

Challenges Faced by First-Year Students Based on Individual Identities: The Case of the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok

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This study examines the challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The research focuses on the impact of individual identities on academic and social integration. A quantitative descriptive methodology was used, employing structured questionnaires. The study reveals a range of obstacles that extend beyond initial expectations and are consistent across gender and departmental lines. The analysis shows that there is a crucial requirement for a support framework that is universally accessible and inclusive, designed to aid students in their transition to higher education. The findings of the study recommend the creation of comprehensive feedback mechanisms and interdepartmental cooperation in the development of support programs. The research emphasizes the significance of acknowledging and addressing the distinct obstacles encountered by students with intersecting marginalized identities. Suggestions for future research involve a more thorough examination of the long-term impacts of these obstacles and the investigation of focused interventions to improve student achievement and well-being. This study adds to the discussion on improving student support services and creating an inclusive academic environment that promotes the growth and development of all students, especially those who are navigating their first year in higher education.

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Public Interest Statement

This study sheds light on the unique challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, highlighting the crucial impact of individual identities on academic and social integration. By utilizing a quantitative descriptive approach, it uncovers obstacles that are surprisingly consistent across gender and departmental lines, underscoring the need for universally accessible and inclusive support frameworks. Our findings advocate for the establishment of comprehensive feedback mechanisms and enhanced interdepartmental cooperation to support students' transition to higher education. This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing student support services, aiming to foster an inclusive academic environment that supports the growth of all students, particularly those in their formative first year of higher education.



Introduction

The transition to college represents a pivotal life passage, ushering in identity shifts as students navigate intensified responsibilities and independence requirements while exploring interests, relationships and purpose (Torres et al., 2009, p. 577). However, exclusionary histories embed obstacles still woven through structures and systems, imposing unequal burdens on marginalized groups seen as outside dominant cultural norms (Harper, 2012, p. 15). Responsible leadership defending equitable access remains essential.

While College of Basic Education asserts commitments to inclusion, no formal analysis has critically inventoried identity-based challenges non-dominant students verifiably face or evaluated sufficiency of current programming and resources levels supporting these groups (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 7). Anecdotal complaints circulate around rigid assimilation expectations, lack of diversity training for staff, and absence of discrimination reporting procedures. This gap between rhetoric and climate reality threatens integrity. Failure providing responsive care contradicts diversity pledges. Declining investigation enables oppression's entrenchment.

Overall enrollment statistics also obscure subgroup variances (Witham et al., 2014, p. 22). Institutions largely question marginalized students' cultural identities rather than hostile systems, dismissing daily aggressions as isolated incidents instead of symptoms of pervasive subtle biases built into structures and cultures (Harper, 2012, p. 5). Oppressed groups battle implicit biases embedded in evaluations systems judging capabilities based on dominant norms, forcing constant justification of basic belonging (Aguilar-Smith, 2022; Garcia, 2019).

Corrective actions require seeking out critical counter narratives capable of illuminating modern systemic exclusion operating through diffuse means that evade detection by less rigorous approaches. Exposing inequities catalyzes overdue reforms. Embracing and responding to groups' struggles must take priority over dictating suitable grievance from unaffected vantage (Linder et al., 2019, p. 37). It requires courage facing injustice's scope honestly.

However, engineering inclusive campuses requires moving beyond critique through constructing solutions tailored to marginalized groups' needs, not just cataloging problems. Consistent with critical methodologies, findings elicited from impacted communities should inform actions in iterative dialogue, as those bearing lived expertise offer unique wisdom that outsider scholars lack (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 200). Their insider guidance proves essential for authentic responsiveness. Responsible leadership involves seeking out excluded voices over preemptively judging grievances as overreactions. Lives depend on reforms mitigating accumulating harms.

While College of Basic Education (CBE) publicly asserts commitments to equitable access and inclusion, no formal analysis has inventoried identity-based challenges non-dominant groups face or evaluated efficacy of current programming and resources in adequately supporting marginalized students. Meanwhile anecdotal complaints circulate among disadvantaged students around rigid cultural assimilation expectations, lack of diversity training for staff and faculty, and absence of reporting procedures for discrimination grievances.

