From Images to Words: Efficient Cross-Modal Knowledge Distillation to Language Models from Black-box Teachers

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Abstract

Knowledge distillation has become the dominant mechanism for transferring capabilities from large models into smaller ones. Yet, despite its widespread success, the transfer remains confined almost entirely within modality boundaries: language models learn from language-only models, vision models learn from vision-only models, and little is known about how knowledge can be distilled across modalities. This limitation is increasingly consequential as modern vision-language models encode rich semantic abstractions about the world that are difficult to acquire from texts alone. Existing cross-modal distillation approaches offer a potential path forward, but typically rely on expensive modality-specific pre-training or multimodal architectures at inference time, limiting their practicality. We introduce `ARMADA`, a cross-modal distillation framework that transfers knowledge from frozen white-box or black-box multimodal teachers into language-only students. For each text input, `ARMADA` obtains a frozen teacher representation (e.g., a latent from a text-to-image diffusion model) and employs a lightweight alignment module, `TS Aligner`, to project teacher and student representations into a shared manifold. The student is trained through a combination of output matching, manifold alignment, and auxiliary supervision objectives, enabling it to internalize cross-modal structure while remaining predictive of downstream tasks. Across twelve natural language understanding tasks, eight reasoning benchmarks, and five instruction-tuning datasets spanning BERT, DeBERTa-v2-1.4B, OPT-1.3B, and LLaMA-3B,7B,8B students, `ARMADA` consistently improves performance, yielding gains of up to 3.4% on NLU tasks and 2.6% on reasoning benchmarks while using only 0.8% of the trainable parameters required by competing distillation methods. Through controlled comparisons against five degraded-teacher baselines and a capacity-matched control, we show that these gains cannot be explained by additional parameters or generic regularization alone: `ARMADA` separates significantly ($p < 0.1$) from the undistilled baseline and from every fully-degraded teacher, with prediction-level evidence of semantic transfer on grounded inference tasks. Taken together, our results suggest that multimodal foundation models contain transferable semantic structure that can be imported into language-only systems without multimodal pre-training or inference-time multimodal components.

1 Introduction

Pre-trained large language models (LLMs) (Achiam et al., 2023; Gunasekar et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023a; Dubey et al., 2024; DeepSeek-AI et al., 2024) have achieved remarkable performance across reasoning, natural language understanding, code generation, and dialogue tasks. However, their growing scale has made deployment increasingly expensive, motivating extensive research on *model compression* techniques (Hinton et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2021). Knowledge distillation (KD) (Hinton et al., 2015) has emerged as one of the most successful compression paradigms, but most existing methods (Sun et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2021) remain *unimodal*, requiring both teacher and student models to operate within the same modality. Consequently, a text teacher can only transfer knowledge already expressible in text and cannot readily convey grounded perceptual structure — spatial relations, object affordances, and physical or social commonsense —

that humans acquire through vision and that text corpora often capture only weakly. Modern vision-language models encode precisely this type of information, motivating its transfer into language-only models.

Cross-modal knowledge distillation addresses this limitation by allowing a teacher specialized in one modality to transfer knowledge to a student operating in another. Despite growing interest in multimodal foundation models, recent surveys (Song & Zheng, 2026) note that cross-modal distillation remains poorly understood, with limited empirical understanding of how semantic structure transfers across modalities. Existing approaches such as Vokenization (Tan & Bansal, 2020) and VidLanKD (Tang et al., 2021) typically depend on large-scale modality-specific pre-training (e.g., 136M video clips in VidLanKD) and often retain multimodal components at inference time. Yet modern text-to-vision models — both white-box (Rombach et al., 2022b) and black-box (Betker et al., 2023) — already encode rich cross-modal abstractions and are readily available off-the-shelf. This raises a fundamental question: *can a frozen multimodal teacher improve a strictly language-only student without additional teacher pre-training or multimodal inference?* A positive answer would make cross-modal knowledge transfer practical, scalable, and architecture-agnostic.

To this end, we propose `ARMADA`[‡], a cross-modal knowledge distillation framework that transfers knowledge from white-box or black-box text-to-vision teachers into language-only students. Given a text input, `ARMADA` queries a frozen teacher to obtain a cross-modal representation and projects it into a low-dimensional manifold shared with the student through a lightweight aligner, `TS Aligner`. The student and aligner are trained jointly through coupled output-, manifold-, and auxiliary-alignment objectives that encourage the student's internal representations to remain consistent with the teacher's cross-modal structure while preserving task performance. Because the teacher is frozen and accessed only through its representations, `ARMADA` introduces only 0.8% additional trainable parameters and remains compatible with heterogeneous student architectures.

We evaluate `ARMADA` on twelve NLU tasks from GLUE (Wang et al., 2018) and SuperGLUE (Wang et al., 2019), five commonsense reasoning tasks, and three mathematical reasoning benchmarks. Across BERT, DeBERTa, OPT, and LLaMA models, `ARMADA` consistently improves performance, yielding gains of up to 3.4% on NLU tasks and 2.6% on reasoning benchmarks. These improvements persist across model scales, including models with more than 1B parameters, while requiring only 0.8% of the trainable parameters used by competing distillation approaches.

Beyond benchmark performance, we investigate whether the gains arise from meaningful cross-modal transfer or merely from additional regularization. We conduct a controlled mechanism study (Section 6) using frozen, random, shuffled, and constant-teacher controls, together with a capacity-matched variant that removes the alignment mechanism while preserving parameter count. Across seven tasks and three random seeds, `ARMADA` consistently outperforms the undistilled baseline, the capacity-matched control, and every fully degraded teacher. Although the strongest control — a shuffled teacher retaining full task supervision — narrows the gap, prediction-level analyses continue to reveal evidence of semantic transfer, suggesting that multimodal representations contain exploitable structure beyond generic regularization effects.

The contributions of our paper are summarized below:

- **Cross-Modal Knowledge Distillation for Large Language Models.** Unlike multimodal pre-trained models such as CLIP (Radford et al., 2021) or Qwen-VL (Wang et al., 2024), cross-modal distillation transfers knowledge into models that operate on a single modality, making effective knowledge fusion substantially more challenging. To our knowledge, `ARMADA` is the first architecture-agnostic framework that distils knowledge from frozen black-box multimodal teachers into language-only student models.
- **Efficient and Scalable Cross-Modal Distillation.** Existing cross-modal KD methods typically rely on expensive modality-specific pre-training or tightly coupled multimodal architectures. In contrast, `ARMADA` operates with frozen teachers, requires no additional multimodal training, and introduces only 0.8% of the trainable parameters used by competing approaches, making cross-modal transfer practical, scalable, and compatible with both white-box and black-box foundation models.
- **Mechanistic Evidence of Cross-Modal Transfer.** Beyond benchmark improvements, we perform a controlled mechanism study using degraded-teacher controls, capacity-matched variants, paired

[‡]The source code of `ARMADA` will be released upon acceptance of the paper.

statistical tests, and prediction-level analyses. The results indicate that the gains are associated with semantically aligned cross-modal supervision rather than parameter expansion or generic regularization, providing empirical evidence that multimodal foundation models encode transferable semantic structure.

2 Related Work

Unimodal Knowledge Distillation. Knowledge distillation (KD) was popularized by Hinton et al. (2015), building on earlier model-compression work by Buciluǎ et al. (2006). Beyond output matching, subsequent studies explored transferring intermediate representations (Romero et al., 2014; Zagoruyko & Komodakis, 2016; Sun et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020), relational information (Park et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020), and meta-learned supervision (Zhou et al., 2021; Sengupta et al., 2024). However, nearly all of these approaches assume that teacher and student operate within the same modality.

Cross-modal Knowledge Distillation. Unlike unimodal KD, cross-modal distillation transfers knowledge across modalities. Early work by Gupta et al. (2016) transferred representations from RGB to depth models, while later studies distilled information from multimodal teachers into language models (Tang et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2022) or from language models into vision systems (Ghosh et al., 2023). Related multimodal architectures, including VL-BERT (Su et al., 2019), VisualBERT (Li et al., 2019), ViLBERT (Lu et al., 2019), and X-adapter (Zhang et al., 2023), rely on multimodal pre-training and jointly learned visual-language representations. However, most existing methods require large-scale modality-specific pre-training and often retain multimodal components during inference.

From Off-Policy to On-Policy LLM Distillation. Recent LLM distillation research has shifted from static output matching toward *on-policy* training, where supervision adapts to the student's evolving behavior. Sequence-level distillation (Kim & Rush, 2016) introduced trajectory-level supervision but remained susceptible to exposure bias (Ross et al., 2011). More recent approaches such as Generalized KD (Agarwal et al., 2024), MiniLLM (Gu et al., 2024), DistiLLM (Ko et al., 2024), and DistiLLM-2 (Ko et al., 2025) optimize student-generated trajectories using alternative divergence objectives. A parallel line of work studies adaptive divergence design, including ToDi (Jung et al., 2025), AKL (Wu et al., 2025), and entropy-aware distillation (Jin et al., 2026), while chain-of-thought distillation and process-level supervision extend these ideas to reasoning models (Guo et al., 2025; Li et al., 2026; Lightman et al., 2024). These developments motivate our jointly trained alignment framework, although they largely remain confined to text-only settings.

Representation-space, and Black-box Distillation. Several recent methods perform distillation through a shared representation space. Dual-Space KD (Zhang et al., 2025) aligns teacher and student hidden states through learned projectors, Delta-KD (Cao et al., 2025) transfers fine-tuning-induced representation shifts, and ORPO-Distill (Singh et al., 2025) enables cross-architecture preference transfer. Our `TS Aligner` plays a similar role but aligns representations across modalities rather than across text models. The setting is also related to black-box distillation methods such as Lion (Jiang et al., 2023b) and Generative Adversarial Distillation (Ye et al., 2025), which learn from proprietary API-based teachers. Unlike these approaches, `ARMADA` never accesses teacher logits and relies solely on frozen cross-modal embeddings. More importantly, existing representation-space, black-box, and on-policy distillation methods operate almost exclusively within a single modality, leaving cross-modal distillation largely unexplored.

How is Our Method Different? `ARMADA` differs from prior cross-modal KD along four dimensions. *(i) Black-box teachers without additional pre-training.* Methods such as Vokenization (Tan & Bansal, 2020), VidLanKD (Tang et al., 2021), and X-adapter (Zhang et al., 2023) require white-box access and extensive modality-specific pre-training, whereas `ARMADA` uses frozen embeddings from off-the-shelf white-box or black-box text-to-vision models. *(ii) Text-only inference.* Unlike VL-BERT (Su et al., 2019), VisualBERT (Li et al., 2019), and ViLBERT (Lu et al., 2019), the distilled student requires no multimodal components at deployment. *(iii) Jointly trained alignment.* The `TS Aligner` is optimized alongside the student through coupled output, manifold, and auxiliary objectives. *(iv) Parameter efficiency.* The aligner introduces only $\sim 0.8\%$ of the trainable parameters required by competing multimodal KD approaches.

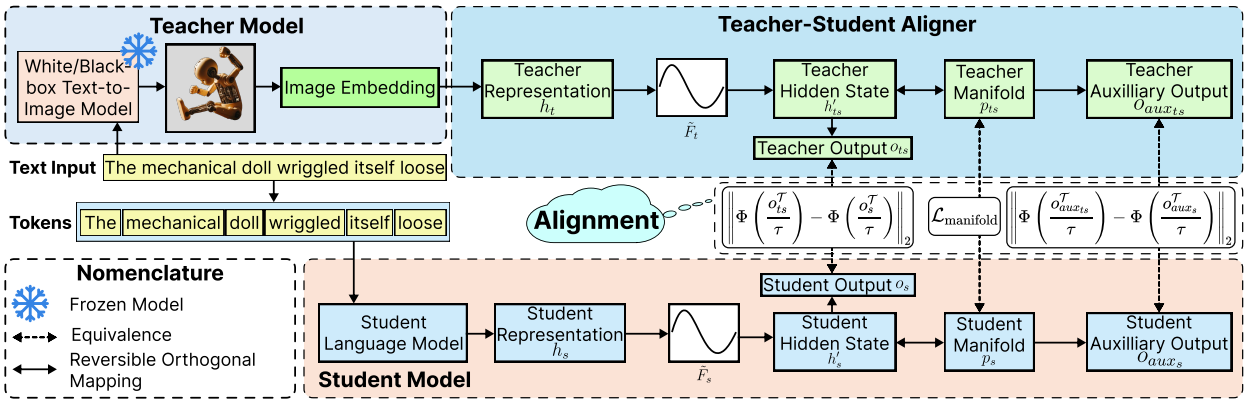

Figure 1: Overview of ARMADA, illustrated on an NLU example. A text-to-image teacher produces a frozen cross-modal embedding for the input; the TS Aligner aligner and the language-only student are trained jointly under coupled output, manifold-alignment, and auxiliary-output losses.

