Analysis of the English Test Level A (PRETCO) for Vocational Students in Yunnan, China PR

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Abstract

This study analyzes the content of the English Test Level A (PRETCO), a standardized vocational English assessment in China. The analysis applies Messick's (1996) Validity Framework and Bachman's (1996) Communicative Language Ability Model to examine PRETCO test papers from 2021 to 2023. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining thematic analysis, grammatical analysis, and content validity assessment. Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) is used to measure the degree of alignment between test items and vocational English competencies. The findings address both research objectives. First, the content analysis reveals that the Listening and Reading sections align well with vocational English tasks, while the Translation and Writing sections show inconsistencies in task design and scoring reliability. Grammatical analysis indicates a strong focus on basic structures such as noun forms and verb tenses, with limited integration of complex grammatical constructs. Second, the content validity assessment shows that PRETCO-A achieves a moderate-to-high level of construct alignment (IOC = 0.78), indicating that the test reasonably reflects communicative competence required in vocational settings, though further improvement is recommended (Messick, 1996). These results support the enhancement of PRETCO-A and provide guidance for educators and policymakers to align vocational English instruction with assessment standards.

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Introduction

China's vocational education system has played an increasingly strategic role in supporting national development goals, particularly as the country transitions toward a skills-driven economy. With over 7,000 secondary vocational schools operating as of 2023, vocational training is no longer seen as secondary to academic education but as a core channel for producing job-ready talent (MOE, 2023). In line with these reforms, English proficiency has emerged as a critical competency, especially in provinces like Yunnan that border Southeast Asia and rely heavily on cross-border trade, tourism, and regional economic integration (TESOL Union, 2021; China Briefing, 2023).

To meet the growing demand for vocational-level English communication, Ministry of Education of China introduced the Practical English Test for Colleges (PRETCO), a standardized national assessment for vocational students. PRETCO-A, the advanced version, evaluates listening, reading, writing, and translation competencies, all of which are considered essential for career advancement in international industries (Chen, 2022; TESOL Union, 2021). While PRETCO-B serves as a steppingstone for students with lower English proficiency, PRETCO-A functions as a higher-level assessment for those aiming for career progression in global contexts (Chen, 2022). However, many vocational students struggle to pass PRETCO-A, often failing multiple attempts due to inadequate preparation and a lack of alignment between their classroom training and the test's expectations (TESOL Union, 2021; Chen & Zhang, 2021). This challenge is consistently observed in areas such as translation and writing, where students face increased task complexity and higher demands in applied language use (Chen, 2022).

This study focuses on evaluating PRETCO-A's structure and content to determine whether it effectively supports vocational learners in developing workplace-relevant English competencies. Specifically, the research examines whether the

communicative demands and test tasks align with the language skills needed for real-world employment settings. These concerns underscore the need to assess whether PRETCO-A's design reflects both construct validity and content representativeness in a vocational education context.

In response to these challenges, this study applies Messick's (1996) Validity Framework and Bachman and Palmer's (1996) Communicative Language Ability Model to analyze PRETCO-A test papers from 2021 to 2023. Through thematic, grammatical, and validity-based content analysis, the research aims to assess how well the test aligns with the communicative demands of real-world vocational contexts.

Research Objectives

This study attempts to answer the following research objectives:

1. To analyze the test content of PRETCO-A from 2021 to 2023
2. To examine the content validity of PRETCO-A from 2021 to 2023

Literature Review

Vocational English Testing in China

Vocational education in China plays an increasingly strategic role in supporting workforce development by equipping students with practical, job-related competencies (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). English proficiency is essential across various sectors, including tourism, international trade, hospitality, and business services (China Briefing, 2023). In response, vocational institutions have integrated standardized English assessments to evaluate learners' communicative readiness for professional environments (TESOL Union, 2021).

One of the key instruments in this context is the Practical English Test for Colleges (PRETCO), a national-level assessment specifically tailored for vocational college students (Chen, 2022). Unlike general academic English tests that emphasize scholarly reading and writing, PRETCO focuses on applied language use in the workplace. The advanced version, PRETCO-A, requires test-takers to engage with higher-level linguistic and communicative tasks such as listening to business dialogues, translating workplace materials, and composing formal or semi-formal written

responses (Chen & Zhang, 2021). These tasks are designed to reflect real-world communication demands commonly encountered in customer service, trade negotiations, and administrative roles (TESOL Union, 2021).