This gap between espoused values and on-the-ground climate reality threatens CBE's ethical integrity and long-term sustainability (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 41). Failure providing responsive care for minorities contradicts pledges around diversity. Declining to investigate shortcomings enables ongoing obstruction of oppressed groups behind claims of meritocratic evenhandedness. Problems then inevitable intensify.

Unfortunately, deprioritizing minority struggles proves customary in higher education. Institutions concentrate on overall enrollment and completion figures obscuring subgroup variances (Witham et al., 2014). Petitioning marginalized students to sacrifice cultural identities for comfort of the majority goes unquestioned as neutral standards. This enables dismissing inequities as isolated incidents rather than pervasive biases built into structures (Harper, 2012, p. 5).

But oppressive environments produce palpable harm and retention barriers. Absent counteraction, burdens disproportionately tax non-dominant groups forced to perpetually justify belonging and repeatedly contest dismissals their documented experiences are anomalies or misinterpretations (A. Jones & J. Reddick, 2017, p. 181). Meanwhile majority peers enjoying implicit advantages progress unimpeded, then point to performance differences as justifying unequal outcomes instead of acknowledging headwinds generating disparities.

CBE risks being lulled into negligent complacency around barriers facing underrepresented students by relying on incomplete indicators like overall graduation rates or student self-reports through surveys utilizing outmoded colorblind frameworks (Witham et al., 2014). Corrective action requires intentionally seeking counter narratives through qualitative phenomenological inquiry focused on illuminating modern forms of marginalization. Exposing inequities is essential first step spurring overdue reforms. If CBE intends upholding stated commitments to inclusion rather than just marketable branding, understanding precise struggles non-dominant groups encounter must take priority. No excuses justify evading this duty any longer.

The study aims to understand and address the challenges faced by first-year College of Basic Education students from marginalized identity groups. It is based on a phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of these students, focusing on structural barriers, cultural mismatches, and explicit discrimination they encounter. The study aims to catalog the discrepancies between the college's publicly stated commitments to equitable access and inclusion and the actual availability of supportive resources for students from non-dominant groups. Based on this foundation, the research will construct recommendations for policy, programming, and climate interventions. These recommendations are designed to address the identified obstacles, emphasizing an emic understanding of the students' needs to assist those who are struggling.

The study's scope concentrating solely on College of Basic Education students allows nuanced investigation of culture-specific obstacles but limits immediate generalizability. Additionally, the sample spans only current freshmen, excluding potential variances in impressions across cohorts. Self-reported data around discrimination relies on perceptions lacking external validation. Social desirability biases may also shape responses. Finally, as an initial

exploratory phenomenology the qualitative approach prioritizes highlighting student voices over quantitative generalizability to broader populations. Significance rests more on establishing existence of equity gaps than precisely measuring their pervasiveness statistically. Further studies might address these constraints through mixed-methods approaches on expanded samples.

Materials and Methods

In this chapter, the methodology tailored to our investigation on Challenges Faced by First-Year Students Based on Individual Identities at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok is discussed. This methodology is designed to thoroughly assess the experiences and challenges of first-year students from their own perspectives, utilizing a quantitative, descriptive approach through structured questionnaires. This setup aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of the challenges these students face, influenced by their unique identities within the educational setting of the University of Duhok.

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive approach, utilizing structured questionnaires to delve into the first-year students' experiences and challenges at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The design is specifically chosen to capture a broad spectrum of student perspectives on the varied challenges they face, influenced by their individual identities within the academic setting.

Study Population and Sample

The study's scope encompasses all first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, across five departments, reflecting a wide academic range. With 221 students participating, the sample showcases diversity in gender and academic focus—specifically in English, Arabic, Kurdish, Geography, and Mathematics. This distribution is critical for understanding the varied challenges first-year students encounter, influenced by their individual identities and academic environments. [Table 1](#) provides a critical demographic breakdown by gender and department, offering insight into the complex dynamics at play, pivotal for understanding the study's context and interpreting its findings effectively.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of the study sample

Variables	Variable Categories	No.	%
Gender	Male	82	37.1
	Female	139	62.9
	Total	221	100
Department	English	49	22.2
	Arabic	49	22.2
	Kurdish	36	16.3
	Geography	53	24
	Mathematics	34	15.4
	Total	221	100

[Table 1](#) displays the demographic distribution of the study sample, categorizing 221 participants by gender and department. Gender-wise, 82 participants are male (37.1%) and 139 are female (62.9%). By department, participants are divided into English (49 participants, 22.2%), Arabic (49 participants, 22.2%), Kurdish (36 participants, 16.3%), Geography (53 participants, 24%), and Mathematics (34 participants, 15.4%). Each category contributes to the total sample size, illustrating the study's demographic diversity.

