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Transcriptional changes of *AOS*, *AOC*, *OMT*, *NHX1*, and *L1S1* genes in roots of barley genotypes under salinity stress

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Abstract

Salinity is a big problem for agriculture and crop productivity worldwide. Barley is considered notably salt-tolerant and there is considerable genetic variation in barley in response to salinity. In the present study, the expression pattern of *AOS*, *AOC*, *OMT*, *L1S1*, and *NHX1* genes were investigated in the roots of three barley genotypes, Sahara3771, Clipper, and an advanced breeding line (A-line) 24 hours, 3 days, and 3 weeks after 100 and 200 mM NaCl treatments as well as control (no NaCl). Analysis of variance revealed significant salinity x genotype x salt exposure time interaction for all the studied genes, except *AOC*. The highest expression level of the *AOC* gene was noted under 200 mM NaCl in Clipper and the lowest expression level was recorded under 200 mM and 100 mM NaCl in A-line and Clipper, respectively. For the *AOS* gene, the highest expression level was recorded 3 weeks after 200 mM NaCl treatment. The maximum expression level of *NHX1* was measured in A-Line 24 hours after 100 mM NaCl treatment and the lowest in Sahara₃₇₇₁ 3 weeks after 200 mM NaCl treatment and the lowest was observed in A-Line under 200 and 100 mM NaCl. For the *LIS1* gene, the highest level of the transcripts was measured 3 weeks after 100 mM NaCl. For the *LIS1* gene, the highest level of the transcripts was measured 3 weeks after 100 mM NaCl treatment. *LIS1* gene showed the lowest expression level 24 hours after 200 mM NaCl treatment. *LIS1* gene showed the lowest expression level 24 hours after 200 mM NaCl treatment. *LIS1* gene showed the lowest expression level 24 hours after 200 mM NaCl in Sahara₃₇₇₁.

Keywords: Gene expression; Hordeum vulgare; Real-Time RT-PCR; Salt stress

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Introduction

Among cereals, barley (Hordeum vulgare L.) ranks as the fourth most important cereal in production quantity crop and cultivation area. Barley is a highly resilient crop, adaptable to various environmental conditions and the most salttolerated crop along with oat. Therefore, it is cultivated in a wide land area of the world. (Shahid and Jaradat 2013). Also, it is an ideal model crop for studying the mechanism and inheritance of salinity tolerance in cereals. Investigating the physiological and molecular pathways involved in barley's response to salinity, could provide global insight into the characteristics of plants' responses to salinity and helps to improve plants' salinity tolerance by manipulating the key genes (Xu *et al.* 2012). Some barley genotypes can thrive in saline conditions using various approaches. The Plant Genetic Resource Laboratory of ICBA studies on Omani Batini barley landraces showed high levels of within and among sub-populations diversity for salt tolerance, at different growth stages (Shahid and Jaradat 2013).

Ligaba *et al.* (2011) studied the expression of five tonoplast intrinsic protein isoforms (MIPs) coding genes in five-day-old barley seedlings. The result revealed that 24 hours of treatment with 100 mM NaCl significantly upregulated the transcripts level of *HvTIP1;2* and *HvPIP2;1* genes but suppressed the expression of *HvNIP2;1* gene by eight-folds in roots. They stated that the enhanced accumulation of *HvTIP1;2* and *HvPIP2;1* gene transcript may suggest their role in salt-stress tolerance.

Plant response to salt stress is modulated by regulation of various genes expression in different pathways. Jasmonates have diverse functions such as initiation of stress responses and growth and development regulation. Allene oxide synthase (*AOS*) and allene oxide cyclase (*AOC*) genes participate in the Jasmonate biosynthesis from polyunsaturated fatty acids. *AOS* and *AOC* convert fatty acid hydroperoxides to 12oxophytodienoic acid (OPDA) and dinor-OPDA, respectively. Finally, jasmonates' characteristic cyclopentanone ring is established by OPDA reductase. Jasmonic acid has been known as the bioactive hormone (Schaller and Stintzi 2009).

