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Teaching rehearsals in English subject didactics courses in primary teacher education

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Abstract: This paper explores the effectiveness of on-campus teaching rehearsals in teacher education, with a focus on grammar instruction in English teaching in Norway. Despite supported field placements in teacher education, preservice teachers often feel unprepared for the practical realities of the classroom, particularly when it comes to teaching English grammar. This study illustrates how rehearsals of a specific core practice – explicit grammar instruction – enhance preservice teachers’ ability to integrate instructional methods fluidly into their teaching repertoire. The findings underscore the importance of rehearsing relational skills that balance content delivery with the dynamics of classroom interactions. By engaging in structured practice-oriented teaching, preservice teachers can better align their theoretical knowledge with practical application, thereby improving their readiness for real-world teaching challenges. The paper argues that on-campus teaching rehearsals are particularly effective in preparing preservice teachers for grammar instruction, as they highlight the critical transition from understanding instructional methods to enacting them proficiently in the classroom.

Keywords: teaching rehearsals, grammar instruction, English teaching, teacher education, practice-oriented teaching

Sammendrag: Denne artikkelen utforsker effektiviteten av øving på undervisning på campus i lærerutdanningsemner med fokus på grammatikkundervisning i engelsk i Norge. Tross veiledet praksis i alle lærerutdanningsprogram føler lærerstudenter seg ofte uforberedte på klasseromsrealiteter, spesielt i forbindelse med undervisning i grammatikk. Denne undersøkelsen illustrerer hvordan øving på bruk av en spesifikk kjernepraksis – å undervise eksplisitt grammatikk – forsterker lærerstudenters evne til å integrere forskjellige undervisningsmetoder sømløst i deres undervisningsrepertoar. Våre funn viser viktigheten av å øve på å kunne balansere innholdsformidling med dynamisk samhandling i klasserommet. Ved å delta i strukturerte praksisorienterte undervisningsmetoder kan lærerstudenter få bedre samsvar mellom deres teoretiske kunnskap og praktiske anvendelse, noe som igjen forbedrer deres evne til å takle utfordringer de kan møte i klasserommet. Vi viser at øving på undervisning på campus er en effektiv metode for å forberede lærerstudenter på grammatikkundervisning fordi den fremhever den avgjørende ferdigheten av å kunne anvende teoretisk forståelse av undervisningsmetoder i praktiske undervisningssituasjoner.

Nøkkelord: øving på undervisning, grammatikkundervisning, engelskundervisning, lærerutdanning, praksisorientert undervisning

Introduction

Preservice teachers in Norway have many opportunities to rehearse teaching during their education, including 100–110 days of practice in their 5-year Master's Programme in Teacher Education, level 1–7 and level 5–10 (hereafter referred to as GLU 1–7 and GLU 5–10). However, preservice teachers (PSTs) often experience that their on-campus training does not fully prepare them for classroom realities. Often content-focused, campus subject teaching can seem remote from the classroom.

While PSTs receive education in instructional methods and tools during their classes, they find during their field placements that they often have to focus on classroom management instead of subject didactics. Our experience also suggests that practicum teachers provide classroom-management feedback, but that it is very rare for the PSTs to receive feedback on the subject didactics of teaching during their practice period.

Furthermore, studies of teacher education programmes and preservice teachers' preparedness for the profession show that the connection to practice should not be limited to the practice in schools (Jenset et al., 2018). Teacher education programmes should also aim to build preservice teachers' competence to rehearse and analyse teaching during on-campus training (Hammerness et al., 2020), including opening up for their instructional decisions being discussed by peers, and faculty (Kazemi et al., 2016).

While a practice/theory gap has long been cited as a weakness in teacher education programmes (see among others Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Jahreie, 2012; Meld. St. 19, 2023–2024; Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2024; Ottesen, 2006), this project identifies not only the gap between research/theory and practical application mentioned in these studies and reports, but also one between subject teaching and the management of relational transactions in the classroom.

