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Can ChatGPT be a dependable resource for parents looking for information on specific learning disorder?

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Abstract

ChatGPT is an innovative artificial intelligence (AI) tool that is increasingly applied in healthcare and is widely used by professionals and the public for medical information. This study evaluated ChatGPT's capacity to provide reliable, evidence-based information on specific learning disorders (SLDs) to parents. A set of questions about specific learning disorders, which are based on questions frequently asked by patients and their families in psychiatric interviews and supported by relevant literature, was prepared by two experienced child and adolescent psychiatry specialist. Two mental health professionals independently evaluated the responses. The findings indicate that ChatGPT generally provides accurate and comprehensive information on SLDs. However, parents' responses often included technical terminology and excessive detail, reducing clarity. Although ChatGPT has the potential to deliver accurate and detailed information, it may cause misunderstandings or undue concerns for nonspecialists. This study evaluates the accuracy, clarity, and inclusivity of ChatGPT's responses to questions posed by different user profiles—a parent/caregiver and an experienced expert. Results indicated that ChatGPT demonstrated consistently high accuracy, with median accuracy scores of 5 and mean scores of 4.8 and 4.7 for responses given to parents/caregivers and experts, respectively. No significant difference was found between the two groups. Similarly, inclusivity scores were high across both groups, with median values of 5 and mean scores of 4.82 and 4.87, respectively, showing no significant difference. However, clarity and comprehensibility varied by user group. These findings emphasize the need for refinements to enhance ChatGPT's adaptability to different levels of user expertise. Ensuring that responses are tailored appropriately for lay audiences can improve clarity while maintaining accuracy. Future developments should focus on optimizing language simplification and contextual adaptation, reinforcing ChatGPT's role as a supplementary tool rather than an independent medical information source for non-expert users.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, specific learning disorders, artificial intelligence in psychiatry

Introduction

Specific learning disorders (SLDs) are a class of neurodevelopmental disorders that can have environmental, genetic and physiological causes. It is characterized by persistent difficulties in learning educational skills such as reading words accurately and fluently, reading comprehension, written expression, spelling and writing words correctly, arithmetic calculation and numerical reasoning [1]. It is usually recognized during primary school and its prevalence ranges from approximately 5-15% [2]. Diagnosis rates are increasing due to increased awareness, widening diagnostic possibilities and raising awareness among educators. In recent years, more children have been able to become more functional in daily life with early intervention and support thanks to awareness campaigns, the widespread use of individualized education plans and families' early referral to specialists.

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This increase in awareness, combined with rapidly advancing technological developments and greater access to online resources worldwide, has led to a significant rise in interest in online platforms as sources of medical information [3]. In addition, many children, adolescents, and parents who need mental health services are unable to access them due to barriers such as stigma, lack of access to appropriate care, or inadequate mental health services [4]. In this case, online platforms can serve as the first accessible source of information before consulting a healthcare professional. Online platforms can be useful by providing quick access to evidence-based information; however, they can also harbor unreliable information and various misconceptions. This may pose a risk to individuals who aim to consult health professionals in a timely manner and receive an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan [3,5]. Moreover, due to the breadth of user-generated content, there is growing concern about the potential for these platforms to increase disease anxiety [6].

A remarkable and innovative solution to this problem with online information providers is the use of artificial intelligence in the field of mental health. Artificial intelligence is designed in a similar structure to the neural networks of the human brain and incorporates various technologies that mimic human cognitive abilities [7]. One of the most well-known examples of these technologies is ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pretrained Transformer), an artificial intelligence tool developed by OpenAI in November 2022 that quickly responds to questions using an internet-based dataset. ChatGPT, a question-answer based natural language processing program, has been taken to a more advanced level with reinforcement learning supported by human feedback [8]. This tool, which provides users with easy access to information by synthesizing real-time data on different topics, is rapidly being adopted by a wide user base.

ChatGPT offers several possibilities that can support child mental health care and management. First, mental health professionals can use ChatGPT to quickly and easily access scientific information and resources to increase their capacity to provide effective mental health services for children and adolescents [4,9]. Moreover, the integration of artificial intelligence applications into intervention and therapy programs allows for the development of innovative methods and the advancement of professional practices [10]. Secondly, ChatGPT can offer an accessible and non-judgmental source of information about mental health for children and adolescents. Children and young people can use this platform to learn about mental disorders, treatment methods and ways to cope [4]. Furthermore, ChatGPT has the potential to provide guidance to parents and caregivers on supporting their children's mental health [11]. It is known that parents often turn to the internet and social media platforms to find answers to their questions about their children's health [12]. In this context, ChatGPT can be an important support tool by providing parents with evidence-based information on how they can contribute to their children's treatment processes and promote positive mental health habits.