Data Collection Instrument and Analysis

A quantitative questionnaire on Vocabulary Building Strategy in Teaching English was developed based on principles outlined by Lambert & McCombs (1998).

1. Data Collection Procedure

Data Collection Procedure: Participants were contacted via their institutions and provided with links to the online questionnaire in three languages: English, Kurdish, and Arabic, upon giving their consent. This multi-lingual approach facilitated broader participation, enhancing the diversity and inclusivity of the responses. The online format, through Google Forms, ensured convenient participation from a wide range of respondents, contributing to a strong response rate. Participants were given two weeks to submit their feedback through their preferred language form: English link (<https://forms.gle/SL6xgYXHfv5DXcAv5>), Kurdish link (<https://forms.gle/Wp1y62jWW7vRv4Gy7>), or Arabic link (<https://forms.gle/x4t9EE5LbVDYnDoB8>). This methodology ensured the collection of comprehensive data across different linguistic groups.

2. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from Google Forms was exported to SPSS for rigorous statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics and t-tests were leveraged to discern patterns and determine statistical significance.

3. Ethical Considerations

Participants were apprised of the study objectives and their consent obtained. Anonymity was ensured by excluding personal identifiers. Participants could voluntarily withdraw without ramifications.

Tools Used

1. Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire focused on understanding the specific challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, examining how individual identities influence their experiences. Its development ensured it was directly relevant and clear for the study's objectives, omitting the need for a pilot study to test its experimental applicability.

2. Statistical Software

SPSS enabled data management, cleansing, and detailed statistical analysis.

3. Google Forms

Allowed user-friendly questionnaire design, data collection, and export to SPSS.

4. Questionnaire Validity

Experts in English learning, educational psychology, and learning methods evaluated the questionnaire. Items with over 80% agreement on relevance and clarity were retained. Minor modifications were made.

5. Questionnaire Reliability

Internal consistency was determined via Cronbach's alpha on responses from 50 students. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was achieved, validating the questionnaire. Post this validation, the finalized questionnaire was structured with 22 items, each offering five response alternatives: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Literature Review

The first college year poses a constellation of academic, social, financial, cultural and psychological hurdles as students acclimate to heightened expectations and logistical shifts migrating into new educational environments. How newcomers traverse early turbulence navigating unfamiliar territories until finding secure footing establishes trajectories for the journey ahead. Support structures play a crucial role through orientation guidance, scaffolding developmental of necessary competencies and removing unnecessary barriers interfering with engagement opportunities (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989, p. 1). However, both depth of disruption and available mitigation resources may vary substantially across institutional types and student backgrounds.

Transitional difficulties concentrate distinctly amongst first-generation, mineralized racial and ethnic groups and other underrepresented populations like rural students facing significant cultural and financial access barriers entering foreign middle-class institutional environments (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018, p. 29). Unfamiliarity navigating college systems and opaque unwritten social rules and norms around relating with faculty, joining clubs or advocating needs hampers integration and retention disproportionately absent deliberate supportive accommodations (Jahangir et al., 2009, p. 33). Meanwhile thresholds for tolerating suboptimal experiences prove lower for marginalized groups given greater family and community pioneer pressures to achieve security through credentials paired with substantial sacrifices endured making attendance possible, raising stakes (Abdullah & Qolamani, 2024).

A robust constellation of theories offers lenses analyzing the interplay between student identity and developmental growth trajectories during transitional college experiences as emerging adults navigate intensified responsibilities and independence requirements while exploring interests, relationships and purpose. Psychosocial development theories concentrate on cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal changes students undergo like securing identity and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45). Transition environment fit frameworks examine interactions with campus cultures and adaptation capacities balancing assets against barriers (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 67). Racial and ethnic identity models detail processes reconciling internalized assumptions from majority culture against collective pride cultivated from heritage (Helms, 1995a, p. 184, 1995b, p. 184). Critical systemic lenses interrogate institutional inequalities embedded in structures that impose assimilation burdens on diverse groups while enabling unearned advantages for dominant populations (Harper, 2012, p. 15). Integrative frameworks allow capturing multifaceted forces shaping complex identity shifts.

