

## Emotional Disclosure among Secondary School Students

Iman Mutashar Khalaf Muhammad

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### Abstract

*The present study aims to identify the level of emotional disclosure among secondary school students and to examine the statistical significance of differences according to the gender variable (males – females). The study was limited to fifth-grade scientific secondary school students in schools affiliated with the General Directorate of Education in Wasit Governorate for the academic year 2025–2026. The research sample consisted of (100) male and female students. The Emotional Disclosure Scale developed by Al-Zuhairi (2025), in its initial form consisting of (28) items, was adopted. After verifying the psychometric properties and conducting item analysis, (4) items were excluded, resulting in a final version of (24) items. Face validity and reliability were established using Cronbach's Alpha method, yielding a reliability coefficient of (0.86). The results indicated that secondary school students demonstrate a good level of emotional disclosure. The findings also revealed no statistically significant differences according to the gender variable (males – females). Based on these findings, the researcher formulated a set of conclusions, recommendations, and proposals.*

### Introduction

The secondary school stage is one of the most sensitive stages that students go through, as they face psychological and social changes along with increasing academic pressures. Students respond to these pressures differently: some experience anxiety or withdrawal, while others attempt to cope in various ways. A segment of students, however, tends to suppress their feelings and refrain from expressing them, which limits their capacity for positive interaction with others. Emotional disclosure is a fundamental means of expressing feelings and building healthy relationships within the school environment, operating through a mutual communication process between the student and others whether peers or teachers. The weakness or absence of this process may lead to psychological and social difficulties that hinder students' adjustment within the school setting.

A review of the literature on emotional disclosure reveals that the phenomenon of emotional suppression and non-disclosure has been growing within the school environment, constituting an educational and social problem due to its negative effects on students' personality development and behavioral patterns. This problem intensifies among secondary school students because of the rapid developmental changes they undergo encompassing physical, psychological, and emotional dimensions making them more vulnerable to various psychological disturbances, most notably a diminished ability to perceive and appropriately express emotions. This negatively affects their level of social interaction and psychological balance, necessitating early educational intervention to address this phenomenon (Al-Duri, 2021: 252). Accordingly, the research problem is defined as identifying the level of emotional disclosure among secondary school students.

### Significance of the study

Emotional disclosure is considered one of the important cornerstones of positive psychology, as it enables the individual to express suppressed feelings and emotions in a healthy way, thereby contributing to the enhancement of psychological balance and stability. It also helps develop the individual's self-awareness and increases the level of insight into one's personality, as well as contributing to the formation of a positive self-concept. Additionally, emotional disclosure forms a foundation for establishing human relationships built on intimacy, acceptance, and empathy, which supports psychological adjustment and contributes to improving quality of life (Black & Ravichander, 2018: 253–263).

The significance of the present research is manifested in shedding light on the role of emotional disclosure and its relationship to students' possession of social communication skills. Emotional disclosure is considered one of the factors influencing various aspects of a student's life; it contributes to developing personal relationships with others, whether within the family, school, university, or other social environments. Emotional disclosure is also an essential element in the process of social interaction, as open expression of feelings and emotions is an effective means of reducing the psychological distance between individuals, thereby enhancing the chances of building relationships based on intimacy and closeness. Therefore, emotional disclosure is an important prerequisite for developing and deepening intimate relationships among students (Waring & Chelune, 1983: 184).

### **Objectives of the study**

The present research aims to identify:

1. The level of emotional disclosure among secondary school students.
2. The statistically significant differences in emotional disclosure among secondary school students according to the gender variable (males – females).

### **Research limitation**

The present research is limited to fifth-grade preparatory (scientific branch) students in both genders (males – females) in the Wasit Governorate Education Directorate for the academic year (2025–2026).

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Emotional Disclosure**

Defined by:

1. Pennebaker (1997): "It is the conscious disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings to others honestly, whether negative or positive, which enhances effective communication between individuals and alleviates mental and psychological burdens" (Pennebaker, 1997: 169).
2. Penne (2010): It is the method used in behavioral modification intervention, relying on the individual's expression of their deep feelings and emotions related to painful experiences or events, whether verbally or in writing. The idea stems from the premise that expressing such experiences helps alleviate the weight of negative thoughts stored in memory, which may be periodically activated and bring associated negative feelings (Penne, 2010: 102).

