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from segregation to diversity: professional identity formation among indigenous minority students

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ABSTRACT

Cultural expectations reinforce the notion that teaching is a field that balances work and family. However, unlike their Jewish peers, who have time for reflection during military service, Bedouin students transition directly from school to academia, often before their personal aspirations are clarified. This study examines the professional identity dilemmas of 30 Bedouin candidates (14 men, 16 women) at a multicultural college in Southern Israel. Using narrative questionnaires and discourse positioning analysis, this research explored the transition from segregated schooling to a diverse academic environment. The findings highlight systemic educational challenges and distinct gender-based coping strategies, with female participants demonstrating more active resilience and experiential learning.

Keywords: Negev Bedouin community, Bedouin students, professional identity, dilemmas and challenges, multiculturalism, discourse analysis.

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Introduction

Higher education plays a critical role in advancing socioeconomic mobility and social integration, particularly for students from historically marginalized and minority communities (Abu-Gweder, 2023, 2024). Beyond improving labor market outcomes, access to higher education can facilitate broader participation in civic and social life, offering young men and women opportunities to renegotiate identity, belonging, and future aspirations. In recent decades, a growing number of young Bedouins in the Negev have turned to higher education as a pathway toward professional stability, with teaching emerging as a particularly prominent career choice. Despite this upward trend, the overall participation rate of Bedouin youth in Israeli higher education remains comparatively low due to persistent structural, cultural, and institutional barriers (Ali & Da'as, 2019).

Within the Negev Bedouin community, increased awareness of the expanding presence of Arab academics has contributed to rising interest in higher education, especially in the teaching profession (Abu-Saad, 2016). This trend reflects both pragmatic and sociocultural considerations. On one hand, academic credentials are increasingly recognized as essential for improving employment prospects in a competitive labor market. On the other, teaching is widely perceived as a profession that enables individuals—particularly women—to reconcile paid employment with family and caregiving responsibilities (Ali & Da'as, 2019; Abu-Gweder, 2024). Consequently, teaching is actively encouraged among young Bedouin men and women and is often framed as a socially acceptable and attainable academic trajectory (Abu-Saad, 2013).

The transition into higher education, however, represents a profound cultural and social shift for Bedouin students. Israel's educational system is largely segregated during primary and secondary schooling, with Arab and Jewish students educated in separate systems. As a result, higher education institutions constitute one of the few social spaces in which sustained, everyday interaction between Arabs and Jews occurs (Gribiea, Ben-Asher, & Kupferberg, 2019). For many Bedouin students, entry into higher education marks their first meaningful encounter with Jewish peers, academic norms, and institutional cultures that differ markedly from those of their home communities. This transition requires navigating not only the unfamiliar expectations of academic culture but also the broader Israeli sociocultural context, often simultaneously and without prior preparation (Lev Ari & Husisi-Sabek, 2020).

Despite growing interest in higher education, Bedouin students remain significantly underrepresented relative to their proportion in Israeli society (Abu-Gweder, 2024; Abu-Saad, 2016). This underrepresentation is closely linked to systemic challenges within the Bedouin education system in the Negev, including high dropout rates, low matriculation achievement, teacher shortages, and inadequate educational infrastructure (Abu-Saad, 2016). Economic constraints further limit access to higher education (Abu-Bader & Gottlieb, 2009), while cultural expectations—particularly those affecting young women—can restrict

academic mobility and independence (Aburabia-Queder, 2017). Moreover, unlike their Jewish counterparts, Bedouin youth are exempt from military service (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2013), resulting in a direct and often abrupt transition from secondary education to higher education. This accelerated pathway leaves limited time for reflection, exploration, or career clarification, particularly regarding suitability for the teaching profession (Abu-Gweder, 2022).

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the academic, cultural, and professional challenges faced by Bedouin students enrolled in a multicultural college in southern Israel and explores the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges. Focusing on identity formation and professional dilemmas, the study contributes to broader conversations in international student and minority student research by illuminating how structural inequalities, institutional contexts, and cultural expectations intersect in shaping educational trajectories. Successful integration into a multicultural academic environment, we argue, has implications not only for individual socioeconomic mobility but also for strengthening the professional capacity of Bedouin teachers to participate meaningfully in Israel's diverse educational and social landscape (Abu-Gweder, 2025; Ari & Laron, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Socioeconomic Role of Higher Education

Since the 1970s, the number of Israeli Arabs attending higher education institutions has increased. This population views higher education as an essential means of advancing youth, changing their socioeconomic status, and facilitating their integration into the Israeli labor market (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2013). In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in the number of young Arabs choosing to pursue teaching as a profession (Abu-Saad, 2013), partly because this profession guarantees employment after completing an academic degree (Abu-Gweder 2024).

