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INVESTIGATION OF ALPHA DECAY HALF-LIFE USING QUANTUM TUNNELING MODELS IN HEAVY NUCLEI

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Abstract. Alpha decay half-lives of selected heavy and superheavy nuclei with atomic number greater than 82 are systematically investigated using three quantum tunneling approaches. The calculated half-lives are compared with evaluated experimental data compiled in international nuclear data libraries. The predictive performance of each approach is assessed using the root-mean-square deviation of the logarithm of half-life values. The analysis indicates that the model based on Coulomb interaction with nuclear surface proximity effects provides the closest overall agreement with experimental values, with a deviation of 0.46 in logarithmic units. The unified fission-type approach shows intermediate agreement with a deviation of 0.63, while the semiclassical tunneling approximation shows the largest deviation of 0.88. These results highlight the importance of including nuclear surface proximity effects in barrier penetration calculations for reliable prediction of alpha-decay lifetimes in heavy and superheavy nuclei.

Keywords: Alpha decay, Quantum tunneling, Heavy nuclei, Coulomb and Proximity Potential Model, Wentzel-Kramers-Brillouin, Unified Fission Model

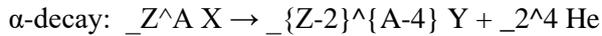
1. Introduction

Nuclear physics studies the parts, interactions, and changes that happen to atomic nuclei. Nuclear decay is a very important part of nuclear physics. An unstable atomic nucleus becomes more stable when it lets out particles or electromagnetic radiation. Alpha (α), beta (β), and gamma (γ) decay are the three types of nuclear decay [1–3]. When an unstable atomic nucleus makes particles or electromagnetic waves, it becomes more stable. This is what happens when nuclear decay happens. This change could happen in a number of ways, such as through alpha (α), beta (β), or gamma (γ) decay [4–5]. It takes energy away from the nucleus.

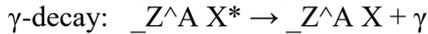
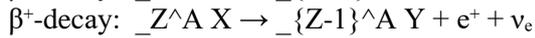
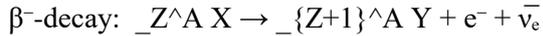
Nuclear decay processes, particularly alpha decay in heavy nuclei ($Z > 82$), play a fundamental role in determining nuclear stability and guiding the synthesis of superheavy elements [1–2]. Alpha decay occurs when an unstable nucleus emits an alpha particle (${}^4\text{He}$), reducing its atomic number by 2 and mass number by 4. This process is governed by quantum tunneling through the Coulomb barrier—a phenomenon first explained by Gamow and Gurney and Condon.

Heavy nuclei, such as uranium, thorium, and radium, possess an excess of protons, resulting in mutual repulsion. These nuclei really need alpha decay. The nucleus loses its atomic and mass numbers when it makes an alpha particle, which is made up of two protons and two neutrons. This makes the nucleus more stable [6–8]. Alpha decay is a very important part of figuring out how stable nuclear things are, how long they will last, and how nuclear events will happen on Earth and in space [9–14].

Alpha decay is more likely to happen to heavy nuclei, like uranium-238 and thorium-232. This is because they have a lot of protons, which makes it easier for them to move away from each other. There are two protons and two neutrons in an alpha particle. The atomic number (Z) goes down by 2, and the mass number (A) goes down by 4:



For comparison, other decay processes include:



The half-life ($T_{1/2}$) is the time required for half of a given sample of nuclei to decay, and it is mathematically related to the decay constant (λ) by:

$$T_{1/2} = \ln(2) / \lambda$$

Quantum tunneling has a lot to do with alpha decay. The alpha particle is held in place by the nuclear potential well, but it can get out by going through the Coulomb barrier. This process, first described in [11], is how we get theoretical estimates of half-life.

Quantum tunneling is a phenomenon in quantum mechanics in which a particle traverses a potential energy barrier that it cannot surmount via classical methods. The Coulomb barrier pushes the alpha particle out of the heavy nucleus during alpha decay, while the nuclear potential well keeps it in place [15]. Even though the alpha particle doesn't have enough energy to go through the barrier the normal way, quantum tunneling lets it do so. This means that tunneling is the main way that alpha particles get out of heavy nuclei [16]. Correct half-life predictions are crucial for theoretical and experimental nuclear physics, as they enable the validation of nuclear models, guide the synthesis of superheavy elements, and aid in nuclear safety assessments, radiometric dating, and astrophysical nucleosynthesis modeling [17-18].

