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Proposing a Framework for Development Diplomacy Policy: Antecedents and Consequences

Milad Molajan¹, Ali Asghar Pourezzat^{2*}, Seyed Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi³, Hormat Asghari⁴

1. PhD Student in Public Administration, Specializing in Comparative and Development Administration, Department of Management and Economics, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

2. Professor, Faculty of Public Administration and Organizational Sciences, College of Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

3. Professor, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

4. Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management and Economics, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*Correspondence: e-mail: pourezzat@ut.ac.ir

Abstract

Development diplomacy, as a strategic tool in international relations, plays a significant role in promoting international cooperation, reducing inequalities, and achieving sustainable development goals. This study was conducted with the aim of proposing a framework for development diplomacy policy. The research method is qualitative and based on a systematic literature review. Out of 210 articles examined, 23 were ultimately selected for final analysis after several stages of screening. This study offers a framework for development diplomacy policy that identifies the antecedents, strategies, outcomes, and intervening conditions in the development diplomacy process. It addresses various dimensions of development diplomacy, including environmental diplomacy, public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. The internal factors influencing development diplomacy include security, economic and soft power, political stability, corporate social responsibility, government-business relations, and leadership styles. International factors also play a crucial role in shaping development diplomacy. These include geopolitical policies, foreign direct investment, foreign policy interests, diplomatic relations, and international relations. As a key instrument of foreign policy, development diplomacy encompasses a wide range of activities, including environmental diplomacy, public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and development cooperation. Strategies of development diplomacy are generally categorized into five types: political, economic, social, environmental, and technological. Moreover, the outcomes of development diplomacy are extensive and may lead to improvements in global image, creation of development opportunities, structural development, economic growth, national competitiveness, capital enhancement, and knowledge transfer. In addition, internal and external intervening conditions influence the success of development diplomacy. Political and economic conditions, national reputation, governance, the global economy, and economic sanctions are among these conditions.

Keywords: diplomacy, development, policy, development diplomacy, systematic literature review

1. Introduction

The concept of development diplomacy has emerged as a central strategy for countries seeking to leverage foreign relations to achieve domestic development goals. Development diplomacy is regarded as a vital strategy for many countries aiming to accomplish foreign policy objectives and contribute to global development. However, the absence of a comprehensive and cohesive framework has limited the effectiveness of such efforts. This study aims to develop a framework for development



diplomacy policy by examining the antecedents and consequences of development diplomacy. Diplomatic relations between states serve as a crucial bridge connecting domestic institutions with host countries and facilitate favorable conditions for private investment across borders (Bertrand et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2018).

These relations, defined between two nations in alignment with their national interests in international affairs, are often rooted in shared ideological or historical backgrounds. Nevertheless, such relations are constantly influenced by political events and may shift toward cooperation (e.g., military alliances, economic aid) or conflict (e.g., military confrontations, economic sanctions) (Gulrajani et al., 2020; Wu, 2024). Today, assistance provided by wealthier nations to less developed countries is considered a key element in maintaining favorable bilateral relations. This assistance enhances the philanthropic and benevolent image of donor countries in the international arena and supports developmental activities in recipient nations (Zielińska, 2016).

Furthermore, evidence indicates that intangible resources—such as knowledge, achievements, and innovations in science, technology, environment, health, political systems, and social life—constitute the most valuable assets a donor country can offer. This notion aligns with the idea that transferring aid helps maintain close relationships between donor and recipient nations, enhances donor influence, and promotes public diplomacy (Regmi, 2019). While development has historically been viewed as a distinct but related domain to diplomacy, there is now increasing convergence between the developmental activities of donor countries and their broader strategic interests on the international stage (Gulrajani et al., 2020; Gulrajani & Swiss, 2017, 2019).

Diplomacy has been a critical activity throughout human history, consciously or unconsciously considered since the inception of human communication. In early societies, diplomatic thinking focused on maintaining various forms of friendly or even adversarial relationships (Bhattarai, 2023; Lohani, 2023; Sharp, 2009). Development diplomacy is part of the new diplomacy needed to strengthen global and local cooperation based on inclusivity, equity, and respect for human rights, enabling transformative collective actions in alignment with sustainable development solutions and governance aimed at inclusive and equitable growth (Krzymowski, 2021).

