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The study explores the role of supervisors in English as a Foreign Language writing teaching in Saudi Arabia, bridging a significant gap in previous literature. Despite the tremendous hurdles that come with teaching writing successfully, supervisors act as educational leaders who guide and support teachers in adopting effective writing instruction techniques. The purpose of this study is to investigate the roles of supervisors in promoting successful EFL writing teaching, as well as the factors that influence their involvement in this context. The study used a qualitative technique, conducting semi-structured interviews with eleven professional educators at various educational levels. The data demonstrate a variety of supervisory techniques, highlighting differences in approaches between male and female supervisors, with female supervisors frequently having more stringent expectations for lesson design and strategy implementation. Additionally, cultural factors and external constraints have a substantial impact on supervisory positions, underlining the need of supervisors fostering a collaborative environment, prioritizing professional growth, and addressing cultural settings in their supervisory practices. The study finishes with recommendations and suggestions for further research. The findings provide important insights into the dynamics of EFL writing instruction and the role of supervisors in improving teaching quality in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: culture, EFL, gender, instructions, supervisors, writing

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Introduction

The four skills of a language (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) are equally essential, but the writing skill takes more importance than the other skills in the academic fields (Forbes, 2019; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Yu et al., 2023). This is because writing is considered as one of the most important tools used to assess learners' performance in the academic disciplines (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). In addition, writing is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, enabling learners to communicate effectively in academic, professional, and social contexts (Alhojailan, 2015).

However, teaching writing effectively poses challenges, requiring a nuanced understanding of the writing process, learner needs, and appropriate pedagogical approaches. Therefore, language teacher supervision is an important aspect of teacher education and development (Atefinia & Alavinia, 2019). In this context, the role of supervisors assumes immense significance. Although considerable research has been devoted to discussing EFL in general and different aspects of EFL writing in particular, less attention has been paid to the role of supervisors in EFL context (Mehrpour & Agheshteh, 2017).

Supervision, according to Hinchey (2010), "is used to gain information that can help teachers, even teachers who are already proficient, to improve or expand their abilities" (p. 6). Supervisors, as educational leaders, hold a crucial responsibility in guiding and supporting teachers to implement effective writing instruction. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted to investigate the role of supervisors in EFL writing instruction in Saudi Arabia.

To fill this gap, our study focuses on the role of supervisors in EFL writing instruction in Saudi Arabia. The current study aims to answer the following research question:

1. What are the roles of supervisors in supporting effective EFL writing instruction?
2. What are the factors, if any, that affect the role of supervisors in supporting effective EFL writing instruction?

Literature Review

The literature on EFL writing instruction has extensively explored various aspects of teaching writing, including pedagogical approaches, learner challenges, and the role of feedback. However, the specific role of supervisors in EFL writing instruction and the factors that affect their role remain under-explored, especially in the Saudi context. This section reviews relevant literature on supervisory practices in EFL, highlighting key concepts and research findings that inform this study.

A supervisor is "anyone who has...the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in an educational setting" (Wallace, 1991, p. 107). Supervisors may perform a variety of responsibilities. According to Bailey (2009), some supervisors are senior personnel who guide junior colleagues. Others may serve as program directors, coordinators, or consultants without concurrent teaching obligations (Chen & Cheng, 2013).

Supervision might also take several forms. Gebhard (1984) proposed five methods for language teacher supervision, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Gebhard's (1984) Supervision Models

Model	General description
Directive supervision	The supervisor's role is to direct and inform the teacher, model teaching behaviors, and evaluate the teacher's mastery of defined behaviors.
Alternative supervision	The supervisor's role is to suggest a variety of alternatives. The purpose of offering alternatives is to widen the scope of what a teacher will consider doing.

Non-directive supervision	The supervisor listens attentively and non-judgmentally as teachers describe their work and reflect on their teaching.
Collaborative supervision	The supervisor actively works with the teacher and attempts to establish a sharing relationship.
Creative supervision	This model allows a combination of different models as supervisors see the need to switch roles during supervision.

