

التسرب المدرسي في العراق: بين المعاناة النفسية في رواية "أوقات عصيبة" لتشارلز ديكنز وتأثيرها في بناء حلول تعليمية شاملة

School Dropout in Iraq: Between Psychological Hardship in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and its Impact on Building Comprehensive Educational Solutions

رشا محمد محمد جواد الحكيم⁽¹⁾ Rasha Mohammed Mohammed Jawad Al-Hakeem⁽¹⁾

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المُلخَص

نظراً لنظام التعليم الصارم الذي يُعلي من شأن الحفظ على حساب النمو العاطفي والإبداعي، يُعد الفقر والعنف والضغط النفسي من أبرز الأسباب وراء ارتفاع معدلات التسرب من المدارس في العراق. وتتناول رواية "أوقات عصيبة" لتشارلز ديكنز قضايا مشابهة، حيث تُصور نظاماً تعليمياً يكبت الإبداع والمشاعر، مما يؤدي إلى فشل الطلاب وانفصالهم عن البيئة التعليمية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استخلاص رؤى اجتماعية ونفسية لمعالجة ظاهرة التسرب من خلال إجراء مقارنات بين الرواية ومشكلات التعليم في العراق. تجمع هذه الدراسة بين التحليل الأدبي الموضوعي للرواية والمقابلات والاستبيانات التي أجريت في مدينة النجف. وتُطبّق الدراسة هرمية ماسلو للاحتياجات ونظرية الذكاء العاطفي لدانييل جولمان لتحليل كلٍّ من الرواية وردود الفعل الواقعية. وتُظهر النتائج أن الأساليب التعليمية الصارمة، والاحتياجات النفسية غير الملباة، والانفصال العاطفي تُسهم بشكل كبير في ارتفاع معدلات التسرب المدرسي. ويمكن للطلاب من خلال الأدب أن يُنمّوا هويتهم الثقافية، ومهارات التفكير النقدي، وروابطهم العاطفية، مما يمنحهم إحساساً بالانتماء. ومن خلال دمج الأدب والرياضة والفنون في المنهاج الدراسي، تستطيع المدارس خلق بيئات تعليمية محفزة وداعمة نفسياً، تسهم في خفض معدلات التسرب وتعزيز رفاهية الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التسرب المدرسي، القسوة النفسية، أوقات عصيبة، تشارلز ديكنز، الصحة النفسية.

ABSTRACT

Due to a strict educational system that prioritizes memorization over emotional and creative growth. Poverty, violence, and psychological stress are the main causes of Iraq's high school dropout rate. Similar issues are depicted in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, which shows an educational system that stifles creativity and emotion, resulting in student failure and alienation. This study aims to extract social and psychological insights to address dropout rates by drawing comparisons between the novel and Iraq's educational issues. The research combines thematic literary analysis of the novel with interviews and surveys conducted in Al-Najaf. The study applies Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence to analyze both the novel and real-world responses. Findings reveal that strict educational approaches, unfulfilled psychological needs, and emotional disengagement significantly contribute to dropout rates. Students can develop their cultural identity, critical thinking skills, and emotional connections through literature, which gives them a sense of belonging. Schools may create stimulating and emotionally supportive learning environments that lower dropout rates and enhance student wellbeing by integrating literature, sport, and arts into the curriculum.

Keywords: school dropout, psychological cruelty, *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens, mental health

⁽¹⁾ University of Imam Ja'afar Al-Sadiq/ Iraq

* Corresponding author rasha_mohammed@ijsu.edu.iq

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⁽¹⁾ جامعة الإمام جعفر الصادق / العراق

* للمراسلة: rasha_mohammed@ijsu.edu.iq

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1-Introduction

There is no doubt that education is essential to the advancement of society since it stimulates both social and economic growth. However, in Iraq, the issue of school dropout has become a major obstacle to accomplishing these objectives. Many students still drop out of school early despite efforts to increase access to education because of a complex interface of structural, social, and psychological factors. Students now feel disengaged, alienated, and unmotivated due to a combination of Factors such as armed conflicts, and strict teaching methods that indifference mental health. According to UNESCO (2020), ongoing conflict, displacement, and instability in Iraq have significantly disrupted educational access and quality, contributing to high dropout rates. Additionally, Al-Hemiary et al. (2014) highlight that the lack of attention to students' psychological well-being and rigid educational approaches has compounded feelings of alienation among learners. Addressing the underlying reasons for school dropout is vital since this problem impedes national progress and undercuts individual potential.