3 Proposed Methodology

In this section, we present ARMADA – an **A**lignment-induced c**r**oss-**m**od**a**l knowledge **d**istill**a**tion. We assume a multimodal model F_t of modality set $\mathcal{M}_t$ as our teacher model. The student model F_s, the model that is being distilled, is assumed to belong to a different modality set $\mathcal{M}_s$, with $\mathcal{M}_s \subset \mathcal{M}_t$. We introduce TS Aligner, a cross-modal alignment module for aligning teacher and student models to a common modality. TS Aligner, denoted by F_{ts}, consists of a non-linear mapping $\tilde{F}_{ts}$, an output layer O_{ts}, a manifold projection layer P_{ts} and an auxiliary output layer $O_{aux_{ts}}$. For a student input sequence $\{x_1, x_2, \cdots, x_n\} = X_s \in \mathcal{M}_s$, we assume a cross-modal representation $X_t \in \mathcal{M}_t$. For instance, if the student input is a sequence of text tokens, we can obtain the teacher sequence X_t from a text-to-image teacher model. The cross-modal distillation process consists of three major steps – (i) output alignment, (ii) manifold alignment, and (iii) auxiliary output alignment. Figure 1 illustrates the overall framework of ARMADA. We enlist all the notations used in the paper and their descriptions in Table 7 (Appendix A).

3.1 Output Alignment

For a given student input sequence X_s and its equivalent teacher input sequence X_t, we first extract hidden representation using the student model F_s and the frozen teacher model F_t, in sequence and obtain $h_s^X = F_s(X_s)$ and $h_t^X = F_t(X_t)$, respectively. We utilize a non-linear mapping, defined by the operators, $\tilde{F}_s$ and $\tilde{F}_{ts}$, for encoding the hidden representations, obtaining $h'^{X}_{s} = \tilde{F}_s(h_s^X)$ and $h'^{X}_{ts} = \tilde{F}_{ts}(h_t^X)$, respectively. For each task $\mathcal{T} \in \mathbb{T}$, we use task-specific linear layers for both TS Aligner and the student to obtain the outputs, $o_{ts}^{\mathcal{T}}$ and $o_s^{\mathcal{T}}$, respectively. We use the task-specific loss function $\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{T}}$ (*e.g.,* cross-entropy for classification and mean squared error for regression) to compute loss against the ground-truth $Y^{\mathcal{T}}$ on the training dataset. For TS Aligner, the output loss is given as,

$$\mathcal{L}_{ts}^{(1)} = \mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{T}}(Y^{\mathcal{T}}, o_{ts}^{\mathcal{T}}). \tag{1}$$

For the student model, the output loss is computed as the weighted sum of the loss against the ground-truth and the logit matching loss (Hinton et al., 2015) with the aligner as,

$$\mathcal{L}_{s}^{(1)} = (1-\alpha) \cdot \mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{T}}(Y^{\mathcal{T}}, o_{s}^{\mathcal{T}}) + \alpha \left\| \Phi\left(\frac{o_{ts}^{\mathcal{T}}}{\tau}\right) - \Phi\left(\frac{o_{s}^{\mathcal{T}}}{\tau}\right) \right\|_2. \tag{2}$$

For the classification task, Φ is the softmax function, whereas it is an identity function for the regression task. α and τ are the hyperparameters representing the output loss and temperature factors, respectively. We use $\alpha = 0.5$ as default.

3.2 Manifold Alignment

Sun et al. (2019) suggested an additional loss between the teacher and student hidden representations to enforce the student model in learning the feature representations similar to the teacher. However, minimizing the point-wise distance between the teacher and student representations can distort the information learned in the student's original modality in cross-modal distillation. Therefore, we first project the representations obtained from `TS Aligner` and the student models to a shared manifold and subsequently minimize their distance on the common subspace. We use two orthogonal projection mapping, P_{ts} and P_s, to project the original teacher and student hidden representations to a common subspace to obtain $P_{ts}(h'^{X}_{ts}) = p^X_{ts}$ and $P_s(h'^{X}_{s}) = p^X_s$. Note that p^X_{ts} and p^X_s belong to the same dimensional subspace, therefore the manifold equivalence can be enforced with traditional similarity or distance measures. Following Huo et al. (2021), we propose an inner-product-based distance measure,

$$\mathcal{L}_{cosine}(p^X_{ts}, p^X_s) = 1 - \langle \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} p^{x_i}_{ts}, \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} p^{x_i}_{s} \rangle \tag{3}$$

where, $\langle ., . \rangle$ denotes the inner product between two vectors, and $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$ measures the semantic similarity between teacher and student manifolds. Similarly, we formulate two other losses, $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$ and $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$, to measure the distance between two manifolds in Euclidean space.

$$\mathcal{L}_{euclid}(p^X_{ts}, p^X_s) = \left\| \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} p^{x_i}_{ts} - \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} p^{x_i}_{s} \right\|_2 \tag{4}$$

$$\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}(p^X_{ts}, p^X_s) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} ||p^{x_i}_{ts} - p^{x_i}_{s}||_2 \tag{5}$$

Using $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$, we compute the Euclidean distance between the *centroids* of the teacher and student projection vectors, whereas with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$ we compute the expected *per-sample* distance between paired teacher and student projection vectors. The three objectives form an increasingly strict regularization ladder: $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$ constrains only the *direction* of the mean projections, $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$ additionally constrains their *magnitude* (centroid distance), and $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$ constrains *every* sample's projection individually. By the triangle inequality, $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise} \geq \mathcal{L}_{euclid}$ for any batch, so $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$ imposes the tightest teacher-student coupling and $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$ the loosest. These manifold-alignment losses parallel the dominant divergence measures (Jung et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025; Jin et al., 2026) and form a regularization ladder of increasingly strict teacher–student coupling that trades off differently across tasks; and, as in on-policy distillation, our `TS Aligner` aligner is trained *jointly* with the student, so that the cross-modal supervision tracks the student as it learns rather than being fixed in advance.

For the rest of the paper, we generalize these three losses as $\mathcal{L}_{manifold}$, and — unless stated otherwise — a model labelled simply "`ARMADA`" uses the loss that performs best for that regime (see below). We adopt $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$ as the default for NLU tasks (most robust on average) and $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$ for instruction-tuning, and we always state the loss explicitly in every table and figure to avoid ambiguity.

3.3 Auxiliary Output Alignment

To further regularize the student representations, we incorporate an auxiliary output head on `TS Aligner` and student projection heads. We align the models to learn appropriate manifold projections that maximize their performance on downstream tasks by incorporating an auxiliary output head on both teacher and student projection vectors. Given the auxiliary output $o^{\mathcal{T}}_{aux_{ts}} = O^{\mathcal{T}}_{aux_{ts}}(p^X_{ts})$ and $o^{\mathcal{T}}_{aux_s} = O^{\mathcal{T}}_{aux_s}(p^X_s)$, we calculate the auxiliary losses, $\mathcal{L}^{(2)}_{ts}$ and $\mathcal{L}^{(2)}_{s}$, similar to Equations 1 and 2. The intuition is that aligning the projected teacher manifold to the student manifold under a task-relevant supervisory signal forces the student to internalize structure that is simultaneously consistent with the teacher's cross-modal abstraction and predictive of the downstream label, rather than collapsing to either signal in isolation.

As opposed to vokenization (Tan & Bansal, 2020) and VidLanKD (Tang et al., 2021), which use pre-training objectives to train the teacher models, we optimize `TS Aligner` on task-specific objectives, allowing task-specific knowledge diffusion to students. The final `TS Aligner` loss is calculated as $\mathcal{L}_t = \mathcal{L}_{ts}^{(1)} + \gamma\mathcal{L}_t^{(2)}$. For the student model, we use the output loss, auxiliary output loss, and manifold alignment loss to calculate the final training loss as $\mathcal{L}_s = \mathcal{L}_s^{(1)} + \gamma\mathcal{L}_s^{(2)} + \beta\mathcal{L}_{manifold}(p_t^X, p_s^X)$. β (default to 1) and γ (default to 1) are hyperparameters used to assign weightage to the manifold and auxiliary output alignment loss, respectively.

4 Experimental Setup

Tasks. We apply `ARMADA` on seven student LMs and four multimodal teacher models and compare it against ten unimodal and three multimodal KD methods across 12 NLU tasks and 5 instruction-following tasks. Following Liu et al. (2022); Zhou et al. (2021), we consider four different NLU tasks from SuperGLUE (Wang et al., 2019) – CB, COPA, BoolQ and WiC, and eight tasks from GLUE (Wang et al., 2018) – CoLA, MRPC, RTE, STS-B (categorized as *GLUE-small*), SST-2, MNLI, QNLI and QQP (categorized as *GLUE-large*). We also consider Multimodal-IMDb (Arevalo et al., 2017) and Hateful meme classification (Kiela et al., 2020), two multimodal classification tasks comprising text and image modalities. Additionally, we consider five commonsense reasoning tasks – HellaSwag (Zellers et al., 2019), WinoGrande (Sakaguchi et al., 2021), ARC-easy, ARC-challenge (Clark et al., 2018) and OpenBookQA (Mihaylov et al., 2018) and three mathematical reasoning tasks – MultiArith (Roy & Roth, 2016), SingleEq (Koncel-Kedziorski et al., 2016) and AQuA (Ling et al., 2017). For instruction-following experiments, we fine-tune the student models on Dolly-15K Gu et al. (2024) dataset and evaluate on Dolly, SelfInst Wang et al. (2022a), Vicuna Chiang et al. (2023), SNI Wang et al. (2022b) and UNI Honovich et al. (2023) datasets.

Student and teacher models. We consider seven different pre-trained language models, including BERT-base (Devlin et al., 2018) (111M parameters), pre-trained BERT 6-layer (66M parameters), DeBERTa-v2-xxlarge (He et al., 2020) (1.4B parameters), OPT-1.3B (Zhang et al., 2022), LLaMA-7B (Touvron et al., 2023), LLaMA-3.1-8B (Dubey et al., 2024) and LLaMA-3.2-3B*. We utilize two text-to-image teacher models: Stable Diffusion v1-4 (Rombach et al., 2022a) and Midjourney (Borji, 2022), along with the ModelScope text-to-video (Wang et al., 2023) (1.7B parameters) and the SpeechT5 text-to-audio model (Ao et al., 2022) (144M parameters). For the text-to-image teacher models, we generate latent representations that are 32 $\times$ 32 dimensions (flattened to a 1024-dimensional vector) for each text input, using 20 diffusion inference steps and a guidance scale value of 7.5. Similar configurations apply for extracting latent representations from the text-to-video model, where 64 frames are generated for each text input. We extract the hidden representation from the first frame, resulting in a 512 $\times$ 512 hidden representation that is flattened into a 262144-dimensional vector for each text input. For the text-to-audio teacher model, we generate audio corresponding to each text input, which is subsequently processed by the Wav2Vec2-base model (Baevski et al., 2020) to produce a 768-dimensional vector representation. These vector representations of the texts are utilized to pre-train the `TS Aligner`. For natural language understanding (NLU) tasks, we employ cross-entropy loss for the pre-training of the `TS Aligner`. Conversely, for commonsense reasoning and instruction-tuning tasks, the `TS Aligner` is pre-trained using reconstruction loss measured by the mean squared error.

Evaluation metrics. For CoLA and STS-B tasks, we use the Mathews correlation coefficient ('Mcc') and Pearson's correlation coefficient ('Pear'), respectively, for evaluation. For the remaining NLU and commonsense-reasoning tasks, we use the accuracy score ('Acc'). For evaluating on instruction-tuning tasks, we use 'RougeL' metric. **Reporting protocol.** We report *mean* performance across three random seeds ($\{7, 42, 100\}$) rather than the maximum over runs, and base all significance claims on paired statistical tests over the per-seed results (Section 6 and Appendix F). The full per-seed mean$\pm$std values are reported in the accompanying result tables; for the GLUE-small/SuperGLUE NLU suite the seed-to-seed standard deviation is small (typically < 0.5 pp), but we no longer rely on best-of-n selection for any headline number.