In Pakistan, Ghulam et al. (2011) found that 75% of supervisors lacked pleasant, supportive, or democratic attitudes toward developing professional advice both within and outside of the classroom, and so did not guide, motivate, or assist the teaching process. By the same token, Iranian teachers, according to Agheshteh and Mehrpour (2021), lacked encouragement and collaboration from their advisors.

Al-Seghayer (2011) provided some practices followed by Saudi EFL teachers. For example, teachers ask students to write a memorized piece of writing. This happens when students memorize writings about chosen topic because they are confident that they will be asked to write about them. He added that teachers are sometimes afraid of being questioned by schools' administrations or their supervisors about students' poor performance in the tests, so they develop tests that may not be able to reflect students' actual performance.

Shukri and Sheikhi (2017) looked at how supervisor comments might help EFL teachers improve their teaching approaches, especially in writing. They found that constructive comments from supervisors helped teachers implement more effective writing instruction tactics. Moreover, supervisors who offered precise, practical comments helped instructors improve their lesson plans, vary their teaching strategies, and better assist students' writing growth.

Studying the impact of the workshops led by supervisors on the development of the teachers' practices, Ahmed and Johnson (2019) found that the workshops were shown to greatly improve instructors' comprehension of modern writing pedagogy. Supervisors who were well-versed in the most recent EFL teaching strategies may bridge the gap between theory and practice, resulting in more innovative writing instruction in classrooms.

Lee and Park (2020) looked at how supervisors help EFL instructors change writing courses to better meet the requirements of their students. Their findings show that supervisors helped instructors understand and adjust standardized writing courses. Furthermore, teachers stated that supervisors who provided flexible rules and encouraged curriculum customization were more effective at increasing student writing outputs.

On the study conducted by Brown and Smith (2021), it was discovered that supervisors who stressed formative assessment strategies helped instructors evaluate writing more efficiently. This, of course, resulted in more tailored feedback for pupils, which improved their writing abilities.

The purpose of the study conducted by Wang and Liu (2018) was to look at how supervisor support influences EFL instructors' morale and writing instruction quality. The researchers pointed out that high levels of supervisory assistance were associated with increased teacher morale, which in turn improved the quality of writing teaching. Teachers, they continue, who felt encouraged were more inclined to use new writing approaches and take chances in their instruction.

Al-Khairi and Zafar (2022) investigated the supervisors' role in reducing teacher burnout, particularly in the setting of EFL writing teaching. Their findings show that supervisors who offered emotional and professional support helped to prevent burnout among EFL teachers. This assistance was critical in keeping teachers enthusiastic and effective in teaching writing.

looking at how supervisor-facilitated cooperation among instructors affected students' writing outcomes in EFL settings, Johnson and Martinez (2023) indicated that when supervisors supported collaborative teaching approaches, students' writing ability improved significantly. This was ascribed to instructors sharing their best methods and working together to solve problems.

Regarding the factors that may affect the role of the supervisors, several studies have been conducted resulting in different findings. Some studies (e.g., Richards & Farrell, 2005) highlighted the importance of supervisors' expertise in EFL instruction. They pointed out that supervisors with an EFL background are better able to provide meaningful comments and promote instructional progress.

Moreover, Freeman (2009) stated that supervisors who participate in continual learning are better equipped to meet the different demands of EFL teachers. Similarly, Burns (2011) indicated that effective collaboration and communicating with the teachers is one of the factors that could affect supervisors' roles positively. Additionally, Holliday (1994) referred to the effect of cultural context. He encouraged supervisors to be culturally knowledgeable and attentive to the unique issues faced by teachers in various cultural situations.

Methodology

Research Design

Our research is based on the qualitative approach. "Purposeful sampling, collection of open-ended data, analysis of text or pictures, representation of information in figures and tables, and personal interpretation of the findings all inform qualitative procedures" (Creswell, 2009, p. 24). Dörnyei (2007) mentioned some significant merits of the qualitative approach. One is that it has exploratory nature. Moreover, it can make sense of complexity. In addition, it can broaden the understanding of different phenomena. This study adopted a qualitative approach, employing one method to gather data; namely semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

According to Dörnyei (2007), interviews, as research instruments, are the most commonly used methods in qualitative inquiries, and they work so well as a versatile research method. Moreover, the semi-structured interviews, as Dörnyei (2007) stated, can provide a compromise between the two structured and unstructured interviews. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews may better answer the research questions.

