

Exploring English Lecturers' Perceptions of Content-Based Instruction in Islamic Higher Education: A Qualitative Case Study in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is widely recognized for enhancing student engagement and integrating language learning with meaningful content. However, its implementation in Islamic Higher Education remains underexplored, particularly regarding English lecturers' perceptions and practices. This qualitative case study investigates how English lecturers in Islamic Higher Education institutions in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, perceive and implement CBI. Eleven lecturers were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, then analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti 24. Findings show that lecturers generally possess a strong understanding of CBI and endorse its application, especially for its ability to enhance student motivation and learning depth. Many reported success in designing interactive, content-rich lessons aligned with students' academic fields. However, challenges were noted in the balanced integration of language skills—particularly listening, speaking, reading, and writing—which were often fragmented. In addition, some lecturers struggled with adapting instructional materials to meet both content and language objectives effectively. The study highlights both the promise and the limitations of CBI in faith-based contexts. While CBI can support language development and contextual learning, its success relies heavily on lecturers' pedagogical competence, institutional support, and ongoing professional development. Structured training is essential to enhance consistency in language integration and content relevance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the innovative approach of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), English Language Teaching (ELT) combines teaching English with content from an academic or vocational discipline, moving away from learning skills in silos to more immersion in context (Brinton et al., 2017). This model of teaching promotes

language acquisition through real-world content and authentic materials which include engaging tasks that require higher order thinking, leading to a better understanding of the content and enhanced communication skills (Brown & Bradford, 2014). In the context of Southeast Asia and within the frameworks of English Language Teaching (ELT) with a special focus on predominantly Muslim regions, researchers have noted the usefulness of CBI in addressing the needs of culture-sensitive responsive language pedagogy (Amutha, 2017; Faridah & Rosnani, 2020). Specifically, Arifin and Suryani (2023) highlight how implementing CBI in Indonesian Islamic higher education presents both challenges and opportunities in integrating religious and cultural values with language learning, thereby enhancing student engagement and contextual relevance.

So far, there is scant empirical literature on the ways English lecturers in Islamic universities conceptualize and enact CBI in their pedagogical practices in the context of Southeast Asia. The use of CBI processes in Islamic Higher Education has not been adequately researched or applied, even though it has many advantages. There exists an understanding of the advantages of content and language integrated instruction in English language teaching, but there seems to be no grasp of how CBI is perceived and practiced by English lecturers in Islamic universities. Educators' beliefs related to their professional roles and their capacity to design instruction greatly influence the decisions they make in the classroom (Borg, 2006; Farrell, 2015). CBI in teaching practices is impacted by the teachers' cognition which is the blend of the educators' beliefs, knowledge, and the reality of the context within which they operate, especially when it comes to its practical implementation (Johnson, 2009). This coincides with Borg (2006) about teacher cognition, who stated that teachers' prior beliefs and knowledge will shape the rationale behind design decisions and instructional implementation in a given classroom.

Besides, the execution of CBI is successful only if the lecturers have the competence to create learning materials where the linguistic outcomes and the subject matter are integrated, which requires both pedagogical content knowledge and institutional backing (Richards, 2013).

In Indonesian Islamic Higher Education institutions, a limited number of works (Kamilia & Lina, 2024; Maming, 2020) highlight the gaps in training provided, pertinent materials, and the integration of religious and language content as persistent challenges to CBI adoption. Such challenges are worsened by the inconsistent understanding of the CBI framework, leading to shallow adoption (Ingraham, 2022; Symeonidou, 2009).

The current study attempts to fill the gaps by scrutinizing the perspectives of English lecturers at Islamic Higher Education institutions in South Sulawesi regarding the implementation of CBI in their teaching practices. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the Islamic Higher Education English lecturers perceive CBI in their teaching?
2. What teaching practices do English lecturers apply when implementing CBI in their classrooms?

Focusing on the perspectives and practices of the lecturers, this study deepens the understanding of teacher thought and educational design concerning Muslim contexts while addressing the gaps about the English language pedagogy in faith-based higher education.

