

Summary

Evaluation of the elective subject traffic

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The elective subject traffic got its own curriculum in 2013 and has since been offered to lower secondary schools across Norway. Each year, approximately 5% of the students choose the elective subject traffic, many with the aim of obtaining the basic traffic course. For youths on their way to becoming safe road users, the elective subject traffic is thought to contribute to a more complete and interdisciplinary approach to traffic education. The Norwegian Council for Road Safety (Trygg Trafikk) wanted to evaluate how the intention of elective subject traffic is implemented in practice. To investigate this, we used three data sources: a) a survey among students who took the elective subject traffic, b) a survey among teachers teaching the subject and c) data from a previous survey among youngsters who attained a driver's license either for moped or light MC in 2016. The data reveal that the subject elective traffic is highly valued. Most students report that they are looking forward to the elective, and this is supported by teachers who report that the students are motivated and like the subject.

Both teachers and students believe that the students improve attitudes and become safer in traffic because of the elective subject traffic. The possibility to take the basic traffic course as part of the elective is an important reason why the elective subject traffic is popular.

Background and research questions

In 2005, the traffic education regulation started allowing basic traffic courses to be offered in public schools. Until 2013, adaptations were made, both in laws and in local implementation of the subject. After the curriculum was introduced in 2013, systematic assessments have not been made to evaluate how the subject is implemented in practice. The Norwegian Council for Road Safety (Trygg Trafikk), which helped develop the curriculum, therefore now wanted to carry out such an evaluation.

An important element in the elective subject traffic, is that students can get a basic traffic course approved through the elective and continue with their driver training. However, the elective subject is intended to provide a broader and more comprehensive introduction to traffic than the basic traffic course does. The elective lasts for a longer time, and it gives opportunities to work interdisciplinary; there are learning goals within traffic both in physical education and science. These differences also make it interesting to compare those who took basic traffic courses in elementary school through the elective subject traffic, and those who took it at a traffic school.

In this report we focus on how the subject is taught and what both teachers and students think about content and teaching methods. In addition, we have examined how the curriculum is perceived and used.

Participants and analyses

We used three datasets to investigate the elective subject traffic. We contacted all schools offering the elective and who had classes with more than 10 students. Here, we recruited teachers to answer a questionnaire for teachers and students to answer a questionnaire for

students. Of the 8571 students in these classes, 1177 responded. Among the teachers, 128 responded. We do not know how many teachers and students were offered to participate (the inquiry went to schools), so we do not know the answer rate for neither students nor teachers.

The third data set consisted of persons who had taken a driver's license for moped or light MC in 2016, and whom TØI has used in an evaluation of driver training for moped and light MC for the Norwegian Public Roads Administration. These were merged into one dataset of 1897 participants, 1503 of whom had the basic traffic course from traffic schools and 394 who had taken the course in primary school. This dataset was used to investigate whether there are differences in attitudes and behavior between those who have taken basic traffic courses as part of the elective subject traffic and those who have taken it through regular traffic schools.

The questionnaires for the students and teachers were intended to evaluate teaching plans and materials, as well as understanding of the curriculum. In addition, to measure well-being we included some questions from the student survey by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

Good attitudes to road safety and pleased with the subject

Both student and teacher surveys convey a positive message about the students, teachers and elective subjects. The students say it is important to work to increase road safety and that youth using safety equipment are good examples for others. They also report to be well-adjusted in the elective class and with their teacher. This impression is strengthened by the teachers' answers. They report students who get better attitudes towards road safety through the curriculum. Teachers also say that the students seem engaged and satisfied, and that they are not less motivated for school than other student groups. Many report taking the subject to get the basic traffic course approved.

We find no difference in attitudes between those who took the basic traffic course in elementary school and those who took it in a traffic school. The two groups answer roughly the same on questions about attitude, self-reported proficiency and risk behavior. One might have expected that students taking the elective subject traffic would have better attitude to road safety, as these students have had a longer and more extensive education in traffic. The teachers also believe that they develop better attitudes and behavior through the elective.

The perhaps most likely explanation for why we cannot find such a difference is that the comparison between students with and without elective traffic was conducted among novice drivers of moped and light MCs a while after they had completed their driver education and after they had been through practical driver training, driver test and own driving experience with moped or light mc. This practical training combined with their own driving experience may have helped to remove any differences.

The content in line with the model for behavioral impact developed by The Norwegian Council for Road Safety

The elective subject traffic contains just about all the elements that are emphasized in the model for behavioral impact developed by The Norwegian Council for Road Safety, which are documented to being able to modify behavior. Curriculum and teaching contain

elements such as risk awareness and risk factors, how safety equipment reduces consequences, group pressures, community norms, all of which influence factors and attitudes towards road safety. Furthermore, motivation and commitment are important, and both teachers and students are engaged in the elective subject according to our research. All of these are elements that previous research has documented is important for influencing behavior.

There is therefore good reason to assume that young people develop better attitudes and safer behavior through the elective subject traffic. The ability to complete the basic traffic course in the Norwegian driver education as part of the elective traffic is very important and one of the main reasons why this is among the most popular electives. This can be seen as a direct factor in the model for behavioral impact.