However, the concept of development diplomacy has only been featured in the diplomatic literature for a few decades, and research in this area remains scarce, both domestically and internationally. One of the domestic studies related to this research area was conducted by Asadi (2020), who proposed a paradigmatic model of development diplomacy for hosting international sports events in free trade zones (Asadi, 2020). Additionally, a few scattered studies have addressed this topic. For instance, Regmi (2019) examined China's road development diplomacy in Nepal, and Zielińska (2016) explored development diplomacy as a component of public diplomacy within the framework of foreign policy objectives (Zielińska, 2016).

Despite the importance of this issue, a comprehensive and systematic framework for policymaking in development diplomacy is lacking. Existing studies often focus on specific case studies or theoretical approaches, yet there is a need for a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of the subject. This study seeks to bridge this gap by developing a policy framework to guide the formulation and implementation of development diplomacy strategies. A well-defined policy framework for development diplomacy can yield significant outcomes. First, it can enhance the effectiveness of development diplomacy efforts by providing a clear roadmap for action. Second, it can improve coordination and coherence among different government units and stakeholders involved in development diplomacy. Third, it can bolster the credibility and legitimacy of a country's development diplomacy initiatives on the international stage. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to formulate a specific framework for development diplomacy—one that, based on a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, synthesizes and presents the best possible practices for development diplomacy.

2. Methods and Materials

This study was conducted using a systematic literature review approach, during which studies published between 2000 and 2024 were examined. A systematic review is a scientific research method that utilizes academic articles to explicitly answer research questions by minimizing errors and random bias through a structured research process. By reviewing theories proposed by previous scholars, it can be concluded that a systematic review consists of several distinct stages. In this research, the Cochrane method (2008) was adopted, which includes the following steps: (1) formulating the research question, (2) defining



inclusion criteria, (3) identifying studies, (4) selecting studies, (5) assessing the quality of studies, (6) extracting data, and (7) analyzing and presenting the findings.

3. Findings and Results

During the systematic review process, various stages were completed to identify the components of development diplomacy as well as its antecedents and consequences. The stages are outlined as follows:

Stage One – Formulating the Research Question:

Formulating the research question is the foundation and core of a systematic review. In line with the main goal of this study, which is to propose a policy framework for development diplomacy, the central question of the systematic review was: *What dimensions and components have previous studies identified for development diplomacy and its antecedents and consequences?*

Stage Two – Defining Inclusion Criteria:

One of the most critical aspects to determine is the inclusion criteria for the systematic review, which are defined based on the subject and type of studies under review. The sources to be examined were limited to articles relevant to development diplomacy, specifically including only English and Persian language articles that were likely to address the research question. The journals selected in this study were those indexed in reputable national and international databases. For foreign articles, only those published in journals indexed in Scopus and ISI with an impact factor above 0.5 were used. For Persian articles, only those published in journals with a scientific-research ranking were considered.

Stage Three – Identifying Studies:

After defining the inclusion criteria, the next step involved identifying and locating relevant studies within the available literature that aligned with the set criteria. At this stage, the researcher focused their search on articles published in various journals, selecting appropriate keywords. The Persian keywords searched in local databases were: "دیپلماسی توسعه" (development diplomacy), "دیپلماسی + توسعه" (diplomacy + development), and "خط مشی دیپلماسی توسعه" (development diplomacy policy). The English keywords searched in international databases were: "Development diplomacy," "Development + diplomacy," and "Development diplomacy policy."

The domestic databases searched included: Noormags, SID (Scientific Information Database), the Comprehensive Portal of Humanities, and Magiran. The international databases included: ScienceDirect, Springer, Wiley, SAGE, Emerald, and Taylor & Francis. After performing the keyword searches and retrieving all relevant articles from these databases, a total of 189 English-language articles and 21 Persian-language articles were selected.

Stage Four – Selecting Studies:

In this stage, the final studies were selected using a multi-step process based on the PRISMA framework. First, the studies were reviewed, and duplicates were removed. Second, the titles of the remaining studies were examined, and unrelated studies were excluded. Third, the abstracts of the remaining studies were assessed, and further unrelated studies were excluded. Finally, the full texts of the remaining articles were reviewed, and those not addressing the research question and objectives of this study were eliminated. Diagram 1 presents the number of articles excluded at each stage.

