


Research Article

Understanding Instructors' Views of Consequence Effect of International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Writing Task on Teaching

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Abstract

The surge in international education has propelled a corresponding rise in the demand for English proficiency, particularly evidenced by Kuwait students' enrolment in foreign institutions. Central to this trend is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), a universal examination that assesses various language skills, including writing tasks, in Kuwait. This research's purpose is to delve into the impact of IELTS writing tasks on instructional methods employed in Kuwaiti language centers, aiming to elucidate how educators adjust their teaching strategies in response to the test's requirements. Employing a quantitative research design methodology, the study authors gathered data through structured questionnaires administered to 15 IELTS instructors across language centers in Kuwait. The findings of the study unveil nuanced perspectives among instructors concerning the influence of IELTS on teaching practices. While a majority of respondents acknowledge the test's significance in evaluating academic writing proficiency, opinions diverge regarding its effects on teaching materials and methodologies. Additionally, there exists a disparity in perceptions regarding the extent of IELTS's impact on fostering creativity in teaching writing and the necessity of adapting teaching methods to align with the test's requirements. These findings underscore the intricate relationship between language testing and teaching practices, emphasizing the imperative for tailored approaches to IELTS preparation within Kuwaiti language centers. Furthermore, the research highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of how the IELTS examination shapes instructional strategies within educational institutions. The paper concludes that learning centers tailor their approaches according to the demands of IELTS writing tasks and assessment criteria, while instructors align their methods with institutional policies. The primary objective for instructors is to guide students toward successful test outcomes, prompting continuous refinement of teaching techniques to achieve this goal. Teachers prioritize areas where students can excel and demonstrate proficiency, thereby ensuring effective preparation for the IELTS examination. The study contributes valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between language testing and teaching practices, particularly in the context of IELTS preparation. By shedding light on the diverse perspectives and complexities involved in adapting teaching methods to meet assessment requirements, the research underscores the importance of tailored and flexible approaches to language education. The research underscores the significance of educators' adaptability in responding to the evolving demands of language testing, emphasizing the need for continuous refinement and customization of teaching strategies. Overall, these insights inform efforts to optimize language education and ensure effective IELTS preparation within Kuwaiti language centers.

Keywords

IELTS, Test Impacts, Consequence Effects, Teaching Strategies, Language Assessment

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, interest in international education has significantly increased, influencing the need for more people to learn English, an integral component of learning abroad [8]. Students from Kuwait have not been left behind as they enroll in masses at foreign learning institutions at different academic levels. Many schools using English as a primary teaching mode require students to take an English test [22]. This has increased the number of people learning English as they prepare for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), a universal examination [22]. The language tests have different impacts on teaching and curriculum design, commonly known as the “consequence effect” [11]. These effects may influence the teaching mode; for instance, tutors may focus on the test by coaching students on tested areas with little focus on their language proficiency [6]. This study’s authors aim to explore the IELTS writing tasks’ consequence effects and their correlation to the teaching methods from the point of view of instructors. Using quantitative research methods as the primary data collection approach, the researchers examine the impact of IELTS writing tasks on the learning institution’s teaching mode in Kuwait.

Compared to the other tested skills, IELTS gives students tasks based on their logical and critical thinking [23]. Instructors have raised concerns over quality optimization, necessitating the examination of the consequence effects and how learning institutions attempt to adapt, prevent, or resolve them in their teaching approaches [5]. The study improves the understanding of these aspects of English acquisition and promotes the improvement of writing teaching practice to ensure quality education and language proficiency among the learners. The researchers offer insights into the approaches used in learning institutions in teaching English, particularly writing.

2. Literature Review

Assessing a person’s aptitude for learning a foreign language typically involves a multifaceted approach, with language testing being a primary method. Language testing can encompass various components such as proficiency tests, aptitude tests, and diagnostic assessments. These tests aim to measure different aspects of language learning abilities, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and speaking skills. Language testing is the primary means of assessing an individual’s capacity to acquire a second language [20]. It is an important source of data that shapes research interests in language instruction. The objectives and purposes of language assessment, according to Schmidgall et al. [16], can be categorized into two groups: assessing the test-taker’s abilities and forming conclusions about them for the purposes of placement, grading, or selection. Stakeholders and researchers are paying attention to it because it is essential to education.