Baselines. The competing baselines include unimodal KD methods (KD (Hinton et al., 2015), Sequence-KD (Kim & Rush, 2016), PKD (Sun et al., 2019), TinyBERT (Jiao et al., 2019), MetaDistil (Zhou et al., 2021) and Rail KD (Haidar et al., 2022)) and multimodal KD methods (VL-BERT (Su et al., 2019), VisualBERT (Li

*The pre-trained models are obtained from `https://huggingface.co/models/`.

et al., 2019), ViLBERT (Lu et al., 2019), Vokenization (Tan & Bansal, 2020), VidLanKD (Tang et al., 2021), Visual guidance (Zhang et al., 2021) and X-adapter (Zhang et al., 2023)). Appendix C presents more details.

Models	Distillation type	CoLA Mcc	MRPC Acc	RTE Acc	STS-B Pear	CB Acc	COPA Acc	BoolQ Acc	WiC Acc
BERT-6L	undistilled	42.8±0.1	78.6±0.0	64.1±0.2	88.5±0.4	75.0±0.0	53.0±0.0	71.3±0.1	55.7±0.2
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**46.1±0.1**	**80.3±0.0**	**67.5±0.0**	88.5±0.1	**76.8±0.0**	**62.8±0.1**	**73.1±0.0**	**57.8±0.1**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**47.6±0.0**	**80.5±0.0**	**67.4±0.1**	88.5±0.2	**78.5±0.1**	**63.0±0.0**	**73.1±0.0**	**58.1±0.1**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**45.7±0.2**	**79.5±0.0**	**67.5±0.1**	88.6±0.1	**78.6±0.0**	**63.0±0.0**	**73.0±0.1**	**57.9±0.0**
BERT-base	undistilled	60.8±0.1	83.8±0.1	71.0±0.0	89.3±0.0	83.7±0.1	62.9±0.0	75.1±0.1	58.4±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**61.6±0.0**	**85.0±0.0**	**72.5±0.1**	**89.5±0.1**	**85.7±0.0**	**67.7±0.2**	**75.8±0.0**	58.5±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**61.9±0.0**	**85.2±0.1**	**73.9±0.0**	**89.7±0.0**	**85.7±0.0**	**67.9±0.1**	75.1±0.0	**58.8±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**61.8±0.0**	**85.0±0.0**	**71.7±0.1**	**89.6±0.0**	**87.4±0.1**	**68.0±0.0**	**75.3±0.0**	58.4±0.0
DeBERTa-v2-xxlarge	undistilled	72.1±0.0	89.7±0.1	90.3±0.0	92.3±0.0	81.9±0.1	83.7±0.0	87.2±0.0	60.8±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**72.6±0.0**	89.9±0.0	**92.3±0.0**	**92.4±0.1**	**92.8±0.0**	81.9±0.1	86.2±0.0	59.2±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**73.1±0.0**	**90.2±0.0**	**91.6±0.1**	92.3±0.0	**92.8±0.0**	78.9±0.1	**87.7±0.0**	58.2±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**73.4±0.0**	89.4±0.1	**91.6±0.0**	92.0±0.1	**93.0±0.0**	79.9±0.1	**87.8±0.0**	59.9±0.0
OPT-1.3B	undistilled	59.6±0.0	84.3±0.1	76.3±0.0	89.7±0.0	78.2±0.1	54.8±0.0	74.6±0.0	57.9±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**62.6±0.0**	84.5±0.0	**77.3±0.0**	**90.4±0.1**	**78.5±0.0**	**57.9±0.1**	**77.3±0.0**	56.7±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**61.7±0.0**	83.1±0.1	**79.0±0.0**	**90.1±0.0**	76.7±0.1	**57.0±0.0**	**76.0±0.0**	57.0±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**62.4±0.0**	**84.7±0.0**	**78.6±0.1**	**90.0±0.0**	76.7±0.1	**58.9±0.0**	**76.1±0.0**	56.1±0.0

Table 1: Results of different LMs (undistilled and distilled by ARMADA with Stable Diffusion teacher) on ***GLUE-small*** and ***SuperGLUE*** tasks - different training paradigms. **Blue** indicates the tasks where the student model distilled - ARMADA exhibits better performance than the undistilled fine-tuned variants. We report the mean (± standard deviation) over three seeds ($\{7, 42, 100\}$). The improvement of ARMADA over the undistilled model across these GLUE-small/SuperGLUE tasks is statistically significant (one-sided paired t-test, $t = 3.98$, $p < 0.01$).

5 Experimental Results

5.1 Results on NLU and Reasoning Tasks

Effectiveness of ARMADA on different LLMs. We first investigate whether cross-modal supervision can consistently benefit language models of different architectures and scales. Table 1 reports the performance of ARMADA on GLUE-small and SuperGLUE benchmarks, while Table 8 (Appendix E) presents the corresponding results on GLUE-large tasks. Across all student architectures, ARMADA consistently improves upon the undistilled baselines, indicating that the benefits of cross-modal distillation are not restricted to a particular model family or parameter regime. The largest gains are observed for the smaller BERT variants, where BERT-base and BERT-6L improve by 2.8% and 3.4%, respectively, when aggregated across Tables 1 and 8. Importantly, these gains persist even for substantially larger models, with DeBERTa and OPT improving by 1.4% and 1.5%, respectively, despite their considerably stronger starting performance. This pattern suggests that the information transferred through cross-modal supervision is complementary to the knowledge already encoded in modern pre-trained language models rather than merely compensating for limited model capacity.

To examine whether these benefits extend beyond language understanding, we evaluate ARMADA on commonsense and mathematical reasoning benchmarks using LLaMA-7B. Table 2 shows that ARMADA improves performance on five of the eight reasoning tasks, with gains reaching up to 2.6% on individual benchmarks and an average improvement of 0.5%. Although the average gain is smaller than that observed on NLU tasks, the consistent improvements across both understanding and reasoning suggest that the transferred signal captures broadly useful semantic structure rather than task-specific heuristics. One-sided t-tests further confirm that the improvements over the undistilled baselines are statistically significant across GLUE-small, GLUE-large, and reasoning benchmarks (GLUE-small: $t = 3.98$, $p = 0.00$; GLUE-large: $t = 5.11$, $p = 0.00$; reasoning: $t = 2.0$, $p = 0.04$). These findings are particularly noteworthy because the cross-modal teacher representations are obtained from a frozen Stable Diffusion model that is never optimized for any of the downstream language tasks, suggesting that multimodal foundation models encode transferable semantic structure that can be successfully incorporated into language-only systems.

Where ARMADA helps less. The benefits of cross-modal supervision are not uniform across all tasks. For example, WiC exhibits little or even negative improvement in several configurations, while the average gains

Distillation type	Hellaswag	Winogrande	ARC-c	ARC-e	OpenBookQA	MultiArith	SingleEq	AQuA	Avg.
undistilled	65.2	70.5	65.5	80.9	75.6	96.0	83.5	14.8	69.0
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**67.8**	69.5	64.7	**81.1**	**76.8**	**97.0**	83.1	**15.9**	**69.5**
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**67.0**	70.0	**65.7**	80.8	**76.5**	**96.5**	83.3	**15.6**	**69.4**
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**65.8**	69.6	64.3	80.8	**75.9**	**96.2**	83.1	**15.2**	68.9

Table 2: Zero-shot accuracy on reasoning tasks for LLaMA-7B distilled with ARMADA with Stable Diffusion teacher model. **Blue** indicates the tasks where ARMADA improves performance over the undistilled LLaMA. Averaged over the eight reasoning tasks, the improvement is modest (∼0.5%) but statistically significant (one-sided paired t-test, $t = 2.0$, $p = 0.04$).

Methods	CoLA	MNLI	MRPC	QNLI	QQP	RTE	SST-2	STS-B	Avg.
KD (Hinton et al., 2015)	43.5	79.3	79.4	85.6	89.6	64.4	87.8	89.2	77.4
PKD (Sun et al., 2019)	43.9	79.4	78.9	85.9	89.6	64.3	87.9	89.2	77.4
TinyBERT (Jiao et al., 2019)	41.8	**80.3**	80.7	86.2	89.3	64.4	88.5	89.8	77.6
RCO (Jin et al., 2019)	43.0	79.1	79.3	86.1	89.3	64.3	88.0	89.2	77.3
TAKD (Mirzadeh et al., 2020)	43.2	79.2	79.2	86.0	89.4	65.0	88.0	89.3	77.4
DML (Zhang et al., 2018)	43.1	79.1	79.3	86.0	89.0	64.9	88.1	89.2	77.3
ProKT (Shi et al., 2020)	43.7	79.5	80.5	86.1	89.6	64.9	87.9	89.6	77.7
SFTN (Park et al., 2021)	43.0	79.1	79.5	85.9	89.1	65.0	88.1	89.3	77.4
MetaDistil (Zhou et al., 2021)	**48.0**	80.2	81.0	86.8	89.7	66.1	88.9	**90.7**	78.9
Continuation KD (Jafari et al., 2022)	42.7	78.6	**84.3**	86.0	**91.3**	64.9	89.7	89.1	78.3
Rail KD (Haidar et al., 2022)	45.9	78.6	79.3	85.7	90.0	**68.3**	89.4	90.0	78.4
ARMADA	47.6	**80.3**	80.5	**87.3**	89.2	67.5	**90.7**	88.7	**79.0**

Table 3: Improvement for BERT-6L on GLUE tasks distilled with ARMADA and other contemporary unimodal distillation methods. For all the KD baselines except ARMADA, BERT-base ($110M$ learnable parameters) is used as the teacher model. ARMADA uses Stable Diffusion as the teacher model ($0.8M$ learnable parameters). ARMADA attains the best average improvement (+2.2%); the gain over the unimodal and multimodal KD baselines is statistically significant (one-sided t-test, $t = 1.56$, $p < 0.1$).

on zero-shot reasoning remain comparatively modest. Similarly, the instruction-tuning improvements for larger models such as LLaMA-8B (Appendix E, Table 14) are generally smaller than those observed for compact models. These cases are informative because they help delineate the boundary conditions under which cross-modal supervision is most useful. Broadly, ARMADA appears most beneficial when tasks can plausibly exploit grounded semantic abstractions, whereas tasks that are already well served by language-only representations provide less room for improvement. We revisit this phenomenon in Section 6 through prediction-level analyses that characterize the examples most affected by cross-modal supervision.

Comparison against baselines. Having established that ARMADA consistently improves a diverse collection of language models, we next investigate whether these gains remain competitive against existing distillation approaches. Tables 3 and 11 compare ARMADA against representative unimodal and multimodal KD methods, respectively.[†] On GLUE benchmarks, ARMADA delivers the strongest overall improvement for the BERT-6L student, achieving an average gain of 2.2% over the undistilled model and surpassing the most competitive unimodal baseline, MetaDistil, despite relying on substantially fewer trainable teacher parameters. The comparison against multimodal KD methods is particularly noteworthy. Methods such as VidLanKD and X-adapter depend on extensive modality-specific pre-training and significantly larger training budgets, whereas ARMADA attains comparable performance using less than 0.8% of the corresponding teacher-training effort. These results suggest that much of the transferable semantic structure required for cross-modal learning is already present within off-the-shelf multimodal foundation models and can be exploited effectively without the expensive multimodal pre-training pipelines traditionally associated with cross-modal distillation. A one-tailed t-test further indicates that the improvements achieved by ARMADA over the unimodal and multimodal KD baselines are statistically significant ($t = 1.56$, $p < 0.1$), reinforcing the competitiveness of the proposed framework.

[†]Following Zhang et al. (2021), we only compare the multimodal KD methods on GLUE-large tasks.

Additional results. While the preceding experiments establish the effectiveness of ARMADA on language understanding, reasoning, and instruction-following tasks, a broader collection of analyses provides further evidence regarding its robustness, generality, and underlying mechanisms. To maintain readability, we defer these results to Appendix E. Table 8 extends the evaluation to the complete GLUE-large benchmark and demonstrates that the trends observed on GLUE-small and SuperGLUE persist on substantially larger datasets, indicating that the benefits of cross-modal supervision are not restricted to low-resource settings. Tables 9 and 10 investigate the role of the teacher model and the standalone predictive ability of TS Aligner, respectively. These experiments help disentangle the contribution of the alignment mechanism from the capacity of the auxiliary model and show that the gains arise from teacher–student interaction rather than from the aligner itself acting as a strong classifier.

