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Middle East Journal of Rehabilitation and Health Studies

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Peer Review Report for "A Comparative Study of The Efficacy of Photobiomodulation and Electrical Stimulation on Healing of Diabetic Foot Ulcer: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis"

Author(s): Parsa Owliaee, Soheila Saeedi, Mohammadtaha Kouchaki, Mohammad Reza Asadi

Review Timeline:

Submit Date:	31 Dec 2024
Revised Date:	21 May 2025
Accepted Date:	25 May 2025

Revision (0)

Here, you can see the **Reviewers**, **Associate Editors** and **EICs'** comments from the beginning to the end of the revision process.

REFeree : Reviewer

19 Jan 2025

Dear Editor

Thank you for the opportunity to review the manuscript. The manuscript needs minor revision. In general, an interesting and important topic. The comments to the authors are given below:

Introduction

Increasing coherence helps maintain a cohesive narrative by seamlessly connecting different aspects of the discussion.

When discussing the variability of patient responses and the adjunctive therapies

(occupational therapy, physical therapy, and...) could strengthen the argument and provide a clearer picture of the current research landscape.

Addressing the variability in patient responses and the need for a comprehensive evaluation signals an awareness of ongoing challenges in the field, justifying the need for a systematic review and meta-analysis.

Method:

Include the reference for the data synthesis method.

The registration code for the systematic review is not specified. Is the protocol registered?

Please present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies.

- Discussion

The discussion would be improved with increased organization and perhaps subheadings.

- Address potential biases and study limitations.

Tables:

- Look at APA for formatting.

REFeree : Reviewer

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Dear AE

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- Discussion

The discussion would be improved with increased organization and perhaps subheadings.

- Address potential biases and study limitations.

Tables:

- Look at APA for formatting.

REFEREE : Reviewer

29 Jan 2025

Dear Associate Editor

This study was written in the context of the efficacy of Photobiomodulation and Electrical Stimulation on Healing of Diabetic Foot Ulcer

It is recommended to review the following points:

Given that your search was until April 2024 and if the article is accepted, the time period will be 2025, please update it by performing a search update.

In one place of the article, it is stated that the search period was until April and in another place it is stated until July! Please make it uniform.

The abstract of the article is poorly written. Please mention the following in the abstract: Did you have any restrictions on the language of the studies in the search? How many researchers participated in the search for sources? How many researchers reviewed the studies? In case of conflicting opinions, how was agreement reached? How many studies were included in the initial search in total? What was the reason for excluding studies?

The table of Quality Assessment of the articles should be included.

The "search terms" used should be written in full.

Given that studies in the field of photobiomodulation use different laser spectra, it seems better to include a paragraph on the characteristics of the included studies in the field of laser use, what wavelengths they used, what class of laser was it... and also what were the characteristics of the studies using electrical stimulation in these studies? What electrical stimulations were used, and...

REFEREE : Associate Editor

29 Jan 2025

Dear EIC

Based on the reviewers' comments, the manuscript requires major revisions before it can be considered for publication.

Fatemeh Ehsani : EIC

1 Feb 2025

Dear Authors

According to the reviewers and associate editor's comments, your article needs to be revised majorly. When revising your manuscript, please consider all issues mentioned in the reviewers' comments carefully: please outline every change made in response to their comments and submit the required files up two months.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (1)

Reply to Reviewers

Ideally, the reviewing process can significantly improve the submitted manuscripts by allowing the authors to take into account the advice of reviewers. Author(s) must reply to all reviewers' comments in a separate Word file, point by point. A "**Reply to Reviewers**" document is submitted along with revised manuscript during submission of revised files, summarizing the changes that the authors made in response to the reviewers' comments. The responses to reviewers' comments specifies how the authors addressed each comment the reviewers made.

You can read the authors' responses to the reviewers' comments in the next page.

Dear Dr. Ehsani,

Thank you for your time and consideration in the review of our manuscript. We are pleased to attach here a revised version here. We would also like to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful feedback. Each critique has been addressed in this resubmission which is stronger and clearer as a result.

Kind Regards.

Reviewer 1:

Unclear/Questionable Points

- **Absence of risk of bias assessment for included studies.**

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. We have now included Table in the 4.4 section, summarizing the quality assessment of the included studies using the Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) tool. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the quality ratings for each study across key domains, including selection bias, study design, confounders, blinding, data collection, drop-outs, and global rating.

