



Revisiting Child Labour and Socialisation in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*

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Abstract

Despite international initiatives to eradicate child labour in modern societies, this evil continues to be a social problem for many people around the world, particularly in Africa and in the United Kingdom. The objective of this study is to examine child labour from Dickens's point of view throughout *Oliver Twist*, and point out its relationship with children's socialisation in the Victorian Era, and ways in which Victorian experience can help enrich in today's life with reference child labour issues. The analysis draws on New-historicism to contextualise the novel within socio-economic realities of Victorian England. Also, through the Psychoanalysis criticism, the study explores the psychological impacts of child labour on characters, their trauma, training identity, and coping mechanisms leading to socialisation. Some findings reveal that C. Dickens's *Oliver Twist* serves as both a literary protest against Victorian child labour, and a subtle exploration of how adversity paves the way to childhood socialisation.

Keywords: child labour, socialisation, Victorian society, poverty, drawback.

Une exploration du travail et de la socialisation des enfants dans *Oliver Twist* de Charles Dickens

Résumé

Malgré les initiatives internationales visant à éradiquer le phénomène du travail des enfants dans les sociétés modernes, ce fléau continue de constituer un problème social pour de nombreuses populations à travers le monde en général, et celles de l'Afrique et de la Grande Bretagne en particulier.

L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner la problématique du travail des enfants à travers le roman *Oliver Twist*, en vue d'appréhender les raisons qui fondent la persistance de cette pratique, et d'envisager des solutions. L'analyse s'appuie sur le nouvel historicisme pour contextualiser le roman dans les réalités socio-économiques de l'Angleterre victorienne. Également, à travers la critique psychanalytique, l'étude vise à examiner l'impact psychologique du travail des enfants sur les personnages, leur traumatisme, la formation de leur identité et les mécanismes d'adaptation conduisant à la socialisation. Les résultats attendus révèlent que le roman de C. Dickens sert à la fois de protestation littéraire contre le travail des enfants à l'époque victorienne et d'exploration subtile de la manière dont l'adversité ouvre la voie à la socialisation.

Mots clés : travail des enfants, socialisation, société Victorienne, pauvreté, inconvénient.

Introduction

Governments, almost in many countries, have taken measures including international laws, conventions on children's rights, and other great decisions to end child labour. However, this evil remains a global social problem. Its persistence around the world, particularly in developing regions, raises questions about the social, cultural and economic factors that perpetuate it. Like many works of literature, Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is set in a real social context, illustrating and criticising social reality. By depicting the exploitation of children in Victorian social conditions. This research applies contemporary theorising to a historical text, with the aim of better understanding child labour, both as a harmful practice and in terms of the role it plays in children's socialisation, as well as identity over time. To succeed, I have organised the discussion around the introduction to the study, the Historical Context of the novel, and Child labour, Dicken's perception of Child labour in the novel, Children's Socialisation from Victorian Society to contemporary contexts, and Practical Strategies to reduce child labour for Sustainable Development of nations.

1. Introduction to the Study and Theoretical Framework

1.1. Problem Statement

Today, child labour persists and continues to be a social problem for many people around the world. Much of the political discourse on child labour deals primarily with socio-economic issues, while its wider ramifications on children's socialisation, the process by which individuals internalise the norms, values and roles of their society, are explored here in personal, literary and educational contexts. In Dickens's depiction, children like Oliver Twist and the members of Fagin's gang all find themselves in environments where the available social learning is about survival, deceit and crime. *Oliver Twist* thus raises many crucial questions, not least of which is how society creates or regulates childhood through work, particularly when the protection provided by institutions such as the home, the church and the justice system, which are supposed to protect children, are at the root of their exploitation.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

My study aims to critically evaluate how child labour acts as a strategy for the socialisation of children in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. It considers the novel's structure, character representation and themes in order to examine how children are morally and socially undermined by experiences of labour exploitation within the context of Dickens's Victorian ideology. Focusing on Dickens's criticism of childhood, I will show how child labour can be read in terms of socialisation. I hope to illustrate how Dickens's fictional account has the potential to demonstrate that many children in today's world are socialised for work rather than education. By linking the nineteenth-century workhouse to similar contemporary examples of child exploitation, I hope to show the cyclical relationship between poverty, work and early moral conditioning at its very foundation. Finally, the study aims to assess the role of child labour in the process of socialisation for child characters in *Oliver Twist*.

