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## Research Article

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# Non-trivial solutions for Schrödinger-Poisson systems involving critical nonlocal term and potential vanishing at infinity

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**Abstract:** The present study is concerned with the following Schrödinger-Poisson system involving critical nonlocal term

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta u + V(x)u - l(x)\phi|u|^3u = \eta K(x)f(u), & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \\ -\Delta \phi = l(x)|u|^5, & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \end{cases} \quad (1.1)$$

where the potential  $V(x)$  and  $K(x)$  are positive continuous functions that vanish at infinity, and  $l(x)$  is bounded, nonnegative continuous function. Under some simple assumptions on  $V, K, l$  and  $f$ , we prove that the problem (1.1) has a non-trivial solution.

**Keywords:** Schrödinger-Poisson system, variational methods, critical nonlocal term, vanishing potential

**MSC:** 35B09, 35J20

## 1 Introduction and main results

The aim of this paper is to investigate the existence of non-trivial solutions for the following Schrödinger-Poisson system involving critical nonlocal term and potential vanishing at infinity

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta u + V(x)u - l(x)\phi|u|^3u = \eta K(x)f(u), & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \\ -\Delta \phi = l(x)|u|^5, & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \end{cases} \quad (1.1)$$

where  $V, K \in C(\mathbb{R}^3, \mathbb{R})$ ,  $f \in C(\mathbb{R}^3 \times \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R})$ ,  $l(x)$  is bounded, nonnegative continuous function, and  $V, K$  are nonnegative functions which can be vanishing at infinity.  $\eta > 0$  is a parameter and  $2^* := 6$  is the critical Sobolev exponent. Similar problems have been widely investigated, and it is well known that they have a strong physical meaning, because they appear in quantum mechanics models and in semiconductor theory. In particular, systems like (1.1) have been introduced in [1] as a model describing solitary waves, for nonlinear stationary equations of Schrödinger type interacting with an electrostatic field, and are usually known as Schrödinger-Poisson systems. Indeed, in (1.1) the first equation is a nonlinear stationary Schrödinger equation that is coupled with a Poisson equation, to be satisfied by  $\phi$ , meaning that the potential is determined by the charge of the wave function. For more details, we refer the readers to [2–5] and the references therein.

In recent years, with the aid of variational methods, there has been increasing attention to problems like (1.1) on the existence and non-existence of positive solutions, positive ground states, multiple solutions, sign-changing solutions and so on. see for instance [6–21], and the references therein. In fact, the most of the

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above results focused on the subcritical nonlocal term. However, the system (1.1) with critical nonlocal term has only been studied in [22–25].

In [22], A. Azzollini and P. d'Avenia firstly studied the following Schrödinger-Poisson system with critical nonlocal term

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta u = \mu u + p\phi|u|^3 u = f(x, u), & x \in B_R, \\ -\Delta \phi = p|u|^5, & x \in B_R, \\ u = \phi = 0, & \text{on } \partial B_R. \end{cases} \quad (1.2)$$

They proved that the existence and nonexistence results for system (1.1) depend on the value of  $\lambda$ .

In [23], Liu studied the following Schrödinger-Poisson system with critical nonlocal term

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta u + V(x)u - K(x)\phi|u|^3 u = f(x, u), & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \\ -\Delta \phi = K(x)|u|^5, & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3. \end{cases} \quad (1.4)$$

Under the condition  $V(x), K(x), f$  are asymptotically periodic, the author proved the system (1.4) has at least a positive solution by the mountain pass theorem and the concentration-compactness principle.

In [25], F. Li, Y. Li and J. Shi proved

$$\begin{cases} -\Delta u + bu - \phi|u|^3 u = f(u), & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \\ -\Delta \phi = |u|^5, & \text{in } \mathbb{R}^3, \end{cases} \quad (1.3)$$

possesses at least one positive radially symmetric solution when  $b > 0$  is a constant. To the best of our knowledge, there seems to be little progress on the existence of nontrivial solution for Schrödinger-Poisson systems involving critical nonlocal term and potential vanishing at infinity.

By the motivation of above work, In our article, we establish the existence of non-trivial solution for problem (1.1) with critical nonlocal term and potential vanishing at infinity. Firstly the critical growth causes a lack of compactness, and it is much more difficult to obtain the existence of non-trivial solutions. Secondly since  $V(x)$  is potential vanishing at infinity, which makes our studies more interesting. At last, we obtain a non-trivial solution by using the mountain pass theorem without (PS) condition.

Below, we assume that the pair  $(V, K)$  of continuous functions  $V, K : \mathbb{R}^3 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  belongs to  $\mathcal{K}$ . Throughout the paper,  $(V, K) \in \mathcal{K}$  means that

(VK<sub>1</sub>):  $V(x), K(x) > 0$  for all  $x \in \mathbb{R}^3$  and  $K \in L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)$ .