Theoretical Definition: Emotional disclosure refers to the process by which the individual releases suppressed internal feelings, expresses them, and discusses them whether positive or negative as this emotional venting contributes to improving the individual's psychological state and enhancing a sense of comfort and well-being

Operational Definition: It is the score obtained by the student upon answering the Emotional Disclosure Scale used in the present research

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies**

### **Part One: Theoretical Framework**

#### **The Concept of Emotional Disclosure**

Educators, psychologists, and sociologists have paid attention to the psychological, social, and physical aspects of the adolescent in an attempt to understand this stage and address all aspects of growth during it. As MasiraTaher et al. note, teachers, counselors, and parents face a large number of problems specific to this age group (MasiraTaher et al., 1993: 44). The concept of emotional disclosure is among those that have not reached a unified consensus among researchers in terms of naming and definition. Some refer to it as 'affective disclosure,' while others prefer terms such as 'emotional revelation' or 'unveiling of affect.' In Arabic, the term means to reveal something and remove what conceals it. As a scientific term, Jourard defined emotional disclosure as the process through which the individual reveals very personal information to others, making them better known and understood (Derlega& Berg, 1987: 57)

Al-Jubouri (2024) views emotional disclosure as any behavior through which you share private information with others; it is difficult to hide yourself from others. Every time you talk with others, you disclose your interests, desires, and opinions (Al-Jubouri, 2024: 18).

Emotional disclosure is considered one of the important methods that help students reduce the intensity of their internal conflicts and alleviate feelings of loneliness and sadness. It is a way of expressing feelings by sharing the difficulties or pressures a student experiences, helping them feel psychological comfort. Disclosure also allows the individual to communicate their feelings to others more clearly, making them better understood. On the other hand, sharing feelings and personal information even simple ones contributes to strengthening social relationships among students, encouraging others to also express what is within them, leading to a positive exchange of feelings. Emotional disclosure also helps the student express their needs, values, and opinions, and to define personal boundaries in dealing with others, ensuring those boundaries are respected and enhancing social relationships (Al-Khatib, 2022: 33).

#### **Functions of Emotional Disclosure**

Derlega and Grezlak identified five basic functions of self-disclosure:

1. Expression: helps the individual relieve themselves by talking about their difficulties and stressful circumstances.
2. Clarification: allows the individual to present a clear image of themselves, making them better understood by others.
3. Social Validation: occurs when the individual receives support from others for their expressed opinions and attitudes; one's disclosure encourages others to disclose in return, leading to an exchange of feelings and strengthening of relationships.
4. Social Control: helps the individual express their needs, values, and beliefs, as well as define personal limits that others should respect.

5. Development of Social Relationships: mutual disclosure between individuals contributes to building positive relationships based on understanding and trust (Abu Saria, 1993: 47).

#### **Factors Affecting Emotional Disclosure**

Emotional disclosure among individuals, especially students, is influenced by a range of interrelated factors that determine its level and pattern. Cultural background, students' nature and personality types, individual skills, and gender all play a fundamental role in shaping their disclosure behavior (Derlega et al., 2013: 84). Emotional disclosure also changes according to the development of social relationships, being influenced by the degree of cultural similarity between individuals, the nature of personal relationships, the level of mutual trust, the degree of emotional closeness, and reciprocity expectations (Antaki et al., 2005: 102).

Al-Jubouri (2024) notes that among the most prominent determinants influencing students' emotional disclosure especially in friendships is the climate of friendship based on mutual interaction and the presence of frank, direct communication within the family. Clarity of family communication positively reflects on the nature of children's relationships with their peers. It also appears that the parents' educational level has a notable effect on enhancing or weakening adolescents' emotional openness (Al-Jubouri, 2024: 20–21).

The process of emotional disclosure is also influenced by situational factors such as audience size, topic nature, reciprocity, and gender. Regarding audience size, individuals tend to disclose more in small groups than large ones due to lower levels of anxiety. The nature of the topic determines the amount and type of feelings revealed. As for reciprocity, negative emotional disclosure does not typically match the level of positive disclosure that individuals tend toward. Regarding gender, studies indicate that females are more inclined to disclose their feelings compared to males (Devito, 1993: 229).

The Johari Window theory suggests that some individuals retain their feelings and thoughts within what is called the 'hidden area' aspects the individual knows about themselves but does not disclose to others, often due to fear of rejection or weak trust, which may affect the nature of social relationships and communication (Luft & Ingham, 1955: 232). In contrast, some individuals may over-disclose without considering others' opinions or receiving feedback, widening their 'blind spot,' and making them less capable of perceiving how others see them. The most balanced pattern involves combining emotional disclosure with mutual feedback and a clear exchange of information, contributing to expanding the 'open area' and enhancing opportunities for building healthy and developing personal relationships (Mahmoud, 2013: 257–270).