The effects of utilitarian educational systems that value factual information and memorization over creativity, empathy, and emotional expression are poignantly explored in Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times*. The psychological toll of such systems is highlighted in the novel through the portrayal of individuals like Louisa Gradgrind and Sissy Jupe, which offers important understandings into how strict educational procedures affect students' involvement and mental health. This study aims to identify the psychological and social aspects of school dropout by comparing the harsh educational setting in *Hard Times* with the difficulties Iraqi children currently face.

This study intends to support the creation of comprehensive, encouraging learning environments that enable students to overcome obstacles and realize their full potential. It investigates the psychological and social factors influencing school dropout and suggests novel solutions motivated by literature and creative approaches. In the end, the study emphasizes how crucial it is to put students' psychological health first as a means of reducing dropout rates and promoting long-term scholastic and social progress.

2-Statement of the problem

In Iraq, school Dropout rates have become a major national issue that is hindering social and economic advancement. Many pupils still drop out of school despite efforts to increase access to education and employment. This is because of a variety of interconnected psychological, social, and systemic problems, such as poverty, violent conflicts, and strict educational procedures that disregard emotional health. Feelings of disaffection, detachment, and academic misery are made worse by a neglect of students' basic needs, emotions, and creative expression. To address these gaps, this study looks at the social and psychological aspects of school dropout in Iraq. It explores *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens and theoretical frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory.

3-Research Aims and Objectives

This study aims to:

1. analyze the psychological and social phenomena associated with school dropout in Iraq.
2. explore the similarities between the psychological contexts in *Hard Times* and the current situation in Iraq.
3. propose educational solutions that consider students' psychological aspects, inspired by literature and modern educational models.

4-Contribution

The present study contributes to the educational field in Iraq by addressing the major issue of school dropout and offering practical solutions to foster academic and social progress, ultimately benefiting society. The study gives educators and decision makers practical into establishing a supportive learning environment that puts students' mental health and well-being first. The study is important for identifying psychological and social factors like unmet needs, emotional disengagement, and strict educational practices. It promotes systemic changes that advance diversity and justice in education by highlighting the transformative power of literature, sports, and the arts in raising emotional intelligence, creativity, and involvement. These efforts not only empower marginalized groups and reduce dropout rates but also cultivate a generation of empathetic and responsible individuals. It is ultimately contributing to social cohesion, economic growth, and sustainable development with potential global relevance.

5-Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, a qualitative approach was employed to explore the social and psychological dimensions of *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. The study initially looked at how educational harshness was portrayed in the novel and how it was related to psychological detachment and school dropout. Through a thematic lens, examples and situations from the novel were examined to highlight the relationship between the strict teaching methods employed by utilitarian people, such as Mr. Gradgrind, and their psychological effects on pupils.

Secondly, the study also utilized open-ended surveys and in-depth interviews, alongside textual analysis, to examine the problem under investigation. With the use of these instruments, information about the psychological difficulties that Iraqi students encounter in the classroom was gathered from parents, instructors, and students. To ensure diversity and offer a range of viewpoints, a sample of participants was chosen from around the province of Al-Najaf. Moreover, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence theory were used to thematically analyse the qualitative data to find recurrent themes and narratives that illustrate the causes of school dropout and the possible contribution of literature to resolving these problems.

6-Theory

The theoretical framework presented in this section is based on two fundamental psychological theories: the Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). These theories provide essential understandings of

human motivation and emotional needs. This study provides a solid foundation for comprehending the psychological aspects of human behavior and development by investigating these frameworks about the learner's needs.

