

## **PROBLEMS OF PREVENTING THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION ON STUDENTS REQUIRING SPECIAL LEARNING CONDITIONS**

**DOI: 10.24234/se.v7i2.3**

### **AUTHORS' DATA**

**Armen Avetisyan**, PhD Student

Researcher at Chess Research Center

Khachatur Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, Republic of Armenia

Contacts: [avet1syar.armen@inbox.ru](mailto:avet1syar.armen@inbox.ru)

### **ABSTRACT**

*In an era dominated by information and communication technologies, the pervasive influence of misinformation has become an issue of paramount concern. This article delves into the multifaceted challenges posed by misinformation and the dire socio-psychological consequences it imposes on this vulnerable student demographic. There is an attempt to understand the destructive impact of misinformation from a pedagogical and psychological point of view, to describe the influence of social media services children requiring special learning conditions use in their everyday lives.*

*The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to comprehensively explore the intricate problems presented by the socio-psychological destructive impact of misinformation on students who need special learning conditions, and second, to offer insights and strategies for mitigating these issues. By shedding light on this critical intersection between misinformation and special learning conditions, it is aimed to provoke a broader discourse, raise awareness, and empower educators, parents, and policymakers to take action.*

**Keywords:** *misinformation, socio-psychological impact, student with special educational needs, special learning conditions, prevention.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Misinformation often intermingled with disinformation, circulates at an unprecedented rate, affecting a wide spectrum of our society (Pennycook & Rand, 2020). However, one often overlooked aspect of this phenomenon is its profound impact on students who require special learning conditions.

Misinformation, the inadvertent spread of incorrect or misleading information, is an omnipresent companion in the digital age. Social media, online platforms, and other information channels, while providing unprecedented access to information, have also ushered in a deluge of unverified, biased, or

simply false data (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). This proliferation of misinformation has sweeping societal implications, undermining critical thinking, shaping false perceptions, and causing discord. However, what is of particular concern is how this crisis intersects with students who need special learning conditions.

Students with conditions such as autism, dyslexia, ADHD, and more face unique challenges in navigating the information landscape. Their vulnerabilities often stem from difficulties in processing, analyzing, and discerning information accurately (Fletcher-Watson, 2021). Misinformation, when absorbed by these students, has the potential to exacerbate their learning hurdles, trigger socio-psychological distress, and create barriers to education and social integration.

It is of paramount importance to recognize that these students, as essential members of the human's diverse society, deserve not only equitable access to education but also protection from the negative repercussions of misinformation (Karas, Ottmar, Kim & Wenzel, 2019). By addressing this issue head-on, it is possible to work toward creating a more inclusive and informed educational environment that supports the holistic development of all students, regardless of their learning abilities and differences.

In the following paper, we will delve deeper into the socio-psychological consequences of misinformation on students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs and explore strategies to prevent and mitigate its impact on their educational journey.

## **ANALYZING THE LITERATURE**

Misinformation is a prevalent issue in the modern information landscape. It can be defined as the dissemination or sharing of false or inaccurate information, often without the intent to deceive (Pennycook & Rand, 2020). This is in contrast to disinformation, which involves the intentional spread of false information to deceive or mislead the audience (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017). It's important to distinguish between these two concepts, as the inadvertent spread of misinformation is pervasive and may have profound consequences, particularly for individuals with special learning conditions.

In today's digital age, misinformation finds its breeding ground in various online sources. Social media platforms, websites, and online forums have become hotspots for the rapid dissemination of information, whether accurate or not (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018). Moreover, the echo chamber effect, where individuals are exposed to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, can further intensify the spread of misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). The virality of false information is amplified through mechanisms such as clickbait headlines, emotional manipulation, and the rapid sharing of sensational content (Friggeri, Adamic, Eckles & Kern, 2014).

Students requiring special learning conditions or those with special educational needs, such as

autism, dyslexia, and ADHD, are particularly vulnerable to the impact of misinformation due to their unique learning needs and cognitive profiles (Fletcher-Watson, 2021). They may face challenges in information processing, critical thinking, and discerning credible sources from unreliable ones. As a result, they are more likely to absorb and accept misinformation as truth, which can lead to academic setbacks and socio-psychological distress. It is imperative to recognize the heightened susceptibility of these students to misinformation and take proactive steps to address this issue.

Students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs encompass a diverse group with a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral challenges. Some of the most prevalent conditions include (a) Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which is characterized by social communication difficulties, repetitive behaviors, and restricted interests. Individuals with ASD may struggle with understanding social cues and context (American Psychiatric Association, 2013); (b) Dyslexia, which is considered a specific learning disability that affects reading and language processing. Individuals with dyslexia often have difficulty decoding words and may experience challenges in reading comprehension (Shaywitz, 2018); Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is marked by symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Individuals with ADHD may have difficulty sustaining attention and may act impulsively (American Psychiatric Association, 2013); and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), which is an umbrella term for various learning disorders that impact skills like reading, writing, and math. These conditions often result in difficulties with academic achievement (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). There are many more conditions, but those are quite widespread all over the world and require profound attention from field specialists and society.