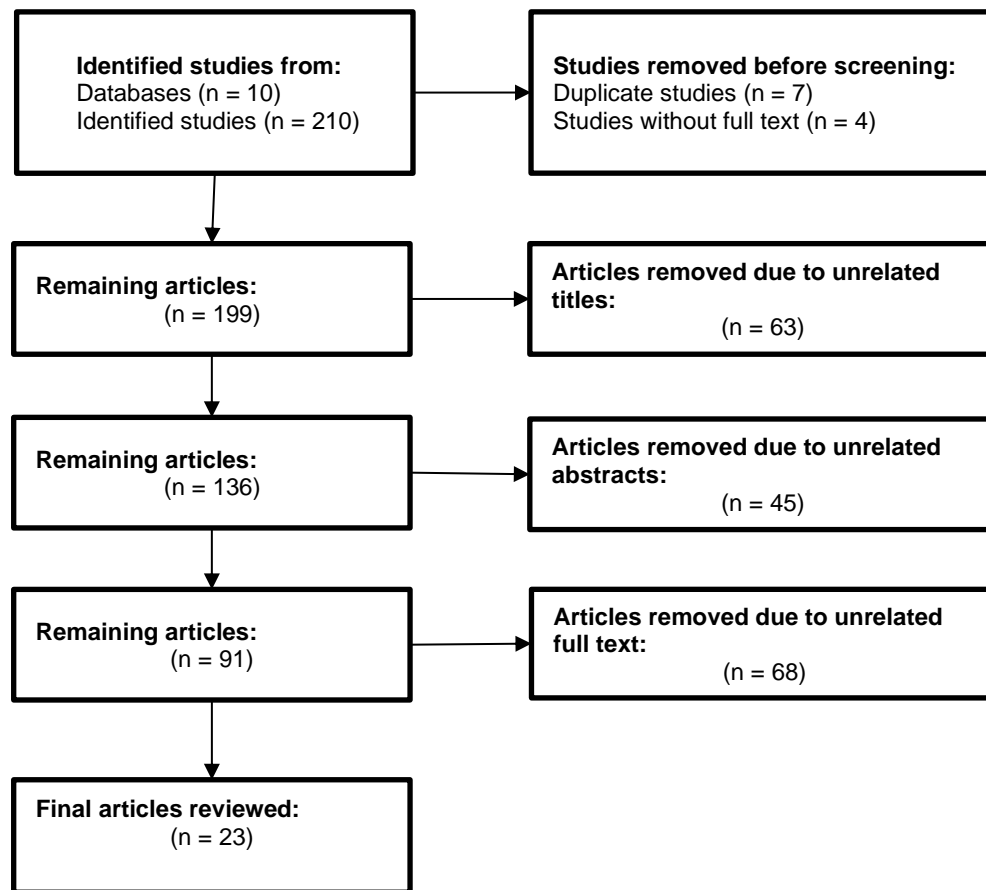


Figure 1. Number of Articles Removed and Selected at Each Stage

Stage Five – Quality Assessment of the Studies:

To evaluate the methodological quality of the studies, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was employed. For each article, ten scoring criteria were applied, and each article was assessed in terms of quality. Based on the results of the quality assessment and the scoring of the selected studies, 23 articles received scores above 25 and were included in the final analysis. The remaining articles either did not achieve the required score or failed to meet the inclusion criteria and were thus excluded.

Stage Six: Data Extraction

In this stage, a thorough examination of the selected articles was conducted to extract relevant data. The primary focus remained on addressing the central question of the systematic review. Specifically, the dimensions and components of development diplomacy, along with its antecedents and consequences, were identified and extracted from the literature. An example of the concept extraction process from the content of one article is presented in the accompanying table. The results obtained from this stage are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Main Themes, Categories, and Subcategories in the Development Diplomacy Policy Framework