We further compare ARMADA against multimodal distillation baselines on GLUE-large tasks in Table 11, where the proposed framework remains competitive despite requiring substantially less multimodal pre-training and optimization effort. Table 13 evaluates ARMADA on MM-IMDb and Hateful Memes, providing evidence that the benefits of cross-modal transfer are not limited to language-only benchmarks and can also extend to tasks where multimodal reasoning is intrinsically important. The contribution of auxiliary supervision is isolated in Table 12, revealing that the auxiliary objectives consistently improve the quality of the learned alignment and contribute to downstream performance gains. Finally, Figures 2 and 3 analyze the sensitivity of ARMADA to hyperparameter choices and manifold-alignment objectives. Collectively, these experiments demonstrate that the effectiveness of ARMADA is robust across teacher choices, task domains, alignment objectives, and training configurations, while simultaneously providing additional evidence that the observed improvements originate from semantically meaningful cross-modal supervision rather than incidental architectural choices.

Model	**CoLA**	**MRPC**	**RTE**	**STS-B**	**CB**	**COPA**	**BoolQ**	**WiC**
	Mcc	Acc	Acc	Pear	Acc	Acc	Acc	Acc
TS Aligner	9.9	66.5	54.5	2.1	51.8	54.0	53.9	52.3
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	59.3	84.3	69.7	89.3	85.7	62.0	73.2	57.2
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	59.3	82.4	69.7	89.3	85.7	54.0	76.2	56.4
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	59.3	82.4	69.7	89.3	83.9	55	76.7	55.6

Table 4: Results of TS Aligner and BERT-12L with ARMADA on all GLUE-small and SuperGLUE tasks with a higher-capacity TS Aligner. We increase the number of hidden layers in TS Aligner and remove the projection mapping $\tilde{F}_{ts}$ and auxiliary output head $O^{\mathcal{T}}_{aux_{ts}}$, so that capacity is preserved (or increased) while the alignment mechanism is removed. The objective is to corroborate that the gains from ARMADA are not attributable to aligner capacity. The capacity-matched variant is on average 2.8 pp worse than the full ARMADA (with alignment); the drop is statistically significant (one-sided paired t-test, $p < 0.05$), confirming that structured alignment, not parameter count, drives the improvement.

Are the gains simply due to additional capacity? A natural alternative explanation for the improvements observed with ARMADA is that they arise from the additional parameters introduced by the alignment architecture rather than from cross-modal knowledge transfer itself. To isolate this effect, we construct a capacity-matched control in which the number of hidden layers in TS Aligner is increased to match and slightly exceed the total parameter count contributed by the projection module $\tilde{F}_{ts}$ and the auxiliary output head $O^{\mathcal{T}}_{aux_{ts}}$, while removing both alignment mechanisms. This design preserves the parameter budget while eliminating the structured teacher-student correspondence central to ARMADA. Table 4 presents the results on GLUE and SuperGLUE benchmarks under this higher-capacity configuration. If additional capacity were the primary driver of performance, this variant would be expected to recover the gains achieved by the full model. Instead, it exhibits an average performance degradation of 2.8% relative to ARMADA, with the difference being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Notably, the capacity-matched model fails to reproduce the consistent 1–3% improvements observed throughout the benchmark suite despite possessing comparable or greater parameter count. These findings rule out parameter expansion as the dominant explanation for the observed gains and instead point to the importance of structured cross-modal alignment. The projection mapping and auxiliary alignment objectives appear to be critical for establishing semantically meaningful

teacher–student correspondence, suggesting that effective cross-modal transfer depends not on capacity alone but on how that capacity is used to align representations across modalities.

5.2 Results on Instruction-tuning Tasks

Teacher	Distillation Type	Dolly	SNI	SelfInst	UNI	Vicuna
-	undistilled	31.30	26.68	18.44	32.01	17.59
language-only	SeqKD	31.45	28.48	18.61	31.05	17.74
text-to-image	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**31.94**	**27.13**	**19.83**	**33.57**	**18.73**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	30.57	**28.25**	18.06	31.59	**18.15**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**31.38**	**26.68**	18.28	**32.27**	**18.16**
text-to-video	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**33.02**	**26.98**	**18.49**	**32.07**	**18.44**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**33.07**	**27.75**	**18.96**	31.51	**17.92**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**31.85**	26.57	**18.84**	**32.01**	**17.84**
text-to-audio	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**32.95**	**27.46**	**18.92**	**33.67**	**18.15**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**32.68**	**27.70**	**18.66**	**32.70**	**18.01**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**32.81**	**28.07**	**19.57**	**33.01**	**18.67**

Table 5: Results on instruction-tuning tasks (RougeL) with LLaMA-3.2-3B under different multimodal teacher models and the three loss objectives. We also report the RougeL when distilled from a language-only LLaMA-8B teacher with SeqKD (Kim & Rush, 2016). ARMADA outperforms SeqKD (one-sided t-test, $p = 0.005$) while using teacher models that are far smaller ($<$ 2B vs. 8B). A two-way ANOVA finds no significant difference between teacher modalities ($p > 0.05$; we fail to reject equality), whereas the manifold-weight β and auxiliary-weight γ are each significant ($p < 0.01$).

We next investigate whether the benefits of cross-modal distillation extend beyond classification and reasoning tasks to open-ended instruction following. Table 5 reports the performance of LLaMA-3.2-3B-Instruct distilled from different multimodal teacher models using ARMADA. Across all five evaluation benchmarks, ARMADA consistently improves upon the undistilled LLaMA-3B baseline, achieving gains of up to 1.8%, 1.6%, and 1.5% on Dolly, UNI, and SNI, respectively. The consistency of these improvements across multiple instruction-following datasets suggests that the transferred cross-modal signal remains useful even when evaluation shifts from structured prediction tasks to open-ended generation. Perhaps more surprisingly, ARMADA frequently outperforms SeqKD, which performs unimodal distillation from a substantially larger LLaMA-8B teacher. On datasets such as Dolly, SelfInst, and UNI, the margin exceeds 1%, despite ARMADA relying on comparatively lightweight multimodal teacher models. This observation suggests that the value of the transferred knowledge is not determined solely by teacher scale; rather, multimodal teachers appear to provide complementary semantic information that is difficult to obtain through text-only supervision.

Across modalities, the text-to-audio teacher yields the strongest average improvement (1.4%), followed closely by the text-to-image teacher (1.3%). The teacher modalities are nonetheless statistically equivalent ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the effectiveness of ARMADA is not tied to any specific modality. Instead, the results indicate that multiple forms of multimodal supervision can provide useful semantic structure that can be distilled into language-only models. Hyperparameter and loss-function ablations for the LLaMA-3B student (Figures 4 and 5) and results with the larger LLaMA-8B student (Table 14) are reported in Appendix E.

6 Discussion

The central question underlying this work is whether multimodal foundation models contain semantic structure that can be transferred across modality boundaries into language-only systems. While the empirical results demonstrate consistent improvements across language understanding, reasoning, and instruction-following tasks, they do not by themselves explain *why* cross-modal supervision helps. We therefore complement the benchmark evaluations with a series of representation-level, optimization-level, and statistical analyses aimed at understanding three questions: *(i)* how cross-modal distillation influences the learned representation space; *(ii)* what role the trained TS Aligner plays during optimization; and *(iii)* whether the observed gains

originate from semantically aligned cross-modal supervision rather than generic regularization or increased capacity.

How does the cross-modal distillation work? Projecting the student and `TS Aligner` into a shared manifold imposes a soft constraint that encourages the student's internal representations to remain predictable from the teacher's cross-modal abstractions while preserving information from the original language modality. Unlike direct feature matching, which can distort modality-specific representations, the manifold objective encourages consistency at the level of latent structure rather than individual features. We quantify this effect through three complementary representation-space probes on BERT-12L. First, t-SNE visualizations (Appendix Figure 6) show that students trained with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$ occupy regions of the latent space that are substantially closer to the teacher manifold than those of the undistilled model. Second, silhouette scores (Appendix Table 17) increase by 76% on examples where `ARMADA` improves upon the baseline and decrease by 20% where it does not, suggesting that performance gains are associated with more coherent semantic organization rather than uniform shifts of the representation space. Third, cluster purity increases from 0.77/0.56 (CoLA/COPA) for the undistilled model to 0.81/0.68 for `ARMADA`, indicating improved separation of task-relevant concepts.

The effect is further reflected at the prediction level. Appendix Figure 7 shows that the corrected examples are not uniformly distributed across the evaluation sets but instead concentrate in categories that plausibly benefit from grounded semantic abstractions, including syntactic CoLA constructions (>70% of corrected cases) and Social & Institutional COPA examples ($\sim$ 42%). Taken together, these findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the student acquires task-relevant semantic structure from the multimodal teacher rather than merely receiving an additional source of optimization noise or regularization. At the same time, these analyses remain observational in nature and should be interpreted as evidence consistent with semantic transfer rather than definitive proof of the underlying mechanism.

How does the `TS Aligner` affect the student? A notable aspect of `ARMADA` is that the `TS Aligner` itself is intentionally weak. Despite containing only $\sim$ 0.8M parameters and achieving relatively poor standalone performance on downstream tasks (Table 10), it nevertheless provides substantial benefit to the student during training. When the student is trained against a randomly initialized frozen `TS Aligner`, performance deteriorates relative to the undistilled baseline on six of eight NLU tasks, whereas the standard training curriculum consistently improves performance (Appendix Figure 8 and Appendix Table 18). This suggests that the value of the aligner does not arise from its ability to solve the task independently. Instead, the aligner appears to act as a conduit through which the multimodal teacher imposes a structured learning signal on the student. In other words, the utility of the aligner lies not in its final predictive accuracy but in the trajectory it induces during optimization.

Does the cross-modal signal drive the gains? The preceding analyses suggest that cross-modal supervision influences the learned representation space, but they do not rule out alternative explanations such as generic regularization or increased model capacity. We therefore perform a controlled mechanism study using progressively degraded teacher signals. Specifically, we compare `ARMADA` against a Frozen Teacher, Randomly Frozen Teacher, Random Teacher, Shuffled-Input Teacher, and Constant Teacher. These controls systematically remove semantic correspondence while preserving varying degrees of architecture, supervision, and optimization dynamics. All configurations are evaluated across seven NLU tasks, three random seeds, and three manifold objectives.

Table 6 shows that `ARMADA` significantly outperforms the undistilled baseline ($\bar{\Delta} = +1.59$, $p = 0.002$), the capacity-matched control (Table 4, $p < 0.05$), and every fully degraded teacher configuration. These results indicate that neither parameter count nor generic auxiliary supervision is sufficient to explain the observed gains. The strongest controls are the Random and Shuffled-Input variants, which preserve most of the optimization machinery while disrupting semantic correspondence. Although both comparisons remain directionally favorable to `ARMADA`, neither reaches statistical significance at the aggregate level. This observation is important because it suggests that a portion of the benefit may indeed arise from regularization effects associated with the alignment procedure itself, even though semantic correspondence provides additional measurable value.

Comparison	Aggregation	n	$\bar{\Delta}$ (pp)	Wins/n	Cohen's d	Wilcoxon p
ARMADA > Undistilled (Base)	max-over-loss	21	+1.59	16/21	0.51	0.002^{**}
ARMADA > Constant Teacher	max-over-loss	21	+0.94	17/21	0.31	0.002^{**}
ARMADA > Frozen Teacher	per-loss	63	+1.10	35/63	0.31	0.018^{*}
ARMADA > Randomly Frozen Teacher	per-loss	63	+0.68	35/63	0.22	$0.052^{\dagger}$
ARMADA > Random Teacher	per-loss	63	+0.44	32/63	0.15	0.140
ARMADA > Shuffled Input	per-loss	63	+0.44	37/63	0.12	0.136

Table 6: One-sided paired Wilcoxon tests comparing ARMADA against the undistilled baseline and five negative controls (best aggregation slice, pooled across 3 seeds). ARMADA improves over *every* comparator ($\bar{\Delta} > 0$) and separates significantly ($p < 0.1$) from the undistilled baseline and from every fully-degraded teacher (Constant, Frozen, Randomly-Frozen). The two strictest controls — Random and Shuffled Input, which retain full task supervision and therefore most of ARMADA's capacity — are directionally favourable but short of aggregate significance, and are examined at the prediction level in Table 15. Significance markers: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$.