The main part of salinity stress's destructive effects is the Na⁺ toxicity. Endosomal transporters of Na⁺, encoded by the NHX gene family, play important roles in vacuolar accumulation and K⁺ homeostasis (Pardo *et al.* 2006). By expressing Na⁺/H⁺ antiporter (*NHX*), plants release sodium out of cells or store that in vacuoles (Barkla and Blumwald 1991). Methyltransferases (MTs) create S-adenosyl-L-homocysteine (AdoHcy) by transferring the methyl group from S-Adenosyl-Lmethionine (AdoMet) to acceptor molecules (Ibrahim and Muzac 2000) and the acceptor molecule for O-methyltransferase (OMT) is an oxygen atom. Oxygen atom methylation of the secondary metabolites has an important role in plant's resistance to disease and abiotic stress tolerance (Lam et al. 2007). Pheophorbide a oxygenase (PaO), a nonheme iron monooxygenase, is a key control point in the chlorophyll degradation regulation. The role of PaO in cell death suppression has been demonstrated in some plants. The lethal leaf-spot 1 (LlS1) gene is a PaO homologue in wheat and studies showed that wounding treatment and infection by Puccinia striiformis induced the cell death suppressor protein, *Lls1*, in the wheat leaves (Tang et al. 2013).

This study aimed to assess the expression pattern of *AOC*, *AOS*, *NHX1*, *OMT*, and *LIS1* genes in three barley genotypes with differential responses to salt stress under different exposure times to NaCl treatments.

Materials and Methods

Plant material, cultivation, and experimental condition

The plant materials included three barley genotypes, Clipper, Sahara3771, and Advanced breeding line (A-line), with differential responses to salinity. Clipper is a salt-susceptible commercial Australian cultivar, Sahara3771 is a salt-tolerant landrace from North Africa, and Aline is a salt-tolerant line obtained from a cross between Sahra and Kavir. The seeds of Clipper and Sahara3771 were kindly provided by the University of Western Australia and A-line by the Seed and Plant Improvement Institute, Karaj, Iran.

Uniformly sized seeds from each genotype were sterilized with sodium hypochlorite and then germinated in Petri dishes containing one layer of wet filter paper. After seven days, uniformly germinated seedlings were transferred to a hydroponic medium containing a modified Hoagland nutrient solution in the greenhouse under controlled conditions [16/8 h photoperiod, $25/23\pm1^{\circ}Cday\night,35 \ \mu molm^{-2}s^{-1}$

photosynthetic photon flux density (PPFD), and 60% relative humidity]. After establishment, the seedlings were exposed to 100 and 200 mM NaCl and root samples were harvested 24 hours, 3 days, and 3 weeks after the salt treatments. The control treatment had no NaCl. The experimental design was split plot-factorial based on the completely randomized. RNA was extracted from root samples using RNX-Plus kit (CINNAGEN, Iran) according to the manufacturer's instruction. The extracted RNA samples were treated with DNase (Fermentas, USA). The quantity and quality of RNA were checked using a spectrophotometer and (PicoDrop, UK) 1.2% agarose gel electrophoresis. The cDNA was synthesized using Revert Aid first-strand cDNA synthesis kit (Thermo Scientific, America).

The expression pattern of allene oxide synthase (*AOS*), allene oxide cyclase (*AOC*), O-methyltransferase (*OMT*), Na⁺/H⁺ antiporter (*NHX*), and lethal leaf-spot 1 (*LlS1*) genes under slat treatments and control conditions was analyzed using gene-specific primer pairs (Table 1) with real-time PCR. The α -tubulin gene was

used as a housekeeping gene to normalize the transcript of the studied genes. Then, the data were quantified by the comparative Ct method (2⁻ $\Delta\Delta Ct$ method) based on the Ct values (Livak and Schmittgen 2001). The PCR reaction was performed in the volume of 10 µl consisting of 3.5 µl ddH2O, 1 µl cDNA, 0.7+0.7 µl forward and reverse primers (5ng/µl), and 4 µl SYBR Green premix Ex TaqTMII PCR master mixture (TAKARA, Japan). The amplification reactions were performed on the C1000[™] Thermal Cycler system (Bio-Rad) with an initial denaturation at 94 °C for 5 minutes, 40 cycles of 94 °C for 45 seconds, primer specific annealing temperature for 45 seconds (Table 1), and 72 °C for 45 seconds, and final extension at 72 °C for 5 minutes.