According to the test structure outlined by the National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA, cited in Chen, 2022), PRETCO-A comprises five core components: Listening Comprehension, Grammar & Structure, Reading Comprehension, Translation, and Writing. Each component targets workplace-relevant communicative functions such as interpreting professional discourse, producing formal written responses, and translating business content.

Theoretical Perspectives on Language Assessment Validity

Multiple theoretical frameworks have emerged to guide language test evaluation, ranging from psychometric approaches focused on reliability to sociocognitive models that emphasize interaction, authenticity, and the test's impact (McNamara, 2006; Weir, 2005; Taylor, 2006). Fulcher and Davidson (2007) highlight the importance of test practicality and fairness, while Messick's (1996) unified validity framework is recognized for its integrative approach, considering construct, content, and consequential dimensions within a single evaluative model. In parallel, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) Communicative Language Ability (CLA) Model provides insight into how linguistic competence and strategic use of language interact in real-world communication. Additionally, their Test Usefulness Framework introduces a multidimensional perspective for evaluating language assessments through key criteria such as construct validity, authenticity, reliability, instructiveness, impact, and practicality. These complementary frameworks support the evaluation of whether vocational English tests like PRETCO-A accurately reflect the language demands of contemporary professional environments.

Messick's Validity Framework

Messick's (1996) validity framework emphasizes that validity is not a static property of a test but a dynamic evaluation of the interpretations and uses of test scores. The framework integrates six interrelated aspects: Construct Validity – Determines whether the test measures the intended language skills. Content Validity

– Assesses whether test tasks reflect actual language use. Substantive Validity – Examines whether the test items are designed to assess meaningful linguistic constructs. Structural Validity – Evaluates the internal organization of the test and its scoring system. Generalizability – Measures whether test results are applicable to real-world settings. Consequential Validity – Considers the educational and social implications of the test results.

Modern validation approaches continue to draw on this holistic model. Taylor and Geranpayeh (2021) affirm that high-stakes language tests, especially those for workplace or academic settings, benefit from viewing these aspects as mutually reinforcing rather than isolated. In this study, Messick's framework serves as the foundation for evaluating PRETCO-A in terms of both construct validity and content representativeness. The latter is further supported by Harding (2014), who emphasizes the need for task authenticity and contextual alignment in vocational English assessments.

Bachman and Palmer's Communicative Language Ability Model

Communicative competence, first conceptualized by Hymes (1972) and later elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980), includes not only grammatical knowledge but also the sociocultural and strategic dimensions of language use. These foundational models have since evolved into more refined frameworks, including Bachman and Palmer's (1996) Communicative Language Ability (CLA) Model, which integrates language and strategic competence into a unified construct applicable to language assessment. The CLA model conceptualizes language ability as an integration of linguistic knowledge and the capacity to use language appropriately in context. It includes two major components i.e. language competence and strategic competence. Language Competence comprises grammatical, textual, and sociolinguistic knowledge. Grammatical competence involves control over syntax, vocabulary, and word formation. Textual competence involves the ability to organize written or spoken discourse coherently and cohesively. Sociolinguistic competence refers to appropriateness of language use in social and cultural contexts. Strategic Competence refers to the metacognitive ability to plan, monitor, and adapt language use in real time. This includes clarifying meaning, adjusting register, and negotiating meaning—

particularly critical in workplace situations such as customer service or collaborative problem-solving.

These components are particularly applicable to vocational English learners who must navigate diverse communicative scenarios in real-world employment. Studies by Salmani Nodoushan (2020) and Chang and Lin (2021) indicate that assessments lacking industry-specific discourse often fail to reflect learners' actual communicative needs, reinforcing the importance of contextualized test design.