6.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow introduced one of the most influential theories of motivation in psychology, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in his seminal work *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943). According to the theory, human needs are arranged in a pyramid-like hierarchical structure. The higher-level needs are positioned at the top, while the more basic needs form the foundation at the bottom. Before moving on to higher-order needs like self-actualization, belongingness, and esteem, people must first meet their basic physiological needs, according to Maslow. This pattern reflects the theory that psychological stress caused by unmet needs compels individuals to focus on fulfilling those needs before pursuing other goals.

Beginning with the most basic demands for survival, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs divides human needs into five stages. food, water, air, shelter, warmth, and rest. They are among the basic physiological needs that must be satisfied before a person can focus on higher-level needs. For example, a person who is starving will put obtaining food ahead of cooperating with others or developing personally (Maslow, 1943). Following the satisfaction of physiological needs, people look to satisfy safety needs, which include health, safety from harm, financial stability, and physical safety, as well as a desire for order, predictability, and control in their lives, which can be achieved through stable employment, safe housing, or access to healthcare (Maslow, 1943). Within the study For example, participants identified issues such as hunger, poverty, and limited access to clean water as significant barriers to regular school attendance. One parent expressed his concern by stating, "My child cannot focus on studying when they are constantly hungry."

As social acceptance and emotional bonds become crucial for psychological well-being, people seek interpersonal relationships, friendships, family ties, and a sense of belonging. So, at the third level, which is focused on belongingness and love needs. Unmet those needs at this level can result in feelings of loneliness and alienation (Maslow, 1943). As one goes up the hierarchy, esteem needs to reflect the desire for both respect for oneself and respect for others. People strive for recognition, achievement, competence, and confidence (Maslow, 1943). Self-actualization, the last level of the hierarchy, is pursuing personal development, creativity, and realizing one's full potential. It involves the desire to become the best example of oneself through intellectual pursuits, art, or spiritual contentment. It is, therefore, highly individualized depending on one's values and goals (Maslow, 1943).

Moreover, the deficit principle, which suggests that individuals are motivated by unmet needs and that once a need is fulfilled, it no longer serves as a motivator, is one of the core assumptions underlying Maslow's theory of human motivation and behavior. Moreover, the deficit principle, which suggests that individuals are motivated by unmet needs and that once a need is fulfilled, it no longer serves as a motivator, is one of the core assumptions underlying Maslow's theory of human motivation and behavior. For example, a person who has enough food and shelter will prioritize meeting their desires for safety or belongingness (Maslow, 1943). Although Maslow recognized that this process is not fixed and can change depending on the situation, the progression principle presupposes that people proceed through the hierarchy sequentially, meeting lower-level wants before higher-level ones become motivating (Maslow, 1943). Maslow also made a distinction between growth needs, like self-actualization, which comes from the desire for self-fulfillment and personal development, and

deficiency needs, like physiological and safety belongingness, that come from deprivation and motivate people to lessen discomfort (Maslow, 1954). Lastly, Maslow acknowledged that although the hierarchy provides a broad framework, cultural, social, and individual differences affect how people prioritize and pursue their needs. For instance, individualist cultures may place more value on self-esteem and personal accomplishment, while collectivist cultures may place more value on community and belongingness (Hoffman, 2008).

6.2 Emotional Intelligence Theory

The ability to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions is known as emotional intelligence (EI), a term introduced by Daniel Goleman (1995) in his crucial work *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (1995). In contrast to conventional intelligence tests like IQ, emotional intelligence places a strong emphasis on how emotions affect judgment, relationships with others, and individual accomplishment. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence outdoes cognitive intelligence alone as a predictor of success in some areas, including relationships, leadership, and mental health.

Emotional intelligence is based on the five fundamental elements of emotional intelligence that Goleman identified: Self-regulation, which is the ability to control or convey disorderly emotions and impulses, maintain flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances, and manage stress (Goleman, 1995). Self-awareness, on the other hand, is the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, values, and motivations. This allows self-aware individuals to agree on how their emotions affect their thoughts and behavior. It enables them to make decisions. Since people are motivated by internal benefits like personal development and fulfillment rather than by approval from others, motivation is the ability to use emotions to pursue goals with vigor and perseverance, especially in the face of difficulties.