Trends in Bedouin Participation

Despite living on the geographic periphery and social margins of Israeli society (Aburabia-Queder, 2017), many graduates of the Bedouin education system in Negev pursue higher education (Abu-Saad, 2016). Research conducted in recent decades among the younger generation of the Bedouin community in Negev has indicated that access to higher education leads to changes in terms of economic, social, and political mobility (Abu-Saad, 2016). These changes have also impacted the traditional tribal organizational structure of the community, where greater emphasis is now placed on individualism, personal achievement, and social pluralism over traditional collectivism (Aburabia-Queder & Weiner-Levy, 2013).

In recent years, the number of Bedouin students, particularly women, enrolling in teacher training colleges and universities has been steadily increasing (Abu-Gweder, 2022; 2024). According to data from the Al-Nahud Association, in

the 2002 academic year, 98 Bedouin women were studying for a bachelor's degree in teacher training colleges and at Ben-Gurion University. By the 2009 academic year, the number of female students in academic institutions had risen to 732 (Aburabia-Queder and Arar, 2011). Data published by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute show that between 2008 and 2014, the number of Bedouin students in Negev attending all higher education institutions in Israel doubled from 1,313 to 2,822. Additionally, the number of Bedouin female students increased significantly, from 710 in 2008 to 1,861 in 2014. This increase in the number of female Bedouin students corresponds with the dramatic improvement in matriculation eligibility rates among Bedouin girls (Abu-Gweder, 2022, 2023).

Structural and Cultural Barriers

Today, young Bedouin people, whose nomadic ancestors believe that knowledge of the desert, rather than formal education, is essential for survival (Abu-Saad, 2013), view academic education as the best means of improving their lives both economically and socially. Hence, successfully entering academic studies strengthens their personal identity, sense of independence, and autonomy (Abu-Gweder 2024).

In this context, it is worth noting the study by Aburabia-Queder and Karplus (2013), which examined the significance of higher education for Bedouin women. The researchers found that young Bedouin women perceive education as a valuable asset for integrating into the Israeli labor market and that their participation in higher education strengthens their ability to navigate patriarchal society, blurring the lines between private and public and between what is permitted and forbidden in conservative Bedouin society.

Cross-Cultural Dynamics in Academia

The underrepresentation of the Bedouin population in academia in the Negev in academia has led to the development of unique programs aimed at increasing the number of Bedouin academics. For example, in recent years, the Council for Higher Education has been running the "Gateway to Academia" program in several higher education institutions across the country. "Gateway to Academia" is a four-year bachelor's degree program designed to improve the integration of young Bedouins from the Negev into higher education. The first year of the program, known as the "Gateway Year," aims to prepare Bedouin students for academic studies by improving their learning and language skills and providing them with experience in taking academic courses. This year, students study in small classes alongside other students at colleges and receive extensive academic support (Simon, Levi & Kahan-Strawczynski, 2018).

Transition and Identity Challenges

Higher education precipitates significant identity transitions among Bedouin youth. As they move from traditional community structures into multicultural and academic environments, they experience shifts in self-perception, autonomy, and integration. These transitions often highlight tensions between traditional

collectivist values and the individualistic demands of academic and professional life (Aburabia-Queder & Weiner-Levy, 2013; Abu-Gweder 2024).

A Look Toward the Bedouin Community in the Negev

The Bedouins in Negev are part of the Arab minority in Israel, and they consider themselves bearers of the original Arab culture (Cohen, 2002). Until 1948, the Bedouins in the Negev lived traditionally, but during the 1948 war, many were expelled or fled the Negev and became refugees in neighboring Arab countries and the Palestinian territories that were occupied (Abu--Saad, 2013). The remaining Bedouins in Negev (approximately 14,000) were possibly concentrated in the Siyag area in northeastern Negev (Yiftachel, 2003).