(VK<sub>2</sub>): If  $\{A_n\}_n \subset \mathbb{R}^3$  is a sequence of Borel sets such that the Lebesgue measure  $\text{meas}(A_n) \leq R$ , for all  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  and some  $R > 0$ , then

$$\lim_{R \rightarrow +\infty} \int_{A_n \cap B_R^c(0)} K(x) dx = 0, \text{ uniformly in } n \in \mathbb{N}.$$

Furthermore, one of the below conditions occurs:

(VK<sub>3</sub>):  $K/V \in L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)$  or

(VK<sub>4</sub>): there exists  $p_0 \in (2, 6)$  such that

$$\frac{K(x)}{V(x)^{\frac{6-p_0}{4}}} \rightarrow 0 \text{ as } |x| \rightarrow +\infty.$$

The hypotheses (VK<sub>1</sub>) – (VK<sub>4</sub>) on functions  $V$  and  $K$  were first introduced in [26] and characterized problem (1.1) as zero mass. Problems of zero mass have been studied by many authors, see for example, [27–32] and references therein.

Finally, we assume the following growth conditions at the origin and at the infinity for the continuous function  $f : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ :

(f<sub>1</sub>)  $\lim_{t \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(t)}{t} = 0$ , if (VK<sub>3</sub>) holds; or  $\lim_{t \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(t)}{|t|^{p_0-1}} < \infty$ , if (VK<sub>4</sub>) holds.

(f<sub>2</sub>)  $f$  has a "quasiscritical growth", namely,  $\lim_{t \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{f(t)}{t^5} = 0$ .

(f<sub>3</sub>) There exists a  $\theta \in (2, 2^*)$  such that

$$0 \leq \theta F(t) \leq tf(t) \text{ for all } t \in \mathbb{R},$$

where  $F(u) = \int_0^u f(s) ds$ .

Furthermore, we make the following hypotheses on the function  $l(x)$ .

( $l_1$ ) There exists  $x_0$ , such that

$$l(x_0) = \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} l(x).$$

( $l_2$ ) For  $x$  close to  $x_0$  we have

$$l(x) = l(x_0) + O(|x - x_0|), \text{ as } x \rightarrow x_0.$$

Now we state our main results as follows.

**Theorem 1.1.** Suppose that  $(V, K) \in \mathcal{K}$ , and  $f$  satisfies  $(f_1), (f_2), (f_3)$ ,  $l(x)$  satisfies  $(l_1) - (l_2)$ .

(i) If  $\theta \in (1, 3]$ , for sufficiently large  $\eta > 0$ , then system (1.1) has at least one non-trivial solution.

(ii) If  $\theta \in (3, 5)$ , for any  $\eta > 0$ , then system (1.1) has at least one non-trivial solution.

**Notation.** In this paper we make use of the following notations:  $C$  will denote various positive constants; the strong (respectively weak) convergence is denoted by  $\rightarrow$  (respectively  $\rightharpoonup$ );  $o(1)$  denotes  $o(1) \rightarrow 0$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ ,  $B_\rho(0)$  denotes a ball centered at the origin with radius  $\rho > 0$ .

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, some preliminary results are presented. In Section 3, we give the proof of our main results.

## 2 Variational setting and preliminaries

Let us consider the space

$$E = \left\{ u \in D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3) : \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x)|u|^2 dx < +\infty \right\}$$

endowed with the norm

$$\|u\|_E^2 = \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla u|^2 dx + \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x)|u|^2 dx.$$

Recall that a weak solution of problem (1.1) is a function  $u \in E$  such that

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \nabla u \nabla \varphi dx + \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x)u\varphi dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi|u|^4 \varphi dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(u)\varphi dx = 0, \quad (2.1)$$

for all  $\varphi \in E$ .

Then, the weak solutions of (1.1) are the critical points of the energy functional defined on  $E$  by

$$J(u) := \frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u|^2 + V(x)|u|^2) dx - \frac{1}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi|u|^5 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(u) dx, \quad (2.2)$$

where  $F(u) = \int_0^u f(s) ds$ . More precisely,  $J \in C^1(E, \mathbb{R})$  and its differential  $J' : E \rightarrow E'$  is defined as

$$\langle J'(u), v \rangle = \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u| |\nabla v| + V(x)uv) dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi|u|^4 v dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(u)v dx, \quad (2.3)$$

for all  $v \in E$ , where  $E'$  is the dual space of  $E$ .

