



From Local Arenas to International Stages: Adolescents' Cultural Identity and Communication Development in Global Cheerleading Competitions

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Abstract. In the context of globalization, the development of adolescents' cross-cultural competence and cultural identity has become a critical issue in education and social science research. This study focuses on international cheerleading competitions as a research context and reviews existing literature to construct an integrated theoretical framework encompassing cultural identity, cross-cultural communication competence, and socio-economic factors. Findings indicate that adolescents develop multiple cultural identities through team collaboration, cross-cultural interaction, and international competition experiences, while enhancing cross-cultural communication skills, including language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and team coordination. Socio-economic conditions, educational resources, and institutional support play a key moderating role in shaping competence development and identity formation. The study contributes theoretically to cross-cultural education, adolescent social development, and sports sociology, and provides practical guidance for educators, coaches, and policymakers to enhance cross-cultural learning outcomes and promote social equity. Future research is encouraged to incorporate longitudinal tracking, quantitative measures, and socio-economic impact assessment to further advance the systematic study of adolescents' cross-cultural competence and identity development.

Keywords: International Cheerleading; Adolescents; Cultural Identity; Cross-Cultural Communication Competence; Socio-Economic Factors; Sports Sociology

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Against the backdrop of rapid globalization and digitalization, developing adolescents' cross-cultural communication skills and cultural identity has become a key focus in education, sociology, and economics research. With growing international opportunities, young people now need not only academic and language proficiency but also the ability to communicate effectively, understand, and adapt to diverse cultural values in

multicultural settings. Sports and cultural activities, as vital platforms for youth socialization, provide rich cross-cultural practice scenarios. Among these, international sporting events hold unique research value due to their high interactivity and global participation.

Cheerleading, a dynamic blend of athletic competition, performing arts, and teamwork, not only enhances teenagers' physical fitness and collaborative skills but also serves as a vital platform for cultural exchange and identity formation in international events. In global cheerleading competitions, young athletes compete against participants from diverse countries and regions, engaging in training and performances within multilingual and multicultural environments. This process not only sharpens their cross-cultural communication abilities but also inspires them to redefine their self-identity within a global context.

Furthermore, organizing and participating in international cheerleading competitions often involves significant socioeconomic factors. Family financial conditions, school resources, educational policies, and regional support levels directly influence adolescents' opportunities and experiences in international cheerleading events. This socioeconomic dimension not only determines participation accessibility but also impacts the depth of skill development and identity formation during cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, conducting systematic research on international cheerleading competitions from social, economic, and educational perspectives holds both academic value and practical significance for policy-making and educational practices.

1.2 Research Significance

Theoretical Framework: This study aims to enrich theoretical systems in cross-cultural communication competence, adolescent social identity, and educational sociology. First, by systematically examining the behaviors and experiences of adolescents in international cheerleading competitions, it deepens our understanding of the interactive mechanisms between team sports activities and cross-cultural competence. Second, incorporating socioeconomic factors into the research framework helps reveal how educational and social resources contribute to the development of cross-cultural competence, thereby providing theoretical support for interdisciplinary studies. Finally, this paper attempts to establish a comprehensive analytical framework in the intersection of sports sociology, education, and social economics, offering theoretical foundations for subsequent empirical research and policy analysis.

Practical Implications: The research findings provide empirical references for educational administrators, sports organizers, and policymakers. By analyzing the impact of cross-border cheerleading competitions on adolescents' intercultural communication and identity formation, this study offers decision-making support for designing international exchange programs, developing educational curricula, and optimizing resource allocation. Furthermore, the research can guide families and communities in improving youth participation pathways and growth opportunities under limited economic and educational resources, thereby promoting equitable development of intercultural competencies.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Cross-Cultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence refers to an individual's ability to effectively understand, adapt to, and respond to others in diverse cultural contexts, typically encompassing three dimensions: cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude), and behavioral (skills). This competence involves not only linguistic expression but also sensitivity to cultural differences and social adaptability, thereby enabling effective and appropriate intercultural interactions in practice [1][2].