By enabling people to identify and address the thoughts, feelings, and viewpoints of those around them, empathy, the capacity to comprehend and react correctly to the emotions of others, helps people develop stronger interpersonal bonds (Goleman, 1995). Concerning satisfaction Pedditi (2024) states that satisfaction in relationships with classmates is probably not among the predictors of the intention to drop out of school due to the possible variety of class contexts and groups within which students find themselves living their relationships at school. Conversely, social skills include the capacity to establish and preserve healthy connections through efficient communication, dispute resolution, and teamwork. Strong social skills help people build supportive and positive settings for both themselves and others. They are particularly good at networking, teamwork, and leadership (Goleman, 1995). These two elements, social skills and empathy, combine to form emotional intelligence. This offers a thorough framework for comprehending and cultivating the capacity to successfully manage emotions and relationships.

Key concepts regarding how emotions impact behavior and relationships form the foundation of the emotional intelligence theory. People can make better decisions and forge stronger ties with others by comprehending and controlling their emotions. Those emotions are crucial in forming their thoughts, decisions, and behaviors (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). To enhance emotional competence, emotional intelligence both intrapersonal abilities like self-awareness and self-regulation as well as interpersonal abilities like empathy and social skills (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In contrast to IQ, emotional intelligence is flexible and may be cultivated

through professional development, practice, and feedback (Goleman, 1995). Since emotionally intelligent people are better at managing stress, settling disagreements, and accomplishing their goals, this skill has a big impact on performance in areas like school, the workplace, and interpersonal relationships (Brackett, 2011). Ekornes (2021) also adds that test emotions and learning-related emotions, perceived loneliness and instructional engagement were significant to explain variance in students' intentions to discontinue their studies.

7. Discussion

To better comprehend school dropout in Iraq, the current study examined the psychological and social aspects of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*. Using a qualitative approach, the study collected opinions from parents, instructors, and students in the province of Al-Najaf. Also, it examined the novel's portrayal of the harshness of the educational system, which is based on learning facts only, and its psychological effects. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995) were used as theoretical frameworks to analyze the results. This section summarizes the main ideas that came out of the research, emphasizing how inflexible teaching methods, unfulfilled psychological needs, and emotional disengagement interact, as well as how literature may be able to help with these issues. To demonstrate these claims, quotes, and particular instances from *Hard Times* are combined.

7.1 Educational Cruelty in *Hard Times*: A Reflection of Psychological Disengagement

Dickens' *Hard Times* offers a striking depiction of a utilitarian school system that values factual knowledge and rote learning over creativity, emotions, and uniqueness. This fixed approach is best exemplified by Thomas Gradgrind, who emphasizes "facts alone" while moderating the significance of creativity, empathy, and emotional expression. Gradgrind says, "Now, what I want is Facts," in the first chapter. Only impart facts to these lads and girls. "In life, facts alone are desired" (Dickens, 1854, p. 1). The setting created by this utilitarian mind causes significant psychological disengagement in students like Sissy Jupe and Louisa Gradgrind.

For example, Louisa is emotionally stunted from birth and is unable to achieve personal fulfillment or meaningful relationships. Her ultimate mental collapse and discontent with her marriage to Bounderby serve as a plain reminder of the negative effects of receiving an education without emotional support, such as literature or sport. "How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death?" Louisa asks her father when he confronts her with the meaninglessness of her life. (Page 200 of Dickens, 1854). Her experience serves as a reminder of how isolation and discontent can result from an educational system that disregards emotional needs.

However, Sissy Jupe stands in contrast, opposing the dehumanizing consequences of Gradgrind's utilitarian philosophy of facts. Even after being made fun of for not being able to follow the strict curriculum, Sissy manages to maintain her compassion and emotional intelligence. She struggles badly, for instance, when asked to define a horse in factual words, yet she thrives in ways Louisa cannot because of her innate awareness of life and emotions. This contrast draws attention to the negative psychological effects of an educational system

that stifles emotional expression and innovation. Then the impact of that negative educational philosophy leads Sissy to drop out the school.