Calls persist for continually seeking out authentic voices and elevating multidimensional counter narratives from those facing overlapping marginalization to reverse deficit inequalities through empowerment (K. I. B. Qolamani & Kaya, 2024). Phenomenological investigations embracing personal narratives counter explanatory gaps left by demographic categories and static identity models, attending to textured heterogeneity of lived realities navigating higher education environments (Evans, 2014). Elevating subjugated standpoints offers vital insight often sadly lacking in reform efforts led predominantly by those lacking first-hand perspective at the epicenter of oppression (Harper, 2010, p. 64). Understanding identity transitions remains an unfinished process, not outcome. Listening to those traversing complicated pathways unlocks possibility.

The academic shift moving from heavily structured high school settings into largely self-directed college learning environments proves challenging for many students (Yee, 2016, p. 8). Procrastination, uncertainty interpreting texts, unfamiliarity accessing help resources, limited writing fluency and unchecked confidence frequently impair progress (Holschuh, 2019). Students accustomed to passing courses effortlessly through last minute cram sessions often struggle without built-in supports while advanced learners denied sufficient earlier challenge finally face roadblocks (Schneider & Preckel, 2017, p. 565).

Quantitative disciplines like chemistry, physics, engineering and advanced mathematics requiring rapid assimilation of hierarchical conceptual building blocks also pose early barriers as struggling with foundational elements hinders ability to advance given sequential dependencies (Johnson et al., 2018, p. 52). High early failure and switching rates result, especially amongst groups lacking rigorous college preparatory backgrounds. Remedial courses bring stigmatization. Gaining early momentum matters greatly across stratified learning contexts.

First-generation college students often struggle with deciphering opaque administrative bureaucracy, campus cultural norms, and unwritten competency expectations that their college-educated peers appear to implicitly understand due to prior socialization within their families (Yee, 2016, p. 6). Additionally, imposter syndrome can lead to self-doubt as these pioneer's fear that entire communities rely on their fragile shoulders. International students encounter multiple challenges when adapting to a new culture, such as interpreting unfamiliar teaching styles or norms around student-faculty discourses, while also juggling external obligations that can introduce complications (Zhou & Cole, 2017, p. 82). These layered transitions can be taxing without proper support.

In social domains, identity shifts also unfold as students explore new relationships and interests while determining personal direction (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45). Loneliness and isolation correlate with adverse outcomes given fracturing of earlier supports as adolescents individuate and migrate away from families (Azmitia et al., 2013, p. 391). Marginalized students detail tensions balancing cultural values between external home environments and predominantly white middle-class campus cultures while avoiding disclosing struggles to overtax families (Guiffrida, 2006, p. 456). Imposter syndrome from pioneering through unfamiliar spaces intensifies absent surrounding similar students overcoming analogous barriers. Safe havens help restore capacities when taxed on multiple fronts by layered transitions.

Further challenges arise around independent financial management and college affordability issues that create immense burdens for working and lower-middle class students lacking familial wealth buffers at residential institutions with annual sticker prices exceeding \$70,000 (Judith-Clayton, 2017; Park & Scott-Clayton, 2018). Unfamiliarity securing housing, transportation, insurance and healthcare independently leaves many novices struggling to learn critical life skills without a net through messy trial and error (Kumpfer & Summerhays, 2006, p. 102; Saleebey, 2012). Anxiety floods bandwidth better devoted to intellectual growth and social integration. Resource precarity leaves bare margins around inevitable emergencies that better resourced peer's escape.

Of course, the notion of standard, full-time residential immersive college experiences itself reflects dated assumptions. Nearly half of today's students commute to campus while working jobs to finance education, attenuating social integration and extracurricular participation opportunities (Irlbeck et al., 2014, p. 154). Developmental needs and key obstacles diverge tremendously across groups like veteran, parenting and other non-traditional students who juggle added life complexities (O'Neill & Thomson, 2013, p. 162).