1.3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1.3.1. The New-Historicism Approach

Developed notably by Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism advocates that literature is deeply embedded in the cultural and ideological contexts of its time. Texts are seen not merely as imaginative creations, but as “cultural artefacts” that reflect and are structured by their historical environments. Greenblatt has pointed out that a document of culture has also been one of barbarism (S. Greenblatt, 1990). This indicates how literature often unconsciously preserves the ideological structures and social injustices of its time. Besides, (L. Montrose 1989, p. 20) asserts that New Historicism involves “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” he suggests that literature and history are interwoven narratives that inform and destroy each other.

1.3.2. The Psychoanalytic Criticism

Rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud and extended by theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Psychoanalytic Criticism examines the unconscious motivations and inner conflicts of both characters and authors. Freud's theory lays emphasis on how early childhood experiences contribute to adult psychosexual life. A notion which is later turned into the proverb: “The child is the father of the man,” pointing out the lasting influence of childhood trauma and repression. In *Oliver Twist*, the traumas experienced by children are abandonment, hunger, or violence interpreted in terms of psychic wounds and repressed desire. Oliver's consistent innocence in the face of cruelty reflects a psychological defence mechanism, a projection of Dickens's own idealised self-image and a symbolic retrieval of his own disrupted childhood. In addition, to paraphrase S. Zizek in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. MIT, the emphasis is laid on the fact that “the trauma is not the reality itself, but the way it disrupts the symbolic order. «Thus, this helps us analyse how Oliver's suffering exposes the cracks in the Victorian symbolic system: the family, the church, the legal system, and charity. While New Historicism

provides the ideological and institutional backdrop of Victorian society, Psychoanalytic criticism offers insight into the internal mechanisms of trauma, repression, and identity. These theories perfectly capture the historical and exploitative conditions children are exposed to through the eyes of C. Dickens and will help in the interpretative process of the narrative under study.

1.4. Literature Review

Many previous works focused mainly on the negative impact child labour has on society and on sustainable development, but they fail to analyse it deeply and point out the role child labour can play in children's socialisation and personal development. Considering A. Dutta's work on children in Dickens's novels, I realise that the researcher has pointed out the negative aspects of child labour. She sees it as a social disorder and a social curse which leads to degradation and dignity of humanity (A. Dutta, 2014). Examining the phenomenon profoundly at all levels, I think that the study has underestimated the role child labour plays in relation to poverty and the economic development of nations. A. Dutta explains that the Industrial Revolution created the issue of child labour (A. Dutta, 2014). This means that children did not indulge in child labour for pleasure or jokingly. They contributed to the economic development of the country when there was a lack of manpower or workforce to deal with the Industrial Revolution. Thus, for children themselves and their parents' survival, they were compelled to become labourers. I. Yekini 2011, p. 38). reinforces the idea in these terms: "Economic conditions forced poor children into working, sometimes as hard and long as their parents. As it was essential to the economy, Parliament supported child labour, saying that a child was more useful to his family working." Moreover, it reveals that even the United Kingdom's Parliament had supported child labour on the grounds that it is useful to children's parents.