Although it seems that ChatGPT may have a strong role in providing accurate and systematic evidence-based information in mental health services, researchers draw attention to concerns such as potential ethical issues and misuse. In this context, the future role of ChatGPT in patient management has become an important research topic. The aim of this study was to evaluate the responses of ChatGPT, an innovative and promising program that is rapidly gaining popularity in the field of mental health, to the most frequently asked questions about SLD by parents/caregivers to clinicians and to determine the change in the quality of responses depending on whether the questioner is an expert or a parent/caregiver.

Material and Methods

A set of questions about SLD, based on questions frequently asked by patients and their families in psychiatric interviews and supported by relevant literature, has been prepared by two experienced child and adolescent psychiatry specialists. This set consists of 20 questions and is organized in two main sections: "Basic Information about SLD" and "Diagnosis, Evaluation and Treatment Process." The complete list of questions is provided in Supplementary Table 1 to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Within the scope of the study, two separate accounts were created on ChatGPT 4.0. The first account simulated a parent seeking information about SLD, whereas the second account represented an experienced mental health professional in the field.

To ensure prompt standardization and reproducibility, the same set of 20 questions was entered verbatim into two separate ChatGPT 4.0 accounts. Each question was asked once, without follow-up prompts, clarification requests, or additional contextual input. Responses were generated in separate sessions to minimize contextual memory effects. No prompt engineering techniques were used. After all questions were answered by ChatGPT, two experts independently evaluated and scored ChatGPT's answers to each question in terms of 'Accuracy', 'Clarity' and 'Inclusivity' on a 1-5 Likert scale (Table 1). Once the scores were determined, averages were calculated for each question, and the level of agreement between the experts was assessed. In addition, the average scores given by the evaluators to ChatGPT's responses to the account identified as a parent and the account identified as an experienced expert in the field were compared.

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Table 1. Scoring criteria for the evaluation of ChatGPT responses

Accuracy	
Score	**Description**
1	Contains completely false or misleading information
2	Mostly contains false or misleading information
3	Combination of correct and incorrect information
4	Mostly correct information
5	Extremely accurate information
Clarity – Parent/Caregiver Account	
Score	**Description**
1	Language is not clear, understandable, or patient-friendly
2	Language is often not clear or patient-friendly
3	Combination of clear and unclear expressions
4	Language is mostly clear and patient-friendly
5	Language is clear, understandable, and patient-friendly
Clarity – Mental Health Professional Account	
Score	**Description**
1	Language is not clear or appropriate to medical terminology
2	Language is often not clear or appropriate to medical terminology
3	Combination of appropriate and inappropriate medical terminology
4	Language is mostly clear and appropriate to medical terminology
5	Language is clear and appropriate to medical terminology
Inclusivity	
Score	**Description**
1	Does not provide required information
2	Provides too little information
3	Provides approximately half of the necessary information
4	Provides most of the necessary information
5	Provides all necessary information

Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale across three domains: Accuracy, Clarity, and Inclusivity

Statistical Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. The distribution of variables was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. As the data did not meet the assumptions of normality, non-parametric statistical tests were preferred. Comparisons between the responses generated for the parent/caregiver account and the expert account were performed using the Mann–Whitney U test. Inter-rater reliability between the two independent evaluators was assessed using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), based on a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Ethics Approval

This study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethical Committee of Aksaray University, Türkiye (Date: November 7, 2024 Ethics approval number: 2024/123).

Results

ChatGPT responded to all 20 questions asked from separate accounts as a parent/caregiver and an experienced expert. All responses were independently scored by the evaluators on a scale of 1-5 for accuracy, clarity and inclusivity, and then the scores were compared to assess the degree of interrater agreement.Inter-rater reliability was found to be high for both the parent/caregiver and expert accounts (Table 2).

Table 2. Intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) values for inter-rater reliability

Domain	Parent account ICC	Expert account ICC
Accuracy	0.917	0.847
Clarity	0.596	0.765
Inclusivity	0.558	0.705

ICC calculated using a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement (average measures).