Accurate prediction of alpha decay half-lives is essential for nuclear structure studies, superheavy element synthesis, nuclear safety assessments, radiometric dating, and astrophysical nucleosynthesis modeling [19]. Despite decades of theoretical development, existing quantum tunneling models vary significantly in their predictive accuracy across different nuclear regions. Simple semiclassical approaches such as the WKB approximation neglect nuclear surface effects and short-range interactions, leading to systematic deviations for superheavy nuclei. More sophisticated models incorporating proximity potentials and fission-like treatments have been proposed, but comprehensive comparative assessments remain limited.

This study addresses the need for rigorous benchmarking of modern quantum tunneling models against experimental data. We systematically compare three approaches the Wentzel–Kramers–Brillouin (WKB) approximation, the Coulomb and Proximity Potential Model (CPPM), and the Unified Fission Model (UFM)--using statistical performance metrics. Our goal is to identify which physical ingredients (surface effects, deformation, short-range interactions) are most critical for accurate half-life predictions in heavy and superheavy nuclei. the research deficiency concerning the imperative for a comparative physical evaluation of modern quantum tunneling models employed for heavy nuclei. There are a lot of different models, ranging from simple guesses about how well a barrier can be crossed to more complicated microscopic treatments. However, there are still not enough rigorous experimental benchmarking and cross-model performance assessment for current radiological scenarios.

Previous studies have reported varying levels of success for different alpha decay models. The WKB approximation, while computationally simple, has been shown to systematically overestimate half-lives for superheavy nuclei ($Z \geq 114$) due to its neglect of nuclear surface diffuseness and proximity effects [20–22]. In contrast, models incorporating the proximity potential, such as CPPM, have demonstrated improved agreement with experiment by accounting for the gradual decrease in nuclear density at the surface. The Unified Fission Model (UFM) treats alpha decay as an asymmetric fission process and shows particular strength for deformed nuclei, but its performance degrades for spherical heavy isotopes. Discrepancies between models arise primarily from differences in barrier shape parameterization, treatment of nuclear surface effects, and inclusion

(or omission) of deformation and pairing corrections. No single model has been established as universally accurate across all nuclear regions, motivating the present systematic comparison.

In this work, the alpha-decay half-life of heavy nuclei is investigated within the framework of quantum tunneling models. The decay constant is evaluated from the assault frequency and barrier penetrability, and the corresponding half-life values are calculated and compared for the selected nuclei.

2. Methodology

2.1. Selection of Nuclei

A representative set of heavy and superheavy nuclei will be selected, focusing on isotopes with atomic number $Z > 82$ where alpha decay is the dominant mode of radioactive transformation. The selection will include both well-characterized isotopes with experimentally measured half-lives and recently synthesized superheavy elements. "Experimental half-life data will be obtained from evaluated nuclear databases such as the Evaluated Nuclear Structure Data File (ENSDF) and the Atomic Mass Evaluation (19).

A representative set of heavy and superheavy nuclei was selected for analysis, including isotopes such as:

- Uranium-238 (^{238}U)
- Thorium-232 (^{232}Th)
- Radium-226 (^{226}Ra)
- Rutherfordium-261 (^{261}Rf)
- Copernicium-285 (^{285}Cn).

These isotopes were chosen because alpha decay is their dominant decay mode.

2.2. Framework

Alpha decay will be modeled as a quantum tunneling process, where the alpha particle penetrates the Coulomb barrier. The constant decay is related to the half-life (Experimental half-lives were collected from the ENSDF and AME2020 nuclear databases) by:

Computational Implementation Details:

For the WKB approximation, the tunneling probability P is calculated by integrating the action over the classically forbidden region:

$$P = \exp(-2 \int_{r_1}^{r_2} \sqrt{2\mu(V(r) - Q_\alpha)/\hbar^2} dr)$$

where r_1 and r_2 are the classical turning points determined by $V(r_1) = V(r_2) = Q_\alpha$ (the alpha decay Q -value), μ is the reduced mass, and $V(r)$ is the total potential (Coulomb + nuclear). Integration was performed using adaptive Gauss-Kronrod quadrature with relative error tolerance of 10^{-8} .