Synthesized comprehensively, making headway into the first college year encompasses effectively managing transition shock, securing adequate orientation guidance and asserting self-advocacy to acquire necessary skillsets, social supports and financial stability facilitating engagement enabling personal growth (K. Qolamani, 2022). But heterogeneity between institutional offerings and student destabilizers means no static playbook exists ensuring successful passages for all. Listening to learners detailing ruptures requiring restoration offers most hope informing reforms to widen inclusion. Their direct testimony spotlights leading priorities.

Psychosocial development theories like Chickering's seven vector model concentrate on cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal changes college students undergo including developing competence, managing emotions, establishing

identity, clarifying values and securing stability. Deficits manifest clearly in struggles with isolation, financial hardship or loss of direction thwarting thriving. Survey instruments diagnosing transitional hindrances help target interventions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 45).

Related scholarship examines adjustments along racial, ethnic, gender and other identity facets, adapting psychosocial models to reflect shared phases marginalized groups traverse reconciling personal and collective affiliations (Torres et al., 2009, p. 581). Understanding common pathways grants insight to inform variation. Developing synthesis between aspects of self-strengthens resilience against fragmented demands. Psychosocial lenses reveal interdependence fostering maturity in community.

Transition environment fit theories like Tinto's internationalist model posit persistence relies on finding congruence with campus cultures and norms through integration (Tinto, 1993, p. 104, 1998). Critics argue assumptions that non-dominant group students must conform to white, middle-class values to succeed wrongly frame diversity as an obstacle rather than resource for positive climate (Tierney, 1992, p. 608). Transition environment fit redresses this by validating assets historically oppressed communities already possess and suggesting institutions transform to honor those rather than demanding assimilation to exclusionary norms (Museus, 2014, p. 192). Assessments should ensure cultural responsiveness, not impose universalist standards.

Racial and ethnic identity development models detail processes through which minoritized groups navigate understanding of self through reconciling internalized assumptions from majority culture against lived collective experiences and cultivated heritage pride (Helms, 1995a, 1995b, p. 184). Early models assumed linear progressions Cross Jr (1971, p. 13) but contemporary scholarship recognizes more continual recursive cycles re-evaluating new situations that may spur regression (Seaton & Iida, 2019; Yip et al., 2019). Additionally, intersectionality acknowledges combined gendered racism oppressions facing Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). Fluidity and compounding barriers enrich these models.

Critical theoretical lenses explicitly interrogate systemic inequalities embedded in structures that impose assimilation burdens on diverse groups while enabling unearned advantages for dominant populations (Harper, 2012). Racial realist perspectives directly confront biases rather than evading harsh truths about inequality under mythical tropes of meritocracy or colorblindness. Critical whiteness studies interrogate problematic constructions of white identity that assume ethnic neutrality as the norm minorities must conform towards rather than a limited, positioned lens garnering unspoken privilege (Cabrera, 2014). Success reconceptualizes as liberation from oppressive demands to fit distorted norms on terms laden with barriers. Transforming systems, not changing minorities, becomes responsibility of equitable institutions.

While distinct angles exist examining identity shifts during college experiences, holistic understanding comes through bridging complementary conceptual frameworks attentive to cognitive growth, campus environmental interactions and critical analyses revealing internalized and external systemic oppressions constraining (Park & Scott-Clayton, 2018). Integrative models allow capturing cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural forces shaping complex transitions and identity negotiations. But student direct testimonies offer vital grounding for responsive theory building and leadership reforms. Their expertise deserves center stage guiding efforts to reverse deficit inequalities through empowerment.

Calls persist for continually seeking authentic voices and elevating multidimensional narratives from those facing overlapping marginalization to fuel inclusive reforms. Phenomenological approaches embracing personal narratives counter explanatory gaps left by demographic categories and static identity models which fail capturing textured heterogeneity shaping lived realities navigating higher education environments (Evans, 2014). Spotlights subjugated standpoints offers vital insight often sadly lacking in change efforts led predominantly by those lacking first-hand perspective enduring oppression's epicenter (Harper, 2010).

Understanding identity transitions on campus remains an unfinished process, not static outcome. Listening to those traversing complicated pathways unlocking possibility and authoring more empowered futures is never exhausted. For those committed to reversing deficit inequalities by empowering students to author futures with enhanced agency and self-determination, continually elevating narratives and lived expertise matters immensely (K. I. B. Qolamani & Kaya, 2024). There is no substitute for creating welcoming space for people to speak their truths across differences powerfully shaping life's chances in ways often unseen by the fortunate few enjoying insulation from oppression in its many guises. Wisdom abounds for those who come humble seeking guidance.