Participants

This study is a part of a bigger project that tackled various research areas. In the project, eleven expert educators from Saudi Arabia were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring representation from different educational levels (elementary, intermediate, and secondary) and roles (teachers, supervisors, and university professors). The interview guide explored participants' perspectives on the role of supervisors in supporting EFL writing instruction.

The Interview Questions

In the continuum of inductive and deductive orientations, our research was located in the middle, with more dominance in induction. Thus, our interview questions did not depend much on the literature, though we derived some of them indirectly from our readings and interpretations. We further wrote some of them based on our own experience. This was basically because the research is descriptive and

interpretive in nature and does not require any theory or model to be involved. Besides, semi-structured interviews allowed us to ask more questions if needed. Our interview questions were 20, distributed to our research questions.

Data Analysis

Based on thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke in 2006, we decided to use it as a method of analysis. However, the approaches of thematic analysis have expanded since then (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). One approach is reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). According to Braun and Clarke (2019b), reflexive thematic analysis aims to “identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision” (para. 10).

To analyze our data following reflexive thematic analysis phases, we used MAXQDA software to help us better organise and categorise my data. MAXQDA is a “world-leading software package for qualitative and mixed methods research . . . It is one of the most comprehensive programs in the field and is used by thousands of researchers in more than 150 countries around the world” (MAXQDA, 2020, para. 1). It helped us in managing our data, writing memos, coding data, categorising themes and subthemes, including all our data in only one page, and saving our time.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that trustworthiness in a given research is crucial to evaluate its worth. They gave four criteria to establish trustworthiness. First, credibility which means confidence in the accuracy of findings. Second, transferability which means that the findings can be applicable in another context. Third, dependability which shows the consistency of the findings. Finally, confirmability which is the extent to which the findings represent participants’ responses and, thus, are bias-free. Additionally, they provided some techniques to meet previously mentioned criteria. However, these techniques are used in qualitative research in general, while we were looking for criteria related to thematic analysis.

Nowell et al. (2017) outlined a practical process to meet Lincoln and Guba’s criteria in thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). We followed Nowell et al.’s (2017) outline to meet quality criteria as follows. First, we collected data by our own and transcribed them. We were then immersed in them for relatively a long time. Second, we stored all data in well-organised files and kept the audio recordings. Third, we documented our reflective thoughts. Fourth, we sent all transcribed interviews to our participants to confirm that they were done correctly. Fifth, we diagrammed some of my themes and codes to make sense of them. Sixth, we tried to provide a thick description to all details related to our research, including data collection procedure, data analysis method, justifications for all our methodological and theoretical decisions, and the context itself.

Findings

Features of practices supervisors adopted with the EFL writing teachers were different. One of the participants, for example, mentioned that some supervisors require using more than one teaching strategy in the class. Other supervisors, on the other hand, may allow teachers to choose and employ the number of strategies s/he believes that will help their students.

In addition, one of the participants highlighted the importance of cooperation among teachers. He mentioned that if a teacher prepared a lesson and share it online, other teachers might find it useful and start using it. Some supervisors would encourage such practice by accepting the same lesson and strategy to be employed by various teachers.

When talking about differences between female and male supervisors, Mr. Turki, one of the participants, suggested that they were similar, but how they were taught was different. In other words, he attributed the difference in teaching to the way female and male supervisors worked. He argued that female supervisors had different practices from male supervisors. He said:

(Excerpt 1):

يخلي خت تنأ اللثم ينعي، يجت امل ففرش م لا تا بل طتم وأ . . . ، سردلا دادع! اي حان نم يتح فل تخي
نم نوبلطي تافرشم هي ف . . . ، ءكرب ، ءم عنو ريخ فصل لا ل خاد ءدح او ءيجي تارتسا بي جأ ول مل عمك ان
ل ع طغض هي ف ، ءوافت هي ف ، ءدح اول ءص ح لا ل خاد ، ءالث ، ني تي جي تارتسا مدختست تامل عمل ا ضعب
«ج.هنم لا سفن نوسردي مه امنيب ، ءلكش م لا شو يردأ ام تامل عمل ا