Beyond the aggregate test, we examine prediction-level behavior with a per-task McNemar analysis pooled across seeds (Appendix Table 15), where the counts b and c record the examples ARMADA corrects that the comparator misses and vice versa. Across the panel, ARMADA corrects more predictions than it breaks against both the undistilled baseline and the strict Shuffled-Input control, with the largest correction margins concentrated on tasks whose solution plausibly relies on grounded semantic abstractions. The per-task significance pattern is consistent with the aggregate Wilcoxon picture: clear separation from the undistilled baseline on the more semantically demanding tasks, and a directional but narrower advantage over the Shuffled-Input control once predictions are pooled across the full panel.

Taken together, the evidence supports a nuanced interpretation of cross-modal transfer. The improvements cannot be explained solely by additional parameters, generic auxiliary objectives, or trivial regularization effects, as demonstrated by the capacity-matched and degraded-teacher controls. At the same time, the remaining gap between ARMADA and the strongest shuffled-input baseline is relatively modest, indicating that the contribution of semantic transfer and regularization are not completely separable within the current experimental framework. We therefore view our results not as definitive proof of cross-modal semantic transfer, but as strong empirical evidence that semantically aligned multimodal representations contain information that language-only models can exploit. Developing sharper causal tests, stronger negative controls, and more challenging grounded reasoning benchmarks remains an important direction for future work.

7 Conclusion

In this work, we presented ARMADA, a cross-modal knowledge distillation framework that enabled language-only models to acquire knowledge from frozen multimodal teachers without requiring modality-specific teacher pre-training, multimodal inference architectures, or access to teacher internals. By introducing a lightweight alignment mechanism that projected teacher and student representations into a shared latent manifold, ARMADA provided a practical and architecture-agnostic pathway for transferring cross-modal abstractions into language models while preserving their efficiency and deployment simplicity. Beyond proposing a new distillation framework, our study explored a broader question of whether semantic structure encoded within multimodal foundation models can be transferred across modality boundaries and subsequently utilized by language-only systems. The empirical and mechanistic analyses suggested that the observed improvements were associated with semantically aligned cross-modal supervision rather than merely increased capacity or generic regularization, providing evidence that multimodal representations contain transferable structure beyond their native modality. Nevertheless, the precise mechanisms underlying such transfer remain only partially understood, particularly in the presence of strong regularization-based controls, and our evaluation was limited to language understanding, reasoning, and instruction-following tasks. Future work could therefore focus on developing a deeper theoretical understanding of cross-modal knowledge transfer, extending the framework to longer-horizon generation and interactive reasoning settings, and exploring its integration with emerging on-policy distillation and foundation-model compression paradigms.

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A Notation

Table 7 summarizes the notation used throughout the paper.

Notation Type	Notation	Description	Dimension/Shape
Modalities	$\mathcal{M}_t$	Teacher model modality	
	$\mathcal{M}_s$	Student model modality	
Architectures	F_t	Multi-modal teacher model	
	F_{ts}	`TS Aligner` module	
	$\tilde{F}_{ts}$	Hidden non-linear projection mapping for `TS Aligner`	$\mathbb{R}^{128} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{h}$, h is hidden dimension of `TS Aligner`
	$O_{ts}^{\mathcal{T}}$	`TS Aligner` output layer for task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{h} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{c}$, h is hidden dimension of `TS Aligner`; c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$
	P_{ts}	`TS Aligner` manifold projection mapping	$\mathbb{R}^{h} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{768}$, h is hidden dimension of `TS Aligner`
	$O_{aux_{ts}}^{\mathcal{T}}$	`TS Aligner` auxiliary output layer for task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{768} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{c}$, c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$
	F_s	Student representation learning model	
	$\tilde{F}_s$	Hidden non-linear projection mapping for student model	$\mathbb{R}^{d} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{d}$, d is hidden dimension of student language model
	$O_s^{\mathcal{T}}$	Student output layer for task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{d} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{c}$, d is hidden dimension of student language model; c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$
	P_s	Student manifold projection mapping	$\mathbb{R}^{d} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{768}$, d is hidden dimension of student language model
	$O_{aux_s}^{\mathcal{T}}$	Student auxiliary output layer for task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{768} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{c}$, c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$
Inputs	x_s	Sample student input sequence	
	x_t	Teacher representation generated for x_s	
	X_s	Student input sequences $\{x_1, x_2, \cdots x_n\}$	
	X_t	Teacher generated sequences corresponding to X_s	
	$Y^{\mathcal{T}}$	Ground truth labels for inputs X_s for task $\mathcal{T}$	
Model outputs	h_t^X	Representations obtained from multi-modal teacher model on input X_t (inputs to `TS Aligner`)	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times 128}$, b is batch size
	$h_{ts}^{'X}$	`TS Aligner` hidden representation	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times h}$, h is hidden dimension of `TS Aligner`; b is batch size
	$o_{ts}^{\mathcal{T}}$	`TS Aligner` output in task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times c}$, c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$; b is batch size
	p_{ts}^X	`TS Aligner` manifold projection	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times 768}$, b is batch size
	$o_{aux_{ts}}^{\mathcal{T}}$	`TS Aligner` auxiliary output in task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times c}$, c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$;b is batch size
	h_s^X	Hidden representation from student representation model	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times d}$, d is hidden dimension of student language model; b is batch size
	$h_s^{'X}$	Student hidden representation	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times d}$, d is hidden dimension of student language model; b is batch size
	$o_s^{\mathcal{T}}$	Student output in task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times c}$, c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$; b is batch size
	p_s^X	Student manifold projection	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times 768}$, b is batch size
	$o_{aux_s}^{\mathcal{T}}$	Student auxiliary output in task $\mathcal{T}$	$\mathbb{R}^{b \times c}$, c is number of output classes for task $\mathcal{T}$; b is batch size
Hyperparameters	α	Weightage of logit matching loss in student output loss	
	β	Weightage of manifold alignment loss in the final loss value (for both `TS Aligner` and student models)	
	γ	Weightage of auxiliary output loss in the final loss (for both `TS Aligner` and student models)	
	τ	Temperature value used in student logit matching loss	

Table 7: Glossary of all the mathematical notations in the paper and their descriptions.

B Datasets

B.1 Natural Language Understanding

The General Language Understanding Evaluation (GLUE)[‡] benchmark (Wang et al., 2018) and SuperGLUE[§] benchmark (Wang et al., 2019) evaluate the language understanding capabilities of language models. We elaborate on the GLUE and SuperGLUE tasks as follows:

CoLA (Warstadt et al., 2019), or The Corpus of Linguistic Acceptability, comprises acceptability judgments from books and journal articles. The task is to indicate the grammatical correctness of the given sentence as "acceptable" or "unacceptable" using the Matthews correlation coefficient as the evaluation metric.

MRPC (Dolan & Brockett, 2005), Microsoft Research Paraphrase Corpus comprises pairs of sentences extracted from online news sources. The objective is to predict whether the provided pair of sentences are paraphrases of each other or not.

RTE (Dagan et al., 2005; Haim et al., 2006; Giampiccolo et al., 2007; Bentivogli et al., 2009), short for Recognizing Textual Entailment, are formed by combining a series of annual textual entailment challenges. The task comprises categorizing whether the two sentences entail each other.

STS-B (Cer et al., 2017), or Semantic Textual Similarity, compiled from various sources, including news headlines, video-image descriptions, and NLI descriptions. The task is to predict the degree of similarity between two sentences.

SST-2 (Socher et al., 2013), Stanford Sentiment Treebank involves a two-class classification task, predicting the sentiment of the given movie review as 'positive' or 'negative'.

QQP (Chen et al., 2018), or Quora Question Pairs, is a dataset comprising questions collected from the question-answering platform - Quora. The task involves predicting whether or not the given two questions are duplicates of each other.

MNLI (Williams et al., 2017) Multi-Genre Natural Language Inference involves a three-class classification problem. The goal is to predict whether the premise "entails"/"contradicts" or is neutral towards the hypothesis statement.

QNLI (Wang et al., 2018) or Question Answering NLI is a dataset derived from the Stanford Question Answering Dataset. The task comprises a question and a sentence. The goal is to predict whether or not the given sentence contains the answer to the question.

BoolQ (Clark et al., 2019), or Boolean Questions, involves binary inquiries sourced from the Google search engine. These questions are combined with pertinent paragraphs extracted from Wikipedia articles, ensuring that the provided paragraphs contain accurate answers to the queries.

CB (De Marneffe et al., 2019), short for CommitmentBank, comprises concise texts featuring embedded clauses. These examples are extracted from diverse sources, including the British National Corpus Fiction and Wall Street Journal. The task comprises of three-class textual entailment, where each example consists of a premise and a corresponding hypothesis and is labeled as either "contradiction," "neutral," or "entailment".

COPA (Roemmele et al., 2011), abbreviated for Choice of Plausible Alternatives, is a causal reasoning task with the goal of selecting the most plausible choice between two choices given a premise and cause/effect. The examples are sourced from blogs and a photography-related encyclopedia.

WiC (Pilehvar & Camacho-Collados, 2018), short for Word-in-Context (WiC), is a word sense disambiguation task that involves binary classification of sentence pairs. Within this task, two text snippets are presented, each featuring a word with multiple potential meanings. The objective is to determine whether the specified word holds the same meaning in both sentences.

[‡] `https://gluebenchmark.com/`
[§] `https://super.gluebenchmark.com/`

B.2 Multimodal Tasks

Multimodal IMDb (Arevalo et al., 2017) is a collection featuring movies complete with their plot summaries, posters, genres, and an additional set of 50 metadata fields. The dataset is constructed using IMDb IDs from the Movielens dataset.

B.3 Arithmetic Reasoning

MultiArith (Roy & Roth, 2016) consists of arithmetic word problems presented in natural language. The dataset includes various problems that require interpreting and performing basic arithmetic operations.

SingleEq (Koncel-Kedziorski et al., 2016) or Single-equation, consists of word problems with single equations of varying length.

AQuA (Ling et al., 2017) short for Algebra Question Answering with Rationales, consists of algebraic word problems with natural language rationales.

B.4 Commonsense Reasoning

Hellaswag (Zellers et al., 2019) is a Natural Language Inference (NLI) task which involves finishing the sentence given context. The dataset consists of multiple-choice questions where the task is to choose the most plausible continuation of a given sentence.

Winogrande (Sakaguchi et al., 2021) is a commonsense reasoning task inspired by the WSC (Levesque et al., 2012). The goal of the task is to choose the correct choice given two choices.

ARC-c & **ARC-e** (Clark et al., 2018) comprise the AI2 Reasoning Challenge (ARC) partitioned into easy (ARC-e) and challenging set (ARC-c). The dataset consists of grade-school science questions in multiple choice format.

OpenBook-QA (Mihaylov et al., 2018) consists of elementary level science questions in form of multiple choices requiring additional commonsense knowledge.

B.5 Instruction-tuning

Dolly Gu et al. (2024): We use a curated subset of the `databricks-dolly-15K` dataset, comprising approximately 12.5k training samples, 1k validation samples, and 500 test samples.

SelfInst Wang et al. (2022a) dataset includes 252 instruction-following examples designed around user-centric tasks.

Vicuna Chiang et al. (2023) contains 80 high-difficulty queries generated by GPT-4, which are employed for evaluating the Vicuna model.

SNI Wang et al. (2022b) derived from the Super-Natural Instructions benchmark, this dataset includes about 9,000 examples spanning 119 tasks. Following the methodology in Gu et al. (2024), we segment the data based on the length of reference answers and use the subset with response lengths greater than 10 tokens, which contains roughly 1,600 samples.

UNI Honovich et al. (2023) is shortlisted from the Unnatural Instructions dataset, we evaluate on the subset with reference responses longer than 10 tokens, using the first 2,000 samples from this segment.

C Baselines

This section elaborates on the unimodal and multimodal knowledge distillation frameworks we use in this paper for evaluating against `ARMADA`.

C.1 Unimodal KD Baselines

KD: Hinton et al. (2015) introduced the concept of distilling knowledge from a bigger complex model to a shallower model by utilizing the *dark knowledge* or the soft label distribution of the teacher model.

SeqKD: Motivated by Hinton et al. (2015), Kim & Rush (2016) proposed sequential KD, that forces the student model to generate entire sequences that match the teacher's outputs. This distillation method is particularly useful for sequence generation tasks.

