

EMPOWERING SPORTS SOCIAL WORK: LINGUISTIC INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND RESOURCE PEDIGREES

ZiLin Cheng¹, Tao Luo^{2*}

¹*Department of Management, Guizhou Vocational College of Sports, Huaxi 550025, Guiyang, China.*

²*School of Economics, Guizhou University, Guiyang 550025, Guizhou, China.*

**Corresponding Author: Tao Luo*

Abstract: As the "Leading Sports Nation" strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) deepen, the scope for sports social work to professionally engage in major foreign-related sports events and international sports assistance is expanding significantly. However, current sports social work professionals frequently face a dual predicament: a scarcity of language tools and a deficit in cross-cultural competence. This dilemma often leads to a "loss of professional voice," thereby severely constraining service efficacy. Grounded in Empowerment Theory, this paper draws on major foreign-related sports events and mountain rescue operations in Guizhou as a contextual blueprint to propose the construction of a language resource pedigree for sports social work. This pedigree encompasses event crisis intervention, bilingual care for special populations, and cross-cultural conflict mediation. Building upon this foundation, the study proposes language intervention strategies from three dimensions—scenario-based simulation, digital tool assistance, and field supervision and feedback—to enhance the international service capacity of sports social workers. Ultimately, these strategies aim to cultivate versatile practitioners equipped with both global perspectives and local action capabilities, thereby advancing the modernization of regional sports governance.

Keywords: Sports social work; International service capacity; Empowerment theory; Language intervention; Resource pedigree; Cross-cultural competence

1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, at the convergence of the "Leading Sports Nation" strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's sports sector is undergoing a profound transformation from a singular focus on competitive sports to encompassing multifaceted social governance functions. Notably, as a distinct educational typology, the development of vocational education must respond to societal demands and holistic human development [1-2]. In Guizhou—a national ecological civilization experimental zone and a major hub for mountain outdoor sports—grassroots sporting events like "Cun Chao" and "Cun BA" have transcended local boundaries to gain international traction. Coupled with the institutionalized hosting of the International Mountain Tourism and Outdoor Sports Conference, the regional sports industry presents an unprecedented internationalized landscape. Within this emerging arena, sports social work, as a professional force facilitating sports participation for vulnerable groups, promoting social inclusion, and resolving on-site conflicts [3], is rapidly expanding its clientele from local community residents to foreign athletes, international tourists, and transnational event organizers. The active engagement of sports social workers has become a crucial nexus in modernizing regional sports governance.

However, an examination of current sports social work practice reveals a prevailing dilemma: due to a long-standing focus on local community service in professional training [4], practitioners frequently experience "competence anxiety" and a "loss of professional voice" when confronting foreign-related service scenarios. This predicament manifests on two distinct levels. First, there are instrumental barriers—specifically, a lack of specialized linguistic proficiency to manage high-risk situations such as foreign-related medical emergencies, event dispute mediation, and care for special populations (e.g., disabled foreign athletes)—which leads to a breakdown in the service chain. Second, there is a cultural divide; a deficit in cross-cultural competence makes it difficult to establish effective professional rapport, occasionally triggering secondary conflicts due to cultural misinterpretations. As Cai notes [5], traditional foreign language instruction is often confined to general linguistic knowledge and fails to meet the interdisciplinary application demands of specific occupational contexts. This low service efficacy, driven by a "linguistic deficit," severely restricts the depth and breadth of sports social workers' intervention in internationalized sports affairs, emerging as a prominent bottleneck hindering the global outreach of sports service standards from Guizhou and the broader western regions of China.

Confronted with this practical challenge, the traditional "general English teaching" paradigm, which relies heavily on vocabulary and grammar instillation, proves inadequate for the highly complex and dynamic demands of social work practice. Empowerment Theory offers a novel perspective to address this impasse [6]. This theory posits that individuals can gain mastery over their environment through the unearthing of personal potential and the provision of resource support. In the context of sports social work, language must not be viewed merely as a communication tool; rather, it should be reconceptualized as a core "medium for practice intervention." Constructing a language resource pedigree tailored to authentic occupational scenarios and implementing context-specific intervention strategies is fundamentally a process of "professional empowerment." It aims to endow social workers with the authority and capacity to

independently conduct case management, crisis intervention, and resource linkage in a globalized context. Based on this premise, this paper uses typical practice scenarios from volunteer services in major foreign-related sports events and mountain outdoor rescue operations in Guizhou as a foundation. By introducing Empowerment Theory and adopting the ecological "person-in-environment" perspective [7], this study constructs a bilingual service resource pedigree for sports social work encompassing survival safety, emotional support, and cultural adaptation. Concurrently, it explores how to formulate systematic linguistic intervention strategies utilizing approaches such as scenario-based simulation and digital tool assistance. Ultimately, this research aims to bridge the current gap in the international capacity building of sports social work, providing theoretical frameworks and practical benchmarks for cultivating versatile practitioners equipped with global perspectives, local sensibilities, and professional expertise.

