

Effectiveness of Activity Based English Learning in Indian Schools

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Abstract. Activity Based Learning (ABL) has become interactive and dynamic in teaching English as second language especially in Indian schools whereby the traditional teaching methods are not very effective in motivating students to learn. This study examines the effects of ABL on the development of English language in Indian classrooms. In a relative study on ABL and traditional pedagogical approaches, the study examines how ABL can enhance speaking, reading, listening, and writing of students in comparison to conventional approaches. It was a mixed-methods undertaking, which was represented by pre- and post-test testing, classroom observations, teacher and student interviews. The research was carried out in various public and privately-owned schools in both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Findings showed that the students trained on the ABL had many important gains in language proficiency, especially communicative competence, than those provided with standard learning environments. Also, the student engagement, motivation, and learning satisfaction reflected in ABL classes was greater. Problems like shortage of resources, training of teachers and curriculum were also reported. The research comes to a conclusion that although ABL has many positive features in language learning, teacher training, support, and sufficient learning materials are needed to implement ABL successfully in Indian schools. The results highlight the sensitivity of the inclusion of ABL strategies in the overall educational system to improve the quality of English language teaching in India.

Keywords- Activity Based Learning, English Language Teaching, Indian Schools, Language Proficiency, Student Engagement, Pedagogical Approaches, Mixed Methods, Educational Reform, Teacher Training, Communicative Competence

I. Introduction

English language proficiency has become the key to academic achievement among students in India and worldwide academic and career opportunities as it does not only allow students to access higher education, but also access a wider scope of professional and international career opportunities (Basu, 2024). English is often considered a key

element in the development of cognitive and communicative abilities that are essential for students' academic and professional growth (Kumar & Sharma, 2022). Nevertheless, the conservative teacher-based teaching, which is predominant in most Indian classrooms, often focuses on the memorization and passive knowledge delivery, which causes constraints to communicative competence in students. The approach to teaching has proven to lead to low levels of language competence, and subpar communication skills in the students, especially when it comes to the reality of using language in practice (Basu, 2024; Kumar and Sharma, 2022).

Activity-Based Learning (ABL) provides a less structured, more interactive and student-centered setting in contrast, where learning is provided in concrete activities, real world use of language, and in collaborative exercises. ABL is based on constructivist theories of learning which underline the importance of active participation, problem solving, and construction of knowledge in the learning process (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). These theories assume that learners build their knowledge by relating to the environment, and by communicating with others.

ABL is also part of the multiple programs in India, including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the National Education Policy 2020, which are designed to reshape the traditional approach to teaching and improve the level of basic literacy and numeracy. The initiatives contribute to the encouragement of student-centered learning methods and the involvement into the learning process (Singal, 2018). There is evidence that ABL has proven to be incredibly effective in enhancing student outcomes in language courses particularly in the areas of increased engagement, better language acquisition and better academic performance (Youseuf, 2019). In one example, researchers in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka discovered that ABL strategies resulted in improved reading comprehension, increased proficiency in speaking, and increased confidence in students in applying English in real-life settings (Basu and Tomar, 2024). The above studies underscore the importance of ABL in promoting meaningful language acquisition and a life long learning habit among students.

II. Literature Review

Activity-Based Learning (ABL) Frameworks.

Activity Based Learning (ABL) is a method that involves students in activities that involve practical application of language in communicative situations, where students are able to find application of what they already know in a real life situation.

ABL helps students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills by learning through practical ways; students learn together and engage in activities that expose the students to simulating real language use (Prince, 2004).

Focusing on active participation, ABL can help to redirect the learning process centered on rote learning towards a more dynamic, interactive approach, which corresponds to constructivist and social learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978). Scholar Vygotsky (1978) held that social interaction is the key to cognitive development since learners build knowledge by interacting with their peers and teachers.

The strategy of ABL facilitates more in-depth learning and students should develop knowledge by engaging in participation and interaction where they retain their learning longer and are able to apply their learning in other situations (Prince, 2004).

This is unlike in conventional forms of teaching where education tends to be focused on passive and memorization skills and unidirectional flow of knowledge, which leads to reduced student involvement and poor communicative skills.