The Bedouin community has a unique cultural, historical, and political identity that distinguishes it from other minority groups (e.g., Druze and Circassians) in the country (Gribiea, Kabha, and Abu-Saad, 2019). Society is characterized by its tribal and collective nature, placing the needs and interests of the group above those of the individual. This societal structure is deeply conservative, with a strong emphasis on women's modesty, contributing to rigid gender segregation and the widespread exclusion of women from public life (Abu-Rass, 2010).

In 1968, the process of urbanization began with the establishment of Tel Sheva. Later, six more settlements were established: Segev Shalom, Kuseife, Ar'arat, Hura, and Laqiya. The stated goal of the urbanization process was the resettlement of the Bedouin in Negev (Yiftachel, 2003), but the planning did not consider the traditional Bedouin way of life. As a result, the seven settlements were doomed to fail (Abu-Saad 2013). Even today, Bedouin settlements rank among the lowest in socioeconomic indices, with high unemployment, low levels of education, inadequate services, and minimal government funding (Abu-Bader and Gottlieb, 2009).

In 2004, the government established the Abu Basma Regional Council to provide services to newly recognized settlements. However, even these settlements received minimal infrastructure (Braun-Lewensohn, Sagy, and Al-Said, 2014). In 2012, the Council was divided into two regions: Neve Midbar and Al-Kasom; however, both regions also lack planning and development (Abu-Saad, 2013).

In addition to recognized towns, dozens of unrecognized Bedouin villages are excluded from state services and absent from official maps. Residents lack addresses, land rights, and access to basic infrastructure (Cohen, 2002; Aburabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy, 2013). Homes in these areas are at risk of demolition, and crops are frequently destroyed (Braun-Lewensohn, Sagy, and Al-Said, 2014). Today, the Bedouin community in Negev numbers approximately 300,000. Approximately 60% of these children are children, and the population growth rate is among the highest in the world (Gottlieb, Ben-Asher and Alsraiha, 2023). The community continues to experience marginalization, discrimination, and limited integration into Israeli society (Abu-Saad, 2016; Abu-Rass, 2010; Aburabia-Queder, 2017; Abu-Bader and Gottlieb, 2009).

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to examine the integration of the Bedouin community in the Negev into the higher education system, highlighting key sociological, educational, gender, and political-geographical lenses. From a sociological perspective, the shift from tribal collectivism to individualism among young Bedouin workers—especially student teachers—reflects broader identity transitions within a traditionally conservative society. Using education policy as a lens, the study explores systemic barriers to access, such as geographic marginality, infrastructural neglect, and institutional exclusion. Gender studies illuminate how higher education serves as a vehicle for empowering Bedouin women, enabling them to negotiate public participation and challenge patriarchal norms. Finally, the lens of political geography foregrounds the spatial inequalities that affect educational integration, particularly in unrecognized villages that lack basic infrastructure. This theoretical framing moves beyond descriptive accounts and enables meaningful analysis of the challenges and transformative potential of academic integration within the Bedouin community.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research design utilizing discourse analysis, with a specific emphasis on personal narratives as a methodological and interpretive lens. Discourse analysis is broadly defined as the study of how language is used to construct meaning, identities, and social realities in context (Flick, 2017). Specifically, this research draws on a functional approach to discourse (Kupferberg & Gilat, 2012), which views language as a means through which individuals position themselves emotionally, socially, and culturally within broader structures.

Narrative discourse analysis was selected as the most appropriate tool for examining how Bedouin undergraduate students in teacher education programs express their evolving identities, confront educational and social challenges, and reflect on their trajectories within Israeli higher education. According to Ben-Asher, Gottlieb, and Alsraiha (2022), personal narratives function in this context as both communicative acts and socially constructed reflections of lived experience.

This approach aligns with the study's interdisciplinary theoretical framework, which integrates sociological, educational, gender, and spatial theories (see *Theoretical Framework*). The use of personal stories enables an exploration of how these students navigate the complex tensions between tribal collectivism and emerging individualism, traditional gender expectations, and institutional barriers.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

The study included 30 Bedouin undergraduate students (14 men and 16 women), aged 20–22, all enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program in

elementary education at a multicultural academic college in southern Israel. None of the participants were practicing teachers; all were still in training, participating in coursework and school-based internships as part of the national *Academia-Classroom* program.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their enrollment in this program, which integrates academic learning with early exposure to classroom settings. This provided insight into how preservice teacher candidates make sense of their experiences in both academic and school environments while still in training.

