

## The Unspoken Campus: East Jerusalem Students Navigating Identity, Politics, and Belonging

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### Abstract

Explores the complex adaptation processes of Palestinian students from East Jerusalem entering Israeli academic colleges, a transition marked by profound cultural, linguistic, and social challenges. Drawing on a qualitative case study of thirty first-year students, the research examines their lived experiences of culture shock, language barriers, and unfamiliar teaching methods, alongside the strategies they employ to cope with these obstacles.

Findings reveal that students encounter multiple layers of dissonance: academic adjustment intertwined with social isolation, ambivalent attitudes toward Hebrew as both a tool of integration and a symbol of domination, and tensions between traditional norms and the liberal academic environment. Despite institutional support mechanisms, most students report limited trust in official frameworks, relying instead on family, peers, or faith-based coping strategies. Their narratives highlight a recurring paradox: they voluntarily choose Israeli higher education to secure future opportunities, yet simultaneously resist full cultural integration, framing their presence as instrumental rather than transformative.

By situating these experiences within broader theories of student persistence and intercultural adaptation, the study exposes gaps between policy intentions and actual practices of inclusion. It argues that genuine integration requires more than remedial language courses; it demands culturally responsive pedagogy, safe spaces for identity negotiation, and a rethinking of academic support models. The case sheds light on a population largely absent from international discourse on higher education, offering new insights into the intersections of politics, identity, and learning in divided societies.