Main Theme	Category	Subcategory
Antecedents	Internal Antecedents	National security, Economic power, Soft power, Political stability, Corporate social responsibility, Government-business relations, Leadership styles, Public and private stakeholders, Development context
	External Antecedents	Geopolitical policies, Foreign direct investment (FDI), Foreign policy interests, Diplomatic relations, International relations
Intervening Conditions	Internal & External Conditions	Political conditions, Economic conditions, National reputation, Governance, Global economy, Economic sanctions
Development Diplomacy	Types of Diplomacy	Environmental diplomacy, Public diplomacy, Economic diplomacy, Bilateral diplomacy, Multilateral diplomacy
Policy Strategies	Strategic Dimensions	Political strategy, Economic strategy, Social strategy, Environmental strategy, Technological strategy
Consequences	Outcomes of Development Diplomacy	Improved global image, Creation of development opportunities, Structural development, Economic growth, National competitiveness, Capital formation, Knowledge transfer

In the final stage, the findings from the previous phases were analyzed and the results were presented. Diagram 2 illustrates the development diplomacy policy framework based on the analyzed literature.

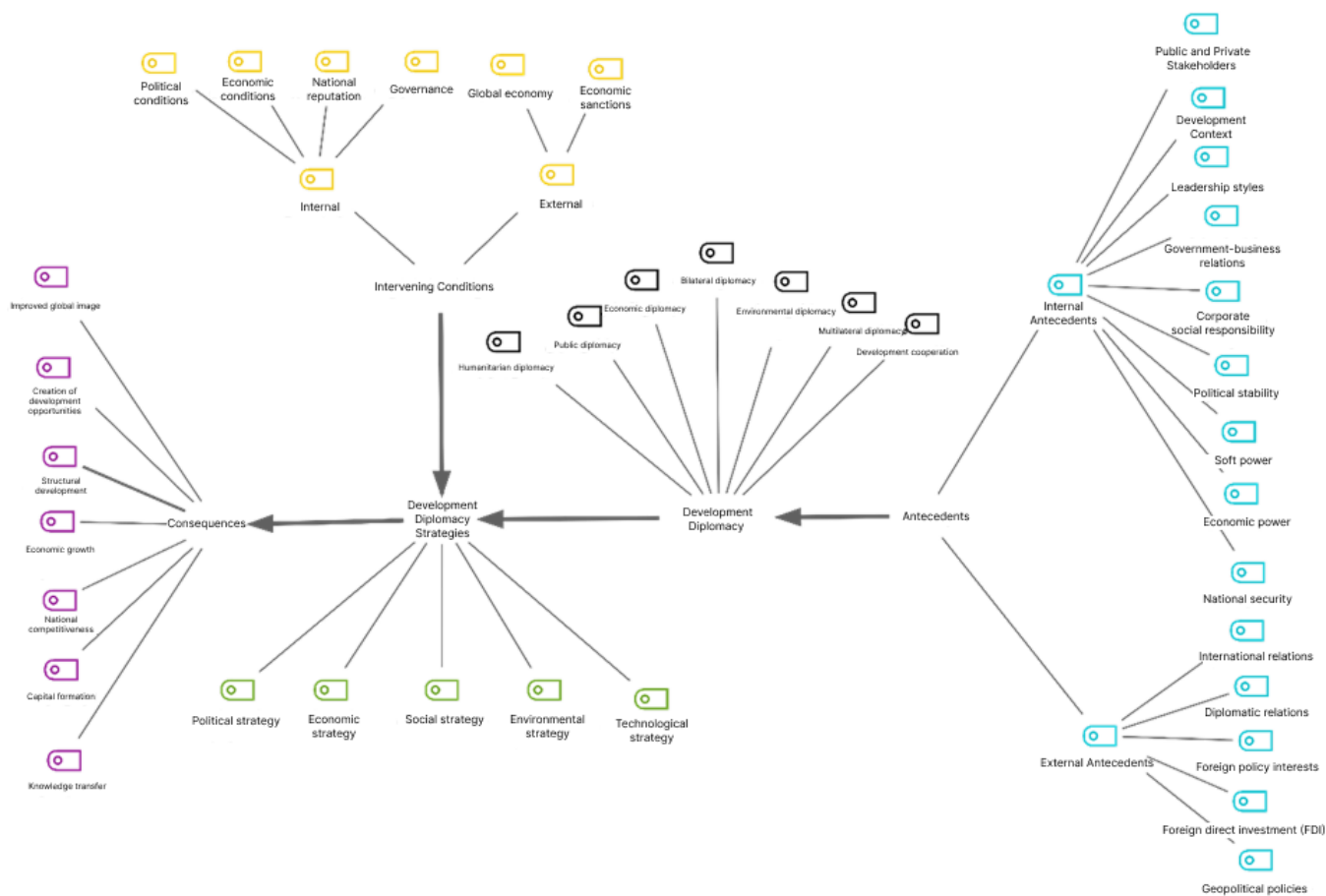


Figure 2. Development Diplomacy Policy Framework

In qualitative analysis, the inter-coder agreement coefficient—commonly referred to as the Kappa coefficient—is primarily used to assess the validity of the proposed model. If the value of this coefficient exceeds 0.60, the model is considered to possess acceptable validity. Therefore, given that the Kappa coefficient in this study was calculated as 0.72, the extracted model of the research demonstrates appropriate validity.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The proposed policy framework for development diplomacy offers a comprehensive approach to utilizing diplomatic tools to promote sustainable development. By systematically examining internal and external factors, this framework highlights the complex interplay between domestic and international influences on development outcomes. The emphasis on various diplomatic tools—including environmental, public, and economic diplomacy—underscores the multifaceted nature of development diplomacy and the necessity of context-specific strategies. The significance of this framework lies in its ability to provide a structured approach to policymaking for designing and implementing effective development diplomacy strategies.

The findings of this study significantly contribute to the evolving field of development diplomacy by offering a comprehensive framework to understand the complex interaction of internal and international factors. By identifying key factors, strategies, and outcomes, this framework presents a roadmap for countries seeking to enhance global influence and engage in international development. Additionally, the framework highlights the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach—including the state, private sector, and civil society actors—in the development process. This study also presents a clear and coherent conceptual framework that distinguishes development diplomacy from other forms of foreign policy. Furthermore, the present research provides practical insights for policymakers, guiding them on how to design and implement effective