Findings and results

The study conducts a thorough statistical analysis to understand the challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, based on their individual identities. Instead of focusing on a specific educational stage, it explores variations in experiences across different scientific departments and between genders.

The findings are presented in detailed tables, shedding light on how these diverse backgrounds influence the challenges encountered, providing a nuanced view of student experiences within the academic setting.

Table 2. Results of one-sample t-test

Sample	Hypothetical mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	
				t-calculated	t-tabulated
221	66	74.08	14.182	7.765	1.652

[Table 2](#) provides a statistical analysis relevant to the research on Challenges Faced by First-Year Students Based on Individual Identities at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. It compares the mean score of 221 students, which is 74.08, against a hypothetical mean of 66, with a standard deviation of 14.182. The one-sample t-test results in a calculated t-value of 7.765, significantly surpassing the critical tabulated value of 1.652. This notable difference strongly indicates that the challenges faced by first-year students are significantly different from the hypothesized average, highlighting the substantial impact of individual identities on their experiences.

This finding suggests that first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, experience challenges that are significantly greater than what was initially hypothesized. The high mean score indicates that the students' experiences are not only varied but also more challenging on average than anticipated. The substantial standard deviation further points to a wide variability in the experiences among the students, suggesting that while some may face relatively minor challenges, others encounter obstacles that are significantly more daunting.

The statistical significance of these results, as indicated by the t-value exceeding the tabulated value, underscores the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms at the university. It highlights the importance of understanding the diverse backgrounds and identities of students to tailor support systems that can effectively address the unique challenges they face. This could involve the development of more inclusive policies, the provision of resources that cater to a wide range of needs, and the implementation of programs designed to foster a supportive and understanding campus environment.

In the broader context of higher education research, these findings contribute to the growing body of evidence that underscores the importance of considering individual identities in educational settings. They align with previous studies that have highlighted the impact of factors such as socio-economic background, culture, and personal experiences on students' academic journeys.

In conclusion, the analysis provided by [Table 2](#) offers compelling evidence of the significant challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, based on their individual identities. These results have important implications for educators, policy-makers, and administrators, advocating for the adoption of more personalized and inclusive approaches to support student success. By acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs of the student body, educational institutions can enhance the overall learning experience and foster an environment that supports all students in overcoming the challenges they face.

Table 3. Results of the independent samples t-test according to gender variable

Gender	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	
				t-calculated	t-tabulated
Male	82	75.27	15.003	0.959	1.971
Female	139	73.37	13.681		

[Table 3](#) investigates gender-based differences in the challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, as per the study's focus. It compares the mean scores of 82 male students (75.27) with a standard deviation of 15.003, against 139 female students (73.37) with a standard deviation of 13.681. The t-test produces a calculated t-value of 0.959, below the critical value of 1.971, indicating no statistically significant difference in challenges encountered by male and female students, despite varied individual identities.

This finding suggests that, in the context of the challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, gender does not play a significant role in the magnitude of challenges experienced. The similar mean scores between male and female students imply that both genders encounter challenges that are, on average, comparable in intensity. The lack of statistical significance, as indicated by the t-value not exceeding the critical threshold, reinforces the idea that the challenges are universally felt across gender lines, highlighting the importance of addressing these challenges in a way that is inclusive of all students.

The close mean scores and the absence of a significant statistical difference may also point towards a shared experience among students, regardless of gender, in adjusting to university life and navigating the educational landscape at the

College of Basic Education. This underscores the need for support systems and interventions that are not gender-specific but rather targeted at addressing the common challenges faced by all first-year students.

Moreover, these findings contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality in education, suggesting that when it comes to the challenges of adjusting to higher education, male and female students are more alike than different. This can inform policy and program development at the university, advocating for approaches that ensure equal access to resources, support, and opportunities for all students, irrespective of gender.

In conclusion, the analysis provided by [Table 3](#) offers insightful evidence that gender does not significantly influence the challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. These results have important implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers, emphasizing the need for universal support strategies that recognize the commonalities in student experiences. By fostering an educational environment that addresses the needs of all students equally, the university can better support the academic and personal growth of its diverse student body.