As for S. Saha, child labour could deserve being legalised. Most studies condemn it in various ways and regard it as a social evil to be combated. As mentioned above, I think it is in the same context that S. Saha evokes

its legalisation. This means it plays an important role in societies, and all strict measures taken to combat it have failed. As a result, it continues to prevail in all countries. In his work, he confirms that the mission to eradicate child labour is a failure (S. Saha, 2012). In fact, the work shows that the experience of child labour in India differs from that of other places, meaning they must find appropriate policies to control it. I do not share the idea of legalising it but I suggest they should revisit its regulations because there is a need for change in existing legislation and also in social structure. Similarly, I believe the eradication may seem a luxury when poverty is deeply rooted. Therefore, I entirely back up S. Saha (2012) who argues that it is better to legalise child labour in India with changes in laws like mandatory education for child labourers by the employer, which may be a doable and sustainable solution for the survival of the family and proper development of the child. This idea is reinforced by observations made by four specialists of child labour in their book entitled *Rights and Wrongs of Children's Work*. In the preface, M. Bourdillon et al. (2010) observe that two mainstream opinions exist about the issue of child labour are firstly a mainstream view that regards child labour as harmful, one that entraps populations, regions, and nations in cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Within this frame, its abolition is sought, and the sooner the better. The second is referred to as a minority view. It is the one that holds there are many things worse than premature labour that can happen to children and that as long as children's economic contributions remain essential for family and child survival, rather than seeking to abolish child labour, they maintain that it would be better to support it insofar as it enables them to find decent work (M. Bourdillon et al., 2010).

From this quotation, I neither advocate for abolition nor legalisation, but I believe that child labour, despite its drawbacks, plays a certain role in society which must focus our attention. Thus, the book showcases excellent use of case-study illustrations highlighting children's opinions and perceptions about their work and the policies or interventions impacting it. In fact, these illustrations confirm the crucial role child labour plays in poor families and society. For instance, one case displays: 'When I was fired, I cried for two weeks.' This is how Amal, a girl in Meknes,

describes her experience of finding a job at the age of thirteen in the Sicome clothing factory and losing it the following year" (Rights and Wrongs of Children's Works, p. 1).

Thus, Michael et al. both relieve and confuse child labour abolitionists by reporting that a thirteen-year-old girl from Senegal said in a short speech that silenced the hall:

Do you understand how you insult me when you talk of 'combating' and 'abolishing' the work I do? I have worked as a domestic servant since I was eight. Because I do this work, I have been able to go to school (which my parents in the village could not afford); I help my parents with the money I earn. I am very proud of the work I do! I joined the movement of working children, and I know what the Convention says about children's rights: it says you should listen to me (ibid., pp. 8-9).

Thus, we should change our mindsets about this social evil in order to progress.

2. Historical Context of the Novel, and Child Labour

2.1. Historical Context of the Selected Novel

The Victorian period witnessed historical events which pushed Dickens to write *Oliver Twist*, as a response to protest against what was going on. The period was marked by the war between England and France, when the British government had imposed heavy taxes to pay for the war. The payment of these taxes resulted in a heavy burden on the poor. As price rose, food became scarce and inflation rose. Also, French and European markets were closed for English goods, leading to unemployment among workers. As a result, workers became jobless, because of the increasing use of machinery in manufacturing instead of manpower.

Historically, in such a terrible torpor, each parish became responsible for taking care of its poor, by handling out money and food. During this time,

children often worked long hours every day of the week in dangerous factories. Yet, in the opening chapters of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, the reader is introduced to the Poor Law and the administration of the workhouse, which were initiated three years before Dickens wrote the novel. The aim of this law was to check the alarming growth in pauperism, and the writer precises in these terms:

Alarmed by the economic and moral waste of the old system, the sponsors of the New Poor Law hope to kill pauperism. The dole to supplement low wages was abolished, the unemployed labourer was no longer allowed to exist with his family on an allowance from the parish, for he was forced into the workhouse and separated from his wife and children who were sent to other wards of the same grim institution (*'Poor Law'* Encyclopaedia Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica).