Bachman and Palmer's Test Usefulness Framework

To complement the CLA model, Bachman and Palmer (1996) also proposed a Test Usefulness Framework, which evaluates language tests based on six dimensions i.e. construct validity, reliability, authenticity, interactiveness, impact, and practicality. For this study, two key criteria—construct validity and authenticity—are especially relevant. Construct Validity examines whether the test accurately measures the communicative competencies it intends to assess, such as grammar use, lexical range, and syntactic structures aligned with vocational English requirements. Authenticity considers whether test tasks resemble real-life language use. Tasks that simulate emails, job interviews, or translation of workplace documents support authenticity by aligning test content with real communicative practices in professional contexts.

Together, these models inform this study's framework for evaluating PRETCO-A. They allow the analysis to examine not only the alignment between test content and theoretical constructs but also the degree to which tasks simulate the communicative challenges vocational students are likely to encounter in the workplace.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method content analysis design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the English Test Level A (PRETCO-A) from 2021 to 2023. The analysis focuses on two primary dimensions of validity—construct validity and content representativeness—through a multi-layered framework

involving thematic analysis, grammatical feature analysis, and expert validation. The study is grounded in Messick's (1996) validity framework and the test usefulness model proposed by Bachman and Palmer (1996).

Data Collection

The dataset consists of English Test Level A (PRETCO-A) papers from the years 2021, 2022, and 2023. The test comprises five components i.e. Listening Comprehension – Assesses professional communication skills in workplace contexts. Grammar & Structure – Evaluates sentence accuracy, professional tone, and syntactic complexity. Reading Comprehension – Focuses on business documents, company policies, and vocational texts. Translation (English to Chinese) – Measures functional equivalence and bilingual proficiency in applied contexts. Writing – Examines business correspondence, workplace memos, and structured written communication.

Each PRETCO-A paper contains 66 items (100 points), comprising five components: Listening Comprehension (20 items, 20 points), Grammar and Structure (20 items, 20 points), Reading Comprehension (20 items, 20 points), Translation (5 items, 20 points), and Writing (1 task, 20 points). This structure ensures comprehensive coverage of vocational communication skills. In this study, grammatical and thematic features were systematically tagged across all test sections to examine test validity and alignment with workplace communication needs.

To ensure consistency across test cycles, this study analyzes three full-length PRETCO-A test papers per year, totaling nine papers. These materials were retrieved via Baidu (www.baidu.com), which provided access to publicly available PRETCO-A test archives (Baidu, 2024).

Data Analysis

1. Thematic Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes and content distribution across the 2021 to 2023 PRETCO-A test papers. This analysis is grounded in Messick's (1996) unified theory of validity, which emphasizes the relationship between test content, construct representation, and intended use. In

support of this framework, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) notion of authenticity is applied to examine how test tasks reflect real-world language use in vocational contexts. The test items were categorized into the following dimensions. Workplace communication focus assesses the extent to which test content mirrors real-world professional interactions, such as email exchanges, customer service dialogues, or company policies (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Professional and vocational English use evaluates how well the test aligns with the language competencies required in vocational settings, including decision-making, problem-solving, and technical communication (Messick, 1996).

2. Grammatical Analysis

This study conducts a descriptive analysis of grammatical categories to assess how PRETCO-A test items reflect core components of English proficiency relevant to vocational contexts. All test items covering 5 components (Listening Comprehension, Grammar and Structure, Reading Comprehension, Translation (EN to CN), Writing) from the 2021–2023 PRETCO-A papers were manually reviewed, and the grammatical categories present in each item were identified and tagged. The total number of grammatical features in each year's test paper served as the baseline for calculating category percentages. Each percentage reflects the proportion of a given category relative to the total grammatical items observed that year, using the following formula:

$$\text{Category \%} = \left(\frac{\text{Instances of a specific category}}{\text{Total grammatical items observed in the year}} \right) \times 100$$

For example, in the 2023 PRETCO-A paper, if there were 62 total grammatical instances identified and 19 of those were verb tenses, the percentage for Verb Tenses would be calculated as (19 ÷ 62) × 100 = 30.65%, rounded to 31% for reporting in Table 2. These counts were grouped in percentage by year with the total 100% for each year and then averaged to produce the values in the "Average (%)" column.

This approach allows for a normalized year-by-year comparison of how grammatical categories are distributed across test papers. The findings are then used

to evaluate the construct validity of PRETCO-A by examining whether the test's grammatical focus aligns with the communicative demands of vocational English.