Table 4. Mean scores and standard deviations by department variable

Department	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
English	49	72.06	16.797
Arabic	49	75.65	12.719
Kurdish	36	77.75	11.403
Geography	53	72.28	14.069
Mathematics	34	73.62	14.678
Total	221	74.08	14.182

[Table 4](#) outlines the mean scores and standard deviations for first-year students across five departments at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The departments include English, Arabic, Kurdish, Geography, and Mathematics, with a total of 221 students participating. The English department shows a mean score of 72.06 (SD=16.797), Arabic has 75.65 (SD=12.719), Kurdish scores highest at 77.75 (SD=11.403), Geography has 72.28 (SD=14.069), and Mathematics is at 73.62 (SD=14.678). The overall mean score across all departments is 74.08 with a standard deviation of 14.182.

Table 5. Results of the one-way ANOVA according to the department variable

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F- calculated	P-value	F- tabulated
Between Groups	984.240	4	246.060			2.413
Within Groups	43261.452	216	200.285	1.229	0.300	(4-216) (0.05)
Total	44245.692	220				

[Table 5](#) showcases the one-way ANOVA results to explore differences in challenges faced by first-year students across various departments at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The analysis indicates a between-groups sum of squares of 984.240 across 4-216 degrees of freedom, leading to a mean square of 246.060. The F-value calculated at 1.229, with a P-value of 0.300, does not surpass the critical F-tabulated value of 2.413, suggesting no significant differences in challenges among departments, thus pointing towards a uniformity in student experiences irrespective of their academic specialization.

This outcome suggests that the type of department in which students are enrolled does not significantly affect the nature or intensity of the challenges they face during their first year of study. The uniformity in student experiences across departments implies that the challenges encountered are likely to be more closely related to the general experience of transitioning to university life rather than specific to the academic discipline. This finding is crucial for understanding how first-year students adapt to university life and points towards the need for broad-based support mechanisms that can address the common challenges faced by all students, rather than department-specific interventions.

The lack of significant differences among departments also highlights an opportunity for cross-departmental collaboration in developing support services for first-year students. Since the challenges are uniformly experienced,

support programs, orientation activities, and academic assistance can be designed to benefit the entire first-year cohort, fostering a more inclusive and supportive university environment.

Furthermore, these results contribute to the literature on higher education by reinforcing the idea that the challenges of adjusting to university are a universal aspect of the first-year experience, transcending the boundaries of academic specialization. This can inform university policy and program development, ensuring that efforts to enhance student success are aligned with the needs of a diverse student body.

In conclusion, the analysis provided by [Table 5](#) offers valuable insights into the uniformity of challenges faced by first-year students across different departments at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The findings underscore the importance of implementing universal support strategies that address the wide range of needs among the student population, promoting an equitable and conducive learning environment for all students.

Conclusions

The study reveals that first-year students at the College of Basic Education face significantly greater challenges than originally hypothesized. This conclusion is drawn from the observation that the sample mean of the challenges faced exceeds the hypothetical mean. Interestingly, the data also suggest that there are no significant differences in the challenges faced by male and female first-year students, suggesting that the transitional issues are common across genders. Furthermore, the challenges appear to be consistent across students from different academic departments, suggesting that the hurdles faced are not necessarily related to the specific field of study.

In light of these findings, the study recommends the implementation of universal and inclusive support systems. These systems should be designed to address the broad spectrum of first-year transition challenges, rather than focusing solely on identity-specific struggles. It also calls for increased interdepartmental collaboration in the development of responsive orientation programs, advising structures, and early warning systems that can identify common pitfalls. The collection of ongoing feedback through surveys and interviews is also suggested as a method to continually refine and align resources with the evolving needs of students.

The study also suggests areas for future research, including longitudinal studies that track the long-term trajectories of first-year cohorts over successive years at the university. It also recommends research on how the intersections of multiple marginalized identities can lead to compounded struggles that are not present in majority groups. Finally, the study suggests ethnographic and narrative analyses to better understand the nuanced textures of students' lived challenges, offering insights from an emic perspective.

Author Contributions: In the study on the challenges faced by first-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, all contributions including conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, supervision, and project administration were solely undertaken by Shaima Ahmed Hassan. Software and funding acquisition were not applicable, and visualization was not involved. Shaima Ahmed Hassan has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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