DML: Zhang et al. (2018) proposed a mutual learning setup where student models guide each other's learning. The method involved matching the probability distribution of other students by minimizing their KL divergence and task-specific cross-entropy loss.

PKD: Sun et al. (2019) proposed distilling knowledge from the intermediate layers of BERT (Devlin et al., 2018) and introduced two different schemes, *PKD-last* and *PKD-skip* for distillation, where the teacher representations are transferred to the student from its last and alternate k layers, respectively.

TinyBERT: Jiao et al. (2019) proposed general and task-specific distillation to a 4 layer BERT from BERT-base (Devlin et al., 2018) through attention and hidden states distillation of transformer-based teacher to student.

TAKD: Mirzadeh et al. (2020) argued that sub-optimal distillation occurs when a large gap exists between teacher and student. To address this issue, intermediate teachers first distil their knowledge from the teacher model and, in turn, distil their knowledge to the student model.

MetaDistil: Zhou et al. (2021) proposed meta-knowledge distillation, different from the previous settings involving a fixed teacher distilling knowledge to the student. This method proposed providing a continuously updated meta-teacher through a bi-level optimization (Finn et al., 2017) for better knowledge transfer.

C.2 Multimodal KD Baselines

Vokenization: Tan & Bansal (2020) proposed visually supervising a language model through "vokens", which are visual representations of tokens. The "vokenization" process involves assigning a relevant image to each token. In addition to the traditional MLM (Devlin et al., 2018), the language model is pre-trained with an additional voken-classification (voken-cls) objective.

VidLanKD: Tang et al. (2021) proposed improving language understanding through video-distilled knowledge transfer. The teacher model is pre-trained on a video-text dataset using contrastive learning. Knowledge is then transferred to the student using a variety of KD objectives, including NST (Huang & Wang, 2017) and CRD (Tian et al., 2019).

Visual Guidance: Zhang et al. (2021) proposed enhancing word representations by incorporating visual information. The method used a word-image dictionary and an attention mechanism to create text-conditioned image representations and a gating mechanism to combine these with the text representations, improving the original embeddings.

D Experimental Settings

For all the tasks, we employ an online distillation (Anil et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020) framework, where we train both teacher and student simultaneously. We use $\alpha \in \{0, 0.5\}$, $\beta \in \{0, 1\}$ and $\gamma \in \{0, 1\}$. We use $\tau = 5$ in Equation 2. We use Adam optimizer with weight decay (Loshchilov & Hutter, 2017) for training all the models. For GLUE and SuperGLUE tasks, we use a maximum sequence length of 128 and train both the teacher and the student models for 10 epochs. For GLUE tasks, we use a batch size of 32 and a teacher learning rate of $3e-3$. For SuperGLUE, we use the batch size as 8 and `TS Aligner` learning rate as $1e-3$. The BERT student models are fine-tuned for all the GLUE and SuperGLUE tasks with a learning rate of $2e-5$. DeBERTa and OPT student models are trained with learning rate $3e-6$. For MM-IMDb classification task, we use Resnet50 (He et al., 2016) pretrained on the ImageNet (Deng et al., 2009) dataset to extract the `TS Aligner` inputs. For the multimodal task, we use the BERT-base model as the student

Models	Distillation type	MNLI Acc	QNLI Acc	QQP Acc	SST-2 Acc
BERT-6L	undistilled	77.7±0.0	84.9±0.1	89.0±0.0	87.6±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**80.2±0.0**	**87.3±0.0**	88.6±0.1	**90.7±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**80.3±0.0**	**87.2±0.1**	88.9±0.0	**90.6±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**80.1±0.0**	**87.3±0.0**	**89.1±0.1**	**90.7±0.0**
BERT-base	undistilled	79.3±0.0	87.8±0.1	83.1±0.0	89.2±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**83.4±0.0**	**91.0±0.0**	**89.4±0.1**	**93.1±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**83.5±0.0**	**91.0±0.0**	**88.8±0.1**	**92.0±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**83.4±0.0**	**91.2±0.0**	**88.9±0.1**	**92.8±0.0**

Table 8: Results of BERT models (undistilled and distilled by ARMADA with Stable Diffusion teacher) on ***GLUE-large*** tasks (mean over three seeds; loss objective stated per row). **Blue** indicates cases where ARMADA improves performance of the undistilled model. The improvement over the undistilled model is statistically significant (one-sided paired t-test, $t = 5.11$, $p < 0.01$).

model with only the movie plot summaries as the input and trained it for 20 epochs with a learning rate of $2e-5$. For generative evaluations, we fine-tune the LLaMA-7B model (Touvron et al., 2023) with LoRA adapter (Hu et al., 2021) rank=8, respectively on Commonsense8K and Math10K datasets curated by Hu et al. (2023) and evaluated on the downstream tasks zero-shot. The model is trained for 3 epochs with a learning rate of $3e-4$ and batch size of 4.

One Tesla V100 and A100 GPUs were used for conducting the experiments. Each training step for the student and TS Aligner model takes 0.16 and 0.02 seconds, respectively, for a batch size of 32.

E Additional Experimental Results

This appendix collects the secondary experimental results referenced in Section 5, supplementing the headline NLU/reasoning and instruction-tuning results, the baseline comparison, the capacity-matched control, and the mechanism analysis that are retained in the main text.

E.1 Results with a Midjourney Teacher

Table 9 reports the same setup with a Midjourney (Borji, 2022) teacher (Stable Diffusion with a LoRA (Hu et al., 2021) adapter trained on 100K+ Midjourney images). The TS Aligner aligner remains far below the student in isolation (Table 10), yet ARMADA still improves BERT-base and BERT-6L by 0.44% and 3.2% on average, confirming that the gains are not specific to the Stable Diffusion teacher.

E.2 Auxiliary Output Performance

We report the performance obtained with the auxiliary heads in Table 12. The results reveal a striking Spearman rank correlation between output head and auxiliary head performances of 0.99 for student models and 0.69 for teacher models. This correlation indicates a strong alignment in performance trends despite the auxiliary output head's generally lower performance, attributable to its operation over presumed lower-dimensional manifold projections. On average, student models exhibit a modest improvement of 0.61% with the output head over the auxiliary head. TS Aligner benefits even more significantly, with an improvement margin of 6.07%, underscoring the importance of auxiliary outputs in ARMADA framework.

E.3 Hyperparameter and Loss-function Ablations (BERT)

Our in-depth analysis of the BERT-base model's performance across various GLUE-small and SuperGLUE NLU tasks under different hyperparameter settings reveals insights into optimizing cross-modal distillation. As illustrated in Figure 2, our exploration of the effects of the hyperparameters α, β, and γ reveals fine-grained

Models	Distillation type	CoLA Mcc	MRPC Acc	RTE Acc	STS-B Pear	CB Acc	COPA Acc	BoolQ Acc	WiC Acc
BERT-6L	undistilled	42.8±0.1	78.6±0.0	64.1±0.2	88.5±0.4	75.0±0.0	53.0±0.0	71.3±0.1	55.7±0.2
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**44.0±0.0**	**80.1±0.0**	**65.2±0.1**	87.9±0.0	73.1±0.1	49.9±0.0	**71.8±0.0**	**56.6±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**42.9±0.0**	**79.1±0.1**	**66.3±0.0**	88.3±0.0	**75.0±0.0**	**62.9±0.1**	**72.4±0.0**	**58.2±0.0**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**46.9±0.0**	**79.3±0.0**	**67.0±0.1**	88.3±0.0	**78.4±0.1**	51.9±0.0	**73.3±0.0**	55.9±0.0
BERT-base	undistilled	60.8±0.1	83.8±0.1	71.0±0.0	89.3±0.0	83.7±0.1	62.9±0.0	75.1±0.1	58.4±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	58.8±0.0	**84.9±0.0**	69.9±0.1	88.6±0.0	**85.6±0.1**	**64.9±0.0**	73.3±0.0	56.2±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	60.1±0.0	**84.1±0.1**	68.8±0.0	88.3±0.0	**87.4±0.1**	62.9±0.0	72.3±0.0	58.2±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**61.1±0.0**	**85.0±0.0**	68.8±0.1	88.3±0.0	**83.8±0.1**	60.9±0.0	73.0±0.0	**58.7±0.0**
DeBERTa-v2-xxlarge	undistilled	72.1±0.0	89.7±0.1	90.3±0.0	92.3±0.0	81.9±0.1	83.7±0.0	87.2±0.0	60.8±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	71.4±0.0	**90.3±0.0**	**90.9±0.1**	91.9±0.0	**94.5±0.1**	81.9±0.0	87.3±0.0	57.6±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	68.2±0.0	**91.1±0.1**	**90.8±0.0**	91.8±0.0	93.4±0.1	79.9±0.0	**87.9±0.0**	60.0±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	70.4±0.0	**90.5±0.0**	**90.3±0.1**	92.1±0.0	**92.8±0.1**	81.9±0.0	**88.1±0.0**	59.6±0.0
OPT-1.3B	undistilled	59.6±0.0	84.3±0.1	76.3±0.0	89.7±0.0	78.2±0.1	54.8±0.0	74.6±0.0	57.9±0.1
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**60.4±0.0**	83.4±0.0	74.2±0.1	**90.0±0.1**	**80.2±0.0**	54.9±0.0	**75.3±0.0**	55.9±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**61.2±0.0**	82.4±0.1	**77.1±0.0**	89.9±0.0	**78.5±0.1**	**58.9±0.0**	**75.6±0.0**	57.0±0.0
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	59.5±0.0	80.5±0.1	**77.1±0.0**	**90.1±0.1**	76.6±0.0	**58.9±0.0**	**76.0±0.0**	57.0±0.0

Table 9: Results of different LMs (undistilled and distilled by ARMADA) on GLUE-small and SuperGLUE tasks with the Midjourney (Borji, 2022) teacher model (loss objective stated per row). ARMADA improves BERT-base and BERT-6L by 0.44% and 3.2% on average, respectively, mirroring the Stable Diffusion results (Table 1) and confirming the effect is not specific to a single teacher.

Teacher Model	CoLA Mcc	MRPC Acc	RTE Acc	STS-B Pear	CB Acc	COPA Acc	BoolQ Acc	WiC Acc
Stable Diffusion	7.8	66.6	53.4	3.7	55.4	62.0	60.9	53.0
Midjourney	1.8	66.5	52.3	1.9	50.0	56.0	56.6	50.6

Table 10: Standalone task performance of the (shallow, ∼0.8M-parameter) TS Aligner on all GLUE-small and SuperGLUE tasks under two teacher models. As noted by reviewers, the aligner performs far below the undistilled student (e.g. CoLA Mcc 7.8 vs. ∼59 for the student), confirming it does not solve the tasks itself. Despite this, the student distilled against the trained aligner improves significantly (Tables 1, 18; paired t-tests, $p < 0.01$ on most tasks), indicating that the value of TS Aligner lies in the supervisory trajectory it provides rather than its standalone accuracy.

insights into their impact on cross-modal distillation efficacy. Notably, setting α to 0, thereby excluding the logit-matching soft loss from the final training loss, yields a consistent 0.6% improvement across all tasks compared to $alpha = 0.5$, which gives equal importance to the output loss and the soft loss. This finding suggests that prioritizing the output loss can lead to better distillation outcomes. The significance of β, which regulates the weight of the manifold projection loss, is underscored by its performance enhancement in seven out of eight tasks when set to 1, indicating a positive association between higher β values and improved model

Methods	SST-2	QNLI	QQP	MNLI	Avg.
ViLBERT	90.3	89.6	88.4	82.4	87.7
VL-BERT	90.1	89.5	88.6	82.9	87.8
VisualBERT	90.3	88.9	88.4	82.4	87.5
Img-Voken	92.2	88.6	88.6	82.6	88.0
Visual Guidance	89.7	88.2	84.2	79.5	85.4
Vid-Voken w/ResNet	93.4	89.2	88.7	83.0	88.6
Vid-Voken w/CLIP	**94.1**	89.8	89.0	83.9	89.2
X-adapter	92.7	**91.4**	89.3	**84.4**	**89.4**
ARMADA	93.1	91.3	**89.5**	83.5	**89.4**

Table 11: Improvement for BERT-base model on GLUE-large tasks distilled by ARMADA with Stable Diffusion teacher model, compared against the improvements reported by multimodal KD methods. ARMADA is competitive with the multimodal baselines while using $< 0.8\%$ of their teacher training cost; the improvement over the unimodal and multimodal KD baselines is statistically significant (one-sided t-test, $t = 1.56$, $p < 0.1$).