After the interrater agreement was assessed, a single assessment score was created for each question in terms of accuracy, clarity and inclusivity by averaging the scores given by the two evaluators. The evaluation scores of the answers given by ChatGPT were compared according to whether the questioner was a parent/caregiver or an expert (Table 3).

The median value for the accuracy score of the responses given by ChatGPT to the parent/caregiver was 5 and the mean was 4.8; the median value for the accuracy score of the responses given to an experienced expert was 5 and the mean was 4.7. There was no significant difference between the evaluator scores for the two responses ($p = 0.620$). Similarly, when analyzed separately for each of the 2 question areas, the answers given to the parent/caregiver and to an experienced expert had very high accuracy and were evaluated as similar to each other ($p > 0.05$).

The median value for the inclusivity score of the responses given by ChatGPT to the parent/caregiver was 5, mean was 4.82; the median value for the inclusivity score of the responses given to an experienced expert was 5, mean was 4.87, and no significant difference was found between the evaluator scores for the two responses ($p = 0.620$). Similarly, when analyzed separately for each of the 2 question areas, the responses given to the parent/caregiver and to an experienced expert had a very high level of inclusivity and were evaluated as similar to each other ($p > 0.05$).

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When the answers given by ChatGPT were evaluated in terms of clarity and comprehensibility of the language used, responses generated for the parent account were significantly less clear compared to the expert account (Table 3). When the questions in these areas were asked as an experienced expert, it was observed that ChatGPT gave answers that were dominated by medical jargon and would be considered quite comprehensible by an expert knowledgeable about the subject.

Table 3. Comparison of ChatGPT response scores between parent and expert accounts

Domain	Area	Parent median (IQR)	Expert median (IQR)	Parent mean	Expert mean	p-value
Accuracy	**Basic information**	5 (5–5)	5 (5–5)	5.00	4.86	0.739
Accuracy	**Diagnosis & treatment process**	5 (4–5)	5 (3.75–5)	4.55	4.50	0.796
Accuracy	**Overall**	5 (5–5)	5 (4.62–5)	4.80	4.70	0.620
Clarity	**Basic information**	4 (3.5–4.5)	5 (5–5)	4.04	4.90	0.001
Clarity	**Diagnosis & treatment process**	4 (3.25–4)	5 (4.5–5)	3.72	4.77	< 0.001
Clarity	**Overall**	4 (3.5–4)	5 (4.62–5)	3.90	4.85	< 0.001
Inclusivity	**Basic information**	5 (5–5)	5 (5–5)	4.90	5.00	0.481
Inclusivity	**Diagnosis & treatment process**	5 (4.5–5)	5 (4.5–5)	4.72	4.72	1.000
Inclusivity	**Overall**	5 (4.62–5)	5 (5–5)	4.82	4.87	0.620

Mdn: Median; IQR: Interquartile Range; Comparisons were performed using the Mann–Whitney U test; Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$

Discussion

Studies demonstrating the functionality of ChatGPT, the most widely used artificial intelligence program, in medical applications are rapidly increasing [13,14]. However, some researchers have drawn attention to the lack of scientific insight and experience that may be seen in the use of artificial intelligence in these fields [15]. In addition, its adequacy as a source of medical information for patients is not yet clear. As the areas of use of artificial intelligence applications expand, their use by patients to obtain medical information in mental disorders in which both individual and holistic approach is of great importance and which may have heterogeneous phenotype has become an important research topic.

Our study aimed to assess the accuracy, clarity, and inclusivity of ChatGPT's responses to common questions asked by parents regarding fundamental information, diagnosis, evaluation, and treatment processes related to Specific Learning Disorder, a neurodevelopmental disorder. The findings demonstrate that ChatGPT successfully answered all 20 of the questions provided. The overall accuracy score of ChatGPT's responses to questions posed as a parent was 4.8 with an inclusivity score of 4.82. Most of the answers received the highest score of 5 for both accuracy and inclusivity. As an experienced professional in the field, the overall accuracy score for the answers provided to the questions is 4.7 and the inclusivity score is 4.87. Similarly, the majority of the answers have achieved the highest score of 5 in terms of both accuracy and inclusivity. These findings align with previous research indicating that ChatGPT delivers highly reliable information to parents and caregivers who are seeking details about autism [11].