We argue that the perception of a gap between the content-focused instruction on campus, and the classroom-management focus of the teaching practice, disguises another gap – that between the acquisition of what Grossman et al. (2009) identify as the difference between 'learning about instructional methods and learning to enact such practices fluidly' (p. 275). In order to be successful subject teachers, preservice teachers must be given multiple opportunities to practise the discrete skills connected to specific core practices

required for successful classroom teaching alongside their subject-specific practices. Many of these skills involve developing a relational practice that balances content instruction with the abilities of PSTs, both as individuals and as groups, and which must be rehearsed in order to become an organic faculty, capable of adapting to classroom realities. For example, preservice teachers are rarely provided the opportunity to lead group discussions on core subject content within their on-campus subject classes, or provide explicit grammar instruction, and they often struggle with metalinguistic descriptions of the language they use.

By breaking down teaching into the kinds of relational skills connected to specific core practices that allow for the transmission of content knowledge, and allowing preservice teachers to practise those skills on campus, teacher training programmes can better prepare teachers for their practice period.

This paper describes the teaching sequence we employ in teacher training classes at a university in Norway to provide preservice teachers enrolled in English studies with the opportunity to rehearse teaching grammar on campus in preparation for their teaching practice in local schools. It identifies some of the techniques the preservice teachers employ when preparing their grammar teaching.

Ultimately, we argue that on-campus teaching rehearsals are particularly valuable when preparing preservice teachers to teach English grammar in schools, because they make the PSTs aware of the gap between their instructional knowledge and their ability to enact this knowledge in grammar instruction in the classroom.

Theoretical background

In most teacher-training programmes, on-campus teaching is theoretical, and the practicalities of classroom teaching are usually addressed mainly, or only, during field placements (Hammerness et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2014). There are certainly limitations to how much practical training preservice teachers can receive during their on-campus teaching, and some instructional practices are perhaps best developed with real students in authentic teaching situations.

However, preservice teachers must be given opportunities to rehearse core practices regularly and systematically, in addition to the situational learning during the field placements.

Furthermore, some core instructional practices must be practised repeatedly with guidance (Grossman et al., 2009; Janssen et al., 2014; Windschitl et al., 2012) until teaching these practices becomes second nature. Only then will preservice teachers develop the ability to adapt their practices to the dynamic environment of the classroom.

Jenset et al. (2018) define eight practices which can be integrated into on-campus training to help 'ground coursework in classroom practice' (pp. 185–186). While some are frequently integrated into teacher training programmes. While some are frequently integrated into teacher training programmes (e.g. taking students' perspectives, or studying teaching materials), others are rarely presented, most notably practising or rehearsing teacher role(s), seeing models of teaching, or analysing students' learning (Jenset et al., 2018, p. 192).

Planning classes as part of the coursework has long been a central component of teacher training courses, and it is also often labelled as one of the practical activities that can be performed on campus. However, planning itself is not sufficient to prepare PSTs for conducting the planned classes. Several scholars argue that PSTs must have opportunities in their coursework 'to practise and rehearse teaching, not just read about teaching' (Grossman et al., 2009; Hammerness et al., 2020, p. 2; Jenset et al., 2018; Loewenberg Ball & Forzani, 2009).

Recent recommendations from the Norwegian Advisory Council for Teacher Education 2025 also mention on-campus teaching rehearsals, as well as other on-campus practice-related activities, as an important part of the preparation process for school teachers (Advisory Council for Teacher Education 2025, 2024; see also Njå & Forsström, 2023). Such practical engagement with teaching practices has often been missing in university teacher training courses; thus, teaching rehearsals can help integrate learning theories into teaching practice.

Why grammar?

Grammar was selected as the disciplinary focus of our rehearsals for both pragmatic and theoretical reasons. As primarily language teachers, we have access to classes where grammatical instruction is in focus, and where teaching rehearsals connected to grammatical content would fulfil some of the course aims. Both the GLU 1–7 and 5–10 courses require PSTs to develop varied teaching methods geared towards language instruction, and both courses also require PSTs to develop their own English language knowledge and abilities.