This group of students' needs are more susceptible to misinformation due to the cognitive and perceptual challenges associated with their conditions. For instance:

- **Difficulty in Discerning Social Cues:** individuals with autism may struggle to interpret the nuances of social interactions, making it challenging for them to distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones (Fletcher-Watson, 2021). Additionally, a student with autism, who relies heavily on online platforms for information, may struggle to discern the credibility of sources and become influenced by misleading content, leading to misconceptions and potential social challenges.

- **Reading and Language Processing Issues:** Dyslexia can affect reading comprehension and the ability to critically evaluate textual information, making it easier for individuals to accept misinformation (Shaywitz, 2018). Due to difficulties in reading comprehension, the student might misinterpret the information presented and inadvertently accept false claims as fact, hindering their academic progress.

- **Inattention and Impulsivity:** students with ADHD may be more prone to impulsive reactions and quick judgments, potentially accepting misinformation without thorough analysis (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013).

As a response to the problems destructive impact of misinformation on students requiring special learning conditions, many different participants have invested important resources in developing media literacy education and programs (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Although media literacy is difficult to define as a concept, it has customarily been denoted as the capability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages in a diversity of contexts (Potter, 2013). Still, media literacy should be investigated differently and provided with different aspects when the topic is connected with students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs.

These reviews highlight the real-world challenges that students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs encounter when navigating the complex and often misleading digital information landscape. In the following, we will research more on the socio-psychological significance of misinformation for students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs and discover strategies to address these needs.

Based on the conducted literature review the following research question has been formulated: *What are the main milestones of the socio-psychological consequences of misinformation on students requiring special learning conditions?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

Desk research methodology has been used as a method for collecting and analyzing the data from available secondary sources, such as academic publications and other resources presented online. As a research method Desk research examines the data from already existing documents and previous studies and is considered to be secondary data to gather information on a specific topic.

This method relies on data it has already collected from other people. Within the frame of the current study, this method has provided strong arguments and helped to develop a line of thought or fight for the ideas. And to do this, Desk Research.

## **RESULTS**

Based on the data analyses the following main topics have been identified:

<b>Socio-Psychological Impact</b>
<b>Identifying Problematic Misinformation</b>
<b>Importance of Critical Thinking and Media Literacy</b>
<b>Strategies for Prevention</b>
<b>Role of Educators in Creating a Safe and Informed Learning Environment</b>
<b>Support Systems</b>

Misinformation poses a significant **socio-psychological threat** to students with special learning conditions. These individuals are susceptible to a range of adverse consequences, such as **anxiety and stress, confusion, negative impact on self-esteem, and impact on social interactions**. According to the author, misinformation can lead to heightened levels of anxiety and stress among students who may struggle to distinguish fact from fiction (Fletcher-Watson, 2021). The uncertainty and confusion caused by misinformation can contribute to emotional distress, particularly in individuals with autism who rely on structured information environments. The cognitive challenges associated with conditions like dyslexia and ADHD can amplify confusion when students encounter conflicting or incorrect information. This confusion can affect their ability to learn and make informed decisions (Shaywitz, 2018; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs may already grapple with issues related to self-esteem. Misinformation-induced academic setbacks or social misunderstandings can further erode their self-confidence, affecting their overall well-being. Misinformation can also have profound effects on social interactions, especially for those with autism. Misunderstandings stemming from inaccurate information may lead to social isolation and strained relationships, exacerbating the challenges they face (Fletcher-Watson, 2021).

Recognizing misinformation and **identifying problematic misinformation** are critical skills in the digital age. It is discussed that to help students, teachers, and parents identify problematic information, it is necessary to consider the use of fact-checking valid websites and tools to verify the accuracy of claims in articles or posts (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017). At the same time, it is extremely important to teach students to cross-reference information across multiple reputable sources. Consistency in information across various sources can indicate reliability.

**Critical thinking and media literacy** are fundamental in discerning misinformation from accurate information. It is crucial to promote critical thinking and encourage students to question the information they encounter. Critical thinking skills can help them evaluate the credibility of sources and the validity of claims (Pennycook & Rand, 2020). Related to media literacy education, schools and parents should provide media literacy education to help students navigate the digital world effectively. These programs can teach students to critically analyze media messages, identify bias, and recognize persuasive techniques (Livingstone, 2020).