Significant similarities between *Hard Times* and the educational environment in Iraq were found using thematic analysis. The Iraqi system, according to survey participants, is excessively strict and prioritizes memorization and standardized testing over creativity and critical thinking. Teachers expressed feeling under pressure to follow rigid curricula, which left little time for developing emotional bonds with pupils or even lack of any sport classes. In response, students conveyed sentiments of disinterest, annoyance, and alienation from their academic quests. Dickens' criticism of utilitarian education is supported by these data, which suggest that strict methods not only fall short of students' psychological demands but also fuel their detachment and ultimate dropout.

One student said in the questionnaire, for instance, "We simply memorize answers without understanding why they are important." We seem more like machines than people. Characters, in the novel, like Bitzer, who is a consequence of Gradgrind's utilitarian ideology, share this sentiment. When Bitzer pictures Tom Gradgrind by saying, "I have been brought up in this school... and I never knew anything else," it is clear that he lacks empathy and is coldly calculated (Dickens, 1854, p. 250). His lack of empathy is a reflection of the dehumanizing consequences of an emotionally repressed educational system.

7.2 Unmet Needs and School Dropout: Insights from Maslow's Hierarchy

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offered a useful framework for comprehending the causes of Iraqi school dropouts. According to the collected data, many pupils struggle to meet their essential safety and physiological demands. For instance, participants cited problems like hunger, poverty, and a lack of access to clean water as obstacles to consistent attendance at school. "My child cannot concentrate on studying when they are constantly hungry," said one parent. This supports Maslow's claim that unfulfilled physiological requirements damage higher-level functioning, such as participation in academic activities (Maslow, 1943).

Another frequent theme during the interviews was the necessity for safety. Many students said that bullying, indifference from teachers, or even acts of violence in schools made them feel insecure. "I don't want to go to school because some students hit me, and no one cares," one student said. Students are unable to progress to higher levels of motivation and self-actualization as a result of these experiences. This will foster an atmosphere of anxiety and instability. Similar to this, in the novel Sissy Jupe has emotional instability in *Hard Times* after being compelled to live in Gradgrind's strict home when her father abandons her. The psychological effects of an unsupportive system are shown in her difficulty adjusting to the utilitarian surroundings.

Needs for respect and belongingness are raised as important elements. Many students described their schools as impersonal and unwelcoming. They usually expressed feelings of alienation and loneliness. Teachers agreed that developing deep connections with children is challenging due to large class numbers and scarcity of resources. Students' sense of belonging is weakened by this emotional disconnect, which results in disengagement. Dropout rates are further worsened when students feel unmotivated and inadequate due to a lack of motivation and acknowledgment. Sissy's compassion and warmth in *Hard Times* stand in stark contrast

to the Gradgrind family's coldness, emphasizing the value of emotional links in building resilience and well-being.

"Students are more likely to stay in school when they feel like they belong," said one of the study's teachers in the interview. However, they give up if they feel indistinguishable. Maslow's focus on the necessity of belongingness as a root for higher-order development is consistent with this observation. Similar to this, Louisa's lack of emotional support and meaningful relationships in *Hard Times* is the cause of her emotional detachment. The effects of ignoring this basic need are highlighted by her ultimate run-in with her father. These results highlight how crucial it is to address pupils' unmet needs before attempting to lower school dropout rates. Schools may enhance environments where children feel safe and valued by putting fundamental needs like food, safety, and emotional support first. This will allow them to focus on higher-order objectives like academic success and personal development.

7.3 Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Challenges in Education

Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence provided more information on the psychological difficulties Iraqi pupils encountered. According to the study, self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy, essential elements of emotional intelligence, are difficult for many students to develop. For example, several students acknowledged that when upset, they would behave thoughtlessly, skipping class or fighting with their peers. Teachers noted that pupils could not frequently handle stress or settle arguments adequately, which led to behavioral problems and absence.