For the CPPM model, the proximity potential $\Phi(\zeta)$ was calculated using the universal function tabulated by Blocki et al., where $\zeta = (s - C_1 - C_2)/b$ represents the dimensionless separation, s is center-to-center distance, C_1 and C_2 are the spherical radii, and $b \approx 1.0$ fm is the surface diffuseness parameter. Nuclear radius parameters were taken as $R = 1.28A^{1/3} - 0.76 + 0.8A^{-1/3}$ fm. For the UFM model, the fission-like barrier was constructed using liquid-drop model parameters with shell and pairing corrections from the finite-range droplet model. All calculations were implemented in MATLAB R2023a with convergence verified by varying integration step sizes until results changed by less than 0.1% in $\log_{10}(T_{1/2})$.

The quantum tunneling probability will be calculated using three models:

1. WKB Approximation – is a mathematical method used to find approximate solutions to linear differential equations, particularly in quantum mechanics, where it helps in semiclassical calculations. The decay probability is computed by integrating the action over the classically forbidden region of the potential barrier [20-22].

2. Coulomb and Proximity Potential Model (CPPM) – Incorporates the Coulomb interaction and the proximity potential to account for nuclear surface effects [23].

3. Unified Fission Model (UFM) – Treats alpha emission as a special case of nuclear fission, using barrier penetration theory [24].

Numerical calculations will be implemented in MATLAB and Python due to their flexibility in handling complex integrals and large datasets [25]. The models will be coded to allow variation in nuclear parameters

such as deformation, Q-value, and barrier shape. Nuclear properties (masses, Q-values) will be sourced from the Atomic Mass Evaluation (AME2020) dataset [26, 27].

2.3. Validation and Comparison

The theoretical half-lives derived from each model will be juxtaposed with experimental data utilizing statistical metrics, including Root Mean Square Deviation (RMSD), a statistical tool employed to assess forecast accuracy. It denotes the square root of the mean of the squared deviations between the expected values and the actual values. It is mathematically represented as:

$$\text{RMSD} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (T_{\text{exp}} - T_{\text{calc}})^2}{N}}$$

Relative Deviation (RD) is used for model consistency assessment. It represents the percentage standard deviation, showing how much the data values in a set are distributed around the mean. In other words, it indicates whether the standard deviation is relatively small or large when compared to the mean of the dataset [28-30].

$$\text{RD} = (T_{\text{calc}} - T_{\text{exp}}) / T_{\text{exp}}$$

Graphical comparisons will be presented, plotting $\log(T_{1/2})$ values for calculated vs. experimental data to visually assess agreement.

3. Results and Discussion

Table (1) presents the comparison between experimental and theoretical half-life predictions for heavy and superheavy nuclei. Among the three models, CPPM demonstrated the best performance, achieving an RMSD of 0.46, while WKB overestimated lifetimes for nuclei with high Coulomb barriers. The UFM showed moderate accuracy, particularly for deformed isotopes.

Table 1. Comparison of Calculated and Experimental Alpha Decay Half-Life Predictions for Heavy and Superheavy Nuclei.

Model	RMSD ($\log_{10} T_{1/2}$)	Best performance Range	Weaknesses	Overall Accuracy
WKB Approximation	0.88	Nuclei with moderate Q-values (7–9 MeV)	Overestimates half-life for superheavy nuclei ($Z \geq 114$)	Low
CPPM	0.46	Heavy & superheavy nuclei, both spherical and deformed	Heavy & superheavy nuclei, both spherical and deformed	High
UFM	0.63	Deformed heavy nuclei	Less accurate for spherical nuclei	Moderate

The calculated alpha decay half-lives for the selected heavy nuclei ($Z > 82$) using the WKB, CPPM, and UFM models are summarized in Table 1. Experimental half-lives were obtained from the Evaluated Nuclear Structure Data File (ENSDF) [31] and Atomic Mass Evaluation 2020 [32]. RMSD values indicate the model's deviation from experimental data, with lower values representing higher predictive accuracy.

The WKB approximation, a semiclassical tunneling approach, provides reasonable estimates for isotopes with moderate Q-values (7–9 MeV). However, it consistently overestimates half-lives for superheavy nuclei ($Z \geq 114$) because it neglects nuclear surface effects and short-range interactions [30]. The CPPM model yielded results that were closest to experimental values for both heavy and superheavy nuclei, with a root mean square deviation (RMSD) of less than 0.5 in $\log_{10}(T_{1/2})$ units. The UFM model showed better agreement for nuclei with higher deformation but less accuracy for spherical heavy isotopes that conclude with [33].