We define the Lebesgue space  $L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^N)$  composed by all measurable functions  $u : \mathbb{R}^N \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  such that

$$L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^3) = \left\{ u : \mathbb{R}^3 \rightarrow \mathbb{R} \mid u \text{ is measurable and } \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^p dx < +\infty, \right\}$$

endowed with norm

$$\|u\|_{L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^3)} := \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^p dx \right)^{\frac{1}{p}},$$

and we will state, without proof, two important results of Alves and Souto (see [[26], Lemmas 2.1 and 2.2]).

**Proposition 2.1.** Assume  $(V, K) \in \mathcal{K}$  holds,  $E$  is compactly embedded in  $L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^N)$  for every  $p \in (2, 6)$ . If  $(VK_4)$  holds,  $E$  is compactly embedded in  $L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^N)$ .

**Proposition 2.2.** Suppose that  $f$  satisfies  $(f_1)$  and  $(f_2)$  and  $(V, K) \in \mathcal{K}$ . Let  $\{v_n\}$  be such that  $v_n \rightharpoonup v$  in  $E$ . Then,

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(v_n)dx \rightarrow \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(v)dx \quad (2.4)$$

and

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(v_n)v_n dx \rightarrow \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(v)v dx. \quad (2.5)$$

**Lemma 2.3** [25, Lemma 2.1] For every  $u \in L^6(\mathbb{R}^3)$ , there exists a unique  $\phi_u \in D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3)$  which is the solution of

$$-\Delta \phi = |u|^5, \text{ in } \mathbb{R}^3,$$

here  $\phi_u$  can be expressed by the from

$$\phi_u(x) = \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|u(y)|^5}{|x-y|} dy$$

Moreover,

- (i)  $\|\phi_u\|_{D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3)}^2 = \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \phi_u |u|^5$ ;
- (ii)  $\phi_u(x) > 0$  for  $x \in \mathbb{R}^3$ ;
- (iii) for any  $\theta > 0$ ,  $\phi_{u_\theta} = \theta^2(\phi_u)_\theta$ , where  $u_\theta(\cdot) = u(\cdot/\theta)$ ;
- (iv) for any  $t > 0$ ,  $\phi_{tu} = t^5 \phi_u$ ;
- (v) for any  $u \in L^6(\mathbb{R}^3)$ ,

$$\|\phi_u\|_{D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3)} \leq S^{-\frac{1}{2}} |u|_6^5, \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \phi_u |u|^5 \leq S^{-1} |u|_6^{10},$$

where  $S$  is defined in (1.6);

- (vi) if  $u_n \rightharpoonup u$  in  $L^6(\mathbb{R}^3)$  and  $u_n \rightarrow u$  a.e in  $\mathbb{R}^3$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ , then  $\phi_{u_n} \rightarrow \phi_u$  in  $D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3)$ .

**Lemma 2.4.** [25, Lemma 2.3] If  $u_n \rightharpoonup u$  in  $L^6(\mathbb{R}^3)$ ,  $a, e$  in  $\mathbb{R}^3$ , then as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} |u_n|^5 - |u_n - u|^5 - |u|^5 &\rightarrow 0 \text{ in } L^{\frac{6}{5}}(\mathbb{R}^3), \\ \phi_{u_n} - \phi_{u_n - u} - \phi_u &\rightarrow 0, \text{ in } D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3), \\ \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \phi_{u_n} |u_n|^5 dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \phi_{u_n - u} |u_n - u|^5 dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \phi_u |u|^5 dx &\rightarrow 0, \end{aligned}$$

and

$$|u_n|^3 u_n - |u_n - u|(u_n - u) - |u|^3 u \rightarrow 0, \text{ in } D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3).$$

### 3 Proof of Theorem 1.1

To prove Lemma 3.2, we need the following results.

**Lemma 3.1.** Suppose that  $(V, K) \in \mathcal{K}$  hold. Then for  $p \in [2, 6]$ , there is  $C > 0$  such that

$$\|u\|_{L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^3)} \leq C \|u\|_E, \quad \forall u \in E.$$

**Proof.** First we suppose that  $(VK_2)$  holds. The proof is trivial if  $p = 2$  or  $6$ . Now we prove that the embedding is true for  $p \in (2, 6)$  under the assumption  $(VK_3)$ . For fixed  $p \in (2, 6)$ , define  $m = \frac{(6-p)}{4}$ , and hence  $p = 2m + (1-m)6$ , so we have that

