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Prioritizing the Dimensions of Internationalization of Education: Emphasis on the Role of Managers in Higher Education Policymaking by Presenting a Model

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The primary objective of this investigation was to delineate the hierarchical importance of the dimensions constituting the internationalization of education, particularly accentuating the influence of managerial personnel in the formulation of higher education policy.

Methods: This study is categorized as applied research and employs a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative segment of the study targeted professors affiliated with Islamic Azad Universities in Bushehr Province, specifically those possessing over a decade of teaching experience and holding academic ranks of associate or assistant professor; conversely, the quantitative segment comprised a sample of 120 professors. Within the qualitative dimension, a sample of 12 individuals was exactly chosen utilizing the snowball sampling technique, adhering to the principle of saturation, while the quantitative portion involved the selection of 92 participants through a stratified random sampling method informed by university units, following the Cochran formula. The instrument for data collection in the qualitative segment was a semi-structured exploratory interview, whereas the quantitative segment utilized a structured questionnaire.

Results: The findings from the qualitative analysis indicated that political components, managerial and organizational components, socio-cultural dimensions, educational and pedagogical factors, structural elements, informational components, and administrative and supportive aspects were ranked according to their influence on the internationalization of education, with a pronounced emphasis on the pivotal role of managers in higher education policy formulation.

Conclusions: The results may facilitate the endeavors of higher education administrators in the formulation of strategic planning and policy development pertaining to the internationalization of educational practices within the realm of higher education.

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Introduction

In numerous nations, the internationalization of education is perceived not merely as an end in itself but rather as a mechanism to attain broader objectives such as the enhancement of quality, the reformation, and the advancement of the higher education system and its associated services. Nations possess varied motivations for engaging in the discourse surrounding internationalization. The proliferation of neoliberal ideologies fosters the economic independence of universities and higher education institutions. The cultivation of individuals capable of pursuing their personal aspirations becomes paramount, thereby elevating the significance of education in this context (Oleksiyenko & Ros, 2023). Presently, higher education constitutes a critical factor in the scientific advancement and evolution of societies on a global scale. Indeed, the development of skilled and specialized human resources within the higher education framework, the proliferation of scientific and technological knowledge, as well as the broadening of cultural horizons, are among the most pivotal elements contributing to the advancement and enhancement of societies. Such development and enhancement encompass all dimensions, including economic, social, cultural, political, and technological realms. Conversely, in light of the significance attributed to the role of higher education and the prevailing domestic and international competition among higher education institutions, the assurance of quality and accreditation for these institutions, alongside a systematic approach to the internationalization of higher education, is increasingly being deliberated. International education represents a relatively nascent phenomenon that has precipitated substantial transformations within educational paradigms. Currently, internationalization has emerged as a primary concern for the administrators of the world's elite universities, as it serves as a conduit for quality enhancement, branding, revenue generation, and the scientific credibility of these institutions. Historically, the concept of the internationalization of education was regarded as a peripheral phenomenon, primarily associated with the recruitment of international students; however, over the past fifty years, the escalation of globalization, technological advancements, international marketing, and competitive dynamics on a global scale have rendered this phenomenon more salient within the educational frameworks of various countries (Zamani Manesh et al., 2018). In nearly all esteemed higher education institutions, internationalization has assumed a pivotal role, with the accreditation process, intra-organizational assessments, strategic agreements, and engagement in international research being integral considerations (Azizi et al.,