Approximately two-thirds of the participants lived in recognized Bedouin towns, while the remaining third came from unrecognized villages, offering a valuable comparative perspective on spatial and infrastructural disparities within their educational journeys. All the participants self-identified as members of the Arab-Bedouin minority in Israel.

Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the College's Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring compliance with all ethical guidelines. The participants were informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality procedures, and right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant. Pseudonyms were assigned, and all identifying details were removed to protect participant anonymity.

Data collection method

Data were collected via a narrative questionnaire based on McAdams's (1993) "*Your Life is a Book*" method, adapted for the Bedouin cultural and linguistic context in prior research (Abu-Gweder, 2022, 2023). The participants were invited to divide their lives into self-defined stages and to write 2–3 key stories for each stage, focusing on moments they viewed as personally, socially, or educationally significant.

The participants were free to write in Arabic or Hebrew, as they preferred. Stories written in Arabic were professionally translated into Hebrew and then back-translated to ensure semantic fidelity. Member checking was conducted to validate interpretations and preserve the authenticity of meaning.

The narrative questionnaire method was particularly effective in allowing preservice students to reflect on their educational paths, identity formation, and encounters with structural barriers—all from a culturally grounded, first-person perspective.

Data analysis

Thematic discourse analysis was employed via a data-driven and functional approach (Kupferberg & Hess, 2013). The analytic process unfolded in five stages:

1. Preparation and Cleaning: Stories were anonymized, translated where needed, and validated through back-translation and member-checking.

2. Coding: Open coding was used to identify recurring metaphors, emotional markers, and narrative structures. Examples of recurring codes included “*voice of silence*,” “*breaking the frame*,” “*education as hope*,” and “*feeling invisible*.”
3. Theme development: Codes were grouped into overarching themes:
 - Negotiating Identity (e.g., between tribal values and personal ambition)
 - Spatial Marginality (e.g., life in unrecognized villages)
 - Gender and agency (e.g., empowerment narratives among female students)
 - Educational Aspiration vs. Systemic Constraint
4. Theoretical Interpretation: Themes were analyzed through the study's theoretical lenses, highlighting how language reflects and shapes experiences of marginalization, identity struggle, and cultural transition.
5. Validity and Trustworthiness: Analytical rigor was maintained through data triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and alignment with literature on Bedouin students in Israeli higher education.

FINDINGS

The aim of the current study was to examine the difficulties and integration challenges faced by Bedouin preservice teachers studying at a multicultural college in southern Israel, as reflected through the significant experiences they encountered. The following section presents the integration difficulties and challenges that Bedouin preservice teachers face in their academic journeys. These challenges can be classified into three categories: (a) integration challenges related to the Bedouin educational system; (b) integration challenges during the transition from school to academia; and (c) integration difficulties related to the academic study period.

First Theme: Integration Challenges Related to the Bedouin Educational System

The Hebrew Language Barrier

At times, the quality of Hebrew-language education in Bedouin schools is insufficient for successful integration into academic institutions. Hekmat described the transition from inner-cultural interaction circles to broader ones and the linguistic communication challenges she faced with the Jewish environment:

"During my school years, we didn't venture into the outside world on our own... At this stage, I started going out on my own, learning and experiencing things independently... Initially, my Hebrew was barely enough to communicate. Everything I had learned from textbooks wasn't sufficient... I remember one day I didn't know how to say 'spoon' in Hebrew, so I used hand gestures. The shopkeeper laughed at my movements and then told me how to say 'spoon' in Hebrew."

Section Two:

Integration Challenges in the Transition from School to Academia

Lack of Career Guidance from Teachers The participants in the study reported that they did not receive career guidance or advice on selecting an academic institution from their teachers. Ghazala mentioned that her parents did not support her transition to academic studies:

"I finished school and had to choose a profession to study at university, which would determine my future. There was no one in my family to help me, so I was constantly asking others for advice." Marwa described the difficulty she experienced in choosing a career: "At the end of 12th grade, I was unsure about what and where I should study. Eventually, a student at my college spoke with me, saying that the studies there were very good and recommended that I enroll. She suggested that I could become a teacher in the future. I was convinced by her words and managed to get accepted into the college."