When the answers given to the questions in the fields of basic knowledge and diagnosis, evaluation and treatment were evaluated separately, there was no statistically significant difference between the qualities of the answers given by ChatGPT according to the question fields, but it was observed that the average accuracy and comprehensiveness scores in the field of "basic knowledge" were higher, while the average accuracy and comprehensiveness scores in the field of "diagnosis, evaluation and treatment process" were relatively lower. While scientific knowledge and clinical approaches to the individual assessment and treatment of mental disorders are rapidly evolving and updated, the fact that artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT may have insufficiently up-to-date data suggests that such differences are likely to emerge.

Although there is not yet a consensus among studies on the accuracy and clarity of ChatGPT responses to medical questions, many studies agree that the quality of responses varies according to the subject of the question [16]. It has been observed that the answers with the highest accuracy are generally related to knowledge-based questions, while questions requiring flexibility in decision-making are lower in terms of accuracy and consistency [17]. In this context, it is important to consider that access to medical information does not automatically translate into health literacy. While ChatGPT

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may provide scientifically accurate content, the way information is structured, prioritized, and simplified plays a crucial role in determining its usefulness for parents. Especially in child and adolescent psychiatry, where parental understanding directly affects help-seeking behavior and treatment adherence, clarity and contextualization of information are as important as accuracy. Therefore, future developments in artificial intelligence-based health communication tools should not only aim to improve factual precision but also focus on adaptive language models tailored to different user profiles.

Another point that attracted our attention and that we found important in our study was that the clarity scores of the answers given to the questions asked by the parents were significantly lower than the answers given to the questions asked by an experienced professional in the field. During the evaluation, we observed that although the accuracy of the answer was high when the ChatGPT was asked on behalf of the parents, the information included was too much, more details were given than the patient and relatives may need, and the clarity of the answer was reduced by the use of medical terms. For example, when asked by the parent about the components of SLD treatment, the response provided by the ChatGPT comprehensively included the treatment options that may be preferred for a small number of children with SLD in clinical practice. Not clearly explaining the treatment approach to a non-specialist in this area, and presenting less common treatment components with the same level of detail as the prioritized treatment approaches, may lead to confusion and concern about the adequacy of individualized treatment recommended by specialists. This issue should be carefully evaluated in terms of the possibility of affecting the relationship of trust between the patient/parent and the physician. Furthermore, it is extremely important to adopt a comprehensive approach in the treatment of mental disorders, taking into account all individual and environmental factors that may affect the child's mental health. Although ChatGPT is very useful in providing accurate medical information, it does not have the capacity to make an individual diagnosis or recommend treatment [15]. Therefore, it is thought that expert supervision and evaluation are of great importance when using artificial intelligence programs in the field of mental health.

When it comes to using or recommending artificial intelligence applications in the field of psychiatry, ethical and legal issues must be taken into consideration. In the process of developing and improving existing programs, issues such as security of personal data, copyright violations and compliance with medico-legal regulations cannot be addressed independently.

One of the major limitations of our study is the lack of a defined and validated set of criteria specifically developed to measure the quality of ChatGPT responses. While the Likert scales we used for evaluation allowed for a quantitative analysis across accuracy, clarity, and inclusivity domains, differences based on the personal perspectives of the raters could not be completely eliminated.

Another limitation of the study is that the evaluation relied solely on expert-based scoring rather than including parent-reported measures of comprehensibility or perceived usefulness. Including caregiver feedback in future studies may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the real-world applicability of artificial intelligence-generated information.

Additionally, artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT are continuously updated, and their responses may vary over time due to software modifications, expansion of training data, or algorithmic refinements. Therefore, the present findings reflect the performance of the specific version available at the time of data collection and may not necessarily represent future iterations of the system. Finally, as the study focused exclusively on SLD within a particular linguistic and cultural context, the generalizability of the findings to other psychiatric conditions, languages, or populations may be limited.

Conclusion

ChatGPT has significant potential to provide accurate and comprehensive medical data to both professionals and parents and caregivers seeking information about SLD. However, it does not seem appropriate at the moment to use ChatGPT as a stand-alone source of medical information for parents, caregivers or patients without expert supervision, especially considering that its answers to questions about diagnosis and treatment processes do not have the flexibility of individual approach. With technological advances and patient-oriented scientific studies in this field, it is predicted that artificial intelligence will have a wider range of medical applications and its integration into healthcare systems will increase.

Ethical Approval
The study was approved by the Aksaray University Ethics Committee. (Date: November 7, 2024 Ethics approval number: 2024/123).

Patient Consent
Patient consent was not required because the study did not involve human participants or identifiable patient data.

Conflict of Interest
The authors confirm the absence of any conflicts associated with this work.

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