#### **Theories and Models Explaining Emotional Disclosure**

##### **Social Exchange Theory**

Social Exchange Theory is one of the important frameworks for understanding emotional disclosure behavior, based on the fundamental principle that 'disclosure generates disclosure,' known as the principle of reciprocity. This principle indicates that when a student reveals aspects of themselves to others, the other party feels a similar motivation to respond in kind by disclosing personal information. In this context, emotional disclosure is viewed as a voluntary process through which the student provides personal information including feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and experiences in pursuit of various benefits, such as strengthening social relationships, building mutual trust, and achieving a degree of psychological satisfaction. The theory also emphasizes the role of modeling in reinforcing disclosure behavior (Krasnova, 2010: 122).

##### **Pennebaker's Model**

Pennebaker (1997) developed the Emotional Disclosure Model, which indicates the importance of disclosing negative feelings and thoughts through writing or speaking. He demonstrated that emotional disclosure improves physical and mental health through experiments conducted on individuals suffering from health or psychological problems who showed positive changes in their psychological health when writing for 3–4 consecutive days for at least 15 minutes. The assumption was that individuals are able to liberate themselves by writing or talking about their deep thoughts and feelings regarding stressful or painful events in their lives (Pennebaker, 1997: 164).

##### **Pennebaker's model rests on two main principles:**

**First Principle – Emotional Inhibition (Suppression):** This principle is grounded in theoretical foundations developed by Pennebaker and Beall (1986), which emphasize that suppressing feelings and thoughts is associated with negative effects on individual health, as restraining emotional experiences requires a conscious and continuous physiological effort to control those feelings and avoid recalling them.

**Second Principle:** This focuses on the role of emotional disclosure in positively improving psychological and physical health (Gallant, 2001: 7). Disclosure is the antithesis of suppression, referring to the process of expressing verbally or in writing important emotional experiences. This expression contributes to reducing the physiological burden resulting from suppression and helps lower stress levels in the long term by enabling the individual to confront and understand the painful experience more deeply. Additionally, disclosure allows the individual to reorganize their thoughts about the traumatic event and transform it into a comprehensible linguistic form, enhancing the ability to process the experience (Pennebaker, 1995: 21–22).

Pennebaker (1997) notes that moderate disclosure is beneficial when done in a balanced way, but excessive disclosure may diminish its therapeutic value. Some individuals tend to repeatedly narrate their painful

experiences without deeply analyzing their feelings or cognitively reorganizing them, making the disclosure more akin to rumination (Pennebaker, 1997: 196).

The researcher considers that Pennebaker's model highlights the importance of balance between suppression and disclosure: suppression is a stressful factor that harms both psychological and physical health, while disclosure represents an effective means of alleviating this stress provided it is conducted consciously, based on understanding and analysis rather than a superficial repetition of emotional experiences.

### **Part Two: Previous Studies on Emotional Disclosure**

#### **Study: Abd Al-Qadir (2022)**

##### **Location: Egypt**

**Title:** The Effectiveness of a Counseling Program Based on Emotional Intelligence in Improving Emotional Disclosure and Reducing Alexithymia among Middle School Students.

**Population and Sample:** The total sample consisted of (400) male and female university-level students.

**Methodology:** The experimental method was adopted.

**Instrument:** The Emotional Disclosure Scale prepared by Hassan (2020) was used.

**Objective:** The study sought to examine the effectiveness of a counseling program based on emotional intelligence in improving emotional disclosure among middle school students, and to verify the continuity of that effectiveness three months after the program ended.

**Results:** The results showed that the program used in improving emotional disclosure had reasonable efficiency, and also showed a high effect on reducing alexithymia. The results also showed no significant continuation of the program's effectiveness in improving emotional disclosure.

#### **Study: Al-Jubouri (2024)**

**Title:** Emotional Disclosure and Its Relationship to Psychological Loneliness and Life Orientation among University Students.

**Location:** Iraq – University of Tikrit.

**Population and Sample:** The sample consisted of (400) male and female university students.

**Methodology:** The descriptive correlational method was adopted.

**Instrument:** The researcher constructed the Emotional Disclosure Scale.

**Objective:** The study aimed to identify emotional disclosure among university students and to examine the significance of differences in its level according to the gender variable (males – females).

**Statistical Methods:** Chi-square, independent samples t-test, Pearson correlation, Cronbach's Alpha, and one-sample t-test.

**Results:** The results showed that university students possess self-confidence and the ability for emotional disclosure, as this age group is more capable of expressing emotions and more skilled at disclosing their personal feelings. The findings also indicated no significant differences in the level of disclosure according to the gender variable (males – females), attributed to both male and female students having similar skill sets that enable them to employ their abilities and knowledge in emotional disclosure, as they live in the same conditions and face similar life situations.

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Procedures**

#### **First: Research Methodology**

The present research aims to identify the level of emotional disclosure among secondary school students and the significance of statistical differences for the gender variable (males – females). The appropriate methodology is the descriptive method for correlational studies.

