

Exploring Integration Strategies of Vocational English Courses and Intermediate VETS under the “1+X” Certificate System: A Case Study of the Workplace English Course

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Abstract: *With the implementation of the “1+X” certificate system, the reform of vocational English course teaching has become an urgent necessity. Thoroughly understanding the essence of the “1+X” certificate system, examining the current state of vocational English course reforms, and analyzing the assessment content and scoring standards of VETS are crucial for exploring effective strategies to implement course-certificate integration in vocational English courses. Using the Workplace English course as an example, this paper investigates effective strategies for integrating vocational English courses with intermediate VETS from the perspective of teaching resource integration.*

Keywords: *“1+X” Certificate System; Course Reform; VETS; Workplace English; Course-Certificate Integration*

Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous advancement of vocational education reform, the “1+X” certificate system has emerged as a key initiative to deepen industry-education integration and drive innovation in talent cultivation models. Against this backdrop, vocational English teaching has encountered new opportunities and challenges. Effectively integrating course teaching with vocational skill certificates has become a critical issue that demands resolution. As an important standard for evaluating vocational English proficiency, the VETS certificates at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels play a significant role in achieving course-certificate integration within vocational English courses, contributing to enhanced workplace competitiveness for students. This paper focuses on the Workplace English course, exploring strategies for implementing course-certificate integration with intermediate VETS under the “1+X” certificate system. Based on an understanding of students' learning profiles, the study aims to provide valuable references and insights for vocational English teaching reform, foster high-quality interdisciplinary English talents that meet the demands of the new era, and promote closer alignment between vocational English education and workplace requirements.

1. The “1+X” Certificate System

The “1+X” certificate system refers to a framework where learners, upon completing the academic requirements of a certain educational stage, such as secondary vocational education, higher vocational education, or undergraduate studies, obtain a corresponding academic certificate while also earning a vocational skill level certificate (beginner, intermediate, or advanced) that reflects their professional skill level. The core essence of this system includes the following aspects: First, it encourages deep collaboration between schools and enterprises. Vocational education should not be limited to teaching activities within schools but must closely integrate with the actual needs of enterprises as well as industry standards and norms, ensuring that the skills learned by students align with the requirements of real-world job positions. Second, it emphasizes the integration of academic certificates with vocational skill level certificates. The training content of the “X” certificate should be embedded into professional talent cultivation programs, and the curriculum system should be optimized based on vocational skill standards. In this way, the teaching content of professional courses and the assessment content of the certificates can complement each other, maximizing the quality of vocational education. Finally, it focuses on cultivating learners' professional competencies and career development. Centered on the

learner, it provides diverse pathways for skill enhancement, facilitating the transition from coursework to practical skills and thereby improving the relevance, flexibility, and adaptability of talent cultivation^[1].

2. Current State of Vocational English Course Teaching Reform

In 2019, vocational colleges began large-scale enrollment expansions and actively implemented the national policy of integrating the “1+X” certificate system into their teaching frameworks. Since then, vocational English courses have undergone comprehensive reform. However, the practical implementation process has faced numerous challenges and obstacles, making smooth progress difficult. The main issues include the following:

2.1 Limited professional competence of vocational English teachers

Most teachers excel only in traditional English language teaching areas such as phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and reading. They lack relevant industry knowledge and skills as well as practical workplace experience, resulting in a significant disconnect between teaching content and real workplace application scenarios. This deficiency fails to meet the needs of students preparing for future workplace challenges.

2.2 Insufficient cognitive ability among vocational students

Many students have a limited understanding of the “1+X” certificate system and fail to recognize its importance, instead focusing more on traditional English proficiency tests such as CET-4 and CET-6. Moreover, with the expansion of vocational college enrollment, students’ English proficiency levels have become highly uneven. Those with poor listening, speaking, and writing skills struggle to complete oral and written communication tasks in workplace settings, posing significant challenges to the implementation of the “1+X” certificate system^[2].

2.3 Limited teaching resources for vocational English courses

Currently, most vocational English textbooks are still centered on basic English language knowledge, with minimal coverage of the content assessed by the “1+X” certificate. As a result, the existing textbooks fail to meet the teaching needs of vocational English courses under the “1+X” certificate system, severely impacting teaching effectiveness.

2.4 Misalignment between traditional teaching evaluation systems and the evaluation standards of the “1+X” certificate

Traditional vocational English teaching evaluation systems primarily adopt formative and summative assessments, relying on class performance and final exam results as the main evaluation criteria. However, the “1+X” certificate has its own unique assessment standards. Effectively integrating the school’s English teaching evaluation system with the certificate’s assessment criteria remains a persistent challenge.