(Page 14)

- **No discussion of limitations in the included studies or review methodology.**

We thank the reviewer for this important observation. We have now added **Limitations** and **Future Research Directions** subsection to the **Discussion** section to address the limitations of both the included studies and our review methodology and also the **Future Research Directions**. We hope this addition provides a more balanced and critical perspective on the findings of our review.

(Pages 18-20)

- **Missing information about study registration and funding sources.**

We thank the reviewer for pointing out the need for clarity regarding study registration and funding sources. We have addressed this comment as follows:

1. **Study Registration:** We have added a statement in the **Methods** section (under "Study Design and Registration") to clarify that this systematic review and meta-analysis was not registered in a public trial registry because it is a secondary analysis of existing studies, and registration is not typically required for systematic reviews and meta-analyses.
2. **Funding Sources:** We have expanded the **Acknowledgment** section to explicitly state the funding sources and their role in the study. The revised text reads:

We hope these clarifications meet the reviewer's expectations.

(Page 6)

- **Additional Section: Adverse Effects: The current abstract lacks a critical component addressing the potential adverse effects of photobiomodulation and electrical stimulation for diabetic foot ulcer treatment.**

We have also updated the Abstract to briefly mention the safety profile of both interventions.

(Page 2)

Reviewer 2:

It is recommended to review the following points:

- **Given that your search was until April 2024 and if the article is accepted, the time period will be 2025, please update it by performing a search update.**

Thank you for your valuable comments on our manuscript. We appreciate your thorough review and have carefully considered all of your suggestions.

We acknowledge your recommendation to update the search date to ensure the inclusion of the most recent literature. While we agree that this would be ideal, we have encountered some challenges in implementing this suggestion.

Updating the search date would necessitate a comprehensive re-analysis of all the data and a subsequent rewrite of the manuscript. We believe that the current search date, while not exhaustive, still captures the core body of literature relevant to our study. To address your concerns, we have included a more detailed discussion of the limitations of our search strategy in the manuscript.

- **In one place of the article, it is stated that the search period was until April and in another place it is stated until July! Please make it uniform.**

We sincerely apologize for the inconsistency in reporting the search period. The correct search period for this study was until **April 29th, 2024**. The text has now been updated to ensure uniformity throughout the manuscript.

(Page 7)

- **The abstract of the article is poorly written. Please mention the following in the abstract: Did you have any restrictions on the language of the studies in the search? How many researchers participated in the search for sources? How many researchers reviewed the studies? In case of conflicting opinions, how was agreement reached? How many studies were included in the initial search in total? What was the reason for excluding studies?**

We thank the reviewer for their valuable feedback. We have revised the abstract to include the requested details. We hope these revisions meet the reviewer's expectations and improve the clarity and completeness of the abstract. Thank you for your constructive comments.

(Page 2)

- **The table of Quality Assessment of the articles should be included.**

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. We have now included a Quality Assessment Table in the 4.4. Quality Assessment Results section, summarizing the quality assessment of the included studies using the Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) tool. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the quality ratings for each study across key domains, including selection bias, study design, confounders, blinding, data collection, drop-outs, and global rating.

(Page 14)

Study	Selection bias	Study design	Confounders	Blinding	Data collection	Drop-outs	Global rating
Rojas et al,(32)2023/USA	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wadee et al, (33)2021/Egypt	3	1	1	2	1	1	2
Vitoriano et al, (34)2019/Brazil	2	1	2	3	1	1	2
Tantawy et al, (35)2018/Egypt	3	1	1	2	1	1	2
Santos et al,	2	1	1	3	1	1	2

(38)2018/Brazil							
Priyadarshini et al,	1	1	1	3	1	1	2
(37)2018/India							
Franguez et al,	2	1	1	1	1	3	2
(36)2018/Slovenia							
Srilestari et al,	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
(39)2017/Indonesia							
Rasheed et al,	2	1	1	3	1	1	2
(42)2017/India							
Mathur et al,	2	1	1	3	1	1	2
(41)2017/India							
Asadi et al,(40)2017/Iran	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
Sanati et al,(43)2016/Iran	2	1	3	3	1	2	3
Feitosa et al,	3	1	1	2	1	1	2
(45)2015/Brazil							
Asadi et al,(44)2015/Iran	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
Ortíz et al,	1	1	1	1	1	3	2
(30)2014/Colombia							
Mohajeri-Tehrani et al,	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
(46)2014/Iran							
Kajagar et al,	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
(47)2012/India							
Kaviani et al,	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
(48)2011/Iran							
Minatel et al,	3	1	3	1	1	3	3
(49)2009/Brazil							
Naidu et al,	2	1	3	2	1	1	2
(50)2005/Malaysia							
Lundeberg et al,	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
(51)1992/Sweden							

Note. Quality ratings are based on the Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) tool.

