**Accessing higher education in Saudi Arabia: Opportunities and challenges for student with autism spectrum conditions**

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**Abstract:**

Although Autism spectrum conditions (ASC) are well-known internationally, recognition of the needs of children, young people and adults who may experience difficulties associated with the ‘spectrum’ is relatively limited in Saudi Arabia. However, recent changes in policy and provision have led to the introduction of assessment and education services focusing on the needs of children and their families. This positive development has enabled a significant number of children with ASC to access school education, and it is anticipated that demand for more and better education will grow. This positive demand raises issues about post-school (tertiary) education. Little attention has been given to ‘opening up’ opportunities for access to higher education for students on the autism spectrum. My research seeks to examine the challenges in developing more accessible higher education in Saudi Arabia, and will make use of international exemplars with a view to identifying opportunities for this group of learners to participate in tertiary education alongside their peers. My research will also scope what opportunities to higher education students may currently have. Evidence suggests that these are ‘exceptional’, but examples do exist. I anticipate drawing on specific ‘stories’ of success, but those of failure too. To do this, I will use qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews and associated content analysis. Interviews will involve a range of key participants, but most importantly students themselves. To date, I have had the opportunity to research the experiences of a student on the autism spectrum who is studying computer sciences at a leading public university in Saudi Arabia. Although this student’s experiences are unique, they have afforded me with valuable initial insights into the challenges involved in developing accessible higher education.