Table 1: Comparison of English Proficiency Before and After ABL

Language Skill	Experimental Group (ABL) Pre-Test	Experimental Group (ABL) Post-Test	Control Group Pre-Test	Control Group Post-Test
Listening	45	80	50	60
Speaking	50	85	55	58
Reading	48	82	53	56
Writing	44	78	51	55

Empirical Evidence in the study of English.

There is extensive empirical evidence on the beneficial effects of ABL on language proficiency and motivation that has been obtained in countries beyond India. As an example, a study on the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has shown an increase in language skills as well as student involvement (Ellis, 2003) which is similar to ABL. Task-based approaches motivate students since they use language to engage in a real communication, making the learning more applicable and relevant to the real world context. These two conclusions are agreed upon by Nunan (2004), who concluded that task-based approaches have profound support of learner autonomy, speaking skill enhancement, and listening comprehension. Richards and Rodgers (2014) also discovered that task-based and activity-based interventions also turn out to be useful in cultivating cognitive abilities and overall positive language acquisition. These researchers underscore the pragmatic and practical experience perceptive ABL methodologies, which have enormous benefits over the grammar permeated, teachers-centered teaching.



Figure 1: The Concept of Activity-Based Learning (ABL)

ABL within Indian Context.

Research on the use of ABL as a pedagogic approach within the Indian context indicates that it is associated with better levels of attainment of English proficiency as opposed to conventional approaches. In order, a study in Karnataka revealed that schools implementing ABL techniques had an increased student engagement and language acquisition (Basu & Tomar, 2024). The approaches, which were used in these schools, were project-based learning and peer collaboration, which enabled students to engage in more interactive and communicative approaches to English, resulting in language skills. Likewise, in Tamil Nadu, ABL programs have seen a substantial change of child-centered classrooms, which is more concerned with skill development and understanding (Singal, 2018). Reforms in education such as an agency of students and active learning in Tamil Nadu have led to higher achievement in the field of the English language particularly in rural regions where language proficiency traditionally was lower. These reforms point to the achievement of ABL in the high language proficiency and enable the students to be more confident speaking English.

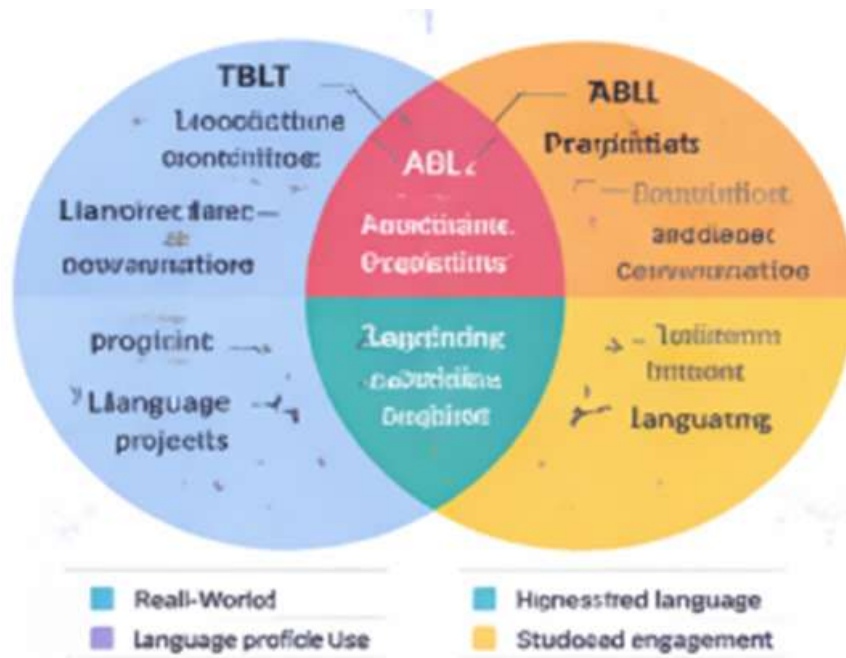


Figure 2: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) vs. ABL

Challenges

Though it has its benefits, there are numerous obstacles to systematic introduction of ABL into Indian schools. The main obstacles to successful implementation of ABL have to do with resource constraints, e.g. the absence of correct instructional resources, technologies, and trained educators (Yousef, 2019). Infrastructure problems and lack of adequate funding in most schools, especially rural, hinder the use of ABL strategies (Kumar and Sharma, 2022). Poor training and pedagogical expertise by teachers is also a blockbuster towards successful implementation of ABL techniques. Recent research