2. METHODS

In this study, a descriptive case study approach was utilised encompassing qualitative methods in order to explore fully how English lecturers perceive and practice the Content Based Instruction (CBI) approach in Islamic Higher Education. The case study approach was chosen to allow detailed examination of particular bounded system Islamic higher education institutions in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia (Yin, 2017).

The participants of this study were eleven English lecturers drawn from various Islamic higher education institutions in the specified region. In this study, participants were selected using a purposive sampling method according to the following criteria: (1) currently teaching English in an Islamic tertiary institution, (2) having a minimum of one year of experience in applying or attempting to apply the CBI

approach, and (3) willing to take part in both the survey and classroom observation sections. These requirements guaranteed that educators included in the study were seasoned enough to provide insightful perspectives grounded on relevant pedagogical knowledge.

In conducting the research, the two major tools used were the questionnaire and the observation checklist. The questionnaire was constructed using Dörnyei's (2003) framework developed for honing a second language which was recomposed in Maming (2020) and it had 20 closed-ended items rated on a 5-point Likert scale and 5 open-ended questions. These items aimed at measuring lecturers' beliefs and perceptions as well as their attitudes towards CBI. Some of the examples provided include, "I feel confident integrating content from students' majors into my English lessons" and "CBI aligns well with the goals of Islamic higher education." With regard to the open-ended items, participants provided responses to challenges, institutional support and teaching strategies relevant to CBI.

Observational data was collected alongside the survey data. These observations were aimed at capturing teaching in action and determining the level of integration of CBI into teaching and learning activities. The checklist was populated with items on teaching strategies, learning materials, student activities and the nature of their interactions. Each class observed had about 20 students. These observations was a response to the questionnaire in order to elicit fuller qualitative description of the teaching of English in Islamic universities.

For the specific analysis, quantitative answers to closed-ended questions were processed using descriptive analysis, particularly average scores and frequency counts, to determine the patterns in perceptions of CBI by lecturers. Qualitative data obtained through open-ended questionnaire responses and observation notes were analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti 24. As in Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis started from becoming familiar with the data and proceeded through the phases of coding, theme generation, thematic review, refinement, and final definition and naming of themes.

This analysis surfaced several key themes: 1) pedagogical congruence with English and Islamic values, 2) Inflexible institutional and curricular boundaries, 3) Construction of restyling innovation in instructional design, and 4) Transforming professional identity of the lecturers under CBI. The use of triangulation in combining quantitative and qualitative data strengthened the findings and aided in understanding English teaching practices in Islamic tertiary institutions, focusing particularly on content integration in language teaching.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This is where we begin analyzing results with respect to the lecturers' opinions and experiences related to teaching Content-Based Instruction (CBI). English lecturers from one of the Islamic higher education institutions completed a survey, which provided the data needed for this analysis. The study intended to assess the level of teacher engagement with active feedback, lesson preparation, student roles, cooperative learning groups, and other diverse practices in their instruction.

3.1. Lecturers' Understanding of CBI

This section explores lecturers' understanding of the Content-Based Instruction (CBI) approach as a foundation for its implementation in teaching practice. Gaining insight into lecturers' initial perceptions is essential, as their conceptual understanding influences how effectively CBI principles are applied in the classroom. Table 1 presents the lecturers' initial insights into the CBI approach, highlighting their levels of familiarity, interpretations, and key ideas associated with this instructional method.

Table 1. Lecturers’ Initial Insight on CBI Approach

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Developing an increased awareness of the language demands of their subject materials.	27.3%	72.7%			
2	Developing teaching materials that engage learners.	72.7%	27.3%			
3	Supporting their content and language learning.	63.6%	36.4%			
4	CBI is a significant approach in language education.	54.5%	27.2%	18.3%		
5	CBI is designed to give the students second language instruction in content and language.	45.4%	45.4%	9.2%		
6	CBI is beneficial for improving the students’ motivation and interest.	72.7%	27.3%			
7	CBI is able to change the students’ learning style.			9.2%	45.4%	45.4%
8	Improving the skills of students’ communication.	63.6%	36.4%			
9	Teaching materials must be authentic.	81.8%	18.2%			
10	Language learning is the main priority.	100%				
11	The evaluation process is based on the language skills.	72.7%	27.3%			
12	The teachers should select the subject matter that will be integrated.	36.3%	63.7%			
13	CBI uses two or more instructional languages.	27.2%	54.7%	18.1%		
14	Applying cooperative learning principles	18.1%	72.7%	9.2%		