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^p dx &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |u|^{2m}|u|^{(1-m)6} dx \\ &\leq \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |K(x)|^{\frac{1}{m}} |u|^2 dx \right)^m \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |u|^6 dx \right)^{1-m} \\ &\leq \left( \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^m} \right) \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x)u^2 dx \right)^m \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |u|^6 dx \right)^{1-m} \\ &\leq C \left( \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^m} \right) \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x)u^2 dx \right)^m \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla u|^2 dx \right)^{3(1-m)} \\ &\leq C \left( \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^m} \right) \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u|^2 + V(x)u^2) dx \right)^{m+3(1-m)} \\ &= C \left( \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^m} \right) \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla u|^2 + V(x)|u|^2 dx \right)^{\frac{p}{2}}. \end{aligned}$$

Since  $K(x) \in L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)$  and  $K/V \in L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)$ , we have that

$$\|u\|_{L_K^p(\mathbb{R}^3)} \leq C\|u\|_E, \quad \text{for } p \in (2, 6).$$

Next, we suppose that  $(VK_4)$  holds. Using the same argument as above, we define  $m_0 = \frac{(6-p_0)}{4}$ , and hence  $p_0 = 2m_0 + (1-m_0)6$  so that we have

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^{p_0} dx &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^{2m_0}|u|^{(1-m_0)6} dx \\ &\leq \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |K(x)|^{\frac{1}{m_0}} |u|^2 dx \right)^{m_0} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |u|^6 dx \right)^{1-m_0} \\ &\leq \left( \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^{m_0}} \right) \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x)|u|^2 dx \right)^{m_0} \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |u|^6 dx \right)^{1-m_0} \\ &\leq C \left( \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^3} \frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^{m_0}} \right) \left( \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u|^2 + V(x)|u|^2) dx \right)^{\frac{p_0}{2}}. \end{aligned}$$

From  $(VK_3)$  we deduce that  $\frac{|K(x)|}{|V(x)|^{m_0}} \in L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)$ . It follows from the above inequality that

$$\|u\|_{L_K^{p_0}(\mathbb{R}^3)} \leq C\|u\|_E.$$

we complete the proof. □

The functional  $J$  satisfies the mountain pass geometry.

**Lemma 3.2.** *The functional  $J$  satisfies the following conditions:*

(i) *There exist  $\rho$  and  $\alpha > 0$  such that  $J(u) \geq \alpha$  with  $\|u\|_E = \rho$ .*

(ii) There exists  $e \in B_\rho(0)$  with  $J(e) < 0$ .

**Proof.** (i) Now, we distinguish two case.

Case 1. We suppose that  $(VK_3)$  is true. For any  $\varepsilon > 0$ , it follows from  $(f_1)$  and  $(f_2)$  that there exists  $C_\varepsilon > 0$  such that

$$F(u) \leq \frac{\varepsilon}{2}|u|^2 + C_\varepsilon|u|^6, \quad \text{for all } u \in E. \quad (3.1)$$

Thus, by (3.1) and Lemma 3.1, we get that

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(u)dx &\leq \frac{\varepsilon}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^2dx + C_\varepsilon \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|u|^6dx \\ &\leq \frac{\varepsilon}{2}\|u\|_E^2 + C_\varepsilon\|u\|_E^6. \end{aligned}$$

Hence, in view of Lemma 2.3, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} J(u) &= \frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla u|^2 + V(x)|u|^2dx - \frac{1}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_u|u|^5dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(u)dx \\ &\geq \frac{1}{2}\|u\|_E^2 - C\|u\|_E^{10} - \frac{\varepsilon}{2}\|u\|_E^2 - C_\varepsilon\|u\|_E^6 \\ &= \left(\frac{1-\varepsilon}{2}\right)\|u\|_E^2 - C\|u\|_E^{10} - C_\varepsilon\|u\|_E^6. \end{aligned}$$

So, taking  $\varepsilon = \frac{1}{2}$ , there exists enough small  $\|u\|_E = \rho$ , such that  $J(u) \geq \alpha$ .

Case 2. We suppose that  $(VK_4)$  holds. By  $(f_1)$  and  $(f_2)$ , there exist  $C'_\varepsilon > 0$  and  $C''_\varepsilon > 0$  such that

$$F(u) \leq C'_\varepsilon|u|^{p_0} + C''_\varepsilon|u|^6, \quad \text{for all } u \in E.$$

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} J(u) &= \frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla u|_E^2 + V(x)u^2dx - \frac{1}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_u|u|^5dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(u)dx \\ &\geq \frac{1}{2}\|u\|_E^2 - C\|u\|_E^6 - C\|u\|_E^{10} - C\|u\|_E^{p_0}. \end{aligned}$$

The same as Case 1, we can take  $\|u\|_E = \rho$  such that  $J(u) \geq \alpha$ .