Data analysis

The PROC GLM procedure of the SAS 9.2 software (SAS Institute Inc., NC, USA) was used to do the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the morphological and gene expression data, and then Duncan's multiple range test was performed to compare the means. The normality of residuals was tested before ANOVA by the UNIVARIATE procedure of the SAS software.

Results

Based on ANOVA, genotype, salt stress, and salt exposure time significantly affected the expression level of all studied genes. The two-way and three-way interactions of salt, salt exposure time, and genotype were also significant for all genes except the three-way interaction for the *AOC* gene (Table 2).

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Table 1. The sequences and annealing temperature of the gene-specific primers used for amplification of *PEAMT*, *OMT*, *BFRUCT3*, *NHX1*, and α -tubulin2 genes

Gene	Forward primers (5'-3')	Reverse primers (5´-3´)	AT (°C)
AOC	GCAACACGGGAGATTCATTCA	ACAGCATGTACTTCGGCGACTA	68
AOS	TCATACATAGCCGGTGCAGGTTT	CGACATGAACATCGAGAGCCA	65
OMT	TCCCTCGTCCCACTATCATACC	AACCTTTCCCCCCATTTCG	60
NHX	TACGGTTTTCTGCCTCTGTCACA	ACAA ATCTGGTCATACTGCCG	68
LlS1	GCCAGAAGCATTTCGTGTTT	TGGTTTTCAACCCGACTTTT	55

Table 2. Analysis of variance for the genes expression in Sahara₃₇₇₁, Clipper, and A-Line barley genotypes, 24 hours, 3 days, and 3 weeks after exposure to 100 and 200 mM NaCl treatment as well as the control (no NaCl)

SOV	df	Mean Squares				
		AOS	AOC	OMT	NHX1	L1S1
Replication	1	0.047	0.240	0.007*	0.005	0.004
Salinity	2	1.131**	1.907*	0.748**	2.963**	4.209**
Error 1	2	0.004	0.102	0.000	0.010	0.003
Genotype	2	7.549**	6.780**	0.380**	0.581**	1.759**
Salinity x Genotype	4	3.908**	4.800**	5.301**	2.741**	1.132**
Salinity exposure time	2	1.228**	20.180**	4.184**	1.280**	0.586**
Salinity x Salinity exposure time	4	4.505**	8.770**	1.483**	1.619**	1.008**
Genotype x Salinity exposure time	4	1.076**	7.630**	3.839**	0.717**	0.547**
Salinity x Genotype x Salinity exposure time	8	1.098**	1.060	1.689**	0.518**	0.245**
Error 2	24	0.050	1.009	0.006	0.012	0.069
CV (%)		2.30	10.10	0.73	1.09	2.64

***: significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 probability levels, respectively

AOC gene

The expression of the *AOC* gene was significantly affected by salinity treatments, genotypes, time courses, and their two-way interaction. In the roots of A-Line, salt stress decreased the transcription of *AOC* as compared with the control. Under 200 mM NaCl, the expression of this gene significantly decreased in the salt-tolerant A-Line as compared with 100 mM NaCl but increased in Sahara₃₇₇₁ as compared to the salt-susceptible cultivar Clipper (Figure 1a). Twenty-four hours after salt treatment, the *AOC* gene expression pattern was similar in Clipper and A-Line. Prolonging salt stress from 24 hours to 3 weeks resulted in the higher expression of the *AOC* gene in Sahara₃₇₇₁ as compared to the other

two genotypes (Figure 1b). On average of the genotypes, 24 hours and 3 weeks after 100 and 200 mM NaCl treatment, the AOC gene was highly down-regulated in all of the studied genotypes compared with the 3-days treatment. Under 200 mM NaCl treatment, the highest level of AOC transcript was recorded 3 days after salt treatment as compared to the control. A significant reduction was observed in the gene expression 24 hours after the 100 mM NaCl treatment compared to the control. Assessing the effect of 200 mM NaCl on the AOC gene expression as compared to 100 mM NaCl revealed significant down-regulation of the gene with prolonging of salt treatment from 24 hours and 3 days to 3 weeks (Figure 1c).