development diplomacy strategies. As global interconnectivity and the complexity of international relations increase, the traditional boundaries between domestic and foreign policy are becoming increasingly blurred. Development diplomacy is no longer confined to bilateral or multilateral relations but is increasingly shaped by global trends such as climate change, globalization, and technological advances.

The proposed framework identifies internal and international factors as antecedents of development diplomacy. Consistent with previous studies, the results of this research emphasize the importance of security and economic power as two key factors in the success of development diplomacy (Gill & Mitra, 2018; Gulrajani et al., 2020). However, this study differentiates and expands the dimensions of economic power and analyzes its role in international relations. While previous research has primarily focused on traditional aspects of soft power (Khanal, 2023; Wu, 2024), this study contributes to a broader understanding of the concept by identifying new components of soft power, such as corporate social responsibility and leadership styles.

The findings emphasize the importance of government–business relations in shaping development policies and highlight the growing role of the private sector in global economies. This research innovates in the field by introducing various types of leadership and analyzing their role in development diplomacy. In particular, the emphasis on policy-based and structural leadership is one of the significant contributions of this study in explaining the success or failure of development policies. The findings affirm the role of geopolitical policies in shaping international relations and development diplomacy, while also underscoring the complexity of these relationships and the mutual influence of various factors—an observation aligned with earlier studies (Bhattarai, 2023; Liao, 2022).

This study underscores the importance of foreign direct investment in achieving development goals by analyzing its role in technology transfer, job creation, and infrastructure development. It also highlights the role of diplomatic and international relations in facilitating development cooperation, emphasizing the importance of communication networks and mutual trust in achieving development goals.

This research introduces seven dimensions of development diplomacy: environmental diplomacy, public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, bilateral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, development cooperation, and humanitarian diplomacy. While previous studies have focused on only one or two aspects (Bhattarai, 2023; Gill & Mitra, 2018; Gulrajani et al., 2020; Wu, 2024), the current study presents a comprehensive picture of the diverse and complex strategies employed within the development diplomacy framework. These strategies—outlined in political, economic, social, environmental, and technological dimensions—reflect the multidimensional and challenging nature of development diplomacy.

Harmonizing foreign policy is identified as a key strategy, stressing the importance of coherence and integration in policymaking. Establishing sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships is another effective strategy in development diplomacy, emphasizing economic cooperation that can contribute to conflict resolution and enhanced international security. Economic strategies also play a central role in development diplomacy. Promoting trade and investment, public-private partnerships, and comprehensive actions aimed at achieving sustainable development goals are among the essential tools for driving economic growth and reducing poverty in developing countries.