This quotation indicates clearly the objective of the Poor Law of 1834. The point is that, far from relieving the poor, the New Poor Law has worsened their living conditions, and enabled institutions like workhouses to exist. Indeed, the Poor Law (Amendment) Act of 1834, also known as the New Poor Law has established the workhouse system where, instead of providing a refuge for the elderly, sick and poor, and far from providing food or clothing in exchange for work in times of high punishment, those workhouses have become a sort of prison. Thus, in writing *Oliver Twist*, Dickens aims at creating a platform to express his concern about the impact of poverty and the flaws of the workhouses system. Indeed, in the novel, the workhouse has been his concern and he has pointed out the treatment of the poor and the cruelty of the house. Oliver bowed low by the direction, and was hurried away by the large ward; where on the rough, hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a noble illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep (C. Dickens, *The Adventures of Oliver Twist with Introduction and Notes*, p. 12).

2.2. Historical Context of the Victorian Child Labour

According to Britannica encyclopaedia, child labour is perceived as “the exploitation of children through any form of work that interferes with their

ability to attend regular school, or is mentally, physically, socially and morally harmful.” So, by definition, child labour is harmful to innocent destitutes. Also, in the same vein, Yekini quote Diane Yancey in these terms: “Child labour in workshops and industries in Victorian England was a social crucial concern, children, were described as chained belted, harnessed like dogs.... black, saturated with wet, and more than half - naked, crawling upon their hands and knees, and dragging the heavy loads behind them” (I. Yekini, 2011, p. 32). This shows the harsh treatment children undergo when they choose to work as labourers so as to grant their assistance to their family facing miserable problems. This includes activities such as helping their parents at home or around home, assisting in a family business, or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays. These kinds of activities contribute to children's development and to the welfare of their families. The question to put is how did this phenomenon evolve during the Victorian period? What is the historical background that sustained it?

In the context of the Victorian period, child labour was perceived as a product of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Consequently, child labourers were subject to exploitation, physical injuries, and even death. Traditionally, child labour, in cottage industry, children had always washed and carded raw-wood so that their mother could spin it on a spinning wheel, which was then woven into fabric by the father using a handloom. Sometimes, craftworkers took an apprentice or two among children, gave them a board, lodging and taught them a particular trade or craft, but in return, the children, not only worked for free, but were also expected to pay a large fee upfront, before starting a contract which could last a certain number of years. As a vivid illustration, let us mention a testimony from James Pearce in 1848 in these terms:

I am twelve years of age. I went down to the pits about seven years and a half to open doors. I had a candle and a fire beside me to show me light.....I was twelve hours a day, and got 6d a day. I attended and got the money, when I was paid, I took it home to my mother. I was a year and a half at this work. I once felt asleep and was well threshed by a driver (H. William, 1842, p. 244).

This shows how the traditional child labour took place in the nineteenth century England. In fact, poverty in which families live forces them to oblige their children to become labourers. This issue, depicted by Dickens during the Victorian period continues to impact negatively our societies by enhancing children schooling.

2.3. Dickens's Perception of Child Labour in *Oliver Twist*

Dickens begins his novel in the workhouse, thus portraying child labour as a consequence of systemic cruelty and bureaucratic inhumanity. The infamous gruel scene displays the essence of deprivation and repression. In the novel we read: "Please Sir, I want some more" (C. Dickens, 2003). This simple yet powerful plea dramatises the dehumanising effects of Poor Relief institutions worsen even the most basic needs of children. The official reaction to Oliver's request reveals how such institutions regard poor children with fear and disdain. "That boy will be hung.... I know that boy will be hung I know" (C. Dickens, 2003, p. 23). This line illustrates the prejudice and fatalism directed at the impoverished youth, who were often judged as criminal by nature rather than as victims of circumstance. Dickens also depicts child labour through instances of criminal socialisation, especially in Fagin's gangs of pickpocket. Rather than being protected or educated, boys like the Artful Dodger are trained in theft as a means of survival.

This episode marks Oliver's moral and emotional shock as he is introduced to a world where children are exploited by adult criminals. Dickens portrays the system as another form of labour: unpaid, illegal, and destructive to the child's moral development. Fagin's method is disturbingly methodical in the sense that: "He was a clever, and had constructed a system of training the boys for his own purposes..." (C. Dickens, 2003, p. 13).