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: RECONCEPTUALIZING LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF EMPOWERMENT THEORY

2.1 Elucidating the Applicability of Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory stands as a foundational pillar of social work practice [6]. Its core tenet lies in unearthing individual potential and dismantling environmental barriers, thereby enabling marginalized or disempowered groups to gain mastery over their lives and environments. In traditional paradigms of social work education, linguistic competence has frequently been marginalized as a mere "instrumental skill." However, when sports social workers engage in major foreign-related events (such as the International Mountain Tourism Conference) or cross-border sports assistance within the "person-in-environment" (PIE) framework [7], a linguistic deficit directly precipitates a state of "disempowerment" for the practitioner on-site. This manifests as a loss of professional agency due to communication barriers and service disruptions stemming from cultural misunderstandings. Consequently, this study posits the cultivation of linguistic competence as a critical dimension of "professional empowerment" for sports social workers. Linguistic intervention transcends the mere acquisition of symbolic tools; it endows practitioners with the professional authority to define problems, link resources, and advocate for rights within cross-cultural arenas, ultimately transforming them from "voiceless bystanders" into "active interveners."

2.2 The Tripartite Dimensions of Language as a "Service Medium"

Guided by Empowerment Theory, the linguistic capacity of sports social workers must not be reduced to an accumulation of vocabulary. Instead, it must be reconceptualized as a multifaceted "service medium," encompassing three distinct dimensions:

First, as a medium for rapport building: The helping process in social work inherently begins with the establishment of a professional relationship. When interacting with injured foreign athletes or international tourists, appropriate bilingual communication is the prerequisite for breaking down unfamiliarity and forging a foundation of trust. Absent this medium, core social work ethics—such as empathy and acceptance—cannot be effectively operationalized with cross-cultural clients [4].

Second, as a medium for needs assessment: Accurately evaluating client needs is the bedrock of effective intervention. In scenarios such as mountain outdoor rescues or event first-aid in Guizhou, social workers must possess precise English for Specific Purposes (ESP) capabilities. This ensures the accurate elicitation of foreign clients' injury descriptions, past medical histories, and psychological states, thereby facilitating the formulation of scientifically sound intervention plans.

Third, as a medium for resource linking: A central role of the sports social worker is that of a "resource broker." In internationalized events, practitioners must leverage their linguistic skills to interface with international insurance agencies, foreign medical teams, and consular protection services. This capacity shatters information silos and constructs a comprehensive social support network for the clients.

3 CONTENT CONSTRUCTION: THE "LANGUAGE RESOURCE PEDIGREE" FOR INTERNATIONAL SERVICES IN SPORTS SOCIAL WORK

Building on the framework of Empowerment Theory, this study transcends the traditional grammar-vocabulary-centric linear logic of language instruction. Instead, it adopts the "person-in-environment" (PIE) practice perspective of social work to reconstruct the content dimensions of linguistic competence. Considering Guizhou's regional characteristics—rich in mountain outdoor sports resources and frequent ethnic sporting events—this paper constructs a hierarchically progressive "Bilingual Service Resource Pedigree for Sports Social Work." Rather than a simple inventory of terminology, this pedigree transforms linguistic symbols into concrete social service resources. It aims to address the urgent needs of clients across three tiers—physiological safety, psycho-social well-being, and socio-cultural adaptation—through structured linguistic intervention.

3.1 Tier I: Survival and Safety Support

At the foundation of the pedigree lie the linguistic resources that address the "biological safety" needs of clients. This constitutes the bedrock for sports social workers fulfilling the "principle of preserving life" in high-risk, foreign-related

sports scenarios. In Guizhou's unique karst mountain rescues and international marathon medical support, social workers are frequently the first responders. This tier primarily comprises two modules: vital signs assessment and emergency evacuation guidance. Specifically, practitioners must master the bilingual discourse for vital signs assessment. For instance, encountering a foreign athlete with hypothermia or a fracture during a mountain trail race, the social worker must conduct a primary survey in accurate English, asking, "Can you feel your legs?" or "Are you experiencing blurred vision?" Furthermore, they must accurately identify and relay core medical terminology—such as hypothermia and open fracture—to assist international rescue teams in triage. Additionally, adapting to Guizhou's volatile mountain climate, this pedigree incorporates standardized bilingual expressions for meteorological warnings and evacuation commands, such as broadcasting a "flash flood warning." This ensures the rapid evacuation of foreign participants to safe zones during extreme weather, aligning with the fundamental requirement of vocational education to safeguard individuals' rights to survival and development.