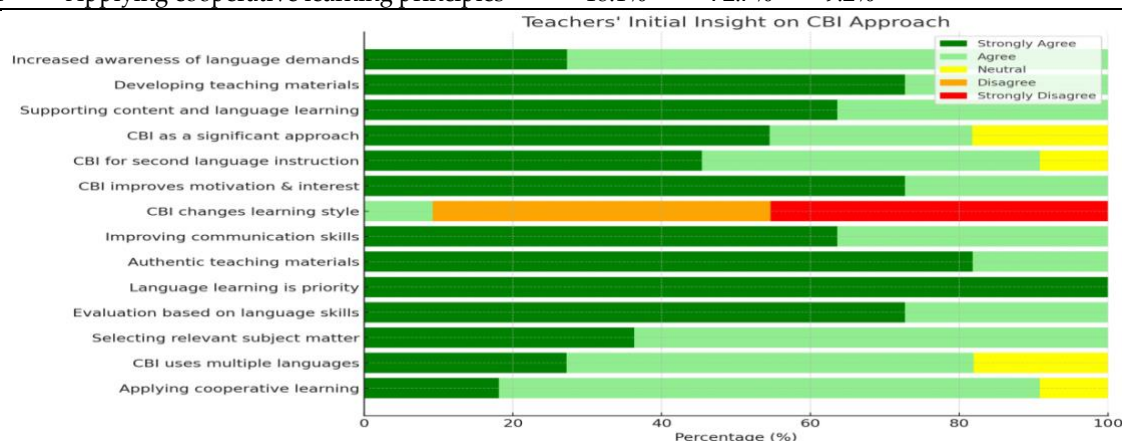


Figure 1. Lecturers’ Initial Insight on CBI Approach

This particular study analyzes lecturers’ basic perceptions of the CBI approach regarding content and language integration in teaching, the scope of lesson plan development, and the influence of content on students’ motivation and engagement. The findings reveal that most lecturers, 72.7% of them, agree that CBI enhances the realization of the relationships between language and subject materials, and a further 27.3% strongly agreed (see table 1). This shows that CBI, indeed, makes it possible for lecturers to use language in their lesson content and teach in a manner that students appreciate and relate to. One lecturer expressed this by stating, “CBI allows me to bring real subject content into language teaching, making lessons more meaningful and engaging for my students”. This is supported by Brinton et al.

(2022), stating that CBI fosters greater integration of substance and language by promoting the use of Practiced Contextualized Language Instruction based on students' learning activities. Rather than presenting language as an independent field of study, CBI cultivates students' interaction with academic materials using authentic communicative situations. This not only increases understanding but foremost enhances learning by doing in a context, which is relevant to the students' future.

Also, from the findings, 72.7% of lecturers strongly agree while the rest 27.3% agree with CBI's overwhelming support toward learner autonomy, affirming material development that promotes learner autonomy. In the case of support content and language, 63.6% of lecturers strongly agree and 36.4% agree that CBI provides both, supporting its function in language acquisition for contextual learning. Furthermore, 54.5% of the respondents strongly agreed and 27.2% agreed regarding CBI being the principal approach toward language teaching, with 18.3% remaining neutral which indicates indecisiveness or lack of certainty. More balanced responses are reported with regard to CBI as a second language teaching method where 45.4% and 45.4% expressed strong agreement and agreement respectively, while 9.2% chose to adopt a neutral stance. The majority of respondents, 72.7%, and 27.3% strongly and simply agree respectively to there being positive influence toward learner engagement state that CBI as a teaching model enhances motivation and interest. This is supported by Fuente (2022) who asserts that employing CBI with sustainability subjects stimulates students' intellectual engagement and their proactive participation in learning in foreign languages.

