

# Integrating Course and Certificate Teaching: Practical Exploration of Enhancing English Vocational Skills under the “1+X” Certificate System

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**Abstract:** This article explores the implementation path of the “1+X” certificate system in vocational college English teaching, specifically how to integrate VETS (Vocational English Test System) level examination teaching with daily teaching. The article analyzes the current situation and dilemmas of course-certificate integration teaching, including the separation of teaching content, the lack of practical ability among teachers and the absence of a unified teaching plan. Subsequently, it proposes the characteristics and design ideas of course-certificate integration teaching, emphasizing the role of the course in cultivating compound talents. A specific case demonstrates how to integrate “Advanced International English for Vocational Colleges” with the VETS primary tutorial to enhance students’ language skills, vocational skills and international perspective and shape the correct professional concepts.

**Keywords:** “1+X” certificate system; VETS examination; Course-certificate integration; Vocational skills

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## 1. Introduction

In April 2019, the Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, and State Administration for Market Regulation jointly issued the “Pilot Plan for Implementing the ‘Academic Degree Certificate + Several Vocational Skill Level Certificates’ System in Institutions,” launching the pilot work of the “Academic Degree Certificate + Several Vocational Skill Level Certificates” (referred to as the “1+X” certificate system). The “1+X” certificate system was already reflected in the “Vocational Education Twenty Articles” issued by the State Council in January of the same year, which called for “improving the standards of education and teaching, and starting the pilot work of the “1+X” Certificate system.” The country’s and society’s demand for compound technical and skilled talents is increasingly obvious. In higher education, especially in the vocational education stage, each major and course should take this goal as guidance, review the shortcomings of existing curriculum content and system, and explore an effective way to cultivate talents

with both academic degrees and vocational skills<sup>[1]</sup>.

The Vocational English Test System (VETS) is a “1+X” vocational skill level certificate authorized and issued by the Research Institute of Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education. The “Public Foreign Language” course, as a public basic course, is responsible for cultivating students’ English abilities and is also an important position to assist students in obtaining VETS certificates<sup>[2]</sup>. Ways to make good use of this course, to add the learning content of the VETS level certificate examination while completing the existing teaching tasks and to realize the integration of course and certificate to enhance the connotation of teaching is both a task and a challenge for most frontline teachers.

## **2. Current situation and dilemmas of course-certificate integration teaching**

### **2.1. Separation of course and certificate teaching**

With the promotion of the VETS certificate in various colleges and universities, training for the level certificate examination has also been carried out<sup>[3]</sup>. Although it can help students quickly become familiar with the type and difficulty of the exam and complete targeted pre-examination exercises, such training will undoubtedly increase the burden on students. Overall, the current course and certificate teaching cannot be organically integrated<sup>[4]</sup>, and some content even appears repeatedly in the two parts of teaching, which undoubtedly increases the burden on students and affects the overall learning efficiency.

### **2.2. Teachers’ practical ability in course-certificate integration teaching is insufficient**

In recent years, many teachers have tried to incorporate training content for the VETS certificate examination into daily teaching. However, the ideal course-certificate integration teaching is not like this. The relationship between “X” and “1” is not divided but should be organically integrated, achieving mutual integration and mutual growth<sup>[5]</sup>. Frontline teachers lack theoretical guidance for course-certificate integration and the time and energy to practice different teaching modes, resulting in course-certificate integration teaching being unable to exert the greatest effect.

### **2.3. Lack of unified teaching plan, great difference in teaching effects**

The “Public Foreign Language (English)” course, as a public basic course, has obvious characteristics different from other courses<sup>[6]</sup>, including a large number of students, a variety of student majors, relatively unified teaching materials and teaching methods, which means that teachers have the opportunity to repeatedly refine more effective course-certificate integration teaching plans<sup>[7]</sup>. However, the preliminary research of this project shows that the same major’s classes belong to different teachers. Still, the teachers have not yet achieved horizontal unification of the course-certificate integration teaching plan in the English classes of each major. Most teachers have been unable to formulate different plans according to the students’ majors, resulting in a large difference in the final teaching effects. They cannot learn from each other, and the course reform effect is unsatisfactory.

## **3. Features and design ideas of course-certificate integration teaching**

The “Public Foreign Language” course, as one of the most widely covered courses in colleges and universities, bears the important mission of cultivating talents with “knowledge + skills.” Previously, the cultivation of skills usually relied on some language skill exercises in textbooks and teachers relied on their personal knowledge reserves to supplement course content. With the introduction of the “1+X” certificate system, high-quality

standards have been proposed for the training of vocational education talents, enhancing the adaptability of vocational education to social needs, promoting the integration of industry and education, and improving the training process of vocational education <sup>[8]</sup>.

This course-certificate integration teaching practice course is the first-semester course of vocational English at the author's institution, targeting first-year vocational college students. In the student situation analysis stage, teachers will consider the following parts: students' college entrance examination English scores, entrance test scores, pre-class questionnaire survey results and semi-structured interviews conducted on some students based on the above data. The results show that the students' entry level is roughly equivalent to the VETS vocational skill level primary level. The author will break up the original teaching units of the teaching materials and integrate them with the content of "Practical English Communication Course for Entry-Level Jobs." Taking "topics" as the resource combination form, using various teaching activities as methods and taking the cultivation of vocational skills as the center help students accumulate language knowledge, exercise communication skills, make full use of classroom time and achieve multidimensional improvement <sup>[9]</sup>.

## **4. Classic case of course-certificate integration teaching**

The eighth unit, "Holidays" of "Advanced International English for Vocational Colleges" and the fifth unit, "Business Travel" of "Practical English Communication Course for Entry-Level Jobs" are integrated into topics, taking into account the key content of both textbooks from several aspects such as situational experience, language knowledge, work skills, career concept and international perspective. Through teaching methods such as lectures, group discussions, and role-playing, students can complete the original set of learning tasks while preparing for the VETS primary examination <sup>[10]</sup>.

