

Exploring the Path of Curriculum Construction for Preschool Care in Secondary Vocational Schools under the Background of 1+X Certificate System

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Abstract: The “1+X” certificate system is a new talent development and evaluation model that has emerged in the process of vocational education development in China in recent years. “1” refers to the educational certificate obtained by students studying in vocational schools after three years of on-campus learning, passing all theoretical examinations and skills tests, and completing corresponding internship tasks. “X” refers to obtaining a vocational skill certificate related to the major while obtaining the educational certificate. Taking the employment status and talent competence requirements of the intermediate professional early childhood education major as the starting point, and using the course “0-3 Years Infant and Toddler Care and Education” as an example, this research aims to explore the curriculum construction path of the intermediate vocational early childhood education major through the integration of course and certificate, and cultivate students in this major with a solid foundation of professional knowledge, strong practical abilities, and competitiveness in the job market.

Keywords: “1+X” certificate system, integration of course and certificate, curriculum construction

1. Introduction

Since 2019, China has been steadily promoting the pilot work of the “1+X” certificate system, focusing on serving national needs, market demands, and improving students’ employability. Vocational skill level certificates serve as credentials for graduates and individuals to demonstrate their professional skills, reflecting the comprehensive abilities required for occupational activities and personal career development. This research takes the combination of the “1+X” certificate system and essential professional level certificates in the field of early childhood education as the background [1].

¹This study explores the curriculum development of the “0-3 Years Infant and Toddler Care and Education” course offered in Yiyang Normal College’s higher vocational childcare program. This

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course is of great practical value for students majoring in early childhood education, as it is a mandatory course in intermediate vocational programs and showcases the integration of coursework and certification, highlighting its unique strengths. The research emphasizes the importance of the “1+X” certificate system in early childhood education and establishes the close connection between the course and relevant professional skill level certificates. By analyzing the course content, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how course and certification are integrated in the curriculum construction of early childhood education programs. Ultimately, this research seeks to enhance the educational experience for students majoring in intermediate vocational early childhood education, ensuring they acquire sufficient professional knowledge and practical skills to meet the demands of this field.

2. Analysis of the Current Employment Status and Talent Demand in the Early Childhood Education Field

2.1. Analysis of the Employment Status in the Early Childhood Education Field

China’s “Three-Child” policy has led to increased demand for professional childcare workers in various industries. However, the current competence of childcare professionals is still in its early stages of development due to low entry requirements for the early childhood education profession. This results in a reliance on practical experience and a lack of theoretical knowledge among practitioners, leading to incorrect childcare methods and lower social recognition for workers. The introduction of early childhood education programs in vocational colleges improves practitioners’ theoretical knowledge and promotes the integration of education and childcare policies. There is a significant demand gap for professional childcare workers in nurseries, childcare centers, and early education centers, providing ample employment opportunities for vocational childcare students and developmental prospects for high-quality professionals.

2.2. Analysis of Professional Career Development Direction and Skills Requirements in Early Childhood Care and Education

Since 2021, China’s secondary vocational institutions have shifted their focus in the field of preschool education. Instead of enrolling students for preschool education majors, they now offer this major in higher vocational schools (junior colleges). However, the newly established early childhood care majors remain in secondary vocational institutions. Many students in the early childhood care program aspire to work as caregivers in kindergartens. Nevertheless, there are job opportunities in daycare centers, early education centers, and postpartum care centers for graduates with a major in early childhood care. These roles require a strong theoretical knowledge base in providing care and education for children aged 0-3, as well as practical caregiving skills.

3. Current Situation of Talent Cultivation in Secondary Vocational Early Childhood Care

3.1. Mismatch Between Employer Demand and Students’ Actual Situation

The key to talent cultivation lies in integrating the curriculum with the requirements of the job [2]. Scholars have proposed a “relationship-based responsive curriculum.” Students majoring in early childhood care in secondary vocational schools often face a common problem, which is that their actual abilities fall short of the demands of employers for relevant positions. Secondary vocational graduates are generally young and lack practical experience in caregiving and education. However, working in the field of early childhood care requires not only a theoretical knowledge base in disciplines such as early childhood education, child psychology, and child health, but also practical

skills. There is a widespread problem among teachers in secondary vocational early childhood care programs, namely, an excessive emphasis on accumulating theoretical knowledge while neglecting the cultivation and summary of practical experience.

Secondary vocational students in early childhood care often lack practical work experience, hindering their comprehensive knowledge development. Limited resources and inadequate simulation of real work scenarios in training rooms further limits their practical abilities to meet employers' demands. To address these issues, schools should enhance the talent cultivation model by emphasizing practical skills and providing more hands-on experience. Improving training conditions and collaborating with employers are essential to ensure students are competent in handling diverse early childhood care tasks upon graduation.

3.2. Separation of Curriculum and Certification Is Common

The "1+X" certificate system is a progressive talent evaluation system that integrates cognition and skills. It suits the characteristics of vocational education. The content covered in the course "Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers Aged 0-3" overlaps considerably with the skill-level exams for nursery caregivers [3]. For example, the course includes practical tasks such as diaper changing and feeding, which are also assessed in the certification exam for nursery caregivers. Moreover, there is a significant overlap in theoretical knowledge and the written exam content for nursery caregivers.

Unfortunately, in the assessment process of the course "Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers Aged 0-3" in secondary vocational institutions, the students' performance in professional certification exams is not considered in the final evaluation. This disconnect between certification and the curriculum hinders students' future career development, as they are unable to demonstrate necessary professional skills through certifications. To address this, it is important to bridge the gap between the curriculum and certification, linking students' achievements in certification exams to their course evaluation. This will enhance their employability and overall career development in early childhood care and education.