Models	Loss type	CoLA Mcc	MRPC Acc	RTE Acc	STS-B Pear	CB Acc	COPA Acc	BoolQ Acc	WiC Acc
`TS Aligner`	-	0.7	66.4	50.2	1.3	48.9	41.0	45.4	48.9
BERT-base	cosine	59.0	83.4	70.4	88.6	87.5	64.0	74.7	57.1
	euclid	60.1	84.1	67.5	88.2	85.7	63.0	73.9	55.2
	elementwise	58.5	82.3	65.7	88.6	85.7	65.0	74.4	57.2

Table 12: Auxiliary-head output results for `TS Aligner` and the BERT-base student under the three $\mathcal{L}_{manifold}$ objectives ($\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$, $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$, $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$) on GLUE-small and SuperGLUE tasks. The auxiliary-head and output-head performances are strongly rank-correlated (Spearman $\rho = 0.99$ for the student, $\rho = 0.69$ for `TS Aligner`), and the output head exceeds the auxiliary head by 0.61% (student) and 6.07% (`TS Aligner`) on average.

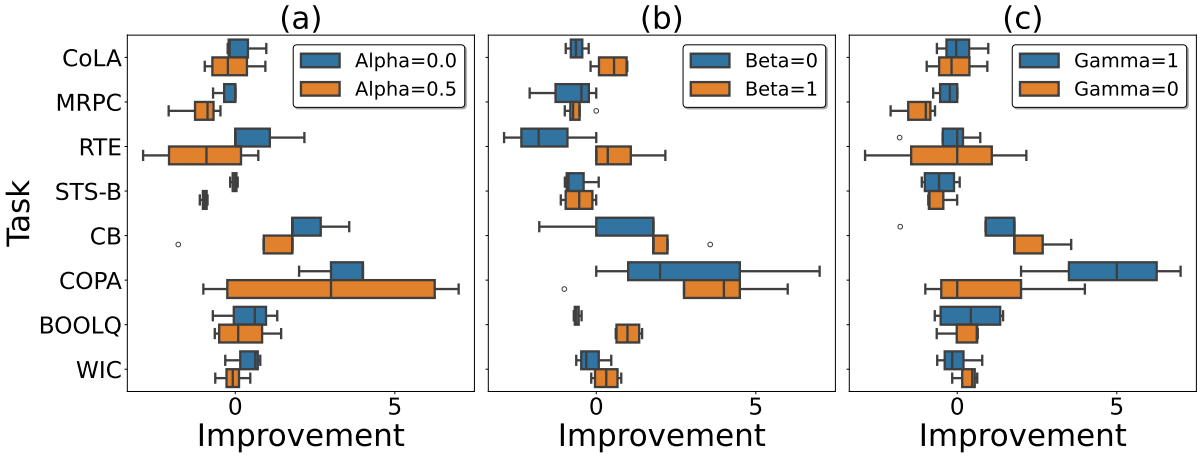


Figure 2: Improvement of `ARMADA`-distilled BERT-base over the undistilled baseline as a function of (A) the logit-matching weight α, (B) the manifold-alignment weight β, and (C) the auxiliary-output weight γ. Stable Diffusion teacher.

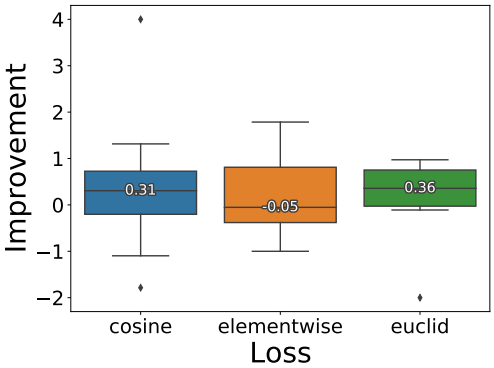


Figure 3: Improvement of `ARMADA`-distilled BERT-base over the undistilled baseline under each of the three $\mathcal{L}_{manifold}$ objectives.

performance. Conversely, γ, which determines the weight assigned to the auxiliary output loss, demonstrates a variable influence on the effectiveness of cross-modal distillation. A γ value of 1 enhances performance by 0.85%, significantly higher than $\gamma = 0$ (improvement 0.36%), highlighting the role of auxiliary losses in the distillation process.

Similar ablation analyses with different manifold projection losses in Figure 3 suggest that all three manifold-alignment loss objectives effectively distil knowledge from the multimodal teacher model to language-only student models, with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$ being most effective and robust on average (median improvement of 0.36 as opposed to 0.31 of $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$ and -0.05 of $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$). As explained in Section 3, all the loss objectives enforce different regularizations for the student. We hypothesize that by balancing regularization and the task objective, $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$ balances the other two losses, leading to the largest performance gain.

E.4 Results on Multimodal Tasks

Models	Distillation type	MM-IMDb F1 Micro/Macro	Meme Acc
BERT-12L	undistilled	64.9/48.1	55.4
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	**65.7/ 49.3**	**60.2**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	**66.2/ 48.9**	**60.4**
	ARMADA - $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	**65.3/ 48.0**	**59.4**

Table 13: Results of the BERT-12L model with and without cross-modal distillation on the MM-IMDb genre and Hateful Memes classification tasks (loss objective stated per row). ARMADA improves micro/macro-F1 on MM-IMDb by +1.3/ + 1.2 pp and Hateful Memes accuracy by up to +5.0 pp (55.4 → 60.4). The student remains text-only at inference, so the gains stem from transferred cross-modal structure rather than architectural multimodality.

We highlight the performance obtained by BERT-12L on the MM-IMDb classification task in Table 13. With cross-modal distillation, the BERT-12L model achieves +1.2% and +1.3% improvements in macro-F1 and micro-F1, respectively, over the undistilled baseline. Notably, this gain is comparable to the improvement reported by Kiela et al. (2019) using a fully multimodal BERT architecture. Importantly, in our setting, the teacher and student share no common modality at inference time, demonstrating that ARMADA effectively transfers multimodal priors into a unimodal language model without architectural modification.

To further validate the generality of this effect, we additionally evaluate on the Hateful Memes benchmark (Kiela et al., 2020), a more challenging multimodal dataset designed to prevent unimodal shortcuts. The undistilled BERT-12L achieves 55.4% accuracy, whereas ARMADA improves performance consistently across alignment variants to 60.2–60.4% accuracy, corresponding to an absolute gain of approximately 5%. Unlike MM-IMDb, where improvements are modest but consistent, Hateful Memes shows a substantially larger gain, suggesting that cross-modal distillation is particularly beneficial for tasks that require joint reasoning over visual and textual semantics.

Crucially, in both experiments, the student remains a text-only model at inference time, underscoring that the observed gains arise from transferred cross-modal semantic structure rather than architectural multimodality.

E.5 Instruction-tuning: Ablations and Larger Student

Figure 4 reports the effect of the manifold-alignment weight β and the auxiliary-output weight γ. Except on Dolly, both hyperparameters contribute an additional ∼0.5% on the instruction-tuning tasks, and both are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Figure 5 reports the effect of the manifold-alignment loss. $\mathcal{L}_{\text{cosine}}$ yields the highest average improvement (0.9%), followed by $\mathcal{L}_{\text{elementwise}}$ and $\mathcal{L}_{\text{euclid}}$ (0.5% each); the three losses are nonetheless statistically equivalent ($p > 0.05$).

Table 14 further highlights the performance of ARMADA with a larger student model, LLaMA-8B. Except for Dolly evaluation, in the other four tasks, ARMADA turns effective, even for a superior baseline model LLaMA-8B. Strikingly, on tasks like SelfInst and Vicuna, ARMADA improves the base model's performance by over 2%. A possible reason behind the muted performance in Dolly evaluation could be the narrow prompt diversity and template simplicity, where the undistilled LLaMA-8B model already shows strong performance, reducing the marginal benefit of distilling cross-modal knowledge. In terms of the different teacher modalities, we observe the text-to-video model to be most effective, with the highest performance improvement of 3.3%, followed by the text-to-audio (2.1%) and text-to-image (1.8%) teacher models. The teacher modalities are nonetheless statistically equivalent ($p > 0.05$).

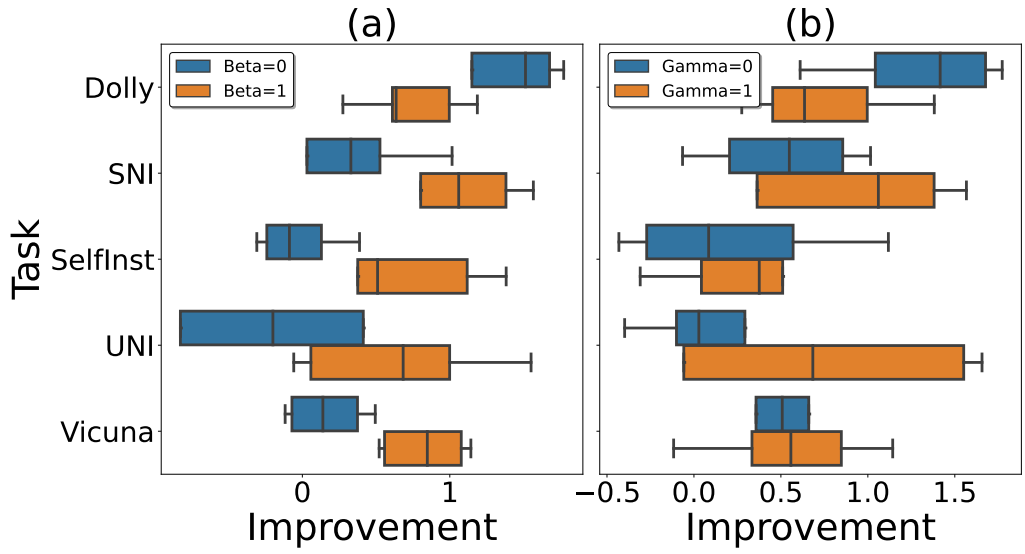


Figure 4: Improvement of ARMADA-distilled LLaMA-3B over the undistilled baseline as a function of the manifold weight β and the auxiliary weight γ. Both are statistically significant ($p = 7 \times 10^{-5}$ for β and 5×10^{-3} for γ).

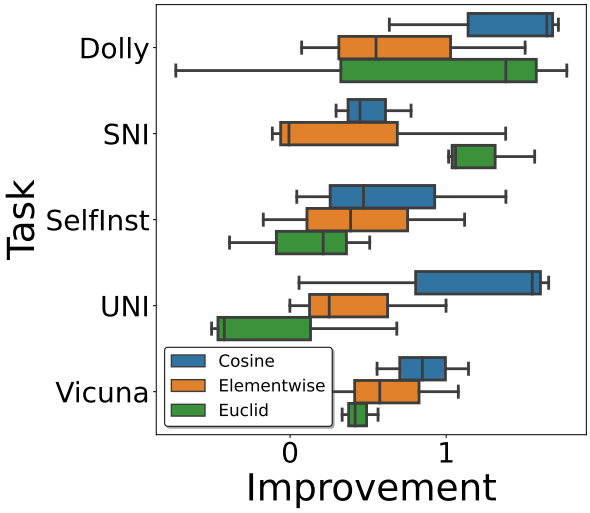


Figure 5: Improvement of ARMADA-distilled LLaMA-3B over the undistilled baseline under each $\mathcal{L}_{manifold}$ objective. The three losses are statistically equivalent ($p = 0.52$).

F Mechanism Analysis: Extended Results

This appendix expands the mechanism analysis of Section 6, evaluating ARMADA against five negative controls (Randomly Frozen, Random, Shuffled-Input, Frozen, and Constant teacher) and the capacity-matched control on seven NLU tasks (CoLA, MRPC, RTE, CB, COPA, WiC, BoolQ) across three seeds and three manifold losses. The aggregate panel (Table 6 in the main text) uses a one-sided paired Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Following reviewer suggestion, we additionally report a prediction-level McNemar analysis as a fine-grained complement.