(ii) For every  $t > 0$  we obtain

$$J(tu) = \frac{t^2}{2}\|u\|_E^2 - \frac{t^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)\phi_u|u|^5dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(tu)dx.$$

From  $(f_3)$ , we obtain  $J(tu) \rightarrow -\infty$  as  $t \rightarrow +\infty$ , so it satisfies (ii). We complete the proof.  $\square$

As a consequence of Lemma 3.2, we can find a  $(PS)$  sequence of the functional  $J(u)$  at the level

$$c := \inf_{\gamma \in \Gamma} \max_{t \in [0,1]} J(\gamma(t)) > 0, \quad (3.2)$$

where the set of paths is defined as

$$J := \{\gamma \in C([0, 1], H^1(\mathbb{R}^3)) : \gamma(0) = 0, J(\gamma(1)) < 0\}.$$

**Lemma 3.3.** Let  $\{u_n\}$  be a  $(PS)_c$  sequence for  $J$ . Then  $\{u_n\}$  is bounded in  $E$ .

**Proof.** Let  $\{u_n\} \subset E$  be a  $(PS)_c$  sequence for  $J$ , that is

$$J(u_n) \rightarrow c \quad \text{and} \quad J'(u_n) \rightarrow 0 \quad \text{as } n \rightarrow +\infty.$$

Therefore, From  $(f_3)$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} c + 1 + \|u_n\|_E &\geq J(u_n) - \frac{1}{\theta} \langle J'(u_n), u_n \rangle \\ &= \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{\theta} \right) \|u_n\|_E^2 + \frac{\eta}{\theta} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)(f(u_n)u_n - \theta F(u_n))dx + \left( \frac{1}{\theta} - \frac{1}{10} \right) \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_u |u|^5 dx \\ &\geq \left( \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{\theta} \right) \|u_n\|_E^2, \end{aligned}$$

which implies that  $\{u_n\}$  is bounded in  $E$ .  $\square$

Because of the appearance of the critical nonlocal term, we have to estimate the Mountain-pass value given by (3.2) carefully. To do it, we choose the extremal function  $U_\varepsilon(x) = \frac{(3\varepsilon^2)^{\frac{1}{4}}}{(\varepsilon^2 + |x - x_0|^2)^{\frac{1}{2}}}$  to solve  $-\Delta u = u^5$  in  $\mathbb{R}^3$ . Let  $\varphi \in C_0^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)$  be a cut-off function verifying that  $0 \leq \varphi(x) \leq 1$  for all  $x \in \mathbb{R}^3$ ,  $\text{supp } \varphi \subset B_2(x_0)$ , and  $\varphi(x) \equiv 1$  on  $B_1(x_0)$ . Set  $V_\varepsilon = \varphi U_\varepsilon$ , then thanks to the asymptotic estimates from [8], we have

$$|\nabla v_\varepsilon|_2^2 = S^{\frac{3}{2}} + O(\varepsilon), \quad |v_\varepsilon|_6^2 = S^{\frac{1}{2}} + O(\varepsilon)$$

and for  $s \in [2, 6)$

$$|v_\varepsilon|_s^s = \begin{cases} O(\varepsilon^{\frac{s}{2}}), & \text{if } s \in [2, 3), \\ O(\varepsilon^{\frac{3}{2}} |\log \varepsilon|), & \text{if } s = 3, \\ O(\varepsilon^{\frac{6-s}{2}}), & \text{if } s \in (3, 6), \end{cases}$$

where  $S$  denotes the best constant for the embedding  $D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3) \hookrightarrow L^6(\mathbb{R}^3)$ , namely,

$$S := \inf_{u \in D^{1,2}(\mathbb{R}^3)} \left\{ \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla u|^2 dx, \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |u|^6 dx = 1 \right\}.$$

We define

$$V_{\max} := \max_{x \in B_{2R}(x_0)} V(x)$$

and

$$K_{\min} := \min_{x \in B_{2R}(x_0)} K(x).$$

By the assumption  $(l_2)$  we also have

$$l(x_0) \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} \phi |u|^5 dx \leq \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} l(x) \phi |u|^5 dx.$$

**Lemma 3.4.** Suppose that  $(V, K) \in \mathcal{K}$ ,  $(f_1) - (f_3)$  hold, and  $l(x)$  satisfies  $(l_1) - (l_2)$ . Then, there exists a  $u_0 \in E \setminus \{0\}$  such that

$$0 < \sup_{t \geq 0} J(tu_0) < \frac{2}{5} S^{\frac{3}{2}} |l(x)|_{L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)}^{-\frac{1}{2}}.$$

**Proof.** We now consider

$$I(tv_\varepsilon) = \frac{t^2}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 + V(x)|v_\varepsilon|^2) dx - \frac{t^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon} |v_\varepsilon|^5 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(tv_\varepsilon) dx.$$

By Lemma 3.1, we know that, there exists  $t_\varepsilon > 0$  such that  $\sup_{t \geq 0} J(tv_\varepsilon) > 0$  is attained and  $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} J(tv_\varepsilon) = -\infty$  for any  $\varepsilon > 0$ .