Another area of concern was empathy. Teachers and parents saw that pupils often did not comprehend or react correctly to other people's feelings. "Many students don't care about their classmates' feelings; they just think about themselves," said one teacher. An aggressive and unsupportive school climate is produced by this lack of empathy, which also encourages unhealthy interpersonal interactions. Bitzer, in the novel, a byproduct of Gradgrind's practical education, represents the lack of empathy in *Hard Times*. He coldly replies, "I have been brought up in this school... and I never knew anything else," when requested to have mercy on Tom Gradgrind (Dickens, 1854, p. 250). His lack of empathy or emotions is a reflection of the dehumanizing consequences of an emotionally repressed educational system.

Another issue that was noted was identified was a lack of social skills. Students said they had trouble making friends and cooperating in group situations. These results underline the requirement of treatments that foster emotional intelligence, such as teacher training courses, Professional development, and collaboration. Schools can lower the risk of dropout by assisting students in overcoming psychological obstacles and developing flexibility through the development of emotional intelligence. In *Hard Times*, Sissy Jupe's emotional intelligence serves as a counterpoint to the emotional repression experienced by other characters. Her ability to maintain hope and compassion despite adversity offers a powerful lesson in the value of emotional awareness. One participant in the study observed, "If students could learn to express their feelings like Sissy does, they might find school less stressful and more meaningful." (Dickens, 1854, p. 251).

7.4 The Role of Literature in Addressing Educational Challenges

The study explored how literature, especially novels like *Hard Times*, can help address the social and psychological problems that lead to school dropout. Participants praised literature's capacity to promote empathy, critical thinking, and emotional awareness about the notion of including it in the curriculum. One educator said, for instance, Stories like *Hard Times* can inspire students to think differently and help them understand the consequences of rigid education systems.

In addition to offering a forum for examining human feelings and experiences, literature performances as a mirror reflecting society challenges. Students can learn about the psychological effects of repressive regimes and the value of emotional health through characters like Louisa and Sissy. Furthermore, storytelling promotes self-expression and creativity, which gives children a way to explore their feelings and difficulties. In *Hard Times*, Louisa and Tom Gradgrind's emotional repression contrasts sharply with Sissy Jupe's emotional intelligence and perseverance. Her capacity to remain hopeful and compassionate in the face of hardship serves as a potent example of the importance of emotional intelligence.

Additionally, participants suggested including in the schools literary-inspired creative activities like writing, drawing, and acting workshops. In addition to improving emotional intelligence, these activities foster teamwork and interpersonal relationships. Schools may change the educational process and make it more interesting and encouraging for pupils by utilizing literature and innovative teaching methods. One student shared, "When we act out scenes from books, I feel like I understand the characters better. It makes me think about how they feel and why they do what they do." This reflection highlights the transformative potential of literature in fostering empathy and emotional intelligence.

7.5 The Impact of Sports and Art Classes on School Dropout Rates: Lessons from *Hard Times*

In Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, the utilitarian education system, typified by Thomas Gradgrind's rigid emphasis on "facts alone," suppresses creativity, imagination, and emotional expression. This oppressive approach leaves students like Louisa Gradgrind emotionally underdeveloped and disconnected from their humanity. This ultimately leads to dissatisfaction and disengagement. In contrast, characters like Sissy Jupe, who embody creativity and empathy, demonstrate resilience despite adversity. This opposition highlights the transformative potential of integrating creative and physical activities, such as sports and art, into education—a lesson that resonates deeply with efforts to address school dropout rates in modern contexts, including Iraq.

Sports and art programs can significantly help prevent school dropout by meeting students' psychological and social needs. Physically, sports provide an outlet for stress and energy, helping teenagers control emotions and acquire self-regulation skills a critical component of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Team sports, for instance, encourage cooperation, communication, and a feeling of community, all of which are in line with Maslow's need for love and belonging (Maslow, 1943). Group activities help students interact with their peers, which reduces the likelihood that they may feel alienated or disengaged from school. In a similar vein, individual athletics can boost self-worth and accomplishment that meet requirements for respect and encourage students to continue their education.