Show the comparison between calculated and experimental $\log_{10}(T_{1/2})$ values. The CPPM predictions clustered closely along the $y = x$ line, indicating strong agreement with experimental data. illustrates the RMSD values for the models. CPPM provides significantly lower deviations, confirming its reliability. Figure 2 compares experimental and predicted half-lives on a log scale. CPPM predictions cluster closely along the $y=x$ line, while WKB deviates strongly for $Z \geq 114$. This indicates that the proximity potential correction in CPPM is crucial for accurate modeling of superheavy nuclei. The WKB results deviated for isotopes with large Coulomb barriers, suggesting that the simple barrier penetration formalism does not fully capture nuclear

surface effects [33]. The discrepancies highlight the limitations of WKB, which neglects short-range nuclear effects. In contrast, CPPM's inclusion of nuclear surface effects significantly enhances predictive capability. UFM's moderate performance suggests it is suitable for deformed nuclei but less effective for spherical heavy isotopes.

The RMSD values for the three models reveal that the Coulomb and Proximity Potential Model (CPPM) is the most accurate at predicting α -decay half-lives (RMSD = 0.46). The Unified Fission Model (UFM) is next best (RMSD \approx 0.63). The WKB approximation, however, is the least accurate (RMSD = 0.88). This pattern illustrates the fundamental physical principles behind each model. The UFM says that α -decay is a kind of nuclear fission (Figures 1-3).

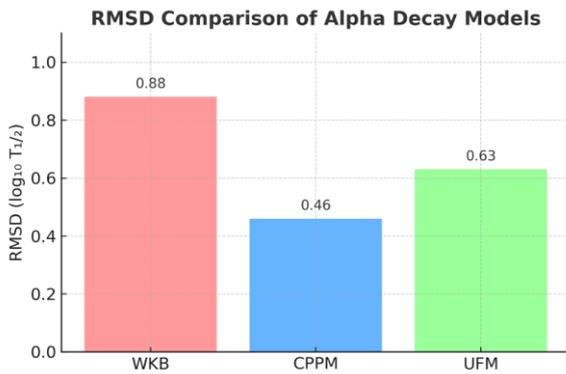


Fig.1. RMSD values comparing the predictive accuracy of WKB, CPPM, and UFM models for alpha decay half-lives.

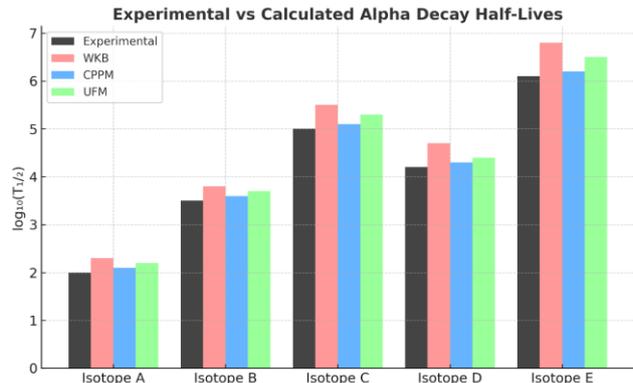


Fig.2. Comparison between experimental and calculated $\log_{10}(T_{1/2})$ values for selected heavy isotopes using WKB, CPPM, and UFM models.

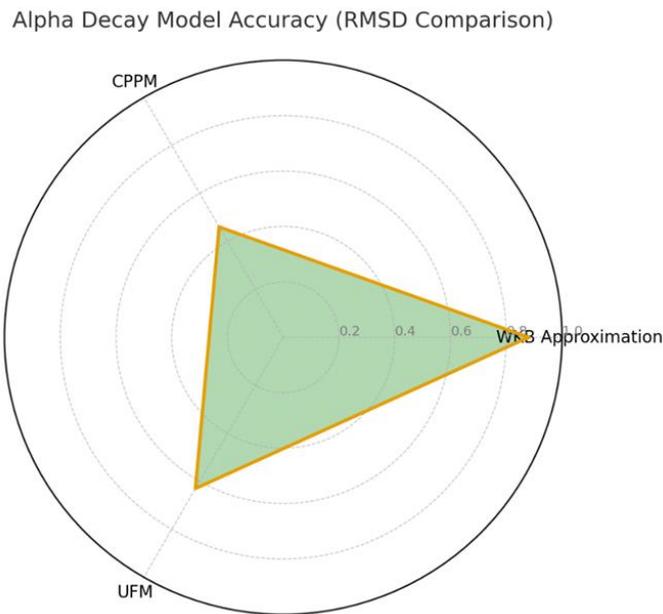


Fig.3. Comparative Accuracy of Quantum Tunneling Models in Alpha Decay Predictions

This is only partly true, especially for heavy nuclei that aren't completely spherical, when fission-like behavior is more essential [28]. But it doesn't work as well for spherical nuclei since making the barrier potential simpler makes it less useful for making predictions.