When learners understand how their studies can be applied in the real world, their willingness to actively participate in the processes deepens, changing the nature of learning a language from a mere requirement to fulfilling an obligation. Rogowsky (2020) has a different opinion regarding whether CBI impacts a student's learning style and its effectiveness, arguing that there are no positive outcomes on students' learning when the instruction is tailored to their learning styles. This aligns with other findings on CBI wherein 9.2% remained neutral, 45.4% disagreed, and 45.4% strongly disagreed, which implies that the learning preference does not shift even when new alternatives are introduced. On the other hand, the neutrality regarding students' enhanced proficiency with communication skills is widely accepted, where 63.6% strongly agreed and 36.4% agreed. This shows that students may have many methods of teaching within CBI, but most of them use traditional learning methods.

The overwhelming consensus for using teaching aids was 81.8% agreeing and 18.2% strongly agreeing that real-life resources greatly emphasize the importance of language learning. As one lecturer put it, "CBI lets us teach real content, not just grammar drills, so students see why English matters." This supports Brinton et al. (2022), who advocate for CBI as a context-based approach that increases relevance and learner engagement. This was validated by Coyle et al. (2010), who claimed that CLIL changes the paradigm of language teaching owing to its mastery of language learning integrated within the subject. Learning language in real-world contexts enables students to enhance their grasp of communication and academic content automatically, thereby lessening the burden of rote learning. This model promotes meaningful learning and enables the students to acquire language that is truly useful in their lives. With regard to the report, all 100% of instructors agree that knowing the language, even when content-centered, is the focus area of CBI. From the balance of the assessment, 72.7% strongly agreed and 27.3% agreed that evaluation placed in content understanding could outnumber attention to language skill, which is a drowned focus in CBI (see Table 1; Figure 1). This holds, as Richard and Rogers argue in their 2020 publication, "The Essence of CBI."

Their outlook emphasizes that while the content provides a framework for enhancing language learning, language proficiency can only be achieved when the student's mastery is meaningfully assessed. As one lecturer noted, "It's not enough to just teach the content; we must ensure students can use both the language and subject knowledge effectively." The student should be able to use content and language proficiently. As Curriculum IV was considered as one of the areas where this intervention was most readily accepted as needing lecturer involvement, 36.3% strongly agreed, alongside 63.7% who agreed that indeed lecturers do have academic freedom to determine the content that relates to language teaching. This is elaborated by Raya (2024), who argues about the need to develop language

teacher education from the point of view of teacher professionalism and autonomy-oriented pedagogies. It offers case studies showing how teachers are able to adapt specific contextual decisions that strengthen their teaching and learning. On the other hand, some perspectives on multilingualism and CBI instruction tend to be more divergent. For instance, 27.2% and 54.7% of the respondents agree or strongly agree, respectively, that CBI involves the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction, while 18.1% is neutral, which suggests that it depends on institutional dictates and particular classroom settings. Moreover, principles of cooperative learning tend to have more empirical support, given that 18.1% of respondents strongly agree, together with 72.7% agreeing that cooperation enhances student engagement and interaction among pupils.

In this case, 9.2% remain neutral, which indicates that the majority supports the idea of cooperative teaching, but there is little agreement on its practical application. One participant emphasized, “CBI encourages students to connect language learning with meaningful content, which truly motivates them to participate actively”. The overall results reveal that lecturers deeply support CBI, particularly regarding its role in engaging motivated learners and promoting deep learning (see figure 1). They understand the value of assessment of the language, the subject matter concerning collaborative learning, and active participation. Despite this, there is still a split in the use of several languages in instruction, which requires a deeper focus on thinking in more than one language in a single education system. It appears that lecturers who understand CBI frameworks tend to develop relevant teaching materials, endorse the teaching and learning of languages in context, and align assessed language skills and content knowledge with appropriate levels of emphasis in the evaluation framework. It seems clear that CBI is widely accepted, but other aspects, particularly its impact on context-dependent variations of learners, require further investigation for practical implementation.

3.2. Lecturers' Instructional Practices Perspective on Their Teaching Experiences

To explore the methods English lecturers apply to CBI (Content-Based Instruction), the study formulated a questionnaire targeting classroom practices. The next table illustrates the frequency distribution of the responses from lecturers concerning the set questionnaire on the nine statements. The responses are categorized into three levels: Never, Sometimes, and Often, suggesting the degree of integration into their teaching practices. These responses capture the integration of CBI practices into teaching, considering feedback, scaffolding levels, class interactions, as well as relevance and materials used for instruction.