Furthermore, according to Shohamy [17], a language testing system must cover every subject in the curriculum and acknowledge the degree of difficulty and guidance a test has for students’ learning outcomes.

To optimize language evaluation results, learning centers must use appropriate, formative, and summative interventions [10]. Moreover, Soomro [18] pointed out that Alderson and Wall, the inventors of the “consequence” idea, claim that it affects how teachers and students act. Furthermore, as Fasih [9] noted, what either improve or detract from language learning environments are the elements that affect the administration and preparation of assessments as well as the superfluous elements. Ahmmed and Rahman’s [2] definition of the negative association between instruction and testing. Its impacts on teachers can be divided into two categories: positive and negative. Whereas the negative impacts prevent education from reaching its full potential, the positive effects improve teaching activities and foster a positive mindset [21]. A negative impact is that teachers may reduce their focus to the areas that are assessed out of fear that they will not cover everything, which would limit the benefits of learning.

Additionally, numerous researchers have covered the consequence effect, concentrating on teachers and learners seeking English language acquisition [10]. In their research, Gallardo [10] found that consequence effects on the assessments administered for EFL takers are higher due to the pressure and stakes that accompany them compared to Arabic tests. Lefstein et al. [12] indicated that most teachers and students tend to focus more on the ability to pass the examination than genuinely acquiring skills and fluency in the English language. Iranian study regarding English learning needs to demonstrate more attention dedicated to speaking, writing, and listening during teaching because they are insignificant for students seeking to sit for the university entrance exam Lefstein et al., [12]. Studies show the positive and negative impact on IELTS. Almulla [4] demonstrated that developing and utilizing relevant and authentic content and teaching approaches enhances test preparation among students and improves their fluency in the language, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. However, local circumstances significantly affect consequence effects and may differ from one learning center to another. Nodoushan [13] discussed the negative consequence, claiming that there are tendencies among teachers to only concentrate on exams, teaching students the aspects that would make them score highly instead of enhancing learning and language skills acquisition.

Teachers’ attitudes about writing suffer as a result of the writing assessment areas of the IELTS being less comprehensive than what is necessary to achieve English language competence. Thus, the IELTS writing exam may have a negative impact on instructional writing practices. Narrowness is typically ineffective when it comes to developing, producing,

and implementing the best teaching methods [14]. Furthermore, it decreases teachers' commitment to assisting students in becoming more fluent in the language; instead, they focus on methods to improve test scores [1]. As a result, the exam places a strong emphasis on the value of realizing learning potential and attaining English language proficiency by giving learning centers—and individual teachers in particular—the authority to choose the most successful teaching method. As a result, students now require more abilities to communicate and use the English language successfully due to the limited scope of the IELTS and the implementation of a score-guided system, which places emphasis on ways to cheat the system rather than studying the language.

In the Middle East, studying English has gained importance recently because it increases one's chances of finding employment [15]. Raza and Chua [15] argued that although learning English is important, achievement levels are not because Arabic is the most common language. Nonetheless, the establishment of learning centers and certain schools offering English instruction has increased the significance of the subject in the area. Unfortunately, there are insufficient teaching resources to facilitate teachers' effectiveness in coaching students on the necessary skills. For instance, learning institutions in Saudi Arabia rarely acquire sufficient English teaching facilities and resources, such as audio recorders and media resources. Moreover, the English language proficiency challenges affect teachers due to limited training. Students graduate with a restricted level of fluency in the English language. Kuang [11] claimed that the cost of the IELTS is equal to that of the classes that people take to improve their scores and abilities. Because of this, many people take shortcuts, such as hiring tutors to teach them at home and concentrating on subjects in which they score highly rather than proficiency. As a result, IELTS writing frequently has a detrimental consequence effect on instructional strategies used in learning centers. The IELTS writing consequence effect has differently influenced teaching approaches in learning centers. Ali and Hamid [3] demonstrated a prevailing assumption that teachers are always guided by the fact that learners want to take the IELTS test. In this case, they always modify their teaching strategies and materials to meet the test requirements. Some teachers introduce assessment-related materials, such as past papers, to facilitate familiarization with the test among the test-takers.

