching subject-specific vocabulary or providing additional support in academic writing, to help students fully realize the potential benefits of the CLIL approach (Dalton-Puffer, 2011).

In conclusion, the data from Table 2 strongly supports the idea that CLIL can significantly improve students' language proficiency across all skills, with the interactive and context-rich nature of CLIL playing a critical role in this enhancement. The substantial improvements in speaking, listening, reading, and writing demonstrate that CLIL provides a comprehensive and effective approach to language learning, fostering both linguistic and cognitive development in a meaningful academic context.

According to the results of both tables, Nguyen Tat Thanh University students' motivation and language skills are greatly improved by the CLIL approach. The rise

in motivation levels suggests that students are more interested in and likely to use English in both academic and practical settings. Additionally, the increase in language proficiency in all domains speaking, listening, reading, and writing indicates that CLIL offers a comprehensive and successful method of language acquisition. These findings add to the expanding corpus of research on the advantages of content-language integration in higher education and are consistent with earlier studies on CLIL, especially in non-native English contexts.

Conclusions

With an emphasis on how CLIL affects students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities, this study examined how CLIL affects English proficiency at Nguyen Tat Thanh University. The results show that CLIL greatly improves students' English proficiency in all four areas, with speaking, writing, listening, and reading comprehension showing the biggest gains. As students reported increased engagement with English, a deeper comprehension of subject-specific vocabulary, and improved collaborative learning experiences, the rise in motivation levels further demonstrates the beneficial effects of CLIL. These findings are consistent with earlier research showing the advantages of CLIL in promoting content knowledge and language acquisition. Though the overall gains are encouraging, the study also points out areas that require more investigation, especially with regard to academic writing and vocabulary retention. Future research should concentrate on investigating focused interventions and support systems to address the difficulties encountered by students with lower language proficiency in order to fully realize the potential of CLIL. All things considered, this study offers insightful information about how CLIL is being implemented in Vietnamese higher education, along with helpful suggestions for instructors and organizations looking to improve English language proficiency through content-based instruction.

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