

**What Does Prospective Teachers Need to Know About Autism?
Evaluation of an Autism Course in a Saudi University**

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Abstract

Working with children and adults with autism require trained and qualified teachers and staff in schools and higher education institutions in order to meet their unique needs in these settings. Autism known as a life-long condition that causes some difficulties for the individuals affected by it in regards to his social interaction, social communication and social imagination. The prevalence of autism is approximately 7.5 per 10,000 people and the number of individuals who are being diagnosis with autism is increasing (the national autistic society and ICEP Europe institute of child education and psychology, 2011). Children as well as adults with autism have the right to access appropriate special education services that can help them overcome the difficulties that might they experience in education settings or limiting these difficulties as much as possible in order to help them reaching their full potential. Although the quality and the quantity of services provided for individuals with autism in Saudi Arabia is still not meeting the significant demand, there have been some efforts made by three public universities in regards to developing training courses for undergraduate students that aimed to prepared them to be teachers for children with special needs in general and for children with autism in specific. However, there is no evidence so far in regards to the quality of the content of these courses. Thus, conducting an evaluation research is recommended in order to ensure that the courses are meeting the international standard. This evaluation research tried to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current autism course for the undergraduate students by examining the topics that were being taught in the course. These undergraduate students will be teachers for individuals with autism in schools or centers and they will play a vital role in the process of including children with autism in mainstream schools. Therefore, ensuring that they gained the best qualification was a high priority for the special education departments at the Saudi universities. The findings of this research can help in modifying the current autism courses for undergraduate students and raising the standards by borrowing successful practices from the best international universities.