“It [teaching EFL writing to female and male students] differs in the way the lesson has been prepared, or what a female supervisor asks when she comes. It would be enough for me, as a male teacher, to use one strategy. It would be more than enough. Some female supervisors ask teachers to use two or three strategies in each lesson. There is a difference. Although male and female teachers teach the same syllabus, there is a pressure on female teachers.” (Mr. Turki, Interview Transcript, p. 71)

Male supervisors are described as having more flexible standards, enabling teachers to use a single technique for their lectures. This contrasts with female supervisors, who frequently require two or three solutions within a single class, putting female teachers under perceived “pressure”.

However, Mr. Turki gave another practice in which some female supervisors were more rigorous in the way the lesson was prepared than male supervisors. He reported:

(Excerpt 2):

، تن لا يف هلزنو ، يباتك وأ ينورتكل! ريضحت لزن دلاخ ، ضر فنل ، يجت تافرشم لا ضعب
تقلو ءمل عم تقلو ت حار ، ريضحت لا هي ف تقلو دلاخ باسح تقلو تلخو ، دلاخ باسح ءفراع ءفرشم لا
ريضحت يبأ ؟ ريضحت ني غبت شي ا بي ط ، هاغبأ ام اذ ريضحت لا ، الال يه تلاق ، اذ ريضحت لا اذن ع
، مه ريضحت ينوطع مهل ني لوقت ، ني مل عمل ا مهن اري ج ، ني مل عمل ا ني حورت امل . . . تا اي جي تارتسا اب
شيل مهنم دح اول هنأ مهبل اطي دحمو ، هن يبي احو تن لا نم هن يذخ ام مهلك ، لثم لثم مهلك ني مل عمل ا ني قلت
«اذك رضحم تنأ

“If we suppose that Khalid prepared a lesson and shared it in the Internet, and the female supervisor read Khalid’s lesson, then found a teacher had the same lesson, she [supervisor] would say: no, I do not want this lesson. Teacher would ask her supervisor: what would you like me to do? She replied: I would like a lesson with strategies. In contrast, when you go to male teachers and ask them to read their lessons, you would find them all have the same lesson. All of them took it from Internet, and no one asks them why they did this.” (Mr. Turki, Interview Transcript, p. 70)

According to the above excerpt, female supervisors are stricter than their male colleagues. This is obvious in their emphasis on individual lesson preparations and their review of teacher-submitted materials. For example, one female supervisor rejected a lesson plan because it lacked “strategies,” even though the instructor had obtained it from a reliable source.

Another practice used by supervisors was that they ask teachers to link every lesson to a religious value or aim. One interviewee said:

(Excerpt 3):

grammar، سردأ موي لا اللثم امل وه يلا ، يني د فدهب كدنع جهنم لا طبرا وأ عوضوم لا طبرا نولوقي اوناك»

«يُنيد فدهب طبرا ي خأ اي لكل نولوقي ي جي مٲ present simple و present perfect سردب

“They [supervisors] were asking us [teachers] to link the topic to a religious aim. For example, when teaching grammar, present simple or present perfect, I was asked to relate it to a religious aim.” (Mr. Turki, Interview Transcript, p. 68)

Additionally, supervisors, as Ms. Sarah referred to, were sometimes forced to assess lessons and teachers based on unsuitable criteria. Basically, those criteria were made and applied by curriculum designers and planners. For example, she discussed that writing sessions should last for not less than two sessions. One session for writing instruction cannot be enough to provide highly effective lessons. She said:

(Excerpt 4):

«ص ح يف حي حص لكشب هيطعن ردقن ام ،قم ل عم و قبل اط تنك ءاوس ؛يرظن ةهجو نم فوش ان writing لـا .»
«ةدح او

“In my point of view, either a student or a teacher, a writing lesson cannot be covered effectively in one session.” (Ms. Sarah, Interview Transcript, p. 142)

These practices were viewed as compulsory, implying that supervisors themselves are likely subject to similar directives.