3. Content Validity Assessment

To measure content validity, this study applied Messick's (1996) validity framework and test usefulness framework (Bachman and Palmer, 1996) to examine the alignment between test content and vocational English requirements. The assessment focuses on two primary dimensions. Construct validity evaluates whether the test accurately measures vocational English competencies in accordance with the theoretical expectations of applied language use (Messick, 1996; Bachman and Palmer, 1996). Content representativeness assesses the extent to which test tasks reflect authentic workplace communication scenarios (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

Reliability and Validity Analysis

For reliability evaluation, this study employs Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) analysis, a widely used method for examining content alignment and consistency across test items. Originally developed by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977), the IOC model has been extended to accommodate multidimensional assessments (Turner & Carlson, 2003). Recent applications of IOC analysis have demonstrated its utility in gathering evidence for content validity in language assessments (Ismail & Zubairi, 2022).

IOC Analysis Process:

1. Expert Selection: Three experts specializing in English language assessment and vocational education, who are also competent in both English and Chinese, independently evaluate the test items (Ismail & Zubairi, 2022).

2. Item Rating Scale: Experts score each item on a three-point scale:

+1 = Clearly measures the intended competency

0 = Uncertain or partially relevant

-1 = Does not measure the intended competency

3. Calculation of IOC Index: The average rating for each item is computed, with a threshold of ≥0.5 indicating acceptable content validity.

4. Refinement and Adjustments: Items with low IOC scores (<0.5) are analyzed for potential ambiguities or misalignment with vocational English learning objectives.

The IOC scores provide a quantifiable measure of content reliability, ensuring that each test section aligns with its intended language assessment objectives. By applying this method, the study minimizes subjectivity and strengthens the validity of its findings.

Results and Discussion

This section presents findings from the analysis of the English Test Level A (PRETCO) from 2021 to 2023, focusing on construct validity and content representativeness. These findings are based on thematic content coverage, grammatical features, and the alignment of test items with vocational communication needs. The analysis draws on Messick's (1996) validity theory and Bachman and Palmer's (1996) test usefulness framework to evaluate how well PRETCO-A reflects English language competencies required in vocational settings. The results highlight design trends that suggest growing attention to workplace-relevant language use, reflecting the evolving needs of professional and technical communication contexts.

Thematic Analysis

Table 1 Thematic Coverage Related to Content Representativeness in the English Test Level A (PRETCO), 2021–2023

Test Section	2021	2022	2023	Trend
Listening Comprehension	Basic workplace dialogues (customer service, small talk)	Expanded business dialogues (meetings, office interactions)	Complex discussions (job interviews, negotiations)	Shift from general dialogues to complex business interactions

Table 1 (Cont.)

Test Section	2021	2022	2023	Trend
Grammar & Structure	Standard grammar questions (sentence completion)	Context-based grammar (business expressions)	Workplace grammar (politeness, professional tone)	Greater focus on workplace grammar, not just accuracy
Reading Comprehension	General business texts (notices, announcements)	Workplace emails, company reports	Authentic workplace documents (HR policies, manuals)	Move towards real-world professional documents
Translation	Short sentence translation, paragraph-level translation	Technical/business terminology translation	Extended translation tasks (functional business use)	Emphasis on contextual translation over direct word-for-word translation
Writing	Business letters (formal requests)	Business emails, structured workplace communication	Workplace memos, semi-formal business correspondence	Expansion to diverse workplace writing formats

From Table 1, the thematic analysis of the PRETCO A-Level Test from 2021 to 2023 demonstrates a progressive shift towards more real-world vocational English applications. In the Listening Comprehension section, the content evolved from basic workplace dialogues and customer service exchanges in 2021 to more complex

discussions, including job interviews and negotiations by 2023. This shift aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of communicative competence in workplace settings (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Harding, 2014).