Soomro and Khoso [18] showed that the IELTS consequence effect influences teachers' attitudes and feelings because most feel that students' performance on them. According to Shohamy et al. [17], instructors often suffer from anxiety during the period of exam taking and after because they feel they may be held liable if the students receive unsatisfactory results. The time pressure associated with teaching course content before the assessment approach necessitates some of them taking shortcuts to ensure that they only focus on areas of concern in which they believe they will be tested [3]. As a result, teachers tend to develop teaching

frameworks that put more effort into the abilities of the learners to score highly on the tests as opposed to long-term fluency in the language.

3. Methodology

The study's authors employed a quantitative research design to investigate English language learning practices from the perspective of IELTS instructors. They based the selection of quantitative research on its capacity to furnish numerical data and statistical analysis, thus enabling accurate measurement and variable comparison. Furthermore, the researchers employed a survey-based methodology to gather data from Kuwaiti learning center teachers. They created surveys to collect data on a range of topics related to teaching English, such as curriculum adherence, teaching strategies, and perceived variables affecting language learning results. They used a systematic sampling procedure to guarantee representative instructors from different language centers. Prior to administering the survey, all participants provided informed consent.

This quantitative study's authors employed a structured questionnaire to gather data from 15 participants. The questionnaire design drew inspiration from a previous quantitative study conducted by Chappell [7]. However, the researchers made modifications to adapt the questions into a Likert scale format ranging from "agree" to "disagree." Thus, they incorporated new questions to expand the scope of inquiry. The finalized questionnaire consisted of 15 items, focusing on three principal dimensions: teaching strategies, writing development, and general teaching approach. The section on teaching strategies explored the techniques and methodologies utilized by instructors in preparing students for the IELTS examination. Questions in this section ranged from assessing the use of interactive teaching methods to evaluating the integration of test-taking strategies into classroom instruction. The segment on writing creativity development delved into instructors' approaches to fostering creative expression in writing tasks, a crucial skill assessed in the IELTS exam.

Finally, the section on the strategy of teaching encompassed broader aspects of pedagogy relevant to IELTS preparation. Questions in this category addressed the overall teaching philosophy, instructor–student interactions, and the incorporation of authentic materials into the curriculum.

3.1. Participants

The inclusion of 15 teachers from diverse language centers in Kuwait is strategic because it broadens the scope of the study and enables a more nuanced exploration of the consequence effect. Each language center may adopt unique teaching approaches, strategies, and curriculum frameworks, contributing to a richer understanding of how the IELTS writing test influences instructional practices and student learning outcomes across different educational contexts.

3.2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire guide consisted of 15 questions designed to explore participants' perspectives on the consequence effect of IELTS writing tasks. The researchers formulated these

statements to probe into various dimensions of the phenomenon, including its impact on teaching practices, writing test preparation, and students' learning strategies. Participants completed responses by categorizing results into agree, neutral, or disagree.

4. Results

4.1. Ways of Teaching

Table 1. Illustrates the participants agreement on the way of teaching.

NO.	STATEMENTS	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
1	The IELTS is an appropriate test to assess candidates' future English language performance for academic writing	60%	26.67%	13.33%
2	The IELTS test influences my choice of material (i.e., what I teach).	46.67%	33.33%	20%
3	The IELTS test influences my choice of methodology in the IELTS classes.	40%	40%	20%
4	Teaching writing comprehension in IELTS classes is different from non-IELTS classes.	53.33%	20%	26.67%
5	I use previous IELTS tests for practice in the IELTS classes.	66.67%	13.33%	20%

The findings from Table 1 indicate that although a majority of respondents acknowledge the appropriateness of the IELTS test for assessing academic writing proficiency, opinions vary regarding the extent to which the test influences teaching materials and methodologies. Additionally, there is a perceived difference in teaching writing comprehension between

IELTS and non-IELTS classes, with a majority of respondents utilizing previous IELTS tests for practice in their classes. These findings highlight the complex interplay between the IELTS test and teaching practices, with implications for curriculum development and instructional strategies in language learning contexts.