In addition, some participants referred to the view that some teachers were forced, under different circumstances, to evaluate students in a specific way. For example, one participant reports being chastised for failing students, despite presenting evidence of their performance. This shows that teachers are frequently pushed to inflate grades, maybe owing to external demands from supervisors, administration or parents.

He said:

(Excerpt 5):

«ان بيط ؟ اذه يزي لجن بسري ي لل ام ،تماق مي ل عتلا ةرادو تماق قس ردمل او بوسر تالاح يدن ع ناك»
مزال ال ، اذه يئاهنل رابتخال ،مهتابج او اولحام و ،لح ام متابج او ، اذك باج يرهشل رابتخال اب اذه اوفوش
«ةعزم ينعي ناسنإل اهل ضرعتي ي لل اطوغضلاف ؟ عفرا فيك ،تاجردل اعفرت

“I had some students failed to pass the course, and, thus, the school and the educational administration criticized me. I explained to them how I evaluated them. Their response was that I have to give students a bonus. How can I give a bonus? Such pressures were annoying.” (Mr. Abdullah, Interview Transcript, pp. 24-25)

Another view by participants was that some supervisors provided less effective and less relatable feedback. One participant commented:

(Excerpt 6):

«عيم جى ل ع عزمو لودج مدن ع وه نأل ؟ نأل تنأ ةدحو ي يف ي ل لوقيو فرشملا يني تايو ،مل عم تنك ام»
ل ص او نيو تنأف ،الثم unit 4, lesson 3 الثم عبارل سردل ريصت سماخل عوبسأل يف هنأ ،ني مل عمل
ينرو ؟ تاجردل ينرو بيط ،رخأتت ام يتح مزال مبننا ؟ ذاتسأ اي رخأتت شيل ، unit 4, lesson 2 ملل او
that's it.» و نيل اؤس ل اؤس ل اؤس بالطلا ل ع ل خدي ،ري ضحتل ارتفد ءيش مهأ ناك ؟ ري ضحتل ارتفد

“When I was a teacher, the supervisor would come to me and ask me, “What chapter are you in now?”

Because he had a schedule distributed to all the teachers, that in the 5th week, the 4th lesson should be covered, for example, unit 4, lesson 3. So, in which chapter are you now? I replied, unit 4, lesson 2. He asked: why are you late, teacher? Be careful so you don't get late. Okay, show me the grades? Show me your preparation notebook? The most important thing was the preparation notebook. He would go to the students and ask one or two questions, and that's it." (Mr. Abdullah, Interview Transcript, p. 24)

In summary, supervisors were different in the way they interact with teachers. However, three codes were emerged from the available data. They showed that features of supervisors' practices were flexible, compulsory, and when comparing female and male supervisors, females were more rigorous in their supervision.

Discussion

The variation in the supervisory practices may suggest that supervisors have different expectations and methods for teaching strategies. Requesting to use one or more strategies shows a directive approach to supervision, where detailed and structured guidelines are provided, according to Gebhard (1984). The request for using more than one strategy could be a way to address diverse learning needs. This finding is consistent with that of Shukri and Sheikhi (2017) and Lee and Park (2020).

Furthermore, the supervisors fostered the collaborative environment through allowing teachers share their best teaching strategies. Such practices by the supervisor could be a means to develop more effective teaching strategies and, eventually, would have a positive influence on students' writing skills. Moreover, this kind of collaboration among teachers would create a supportive learning environment, which is essential for students' success in complex skill areas like writing. This finding aligns with those of Johnson and Martinez (2023) and contradicts those of Ghulam et al. (2011) and Agheshteh and Mehrpour (2021).

For the factors that may affect the role of supervisors in supporting effective EFL writing instruction, the findings suggest three factors: the effect of gender, the effect of culture, and the effect of the external pressures.