Theoretically, Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) outlines six developmental stages from "denial" to "integration," highlighting cultural sensitivity as a key trend in cross-cultural understanding [1]. Meanwhile, Darla K. Deardorff's intercultural competence model emphasizes the multidimensional nature of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, defining its ultimate outcome as "effective and appropriate communication and interaction in cross-cultural contexts" [2]. These two theoretical frameworks are widely applied in education, international exchanges, and professional settings to explain the pathways of cross-cultural adaptation and communication competence development.

In the field of sports and youth activities, research on intercultural competence primarily focuses on global sports exchanges, international team collaborations, and sports social programs. In these contexts, athletes (including adolescents) must adapt their language skills, cultural sensitivity, and situational adaptability to address cultural differences among transnational teammates or competitors, thereby achieving effective communication and team synergy [3][4].

Although traditional cross-cultural communication research has predominantly emerged in the fields of education and management, existing interdisciplinary studies have indicated that sports provide a natural context for promoting intercultural interaction and the development of social skills. However, systematic reviews remain scarce in more specialized competitive events (such as international cheerleading competitions) [4][5].

2.2 Adolescent Identity Formation

Adolescence is a pivotal stage in the development of personal identity, representing a transitional phase from family dependence to social agency, shaped by both social environment and individual experiences. Erik Erikson's identity theory posits that adolescents must resolve the conflict of 'role confusion' during this period, establishing a stable self-identity (including social identity, self-esteem, and values) through social interactions [6].

In the research on sports socialization and team activities, participation in team projects not only provides opportunities for the development of physical skills but also fosters stronger social identity through shared goals, collaboration, and social support. The social identity of sports teams influences adolescents' self-efficacy and collective identity through collective belonging, role-playing, and partnership [4].

In the context of international sports competitions, athletes navigate cultural diversity within a globalized environment, with their identity being multifaceted: encompassing local roots, global athlete status, and international cultural identity. Cross-cultural interactions drive dynamic adjustments and expansions of these identities, rather than establishing a single, fixed framework [4][5]. However, existing youth sports research has yet to fully elucidate the mechanisms of identity construction in cross-cultural competitions, particularly lacking examination of how transnational events integrate with resource disparities within socio-economic contexts [5].

2.3 Socio-Economic Impacts of International Sports

International sports events are not only competitive activities but also exert social, cultural, and economic impacts. Participation in sports can serve as a significant pathway for the accumulation of social capital, facilitating the generation and sharing of individual social resources through interaction networks, team norms, and rule-based engagement [5].

Family, school, and community resources constitute key socioeconomic determinants of adolescents' participation in international sports. The socioeconomic status, educational background, and social support networks of families directly determine whether young people can access opportunities for overseas competitions, training, and cultural exchanges. Given that international sports events typically involve travel expenses, cultural adaptation costs, and time commitments, adolescents from different socioeconomic backgrounds may experience significant disparities in cross-border competition participation and experiences. These disparities are closely linked to educational equity and social mobility [5].

From a policy perspective, youth participation in international sports carries significant educational implications. On one hand, policies such as scholarships and international exchange programs can lower economic barriers to entry, expanding cross-cultural learning opportunities for young people. On the other hand, investments from both government and non-governmental organizations can enhance community sports infrastructure and international cooperation support, enabling youth from diverse social backgrounds to benefit from global sports platforms [5].

2.4 Current Research on International Cheerleading Competitions

Current research on the impact of transnational sports competitions on adolescents' intercultural communication skills and identity construction predominantly focuses on interdisciplinary fields such as macro-sports sociology, adolescent development, and international education. Systematic reviews specifically addressing transnational cheerleading competitions remain scarce. Existing studies predominantly employ qualitative interviews, phenomenological observations, or mixed methods to describe individual participation experiences, team cultural conflicts, and integration strategies [4][5].