Similarly, the Grammar & Structure section moved away from a focus on grammatical accuracy and sentence completion in earlier versions to a more contextualized approach in 2023, incorporating workplace language, politeness strategies, and professional tone. This transition reflects the increasing emphasis on pragmatic language use, aligning with test validity principles (Messick, 1996) and test usefulness framework (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

The Reading Comprehension section also reflects this trend, initially assessing general business texts, notices, and announcements in 2021. Over time, the test integrated more workplace-authentic materials, such as company emails, HR policies, and instruction manuals, by 2023. This shift enhances the test's ability to evaluate a candidate's ability to process work-related documents effectively, consistent with research on authentic assessments in vocational English (Harding, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan, 2020).

In Translation, the test evolved from basic sentence translations and short paragraphs to more extended passages with an emphasis on functional business translation. This shift ensures that candidates are not just translating individual words or phrases but are also considering contextual meaning and professional relevance when converting English into Chinese. This aligns with the communicative translation approach in language assessment (González-Davies, 2018).

Finally, the Writing section has seen a significant transformation, moving beyond traditional formal business letters to a broader range of workplace writing styles, including memos, reports, and semi-formal business correspondence. The expansion aligns with the shift towards test authenticity principles (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), ensuring that test-takers develop versatile writing skills for professional communication scenarios.

In sum, the evolution of PRETCO-A reflects a growing emphasis on vocational English assessment that prioritizes real-world communicative applications. Thematic adjustments observed in the listening, grammar, and writing sections increasingly focus

on workplace-relevant language use, such as professional interactions, reporting, and procedural descriptions—skills essential for job readiness in sectors like customer service, technical operations, and business communication. These developments suggest PRETCO-A is aligning more closely with the communicative demands of vocational settings. The findings also carry pedagogical implications in that vocational educators are encouraged to incorporate communicative language teaching approaches and performance-based tasks that simulate authentic workplace scenarios, thereby helping students develop transferable skills for future employment.

Grammatical Analysis

This section applies theoretical frameworks such as Messick's (1996) construct validity principles and Bachman and Palmer's (1996) test usefulness framework to analyze the grammatical features of PRETCO-A. The goal is to assess how effectively the test measures grammatical competencies that are relevant to vocational English proficiency, thereby supporting its construct validity. The analysis focuses on key grammatical categories distributed across PRETCO-A test sections. Table 2 presents the distribution of key grammatical features found in PRETCO-A papers from 2021 to 2023, revealing patterns that illustrate the test's emphasis on vocationally relevant grammatical competence. These features can be grouped into three broad categories: structural features (e.g., passive voice, conditional sentences), lexical features (e.g., noun forms, prepositions), and functional features (e.g., modal and auxiliary verbs), reflecting the layered complexity of workplace language use. This categorization enables a clearer understanding of how the test aligns with the communicative demands placed on vocational learners and provides insight into the grammatical expectations embedded in each test year.

Table 2 Grammatical Features Distribution Reflecting Construct Validity in the English Test Level A (PRETCO), 2021–2023

Grammatical Features	2021 %	2022 %	2023 %	Average %	Description
Noun Forms	28	31	30	30	Singular, plural, countable, uncountable nouns used for subject-verb structures.
Verb Tenses	27	26	28	27	Present simple, past simple, and future tense usage.
Modals and Auxiliary Verbs	11	13	14	13	Must, should, could, would, can, and may.
Passive Voice	10	9	10	10	Frequently appearing in reading comprehension and writing sections.
Conditional Sentences	9	7	6	7	First and second conditionals used in workplace scenarios.
Prepositions	7	8	6	7	Especially in phrasal verbs and collocations.
Comparatives and Superlatives	8	6	6	7	Used in descriptions and business comparisons.
Total	100	100	100	-	

From Table 2, the grammatical analysis of PRETCO-A from 2021 to 2023 highlights a consistent emphasis on foundational grammar structures essential for vocational and workplace communication. The identified grammatical features can be grouped into three broad categories—structural features (e.g., noun forms, verb tenses, passive voice), functional features (e.g., modals, conditionals), and lexical elements (e.g., prepositions, comparatives/superlatives)—each reflecting different dimensions of grammatical competence aligned with communicative workplace needs. The most

dominant grammatical feature across the three years is Noun Forms (30%), particularly the use of singular, plural, countable, and uncountable nouns, which are vital for forming subject-verb agreement and conveying quantity or specificity in professional contexts. This focus aligns with international frameworks in workplace-oriented assessments, where grammatical precision supports effective communication (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Verb Tenses (27%) are the second most frequent grammatical category, with a predominant use of present simple, past simple, and future forms. These tenses reflect how procedures, responsibilities, and sequences of action are typically described in real-world professional environments. Comparative research—such as studies on the TOEIC Speaking and Writing Test—also highlights the importance of tense control for maintaining clarity in transactional and workplace discourse (Turner & Carlson, 2003).