- The **Global Rating** is an overall assessment of study quality based on the EPHPP tool.

We hope this addition meets the reviewer's expectations and enhances the transparency and rigor of our systematic review. Thank you for your valuable feedback

- **The "search terms" used should be written in full.**

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, we have now included the **full list of search terms** used in our systematic search in the **Methods** section under "Search Strategy".

(Page 7)

- **Given that studies in the field of photobiomodulation use different laser spectra, it seems better to include a paragraph on the characteristics of the included studies in the field of laser use, what wavelengths they used, what class of laser was it... and also what were the characteristics of the studies using electrical stimulation in these studies? What electrical stimulations were used, and...**

We thank the reviewer for this valuable suggestion. We have now added a new subsection titled "**Characteristics of Interventions**" to the Discussion section, which provides a detailed summary of the intervention parameters used in the included studies.

(Pages 18 and 19)

Reviewer 3:

The comments to the authors are given below:

Introduction

- **Increasing coherence helps maintain a cohesive narrative by seamlessly connecting different aspects of the discussion.**

We thank the reviewer for this valuable suggestion. As requested, we have revised the **Introduction** section to improve coherence.

(Pages 3-6)

- **When discussing the variability of patient responses and the adjunctive therapies (occupational therapy, physical therapy, and...) could strengthen the argument and provide a clearer picture of the current research landscape.**

We thank the reviewer for this valuable suggestion. As requested, we have added a discussion on the variability of patient responses and the role of adjunctive therapies, such as physical therapy, in the **Introduction** section. This addition provides a clearer picture of the current research landscape and highlights how these therapies, when combined with standard care, can optimize outcomes for diabetic foot ulcer patients.

(Pages 3-6)

- **Addressing the variability in patient responses and the need for a comprehensive evaluation signals an awareness of ongoing challenges in the field, justifying the need for a systematic review and meta-analysis.**

We thank the reviewer for this insightful suggestion. As requested, we have added a discussion on the variability in patient responses and the need for a comprehensive evaluation in the **Objectives** section. This addition highlights the ongoing challenges in the field and further justifies the need for our systematic review and meta-analysis.

(Pages 5 and 6)

Method:

- **Include the reference for the data synthesis method.**

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. As requested, we have ensured that data synthesis methods, such as the standardized mean change using change score

standardization (SMCC) and the heterogeneity indices, are also properly referenced in the manuscript.

Additionally, we have added reference to the EPHP tool in the Quality Assessment section to properly acknowledge its use in our study.

(Pages 8-10)

- **The registration code for the systematic review is not specified. Is the protocol registered?**

We thank the reviewer for raising this important point. This systematic review and meta-analysis was not registered in a public trial registry because it is a secondary analysis of existing studies, and registration is not typically required for systematic reviews and meta-analyses. We have added a statement in the **Methods** section (under "Study Design and Registration").

(Page 6)

- **Please present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies.**

We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. We have now included **Table** in the **4.4** section, summarizing the quality assessment of the included studies using the Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) tool. The table provides a detailed breakdown of the quality ratings for each study across key domains, including selection bias, study design, confounders, blinding, data collection, drop-outs, and global rating.

(Page 14)

- **The discussion would be improved with increased organization and perhaps subheadings.**

We thank the reviewer for this constructive suggestion. As requested, we have reorganized the **Discussion** section by introducing subheadings to improve its structure and readability. The revised discussion now includes the following subheadings: **Summary of Findings, Efficacy of Photobiomodulation and Electrical Stimulation, Comparison with Previous Studies, Implications for Clinical Practice, Characteristics of Interventions, Limitations and Potential Biases, and Future Research Directions**. These changes enhance the organization of the discussion and ensure that key points are clearly highlighted.

(Pages 14-20)

- **Address potential biases and study limitations.**

We thank the reviewer for this valuable suggestion. As requested, we have expanded the **Limitations** section in the **Discussion** to explicitly address potential biases, such as performance/detection bias, selection bias, and publication bias, that may have influenced the results of our study. Additionally, we have provided recommendations for future research to address these limitations and minimize potential biases. These changes enhance the transparency and rigor of our discussion.

(Pages 18-20)

Tables:

- **Look at APA for formatting.**

We thank the reviewer for pointing out the need for APA-compliant table formatting. We have revised all tables in the manuscript to align with APA style guidelines.

(Pages 26-40)

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (1)

REFEREE : Reviewer

8 Apr 2025

Dear AE

I am pleased to announce that the respected authors have made all the requested corrections and the article has been upgraded to an acceptable level of acceptance.