3. Children's Socialisation from Victorian Society to Contemporary contexts

The Victorian family trained children in obedience through strict discipline. Middle and upper-class households reflect societal hierarchies, with fathers as authority figures, and mothers as moral guardians. As Sarah Josepha Hale asserted in 1846: "A woman may sit in her own quiet room, and, by her love, that brightens the homes of earth, and her faith, she may send out influences that will not only make the world better and happier, but also help nit to rise upward in its onward progress." These lines idealise "Angel in the House" (from Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem) framed motherhood as a sacred duty to instil piety and self-sacrifice. However, Lower-class families relied on children's wages for their survival, sustaining the domestic ideas.

3.1. Child Labour as a Path to Socialisation in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*

Dickens presents the grim realities of child labour in his *Oliver Twist*. Although, Dickens and other Victorian novelists condemn Child Labour, especially its cruelty and injustice, they also illustrate how experiences of child labour serve ironically as a pathway to socialisation, showing children's identity, awareness, resilience, and moral consciousness. In fact, Dickens portrays Oliver's experiences through various oppressive institutions and exploitative environments to reveal how child labour helps integrate children into society, despite its destructive and exploitative ways.

3.2. Socialisation in the Workhouse with Mr. Sowerberry and in Fagin's Den

Dickens starts Oliver's socialisation in the Parish workhouse, a place designed not to nurture, but to discipline and dehumanise. He proves it in these words: "The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men ... and they discovered what it was that poor wanted" (C. Dickens, 2003, p. 8). This sarcastic tone denounces how children like Oliver Twist are introduced to authority and class structures early in life.

He is “socialised” not with care, but with cruel institutional indifference, teaching him his position in the social hierarchy. Oliver’s asking for some more, shows a moment of moral awakening and personal assertion, and the punishment it attracts, illustrates how poverty and obedience embody social norms in working-class association. Thus, through sarcasm Dickens shows how labour is used to condition children for their social role, even in emotionally disturbing jobs. Indeed, Oliver learns through experiences in which his life is valued only in economic terms.

When Oliver escapes, he is taken in by Fagin, who trains children to steal, and this is another form of child labour under the veil of survival. In Dickens’s terms, ‘He (Fagin) is a clever man, and he had trained his boys well...’ C. Dickens, 2003, p. 54). His twisted apprenticeship illustrates how society fails to offer ethical pathways for the poor. Oliver’s exposure to Fagin’s gang marks his social initiation into the underworld which normalises theft as a mode of economic participation.

3.3. Dickens’s Own Experience of Child Labour and Socialisation

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) did not just write about Child labour, but he himself lived it. In fact, at the age of twelve (12), Dickens was forced to work in blacking (shoes-polish) factory when his father was sent to debtors’ prison. This traumatic episode had a profound impact on his world’s view, influencing his literary mission to expose the harsh realities of child exploitation and advocate for social reform. Dickens’s own socialisation through hardship, especially during his formative years, became a recurring theme in his novels, where children are thrust into adult worlds of labour, injustice, and moral choices. In *Oliver Twist*, these themes find a vivid, semi-autobiographical expression. The writer’s own experience in the child exploitation or labour serves as a testimony and accurately captures his readership’s feelings due to such experience as a victim of child exploitation at the time.

In 1812, young Charles was removed from school and put to work at the Blacking Factory in London. In a letter to Forster, his biographer, he

confesses: “It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age” (C. Dickens, 2003, p. 253). Through these lines Dickens’s sense of abandonment and invisibility becomes central to his portrayal of children in his fiction. He was socialised not through education and affection, but through neglect, poverty, and humiliation. In Forster’s biography, he expresses in these terms: “I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously or otherwise, the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life” (C. Dickens, 2004, p. 43). In blacking factory, his job was to paste labels on pots of blacking, and he qualifies this job as monotonous soul-destroying task. He felt class shame, especially when peers saw him working. Indeed, Dickens’s own experience of child labour was a crucial stage of socialisation, one of that reminds him the realities of class, injustice, and institutional failure. Through *Oliver Twist*, he transforms this trauma into literature, not simply to tell a story, but to criticise Victorian society and demand reforms. His key message is that childhood should be protected, not commodified, and that the lesson children learn through exploitation often leave lifelong scars.