Table 2. Teaching Practices Applied by English Lecturers in Implementing CBI

No	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often
1	I design language learning tasks that are linguistically, cognitively, and affectively engaging	-	36.4%	63.6 %
2	I arrange my lessons in such a way so that the students can have more success experiences in my class	-	27.3%	72.7%
3	I teach all skills in one lesson	-	81.8%	18.2%
4	I use language learning materials that are relevant and interesting.	-	27.3%	72.7%
5	I encourage the students to participate actively in the classroom.	-	18.2%	81.8%
6	I promote cooperation rather than competition in my class	-	45.5%	54.5%
7	I am active to give feedback on their speaking and writing performance.	-	18.2%	81.8%
8	I use comprehensible language so that every student, including the less proficient learners can follow my lesson and participate fully in my class.	-	9.1%	90.9%
9	I regularly highlight the values of language learning.	9.2%	54.5%	36.3%

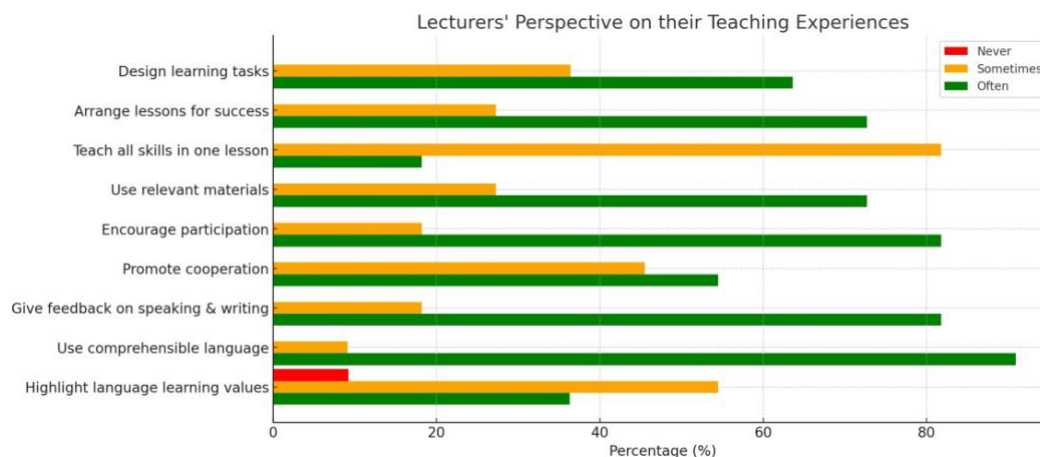


Figure 2. Lecturers' Self-Reported Teaching Practices in Islamic Higher Education

The table presents the results of the analysis on the perceptions of lecturers regarding the use of teaching practices, which indicates the level of implementation of a particular practice in teaching a language by each lecturer. Each claim has some percentage of lecturers who opted for "Never," "Sometimes," or "Often." In order to interpret the findings of the perceptions of lecturers in relation to teaching practices, the data presented demonstrates with no ambiguity the estimated value of instructional practice by educators who attempt to engage students in their learning. The most prominent finding is that in most cases, instructional practices where lecturers issued assignments to learners involve active processes in teaching and learning, and were, for the most part, engaging (63.6%). Also quite high is the number of people from this group, 36.4%, who said that they sometimes do this. One lecturer stated, "We must ensure students experience achievement, not frustration, if we want them to love English." This suggests that the majority of the lecturers strive for optimal task design to foster engagement in the activities by the students. It is also common practice to elaborate lessons that ensure students' success, where often 72.7% described that they do this, and 27.3% reported doing this sometimes.