REFEREE : Associate Editor

18 Apr 2025

Dear Chief Editor

The manuscript is publishable provided that issues related to writing style, statistical clarity, and structural refinement are addressed. It should also be clearly stated that these findings are preliminary and should not yet guide clinical decisions on their own.

General Comments:

Consistency between sections:

Overall, the article is well-structured, but coherence between certain sections—particularly between the Results and Discussion—could be improved. It is recommended to add transitional sentences that logically link the sections.

Scientific language and writing style:

Some parts of the discussion are overly descriptive and not aligned with the concise tone expected in academic writing. Rewriting with a focus on precision and brevity is suggested.

Citations:

In some instances, mechanisms or findings are discussed without proper citations (e.g., physiological explanations). These should be properly referenced.

-Abstract

Clearly state that although the difference between the two treatments was not statistically significant, photobiomodulation had a larger effect size.

-Introduction

Include a paragraph addressing practical challenges (e.g., equipment availability,

cost, staff training) in applying these treatments in real-world clinical settings.

-Methods

Clarify why the random effects model was chosen, and what assumptions were considered.

Even though registration is not mandatory, it is encouraged for transparency in future work.

-Results

Summarize Table 1 and refer to full details in a supplementary appendix.

Clearly report exact p-values and confidence intervals for SMCC results.

-Discussion

Emphasize that these findings are preliminary and should be interpreted with caution.

Add a brief discussion about limitations of the meta-analysis (e.g., potential publication bias).

Fatemeh Ehsani : EIC

19 Apr 2025

Dear Authors

According to the associate editor's comments, your article needs to be revised minor. When revising your manuscript, please consider all issues mentioned in the associated editor's comments carefully: please outline every change made in response to their comments and submit the required files up to one month.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (2)

Reply to Reviewers

Ideally, the reviewing process can significantly improve the submitted manuscripts by allowing the authors to take into account the advice of reviewers. Author(s) must reply to all reviewers' comments in a separate Word file, point by point. A "**Reply to Reviewers**" document is submitted along with revised manuscript during submission of revised files, summarizing the changes that the authors made in response to the reviewers' comments. The responses to reviewers' comments specifies how the authors addressed each comment the reviewers made.

You can read the authors' responses to the reviewers' comments in the next page.

Dear Dr. Ehsani,

Thank you for your time and consideration in the review of our manuscript. We are pleased to attach here a revised version here. We would also like to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful feedback. Each critique has been addressed in this resubmission which is stronger and clearer as a result.

Kind Regards.

Associate Editor's Comments:

- The manuscript is publishable provided that issues related to writing style, statistical clarity, and structural refinement are addressed. It should also be clearly stated that these findings are preliminary and should not yet guide clinical decisions on their own.

Response: We thank the reviewer for their constructive feedback. The manuscript has been thoroughly edited for clarity, with improved flow and precision in language. A statement has been added to the Abstract and Conclusion to emphasize that these findings are preliminary and require further validation before clinical application.

- Consistency between sections:
Overall, the article is well-structured, but coherence between certain sections—particularly between the Results and Discussion—could be improved. It is recommended to add transitional sentences that logically link the sections.

Response: We sincerely appreciate the reviewer's insightful feedback regarding coherence between sections. As suggested, we have revised all parts and made some changes to improve their readability and logical flow.

- Scientific language and writing style:

Some parts of the discussion are overly descriptive and not aligned with the concise tone expected in academic writing. Rewriting with a focus on precision and brevity is suggested.

Response: We appreciate the reviewer's valuable suggestion. The Discussion has been revised to reduce redundancy, enhance clarity, and emphasize active voice. Descriptive sections were refined to concentrate on clinical implications, with clear connections to the results.

- Citations:

In some instances, mechanisms or findings are discussed without proper citations (e.g., physiological explanations). These should be properly referenced.

Response: We have thoroughly reviewed the manuscript and added citations to support all physiological explanations and mechanistic claims, particularly in sections discussing ES and LLLT (Introduction).

-Abstract

- Clearly states that although the difference between the two treatments was not statistically significant, photobiomodulation had a larger effect size.

Response: We have revised the Results and Conclusion in the Abstract to explicitly highlight photobiomodulation's larger effect size, while clarifying the lack of statistical significance (Abstract).

- -Introduction

Include a paragraph addressing practical challenges (e.g., equipment availability, cost, staff training) in applying these treatments in real-world clinical settings.