We suppose that there exists  $\varrho_1, \varrho_2$  such that  $\varrho_1 < t_\varepsilon < \varrho_2$  for small enough  $\varepsilon > 0$ . In fact,  $J(t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon) = \sup_{t \geq 0} J(tv_\varepsilon)$ , and hence  $dJ(tv_\varepsilon)/dt|_{t=t_\varepsilon} = 0$ , we obtain that

$$t_\varepsilon \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} (|\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 + V(x)|v_\varepsilon|^2) dx - \eta \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} K(x)f(t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon)v_\varepsilon dx - t_\varepsilon^{10} \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon} |v_\varepsilon|^5 dx = 0. \quad (3.3)$$

Now, we prove that  $t_\varepsilon \rightarrow +\infty$  as  $\varepsilon_n \rightarrow 0^+$  does not hold. By (3.3)

$$t_{\varepsilon_n} \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} (|\nabla v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2 + V(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2) dx \geq t_{\varepsilon_n}^{10} \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx,$$

which is a contradiction when  $t_\varepsilon \rightarrow +\infty$ .

Similarly, we suppose that there is a sequence  $\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n} \rightarrow 0$  as  $\varepsilon_n \rightarrow 0^+$ . Firstly, if  $(VK_3)$  holds, from  $(f_1)$  and  $(f_2)$ , for all  $\delta > 0$  there exists  $C_\delta > 0$  such that

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n}v_{\varepsilon_n})v_{\varepsilon_n} dx &\leq \delta \tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2 dx + C_\delta(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^5 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^6 dx \\ &\leq \delta C \tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2 + V(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2) dx + C_\delta(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^5 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^6 dx. \end{aligned}$$

Choosing  $\delta = \frac{1}{2C}$ , it follows from (3.3) that

$$\frac{\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n}}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2 + V(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2) dx \leq C_\delta(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^5 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^6 dx + (\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^9 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_n}|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^5 dx.$$

Next, we suppose that  $(VK_4)$  holds. By  $(f_1)$ ,  $(f_2)$ , there is a constant  $\bar{C} > 0$ , such that

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n}v_{\varepsilon_n})dx \leq (\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^{p_0-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^{p_0} dx + \bar{C}(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^5 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^6 dx.$$

It again follows from (3.3) that

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2 + V(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^2) dx &\leq (\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^{p_0-1} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^{p_0} dx + \bar{C}(\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^5 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^6 dx \\ &\quad + (\tilde{t}_{\varepsilon_n})^9 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_{\varepsilon_n}}|v_{\varepsilon_n}|^5 dx, \end{aligned}$$

We arrive at a contradiction because  $p_0 > 2$ . So we complete the proof.

Since  $0 < \varrho_1 < t_\varepsilon < \varrho_2 < \infty$ , together with the definitions of  $V_{max}$  and  $K_{min}$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} J(tv_\varepsilon) &= \frac{t^2}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 + V(x)|v_\varepsilon|^2) dx - \frac{t^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \\ &\leq \frac{t_\varepsilon^2}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 + V(x)|v_\varepsilon|^2) dx - \frac{t_\varepsilon^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon) dx \\ &\leq \frac{t_\varepsilon^2}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx + \frac{t_\varepsilon^2}{2} V_{max}(x) \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |v_\varepsilon|^2 dx - \frac{t_\varepsilon^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx - \eta K_{min}(x) \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} F(t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon) dx. \end{aligned}$$

We define

$$h(t) := \frac{t^2}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx - \frac{t^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx.$$

By some elementary calculations, we obtain

$$\max_{t \geq 0} h(t) = \frac{4(\frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx)^{\frac{5}{4}}}{5(\frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx)^{\frac{1}{4}}} = \frac{2}{5} \frac{(\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx)^{\frac{5}{4}}}{(\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_\varepsilon}|v_\varepsilon|^5 dx)^{\frac{1}{4}}}.$$

The Poisson equation  $-\Delta \phi_{v_\varepsilon} = |v_\varepsilon|^5$  and Cauchy's inequality give

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |v_\varepsilon|^6 dx = \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \nabla \phi_{v_\varepsilon} \cdot \nabla v_\varepsilon dx$$



$$\begin{aligned}
&\leq \frac{1}{2|l(x)|_\infty} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla \phi_{v_\varepsilon}|^2 dx + \frac{|l(x)|_\infty}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx \\
&= \frac{1}{2|l(x)|_\infty} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \phi_{v_\varepsilon} |v_\varepsilon|^5 dx + \frac{|l(x)|_\infty}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx.
\end{aligned}$$