Methodologically, quantitative research predominantly employs social skills scales and cultural adaptation scales for pre-post comparisons, whereas qualitative studies pre-

sent participants' narratives through in-depth interviews, focusing on subjective experiences. However, such studies often lack large-scale cross-cultural comparisons and long-term follow-up data, which limits the assessment of the long-term developmental effects of transnational sports competitions on adolescents [5].

In terms of research focus, scholars have examined gender dynamics, cultural adaptation challenges, and disparities in competition experience distribution, highlighting that socioeconomic background, language barriers, and cultural differences significantly constrain cross-cultural adaptation [5]. Furthermore, the impact of gender differences on identity formation and communication strategies in sports interactions remains complex and warrants further investigation [5].

In conclusion, the existing research has not yet established an integrated theoretical framework for the cultivation of cultural communication competence and the formation of identity in cross-border cheerleading competitions, nor has it provided systematic analysis of socio-economic variables. This gap offers significant research potential for the subsequent review in this paper.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Cultural Identity and Social Capital Theory

Cultural identity theory posits that individuals develop cognitive awareness and a sense of belonging to their cultural identity through social interactions. In international youth sports activities such as cross-border cheerleading competitions, participants gradually cultivate multiple cultural identities through teamwork, cross-cultural exchanges, and shared competitive experiences. These identities encompass not only recognition of their native culture but also acceptance of their roles within the global sports community and as members of cross-cultural teams.

The social capital theory provides a framework for understanding how adolescents' transnational sports participation fosters the accumulation of social resources. Social capital, embedded within social networks, enables the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and support through interactions. In transnational cheerleading competitions, team involvement not only strengthens trust and collaboration among members but also expands adolescents' transnational social networks, thereby providing potential resources for their future education, career development, and social engagement.

3.2 Cross-Cultural Competence Development Model

The intercultural competence development model explains the formation of individual capabilities through experiential learning and social cognitive theory. Experiential learning theory posits that knowledge and skills develop through a cyclical process involving concrete experiences, reflective observation, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation. In international sports competitions, adolescents enhance their intercultural competence by directly participating in cross-cultural team training and matches, where they navigate cultural conflicts, engage in communication and interaction, and collaborate to solve problems.

Social cognitive theory further emphasizes the pivotal role of observational learning and self-efficacy in skill development. Within the context of international cheerleading, adolescents enhance their cross-cultural adaptability and communication skills by observing teammates 'and coaches' intercultural communication strategies, then imitating and practicing effective behaviors. Meanwhile, real-time feedback and social support within the team strengthen individuals' self-efficacy, thereby promoting the stability and internalization of cross-cultural behaviors.

Based on the theory of social cognition and the experience learning, a cross-cultural competence development model is constructed: teenagers gradually form the integrated competence of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the cross-cultural sports activities through the cycle of concrete cross-cultural experience → reflection and observation → conceptual understanding → behavior practice → social feedback.

3.3 Integrated Theoretical Framework

Building upon the aforementioned theories, this study proposes the following integrative theoretical framework:

Cultural identity: Adolescents form multiple cultural identities through team participation and cross-border sports experiences.

The second dimension is intercultural competence, which is the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language and culture.

The third dimension is the socio-economic dimension, which includes family economy, educational resources and international communication opportunities.

This framework not only explains the mechanism of the role of cross-border cheerleading competitions in adolescent development, but also provides theoretical support for subsequent literature analysis and empirical research, while emphasizing the importance of socio-economic factors in cross-cultural educational equity and equal opportunity.

4 Review and Synthesis

4.1 Development Mechanisms of Adolescent Cultural Identity

In international cheerleading competitions, the formation of cultural identity among teenagers is a dynamic and interactive process. First and foremost, team belonging and collective identity serve as the core mechanisms. Through team training, shared competition, and the achievement of collective goals, teenagers develop a sense of belonging to their team and identify with its culture through interaction. This collective identity not only strengthens social connections but also provides the psychological and behavioral foundation for the expansion of cultural identity.