From a theoretical standpoint, a form-focused instructional programme (FFI) such as that described by Spada (1997) helps students acquire language skills in the English classroom. For example, Kang et al. (2019) reviewed 54 scientific articles arguing for the effectiveness of FFI in language instruction over the past 35 years. And while many of the articles reviewed by Kang et al., as well as a recent contribution by Lloyd and Lee (2023), identify a number of factors which contribute to the efficacy of FFI, a general consensus has emerged that FFI requires bringing linguistic form to the attention of learners otherwise engaged in content learning.

As such, it is a fruitful technique in the primary and lower secondary classroom, where lessons are typically conducted based upon thematic content units.

Fear of grammar

The teaching rehearsals described in this paper are not specifically focused on improving preservice teachers' grammatical skills, although such improvement is always a benefit. Rather, the rehearsals aim to reduce teacher insecurity when teaching English grammar, an insecurity which does not necessarily indicate poor personal mastery of grammar.

It is important to note here that the studies mentioned below survey the grammar teaching practices in L1 courses, where the role of grammar and metalinguistic knowledge might be different than in typical L2 instruction.

However, the content of L2 English instruction in Norway, as exemplified by the national curriculum (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019a), is actually more comparable to the content of Norwegian L1 instruction (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019c) than to the instruction in the additional foreign languages (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019b). While the curriculum for foreign languages (typically Spanish, German, and French) focuses more on communicative competence in everyday situations, the curriculum in English also includes a focus on literacy, literature, intercultural competence, and critical reflection (Rødnes et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that English instruction in Norway, especially in higher grades, resembles L1 instruction to a large degree. Similar conclusions are presented by Rindal (2015), based on a survey of Norwegian adolescents' attitudes towards English, and Kabel and Svarstad (2019), and Hanghøi et al. (2022), based on examinations of national curricula and language teaching practices in Denmark.

While PSTs differ in terms of the skills and competencies they enjoy teaching, a recent survey of our current GLU 1–7 and 5–10 PSTs showed that 33 % do not feel comfortable teaching grammar. Lack of confidence in teaching grammar is frequently reported in the literature among both native- and non-native-speaking English teachers (Borg, 2005). Cajkler and Hislam (2002), for example, report high levels of grammatical insecurity among British primary school teacher trainees, and their follow-up study of a smaller British cohort of teacher trainees (Hislam & Cajkler, 2005) reported that 46 % lacked confidence in teaching grammar to their students. Watson (2012) found that approximately half of the practising secondary school English teachers in their study lacked confidence in teaching grammar. Watson (2012) links the lack of enthusiasm for teaching grammar to both mixed messages in textbooks and earlier British national curricula and to prevalent feelings among teacher education students suggesting that teaching grammar necessarily implies the use of old-fashioned lectures and drills (or 'teaching as one has been taught', see Oleson & Hora, 2014). No matter what the root cause of grammatical avoidance might be, Watson argues that teachers 'need support in order to develop the linguistic and pedagogical subject knowledge which can translate this into successful classroom practice' (p. 27).

In Norway, Rødnes et al. (2014) report that newly educated English teachers, while feeling competent in most areas of the English subject, are

often taken aback by the high level of English proficiency of their students, and they struggle with teaching the more advanced aspects of the English language, especially connected to formal writing.

Askland (2020) has noted that while all the English teachers interviewed in her study affirmed the importance of grammar teaching, many did not include grammar in their lesson plans. Askland speculates that the reason might be that ‘teachers had little formal education as far as grammar is concerned and thus found grammar a difficult topic to teach’ (p. 93). If true, this speculation would be in line with that reported in the British studies.

In a similar vein, Raade (2023), although focusing on the teaching of oral skills, found that the teachers in her study were often ‘terrified’ of their own English proficiency and thus avoided some elements of English-language teaching.

While many researchers have studied the mechanisms through which practising teachers in Norway conduct their instruction (Burner, 2016; Horverak, 2016), and Norwegian researchers have studied teachers’ beliefs in the English classroom (Burner & Carlsen, 2022), to the best of our knowledge, no Norwegian studies have directly investigated a relationship between teachers’ grammatical proficiency and their attitudes towards teaching grammar in the classroom.