This implies that

$$\begin{aligned}
\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_{v_\varepsilon} |v_\varepsilon|^5 dx &\geq 2|l(x)|_\infty \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) |v_\varepsilon|^6 dx - |l(x)|_\infty^2 \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 dx \\
&= |l(x)|_\infty^2 S^{\frac{3}{2}} + O(\varepsilon).
\end{aligned}$$

As a consequence of the above fact, one has

$$\max_{t \geq 0} h(t) \leq \frac{2}{5} \frac{(S^{\frac{2}{5}} + O(\varepsilon))^{\frac{5}{4}}}{(|l(x)|_\infty^2 S^{\frac{3}{2}} + O(\varepsilon))^{\frac{1}{4}}} = \frac{2}{5} |l(x)|_\infty S^{\frac{3}{2}} + O(\varepsilon).$$

On the other hand, from  $(f_3)$ , we obtain that  $F(s) \geq Cs^\theta$ , for  $s > 0$ . Hence,

$$\int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} F(t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon) dx \geq C \int_{B_{2R}(x_0)} (t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon)^\theta dx \geq C \rho_1^\theta \int_{B_R(x_0)} (v_\varepsilon)^\theta dx = \begin{cases} C \rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{\theta+1}{2}}), & \text{if } \theta \in [1, 2), \\ C \rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{3}{2}} |\log \varepsilon|), & \text{if } \theta = 2, \\ C \rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{5-\theta}{2}}), & \text{if } \theta \in (2, 5). \end{cases} \quad (3.4)$$

We have  $\max_{t \geq 0} J(tv_\varepsilon) = J(t_\varepsilon v_\varepsilon)$  at the beginning, that is,

$$\begin{aligned}
\max_{t \geq 0} J(tv_\varepsilon) &= \frac{t_\varepsilon^2}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_\varepsilon|^2 + V(x) |v_\varepsilon|^2 dx - \frac{t_\varepsilon^{10}}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_{v_\varepsilon} |v_\varepsilon|^5 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \\
&\leq h(t_\varepsilon) + \frac{V_{\max}}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |v_\varepsilon|^2 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \\
&\leq \frac{2}{5} |l(x)|_\infty S^{\frac{3}{2}} + CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx.
\end{aligned}$$

Using (3.4), we have

$$CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \leq CO(\varepsilon) - \begin{cases} C \eta \rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{\theta+1}{2}}), & \text{if } \theta \in [1, 2), \\ C \eta \rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{3}{2}} |\log \varepsilon|), & \text{if } \theta = 2, \\ C \eta \rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{5-\theta}{2}}), & \text{if } \theta \in (2, 5). \end{cases}$$

If  $(1, 2)$  and  $\eta = \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ , then  $\frac{1}{2} < \frac{\theta+1}{2} - \frac{1}{2} < 1$  and hence for small enough  $\varepsilon > 0$

$$CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \leq CO(\varepsilon) - C \rho_1^\theta \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{2}} O(\varepsilon^{\frac{\theta+1}{2}}) < 0,$$

when  $\eta > 0$  is enough large.

If  $\theta = 2$  and  $\eta = \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ , then for small enough  $\varepsilon > 0$

$$CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \leq CO(\varepsilon) - C \rho_1^\theta \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{2}} O(\varepsilon^{\frac{3}{2}}) |\log \varepsilon| < 0,$$

when  $\eta > 0$  is enough large.

If  $\theta \in (2, 3]$  and  $\eta = \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ , then  $\frac{1}{2} \leq \frac{5-\theta}{2} - \frac{1}{2} < 1$  and hence for small enough  $\varepsilon > 0$

$$CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(tv_\varepsilon) dx \leq CO(\varepsilon) - C \rho_1^\theta \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{2}} O(\varepsilon^{\frac{5-\theta}{2}}) < 0,$$

when  $\eta > 0$  is enough large.

If  $\theta \in (3, 5)$  then  $0 < \frac{5-\theta}{2} < 1$  and for small enough  $\varepsilon > 0$

$$CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(tv_\varepsilon)dx \leq CO(\varepsilon) - C\eta\rho_1^\theta O(\varepsilon^{\frac{5-\theta}{2}}) < 0,$$

for any  $\eta > 0$ .