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2019). Furthermore, contemporary university graduates are increasingly securing positions on a global stage and delivering educational services within international contexts, necessitating the development of international competencies and characteristics (Khorasani & Zamani Manesh, 2012). Experts contend that the internationalization of education encompasses diverse interpretations, resulting in a wide array of definitions pertaining to this concept. Bostrom characterizes internationalization as the process of amalgamating international, intercultural, and global dimensions with academic objectives and functions, advocating for its implementation in a manner that fosters respect for cultural diversity and varied traditions (Hoai et al., 2023). Knight articulates internationalization as the process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the objectives and functions of higher education, specifically in the realms of teaching-learning, research, and service (Knight, 2008). Altbach and Knight (2007) conceptualized internationalization as the deliberate strategies and innovations employed by nations and academic institutions to align with global trends, encompassing initiatives aimed at attracting international students, fostering inter-university scientific collaboration, and establishing international branches of universities. Indeed, in contemporary discourse, internationalization transcends a passive and isolated occurrence; it embodies a proactive response and engagement concerning the role of higher education stakeholders within a knowledge-driven society (de Wit, 2013). Its significance lies in its transformative effect on the global educational landscape, interlinking the triad of economic, political, and cultural dimensions with scientific and academic concerns; thus, within the economic sphere, internationalization has emerged as a pivotal determinant influencing the GDP of knowledge-based nations (Zamani Manesh et al., 2018). Politically, international education has evolved into a mechanism for extending diplomatic influence, with policymakers regarding internationalization as a critical component of foreign policy (Popa, 2014). Culturally, internationalization has assumed a crucial role in fostering deep cultural engagement, reshaping societal viewpoints, and exerting cultural influence (Rezaei et al., 2018). Currently, internationalization has not only transformed the educational landscape but has also undergone substantive alterations, culminating in the development of novel strategies such as internationalization at home and internationalization abroad. The term internationalization at home underscores the global dimensions of the university milieu, illuminating the

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international/intercultural aspects of the teaching-learning and research paradigms, extracurricular engagements, intercultural competencies, and interactions with diverse cultural groups at the tertiary level, while internationalization abroad pertains to transnational endeavors, denoting scenarios wherein a professor, student, curriculum, university, or educational institution is evaluated beyond national confines. In essence, the principal manifestations of internationalization encompass student mobility, faculty mobility, curriculum internationalization, the proliferation of transnational university entities, international collaborative agreements, transnational university networks, and cross-border virtual exchanges (Khorasani & Zamani Manesh, 2012).

Furthermore, through a thorough analysis of both Iranian and international research pertaining to the topic, it has been determined that no exhaustive studies have been undertaken to date concerning the prioritization of the various dimensions of education internationalization. Only studies that are somewhat adjacent to this subject have been carried out, including those conducted by Ghasemzadeh et al. (2019), Hosseini et al. (2019), Zamani Manesh et al. (2018), Azizi et al. (2019), Hoai et al. (2023), Oleksiyenko and Ros (2023), Zhou (2016), Alsharari (2018), Knight and De Wit (2018) and Ozturgut et al. (2014). These studies emphasize the critical importance of prioritizing the dimensions of education internationalization in informing higher education policy decisions.

In addressing the rationale for the current study, it is imperative to highlight that the internationalization of education within the sphere of higher education policy encompasses the processes and strategies through which educational institutions and systems forge global connections, thereby offering avenues for engagement among students, faculty, and researchers from diverse nations. This phenomenon has progressively become a vital element in the formulation of higher education policy and is of significant relevance. The internationalization of education as a strategic initiative in higher education policymaking serves to enhance educational quality, fortify international relations, and equip students to confront global challenges. This initiative enhances the competitiveness of higher education on an international scale, simultaneously generating increased prospects for research, innovation, and economic advancement. In the contemporary context, characterized by an expansion of global communications and interactions, the emphasis on this dimension of higher education policy is both essential and unavoidable. The internationalization of education within the context of higher

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education policymaking, particularly at Islamic Azad University, is underpinned by foundational documents and represents a principal strategy for the advancement of the higher education system, aligned with societal needs and founded upon the tenets of equity in education, ultimately facilitating the cultivation of competent and dedicated human resources. Providing a comprehensive perspective on the internationalization of education, especially within Islamic Azad University, can illuminate the overarching policies governing this domain.