Grammatical avoidance is not, of course, necessarily linked to grammatical competence. In a 2012 interview, Borg noted that the issue is ‘not just about what teachers know; it is how much they believe they know’ and that some teachers with shaky grammatical competence ‘teach inaccurately but very comfortably’ (Birello, 2012, p. 93).

Hislam and Cajkler (2005) reviewed the grammar audits completed by 28 British teachers to see if there was a relationship between perceived grammatical knowledge, as expressed through a self-reported confidence level, and proficiency on the grammatical test portion of the audit. Of the 28 teachers in the study, 9 reported high confidence in their grammatical knowledge but demonstrated poor abilities on the test portion (p. 299). This number was equal to the number of teachers reporting low confidence and low grammatical scores. Of the 28, 18 teachers scored poorly on the grammatical test.

Anecdotally, we believe that our PSTs often overestimate their own grammatical knowledge, and it is worth noting that the self-reported confidence level in English grammar of our PSTs is higher than that routinely reported by

British teachers. As yet, no research in Norway has tested teachers' personal English-language grammatical competence and indexed that competence to their attitudes toward teaching. While the L1 evidence cited above cannot uncritically be transferred to the Norwegian context, it is suggestive, and follow-up studies are needed in the Nordic context.

Teaching rehearsals

Research conducted across teacher training programmes in different countries shows that opportunities to rehearse and study teaching practices are scarce (Hammerness et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2018), despite the continuous call for more practice-oriented teacher education.

It seems to be difficult to combine the theoretical focus of university coursework, whether it concerns subject matter or didactics, with a more practical, student-active approach, as has been pointed out in several reports (Meld. St. 19, 2023–2024; Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2024). The prevalent practice aimed at making teacher training programmes practice-oriented seems to be lecturing, discussing, or testing examples of activities, and studying teaching materials (Jensen et al., 2018).

Microteaching (Allen & Clark, 1967; Allen & Eve, 1968; Arsal, 2014; Bell, 2007; Griffiths, 2016), teaching rehearsals (Hammerness et al., 2020; Kazemi et al., 2016), approximations of practice (Grossman et al., 2009; Janssen et al., 2014), or enacting teacher roles or classroom practices (Canrinus et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 2018) are all terms which could describe the same practice in teacher training courses: letting the preservice teachers prepare, conduct, and evaluate a teaching session in a low-stakes environment.

While some advocate making the teaching situation as realistic as possible by teaching real students in controlled environments, for example teaching labs (among others Allen & Clark, 1967; Arsal, 2014), others argue for more gradual 'approximations' to reality by letting the PSTs rehearse specific aspects of teaching using their classmates as 'students' (among others Bell, 2007; Griffiths, 2016). What is common to all these practices is that the teaching situation is 'scaled down in terms of time and number of students' (Allen &

Clark, 1967, p. 75) or ‘the complexities of the normal teaching encounter have been reduced and the level of feedback to the teacher has been greatly increased’ (Allen & Eve, 1968, p. 181).

Although several studies report positive results connected to implementing microteaching or teaching rehearsals in teacher training programmes (Allen & Clark, 1967; Arsal, 2014; Bell, 2007; Fernandez & Robinson, 2006), this practice is also criticised for not being realistic enough (Griffiths, 2016, p. 228), or for being just a ‘performance’ or an ‘educational requirement’ and not real teaching (Bell, 2007, pp. 25–26).

However, given that PSTs across programmes and national curricula have only very few ‘opportunities to rehearse multifaceted aspects of teaching’ (Hammerness et al., 2020, p. 12), an approximation of practice in the form of teaching rehearsals might be the best option teacher educators have during on-campus training.

The function of teaching rehearsals can be seen as ‘a kind of utilitarian make-believe (...) performed out of [its] usual context’ with the understanding that ‘the original outcome of the activity will not occur’ (Goffman, 1974, p. 59). However, it can still be perceived as a useful experience for the PSTs (Griffiths, 2016, p. 228), especially because it combines the communication of a challenging subject matter, grammar, with subject didactics and classroom management. This combination facilitates the development of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986).