High School Diploma Quality as a Gateway to Academia Some participants indicated that the process of being accepted into college was challenging due to low grades in their high school exams. Samih recounted:

"During high school, I put in a lot of effort to succeed in my matriculation exams so I could start my studies at academic colleges. However, the path was not easy; I struggled in a particular subject. I failed the matriculation exam in the 10th grade, and even before the final exam, the school held a screening test—a 'protection' test—for students planning to take the matriculation exam. If you did not pass the protection test, you could not take the matriculation exam. This negatively impacted my situation because I wanted to finish my exams and earn my diploma to study in higher education institutions."

The Challenge of the Psychometric Exam and Achieving a Sufficient Admission Score Respondents reported difficulties in passing the psychometric exam—a prerequisite for realizing their dream of studying at higher education institutions. The following are descriptions of the challenges faced by participants: Verda shared:

"After finishing 12th grade, I started thinking about the psychometric exam and career choice. I took the psychometric exam twice. The first time, I scored 450, and the second time, I got 560. I was very happy, but I wanted to take it a third time to achieve a higher score. Unfortunately, owing to personal reasons, I couldn't take the test again." Rana reflected on the most challenging period of her life: "The most difficult time for me was in 11th and 12th grade. It was an extremely hard time. I had my matriculation exams, and at the same time, I was studying for the psychometric exam. When I took

the psychometric test, I was confident that I would obtain a very high score, but unfortunately, I did not. That period in the 11th and 12th grades greatly influenced my life and personality. Later, I decided to begin my academic studies to achieve a high score on the psychometric exam. I studied for an additional three months and finally succeeded in getting the required score." Hadra described her experience: "After finishing high school and before entering college, I spent two years at home. I was repeatedly disappointed by my psychometric results, but each time, I became more encouraged. Every day I told myself I had to achieve my dream, and indeed, each time I scored higher than the previous time. I don't give up on failure, and I'm always optimistic. Even if I fail once or twice, I always have the desire to achieve what I want. In addition, now, in college, I don't fail at all. I always have the will to succeed." Fares shared his regret: "After finishing high school, I didn't enroll in higher education because I was preparing for the psychometric exam. After I succeeded, I began studying at college. I wish I could turn back time."

Cultural Challenges—A specific struggle for girls: At times, families oppose their daughters pursuing academic studies. Amira, who lives in an unrecognized village, shared her dream of becoming an academic and the difficulties she faced:

"Since I was a child, I dreamed of continuing my studies after 12th grade... However, after finishing high school, I didn't study and spent a year at home (without studying or working). During that time, I started hating everything, even my favorite thing—studying. My father stood by me until I passed the entrance exam and began studying at college... Thank God. To this day, I respect my father's word... He still stands by me, even though I got married and moved elsewhere." Although Amira did not detail the difficulties she faced during the year she stayed home, it is possible that her brothers, other family members, or her fiancé opposed her academic studies. Her account highlights the importance of her father's support. Amira's story illustrates the significance of supportive figures in enabling Bedouin women to enter academia.

Section Three:

Academic Challenges and Integration During Studies

Balancing Family, Parenthood, and Academic Studies Typically, Bedouin women in the Negev marry at a young age. Those who choose to continue their academic studies face challenges because they are both students and wives, as well as mothers. Naama reflected on her transition into marriage and parenthood:

"At that point, I got married. I knew and felt the meaning of responsibility. I gave birth to a newborn baby and understood the meaning of life—the beauty and the challenges. I meet new people from all walks of life with different behaviors, etc. I attend college, but I'm always thinking about my

baby—how does he feel? Is he okay? What is he doing with his grandmother? Is he tiring her out, or is he giving her some rest?" Verda described the difficulty of juggling academic studies with family life: "On the day of my math exam, I arrived without having studied seriously. I had only skimmed through my notebook... That morning, on the way to college, I encountered a problem. I was nine months pregnant, and a traffic officer in Beersheba stopped the taxi and asked the passengers to get out and walk. I got out of the taxi and started running for almost an hour to make it on time before the exam started. In the end, I made it to the bus station and arrived at the exam on time, thank God. I passed the exam with a high score. That's when I knew that persistence and not giving up are very important, and only after hard work comes success."