4.2. Writing Test Preparation

Table 2. Illustrates the participants agreement on the writing test preparation.

NO.	STATEMENTS	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
1	The IELTS improves my creativity in teaching writing.	40%	33.33%	26.67%
2	The IELTS test has a section on vocabulary and grammar, thus, IELTS improves teaching writing.	46.67%	26.67%	26.67%
3	IELTS writing tasks improve the academic writing of exam takers.	60%	20%	20%
4	It is important to integrate language skills in IELTS classes (e.g., integrating speaking with listening skills).	53.33%	26.67%	20%
5	The IELTS preparation course is a good way of learning English even for students who are not taking the IELTS exam.	40%	40%	20%

The findings from the table 2 of this research suggest that although a majority of respondents perceive the IELTS test and its writing tasks as beneficial for improving academic

writing skills, opinions vary regarding the test's impact on creativity in teaching writing and the suitability of the IELTS preparation course for non-exam takers. Additionally, there is

variability in perceptions among teachers regarding the importance of integrating language skills in IELTS classes. These findings highlight the complexity of the relationship

between the IELTS test and teaching practices, with implications for curriculum development and instructional strategies in language learning contexts.

4.3. Strategies of Teaching

Table 3. Illustrates the participants agreement on teaching strategies.

NO.	STATEMENTS	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE
1	The IELTS test encourages instructors to apply new strategies in teaching writing.	46.67%	26.67%	26.67%
2	Diversify using strategies that can ensure effectiveness and creativity in writing.	33.33%	40%	26.67%
3	My experience with tests as an instructor influences the strategies for teaching IELTS courses.	53.33%	20%	26.67%
4	I apply different strategies for a group of test taker writing tasks.	40%	33.33%	26.67%
5	It is important to modify teaching methods to align with the requirements of the IELTS writing.	46.67%	26.67%	26.67%

The findings from table 3 suggest that although a majority of respondents acknowledge the influence of their experience with tests on teaching strategies in IELTS courses, opinions vary regarding the importance of diversifying strategies and modifying teaching methods to align with the requirements of the IELTS writing test. Additionally, there is variability in perceptions among teachers regarding the extent to which the IELTS test encourages the application of new teaching strategies and the use of different strategies for writing tasks. These findings highlight the complex interplay between the IELTS test and teaching practices, with implications for curriculum development and instructional strategies in language learning contexts.

5. Discussion

5.1. Ways of Teaching

The perceptions of teachers about how IELTS has affected their ways of teaching are as shown in the aforementioned results. Notably, a sizable majority (60%) concur that the IELTS is a suitable exam to evaluate applicants' proficiency with the English language in academic writing. This implies that the test's applicability in assessing writing abilities is widely acknowledged. Based on Toprak's [20] assertion that incorporating authentic materials into the curriculum enhances language learning experiences, it can be deduced that the IELTS exposes learners to content that is relevant to real academic contexts. Additionally, there is a mixed effect of the IELTS on the choice of materials and teaching strategies, with comparable amounts of agreement, neutrality, and disagreement. This implies that although some educators might mod-

ify their lesson plans and pedagogies in light of the IELTS criteria, others might not feel that there is much of an impact or might even want to stick with their current strategies. The mixed effect of IELTS on teaching strategies aligns with the idea that educators should adapt their approaches to meet the changing students' requirements [10]. There is more agreement than disagreement with the observation that teaching writing comprehension in IELTS classrooms is different from teaching writing comprehension in non-IELTS programs, suggesting that there are specific instructional needs for IELTS preparation.

Finally, the majority of respondents (67%) said they have practiced on past IELTS exams in class, which highlights a typical practice used to acquaint pupils with the format and requirements of the test. Moreover, the reliance on previous IELTS exams for practice by a majority of learners resonates with Lefstein et al.'s [12] assertion on the need to integrate test-taking strategies in classroom instructions.