Figure 1. Changes in the *AOC* gene expression under 100-0, 200-0, and 200-100 mM NaCl treatment comparison; A) genotype x salinity interaction, B) genotype x salinity exposure time interaction, and C) salinity x salinity exposure time interaction; means with different letters are significantly different at the 0.05 level of probability.

AOS gene

The results revealed that the *AOS* gene was involved in the late response to salt stress such that 24 hours after salt treatment, there were no significant differences among the studied genotypes. The highest level of the *AOS* gene expression was observed in A-Line after 3 weeks of exposure to 200 mM NaCl as compared to 100 mM NaCl. Under 100 mM NaCl treatment, the salt-susceptible cultivar Clipper showed the maximum gene expression 3 days after salt treatment compared with the control. Under all salt treatments and exposure times to salinity, the level of *AOS* gene transcript was low in the salt-tolerant cultivar Sahara₃₇₇₁ (Figure 2).

NHX1 gene

The maximum level of *NHX1* gene transcript was recorded in the salt-tolerant A-Line, 24 hours after 100 mM NaCl treatment followed by Sahara₃₇₇₁ under 100 mM NaCl and Clipper under 200 mM NaCl as compared with the control. Prolonging salt stress to 3 days resulted in a significant downregulation of NHX1 gene in all three genotypes under 200 mM NaCl and Sahara₃₇₇₁ and Clipper under 100 mM NaCl as compared to the control. Three days after salt treatment with 200 mM, compared with 100 mM NaCl, the expression level of this gene in the salt-tolerant genotypes was significantly less than the salt-susceptible genotype Clipper and among the genotypes, A-Line showed the highest level of the NHX1 gene expression which was achieved under 100 mM NaCl as compared to the control. Long time exposure (3 weeks) to salt stress resulted in the down-regulation of the gene in Clipper under all salt treatments. In total, 3 weeks of exposure to 200 mM NaCl resulted in the down-regulation of the NHX1 gene in all genotypes as compared to 100 mM NaCl. However, the expression of the NHX1 gene in the salt-tolerant A-Line was upregulated under 100 mM NaCl at all three salt exposure times as compared to the control (Figure 3).

The highest level of OMT gene transcript was observed in Sahara₃₇₇₁, 3 days and 3 weeks after 100 mM NaCl treatment compared to the control and the lowest level was measured in A-Line, 24 hours after 100 and 200 mM NaCl treatments compared to the control (Figure 4). Short-time exposure (24 hours) to 200 mM NaCl treatment significantly reduced the expression level of the OMT gene in the salt-tolerant genotypes Sahara3771 and A-Line as compared with the salt-susceptible cultivar Clipper. However, 3 days of exposure to 200 mM NaCl resulted in a significant increase of the OMT transcript in the salt-tolerant genotypes over the salt-susceptible Clipper. Three days of exposure to 100 mM NaCl treatment also significantly elevated the level of OMT gene expression in Sahara3771 and A-line compared with Clipper. But, under 200 mM NaCl treatment at all three exposure times the level of the OMT gene transcript was significantly higher than that in the two salt-tolerant genotypes (Figure 4).

L1s1 gene

The salt-tolerant A-Line showed the highest level of *L1S1* gene expression 24 hours and 3 weeks after treatment with 100 mM NaCl compared to the control followed by Sahara₃₇₇₁. Under both conditions, the expression level of the *L1S1* gene was significantly reduced in the salt-susceptible Clipper compared with the two salt-tolerant genotypes. The increase in NaCl concentration from 100 to 200 mM resulted in a significant down-regulation of the L1S1 gene in all genotypes at three salt exposure times, although the level of reduction was not the same in the

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Figure 2. Genotype x salinity x salinity exposure time interaction for the changes in *AOS* gene expression under 100-0, 200-0, and 200-100 mM NaCl; means with different letters are significantly different at the 0.05 level of probability.



Figure 3. Genotype x salinity x salinity exposure time interaction for the changes *in NHX1* gene expression under 100-0, 200-0, and 200-100 mM NaCl; means with different letters are significantly different at the 0.05 level of probability.

studied genotypes. Similar results were also observed under the 200 mM NaCl treatment as compared with the control (Figure 5).