Prediction-level McNemar tests. Table 15 reports per-task McNemar tests over predictions pooled across the three seeds, separately against the undistilled baseline and the Shuffled-Input control. Counts b and c are the example-level corrections in each direction (best loss per side). Consistent with the aggregate Wilcoxon

Teacher	Distillation Type	Dolly	SNI	SelfInst	UNI	Vicuna
-	undistilled	35.34	28.19	18.01	32.78	17.85
text-to-image	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	33.67	**28.77**	**19.36**	32.59	**18.89**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	33.71	28.11	**19.14**	**34.53**	18.72
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	34.63	**29.06**	**19.80**	32.54	**18.16**
text-to-video	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	33.53	**29.28**	**18.57**	**33.80**	**18.82**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	32.02	28.07	**21.31**	32.41	**18.94**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	30.44	27.56	**18.97**	32.76	**18.36**
text-to-audio	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	33.14	**29.63**	**20.08**	**34.35**	**19.96**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	34.78	27.26	17.47	32.84	**19.51**
	ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	34.67	**29.13**	**18.73**	**34.22**	**18.18**

Table 14: Results on instruction-tuning tasks (RougeL) with LLaMA-3.1-8B under different multimodal teacher models and the three loss objectives. ARMADA improves over the undistilled LLaMA-8B on four of five tasks (up to +2% on SelfInst and Vicuna); the exception is Dolly, where the strong undistilled baseline leaves little headroom. A two-way ANOVA again finds no significant difference between teacher modalities ($p > 0.05$).

		ARMADA vs. Undistilled			ARMADA vs. Shuffled Input		
Task	n	b	c	p	b	c	p
RTE	831	78	61	0.175	**87**	64	**0.073**†
MRPC	5175	233	212	0.343	286	254	0.182
CB	168	9	4	0.267	10	5	0.302
BoolQ	9810	**1056**	920	**0.002****	964	991	0.557
CoLA	3129	131	122	0.615	119	146	0.110
COPA	300	46	47	1.000	58	58	0.926
WiC	1914	150	160	0.609	133	134	1.000

Table 15: Per-task prediction-level McNemar tests (best loss per side; predictions pooled across 3 seeds). b = examples ARMADA corrects that the comparator misses; c = the reverse. Against the undistilled baseline, ARMADA corrects significantly more predictions on **BoolQ** ($p < 0.01$) and is net-positive on most tasks. Against the strict Shuffled-Input control — which retains full task supervision and is therefore a conservative null — ARMADA's clearest prediction-level advantage is on the grounded-inference task **RTE** ($p < 0.1$), with the GLUE-small subset (RTE, MRPC, CoLA) favouring ARMADA overall (b=492 vs c=464). $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

picture, ARMADA is example-level favourable on the GLUE-small subset against the Shuffled-Input control and on the tasks that most plausibly rely on grounded semantic abstractions; the per-task significance pattern across the full panel is mixed, in line with the modest aggregate separation noted in the main text.

Model	CoLA	MRPC	RTE	STS-B	CB	COPA	BoolQ	WiC
	Mcc	Acc	Acc	Pear	Acc	Acc	Acc	Acc
TS Aligner	4.9	66.5	54.9	2.5	41.1	54.0	55.0	53.0
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{cosine}$	57.9	84.4	71.5	90.0	81.1	63.0	75.8	56.4
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{euclid}$	59.4	84.5	70.8	89.5	82.1	63.0	75.5	57.0
ARMADA with $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$	60.4	84.8	70.0	89.8	83.9	63.0	76.7	57.4

Table 16: Results of TS Aligner and BERT-12L with ARMADA on all GLUE-small and SuperGLUE tasks with shuffled teacher inputs (image embeddings from the Stable Diffusion teacher randomly permuted across samples during training). Relative to standard ARMADA training, TS Aligner degrades by 3.8% (one-sided paired t-test, $p = 0.08$) and the BERT-12L student by 1.8% ($p = 0.03$), with up to a 5% drop on BoolQ. Breaking the text–image correspondence thus measurably harms the student, indicating that the cross-modal signal is used during training; prediction-level evidence of this transfer is localized to grounded-inference tasks such as RTE (Table 15).

Shuffled-input accuracies. Table 16 reports the raw accuracies of TS Aligner and the BERT-12L student under shuffled teacher inputs. TS Aligner accuracy drops by 3.8% and the student by 1.8% on average, with

up to a 5% drop on the most semantically demanding tasks; breaking the text–image correspondence thus measurably harms the student, indicating that the cross-modal signal is used rather than ignored.

G Extended Discussion: Representation-level Analysis

This appendix collects the representation-level evidence summarized in Section 6.

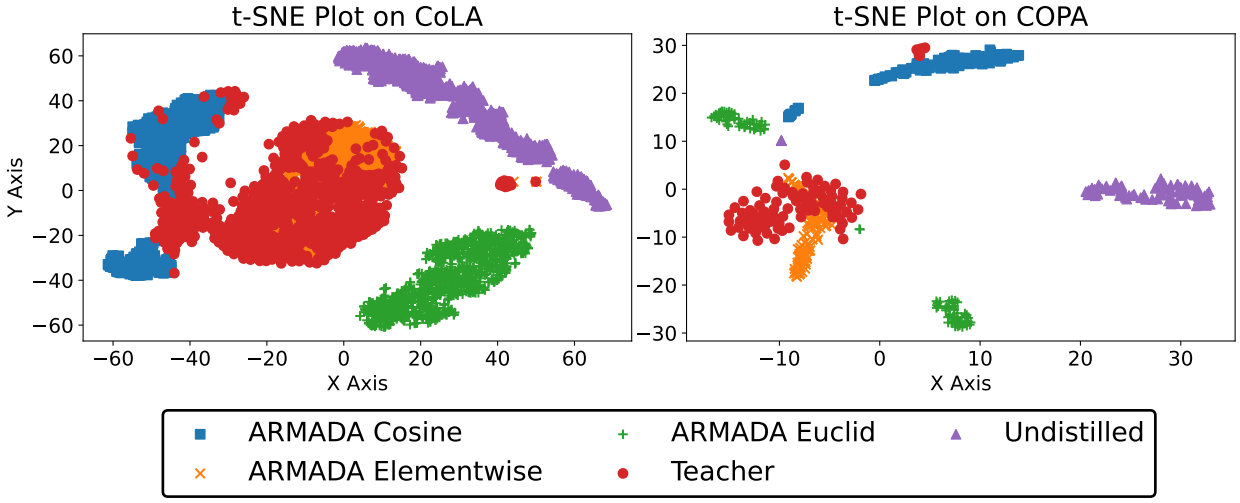


Figure 6: t-SNE plots of embeddings obtained from different models on CoLA and COPA tasks. The student under $\mathcal{L}_{elementwise}$ projects data points closest to the teacher manifold, whereas the undistilled student projects them farthest.

Semantic cohesion and cluster purity.

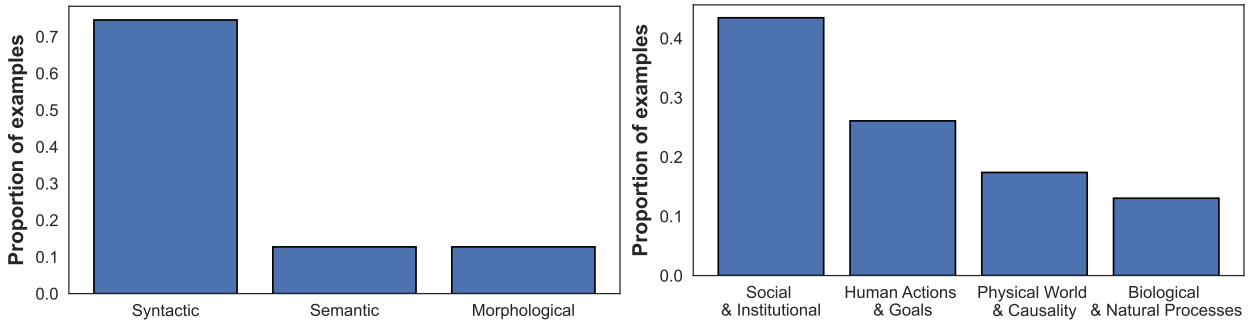
Table 17 reports Silhouette scores for `ARMADA` and the undistilled BERT-base across the two scenarios (`ARMADA` wins vs. loses). Where `ARMADA` wins, its Silhouette score improves by 76% over the undistilled model; where it loses, the score drops by 20%. We additionally compute a cluster-purity score $\text{Purity} = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{k=1}^{K}\max_{y\in\mathcal{Y}}|\{x_i \mid c_i = k \wedge y_i = y\}|$ over BERT-12L hidden states (KMeans, $K = 2$). The undistilled model obtains 0.77/0.56 on CoLA/COPA, while `ARMADA` obtains 0.81/0.68, indicating more topologically organized, label-aligned representations.

Methods	CoLA		COPA	
	Scen. 1	Scen. 2	Scen. 1	Scen. 2
Undistilled	0.31	0.40	0.31	**0.59**
`ARMADA`	**0.52**	**0.48**	**0.57**	0.38

Table 17: Silhouette scores (higher the better) for different scenarios with undistilled and `ARMADA` models.

Where do the gains concentrate? We manually categorize the test instances corrected by `ARMADA` on CoLA and COPA (Figure 7). For CoLA, over 70% of corrected cases are *syntactic* (filler–gap dependencies, long-distance constraints), with the remainder split between semantic and morphological violations. For COPA, ∼42% are *Social & Institutional*, followed by *Human Actions* (26%), *Physical World* (17%), and *Biological / Natural Processes* (15%). This non-uniformity supports the interpretation that `ARMADA` transfers structured semantic and conceptual priors rather than acting as a uniform regularizer; we note, however, that this analysis is descriptive rather than statistically tested.

Impact of the trained `TS Aligner`. Figure 8 shows that in six of eight NLU tasks the student distilled with a frozen (randomly-initialized, untrained) `TS Aligner` is inferior to the undistilled student, whereas the standard trained-`TS Aligner` curriculum improves it. Table 18 reports the t-statistic between the student output-loss distributions with and without `TS Aligner` training; a strong positive t-statistic with low p-value confirms the positive impact of the `TS Aligner` learning curriculum. As noted in the main text, the `TS`



(a) CoLA (b) COPA

Figure 7: Categorization of test examples that `ARMADA`-distilled BERT-12L predicts correctly and the undistilled model gets wrong.

Loss type	CoLA	MRPC	RTE	STS-B	CB	COPA	BoolQ	WiC
Cosine	**6.75 (0.00)**	**6.95 (0.00)**	**3.33 (0.00)**	**54.63 (0.00)**	**3.89 (0.00)**	0.49 (0.62)	-0.29 (0.78)	**12.91 (0.00)**
Euclid	**6.54 (0.00)**	**8.40 (0.00)**	**3.28 (0.00)**	**51.33 (0.00)**	**3.20 (0.00)**	1.47 (0.14)	-3.20 (0.00)	**16.29 (0.00)**
Elementwise	**6.42 (0.00)**	**8.03 (0.00)**	**3.16 (0.00)**	**51.51 (0.00)**	**4.48 (0.00)**	**5.85 (0.00)**	-2.45 (0.01)	**15.81 (0.00)**

Table 18: T-statistic (p-value) between student training loss distributions without and with `TS Aligner` training. A positive t-statistics (highlighted in bold) indicates that the expected student loss without a trained `TS Aligner` is higher than the student loss with a jointly trained `TS Aligner` model, indicating the importance of joint aligner-student training.

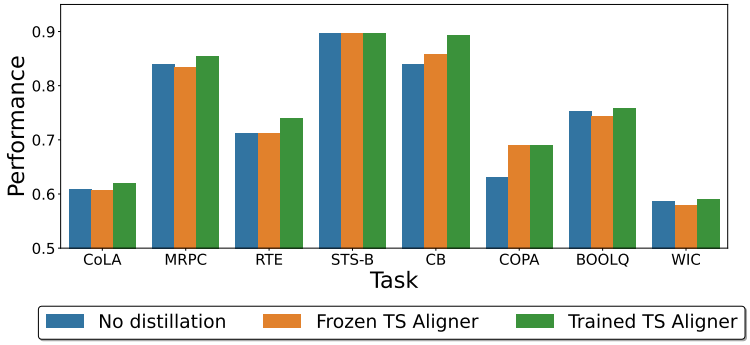


Figure 8: BERT-base performance under two training curricula: distilled against a frozen, untrained `TS Aligner` vs. the standard jointly-trained `TS Aligner`.

`Aligner` itself performs poorly in isolation (Table 10); its value lies in the supervisory *trajectory* it provides, not its standalone task accuracy.