5.2. Writing Test Preparation

The results exploring the link between IELTS exams and writing preparation provide mixed findings. In this regard, whereas a sizable portion (40%) concur that using the IELTS helps teachers be more creative when instructing on writing, an equal proportion disagree or are neutral. This shows that different teachers have different ideas about how much the IELTS encourages originality in writing training. Similarly, opinions on whether teaching writing is improved by the IELTS exam, which emphasizes grammar and vocabulary, are split evenly between agreement and indifference, with a majority (47%) expressing agreement and a similar proportion (27%) being neutral or in disagreement. This shows varying

opinions about how well the test promotes thorough writing abilities. Moreover, the varying opinions on the impact of the IELTS on creativity in teaching writing reflect the diverse viewpoints highlighted by Gallardo [10]. Interestingly, a sizable majority (60%) concur that IELTS writing assignments help test takers write better academically, indicating that there may be a beneficial effect on students' writing. Regarding the significance of including language skills in IELTS lessons, the majority of students (53%) agree with the importance of integrating speaking with listening skills, highlighting the value of integrating speaking and listening components in IELTS lessons to enhance overall language proficiency. Furthermore, reactions to the IELTS preparation course's appropriateness for those who do not plan to take the exam are divided equally between agreement and neutrality, indicating a lack of agreement among educators on the course's wider relevance outside of exam preparation.

5.3. Strategies of Teaching

The researchers examined teachers' perspectives on how the IELTS affects their teaching practices in strategies of teaching. There is a moderate degree of agreement (47%) among respondents that the IELTS exam pushes teachers to use innovative approaches when instructing writing. This implies that there may be a perceived need for innovative pedagogy in the setting of IELTS preparation classes. Additionally, there is a similar split of agreement, neutrality, and disagreement regarding the various tactics for increasing originality and efficacy in writing training, with the majority of instructors (40%) expressing a neutral opinion about the role of diversified teaching strategies. This reveals varying viewpoints among educators about the value and viability of implementing a variety of teaching methods. Nevertheless, Soomro [19] recommended the creation of dynamic and engaging learning environments through a variety of teaching strategies; therefore, the study's findings provide a reflection on the significance of diversification in teaching methodologies. There appears to be a perceived congruence between prior testing experiences and instructional approaches, as indicated by the majority of respondents (53%) who think that their test-taking experiences have an impact on the strategies used when teaching IELTS courses. The equally divided views on using different tactics for various writing tasks, however, suggest distinct approaches to task-specific education. Finally, the majority of respondents (47%) agreed on the significance of changing teaching strategies to conform to the IELTS writing standards, underscoring the importance of upholding IELTS standards in teaching.

The findings of the study on the impact of IELTS writing tasks on teaching approaches in Kuwait language centers resonate with the existing literature on standardized language testing and instructional strategies. In this regard, the results underscore the importance of instructors adapting their instructional strategies to not only meet the requirements of the

IELTS exam but also enhance students' language proficiency. The findings overall align with Toprak and Gallardo [20, 10], who emphasized the significance of equipping teachers with the necessary tools to modify their teaching methods in response to changing student needs and assessment criteria. Consequently, the study's findings about instructors' teaching approaches in IELTS classes resonate with existing literature.

Moreover, the study's exploration of how educators balance fostering students' language competency with meeting the demands of the IELTS exam demonstrates consistency with current literature. For instance, although the study showed that instructors recognize the need to modify teaching methods to align with the requirements of IELTS writing, it equally illustrated that instructors were not enthusiastic about applying different strategies in the writing tasks. The viewpoint resonated with Lefstein et al.'s [12] analysis of the impact of teachers' testing formats on their instructional approaches, which revealed that teachers and students tend to focus more on the ability to pass the examination than genuinely acquiring the skills and fluency in the English language, indicating that the reluctance to adopt a wide variety of teaching methods is a key challenge in IELTS teaching. Additionally, the study's emphasis on the need for teachers to continuously develop their methods to help students succeed in the IELTS exam is supported by the literature on the importance of continuous professional development in language teaching, as discussed by Gallardo and Soomro [10, 19]. Therefore, the findings provide insights into aspects that instructors can focus on to ensure that IELTS teaching is undertaken efficiently and with maximum benefit to the learner.