Bell (2007) argues that the status of microteaching as a performance instead of an authentic classroom situation might bring other benefits, such as the opportunity to be playful, and try out different teaching styles and methods (p. 37).

Self-efficacy in a teaching situation

Arsal (2014) argues that microteaching activities develop PSTs’ self-confidence and self-efficacy because they let them experience an authentic teaching situation in a complexity-reduced context, which increases their chances of mastery (p. 454).

Zimmerman (2000), building on Bandura (1997), shows that ‘students’ beliefs about their academic capabilities play an essential role in their motivation to achieve’ (p. 82). He claims that self-efficacy, or the belief whether one can successfully perform a specific action, depends on several factors, among others, on the context of the performance and perceived mastery, and it is shown to influence future functioning (Zimmerman, 2000, pp. 83–84). In other words, if the students believe that they can successfully perform a specific action in a specific context, and have also, in the past, successfully mastered this action, it is quite likely that they will be willing to try again, even if they consider that specific performance difficult.

Research also shows that enactive mastery experiences, that is, performing the specific action oneself, and vicarious experiences, that is, witnessing a model performing the targeted action, are more influential sources of self-efficacy than verbal persuasion, or improvements in physiological reactions such as fatigue or stress (Arsal, 2014; Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). In a teacher training situation, this means that performing in a grammar teaching rehearsal, or playing a student in such a rehearsal, should have a stronger effect on perceived self-efficacy than learning about the same techniques from a textbook or a lecture. This should eventually lead to PSTs feeling capable of, and willing to, engage in explicit grammar instruction in the classroom.

Method

The goal of this paper is to evaluate the use of teaching rehearsals as a method to prepare PSTs for teaching grammar in the ESL classroom, while at the same time giving them an opportunity to connect the theoretical perspective of language didactics with practical applications before they are put in charge of real students.

The PSTs enrolled in the teaching programmes who have selected English as one of their subjects normally receive instruction in separate courses devoted to English language and didactics, and literature and culture didactics. As part of our interest in incorporating teaching rehearsals focused on grammar, these were naturally integrated into the language didactics classes.

Much of the previous research on the effects of teaching rehearsals and microteaching in higher education focuses on STEM subjects. Because teaching methods in STEM subjects differ from those commonly employed in language teaching, the techniques described in these studies did not seem immediately transferable to the kinds of teaching experiences common among our PSTs. Our study is, therefore, exploratory, relying on qualitative analysis of field notes taken by the instructors during observations of teaching rehearsals in language didactics courses for GLU 1–7 and GLU 5–10 PSTs. The PSTs' rehearsals were not recorded, as this could add unnecessary stress to the learning situation.

The PSTs were asked to rehearse teaching assigned grammatical features in groups roughly equivalent to their field placement groups. The grammatical topics were selected to be appropriate for the grade levels covered by the respective programmes, such as irregular verbs, some/any distinctions, adjective/adverb distinctions, mass nouns, agreement, homophones, or simple expletives.

The 1–7 student groups were asked to select a topic from the list, decide on the appropriate grade level for the instruction, and design a mini-lesson to present to the class based on the topic. After their presentations, the PSTs received feedback from their instructor, and comments from the class.

The 5–10 PSTs were asked to develop a full lesson based on a given grammatical problem, which would include both content-focused and language-focused elements. This teaching sequence happened after they received instruction in different ways to incorporate grammar in communicative teaching (see Loewen, 2015) and learned about the importance of noticing relevant language features in language input (Schmidt, 1990, 2010). Student groups were then paired, and they taught their prepared lesson to each other, with one group acting as the teachers and the other (including the instructor) playing the role of students. This procedure was repeated with GLU 5–10 groups in four consecutive years (i.e. approx. 100 PSTs, or 25 practice groups).

During the rehearsals, the instructors took notes which serve as the main data set for our discussion below. In addition, a short survey was distributed to several student groups within the GLU programme, including, but not limited to, the PSTs participating in the rehearsals, mapping their experience with different teaching activities which they have employed during their field placements (e.g. working with texts, teaching grammar, teaching culture, etc.).