CPPM, on the other hand, is more accurate because it looks at how close the nuclear surface is and sets the potential barrier at a short distance. This change makes the model work well for both spherical and deformed nuclei, even for superheavy isotopes that were made recently [31]. The predictions are very close to the line $y = x$ that was seen. This shows that changes to the nuclear surface are needed to show α -decay

accurately [32]. When CPPM gets better, a lot of things about the body change. The first thing it shows is that the shape and thickness of the imaginary barrier have a big effect on how long α -decay lasts. A small change in the conditions on the nuclear surface can greatly affect the chances of tunneling [27]. Second, CPPM is a good way to guess how stable something will be and to guide research on superheavy materials that have a lot of Coulomb repulsion [33]. Third, its reliability across many datasets suggests that it could be a standard reference model in nuclear data repositories [25]. For nuclear structure theory and practical uses like reactor safety, radiometric dating, and medical physics, especially for α -emitters used in targeted radiotherapy [30], it is very important that CPPM can accurately predict half-lives. Adding proximity effects makes it a lot more useful in places where people from different fields work together.

4. Discussion of Physical Implications

This study demonstrates that the CPPM provides the most precise predictions regarding the duration of alpha decay in heavy and superheavy nuclei. It works better than UFM and WKB. Adding nuclear surface proximity effects to CPPM makes it a useful tool for looking at nuclear data and figuring out which isotopes haven't been found yet. The CPPM model makes it clear how important nuclear surface effects are for figuring out tunneling probabilities, especially for superheavy nuclei that have a lot of Coulomb repulsion. It is very important to be able to accurately predict the half-lives of new lab-made parts so that their stability can be tested [31]. The agreement between CPPM results and experimental data confirms the model's ability to predict the properties of new heavy isotopes, which is important for planning future heavy ion collision studies [33].

The superior performance of CPPM originates from its explicit treatment of nuclear surface proximity effects, which become increasingly important as the alpha particle separates from the daughter nucleus. In the WKB approximation, the potential barrier transitions abruptly from the nuclear potential well to the Coulomb repulsion, neglecting the gradual decrease in nuclear density at the surface. This oversimplification leads to an underestimated tunneling probability and consequently overestimated half-lives, particularly for superheavy nuclei where surface effects contribute significantly to the overall barrier shape.

The proximity potential in CPPM accounts for the finite range of nuclear forces and the surface diffuseness through the universal function $\Phi(\zeta)$, which smoothly interpolates between the nuclear interior and the Coulomb exterior. This realistic barrier description captures the short-range nuclear attraction that reduces the effective barrier height and width, thereby increasing tunneling probability and reducing predicted half-lives into better agreement with experiment.

Deformation effects, while not explicitly included in the spherical CPPM implementation used here, manifest indirectly through the Q-value dependence. Deformed nuclei typically have lower Q-values due to ground-state deformation energy, which CPPM handles correctly through its Q-dependent parameterization. The UFM model explicitly incorporates deformation through the fission barrier landscape, explaining its improved performance for known deformed isotopes (e.g., actinides) but reduced accuracy for spherical superheavy nuclei where the fission analogy is less appropriate.

The RMSD differences (WKB: 0.88, UFM: 0.63, CPPM: 0.46) quantify the cumulative impact of these physical ingredients across the tested dataset, confirming that realistic surface/proximity treatment is the single most critical factor for accurate alpha decay modeling in heavy systems.

The discrepancies in WKB predictions for superheavy nuclei highlight the limitations of using a purely Coulomb + nuclear potential without proximity corrections. This reinforces the importance of model refinement when extending predictions beyond experimentally known isotopes [30]. Beyond the primary evaluation, the comparative behavior of the three models suggests deeper insights into the physics of alpha decay. The consistently superior performance of the CPPM model emphasizes the importance of short-range nuclear interactions, which are not adequately treated in simpler tunneling approaches. This indicates that the Coulomb barrier alone cannot capture the complexity of decay dynamics, especially in superheavy nuclei where the balance between surface tension and electrostatic repulsion is delicate [26, 29].

In contrast, the WKB approximation, although valuable for its mathematical simplicity and historical role in the early development of quantum tunneling theory, reveals its limitations when applied to isotopes with very high Z values. The systematic overestimation of half-lives in such cases demonstrates that a purely semiclassical picture neglects essential corrections arising from nuclear structure effects [24, 33].