3.2 Tier II: Psycho-social Support

The second tier focuses on the psycho-social needs of clients, aiming to provide empathetic support and crisis intervention through linguistic engagement. Within the high-pressure arena of competitive sports, foreign athletes frequently endure psychological stress stemming from injury-induced withdrawals, competitive defeats, or competing away from home. Here, language becomes the core medium for social workers to deliver emotional support. This resource pedigree emphasizes the discursive construction of empathetic listening and validation. For example, when comforting an emotional foreign player in the "Cun Chao" or an international invitational football tournament, a social worker should utilize validating language—such as, "I can see this implies a lot to you"—rather than hollow platitudes like "Don't cry," while also mastering the counseling discourse for post-competition anxiety. Notably, in para-sports services, the pedigree integrates language resources grounded in the strengths perspective. It trains social workers to communicate with foreign athletes with disabilities using empowering vocabulary, such as resilience and self-determination, consciously avoiding stereotyping expressions of sympathy. This approach preserves the clients' dignity, thereby facilitating their meaningful participation and well-being in everyday and sporting occupations [6,8].

3.3 Tier III: Socio-cultural Adaptation

The apex of the pedigree is directed toward social inclusion and cultural adaptation, intending to mitigate culture shock and operationalize the sports social worker's role as a cultural broker. Tailored to Guizhou's distinct ethnic sports ecology, this tier emphasizes the construction of resources for "translating local culture" and "mediating cross-cultural conflicts." On one hand, practitioners must acquire the ability to academically and internationally interpret deeply rural sports modalities, such as the Village Super League (Cun Chao), bullfighting, and single bamboo drifting. This transcends merely translating rules; it involves articulating the underlying sociological significance of community cohesion and rural revitalization. By doing so, they help foreign participants comprehend stadium rituals like the Grand Song of the Dong ethnic group or the "High Mountain and Flowing Water" toasting etiquette, facilitating profound cultural integration. On the other hand, addressing potential physical altercations or etiquette misunderstandings arising from cross-cultural friction in sports venues, the pedigree embeds bilingual mediation strategies for conflict resolution. It trains social workers to employ a linguistic framework of cultural relativism to provide destigmatizing explanations, diffusing irrational confrontations triggered by cultural differences, and ultimately fostering an inclusive and mutually appreciative social ecology within the international sports arena.

4 ACTION PATHWAYS: SCENARIO-BASED LINGUISTIC INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE

The construction of the resource pedigree provides the foundational content for empowering sports social workers. However, translating these static linguistic symbols into dynamic practice capabilities necessitates a set of intervention strategies grounded in authentic scenarios. Adhering to the social work principle of "learning by doing," this study proposes a progressive action pathway—ranging from scenario-based simulation and digital empowerment to reflective practice. This comprehensive linguistic intervention aims to elevate the professional competence of sports social workers navigating complex international arenas.

4.1 Scenario-Based Simulation: Embodied Emergency Response Training

Given the high-pressure and high-risk nature of foreign-related sports services, conventional language lectures fail to cultivate muscle memory. As Han et al. indicate [9], leveraging virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to construct immersive instructional environments effectively enhances experiential learning for vocational skills. Consequently, the primary phase of the intervention strategy involves engineering high-fidelity simulated training arenas. Utilizing VR technology, typical scenarios of Guizhou's mountain outdoor sports are reconstructed, such as "lost person search and rescue in karst cave exploration" or "high-altitude fall at an international rock climbing competition." Within these simulations, social workers transition from passive listeners to lead responders. They are required to deploy Tier I survival support linguistic resources to comfort foreign casualties and issue directives under simulated chaotic conditions and intense time constraints. Through such embodied practical drills, practitioners can repeatedly

refine their bilingual emergency responses within a safe, trial-and-error space, overcoming the acute "freeze response" induced by linguistic anxiety and ensuring composed intervention during actual rescue operations.