Secondly, cultural differences and the adaptation process drive the dynamic development of identity. When facing teammates and competitors from diverse cultural backgrounds, adolescents must adjust their behaviors, language, and attitudes to achieve effective communication and collaboration. Through this process, they gradu-

ally develop a multi-cultural identity—simultaneously identifying with their native culture, team culture, and transnational sports culture. This mechanism reflects the experiential learning effect of cross-cultural adaptation, as well as the gradual and interactive nature of cultural identity.

4.2 Role of Socio-Economic Factors

The socioeconomic factors play a significant role in the transnational cheerleading competitions among adolescents. Firstly, the socioeconomic status of families and educational resources determine the opportunities and depth of adolescents' participation in international events. Families with higher economic levels can provide resources such as international travel, professional training, and language learning, thereby enhancing the cultivation of intercultural competence and the formation of cultural identity.

Secondly, the support from schools, clubs, and local governments provides institutionalized participation channels and social resources, such as specialized training, international exchange programs, and policy funding, which significantly influence the accessibility and quality of experiences in cross-border activities.

Finally, economic barriers and unequal opportunities persist in cross-border cheerleading competitions. Youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds may face challenges such as high participation costs, cultural adaptation difficulties, and limited international experience, resulting in imbalanced development of intercultural competence and identity. This phenomenon underscores the importance of policy interventions and equitable resource allocation in youth international activities.

4.3 Integrated Model

In conclusion, the development of adolescents in international cheerleading competitions can be understood through the tripartite integration of cultural identity, intercultural competence, and socioeconomic factors. Cultural identity serves as the core developmental objective, while intercultural communication skills provide practical pathways to achieve cultural identity. Socioeconomic factors play a moderating role in resource acquisition and equal opportunities. These three elements interact synergistically, collectively influencing the outcomes of adolescents' cross-border competition Experiences

Socioeconomic factors: family finances, educational resources, school and community support, influence access to participation opportunities and resources.

Cultural competence: language skills, cultural sensitivity, teamwork, is an important way to achieve cultural identity.

Cultural identity formation: the dynamic construction of multiple identities, including local culture, team culture and international cultural identity.

The arrow indicates the path of action and mutual influence, in which there is a feedback mechanism between cross-cultural communication ability and cultural identity formation.

5 Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This paper reviews and synthesizes the research on the development of intercultural competence and cultural identity of adolescents in the context of international cheerleading competitions, and makes contributions in the following theoretical dimensions:

1. The Expansion of the Theory of Cross-cultural Education

By analyzing the construction of multiple cultural identities and the development mechanisms of intercultural communication skills among adolescents in international sports competitions, this study addresses the gap in traditional intercultural education theories regarding sports and youth contexts. The research highlights the pivotal role of experiential practice and team interaction in intercultural education, offering a new theoretical framework for pedagogy and sociology.

2. The Deepening of the Theory of Adolescent Social Development

This paper integrates social capital theory with cultural identity theory to demonstrate how transnational sports activities facilitate identity formation and capability enhancement within social networks. The analysis enriches the theoretical framework of adolescent social development by examining the interplay between social networks, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy, while highlighting the potential of cross-cultural practices in fostering comprehensive social competence development among adolescents.

3. The Contribution of Sports Sociology

This study examines sports activities, particularly cross-border cheerleading events, as a practical context for developing intercultural competence and constructing identity, highlighting the educational and social functions of sports. The integrated model presented in this paper provides a systematic theoretical framework for sports sociology, demonstrating that sports activities serve not only as a venue for physical exercise but also as a vital platform for cultural learning, social interaction, and resource accumulation.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

1. Literature Coverage and Cultural Differences

This review primarily focuses on existing literature regarding transnational cheerleading and similar international sporting events. Due to limited data from certain regions and cultural contexts, the conclusions drawn have certain limitations in terms of global applicability. Differences in educational and social environments across countries and regions may influence the pathways of cross-cultural competence and identity formation.

2. Limitations of empirical data

Current research predominantly relies on qualitative interviews and small-sample surveys, lacking large-scale cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal tracking data.