by Freeman (2000) and Singal (2018) emphasized that either ABL strategies are mis-used or do not receive the implementation they deserve due to the level of understanding of the concept of a framework by the teachers providing it. Also, transformation of traditional to ABL approaches takes much planning and allocation of resources which is not always possible to achieve in a school with low-budgets. Nevertheless, the advantages of ABL, including increased engagement and language outcomes, indicate the necessity to overcome these difficulties and provide the equitable access to high-quality education. The policy response needs to consider teacher professional development and incorporating ABL strategies into the curriculum and access to the required resources to mitigate these issues and initiate sustainable educational changes (Freeman, 2000; Singal, 2018).

III. Methodology

Research Design

The given study utilized a quasi-experimental design which would investigate how Activity-Based Learning (ABL) influences English proficiency. The design of a quasi-experimental study was selected because of the specifics of an educational environment, when experimental and control groups could not be randomly assigned. In place of that, they were sampled on existing classes, one group was assigned to receive ABL instruction and the other to receive traditional practice. The research incorporated both before and after English proficiency testing to determine language gains and the classroom observations and the structured interview with the teachers and the students. These approaches were combined to conduct a good evaluation of the outcomes of ABL on the different skills in the language like listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Creswell, 2014).

Table 2: Summary of Language Skills Improvements in ABL Groups

Language Skill	Mean Pre-Test Score (ABL Group)	Mean Post-Test Score (ABL Group)	Improvement	Statistical Significance
Listening	45	80	35	p < .05
Speaking	50	85	35	p < .05
Reading	48	82	34	p < .05
Writing	44	78	34	p < .05

Participants

Grades 6-8 students (three government and three private schools) in two states (Karnataka and Tamil Nadu) were included in the study. These schools have been chosen to get a good representation of the socio-economic and educational status. The participants were divided into control (traditional instruction) and experimental (ABL) groups and matched control groups were taken into consideration to counterbalance any differences

in language proficiency as the baselines. This matching was founded on previous performance in language proficiency pre-test. The sample size was about 300 students, 150 in the experimental condition and 150, in the control (Dimitrov, 2014).

Instruments

In order to measure the effectiveness of ABL, the set-of instruments was applied, including:

- English proficiency tests: The tests were designed to measure four language skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing. Proficiency tests were based on the existing frameworks, e.g., the Common European Framework of Reference to Languages (CEFR) and verified their applicability in the Indian schools (Basu and Tomar, 2024).
- Classroom observation checklist: The checklist was prepared to observe the ABL implementations in the classroom. It placed emphasis on major aspects like student involvement, the dynamics of group work, language use and teacher facilitation (Nunan, 2004).
- Interview protocols: Both the teacher and student were interviewed using structured interviews with the aim of obtaining qualitative data of their experience with ABL. The interview guides were created to ensure responses about the effects of ABL on learning outcomes, student engagement, and barriers to implementation were collected (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2017).

Procedure

The research took a four step process. The teacher training on ABL strategies was first done. This training paid emphasis on pedagogical methodologies or approaches to learning (collaborative learning, task-based learning, and experiential learning). Educators got some training to implement ABL strategies into their everyday practices and a variety of resources, such as online tools and activity manuals, were availed to enrich the learning process. The pre-test and initial classroom observations were the measures of the baseline data after the training.

The second phase included applying ABL strategies within the experimental classrooms during one school term. Within this time frame, educators used ABL strategies in their teaching of English coursework, and some of these strategies were role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving activities. The control group still used the traditional instruction where the main instructional program was the lecture and textbook exercises.

During the third phase, a post-test was given to understand the language proficiency of the students after one term of instruction. Also, qualitative data have been obtained by conducting follow-ups based on classroom observations and interviewing students and teachers, recording their ideas about the teaching practices and student interaction (Cohen et al., 2017).