The organization, support, and strategic targeting of higher education internationalization at Islamic Azad University, the enhancement of the national scientific exchange network, the establishment of collaborative educational programs with esteemed global universities, and the oversight of international educational partnerships are among the fundamental policies championed by the custodians of the higher education system. The effective implementation of these policies necessitates the adoption of holistic and overarching strategies that must be integrated into the national and university-level frameworks of higher education policy formulation and planning. Hence, the enhancement of internationalization functions across scientific, cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions, grounded in ethical principles, has the potential to foster the emergence of a culture of global citizenship, particularly within scientific communities. In recent decades, the phenomenon of internationalization has attained a significant position within the realm of higher education, emerging as one of the principal and critical priorities for universities globally. Consequently, contemporary experts and administrators in this domain perceive the efficacy of higher education as being intrinsically linked to its internationalization, thereby placing it at the forefront of their strategic operational frameworks. It appears that the attainment of this efficacy necessitates the employment of strategic methodologies, including systemic thinking, to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the phenomena and to adequately address the intricacies associated with the internationalization of higher education. To this end, the present inquiry endeavors to elucidate the significance of this subject matter through a comprehensive review of the extant literature. Accordingly, the following research inquiry has been posited: What are the prioritization dimensions of the internationalization of education, with a particular emphasis on the role of managers in higher education policymaking within the Islamic Azad Universities of Bushehr Province? Furthermore,

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how is the model for the internationalization of education presented, with a focus on the role of managers in higher education policymaking in the Islamic Azad Universities of Bushehr Province?

Material and Methods

This investigation is conducted with a clear application focus and employs a mixed-methods approach consisting of a qualitative phase and a quantitative phase, specifically utilizing a data-driven cross-sectional survey methodology. The qualitative segment of the study targeted the academic population of Islamic Azad University professors in Bushehr Province, specifically those possessing a Doctorate in management, educational sciences, or psychology, along with a minimum of ten years of teaching experience and holding the academic ranks of either associate professor or assistant professor, whose insights were solicited for the research. The eligibility criteria for participation in the qualitative segment of the research designated that only specialists with expertise in the internationalization of education or relevant experience in this domain were considered. These participants were drawn from the universities located in *Bushehr*, *Dashtestan, Dashti*, *Tangestan, Assaluyeh, Kangan, and Daier*. Consequently, taking into account the aforementioned criteria, from a pool of 31 individuals who met the qualifications of holding a Doctorate in management, educational sciences, or psychology, possessing over ten years of teaching experience, and holding the academic ranks of associate professor or assistant professor, data saturation was achieved after conducting interviews with 12 individuals, beyond which no additional interviews were undertaken. The quantitative segment of the study encompassed a statistical population comprising 120 professors affiliated with Islamic Azad Universities in Bushehr Province. In the qualitative phase, a total of 12 participants were selected as a sample through the application of the snowball sampling technique, adhering to the principle of saturation. In the quantitative phase, a total of 92 individuals were selected as a statistical sample employing the Cochran formula at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of $\alpha = 5\%$, with the overall statistical population of 120 individuals being sampled using a stratified random sampling approach based on university affiliation. In the qualitative phase, data were garnered through semi-structured interviews utilizing the Delphi method to delineate the dimensions of educational internationalization, whereas the quantitative phase utilized two researcher-developed questionnaires concerning educational internationalization, which encompassed four dimensions:

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Management, Culture, Politics, and Information, comprising a total of 32 items. The distribution of 30 questionnaires yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85 for the questionnaire as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, and its construct validity was corroborated by expert evaluations. Conversely, the researcher-developed questionnaire pertaining to higher education policy formulation included two fundamental and structural dimensions along with 20 items, and was likewise evaluated. This questionnaire also demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.83 as determined by the distribution of 30 questionnaires, with its construct validity confirmed by expert assessments. The analysis of qualitative data was executed through open, axial, and selective coding, while the quantitative data were analyzed via factor analysis and the Friedman test. In addressing ethical considerations, participants in the statistical sample were assured that the inquiries posed were strictly related to research purposes, and anonymity was maintained as they were not required to disclose their names. Furthermore, participation in the research was entirely voluntary, with no coercion involved.