The quantitative indicator system remains incomplete, and the quantitative relationships between cross-cultural competence, identity, and socioeconomic factors require further validation.

3. future research direction

A Long-term Cross-cultural Study: Exploring the Dynamic Development of Adolescents' Cross-cultural Competence and Identity through a Longitudinal Design.

Development of quantitative indicators: Construct measurable scales for cross-cultural communication competence and identity to enable more precise empirical analysis.

Economic benefits and social impact analysis: combining with the social economic data, the long-term social value of the transnational sports events on the allocation of educational resources, the accumulation of social capital and the fair opportunity are evaluated.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive analytical framework for the cross-cultural development of adolescents, physical education, and social equity policies, both theoretically and practically. It also identifies the limitations of current research, pointing the way for future in-depth studies.

6 Conclusion

This paper systematically reviews the role of cross-border cheerleading competitions in developing adolescents' cultural identity and intercultural communication skills, and proposes a theoretical integration model to reveal the interactive relationship among cultural identity, intercultural competence, and socio-economic factors. Through the analysis and synthesis of existing literature, the study draws the following key conclusions:

1. The Formation of Cultural Identity of Teenagers by Transnational Cheerleading Competition

Through team collaboration, shared goal achievement, and cross-cultural interactions in international cheerleading competitions, adolescents develop a multifaceted cultural identity that encompasses local traditions, team spirit, and global sports culture. The process of exposing and adapting to cultural differences plays a pivotal role in this identity formation, enabling young athletes to gradually establish a unified system of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral recognition within multicultural environments.

2. International Competition Provides a Practical Platform for Cross-cultural Communication

International sports events not only provide opportunities for language exchange and cultural immersion, but also enhance adolescents' intercultural communication skills through practical components such as conflict management, collaborative tasks, and leadership training. The development of these competencies is reflected not only in linguistic proficiency, but also in heightened sensitivity to cultural differences, improved social adaptability, and optimized teamwork behaviors.

3. Socio-economic factors play a key role in the development of ability and the formation of identity

The family's financial status, educational resources, and support from schools, clubs, and local governments directly influence adolescents' access to and quality of participation in international competitions. In resource-rich environments, cross-cultural experience and cultural identity development are more pronounced, whereas limited resources may lead to unequal opportunities, hindering the cultivation of cross-cultural competence and the formation of multiple identities. This finding underscores the critical role of educational policies and social resource allocation in promoting adolescents' cross-cultural development and educational equity.

4. The Synthesis of Theory and Practice

Theoretically, this study synthesizes cultural identity theory, social capital theory, experiential learning, and social cognition theory to establish a systematic framework for understanding the development of intercultural competence and identity among adolescents in international sports activities. Practically, the research provides actionable guidance for educational administrators, sports coaches, and social institutions: By enhancing international exchange opportunities, optimizing team management strategies, and strengthening policy support, we can effectively improve adolescents' intercultural development while promoting social equity and equal educational opportunities.

5. Prospect of the combination of future research and practice

This study suggests that future research could be further explored in the following directions:

A Long-term Cross-cultural Study: Exploring the Dynamic Development of Adolescents' Cross-cultural Competence and Identity.

Development of quantitative measurement tools: Establishing scientific scales for cross-cultural communication competence and cultural identity to support large-sample and cross-cultural comparative studies.

Economic benefits and social impact analysis: combining with socio-economic data, evaluate the long-term value of international sports activities on educational resources, social capital accumulation and equal opportunity.

Policy and Practice Innovation: Promoting the collaborative practices of educational policies, international competition organizations, and social institutions in cross-cultural education and youth development to enhance educational equity and the effectiveness of cross-cultural education.

In conclusion, cross-border cheerleading competitions serve not only as opportunities for youth physical exercise, but also as vital platforms for intercultural education and identity development. Through theoretical synthesis and practical analysis, this study provides systematic references for academic research, educational practices, and policy formulation, while simultaneously charting scientific directions and feasible pathways for future intercultural education research.

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