Results

The teaching rehearsals were conducted with two groups of PSTs, GLU 1–7 and GLU 5–10. The 1–7 rehearsals took place after their field placement period, during which they had all served as teachers in 2nd or 3rd-grade classes. By the time of the rehearsals, the PSTs (the majority in their 4th semester, with a couple repeating the course from the previous year) were well-versed in breaking down complex material for young children.

The rehearsals in the 5–10 group were purposefully scheduled prior to their field placement because these PSTs were relatively inexperienced, with only one previously completed practice period of four weeks. Most of the PSTs have never led a language class. During their field placements, the PSTs are typically placed in the entire span of their programme, that is, 5th to 10th grade.

The 1–7 course has a strong didactic component, and only four lessons were exclusively devoted to grammatical instruction. Because the 5–10 PSTs are expected to complete 60 credits in English, and have the option to choose English as their master specialisation, their English language didactics course includes more theoretical basis in grammar and phonetics than the 1–7 group, in addition to language didactics.

The rehearsals in the two student groups shared some common features, which are described below.

Difficulty level and level of instruction

The 1–7 rehearsal groups were asked to describe the appropriate grade level for a lesson based on their assigned grammatical feature. All the groups selected a class at or near the top of their 1–7 grade range, despite having recently completed a practice placement in 2nd or 3rd grade. The PSTs expressed a belief that grammatical instruction was necessarily difficult, and thus more appropriate for older learners.

The topics the 5–10 PSTs were assigned to teach to a large degree corresponded to the topics covered in the grammar instruction in the course, but they were asked to adapt them to a grade of their choosing. Many rehearsal

groups attempted to teach the topics as they had been taught by the instructor in the course, which was often not appropriate for the intended grade level. The PSTs also struggled with selecting relevant, age-appropriate example structures, and generally attempted to cover too much content in their rehearsals.

During the post-rehearsal reflection conversations, they often expressed that they did not want to forget to include something important, and they were not confident in making the choice of what is important themselves – they preferred to be told precisely what they should include.

Embedding in contextualised activity

Both courses strongly emphasise embedding language instruction in activity-based learning to facilitate incidental learning (cf. Schmidt, 1990). The 1–7 groups all selected either a game (Alias, for example) or a picture book to introduce their features to the class. The PSTs used noticing strategies (cf. Loewen, 2015) to highlight the grammatical features before asking for any production from their imaginary students.

In the 5–10 groups, despite being asked to embed their grammar instruction in relevant and, if possible, authentic language, most of the rehearsed lessons contained decontextualised grammar instruction, often in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Some groups chose to use texts, songs, or pictures to illustrate the grammar point before they explained the rules, but for the majority of the groups, the language-focused task and the content-focused task had little overlap.

Worksheets and exercises

When it came to productive activities, the rehearsal groups in both courses frequently relied upon worksheet activities easily found on the internet.

On the one hand, gap-fill activities have a place in the teaching of grammar, particularly among students too young to produce extended prose. On the other

hand, the vocabulary used in these materials is often divorced from the language used in the introductory activity. These worksheets are also often created for English first language students and contain language Norwegian students at the same grade level would not have encountered previously (e.g. a writing exercise describing preparations for the prom used in a 7th-grade Norwegian classroom).

Two of the 1–7 rehearsal groups developed their own worksheets based upon models found online but using vocabulary from the introductory lesson.

One of the 5–10 groups used a worksheet with examples which the rehearsing PSTs were not able to analyse or explain when questioned by their colleagues who were playing students.

Verbalising grammar explanations

The majority of the 5–10 PSTs struggled with grammar explanations. It was very clear to the observers that many of them had memorised rules from textbooks and did not have an understanding of the underlying language system. This was apparent mainly when they used examples which were ambiguous (or, in some cases, incorrect) and then struggled to apply the rules they just recited to these examples.

On the other hand, those PSTs who chose to freehand the grammar explanation, usually of simpler topics such as, for example, simple past tense, often underestimated the need to prepare relevant examples beforehand, and struggled to find simple enough examples on the spot.

