

Evaluation summary

MiniLit is a small-group intervention that focuses on improving students' literacy in five areas: Phoneme awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension, particularly the first three. It is an early literacy intervention developed for struggling readers in the bottom 25% of students in Year 1. In this trial, the program consisted of 80 unique one-hour lessons delivered four to five days per week over 20 weeks¹.

The evaluation was set up as an efficacy trial to evaluate if the program has an additional impact on reading achievement compared to a group who received Usual Learning Support (which could include whole-class approaches and/or support programs for struggling readers). This trial used the YARC-Passage Reading's three primary outcomes of Accuracy, Rate and Comprehension. The evaluation also considered other foundational reading skills related to improved reading outcomes.

The security rating of this trial is low meaning that the findings from this study need to be treated with caution.

The evaluation found that:

1 MiniLit, as experienced in this trial, did not have an additional impact on passage reading but there was evidence of significant improvements in foundational reading skills. These findings were not conclusive however and should be treated with caution.

For all students considered in this trial (irrespective of attendance levels), there was not strong statistical evidence that MiniLit made an additional impact on students' reading outcomes as measured by the YARC-Passage Reading's tests of Accuracy, Rate and Comprehension. However, these findings are not conclusive and need to be treated with caution given uncertainty about the YARC-PR measure² and the level of change this trial was set up to detect. Evidence did suggest significant gains in foundational reading skills (Letter Sound Knowledge, Phoneme Awareness, Regular Word Reading and Non-word Reading) at six months after randomisation with Letter Sound Knowledge sustained at 12 months³.

2 Students who received the minimum recommended attendance appear to have made strong improvements in both Reading Accuracy and in foundational reading skills.

With high implementation fidelity, students who met the minimum recommended 80% attendance, that is at least 4 days per week on average, during the 20-week intervention period scored higher on Reading Accuracy at 12 months and in foundational reading skills (Letter Sound Knowledge, Phoneme Awareness, Regular Word Reading and

¹ MiniLit was designed to take up to 30 weeks (across three terms) to complete the full program. It was proposed at the start of this Efficacy trial to test a 20-week intervention to enable schools to run the intervention twice per year.

² A majority of children in this study were not able to complete the primary outcome measure at baseline and at the follow-up time points, despite the measure being validated for this age group. Over 97 per cent of students performed at the floor level which resulted in a considerable imbalance at baseline for the YARC-PR measure.

³ In this study, Outcome Assessments were completed immediately post-intervention (approximately six months post-randomisation) and six months post-intervention (approximately 12 months post-randomisation).

Nonword Reading) at both six and 12 months. However, it is important to note that nearly half of the students (45%) did not meet the recommended attendance level.

3

Schools highly valued MiniLit but in this trial they faced challenges covering all content in the lessons and having students complete all lessons.

This trial tested a shorter intervention period (20 weeks) which may have hindered students' access to more MiniLit lessons⁴. MiniLit tutors valued the initial coaching by MiniLit to improve specific aspects of the three MiniLit activities (Sounds and Words, Text reading and Storybook reading) but reported difficulties in achieving the full program of 80 unique lessons within 20 weeks and in pacing the time needed to complete all three activities within the one-hour MiniLit lessons.

The cost of the MiniLit program delivered by MiniLit tutors (teachers and paraprofessionals) is moderate at \$946 per student (approximate cost per student averaged over three years). The bulk of the costs is incurred in the first year (\$11,210) which includes training, materials and staff time to deliver the intervention to four students for two terms over three years. The recurring cost of MiniLit per student is \$72.

Unanswered questions

- **Use of a different Primary Outcome measure:** The findings from this trial on the designated primary outcome measure need to be treated with caution as more than 97 per cent of students were not able to complete the level of task of the YARC-PR at baseline. This raised doubt about its reliability for the bottom 25% of Year 1 readers.⁵ It is not known whether MiniLit, if evaluated using another passage reading measure, would show better outcomes.
- **Impact of more MiniLit lessons:** The evidence suggests that greater exposure to MiniLit lessons leads to better outcomes. However it is important to note that a high proportion of students (46 per cent) did not achieve the minimum attendance threshold in this trial. It is not known if the program would have an additional impact on passage reading if more students received the minimum 80 per cent attendance threshold and if the tutors were able to comfortably deliver all three MiniLit activities (Sounds and Words, Text reading and Storybook Reading) within the one-hour lesson. In addition, in this trial schools had 20 weeks to complete the program, whereas a typical MiniLit implementation allows up to 30 weeks (3 terms). A future trial, with 30 weeks intervention period, could evaluate the attendance level and its impact.
- **Phonics and reading achievement:** The findings from this trial do not mean that the underlying concept of phonics instruction does not work. Research suggests phonics instruction improves early readers' foundational reading skills, however developing reading comprehension may require a complex interplay of literacy approaches⁶. We could not determine the effectiveness of MiniLit's synthetic phonics intervention on reading comprehension due to concerns about the reliability of the reading comprehension measure and the fact that we do not know the extent to which MiniLit students received other literacy approaches as part of regular classroom instruction.

⁴ Students receiving MiniLit in non-trial settings may take up to 30 weeks (three terms) to complete 80 unique lessons as students are assessed fortnightly and repeat lessons if necessary to achieve mastery before proceeding to the next lesson block.

⁵ The YARC-Passage Reading was agreed as the designated primary outcome measure for this study when the trial was first designed. Considerable imbalances were found at baseline due to the difficulty level of the task, despite being validated for this group.

⁶ <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/teaching-and-learning-toolkit/phonics/>

Considerations

Schools



- Schools should be cautious when considering the primary outcome findings of this trial given the low security rating. Schools should however consider the potential value of the program in improving foundational reading skills as a support for Year 1 struggling readers.
- The MiniLit program is designed as a Tier 2 intervention, based on a Response to Intervention framework and may take up to 30 weeks to complete but in this trial, the program tested a shorter intervention period of 20 weeks (to enable schools to run it twice per year with reduced costs). To maximise benefits, schools should discuss with MultiLit the approach that would be best in their context, and then implement according to their recommendation.
- Schools should work closely with MultiLit to support teachers delivering the program (MiniLit tutors) in implementing lessons to the required quality and use the MiniLit checklists and feedback from the initial coaching effectively to monitor and improve the fidelity of the program implementation.
- Schools should consider this program as a small-group intervention that focuses on supporting early Year 1 students struggling to read when considering the cost of the program. Any implementation variations should be discussed with MultiLit (i.e. two teachers each with one group or one teacher instructing two groups) which may change the costs.

Systems



- Systems should be cautious when considering the primary outcome findings of this trial given the low security rating. They should however consider the potential value of the program in improving foundational reading skills as a support for Year 1 struggling readers in schools.
- The MiniLit program is designed as a Tier 2 intervention, based on a Response to Intervention framework and may take up to 30 weeks to complete but in this trial, the program tested a shorter intervention period of 20 weeks. To maximise benefits, systems should discuss with MultiLit the approach that would be piloted in schools within their context, and then evaluate the local impact/benefit of this approach before implementing it more widely.
- Systems should support schools implementing the program to the required quality. They should monitor and oversee the fidelity of implementation across schools, as part of ongoing evaluation and work with MultiLit coaches and schools to address concerns early to ensure that program and lesson delivery can be improved to maximise student outcomes.
- Systems should discuss the delivery approach (i.e., two teachers for one group or one teacher running two groups, which may change the costs) of running this program with schools, balancing quality, feasibility and program costs. They should deliver a consistent approach and consider the number and type of schools that would best benefit from this program during the pilot.