4.2 Digital Empowerment: Human-Machine Collaborative Case Recording and Communication

Through the lens of Empowerment Theory, technology should not function as a tool to replace social workers, but rather as a "cognitive exoskeleton" extending their service reach. Han et al. demonstrate that artificial intelligence large language models (LLMs) hold extensive application prospects in vocational education [9], enabling innovative human-machine collaboration. To address practitioners' apprehension toward drafting English case records and international project proposals, generative AI (AIGC) should be introduced as a "digital supervisor." By training social workers in prompt engineering, they can guide AI to assist in generating English case reports or volunteer service proposals that comply with international social work ethical standards. For instance, when managing foreign-related disputes, practitioners can utilize AI to conduct multiple rounds of simulated cross-cultural conflict mediation dialogues, role-playing clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. The AI provides instantaneous feedback identifying potential cultural offenses or empathy deficits in their linguistic expressions. This human-machine collaborative paradigm significantly lowers the threshold for language expression, allowing social workers to concentrate their cognitive resources on formulating service strategies and making ethical decisions, thereby actualizing the profound empowerment of professional efficacy through technology.

4.3 Service-Learning Feedback: Reflective Practice under Dual Supervision

The ultimate locus for evaluating the efficacy of linguistic interventions is the actual practice setting. Guided by Jiang's educational philosophy of work-process systematization and employment orientation [1], this study proposes establishing a "service-learning" mechanism for practical translation. This shifts the training arena from the classroom to the frontlines of volunteer service, such as the "Cun Chao" finals and the International Mountain Tourism Conference. During this process, a dual supervision system comprising a Language Mentor and a Social Work Supervisor is instituted. The Language Mentor observes the service on-site, correcting terminological deviations to ensure the precise transmission of information. Concurrently, the Social Work Supervisor focuses on assessing whether the linguistic intervention effectively established professional rapport and achieved the intended service goals. Following the service, practitioners are guided to maintain reflective journals to review their psychological dynamics and the efficacy of their linguistic strategies during cross-cultural interactions. This elevates fragmented experiences into internalized professional wisdom, ultimately forging an upward spiral of competence characterized by an "action-reflection-action" continuous loop.

5 CONCLUSION

Driven by the dual strategic imperatives of the "Leading Sports Nation" initiative and "Rural Revitalization," sports social work is encountering unprecedented developmental opportunities and challenges. For sports social workers situated in Guizhou—an inland vanguard of opening-up—the deficit in linguistic competence has emerged as the Achilles' heel constraining their engagement in international sports governance. Grounded in Empowerment Theory, this study transcends the limitations of traditional language pedagogy to construct a bilingual resource pedigree for sports social workers that encompasses survival safety, emotional support, and socio-cultural adaptation. Concurrently, it proposes intervention strategies that integrate scenario-based simulation with digital empowerment. This research serves not only as a theoretical response to the capacity building for the "internationalization" of sports social workers but also as a practical exploration of an interdisciplinary training paradigm integrating "Social Work + Sports + Language." Moving forward, as an increasing number of versatile sports social workers—equipped with global perspectives and local sensibilities—dedicate themselves to the frontlines of international events and mountain rescue operations, they will inevitably articulate a more vivid and inclusive "Chinese sports narrative" through their professional practice.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Jiang D. Interpretation and clarification of the development orientation and function of modern vocational education: An analysis of education, vocation, and their relationship with vocational education. *Vocational and Technical Education*, 2025, 46(10): 6-13.
- [2] Zhou J. Vocational education should take greater responsibility and action in empowering the development of new quality productive forces. *Chinese Vocational and Technical Education* (Preface), 2024.
- [3] Li Y, Zhang J. Research on the path of sports social work intervening in youth sports services. *China Sport Science*, 2023, 43(05): 12-18.
- [4] Gu D. Localized practice and professional development of social work. *Social Work*, 2022(04): 3-10.

-
- [5] Cai J. Exploration of the sixth generation of college English textbooks under the interdisciplinary background of foreign language teaching. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, 2023(01): 88-92.
 - [6] Solomon B B. *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
 - [7] Gitterman A, Knight C, Germain C B. *The Life Model of Social Work Practice: Advances in Theory and Practice* (4th ed.). New York: Columbia University Press, 2021.
 - [8] Law M. Participation in the occupations of everyday life. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 2002, 56(6): 640-649.
 - [9] Han X, Li M, Guo W. New breakthroughs in empowering vocational education through digital strategy: New progress in digital research and practice of vocational education in 2024. *Chinese Vocational and Technical Education*, 2025(02): 39-48.