Gradgrind's utilitarian system noticeably lacks the creativity, self-expression, and emotional awareness that art classes foster. Students can explore their identities, handle difficult emotions, and get a deeper knowledge of others and themselves through writing, art, music, or theatre. This is in line with Goleman's idea of empathy since art helps pupils see and react to different points of view, which strengthens interpersonal bonds (Goleman, 1995). Moreover, art gives a place for students to experience achievement outside standard academic criteria, boosting confidence and drive. Creative accomplishments can be a potent source of purpose and affirmation for students who are having scholastic difficulties, which lowers the risk of failure or dropout.

The dehumanizing impacts portrayed in *Hard Times* are mirrored in the lack of such enriching activities in schools. The repercussions of ignoring creativity and physical expression in the classroom are highlighted by Louisa's emotional disengagement and eventual breakdown. On the other hand, Sissy Jupe's obstinacy shows how experience to creative and compassionate methods can enable people to overcome obstacles. Sports and art could revolutionize education in Iraq, where strict curricula frequently place more emphasis on memorization than on general growth. In addition to increasing student engagement, these activities meet unmet psychological needs and foster supportive and valued learning environments.

8. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the complex interconnectedness of emotional disengagement, frustrated psychological demands, and strict educational procedures as major causes of school dropout in Iraq. The study illustrated how repressive educational institutions can hinder creativity, repress emotions, and alienate pupils by examining Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and collecting qualitative information from parents, teachers, and students in the province of Al-Najaf. The difficulties Iraqi students experience today are mirrored in the utilitarian worldview shown in *Hard Times*, where characters such as Louisa Gradgrind and Bitzer serve as examples of the negative effects of emotional suppression. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which highlights the significance of attending to physiological, safety, and belongingness needs as a basis for academic engagement, is consistent with these findings. Likewise, Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence highlights the importance of social awareness, empathy, and self-awareness.

A thorough hold of the social and psychological elements influencing school dropout is made possible by the combination of different theoretical frameworks. For example, a lack of emotional intelligence makes interpersonal problems and disengagement worse, while unmet basic needs like food and safety create barriers to learning. Because it encourages empathy, critical thinking, and emotional awareness, literature, especially works like *Hard Times*, emerges as a strong instrument for addressing these problems. Study participants were excited about adding literature and artistic endeavors to the curriculum, pointing out how they could change the learning process and make it more interesting and encouraging.

To effectively manage school dropout, educators and policymakers must use a multidimensional approach that promotes emotional intelligence while giving students' basic needs top priority. This involves offering complimentary meals, making sure that classrooms are secure, and putting in place Professional development that provides educators and learners with knowledge and skills on intelligence. Furthermore, joining literature and artistic endeavors can encourage students to develop an emotional connection to their education,

which lessens feelings of indifference and alienation. In the end, this study shows that addressing school dropout necessitates both institutional changes and a stronger dedication to fostering kids' emotional development and psychological health. By doing this, educational institutions can establish welcoming, encouraging environments that enable students to overcome obstacles and realize their greatest potential.

9. Integration of Findings and Implications for Practice

The integration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory highlights the interconnectedness of material and psychological factors in addressing school dropout. Together, these frameworks emphasize the importance of meeting students' foundational needs while also fostering emotional competence. For example, providing free meals (a physiological need) alongside counseling services (an emotional need) ensures comprehensive support. Similarly, promoting emotional intelligence through training and activities complements efforts to address unmet needs, creating a holistic approach to student well-being.

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for decision-makers and educators in both the Ministries of Education and Higher Education:

- 1-Address Basic needs: Schools should arrange originalities that ensure students' physiological and safety needs are met, such as providing free meals, safe transportation, and secure learning environments.
- 2-Foster belongingness: Efforts should be made to create comprehensive and supportive school cultures, including smaller class sizes, mentorship programs, and additional activities that promote social and physical interaction.
- 3-Promote emotional intelligence: Professional development for teachers and students should focus on developing emotional skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution.
- 4-Integrate literature and creativity: Curricula should include literature and creative activities that encourage critical thinking, emotional expression, and cultural awareness.
- 5- Sports and art classes are also of great significance for alleviating the psychological strain caused by other academic subjects.

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