Employing negotiation techniques based on mutual interests facilitates win–win agreements and enhances cooperation efficiency. Investment in human development and capacity building constitutes a crucial social strategy. Identifying levels of political and social organization helps design development programs tailored to each country's specific context. Sustainable development, as a holistic framework, is reflected across all dimensions of development diplomacy. Natural phenomena and environmental concerns are particularly significant challenges. Innovation and digital diplomacy, as two key strategies in the technological domain, play vital roles in sustainable development. Collecting scientific, economic, and political data also contributes to better decision-making and policy effectiveness.

Overall, the findings indicate that development diplomacy is a multidimensional and complex approach requiring international coordination and cooperation. Success in this area depends on attention to the cultural, social, and economic diversity of countries, as well as the alignment of strategies with changing international conditions.

The findings reveal that development diplomacy, as a powerful tool of foreign policy, can yield a wide range of positive outcomes. Among these, improving the global image is one of the most significant achievements. Through implementing development programs and enhancing international cooperation, countries can present a favorable image to the global



community and strengthen their relationships with other nations—an especially important benefit for countries seeking to increase their influence and position in the international system. Creating development opportunities is another key outcome of development diplomacy. By attracting foreign investment, transferring technology and knowledge, and expanding economic cooperation, this approach can promote economic growth and sustainable development in developing countries. Moreover, development diplomacy can help open new markets for the export of goods and services, thereby accelerating economic growth.

Page | 39 Structural development and economic growth are additional achievements of diplomacy, which—through investment in infrastructure, education, and health—can improve quality of life and reduce poverty. Strengthening government and private sector institutions can also lead to a more dynamic business environment and enhance national competitiveness. Capital formation and knowledge transfer are other critical dimensions of development diplomacy. By attracting financial aid and foreign investment, development diplomacy can support resource mobilization for development programs. Furthermore, by transferring knowledge and technology, this approach can enhance national capacity, foster innovation, and promote sustainable growth.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that development diplomacy is an effective tool for achieving various development goals and enhancing countries' standing in the international system. However, the success of development diplomacy depends on several factors, including the coherence of domestic and foreign policies, coordination among different governmental bodies, and the existence of a clear national development vision.

One of the strengths of this framework is its comprehensiveness, encompassing a wide range of factors and strategies. Nevertheless, its implementation may face challenges, especially in complex and evolving geopolitical environments. Furthermore, the relative importance of various factors and strategies varies depending on the conditions of different countries and regions.

It is recommended that future research focus on several key areas. First, empirical studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of different development diplomacy strategies across various contexts. Second, further research could explore the role of technology in facilitating development diplomacy—particularly in digital diplomacy and data-driven decision-making. Third, studies on the long-term effects of development diplomacy on sustainable development goals would yield valuable insights.

This approach can assist in the design of national development strategies, strengthen international cooperation, and facilitate the achievement of sustainable development goals. By identifying the core factors and challenges of development diplomacy, this research provides a valuable tool for policymakers and practitioners to develop effective strategies for achieving development objectives. Development diplomacy strategies should be tailored to each country's specific context, taking into account domestic factors, international trends, and resource availability. The role of leadership is particularly crucial, and national leaders must be committed to promoting development and partnering with other countries. Developing countries must implement internal reforms to create a supportive development environment, enhance governance, strengthen institutions, and promote economic growth. In addition, building strong partnerships with other nations and international organizations is vital for development diplomacy. Such cooperation can help mobilize resources, share knowledge, and address global challenges.

Like any study, this research also has limitations that should be acknowledged, along with suggestions for future studies. This research primarily focused on theoretical literature and existing frameworks, with limited attention to case-based and empirical studies. Therefore, to strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings, in-depth and comparative case studies across countries are recommended. To examine causal relationships between the various factors influencing development diplomacy, quantitative models—such as structural equation modeling or regression analysis—can be employed. Based on the findings of this study, future research should develop stronger criteria for assessing the effectiveness of development diplomacy initiatives and use reliable quantitative indicators to measure the success of development diplomacy efforts.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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