Results

The findings derived from the data analysis in the section pertaining to structural equations, along with the path coefficients of the variables delineated in Table 1, indicate that political elements, including the enhancement of intercultural communication competencies, the promotion of legal frameworks and infrastructural provisions, the advancement of peace initiatives among nations, the cultivation of international collaboration, and the fortification of diplomatic engagements, represent some of the most significant determinants influencing the internationalization of education, particularly highlighting the pivotal role of managerial figures in higher education policy formulation within the Islamic Azad Universities of Bushehr Province. Furthermore, managerial and organizational aspects occupy a subsequent position in the hierarchy of factors influencing the internationalization of education, again underscoring the critical involvement of managers in the higher education policy-making process within the Islamic Azad Universities of Bushehr Province. Following these, cultural and social dimensions are identified as influential components.

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Table 1. Results pertaining to the path coefficients of the variables.

Indicators	Path coefficient	Rank
Management-Organizational Components	0.376	2
Socio-Cultural Components	0.257	3
Political Components	0.473	1
Administrative and Support Components	0.109	7
Information Components	0.128	6
Structural Components	0.176	5
Educational and Teaching Components	0.248	4

The proposed research model for the internationalization of education, with a particular focus on the managerial roles in higher education policy-making at Islamic Azad Universities of Bushehr Province, encompasses seven primary dimensions and thirty-one indicators, as depicted in Figure 1.