3.4. Contemporary Child Labour and Socialisation

Today, child labour is not merely an economic or legal issue. It is also a social phenomenon that deeply affects a child’s identity, worldview, and future. In many regions of the world especially in developing countries, children work in hazardous and exploitative environments, not by choice, but by necessity. Despite growing efforts to eradicate the phenomenon, it remains linked to the way children are socialised into adult role, societal norms, and survival strategies. While often seen the violation of human rights, child labour functions paradoxically as an informal system of socialisation which conditions children to adapt to societal expectations under the pressure of hardship. Understanding this process helps us see child labour as both a symptom of structural inequality and a mechanism of a social integration, although it is a damaging one. In fact, at workplace, children informally learn how to obey authority, how to survive in difficult environments, and how to manage adult responsibilities. Contrary to

schooling, this form of learning often enhances hierarchy, submission, and silence. As for their gender roles, boys are socialised into physically demanding jobs like mining, street vending, whereas girls are pushed into domestic work, caretaking, or early marriage. All this perpetuates traditional gender norms, and denies children the chance to question and escape these roles.

Today's child labourers experience similar trajectories: they work instead of attending schools; they are vulnerable to exploitation, and are emotionally detached. Like the character *Oliver Twist*, many children today end up mistrusting authority; they instead rely on their instinct and develop corrupt systems from a young age. To paraphrase Sherry Turkle, in our time, children are still socialised more by their screens than their schools. This means that today, thanks to new technologies, children are more rapidly socialised than they did in the past. Thus, child labour in today's world remains a double-edged force of socialisation. While it provides children with coping skills and early independence, it also robs them of their rights, dreams, and dignity. Indeed, Sherry Turkle extensively documented that "children and adolescents now experience a significant portion of their social development through digital screens, often more than through the organic interactions of schools and family life" (S. Turkle, 2015, p. 30). Like Dickens's portrayal in *Oliver Twist*, reveals a world where survival replaces learning and adaptation replaces empowerment. To protect children, societies must replace harmful forms of socialisation with inclusive, nurturing, and rights-based alternatives.

3.5. Positive Impact of Child Labour on children's Future Lives and Career

From the perspective of International Labour Organisation, child labour is globally a concept that deprives children of their childhood, potential, dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. In this connection, child labour should be eradicated, and measures and legislative body are still condemning it. Nevertheless, within certain cultural, social, and historical contexts, a nuanced view reveals that, child

labour has, in some few contexts contributed to the development of life skills, resilience, and self-determination in children.

3.6. Transformative Power in Child Labour into Self-Determination and Success

Some figures illustrate how early adversity, especially in the form of child labour, became a foundation for personal growth and self-determination. Generally perceived as exploitation, hardship treatment with harmful drawbacks, child labour has in some cases become a crucible for resilience, shaping individuals who later emerged as influential leaders, thinkers, and innovators. As mentioned above, Charles Dickens is one of the vivid examples worth pointing out. Besides, Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) is another illustration. He began his working life at the age of thirteen as a bobbin boy in a Pittsburgh cotton factory, earning \$1.20 per week. His perseverance and passion for self-education led him from child labourer to steel magnate and philanthropist. He believed strongly in self-improvement, stating: "The man who acquires the ability to take full possession of his mind may take possession of anything else to which he is justly entitled" (C, Andrew.1885. p. 19). In other words, his philanthropic legacy, including the establishment of libraries and universities, was grounded in his early experiences of poverty.