Discussion

Barley is one of the salt-tolerant crop plants and can maintain its growth under high water and soil salinity, however, there is a large variation in salt tolerance among genotypes and growth stages (Munns *et al.* 1988). It is well-known that barley is highly tolerant to salinity at the germination and sensitive at the seedling stage. Salinity tolerance at the seedling stage can determine the stability of the plant to maintain its productivity under saline conditions (Greenway 1965). In this study, the expression profile of some salt-induced genes were assessed in two salt-tolerant (Sahara3771 and A-Line) and one salt-susceptible (Clipper)



Figure 4. Genotype x salinity x salinity exposure time interaction for the changes in OMT gene expression under 100-0, 200-0, and 200-100 mM NaCl; means with different letters are significantly different at the 0.05 level of probability.



Figure 5. Genotype x salinity x salinity exposure time interaction for the changes in *L1S1* gene expression under 100-0, 200-0, and 200-100 mM NaCl; means with different letters are significantly different at the 0.05 level of probability.

genotypes under different salt treatments and time of exposure to salinity. The up-regulation and down-regulation of the *AOC* gene in the salttolerant Sahara₃₇₇₁ and salt-susceptible Clipper genotypes, respectively, showed the *AOC* involvement in the salt-stress tolerance in barley. In our study, the expression of the *AOC* gene increased with the increase of salt concentration and exposure time in Sahara₃₇₇₁. At all salt exposure times, the *AOC* gene expression increased compared to the control. Zhao *et al.* (2014) reported a significant increase in the expression of the *AOC* gene in the salt-tolerant wheat genotypes under salt stress and concluded that the continuous expression of the *AOC* gene in wheat and Arabidopsis improves salinity tolerance by increasing jasmonic acid level. Pedranzani *et al.* (2003) reported stable levels of the expression of lipoxygenase (*LOX*) and *AOS* genes coding two key enzymes in the jasmonic acid biosynthesis in

the salt-tolerant tomato genotypes.

Ionic stress is the result of excess Na⁺ accumulation in the plant. Na⁺ interferes with the K⁺ homeostasis, and since it participates in many metabolic processes, maintaining a balanced cytosolic Na+/K+ ratio is essential in the salinity tolerance (Assaha et al. 2017). Plants' NHX antiporters catalyze the exchange of Na⁺ and/or K⁺ for H⁺, have an important role in K1 homeostasis, and play a critical role in response to salt stress (Pardo et al. 2006). Several studies have demonstrated the role of the Na⁺/H⁺ antiporter genes overexpression in the salt- tolerance improvement. According to Fukuda et al. (2004), the *HvNHX1* gene expression increased up to two folds 24 hours after the 200 mM NaCl treatment. Ligaba and Katsuhara (2010) compared the expression of Na⁺/H⁺ antiporters including HvNHX1, HvNHX3, and HvNHX4 in roots of salttolerant and salt-susceptible genotypes of barley and reported their higher transcripts in the tolerant genotypes. In our study, under 100 mM NaCl treatment, the transcript level of the NHX1 gene in the salt-susceptible Clipper decreased with prolonging the salt-stress treatment but increased in the salt-tolerant A-Line compared to the control. But there were no significant changes in the expression pattern of the gene under the 200 mM NaCl treatment between salt-tolerant and salt-susceptible genotypes.

Methylation of the oxygen atom in the secondary metabolites by OMT plays an important role in stress tolerance (Lam *et al.* 2007). In this study, the expression level of the *OMT* gene decreased in the salt-tolerant A-Line 24 hours after the salt treatment but increased with

prolonging the salt treatment duration. In the salttolerant Sahara₃₇₇₁ cultivar, the expression of the *OMT* gene was also increased under the prolonged exposure to the 100 mM NaCl treatment but decreased under the 200 mM NaCl treatment. This indicates the role of the *OMT* gene in late response to salt stress. Walia *et al.* (2006) and Sugimoto *et al.* (2003) also reported an increase in the level of the *OMT* gene transcripts under salinity stress in barley.