### **4.1. Scenario creation**

The tasks included in the elementary tutorial are foundational and functional. While they may lack the professional technicality of intermediate-level tasks, they effectively create various work scenarios for students through business, administrative, technical and service application situations. This provides a good experiential sense for students with little or no prior work experience.

### **4.2. Task setting**

This section aims to design several target tasks for students, refining the entire unit's abstract and broad teaching objectives into specific goals <sup>[11]</sup>. These specific goals can be achieved through simple tasks and are assessable and measurable. For example, by reading to list the number of legal holidays in various countries, by listening to find details of travel arrangements, by group discussion to collect important components of travel arrangements, by exercises to familiarize oneself with common word collocations and near-synonym analysis on this topic, by independent learning to query websites for personalized expansion of the limited content in textbooks, and by individual/small group presentations to promote efficient input, etc.

### **4.3. Language accumulation and training**

The original teaching, that is, the "course" part, and the VETS elementary tutorial, the "certificate" part, include a certain proportion of language knowledge explanation and practice. The implementer of the course-certificate integration must be aware that no matter what the teaching process is oriented towards and how it is organized and implemented, language knowledge and skills are an important foundation <sup>[12]</sup>, including the following parts:

### **4.3.1. Listening**

As an important part of English learning, listening has often been neglected in past teaching for many reasons. Still, one of the important reasons is that the difficulty is too great for students. Few daily application scenarios can obtain positive feedback, and it isn't easy to form a virtuous cycle. However, the proportion of the listening part in the VETS exam cannot be ignored, so in this curriculum reform, listening teaching and practice account for about 30% of the total, helping students to increase the amount of listening practice. At the same time, enrich the types of exercises, from easy to difficult, including original text completion, main idea selection, article detail selection/completion, Q&A, etc., enabling students to have a preliminary understanding of their level. It is also convenient for teachers to explain listening skills for different types of questions, helping students to improve their listening skills step by step.

### **4.3.2. Speaking**

In this part, students will learn many commonly used oral expressions through textbooks, with themes around oral notifications, expressing opinions and common topic Q&As. Given the level of students, the proportion of speaking teaching and practice is slightly lower, and the main purpose is to cultivate students' self-confidence, initially form good oral expression habits, and correct incorrect pronunciation and intonation. The form is mainly group discussion and presentation, striving to have all students participate in exercises a few times, achieving the purpose of practice while reducing students' fear of speaking and at the same time, exercising students' information collection and independent thinking abilities through open-ended questions <sup>[13]</sup>.

### **4.3.3. Reading**

The reading texts involved in this course-certificate integration are mostly applied styles, such as activity schedules, work display charts, website information, etc. The material for this unit is email, a commonly used work communication method in foreign-related business scenarios, and the frequency of emails appearing in students' daily lives and regular textbooks is not high. Therefore, while students perform reading tasks and complete follow-up questions, they can also imperceptibly understand the common formal communication patterns in the workplace, enhance their register awareness and gradually learn to choose and use appropriate English vocabulary, expressions, and sentence patterns in different scenarios.

### **4.3.4. Grammar**

Grammar knowledge, as the foundation of the above skills, often does not receive the attention it deserves, largely related to the mechanical and dogmatic grammar teaching students have experienced. In this course-certificate integration teaching reform, grammar teaching and practice are integrated into other skill modules, achieving learning by practicing, teaching while learning and practicing while teaching. This forms a closed-loop process, not separating grammar from its usage scenarios and enabling students to apply the grammar knowledge they have learned to English skills in the first place.

## **4.4. Work skills**

The focus of this reform is to transform the existing knowledge-oriented teaching and learning into work-skill-oriented teaching and learning <sup>[14]</sup>. The more important work skills include:

- (1) Communication skills, which help students learn to effectively communicate in English in a work environment, ways to distinguish and use oral and written expressions.
- (2) Teamwork ability, which involves learning how to effectively communicate with others in group

discussions and scenario simulations, ways to balance the needs of all parties to find the best solution and striving to extend good teamwork habits into the workplace.

- (3) Customer service ability, where students will learn how to properly handle customer inquiries and complaints in certain scenarios, including using appropriate language expressions to enhance service awareness in the workplace.
- (4) Time management ability, which requires students to correctly judge the priority of tasks, learn how to efficiently arrange work, prioritize urgent and important tasks and handle them quickly and efficiently.

#### **4.5. Professional qualities**

The integration of course and certificate teaching reform not only cultivates students' practical skills in using English in a professional environment but may also influence and shape their professional concepts. For example, lifelong learning can help students adapt to today's rapidly changing workplace.

- (1) Encourage students to adhere to professional ethics, including confidentiality, integrity, responsibility, fairness and respect.
- (2) Help students develop innovative thinking, encouraging them to use new ideas and methods to improve work processes and find better solutions continuously.
- (3) Urge students to establish a professional development perspective, valuing personal career growth and skill enhancement, constantly pursuing higher professional qualifications and levels, and having the awareness to assess and improve their work performance continuously<sup>[15]</sup>.

### **5. Reflection and outlook**

In the implementation process of the course-certificate integration teaching reform plan, some teachers lack a deep understanding of the exam content and still focus on textbook knowledge, failing to deeply integrate VETS exam knowledge and skills, making the course-certificate integration teaching superficial. At the same time, some students are not fully cooperative with this teaching method, lacking internal motivation and initiative. In future teaching reforms, it is necessary to continue to conduct research on the above issues to provide more precise solutions.

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