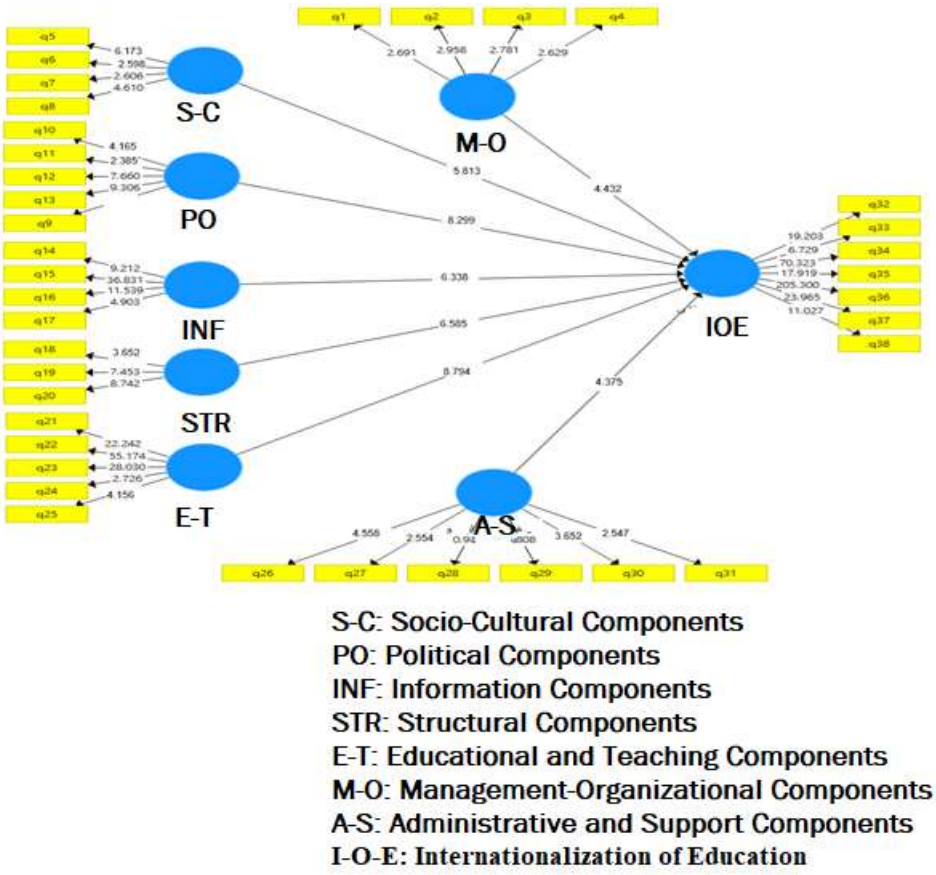


Figure 1. Structural model of the research in significant mode

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Discussion

The objective of this scholarly investigation was to delineate the priorities associated with the dimensions of educational internationalization, particularly focusing on the managerial roles within the formulation of higher education policies through the introduction of a conceptual model. The outcomes derived from the analytical examination of the survey questions indicated that political factors—including the enhancement of intercultural communication capabilities, the provision of conducive legal frameworks and infrastructural support, the promotion of peaceful relations among nations, the advancement of international collaboration, and the fortification of diplomatic ties—are paramount influences on the internationalization of education, specifically highlighting the managerial roles in higher education policy-making within the Islamic Azad Universities situated in Bushehr Province. Furthermore, managerial and organizational elements were identified to hold a subsequent level of significance regarding their impact on the internationalization of education, in conjunction with the managerial roles in higher education policy-making in the Islamic Azad Universities of Bushehr Province. Cultural and social factors were found to follow thereafter in terms of their influence.

In this context, prior research has yielded comparable findings. Zamani Manesh et al. (2018) indicated that the averages for the economic, cultural, political, academic, managerial and informational dimensions were assessed to be at a moderate level, while the results from Friedman's prioritization analysis highlighted that the political dimension exerted the most substantial impact, with the cultural dimension having the least significance in the internationalization of medical education. It appears that, from the participants' viewpoints, all the delineated factors contribute to the internationalization of medical education; among these, the aspects concerning the augmentation of financial resources for internationalization, fostering optimistic perspectives regarding the presence of international students, streamlining visa issuance processes, emphasizing internationalization within the institutional vision, enhancing the organizational framework for international collaboration, and establishing connections with international associations are deemed particularly critical. Wong and Wu (2011) demonstrated that this research methodology was informed by data from five internationalization initiatives undertaken by a university in Hong Kong in collaboration with its international partners in Macau,

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Korea, Australia, Russia, and Finland. The data collected spanned an 18-month timeframe, from September 2009 to March 2010. The study's findings elucidated that Hong Kong's "public role" (the functions of a public administration metropolis) significantly contributed to the internationalization of public administration education across China, Asia, the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the Belt and Road Initiative and Europe. Additionally, the findings underscored that Hong Kong has functioned as a public city endowed with "5C" expertise encompassing curriculum innovation, tailored educational programs, competency frameworks, competency assessments, and comparative policy analysis. Uralov (2020) highlighted that over the preceding three decades, the internationalization of higher education has ascended to become a pivotal priority in the advancement of higher education within Uzbekistan. The significance of internationalization is evidenced by its evolution into a predominant strategy for the enhancement of higher education. It has also emerged as a pivotal element in the advancement of the national economy, as well as in the frameworks for fostering cultural diversity and the national education apparatus. Armstrong (2020) demonstrated that this paradigm of higher education internationalization encompasses seven fundamental components: the initial trio of components resides within the public sector, specifically encompassing the government, the Higher Education Commission, and the Office of the Higher Education Commission; the fourth component pertains to higher education institutions that incorporate six intrinsic quality elements, while the fifth component is represented by the international institution.

In the discourse surrounding the elucidation of the research inquiry, it is imperative to assert that in the contemporary global landscape, ongoing developments and emerging challenges across economic, cultural, political, and social domains have rendered the imperative for the internationalization of education more pronounced than ever. This phenomenon assumes particular significance within the realm of higher education, wherein the transference of knowledge, skills, and experiences among nations facilitates advancements in scientific and technological domains. Administrators of universities and educational institutions, as the principal architects of higher education policy formulation and governance, assume a crucial role in the internationalization endeavor. Within this framework, the internationalization of education is recognized as a fundamental strategy for enhancing educational quality, fostering research, promoting cultural enrichment, and augmenting the global competitiveness of universities. The internationalization

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of education constitutes a critical determinant in the evolution and advancement of higher education in the contemporary world. This trend, characterized by its focus on attracting international students and faculty, enhancing research quality, facilitating cultural and social exchanges, and fortifying scientific and educational collaborations, contributes significantly to the improvement of societal well-being and scientific progress.