4. Exploring the Curriculum Path of "Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers Aged 0-3" under the "1+X" System

We have chosen Yiyang Normal College for the curriculum development in the field of early childhood care. The college has been dedicated to continuous curriculum reform and innovation. It offers diverse learning pathways, encouraging students to learn, practice, and reflect. To meet the demand for theory-practice integration, the "1+X" certificate system is implemented. Practical training rooms are optimized, teaching methods are reformed, and assessment plans are updated to provide more experiential learning opportunities. The specific curriculum path is as follows:

4.1. Transforming the Traditional Practical Teaching Model of "Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers Aged 0-3"

The "Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers Aged 0-3" curriculum consists of two key components: theoretical teaching and practical training. In the traditional practical teaching model, the teaching heavily relies on teachers' demonstrations in the classroom, while students engage in practical operations in the training room. In this exploration of teaching models, an innovative five-step collaborative approach has been proposed to enrich the practical teaching activities of the curriculum, focusing on effective teacher training, student-centered teaching methods, and competency-based student assessment [4]. Please refer to Figure 1 for specific details.

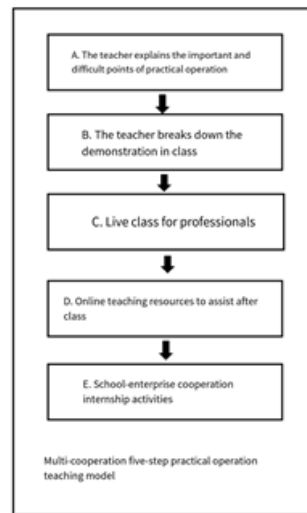


Figure 1: Five-step Collaborative Approach Figure.

4.2. Curriculum Restructuring to Promote Integration of Certificates

In terms of curriculum content, the principle of appropriateness in humanistic education suggests that the focus of curriculum development should shift from textbooks to students, with the selection and organization of content based on students' self-fulfillment needs [5]. In this study, we will restructure the "Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers Aged 0-3" curriculum to improve students' performance in the Infant Caregiver Professional Skills Certificate examination. We will align the curriculum with modules such as ethics, basic knowledge, daily care, health, and education. Additionally, we will expand the curriculum to include recipe development, disease care, game design, and training, to better assess students' practical skills. This will be achieved through a five-step collaborative approach, enhancing their practical abilities.

4.3. Collaboration Between Government and School to Reduce Certification Costs and Promote Win-Win Situations

To reduce costs for students and encourage their participation in training and certification exams, Yiyang Normal College collaborates with the Yiyang Municipal Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security. This collaboration allows students to access free or reduced-cost intermediate-level professional skills training and certification exams for Infant Caregivers. Students are encouraged to continue learning and participate in jointly conducted skill training courses. After passing the theoretical and practical assessments, students obtain the certificate. This collaboration benefits students by reducing their financial burden and increasing career opportunities. It also enhances the school's reputation and improves educational quality through additional resources and support from the government.

4.4. Refining Assessment Standards, Reforming Assessment Plans, and Cultivating Practical Care Professionals

To cultivate care professionals with practical skills and market competitiveness, we will refine assessment rules into process and outcome evaluations. Through multidimensional assessment, we aim to overcome challenges faced by young students in the program and cultivate professionals ready for immediate employment upon graduation.

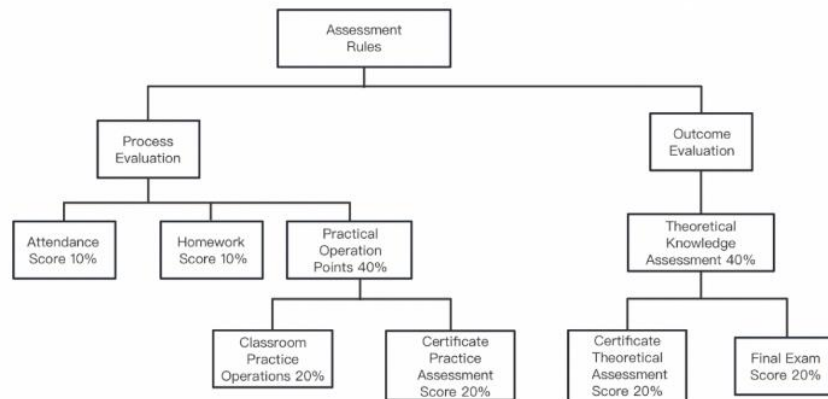


Figure 2: Assessment Rules Figure.

In the process evaluation, we focus on students' progress, practical skills development, and teamwork abilities through multidimensional assessments. This helps identify and address shortcomings and encourages self-reflection and improvement. The outcome evaluation emphasizes academic achievements and professional skills levels, ensuring learning goals are met. This reform cultivates professionals with integrated practical and theoretical abilities, clearer learning objectives, and better readiness for practical work. Combining school and professional assessments ensures students acquire applicable skills for success in their careers after graduation.

5. Conclusion

The introduction of the "1+X" certificate system has brought new vitality to vocational colleges' early childhood care programs, indicating that vocational education should focus on cultivating more practical and operationally skilled professionals. With the continuous development of early childhood education theory and practice, society has placed higher demands on the theoretical and practical abilities of professionals in the field of early childhood care. When vocational colleges establish care programs, they need to closely monitor social development trends, keep up with social trends, grasp social needs, continuously innovate educational perspectives and theories, optimize curriculum construction paths, flexibly adjust curriculum settings, focus on cultivating students' practical operational skills and comprehensive qualities, and take it as their responsibility to cultivate talents that meet the needs of contemporary social development. Only in this way can we cultivate more and more childcare talents who meet the development needs of contemporary society and make positive contributions to the progress and development of society.

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