3. The Assessment Content and Scoring Criteria for VETS Intermediate Level

VETS (Vocational English Test System) is designed under the guidance of the “1+X” concept, covering three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The following are the specific content and scoring criteria for the intermediate level:

3.1 Assessment Content

The VETS intermediate level comprehensively assesses the English language skills and communicative professional abilities required for typical work tasks in general international communication situations within five work areas: business arrangements, product operation and development, customer service, business promotion, and goods trading. Currently, this test consists of the following six tasks:

Task 1 is a guided visit, where candidates listen to a 200-word monologue and answer 5 multiple-choice questions, assessing the candidate's understanding of the general meaning of the passage and ability to capture key information^[3].

Task 2 is a business introduction, where candidates read a 200-word company business introduction within 5 minutes, and then give a 120-second oral presentation based on the content read, assessing the candidate's ability to summarize and orally express the material.

Task 3 is product promotion, where candidates first listen to 3 product introductions, each approximately 100 words long, and complete 7 fill-in-the-blank questions. Then, they listen to 3 customer monologues totaling around 150 words, matching customer needs with the previously heard products. Finally, based on this matching information, candidates make a 90-second product promotion to one of the customers. This task mainly assesses the candidate's ability to capture key information, analyze, compare, and choose, as well as their ability to summarize and promote orally.

Task 4 is written negotiation, where candidates first read a 150-word email and answer 5 multiple-choice questions. Then, candidates read a reply email and select 5 answers from 7 options to complete the email. This task evaluates the candidate's ability to understand, infer, and judge the perspectives or attitudes of both parties.

Task 5 is market research, where candidates read a 150-word report, which includes data charts, and then answer 5 multiple-choice questions, assessing their ability to understand both text and data information.

Task 6 is event organization, where candidates first read a 120-word background of an event and complete 5 fill-in-the-blank questions. Then, they read 3 posters and complete 5 matching questions. Finally, based on all the materials read, they write a suggestion email. This task primarily assesses the candidate's ability to read and process key information and communicate in writing.

3.2 Scoring Criteria

As summarized above, the VETS intermediate level assessment covers four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The types of questions mainly include: multiple-choice/matching questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, oral expression, and written composition.

For multiple-choice or matching questions, incorrect answers, missing answers, or multiple answers result in zero points.

For fill-in-the-blank questions, scoring is comprehensive, considering correctness, spelling, and format. Missing key information, spelling mistakes, singular/plural errors, or grammatical mistakes result in zero points.

For oral expression, scores are given based on content and language in two dimensions, each worth 5 points. For content, if the response covers all required points and details clearly with natural flow, the score is 5 points; if some content is missing or incomplete, the score is 2 points.

For language, if the response is appropriate, grammatically correct, with rich vocabulary, flexible sentence structures, and natural pronunciation and intonation, the score is 5 points; if the language is basic with minor errors, the score is 3 points^[4].

For written composition, scores are given based on content, structure, and language in three dimensions, each worth 5 points. For content, if the response is relevant, covers all key points, and provides detailed information, the score is 5 points; if some content is missing or there is little detail, the score is 2 points. For structure, if the composition is logically clear, properly connected, and follows a standard format, the score is 5 points; if most of the content lacks logical clarity, with improper connection and format issues, the score is 2 points. For language, if the expression is appropriate, with accurate vocabulary and grammar, and flexible sentence structure, the score is 5 points; if the language is inappropriate, with inaccurate vocabulary and grammar, and simple sentence structure, the score is 2 points.

4. Strategies for Integrating the "Workplace English" Course with VETS Intermediate Level Certification

The "Workplace English" course is a required course for the Applied English major at our college.

The textbook currently used for this course is Workplace English, edited by Yang Anwen and Jiang Jing, and published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Although the textbook covers a range of fundamental workplace knowledge, such as business communication and office tasks, and integrates training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing throughout each unit, its content still does not fully meet the requirements of the VETS intermediate assessment. Therefore, after thoroughly understanding the essence of the "1+X" certification system and the current state of English course teaching reforms in higher vocational colleges, I have conducted a detailed analysis of the content and scoring criteria of the VETS intermediate assessment. Based on this analysis, I believe the content of the "Workplace English" course can be integrated with the VETS intermediate assessment content from four dimensions: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This integration would meet the teaching requirements of the "1+X" certification system and ultimately achieve the alignment between the course and the VETS intermediate certification.

4.1 Integration Plan

The textbook consists of 7 teaching units. After comprehensive analysis and consideration, I believe that integrating the VETS intermediate assessment content into the fourth and fifth units would be the most reasonable and appropriate.