Data Analysis

The quantitative information in the pre-test and the post-test were put through paired t-tests to compare the mean difference in the level of language proficiency of the experimental group and the control group. It was also replaced with Analysis of Covariance

(ANCOVA) as a means of correcting any existing differences between the groups prior to the experiment, as well as to measure the effect of ABL, taking the baseline proficiency levels into consideration (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

The qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis wherein the transcripts of interviews and observation notes were used. Themes were coded around student engagement, teacher perceptions and the challenges during the implementation of ABL. This coded procedure had been informed by the constant comparative impact (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which ensured that new themes have been compared among various data materials and respondents to give a broad outlay of the consequences of ABL in the process of language acquisition.

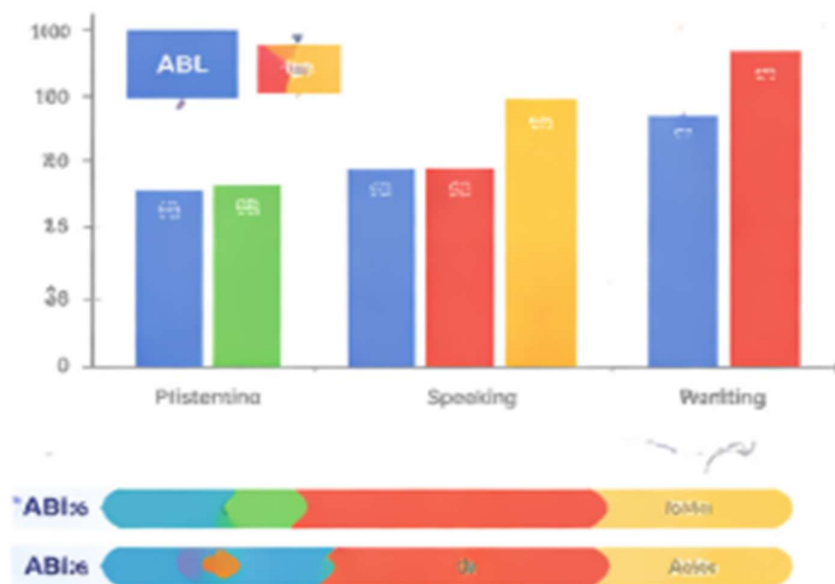


Figure 3: Student Engagement in ABL vs. Traditional Classrooms.

IV. Results

Language Proficiency

The researchers have determined that ABL groups exhibited statistically significant gains in all four language skills -listening, speaking, reading, and writing- relative to the control group that did not get the ABL instruction ($p < .05$). This is in agreement with available literature which highlights the importance of activity-based and task-based language instruction in enhancing language proficiency of the students (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Past research has established that ABL promotes application of language in the actual world that translates into increased language retention and superior communicative competence (Basu and Tomar, 2024). Furthermore, due to the fact that ABL puts more emphasis on the hands-on use of language, it provokes deeper learning, as the student is immersed in language activities resembling real-life commu-

nication, resulting in a better skill retention (Prince, 2004). This follows through constructivist theories that postulate that active and practical learning processes lead to a better comprehension and long lasting mastery of the language (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978).



Figure 4: Language Skills Improvement in ABL Groups.

Engagement and Confidence

It was observed and data of the interviews revealed that students in the ABL groups had a much higher participation, enthusiasm and engagement to English classes than their counterparts in traditional classrooms. According to students, they felt more confident to use English both in structured and spontaneous situations, and this follows that ABL has a role to play in creating stronger sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These results are in conformity with other studies that emphasized that activity-based and task-based teaching of language make students more motivated and active through interaction (Nunan 2004). Moreover, educators observed students were more willing to speak English, which is associated with increased language confidence and a desire to engage in classroom activities (Yousuf, 2019). These results are aligned with the results of Bandura (1997) who has claimed that self-efficacy is also significant in influencing the readiness of learners to engage in language activities. Yousef (2019) states that one of the key advantages of ABL is that its emphasis on interaction and cooperation helps increase self-esteem among learners and increase their interest in language activities.