Some PSTs mentioned in their reflections that they did not realise previously how much background understanding and preparation is needed to conduct a simple grammar-focused activity.

Summary of the observations

The 1–7 PSTs clearly understood general FFI principles and showed sensitive awareness of the learning styles common among young children. The

ease with which the PSTs incorporated noticing strategies into their games and picture book reading suggests that these are techniques they frequently employ during their field placements.

During the conversations after the rehearsals, the class discussed the use of generic worksheets. The PSTs reported that they generally used activities in textbooks designed to accompany thematic units to teach grammar. All agreed that adapting worksheets was a better tactic than simply using online content in class.

The 5–10 PSTs showed less understanding of FFI and communicative grammar teaching principles than the 1–7 groups. They struggled to find relevant texts (in the wide sense) which could effectively illustrate the target language structures, perhaps with the exception of the topic of past tense.

It is necessary to note that these PSTs had very little teaching experience at the time of the rehearsals (only one practice period), and most of them had no experience teaching languages. The post-rehearsal reflections often revealed their insecurity in teaching grammar, and a lack of deeper understanding of English as a language system.

Discussion

The PSTs in the 1–7 group all judged grammar instruction, in contrast to, for example, vocabulary learning, as a more advanced skill, and selected grades 5–7 for their rehearsal target level. This decision reflected their own insecurity about grammar learning, which is also reflected in, for example, Watson's (2012) study of British teacher trainees.

The post-rehearsal discussion also indicated that PSTs often relied on internet teaching sites, or textbook/workbook grammatical explanations, although the use of thematic vocabulary in those materials justified their inclusion in their instructional plans. The PSTs' own relative lack of confidence in their grammatical knowledge likely led to the coding of grammar as an advanced topic in schools.

The 5–10 group did not show a preference for the more advanced grades when they prepared their lessons, and generally picked the grade which they

were going to teach in their upcoming practice period. This might have been a purely pragmatic decision on their part, since the teaching rehearsals took place prior to their field placements. As with the 1–7 group, the 5–10 PSTs also relied heavily on textbooks, and showed low independent understanding of the topics in question.

All of the 1–7 groups incorporated content learning into their grammatical lesson, and showed particular felicity in finding books, nursery rhymes, and other authentic texts to use during the introductory phase of their rehearsal. On the other hand, the 5–10 groups struggled with integrating grammar instruction into a communicative context. The more successful groups chose texts or pictures which illustrated or prompted the target structures, but several of the groups simply conducted a language activity combined with an unrelated text-based activity.

In our own survey of PSTs enrolled in our GLU classes Spring 2024, 44% of the PSTs reported reading a literary text to their students about once a week. However, it is possible that the 5–10 group, who were in their second semester, simply have not had enough experience teaching language yet, and their lack of ability to successfully integrate language learning and content instruction is due to a lack of exposure to such practices. The 1–7 group all reported such reading as a weekly experience in their most recent field placements in lower primary school. All the groups reported preferring to integrate language learning – often vocabulary – through the medium of fictional texts, and rhymes.

To practise the introduced grammar points, worksheets were used both with and without adaptation as a way for students to practise target forms, and for the teachers to evaluate the students' knowledge of the correct use of these forms. Unaltered internet sources were commonly used during school placements, the PSTs reported, often as the result of time pressure on the teacher. The PSTs reported that students like worksheets and seem to gain a sense of mastery by getting the answers right. In their overreliance on generic worksheets, the PSTs mostly reveal that they have not fully mastered the core competences involved in developing grammar lessons.

This is not to say that worksheets should not be given to students, but these worksheets should be integrated into larger communicative frameworks within the classroom. Arguably, the short preparation time given for the microteaching assignment also pushed the PSTs towards the use of generic

worksheets, although during the discussion, they acknowledged that they sometimes relied on such sheets when in the field placement schools as well.