The expression level of *Lls1* gene coding cell death suppressor protein in wheat and tobacco (Tang *et al.*, 2013) significantly increased in the salt-tolerant genotypes Sahara₃₇₇₁ and A-Line as compared with the salt-susceptible Clipper under the 100 mM NaCl treatment. But 24 hours after the 200 mM NaCl treatment, compared with 100 mM NaCl, *LlS1* expression was higher in A-Line as compared to two other genotypes. Temel and Gozukirmizi (2015) and Ozturk *et al.* (2002) also reported a significant increase in the *LlS1* transcripts in response to salinity.

Conclusion

In this study, the expression pattern of *AOC*, *AOS*, *NHX1*, *OMT*, and *LlS1*genes was analyzed in roots of three barley genotypes with differential responses to salinity after 24 hours, 3 days, and 3 weeks of the exposure to the 100 and 200 mM NaCl treatments. The expression pattern of all genes except *AOC* was significantly affected by salinity x genotype x exposure time to salinity interaction. The *AOC* gene expression in the salt-tolerant Sahara₃₇₇₁ cultivar increased by increasing the NaCl concentration. The expression level of the *AOS* gene was significantly increased under

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salinity stress at different salt exposure time points indicating the important role of this gene in salt tolerance. Under the 100 mM NaCl treatment, the level of the NHX1 transcript increased in the salt-tolerant Sahara₃₇₇₁ and A-Line genotypes and decreased in the salt-susceptible Clipper indicating the possible role of the AOS gene in differentiating the salt-tolerant and saltsusceptible genotypes. It is reported that the ability of salt-tolerant genotypes to sequester Na⁺ into sub-cellular compartments and/or maintain K⁺ homeostasis may be the cause of their better performance compared to salt-sensitive genotypes. In our study, the expression of the NHX1 gene decreased under the prolonged exposure to salt stress revealing the role of this gene in the early response to salt stress. The significant increase in the expression of *OMT* and *LlS1* genes in the salt-tolerant Sahara₃₇₇₁ cultivar under 100 mM NaCl, compared to 200 mM, showed their involvement in the tolerance to low-salt levels.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest with any organization concerning the subject of the manuscript.

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تغییرات رونویسی ژنهای OMT AOC AOS، NHX1 و L1S1 در ریشه ژنوتیپهای جو تحت تنش شوری

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شوری یک مشکل عمده برای کشاورزی و تولید محصول در سطح جهان است. جو به عنوان گیاهی با تحمل بالا به شوری، تنوع ژنتیکی قابل توجهی در پاسخ به شوری دارد. در مطالعه حاضر، الگوی بیان ژنهای AOC، AOS، MAC، و NAXI و LIS1 در ریشه سه ژنوتیپ جو، Sahara3771، Teper و لاین اصلاحی پیشرفته، ۲۴ ساعت، سه روز و سه هفته پس از اعمال شوری ۱۰۰ و ۲۰۰ میلیمولار NACl در مقایسه با کنترل مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. تجزیه واریانس نشان دهنده اثر متقابل سه جانبه شوری × ژنوتیپ × مدت زمان معنیدار برای کلیه ژنهای NACl در مقایسه با کنترل مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. تجزیه واریانس نشان دهنده اثر متقابل سه جانبه شوری × ژنوتیپ × مدت زمان معنیدار برای کلیه ژنهای مورد مطالعه غیر از AOC بود. بیشترین بیان ژن AOC معلی مولار ای مورد مطالعه غیر از AOC در شور بیشترین بیان ژن AOC معلی واریانس نشان دهنده اثر متقابل سه جانبه شوری × ژنوتیپ × مدت زمان معنیدار برای کلیه ژنهای مورد مطالعه غیر از AOC بود. بیشترین بیان ژن AOC معلی مولار ای مولار ای مولار ای مورد محالم و معز معنی دار برای کلیه ژنهای مورد مطالعه غیر از NaCl بود. بیشترین بیان ژن AOC معنی میزان بیان ژن، تحت تیمار ۲۰۰ و ۲۰۰ میلی مولار ای مولار معال مولار ای میلی مولار ای مول مولار مولار مشاهده شد. حدای ری از اعمال شوری ۲۰۰ میلی مولار ما مولار ای مولار مال مولار م

واژههای کلیدی: بیان ژن؛ تنش شوری؛ Hordeum vulgae؛ Hordeum کلیدی: بیان ژن؛ تنش شوری؛