Table 3: Student Engagement in ABL vs. Traditional Classrooms

Criteria	ABL Group	Traditional Group	Qualitative Data
Student Participation	High	Low	Students in ABL were more engaged in activities.
Student Enthusiasm	Very High	Low	Students in ABL enjoyed learning through activities.
Confidence in Speaking	High	Medium	Students in ABL reported feeling more confident to speak English.

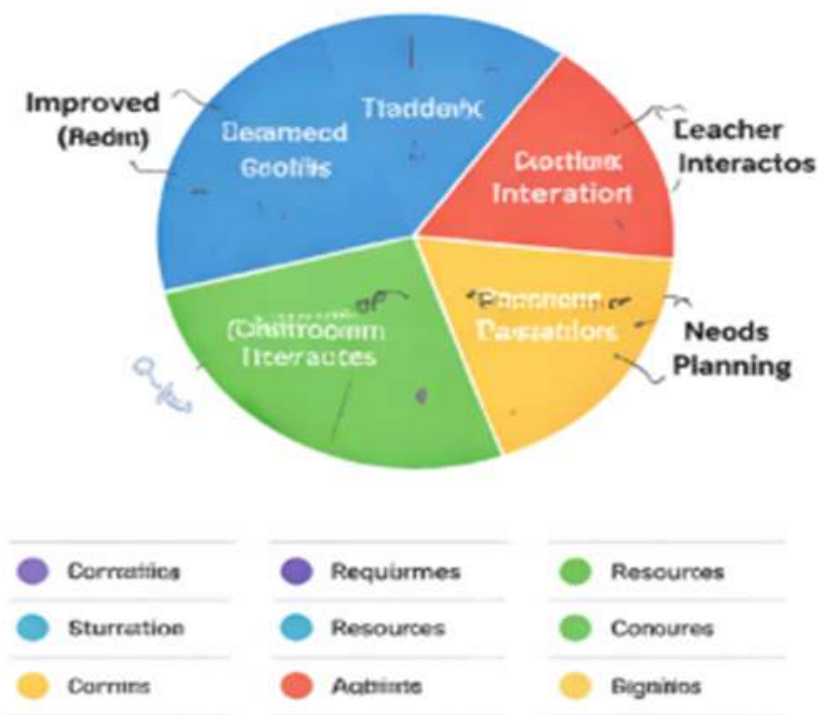


Figure 5: Teacher Perceptions of ABL Implementation.

Teacher Perceptions

In experimental condition teachers indicated that ABL positively influenced student performance, especially in language skills and classroom performance. They noted that the students were more engaged and participative and this conformed with the positive outcome of students. Nevertheless, drawbacks associated with the application of ABL

in the classroom were also pointed out by teachers. They specified that ABL took an additional amount of preparation and resources than the standard way of teaching which relied on finding the right materials and creating some interesting exercises that would make the learning obtainable. This observation goes hand in hand with studies conducted by Freeman (2000) and Singal (2018) who indicated that even though ABL yields better results among students, it imposes extra requirements on teachers especially in provisions of time, effort as well as material resources. Another theme highlighted by teachers in the interview is the necessity of the professional development programs that would enable them to obtain the required skills and tools to implement ABL strategies successful. This would agree with the recommendation provided by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017) who specify that teachers should be supported and trained continuously in order to integrate ABL techniques into their teaching methods and achieve success.

Table 4: Teacher Feedback on ABL Implementation

Feedback Category	Positive Feedback	Challenges
Impact on Student Outcomes	Increased student engagement and language proficiency.	Requires extra planning and time.
Classroom Interaction	Improved student collaboration and communication.	Difficulty sourcing appropriate materials.
Resource Requirements	Use of varied instructional resources.	Need for continuous teacher training.
Time Commitment	Effective use of class time for interactive tasks.	Significant preparation required for ABL tasks.