Also, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) can be one who illustrated himself by transforming child labour into self-determination and success. Raised in poverty, he engaged in arduous physical labour from a young age, including rail splitting and farming. Like Dickens, his early struggle taught him the value of perseverance and empathy. In terms of largely self-educated, we can inspire from this: "The best way to predict your future is to create it" (Attributed to Peter Drucker). Thus, while child labour is undeniably a form of exploitation that must be eradicated, the lives of Charles Dickens, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, even of Ben Carson, reveal how some individuals transformed early hardship into opportunity. Their stories are not to encourage child labour, but rather affirmations of human resilience and the life-altering power of self-determination, education, and opportunity. These figures serve as both

warnings about the dangers of systemic neglect and beacons of what is possible when adversity is met with courage and vision.

3.7. Strategies to Reduce Child Labour for the Sustainable Development of Nations

Child labour remains a significant hindrance to achieving sustainable development in many nations. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Child labour is defined as “work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and which is harmful to physical and mental development” (International Labour Organisation, No. 138 and No. 182). The persistence of child labour is rooted in poverty, weak governance, lack of quality education, harmful social norms, and economic dependence on cheap labour, especially in informal and agricultural sectors. Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi reminds us that: “Child labour perpetuates poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. If children are forced to work today, how will they become educated and skilled tomorrow?” (Knowinsiders.com)

One of the most effective deterrents to child labour is a good quality of education. Children must be offered an attractive alternative to labour through accessible, relevant, and free schooling. The ILO notes that: “Education is a key element in the prevention of child labour” (International Labour Office: A Textbook for University Students International Labour Office, 2013). Countries that provide midday meals, school uniforms, and safe transport for children could see enrolment increase and child labour decrease. Besides, the second chance education programs or “Bridge Schools” help reintegrate former child labourers into mainstreams education. In Sub-Saharan African, programs in Kenya and Ghana have shown that flexible learning schedules also are good for the needs of older children and youth who must balance education with family responsibilities. Also, law protecting children must not only exist, but be effectively enforced. Ratifying and implementing International Labour Organisation Conventions and number 138 (Minimum Age) and number 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour), is an important step. Also, labour inspection systems must be improved to identify violations, prosecute

offenders, and offer protection for children in sectors like agriculture and mining for instance. In sectors where there is lack of monitoring mechanisms, governments must encourage local councils, Non-Governmental Organisations, and Child protection units to create monitoring networks. The transition from school to work must be supported through technical education, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship programs. These strategies, not only reduce child labour, but they build local economies from the ground up.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the representation of child labour and socialisation in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. It revealed the deep relationship between the economic exploitation, social neglect, and the moral development of children in Victorian England. Oliver's experiences, from the dehumanising workhouse to the criminal underworld and eventually to a space of care with Mr. Brownlow, illustrate the consequences of institutional failure and the vulnerability of impoverished children to manipulation and abuse. Through his own experiences of child labour, Dickens has made use of the character of Oliver Twist's innocence perspectives to criticise the existing institutions by exposing the hypocrisy and cruelty of systems that were meant to protect children. This analysis has also revealed that child labour, as depicted in *Oliver Twist*, functions as both a site of oppression and an arena of moral awakening. In our contemporary context, where child exploitation persists in many forms, Dickens's work continues to serve as a compelling reminder of society's responsibility to protect and nurture its children.

Despite the fact that Dickens and other Victorian novelists condemn Child Labour, especially its cruelty and injustice, they also made it possible for their readership to see ways in which experiences of child labour have served as a pathway to socialisation, showing children's identity, awareness, resilience, and moral consciousness. It has been the concern of this study to reveal how child labour helps integrate children into society.

Examining child labourers' declarations and the prominent role child labour plays in poor families, including its contribution to socialisation, the study has similarly shown that it would be difficult to abolish the phenomenon, in the context through which other nations are advocating its legalisation. However, it remains contemporary citizen's responsibility to see to it that the phenomenon decreases on regular basis.

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