Regarding the **strategies for preventing** misinformation from affecting students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs, it is important to stress that preventing misinformation from adversely affecting students with special learning conditions is a multifaceted endeavor. Effective strategies include tailored education which is based on developing the education programs tailored to the specific learning needs of students with special conditions. These programs

should incorporate media literacy and critical thinking skills, focusing on their unique challenges (Livingstone, 2020). The next is the provision of accessible resources and tools such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and audio-visual materials to make online content more inclusive for students with conditions like dyslexia (Shaywitz, 2018). Also, it is very important to create a structured and predictable learning environment to support students with autism, reducing their vulnerability to the chaotic and unpredictable nature of online misinformation (Fletcher-Watson, 2021).

**The role of educators in creating a safe and informed learning environment** is very essential, as they play a central role in preventing misinformation. In this regard, they should promote and foster a culture of critical thinking and skepticism in the classroom. Encouraging students to question information, think analytically, and challenge their own biases is also their responsibility (Pennycook & Rand, 2020). Educators are there to offer guidance on reliable sources of information and teach students how to evaluate sources independently. At the same time, they should create a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable discussing their concerns about information encountered online (Karas, Ottmar, Kim & Wenzel, 2019).

**Support systems** are crucial for students with special learning conditions to thrive. They should include emotional support and educational support. Related to this it is extremely important to create a safe space where students can express their feelings and concerns. This can help reduce the emotional impact of encountering misinformation (Karas, Ottmar, Kim & Wenzel, 2019). Individualized education plans and accommodations, such as extended time for assignments and assessments, can alleviate academic challenges (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and act as a support system for students with special learning conditions or those with special educational needs.

Parents, teachers, and peers play a vital role in providing emotional and educational support and advocating for their child's educational needs. They should collaborate with educators to ensure their child's well-being. At the same time, educators can adapt teaching strategies to accommodate students with special learning conditions and provide additional support as needed. This includes the incorporation of assistive technology and ensuring that information is presented in a clear and accessible manner. Peers can offer social support by promoting inclusion, understanding, and acceptance among students with special learning conditions. Encouraging teamwork and collaboration helps create a supportive peer environment.

A collaborative Approach is the key to success. Parents, teachers, and support staff should work together in a collaborative approach to ensure the holistic development and well-being of students with special learning conditions (Fletcher-Watson, 2021).

While analyzing all this it is very important to continue to explore strategies, case studies, and success stories that highlight how it is possible to address the socio-psychological impact of

misinformation and create a supportive and informed learning environment for all students.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the socio-psychological impact of misinformation on students with special learning conditions is a complex issue that demands our attention and action. Misinformation poses unique challenges for these students, increasing their vulnerability to anxiety, stress, and confusion while negatively impacting their self-esteem and social interactions.

To address this issue effectively, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. We must provide tailored education, encourage critical thinking, and enhance media literacy skills. Educators, parents, and support systems play pivotal roles in creating a safe and informed learning environment.

Challenges persist, but with continued research, awareness, and policy changes, we can make significant strides in preventing misinformation's impact. The future holds promise in the form of collaborative initiatives, technology integration, and global efforts to address this issue comprehensively.

As we move forward, we must recognize the importance of inclusivity and equitable education for all students, regardless of their learning conditions. It is a collective responsibility to empower and protect these individuals, ensuring they have the tools and support needed to thrive in an increasingly digital and information-driven world.

The time for action is now. Let us commit to fostering an environment where all students can learn, grow, and succeed, free from the destructive impact of misinformation.

## REFERENCE LIST

1. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.
2. Bulger, M., & Davison, P. (2018). The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 10*(1), 1-21.
3. Fletcher-Watson, S. (2021). Autism and the psychology of misinformation. *The Psychologist, 34*(4), 16-21.
4. Friggeri, A., Adamic, L. A., Eckles, D., & Kern, D. (2014). Rumor Cascades. *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 101-110.
5. Karas, S., Ottmar, E., Kim, A., & Wenzel, M. (2019). Promoting Media Literacy and Critical Thinking to Prevent Misinformation. *Contemporary School Psychology, 24*(3), 213-220.
6. Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. (2017). Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the “Post-Truth” Era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 6*(4),

353-369.

7. Livingstone, S. (2020). Media literacy in the modern world. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 27(2), 215-227.

8. Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2020). The Implied Truth Effect: Attaching Warnings to a Subset of Fake News Stories Increases Perceived Accuracy of Stories Without Warnings. *Management Science*, 66(11), 4944-4957.

9. Potter, W. (2013). Review of literature on media literacy. *Sociology Compass*, 7(6), 417–435.

10. Shaywitz, S. E. (2018). Dyslexia. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 378(24), 2338-2346.

11. Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151.

***Published by Khachatur Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University Publication***

*The article submitted and sent to review: 19.05.2023*

*Accepted for publication: 19.09.2023*



*This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License.*