With respect to teaching experience and developing professional identity as part of the curriculum in teaching colleges, student teachers are required to participate in internships in schools. This experience allows student teachers to gain new perspectives on their future professional lives as educators. Aliyan shared his experience in special education during his internship:

"At the beginning of my third year, I started an internship in special education. The mentor assigned me to a class for deaf students to help me acquire tools for working with special needs students. At first, I watched the mentor teacher and did not know how he communicated with the students. However, slowly, I began to understand some of the signs and managed to communicate with the students. After a few weeks, I started teaching math to these children. Initially, it was with the help of the mentor teacher, but eventually, I was able to manage on my own."

Nibal shared her commitment to including struggling students during a science lesson: "Three days ago, I taught an entire science lesson alone. During the lesson, I asked the students several questions. I had promised myself to pay attention to the struggling students in the class. When I began asking questions, I directed them at specific students (students who I knew, from my observations, were struggling). After a few questions, the struggling students started answering on their own. One of the students even came to the board to answer, and he was so excited. This event made me reflect on helping struggling students, who are often marginalized in the classroom." Rana described her relationship with a teacher during her internship and how she refused the teacher's request: "At the school where I intern, the mentor teacher was absent, so I took over her schedule and started teaching her classes. Before one of the lessons that day, another teacher approached me and asked me to teach math to her class and continue the topic she had been covering, even though I taught science. I asked her why she wanted me to do this, as I wanted to follow the schedule and complete the science material. The teacher got angry with me, and to this day, she doesn't speak to me. From this incident, I learned that I can be responsible."

In conclusion, while nomadic Bedouin men, whose ancestors value desert survival skills over formal education (Abu-Saad, 2013), emphasize academic success as a means of improving their social and economic lives, Bedouin women, who face restrictions due to their traditional society and gender discrimination (Aburabia-Queder, 2017), demonstrate educational excellence from an early age. They actively and effectively confront challenges and report learning through these experiences. In other words, while Bedouin women are passively positioned as inferior by their tradition, the findings of this study show that they do not succumb to these difficulties and are determined to excel academically and integrate into academia.

DISCUSSION

The current study formulated two key research questions: (1) What are the challenges and integration difficulties faced by Bedouin teacher trainees? (2) How do Bedouin teacher trainees cope with these challenges and integration difficulties?

The findings of this research indicate that young Bedouin workers face various challenges. This study highlights a range of challenges faced by Bedouin teacher trainees, rooted in several key factors. These include the structural characteristics of the Bedouin education system in the Negev and the admission processes of higher education institutions. Bedouin women, in particular, encounter distinct obstacles, such as gender-based discrimination and the tension between academic pursuits and traditional expectations of motherhood. Through an analysis of the difficulties and integration challenges reported by the study participants, distinct coping patterns emerged. The young men articulated their struggles in detail but largely refrained from discussing concrete coping mechanisms, often processing their difficulties on an emotional level. Conversely, young women demonstrate greater determination, actively confronting obstacles in pursuit of their academic and professional aspirations.

This research offers a valuable contribution by shedding light on the multifaceted challenges and integration barriers experienced by Bedouin teacher trainees as they navigate their academic journeys.

The following sections characterize the challenges and integration difficulties that emerged from the life stories of the research participants and discuss their coping strategies.

Characterizing the challenges

The common difficulties and integration challenges mentioned by the participants are generally linked to the Bedouin education system in Negev (e.g., the difficulty of obtaining a quality matriculation certificate) and the process of admission to higher education institutions (e.g., failure to meet admission requirements, psychometric testing, and Hebrew and English language exams). These challenges align with barriers that prevent Arab youth in general (Arar & Haj-

Yehia, 2013; Totry, 2012) and Bedouins in particular from accessing higher education (Abu-Saad, 2016).