University administrators possess the capacity to exert a substantial influence on the progression of this initiative, positioning their institutions along the trajectory of globalization through the formulation of effective strategies, the establishment of international partnerships, and the provision of support for international students. The internationalization of education, particularly at the tertiary education level, serves as a vital strategy in the contemporary global context, enabling universities and educational institutions to assume an impactful role in the international arena and to respond proactively to global challenges and advancements in science. This process not only enhances the quality of education and research but also fosters the cultural, social, and economic development of society. In this regard, university administrators and educational institutions, as the cornerstone entities in educational policy-making, bear the responsibility of steering and propelling this initiative, with their involvement in the formulation of internationalization strategies being indispensable. Ultimately, the internationalization of education within the higher education sector, regarded as a crucial strategy for the advancement of science, culture, and economic development, necessitates active engagement and sustained support from the administrators of universities and educational institutions. Academic administrators are urged to acknowledge both the prevailing opportunities and challenges, while devising policies that not only enhance the caliber of education and research but also elevate universities to the status of global scientific and cultural hubs. This initiative has the potential to catalyze the advancement of human societies, foster scientific innovations, and facilitate the enhancement of international relations, thereby laying the groundwork for a more equitable and sustainable future.

The internationalization of higher education, deemed essential in the context of globalization, assumes an unparalleled significance in determining the trajectory of education, research, and societal evolution. In the contemporary milieu, characterized by swift and extensive

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transformations across economic, cultural, technological, and social spheres, universities and educational institutions must adapt to the dynamics of globalization and broaden their scientific and cultural frontiers. The internationalization of education serves not merely as a mechanism for augmenting the competitiveness and credibility of universities; it also plays a pivotal role in the construction of a global society wherein the interchange of knowledge, culture, and experiences is actively promoted. Consequently, the internationalization of education, particularly within the realm of higher education, presents a singular opportunity for universities and educational institutions to assume an effective and leadership role within a globalized context. Through the avenues of scientific, cultural, and social exchange, universities can achieve growth in scientific research while concurrently contributing to the resolution of global issues, the enhancement of living standards, and the fortification of social solidarity.

Overall, the internationalization of education not only facilitates the global recognition of universities and the augmentation of their scientific standing but also aids in addressing global challenges, reinforcing international relations, and advancing global culture. University administrators and educational policymakers are encouraged to discern the existing opportunities and challenges, formulate suitable policies and strategies to facilitate this process, and enable universities to sustain their progressive role in ameliorating the scientific, cultural, and economic conditions of the global community within the contemporary interconnected and globalized landscape. The internationalization of education, particularly in light of recent phenomena such as disease outbreaks, climate change, and global crises, constitutes a strategic priority for nations and universities alike, playing a critical role in the pursuit of progress and sustainable development. This process possesses the capacity to enhance cultural understanding, extend scientific frontiers, and foster the emergence of a vibrant global community dedicated to addressing shared challenges. Based on the findings of the research, it is recommended that pertinent administrators advocate for university leaders to undertake initiatives aimed at formulating comprehensive internationalization strategies encompassing all educational, research, and cultural dimensions. These strategies ought to encompass both short-term and long-term objectives, fiscal resources, necessary infrastructure, and evaluation benchmarks. Educational policymakers should convene consultative meetings with universities, international institutions, and governmental bodies to elucidate international objectives and programs, thereby fostering coordination and synergy at both national and global

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echelons. Establishing research collaborations with esteemed universities and educational institutions across diverse nations can significantly enhance access to scientific resources, data, and research infrastructures. These collaborations can be established through collaborative projects, exchanges of faculty and students, or alliances within global research networks. Certain research endeavors, particularly in domains necessitating international data acquisition, may encounter fiscal limitations. For instance, should the research necessitate overseas fieldwork or interviews, the expenditures associated with travel, lodging, or coordination with diverse universities and institutions may pose a significant impediment.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. The author contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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