Modals and Auxiliary Verbs (13%), including forms such as *must*, *should*, and *could*, highlight the test's focus on expressing obligation, offering suggestions, and maintaining formality which are core to managing tone, politeness, and professional intent in workplace discourse. This emphasis reflects a communicative approach in vocational English assessment, where modality and tone play a crucial role in ensuring message appropriateness and professional clarity (Weir, 2005).

Passive Voice (10%) appears frequently in reading and writing tasks, underscoring its importance in business documentation and formal reporting. Conditional Sentences (7%), often realized as *if-clauses*, assess learners' ability to express hypothetical reasoning and conditional relationships, which are essential skills in workplace scenarios involving problem-solving, planning, and instructional communication (Alderson, 2000).

Prepositions (7%), especially within phrasal verbs and collocations, are notable for evaluating lexicalized structures common in workplace English. Meanwhile, Comparatives and Superlatives (7%) show moderate inclusion, used in evaluative tasks such as making comparisons in reports or emails.

Overall, PRETCO-A exhibits grammatical consistency over time, and its growing emphasis on contextually appropriate and functional language use reflects broader shifts in communicative language testing (Weir, 2005; Messick, 1996).

Content Validity

This section expands on content validity by discussing the alignment between PRETCO-A and vocational English assessment standards, referencing Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) for validity evaluation. The findings suggest that the shift towards pragmatic English use enhances workplace readiness, particularly in communication-intensive roles such as customer service, international trade, and technical industries (Turner & Carlson, 2003). These findings reflect broader trends in vocational English testing, where real-world communication tasks are increasingly emphasized to support employability and applied language competence. This highlights the need for educators to adapt curriculum strategies to integrate workplace simulations and real-world communication tasks, ensuring students develop transferable language skills necessary for career success (Weir, 2005).

Table 3 Content Validity Assessment of the English Test Level A (PRETCO) (2021-2023)

Validity/Reliability Criteria	2021	2022	2023	$\overline{X}$	S.D.
Content Representativeness	0.82	0.80	0.79	0.80	0.01
Construct Alignment	0.79	0.78	0.76	0.78	0.01

From Table 3, the content validity assessment of PRETCO-A from 2021 to 2023 demonstrates stable content representativeness and construct alignment, with only minor fluctuations across the three-year period. The IOC index for content representativeness remains high ($\overline{X}$ = 0.80), indicating that the test items align well with vocational English skills (Turner & Carlson, 2003). Similarly, construct alignment scores

remain consistent ($\overline{X}$ = 0.78), suggesting that the test reliably reflects communicative competence requirements in vocational contexts (Messick, 1996).

A slight decrease in construct alignment (from 0.79 in 2021 to 0.76 in 2023) is observed; however, the variation is minimal (0.03 across three years) and does not indicate any fundamental issue in test validity. The standard deviation of construct alignment scores is 0.01, reflecting a high level of year-to-year consistency. Similarly, the S.D. for content representativeness is also 0.01, supporting the stability of test alignment with vocational English tasks. These differences likely reflect routine variation in test composition rather than fundamental flaws in assessment design. The consistently high mean score (0.78) affirms that PRETCO-A continues to measure vocational English competencies reliably. However, as Taylor and Geranpayeh (2021) argue, maintaining construct validity in dynamic testing environments requires regular revalidation to account for shifting communication norms and evolving vocational discourse patterns.

