

Motivations during the learning to drive process - Case studies of NSW learners and their parents

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Abstract

A comprehensive range of resources are provided to learner drivers and their supervising drivers in NSW. We are examining learners and their parents during the period of learner licensure to assess reasons for the use or non-use of these resources. Semi-structured interviews of learner drivers and their supervisors are being undertaken. Documentary records of driving activity are being examined through the learner driver log book and data from the Licence Ready app, an application developed for smartphones and tablets which provides a digital record of the parameters required for learner driver log books in New South Wales.

Background

In NSW, learner drivers and their parents are provided with resources to assist the learning to drive process, including a comprehensive road users' handbook (NSW Roads & Maritime Services (2015)), the learner driver log book (NSW Roads & Maritime Services (2013)), a variety of web-based and paper-based resources including information about gaining a drivers licence and preparing for the driving test, and several augmentation programs for learner drivers (Keys2Drive, structured lesson planning, and the Safer Drivers course).

The learner driver log book provides a mechanism for learner drivers to record and keep track of their driving experience (Faulks & Irwin, 2009). There is a regulatory requirement for learner drivers to achieve a minimum of 120 hours of driving practice, although discounts are available through structured lesson planning and the Safer Drivers course. The log book also provides advice of the teaching process for learning to drive, and specifies twenty learning goals based on the GADGET matrix (Hatakka, Keskinen, Hernetoski, Gregersen & Glad, 2003). These goals serve as a guide for both the learner driver and the supervising driver (typically a parent) to enable the structuring of what is being taught, the selection of driving environments to use, and the sequencing of differing types of driving experience during the period of learner licensing (Faulks, 2012; Faulks, Irwin & Morphet, 2010).

It is unclear how well these resources are being used by learner drivers and their supervising drivers (Bates, Watson & King, 2009; Bates, Watson & King, 2014). Our research is designed to provide a detailed, fine-grained assessment of the use or non-use of the resources for learner drivers, and to identify the reasons why learners and their parents to use or ignore the guidance these resources are intended to provide.

Method

Learner drivers from the western and northern suburbs of Sydney who are seeking the assistance of a driving instructor are being recruited. The relationship with the driving instructor follows typical commercial principles. Once agreement to participate has been obtained from the learners and their supervising drivers, the Licence Ready app is provided. This application for smartphones and tablets enables the integration of training, practice and instruction for learner drivers within the framework provided by the learner driver log book. Specifically, the Licence Ready app provides a digital record of the parameters needed to meet the regulatory requirements for recording driving practice in the learner driver log book. The app combines lesson planning, experience-appropriate

driving practice, and route selection for learner drivers throughout their period of supervised driving.

Periodically, each learner driver and their supervising driver will be contacted and a semi-structured interview regarding driving practice experiences and expectations is conducted. The use of the log book, the Licence Ready app, and other resources will be assessed. Where relevant, interviews will also be conducted with the driving instructor(s) working with the learner driver.

The study will continue throughout the period of learner licensure for each individual, expected to be for up to three years. It is anticipated that up to thirty learner drivers will be recruited over the period 2015-2018.

Results and Conclusions

Preliminary results for learner drivers who were first licensed in 2015 indicate that there are major shortcomings in the use of the available resources. The focus is on recording driver experience in the log book (the 'hours'). For learner drivers and their supervisors, the use of the guidance for teaching provided in the log book, as well as the systematic structuring of practice driving to reflect the goals for learning, appears to be limited. Interviews with learner drivers have indicated that they have read the learning goals, but their supervising drivers have not, and consideration of the learning goals does not take place before an episode of driving practice. Similarly, use of the Licence Ready app is limited. In contrast, interactions with driving instructors are focused on learning goals: gaining car control skills initially, and then on achieving hours of experience under structured lesson planning; this scheme provides a discount of up to 30 hours on the 120 hour requirement for completion of learner licensure if ten hours of practice under driving instruction are undertaken and learning goals are specified (Faulks et al., 2010).

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