It appears that in combining different language skills into a single session, most lecturers do not practice this (81.8%), while 18.2% indicate that they do it often. "This means that the integration of skills is done selectively, maybe depending on the lesson's objectives and the needs of the learners," said one lecturer. Moreover, 72.7% of lecturers consider incorporating relevant and interesting materials into their lessons as often as interested, while 27.3% do so only sometimes, illustrating the value of specialized materials in teaching language. Student participation becomes the centre of attention for the teaching and learning process, and so far, 81.8% of lecturers encourage learners to actively participate, while 18.2% do so sometimes. In this case, active participation is equated with having students feel like they are part of the lesson, and therefore, 90% of the time, they are encouraged to provide feedback on learners' oral and written work. It is based on this sophisticated reasoning that 81.8% of them feel that they encourage participation, and 18.2% do so sometimes. Creating active student participation together with providing feedback are complementary approaches to effective teaching. Concerning the general climate of the classroom, it would seem that 54.5% of the lecturers promote cooperation instead of competition more often than not, while 45.5% do so at times.

Observation of classes showed that one lecturer who offered the course "Islamic Cultural Tourism" started the class with a video clip about Indonesia's heritage sites and group discussions on their importance. As students expressed their views and shared experiences, the lecturer incorporated relevant tourism and Islamic culture vocabulary. "Let us discuss why this place is important from cultural and religious angles. Recall the key terms we used last week," she encouraged. The lesson carried on with students collaboratively working on a promotional mini-poster presentation and portraying selected cultural sites using appropriate persuasive and thematic vocabulary. As she

circulated through the classroom, some students needed additional explanation and corrective feedback such as “You may want to use stronger persuasive expressions here, like ‘a must-visit for every Muslim traveler.’” This evidences a strong match with CBI principles which state that content topics are integrated within language instruction: language is never taught in isolation but rather as a medium to explore deeper issues. The lecturer provided contextual tasks along with authentic materials, emphasizing student-centered interaction which reinforced relevance and engagement. These observations corroborate the statistical data indicating that 72.7% of lecturers often use relevant materials while 81.8% promote active participation (See Table 2)."

It appears that so far, the main focus trend is collaborative. While some learning activities do have competition, supplementary activities tend to emphasize collaboration more. It is, however, the strength of almost all 90.9% of lecturers who use clear language that the lesson is accessible for all students, with only 9.1% doing so sometimes.

This demonstrates recognition by lecturers that all learners at different instructional levels have varying proficiency levels and need to be instructed differently. I also note that there is lack of consensus among the respondents on the challenges primary language instruction poses as competency cutoffs increase with advancements in grade levels. Concerning the attention given to the language teachings' importance, a few lecturers stressed opposing tendencies. 36.3% emphasized these values often, while 54.5% did so sometimes to 9.2% never included this aspect (*see table 2*).

This lack of consistency suggests that there are quite a number of lecturers who appreciate the importance of the learning value, but many do ignore mention them during instructions. Most findings indicate that the lecturers incorporate strategies that encourage learner engagement, participation, and ease of access in language learning. However, one lesson that aims to integrate all the language skills and actively endorses the principles of language learning tends to be encouraged less often, creating inconsistency. These results help to address the refinement of pedagogy for effective teaching of language.

4. CONCLUSION

This investigation demonstrates that effective implementation of CBI in Islamic higher educational institutions requires having a sound grasp of its underlying principles. CBI supports student engagement and achievement through integrated content-language instruction, yet inconsistencies remain in skill integration and instructional adaptation. These difficulties arise from different instructional aims and diverse learner characteristics. The results highlight the necessity of appropriate materials, active inclusion, and adjustable teaching methods tailored to learners' profiles. To promote lasting impact, institutions need to support teachers with academic freedom over content—coupled with comprehensive professional development oriented to critical reflective teaching informed by CBI frameworks to bolster responsive pedagogy.

Limitations of this study include its focus primarily on lecturer perceptions within Islamic higher education, without incorporating student perspectives or direct measures of learning outcomes. Moreover, the cross-sectional approach offers little insight into the sustained impact of CBI implementation. Thus, students' perspectives should be incorporated into future research to better understand CBI's effectiveness. Studies comparing Islamic and non-Islamic educational contexts could help ascertain contextual factors that influence the success of CBI. The sustained impact of CBI on learners' language proficiency and autonomous learning can be examined through longitudinal studies. In addition, the role of digital technologies in CBI, targeted faculty training, and the multicultural and multilingual characteristics of the learning environment necessitate further attention and could provide valuable guidance toward enhancing CBI's implementation.

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