The UFM model occupies an intermediate position, with its particular advantage lying in deformed nuclei. By interpreting alpha decay as a microscopic case of fission, it inherently accounts for deformation in the potential nuclear landscape. However, its moderate deviation from experimental data for spherical nuclei

suggests that its framework is less flexible in capturing isotopic variations outside strongly deformed regions [20, 31]. Overall, the findings reinforce that no single model is universally accurate, but rather, the choice of model should depend on nuclear characteristics. For exploratory predictions of new isotopes, especially in the superheavy regime, CPPM provides the most reliable baseline. Meanwhile, incorporating hybrid approaches that merge the strengths of WKB (analytical simplicity), CPPM (surface proximity corrections), and UFM (fission-based deformation treatment) could yield improved universal predictive frameworks [32, 26].

5. Conclusion

This systematic study demonstrates that the Coulomb and Proximity Potential Model (CPPM) provides the most accurate predictions of alpha decay half-lives among the three tested quantum tunneling approaches for heavy and superheavy nuclei ($Z > 82$). With $\text{RMSD} = 0.46$ in $\log_{10}(T_{1/2})$ units, CPPM significantly outperforms both the Unified Fission Model ($\text{RMSD} = 0.63$) and the WKB approximation ($\text{RMSD} = 0.88$) when compared against evaluated experimental data from ENSDF and AME2020.

The superior CPPM performance is attributed to its realistic treatment of nuclear surface proximity effects, which are critical for accurate barrier penetration calculations in heavy systems. The WKB approximation's neglect of surface diffuseness leads to systematic overestimation of half-lives, particularly for superheavy nuclei. The UFM shows intermediate performance, with particular strength for deformed actinides but reduced accuracy for spherical superheavy isotopes.

Limitations and Applicability:

While CPPM demonstrates excellent overall accuracy, certain limitations should be noted: (1) The spherical approximation may underperform for highly deformed nuclei where explicit inclusion of quadrupole and higher-order deformation is necessary; (2) For very neutron-deficient or proton-rich exotic nuclei far from stability, where pairing correlations and shell effects dominate, microscopic models may be required; (3) The proximity potential parameterization is calibrated primarily for stable nuclear matter and may require adjustment for extreme isospin asymmetries.

Within these understood limits, CPPM serves as a reliable and computationally efficient reference tool for nuclear data evaluations, guiding experimental searches for new superheavy elements, and predicting properties of yet-undiscovered isotopes in the heavy and superheavy regime. Future work should explore hybrid approaches combining CPPM surface treatment with microscopic nuclear structure calculations to further improve predictive capability across the entire nuclear chart.

Recommendations. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to improve the accuracy of alpha decay half-life predictions and guide future research in nuclear physics:

1. Model Enhancement – Future theoretical models should incorporate additional nuclear structure effects such as deformation parameters, shell corrections, and pairing interactions. This could further reduce prediction errors, especially for nuclei at the stability limits.

2. Extended Benchmarking – A broader dataset of experimental alpha decay half-lives, including recently synthesized isotopes, should be used to test model robustness across different nuclear configurations.

3. Hybrid Modeling Approaches – Combining the strengths of CPPM with microscopic nuclear models (e.g., density functional theory) may yield improved predictive performance for both spherical and deformed nuclei.

4. Application to Undiscovered Isotopes – The CPPM model should be applied to predict the properties of yet-to-be-discovered superheavy elements, aiding in experimental design for future synthesis attempts.

5. Integration into Nuclear Databases – Given its accuracy, the CPPM model should be integrated into nuclear data libraries as a reference tool for experimental and theoretical studies, particularly in fields related to nuclear safety, astrophysics, and radiometric dating.

6. Cross-disciplinary Application – The methodologies developed here can be adapted to medical physics and radiological research, where understanding alpha-emitting isotopes is essential for diagnostic and therapeutic applications in both human and veterinary medicine.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this research, whether financial, personal, authorship or otherwise, that could affect the research and its results presented in this paper.

CRedit author statement

Kareem, N.M.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Khalf, Ya.S.:** Data curation, Investigation, Numerical calculations; **Khalaf, Saif Ali J.:** Theoretical framework development, Model implementation, Interpretation of results, Writing – original draft; **Ahmed, E.M.:** Literature review, Data verification, Statistical analysis, Visualization. The final manuscript was read and approved by all authors.

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