Linking the study's findings to the literature review, it is evident that educators in Middle Eastern language centers encounter similar challenges and opportunities as discussed in the existing body of research on language testing and teaching methodologies. The study's findings underscore the complex interplay between language testing and teaching practices, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to IELTS preparation within Middle Eastern language centers. The study lays the groundwork for a more in-depth investigation of how standardized testing affects instructional strategies. The study synthesized an extensive literature analysis on language testing, with a focus on the consequential effect. Through the empirical data, a clearer picture of the complex ways in which teaching tactics were impacted by the IELTS was revealed, along with opportunities and challenges for further development in language instruction. The results clarified the intricate ways in which educators balance fostering students' language competency with meeting the demands of the IELTS exam. Furthermore, the study's conclusions emphasized how crucial it is to take into account context-specific possibilities and problems in Kuwait's educational system. All things considered, the study adds significant insights that can guide activities for curriculum creation, policymaking, and teacher preparation programs targeted at improving language learning results in

Kuwait and elsewhere.

5.4. Implications for Teaching Practice

The study's results provide insightful information about the methods used by language teachers to get their pupils ready for the IELTS exam. There is some variation in respondents' opinions on how effective various tactics are, even though most of them agree that it is crucial to match teaching strategies with the unique demands of the IELTS writing test. This emphasizes how important it is to provide chances for continuous professional development that promotes innovation and originality in the teaching of writing skills. Academics such as Toprak and Gallardo [20, 10], have underscored the significance of equipping teachers with the essential tools and assistance they need to modify their teaching methods in response to the changing requirements of their pupils.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that teachers frequently base their IELTS course instruction on their personal test-taking experiences. This is consistent with the body of research showing how important it is for teachers to have specialized knowledge while negotiating the challenges of language assessment and instruction. Lefstein et al. [12] have highlighted that teachers' direct experience with testing formats and assessment criteria can have a substantial impact on their instructional approaches. This knowledge enables them to modify their teaching strategies to better meet the requirements of standardized exams like the IELTS. To maintain efficacy and originality in writing education, the study also highlights the necessity of diversifying instructional approaches. To meet the various learning needs and preferences of students, it is critical to implement a variety of instructional methodologies, as noted by Gallardo [10] and Soomro [19]. Teachers can create dynamic and engaging learning environments that encourage deeper learning outcomes and active student participation by utilizing a range of instructional strategies. This emphasizes how important it is for teachers to always research and try out new pedagogical techniques, using their knowledge and experience to improve the efficiency of their instruction.

As a result, the study's implications for teaching practice highlight the need for continuing professional development and the necessity for teachers to incorporate their testing experiences into their lesson plans. Teachers can build critical thinking abilities and broader language competency in their students while also better preparing them for the IELTS exam by encouraging creativity, innovation, and diversity in their teaching methods. As the requirements of students change, it will be crucial to help teachers in modifying their methods to provide high-quality language instruction and significant learning outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrates how the IELTS test affects the in-

structional strategies used by educational institutions. Learning centers plan their strategies according to the IELTS writing tasks requirements and grading guidelines. Instructors also match their techniques with the policies of the educational institutions by framing them within the same framework. The main objective that instructors set for their students is passing the test, and they constantly work on improving their methods to achieve this aim. They focus, for example, on areas where the pupils can succeed.

In addition, the study provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between the IELTS exam and teaching methodologies within language learning contexts. By delving into teachers' perceptions and practices, the study enriches our understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities inherent in standardized language testing. The findings highlight the need for a nuanced approach to teaching that takes into account the impact of testing on instructional practices. Moving forward, efforts to promote effective teaching practices should prioritize the recognition of the nuanced relationship between testing and instruction. Educators should be encouraged to adopt a balanced approach that integrates the demands of standardized tests like the IELTS with the broader goals of language proficiency and critical thinking development. This entails fostering creativity, innovation, and diversity in teaching strategies to cater to the diverse learning needs and preferences of students. Furthermore, professional development initiatives should be designed to support educators in navigating the complexities of standardized testing while maintaining a focus on holistic language learning outcomes.

Abbreviations

IELTS: International English Language Testing System.
EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

Author Contributions

Manair Abdullah Alanezi: Resources, Software, Formal Analysis, Validation, Investigation, Writing – original draft.

Ahmad Ali Alenezi: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Supervision, Investigation, Visualization, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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