While these findings support the test's stability, ongoing improvements—particularly in task authenticity and domain-specific alignment—could enhance its relevance to modern workplace communication demands (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The shift toward pragmatic English use aligns with the communicative needs of industries such as customer service, international trade, and technical operations (Turner & Carlson, 2003). These trends underscore the need for curriculum designers to incorporate workplace simulations and real-world communication tasks, ensuring that vocational students develop transferable skills for career success (Weir, 2005).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on vocational English assessment by analyzing the English Test Level A (PRETCO) from 2021 to 2023 using test content analysis and content validity assessment framework based on Messick's (1996) validity model. The findings confirm that content representativeness remains high (IOC $\overline{X}$ = 0.80), demonstrating strong alignment between test items and vocational English skills. Similarly, construct alignment (IOC $\overline{X}$ = 0.78) indicates that the test

maintains a reliable measurement of communicative competencies, though continuing improvements could further enhance its authenticity and workplace applicability.

The thematic and grammatical analysis revealed that while the test includes essential vocational English elements. Some sections, for example, writing and translation, could benefit from increased real-world contextualization. The writing tasks could be improved by introducing more explicit workplace constraints, while translation exercises could incorporate industry-specific terminology to better reflect vocational language demands. These insights can inform test development policies, ensuring that future assessments reflect evolving workplace language needs. These findings highlight important considerations for test-takers and educators in preparing for PRETCO. The following section outlines practical strategies for test preparation and discusses future research directions to enhance the test's alignment with vocational English needs.

Implications

Implications for Test-Taking Strategies and Preparation

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for students, educators, and test-takers preparing for the English Test Level A (PRETCO). Given that construct alignment remains stable, effective test-taking strategies should focus on:

1. Understanding Test Structure: Familiarizing with the consistent format and question types can help candidates allocate study time effectively (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

2. Improving Workplace Writing Skills: Since writing tasks involve business correspondence and semi-formal formats, test-takers should practice structured responses and adjust tone appropriately for workplace settings.

3. Expanding Grammar Awareness: Emphasis should be placed on high-frequency grammar categories like noun forms, verb tenses, modals, and prepositions, especially in context-based usage.

4. Enhancing Listening and Translation Readiness: As listening comprehension and translation tasks simulate real-world interactions, learners should

practice domain-specific vocabulary and bilingual equivalents used in business and technical fields.

Implications for Test Designers, Curriculum Planners, and Policymakers

1. Test Developers: The stable emphasis on fundamental grammatical features suggests a need to introduce more discourse-level grammar and functional communication tasks, especially in the writing and listening sections. Doing so can enhance test authenticity and reflect pragmatic workplace interactions more accurately.

2. Curriculum Designers: Curricula should be revised to include workplace simulations, task-based grammar instruction, and contextual translation training that mirrors the actual structure and communicative goals of PRETCO-A.

3. Policymakers: Policymakers overseeing vocational education can use these findings to align national language testing policies with industry-specific communicative competencies, ensuring that vocational English assessments meet evolving labor market needs.

4. Teacher Trainers: Training programs for EFL teachers should integrate strategies that prepare educators to teach not just grammatical accuracy, but also communicative effectiveness and strategic language use, aligned with PRETCO-A expectations.

Implications for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the content and validity of the English Test Level A (PRETCO), it also has limitations that future research should address:

1. Small-Scale Analysis: This study examined only three years of test papers (2021-2023). A larger-scale study covering a broader timeframe or multiple test versions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of test validity trends (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

2. Lack of Score-Based Performance Analysis: This study focused on test content and construct alignment without examining test-taker performance data. Future research should investigate long-term trends in performance using student scores, pass/fail rates, and section-level difficulty. Such empirical data are essential for

validating how well test items function in practice, identifying systematically difficult tasks, and revealing possible construct underrepresentation or bias. Linking test content to actual learner outcomes ensures that future revisions are based on observed evidence rather than assumptions (Turner & Carlson, 2003).

3. Absence of Test-Taker Feedback: Since the study did not incorporate qualitative insights from students or educators, future research could conduct surveys or interviews to gain a better understanding of test difficulty, perceived fairness, and practical relevance (Weir, 2005).

4. Limited Focus on Construct Validity Beyond IOC: While this study applied the IOC method, future research could employ other validity frameworks (e.g., factor analysis, reliability testing) to provide a more multi-dimensional evaluation of test effectiveness (Messick, 1996).

Addressing these limitations would enhance the depth of the English Test Level A (PRETCO) evaluation, ensuring a more well-rounded perspective on its effectiveness as a vocational English assessment tool.

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