In addition to these barriers, Bedouin women face unique challenges:

Gender-Based Discrimination: Women feel discriminated against within their families and schools. Bedouin society is traditionally patriarchal, and the status of women is strongly influenced by the norms of tribal society. While modernization processes and Israeli civil law have improved the status of Bedouin women, their position has not yet reached the level of freedom and equality seen among women in other Arab societies in Israel (Allasad-Alhuzail 2018). Aburabia-Queder (2019) noted that Bedouin women in Negev experience double marginalization: they are on the periphery of patriarchal society as women, and ethnically, they belong to the Bedouin community, a minority group on the periphery of Israeli society. Culturally, Bedouin society demands male superiority in decision-making and policy-setting, with the community's policies being dictated by concepts of honor and shame. Therefore, the woman is tied to the home, with her role limited to reproduction, education, and house maintenance.

Allasad-Alhuzail (2018) noted that during the nomadic period, Bedouin women enjoyed freedom of movement, performing tasks such as herding, fetching water, and gathering wood, as the open spaces and distance between tribes facilitated this autonomy. However, the forced relocation of most Bedouin tribes to the "siyag" region led to a concentration of multiple tribes in a limited area, which restricted women's mobility to prevent their exposure to strangers. Ben-Israel and Meir (2008) argued that the structure of neighborhoods in Bedouin towns, which often contain families from different tribes, and the competition for public resources have also contributed to restricting the freedom of movement for Bedouin women in these localities. Ben-Asher (2020), in her study on pioneering Bedouin women, reported that gender-based discrimination is a major obstacle preventing Bedouin women from fulfilling their dreams and acquiring higher education. In traditional societies, education is often perceived as conflicting with a woman's role within the home, particularly in relation to child-rearing and household responsibilities. Women are expected to prioritize domestic duties over public pursuits. This perspective tends to disregard the importance of education for women, viewing it as irrelevant to their roles within the family and community.

Owing to the transition from a traditional to an urban lifestyle in Bedouin society, changes in the Israeli labor market, where education has become necessary for employment, and pioneering work by Bedouin women, a partial path has been paved for young Bedouin women to move from elementary school to higher education. The economic potential of women's education has become an irreversible force. Over time, educated women who have integrated into the workforce have become a stable economic force within their families. Education has redefined the role of young women in traditional communities, becoming a source of hope, change, growth, and empowerment for building a better future for women, their families, and Bedouin society as a whole.

Conflict between Academic Studies and Motherhood: In Bedouin tradition, a woman's role is to manage the household and raise children (Aburabia-Queder, 2017). In an attempt to reconcile the traditional role of a Bedouin woman with their desire to pursue an academic career, many young Bedouin women marry at a young age, sometimes before starting their academic studies and sometimes during their studies (Mahajna, 2017; Abu-Saad, 2016). The young women in this study reported conflicts related to their dual or triple roles as wives, mothers, and students. At this stage of life, they are expected to fulfill all the traditional roles of women in the home while also realizing their desire to study at an academic institution.

Allasad-Alhuzail (2018) argued that the dual commitment to family (husband and children) and to traditional household roles, on the one hand, and to academic studies, on the other, constitute another gendered challenge faced by Bedouin women in academia. Importantly, for some young Bedouin women, early marriage can serve as a means of escaping parental and familial restrictions. A supportive marriage can provide opportunities for these women to continue their studies in academia until graduation (Aburabia-Queder, 2017; Allasad-Alhuzail, 2020).

Coping Strategies for Challenges and Obstacles: This study's findings highlight distinct gender-based differences in coping mechanisms when facing integration-related challenges and obstacles. Male participants frequently detailed the difficulties they encountered; however, they provided limited information on the specific strategies they employed to navigate or overcome these challenges. In contrast, female participants not only described their obstacles but also elaborated on the coping strategies they employed, providing a more comprehensive view of their adaptive behaviors. This suggests potential variations in how men and women process and articulate their experiences of integration, with implications for support structures tailored to each group's needs.

In contrast, the women demonstrated greater determination to overcome these challenges in a practical and effective manner to achieve their professional dreams. Despite facing gender discrimination and restrictions on their freedom of movement, women are seemingly more successful than men are. They do not give in to the difficulties or the barriers on their path to higher education.

The literature shows that young Bedouin women develop complex and varied identities to cope with changes in Bedouin society in general and with the demands of entering academia in particular. According to Allasad-Alhuzail (2018), the complexity of Bedouin women's identities can be likened to solving a Rubik's cube, as they must remain focused, be patient, and develop precise skills to shape their identities.