-The effect of gender

According to the findings in the previous section, male supervisors have more permissive requirements, allowing teachers to adopt a single approach for their lectures. This contrasts with female supervisors, who sometimes demand two or three tactics in a single class. This outcome is consistent with research on gender variations in leadership styles. According to some studies (Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Carli & Eagly, 2011; Helgesen, 1990), women are more directive and detail-oriented, whereas males may take a more collaborative and flexible approach. This might explain why female supervisors may promote the employment of various tactics, whereas male supervisors are more open to a single strategy.

Moreover, this finding is consistent with research showing that women are more precise and detail-oriented in their job. This might explain why female supervisors may be more concerned with individual lesson planning and the implementation of specific tactics.

-The effect of culture

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that supervisors, both male and female, frequently urge teachers to connect every lesson to a religious purpose or goal. This is referred to as a required practice. Similar to the findings of Holliday (1994), this finding highlights the impact of cultural context on educational processes. In many cultures, religious beliefs are strongly embedded in the educational system, and

instructors are required to include them into their lessons. This approach reflects the power dynamics of the educational system, in which supervisors impose particular norms and expectations.

However, it is worth noting that more abstract language lessons, such as grammar, may sometimes be difficult, if not impossible, to be related to a religious aim. This can burden teachers and deviate the attention to some less important aims.

- The effect of the external pressures

The data illustrate the pressure teachers face to boost student grades despite evidence of performance. This technique may be regarded in terms of educational accountability, in which external stakeholders (e.g., supervisors) demand favorable outcomes. This finding is similar to that of Al-Seghayer (2011). Such pressures, unfortunately, can lead to ethical quandaries for instructors as they strive to balance the expectations of their supervisors with academic honesty. Research shows that such external influences can have a negative impact on teaching practices and damage the legitimacy of educational assessments.

Conclusion

The current study investigates the function of supervisors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction in Saudi Arabia, therefore filling a key gap in earlier research. Despite the enormous challenges that come with teaching writing successfully, supervisors serve as educational leaders, guiding and supporting teachers in implementing effective writing instruction strategies. The goal of this research is to look into the responsibilities of supervisors in fostering successful EFL writing instruction, as well as the elements that impact their participation in this setting. The study employed a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with eleven professional educators from diverse educational levels. The findings show a wide range of supervisory tactics, showing disparities in approaches between male and female supervisors, with female supervisors generally having higher expectations for lesson design and plan implementation. Furthermore, cultural and external restrictions have a significant influence on supervisory roles, emphasizing the need of supervisors establishing a collaborative atmosphere, prioritizing professional advancement, and addressing cultural contexts in their supervisory practices.

Recommendations

- 1- Nuanced Supervisory Practices: Supervisors should take a more nuanced approach, shifting from directive models to collaborative and non-directive ones. This includes providing positive criticism, customized assistance, and promoting teacher autonomy.
- 2- Teacher Development: Supervisors should prioritize professional development opportunities for EFL instructors, with an emphasis on current writing pedagogy, assessment methodologies, and introducing technology into the classroom.
- 3- Supervisors should foster a collaborative atmosphere in which teachers may exchange best practices, resources, and lesson plans, therefore encouraging a culture of collective learning and creativity.
- 4- Addressing cultural context: Supervisors should be culturally aware, recognizing the effect of religious beliefs and expectations while encouraging inclusive and learner-centered practices.
- 5- Addressing External demands: Supervisors should push for a more comprehensive assessment system that lessens external demands on instructors to inflate marks while encouraging realistic evaluation of student learning.

Suggestions for future studies

In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings in a number of ways, for example:

- 1-Multi-Stakeholder viewpoints: Future research should include the viewpoints of instructors, students, and administrators in order to acquire a more complete knowledge of the function of supervisors.
- 2-Future research might take a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative data to gain a more comprehensive grasp of the issue.
- 3-Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Future research might compare supervisory techniques across EFL environments to investigate the impact of cultural characteristics.
- 4-Longitudinal studies might examine the influence of various supervisory approaches over time to determine their efficacy in enhancing EFL writing teaching.

Author Contributions

NMA: conceptualization, methodology, writing–original draft preparation, & investigation. AIA: visualization, investigation, supervision, project administration, writing–review & editing, & funding acquisition. Both authors had approved the final version.

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