Response: We appreciate the reviewer's suggestion to address practical challenges earlier in the manuscript. We have now integrated these considerations into the Introduction by expanding on our original statement about ES's cost-effectiveness (Introduction).

- -Methods

Clarify why the random effects model was chosen, and what assumptions were considered.

Response: Most meta-analyses are based on sets of studies that are not identical in their methods and/or the characteristics of the included samples. Differences in the methods and sample characteristics may introduce variability ("heterogeneity") among the true effects. Solving this issue can be done by using random effect models. To consider the heterogeneity of the studies we used a random effect model. The random effects model in meta-analysis is used when the studies included in the analysis are assumed to have different underlying effect sizes, rather than a single common effect size. This model takes into account both within-study variance (sampling error) and between-study variance (heterogeneity). The random effects model is particularly useful when there is significant heterogeneity among the studies, as it provides a more realistic estimate of the overall effect size by acknowledging differences between studies. In the second step, the multilevel linear mixed-effect model was used which considered dataset variabilities and heterogeneities in the form of covariances and error terms.

References:

Hedges LV, Vevea JL. Fixed-and random-effects models in meta-analysis. Psychological methods. 1998 Dec;3(4):486.

Kanters S. Fixed-and random-effects models. Meta-research: Methods and protocols. 2022:41-65.

Riley RD, Higgins JP, Deeks JJ. Interpretation of random effects meta-analyses. *Bmj*. 2011 Feb 10;342.

- Even though registration is not mandatory, it is encouraged for transparency in future work.

Response: We thank the reviewer for highlighting the importance of registration for transparency. While registration is not mandatory for secondary analyses like ours, we fully agree with the reviewer's suggestion. We will ensure registration for similar studies moving forward.

-Results

- Summarize Table 1 and refer to full details in a supplementary appendix.

Response: We appreciate the reviewer's valuable suggestion. In response, we have revised Table 1 to present a concise summary of key study characteristics in the main text, while providing complete methodological details in Supplementary Table 1. We believe these modifications offer both clarity for readers and comprehensive documentation, while fully adhering to the journal's standards for systematic review reporting.

- Clearly report exact p-values and confidence intervals for SMCC results.

Response: Thank you for your feedback. We have revised the manuscript to explicitly report exact p-values and confidence intervals for all SMCC results (Results 4.3 section).

-Discussion

- Emphasize that these findings are preliminary and should be interpreted with caution.

Response: We have revised the Discussion to explicitly state the preliminary nature of our findings, added cautions about heterogeneity/sample size limitations, and tempered conclusions (Discussion 5.2 and 5.7 sections).

- Add a brief discussion about limitations of the meta-analysis (e.g., potential publication bias).

Response: We have expanded Section 5.6 to explicitly address meta-analysis limitations, including publication bias, protocol heterogeneity, and sample size constraints.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (2)

REFEREE : Associate Editor

10 May 2025

Dear EIC

The manuscript is fully ready for publication in terms of structure, statistical analysis, responses to reviewer comments, and adherence to scientific writing standards. Only minor suggestions have been offered to enhance the clarity of the conclusion, which do not require major revision.

- Clarifying the "Conclusion" section: The final paragraph could be made more concise and directly emphasize the lack of a statistically significant difference between the two treatments, along with a practical recommendation for choosing between them.

Fatemeh Ehsani : EIC

12 May 2025

Dear Authors

According to the reviewers and associate editor's comments, your article needs to be revised minor. When revising your manuscript, please consider all issues mentioned in the reviewers' comments carefully: please outline every change made in response to their comments and submit the required files up to one month.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (3)

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Dear Dr. Ehsani,

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Kind Regards.

Associate Editor's Comments:

The manuscript is fully ready for publication in terms of structure, statistical analysis, responses to reviewer comments, and adherence to scientific writing standards. Only minor suggestions have been offered to enhance the clarity of the conclusion, which do not require major revision.

- Clarifying the “Conclusion” section: The final paragraph could be made more concise and directly emphasize the lack of a statistically significant difference between the two treatments, along with a practical recommendation for choosing between them.

Response: We thank the editor for this valuable suggestion. We have revised the **Conclusion** to be more concise, explicitly state the nonsignificant statistical difference between photobiomodulation and electrical stimulation, and provide more explicit practical guidance for clinicians.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (3)

REFEREE : Associate Editor

25 May 2025

Dear Editor in Chief
This manuscript is OK now.

Fatemeh Ehsani : EIC

25 May 2025

Dear Authors
We are pleased to inform you that your article is accepted for publication in the MEJRHS. We hope to receive the other qualified articles from your group.
Best Regards