Consequently, we show that for  $\theta \in (3, 5)$  with any  $\eta > 0$ , or  $\theta \in (1, 3]$  with enough large  $\eta > 0$

$$CO(\varepsilon) - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(tv_\varepsilon)dx < 0.$$

So, we can obtain that  $\sup_{t \geq 0} J(tv_\varepsilon) < \frac{2}{5} S^{\frac{3}{2}} |l(x)|_{L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^3)}^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ . □

### Proof of Theorem 1.1

Proof. From Lemma 3.3, we know that  $\{u_n\}_n$  is bounded in  $E$ . Up to a subsequence, we have

$$\begin{aligned} u_n &\rightharpoonup u \quad \text{in } E, \\ u_n &\rightarrow u \quad \text{in } L^r_{loc}(\mathbb{R}^3), \quad \text{for } r \in [2, 6), \\ u_n &\rightarrow u \quad \text{a.e in } \mathbb{R}^3. \end{aligned} \tag{3.5}$$

By (2.1) – (2.3), we get

$$\begin{aligned} J(u_n) &= \frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u_n|^2 + V(x)|u_n|^2)dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(u_n)dx - \frac{1}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{u_n}|u_n|^5dx \\ &= c + o(1) \end{aligned}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} \langle J'(u_n), u_n \rangle &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u_n|^2 + V(x)|u_n|^2)dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)F(u_n)dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{u_n}|u_n|^5dx \\ &= o(1). \end{aligned}$$

Assuming  $v_n = u_n - u$ , in view of (3.5), Proposition 2.2, Lemma 2.4 and the Brézis-Lieb Lemma [33, 34],

$$J(u_n) = J(u) + \frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_n|^2 + V(x)|v_n|^2)dx - \frac{1}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_n}|v_n|^5dx \tag{3.6}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} \langle J'(u_n), u_n \rangle &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u_n|^2 + V(x)|u_n|^2)dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(u_n)u_n dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{u_n}|u_n|^5dx \\ &= \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u|^2 + V(x)|u|^2)dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_u|u|^5dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(u)u dx \\ &\quad + \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_n|^2 + V(x)|v_n|^2)dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_{v_n}|v_n|^5dx + o_n(1). \end{aligned} \tag{3.7}$$

Since  $J'(u_n) \rightarrow 0$  as  $n \rightarrow +\infty$  and by (3.5) again, we get

$$\langle J'(u_n), u \rangle = \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u|^2 + V(x)u^2)dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x)\phi_u|u|^5dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x)f(u)u dx. \tag{3.8}$$

From (3.7) and (3.8), we obtain

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} |\nabla v_n|^2 dx + \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} V(x) |v_n|^2 dx - \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_{v_n} |v_n|^5 dx \rightarrow 0 \text{ as } n \rightarrow +\infty \quad (3.9)$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} J(u) &= \frac{1}{2} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla u|^2 + V(x) |u|^2) dx - \frac{1}{10} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_u |u|^5 dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(u) dx \\ &= \frac{1}{2} \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) f(u) u dx - \eta \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} K(x) F(u) dx + \frac{2}{5} \int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_u |u|^5 dx \\ &\geq 0. \end{aligned} \quad (3.10)$$

Without loss of generality we can suppose that

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} (|\nabla v_n|^2 + V(x) |v_n|^2) dx \rightarrow l \text{ as } n \rightarrow \infty \quad (3.11)$$

and from (3.9)

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_{v_n} |v_n|^5 dx \rightarrow l \text{ as } n \rightarrow \infty. \quad (3.12)$$

By estimate

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^3} l(x) \phi_{v_n} |v_n|^5 dx \leq \frac{|l(x)|_\infty^2 |v_n|_6^{10}}{S} \leq \frac{|l(x)|_\infty^2 \|v_n\|^{10}}{S^6}. \quad (3.13)$$

Combining (3.10) – (3.13), which implies  $l \leq \frac{|l(x)|_\infty^2 l^5}{S^6}$ . Therefore, either  $l = 0$  or  $l \geq |l(x)|_\infty^{-\frac{1}{2}} S^{\frac{3}{2}}$ .

If  $l > 0$ , we have  $l \geq |l(x)|_\infty^{-\frac{1}{2}} S^{\frac{3}{2}}$ . Taking the limit in (3.6) as  $n \rightarrow +\infty$ , and using (3.10), we obtain  $c_0 \geq \frac{2}{5} |l(x)|_\infty^{-\frac{1}{2}} S^{\frac{3}{2}}$ . On the other hand, from (3.2) and Lemma 3.4, we obtain  $c_0 \leq \frac{2}{5} |l(x)|_\infty^{-\frac{1}{2}} S^{\frac{3}{2}}$ . We get a contradiction. This shows that  $l = 0$ . Thus

$$J(u) = c > 0 \text{ and } J'(u) = 0,$$

i.e.  $u$  is a non-trivial solution of (1.1). We complete the proof.  $\square$

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