Although the aim of English instruction in Norwegian schools is predominantly communicatively oriented (Fenner, 2020), some formal grammar instruction is usually necessary, even in the lower grades, to avoid communication breakdowns, and increase the students' understanding of English as a system (Askland, 2020). Our goal with the integration of teaching rehearsals in our language didactics classes was for the PSTs to experience what it takes to do this well. PSTs may distrust practices which they have not experienced as successful in the past. The first issue is that they may have experienced ineffective grammar instruction as learners and, as a result, they may believe this to be the standard to attain (Oleson & Hora, 2014).

In order for them to embrace a different instructional approach to grammar, they must first be aware of the different ways to integrate grammar instruction into communicative teaching practice and then believe that it is possible for them to conduct them (Janssen et al., 2014, p. 204). If the PSTs are only told by their instructors, or coursebooks, that other ways of teaching grammar are possible, they may still avoid implementing them, because they may believe that they would not be able to conduct them successfully. If, on the other hand, they experience teaching grammar themselves and being taught grammar by their peers, they may experience both enactive mastery and vicarious experience, which are considered the most influential sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000).

The integration of grammar teaching into a meaningful communicative context with young learners in a foreign/second language classroom is presumably a rather complex task, which can quickly become overwhelming for the novice teacher. By using teaching rehearsals as approximations of practice, we aim to deconstruct this situation, and practise its components in a non-threatening environment on campus, with reflection and direct feedback from instructors and peers (Janssen et al., 2015; Janssen et al., 2014). This should give the PSTs opportunities to develop resources and strategies which they can later employ with real students.

Also, the rehearsals themselves are a type of FFI, encouraging PSTs to notice grammatical forms in the context of a didactics content assignment (Schmidt, 1990, 2010), which should eventually help them design effective learning tasks for their students.

Despite many similarities, there were also some clear differences between the two groups of PSTs who conducted grammar teaching rehearsals in our English language didactics courses. The 1–7 PSTs were much more successful in integrating grammar instruction in meaningful, communicative contexts than the 5–10 PSTs.

One plausible explanation is that this is simply due to a natural maturation process. They were already in their second year of the program, compared to the first-year 5–10 PSTs. A second, related factor could be that they have already completed four practice placements (two of them focused on English) prior to the teaching rehearsals session. One could thus argue that they have already acquired the necessary experiences via trial and error in real classrooms.

This suggests that the best placement of teaching rehearsals as an instructional technique in teacher training programs is prior to the relevant practice placement period. This would afford the PSTs the opportunity to commit the trials and errors in a safe and simplified environment of a peer group.

Conclusion

The instructional activities described in this paper aimed to address two weaknesses in the instruction currently offered in English teacher training courses in Norway: the perceived lack of connection between content-focused on-campus instruction and experiences during field placement, and the PSTs' abilities and willingness to vocalise language descriptions and grammar explanations.

The goal was to explore and evaluate the potential to use teaching rehearsals to provide PSTs with the opportunity to practise grammar teaching in a supportive environment, where direct feedback and immediate post-teaching reflection would be provided (Allen & Eve, 1968). By allowing them to focus on conveying grammatical instruction, a source of insecurity for many of the PSTs in these groups, in a simplified context (Allen & Clark, 1967), we aimed to enhance their self-efficacy and, consequently, their willingness to engage in explicit grammar teaching in real classrooms (Zimmerman, 2000).

The rehearsals allowed the PSTs to practise vocalising grammar explanations, a task they rarely get to rehearse in schools because practice teachers tend to de-emphasise explicit grammar instruction. By experiencing both the teacher role and the student role in these situations, the PSTs should develop an understanding of the preparatory work they need to employ to provide quality grammar instruction and increase their repertoire of different grammar teaching strategies.

The post-rehearsal reflections also facilitated discussions of common, but perhaps not ideal, teaching practices, such as using unadapted material found online, or the struggle to find relevant and age-appropriate examples of the focused language structures.

One of the central differences between the two groups of PSTs who conducted teaching rehearsals was that the rehearsals seem to have a stronger effect on PSTs without much teaching experience, and we, therefore, recommend implementing teaching rehearsals as an instructional technique early on in teacher training programmes.

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