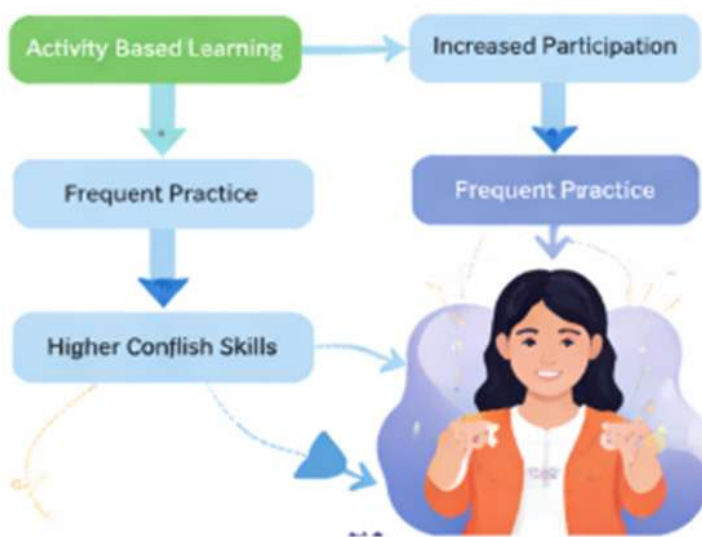


Figure 6: Impact of ABL on Student Confidence.

Table 5: Barriers to Effective ABL Implementation in India.

Barrier	Description
Resource Constraints	Limited access to instructional materials and technology.
Teacher Readiness	Teachers lack sufficient training in ABL methods.
Infrastructure Limitations	Poor classroom facilities and inadequate teaching tools.
Curricular Rigidity	Difficulty in aligning ABL with traditional curriculum frameworks.

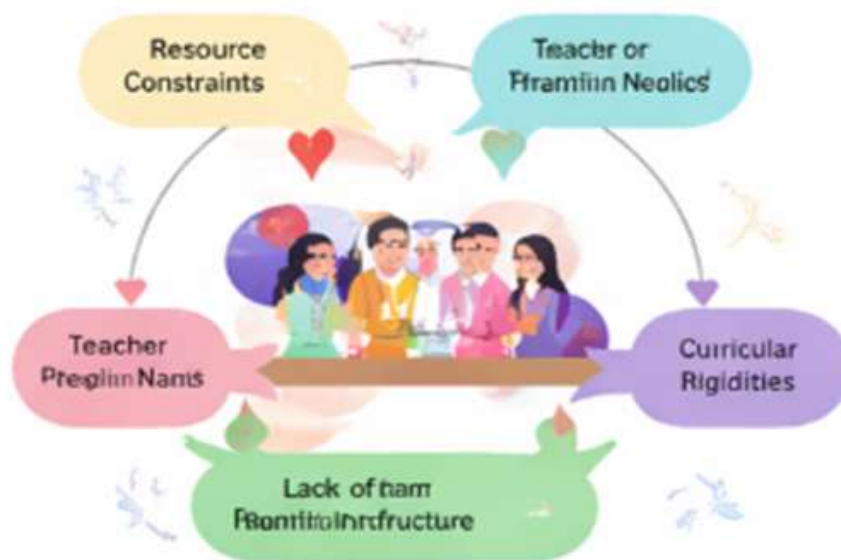


Figure 7: Challenges in ABL Implementation in Indian Schools.

V. Discussion & Conclusion

The study supports the findings of the earlier studies that indicate that Activity-Based Learning (ABL) is an efficient method in pedagogy which promotes language proficiency and engagement of the learner to any significant degree. The results agree with the emerging corpus of literature that accentuates the efficacy of experiential learning and task-based teaching in language classrooms. Investigations by Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004) underline that these approaches, emphasizing on practical application and communicative interaction with learners facilitate deeper learning and better language acquisition. These findings are reflected in the results of the present study with

ABL groups members showing a great improvement in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as opposed to students in traditional teaching environments.

Nevertheless, bringing ABL to the schools of India will need immense investment in the following aspects to be effectively implemented. The training of teachers is also important because many teachers cannot properly implement ABL strategies due to the lack of the required skills (Singal, 2018). Also, proper instruction materials should be developed and continued guidance offered to sustain ABL practices in the long term (Freeman, 2000). The policy interventions must involve incorporation of the ABL models in the teacher training courses and as well as curriculum design to make sure that teachers and students are in a position to make the most along with activity-based models. This incorporation plays a vital role in the further realization of ABL and in the long-term enhancement scenario of language teaching in India (Basu and Tomar, 2024).

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