The fourth unit mainly covers job-related skills. The original list of teaching content is as follows:

Unit 4 On-the-job Skills	Meeting
	Report
	Proposal
	Computer Skills

The list after integrating the VETS intermediate assessment content and replacing the original content is as follows:

Unit 4 On-the-job Skills	Meeting
	Report 1 (VETS Report an activity)
	Report 2 (VETS Write a market research report)
	Proposal (VETS Present a product upgrading proposal)
	VETS Advertise a product

The fifth unit mainly covers knowledge and skills related to business communication. The original list of teaching content is as follows:

Unit 5 Business Communication	Business Phone Call
	Email and Fax
	Presentation
	Small Talks

The list after integrating the VETS intermediate assessment content and replacing the original content is as follows:

Unit 5 Business Communication	Business Phone Call
	Email 1 (VETS Arrange a hotel booking)
	Email 2 (VETS Handle customer complaints)
	Presentation (VETS Introduce a company)
	Small Talks

4.2 Four Dimensions of Teaching Content Integration

4.2.1 Listening

Based on the existing listening exercises in the textbook, we have introduced VETS intermediate listening training. Specifically, we have compiled listening materials from the VETS intermediate Inputting and Extending sections, created a document with corresponding audio files, and uploaded it to the cloud-based platform for students to use as listening practice before and after class. In addition, we have collected listening sections from past VETS intermediate exams and practice tests, summarized them, and regularly organized targeted listening training for students.

4.2.2 Speaking

Based on the original textbook's Role Play exercises, we have integrated oral training from the

VETS intermediate assessment. For Task 2, the company introduction, and Task 3, the product promotion, we have incorporated content from VETS's "Introduce a company" and "Advertise a product" sections. Driven by tasks and focused on output, we simulate workplace scenarios in class and assign oral tasks. Additionally, we have added practical scenario-based classes to provide students with more opportunities to practice Task 2 and Task 3 of the VETS intermediate level. After student presentations, we score and explain their performances according to VETS intermediate scoring standards, helping students master more English expressions and answering techniques specific to these workplace scenarios^[5].

4.2.3 Reading

The chapters in the original textbook, such as "Job Interview Tips" and "Proper Business Telephone Etiquette," primarily focus on explaining and introducing workplace knowledge and skills. In contrast, the reading passages in the VETS intermediate assessment are more focused on practical genres such as company profiles, emails, business reports, and posters. Therefore, we believe that the reading section in the "Workplace English" course should include more reading exercises. Similar to the listening training, we have carefully selected and compiled reading materials from the VETS intermediate Inputting and Extending sections, uploaded them to the cloud platform as supplementary reading practice for students before and after class, enabling them to more comprehensively master the reading content in the VETS intermediate assessment.

4.2.4 Writing

While the writing section in the current textbook covers job application letters, resumes, thank-you notes, and meeting memos, these contents are insufficient to meet the writing requirements for Task 6 of the VETS intermediate assessment. Since Task 6 primarily assesses the ability to write recommendation emails, we must supplement the existing textbook content with explanations and exercises on recommendation emails. To this end, we have effectively used the VETS intermediate "Arrange a hotel booking" section to deeply analyze the concept and techniques of writing recommendation emails. Moreover, we have compiled relevant content from past VETS intermediate exam questions and practice tests related to Task 6, regularly organizing targeted writing training for students, and providing explanations and analysis based on the scoring standards across the three dimensions of content, structure, and language.

4.3 Assessment and Implementation Effectiveness

The evaluation system for the "Workplace English" course combines formative and summative assessments, that is, a combination of regular performance and final exams. Regular performance accounts for 60% of the total grade, covering in-class dictations, homework, classroom presentations, and group practice activities; the final exam accounts for 40%. Before integrating the VETS intermediate content, the final exam consisted of an oral exam and written composition, each accounting for 20%. The oral exam mainly involved scenarios such as interviews, job introductions, and business communication, while the written composition focused on practical writing genres like recruitment advertisements, resumes, and cover letters. After integrating the VETS intermediate content, the scoring ratio and weight remained the same, but the final exam format was adjusted to include both an oral exam and a written test. The oral exam now incorporates VETS intermediate Task 2 and Task 3, where students are asked to conduct a product promotion or company business introduction in specific scenarios, with grading strictly based on the VETS intermediate assessment standards. The written test, on the other hand, follows the VETS intermediate exam format and focuses on assessing listening, reading, and writing skills, including fill-in-the-blank questions, multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, and writing tasks. This assessment content is more comprehensive and targeted.

Practical experience has shown that after integrating VETS intermediate content, the teaching content of the "Workplace English" course has become more complete and refined, and the focus and purpose of the teaching have been significantly enhanced. Teachers are able to conduct more precise instruction, while students acquire more practical workplace English skills. After one academic year of teaching practice, students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities have significantly improved, and their confidence in the VETS intermediate certification assessment has also greatly increased. Therefore, integrating the "Workplace English" course with VETS intermediate content is indeed an effective approach.

5. Conclusion

"Curriculum-certification integration" is key to successfully implementing the "1+X" certification system and optimizing the vocational education model. This paper takes the "Workplace English" course as an example and discusses effective strategies for curriculum-certification integration from the perspective of teaching resource integration, though the scope of this discussion remains limited. To truly realize the integration of vocational English courses with certification, there are still many other issues that need further exploration. For instance, how can we strengthen teacher development to meet the staffing needs for curriculum-certification integration? How can we motivate students to learn and enhance their ability to face workplace challenges? How can we provide students with more practical work-related teaching scenarios? The author must continue to work diligently, keep learning, and deepen research further.

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