According to Ben-Asher (2020), Bedouin women who insist on pursuing higher education within a patriarchal society, which places barriers in front of their aspirations, are quietly and profoundly revolutionizing society from within. They lead this revolution in a way that is unique and adapted to their culture and religion. Part of their coping occurs within their own consciousness, part occurs

in their interactions with trusted individuals in their surroundings, and part takes place in the space between the women and those who seek to control them.

Recent studies on the status of women in Arab-Bedouin society (Abugweder, 2023, 2024; Aburabia-Queder, 2017; Ben-Asher, 2020; Allasad Alhuzai, 2018) indicate that they employ four strategies used by Arab women in Israel to cope with the pressures of patriarchy and restrictions: (1) Passivity and waiting for external change—women wait for external circumstances to change while fully complying with expected social norms; (2) Bargaining with patriarchy and tradition—women seek to achieve their personal goals subtly, avoiding direct conflict with patriarchal norms, thereby appearing to conform to societal expectations while cleverly achieving their objectives; (3) Physically exile (temporary or permanent) and distancing from their place of origin—women redefine their environment to suit their needs, allowing for greater freedom and different social frameworks than those typically accepted in Arab society; (4) Emotional exile—women experience themselves as disconnected from their physical location, either by choice or necessity, feeling emotionally exiled from their surroundings.

Aburabia-Queder (2017) reported that since the social status of Bedouin girls is inferior to that of boys—a message transmitted from early childhood—Bedouin girls develop various coping strategies to address this reality. These include passivity, silence, pleasing others, and restraint. Through these strategies, Bedouin girls learn from an early age to be conservative and to conform to the expected norms for Bedouin women. However, this pattern changes after they prove their morality to society and complete their education. At this stage, young Bedouin women allow themselves to express their “self,” break the silence, loosen the restraint, and move away from passivity (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Weiner-Levy, 2013).

In addition to the active ways in which young Bedouin women cope with challenges, the participants in this study reported learning from their personal experiences throughout different stages of their lives. This learning process has fostered invaluable personal knowledge. Bedouin women, in particular, develop a clear understanding of their professional futures and their roles as educators. As a result, they approach each event and experience as an opportunity for growth, continuously enriching their skill sets. This ongoing learning serves as a source of motivation, propelling them toward achieving their personal and professional goals. Notably, the unique data collection method used in this study enabled the identification of this important finding.

The teacher trainees who participated in the study were in their third year of academic studies. Interestingly, the respondents did not mention significant events related to their studies at multicultural colleges, unlike findings from other studies (Mansour, 2024). This finding does not allow us to learn about the impact of their academic experience on the intercultural competence of Bedouin teacher trainees (Ari & Laron, 2014). This finding can be explained in two ways: first, the data collection method did not directly ask participants to reflect on issues related to their experience in the multicultural college but rather to look back on significant life events they had experienced. Second, participants perceive

academic education as the fulfillment of a dream. Therefore, their primary concern in the past was to be accepted into institutions of higher education. Once they achieved that goal, the challenges and obstacles related to integration into a multicultural academic institution became less significant, and thus, they did not mention them.

The contribution of this study lies in its unique perspective on the challenges and obstacles to integration that Bedouin teacher trainees face on their path to higher education. After gaining acceptance into higher education institutions, young Bedouin students position themselves in relation to both their native culture and Israeli society. Through this positioning, they underscore the importance of higher education within their community in a way that was previously uncommon and demonstrate that it is possible to integrate successfully into Israeli society. The qualitative contribution of this study to understanding the significance of higher education within the Bedouin community in Negev, particularly in multicultural colleges, is modest. Therefore, further research is needed to deepen the understanding of the integration challenges and processes experienced by young men and women from the Bedouin community in Negev as they pursue higher education in multicultural institutions.

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✓ *None*

Some sections, with minimal or no editing

Some sections, with extensive editing

Entire work, with minimal or no editing

Entire work, with extensive editing

This article incorporates content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The sections where AI tools were employed are [specify sections if applicable]. The use of AI tools complied with ethical standards and academic integrity guidelines. The final content has been thoroughly reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy, relevance, and adherence to academic standards.

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