#### **Second: Research Population**

The research population consists of secondary school students in public schools affiliated with the General Directorate of Education in Wasit Governorate / Kut Center, totaling (24) schools, including (15) secondary schools for girls, (7) secondary schools for boys, and (2) mixed secondary schools, for the academic year (2025–2026). The total population was (11,434) male and female students, distributed by gender into (704) male and (709) female students.

#### **Third: Research Sample**

The researcher adopted stratified random sampling with proportional distribution, given the heterogeneous nature of the research population in terms of gender (males – females). The applied sample consisted of (100) male and female students from secondary schools in Wasit Governorate Center, distributed by gender as follows: (55) male students and (45) female students from the scientific branch.

#### **Justifications for Selecting Fifth Scientific Grade Students**

1. The researcher encountered a number of field difficulties that prevented the application of research tools to middle school students, due to the schools' engagement with intensive curricula and students' preparation for ministerial examinations, particularly third-grade middle school students.

2. First and second-grade middle school students were excluded as they do not possess a sufficient level of intellectual and emotional maturity, which may limit their ability to accurately understand and respond to the scale items, potentially affecting the validity and accuracy of results.

3. Fifth scientific branch students were selected due to the low numbers of literary branch students, making scientific branch students more representative and suitable for achieving the objectives of the present research.

4. Fifth scientific branch students are characterized by cognitive and developmental characteristics that help them understand and comprehend psychological concepts, including the variable of emotional disclosure.

#### **Fourth: Research Instrument**

##### **The Emotional Disclosure Scale**

After reviewing the studies and literature that addressed emotional disclosure, the researcher adopted the Al-Zuhairi Scale (2025), consisting of (28) items and comprising a single dimension. The scale was adopted for the following reasons:

1. The scale is specifically designed for the Iraqi environment and has been previously applied to fifth scientific grade students, the same group targeted by the present research.

2. The scale was developed in light of Pennebaker's theory (1997), the same theory adopted by the researcher in the present study.

3. The Al-Zuhairi scale is distinguished by clarity of items and feasibility of application.

4. The recency of this scale

5. The scale possesses good psychometric properties according to its developer.

##### **Procedures for Adopting the Scale**

**First:** Theoretical Definition of Emotional Disclosure: Based on Pennebaker's theory (1997), emotional disclosure is defined as the conscious disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings to others honestly, whether negative or positive, which enhances effective communication between individuals and alleviates mental and psychological burdens (Pennebaker, 1997: 169).

**Second:** Logical Analysis of Scale Items: Logical analysis is one of the fundamental steps in preparing scale items, as it clarifies the degree to which each item represents the trait or characteristic being measured. The quality of item phrasing contributes to increasing discriminatory capacity and raising the validity coefficient (Al-Kubaisi, 2001: 169).

**Third:** Validity of Scale Items (Face Validity): To ensure the validity of the Emotional Disclosure Scale items, the scale in its initial form (28 items) was presented to a group of specialized experts in educational and psychological research (6 judges, see Appendix 1). All items achieved 100% agreement, and thus all items were retained in their final form, establishing the face validity of the scale.

**Fourth:** Response Alternatives and Scoring: The researcher adopted the same response alternatives as the scale developer: 'Applies to a great extent,' 'Applies to a moderate extent,' 'Applies to a small extent,' 'Does not apply to me.'

**Fifth:** Scale Instructions: The instructions serve as a guide for the respondent when answering the items. The instructions were designed to be easy and comprehensible, emphasizing that the respondent should choose the appropriate alternative that reflects their opinion by placing a (✓) mark in front of it, with no correct or incorrect answers, and that responses would remain confidential and used only for scientific research purposes.

**Sixth:** Clarity Trial: Following necessary adjustments based on expert feedback, the scale was applied to an exploratory sample of (20) male and female students at a secondary school in Wasit Governorate Center, selected by simple random sampling. The results showed that the scale items and instructions were comprehensible to students, and completion time ranged between (10–15) minutes.

##### **Statistical Analysis of the Emotional Disclosure Scale**

**A. Discriminatory Power:** To determine the discriminatory power of the scale items, the researcher applied the scale to a random sample of (100) secondary school students, corrected each form, ranked scores in descending order, and used the (27%) threshold to determine the upper and lower groups (Ghiselli et al., 1981: 434). The independent samples t-test was applied to compare the means of the upper and lower groups for each item. Results showed that the computed t-values for all items were statistically significant at the (0.01) level, except for items (10, 15, 18, 20), which showed non-significant t-values, indicating their inability to discriminate between the two groups. These items were therefore excluded.

**B. Item-Total Correlation (Item Validity):** This indicator reflects the level of homogeneity of scale items in measuring the targeted phenomenon. Pearson correlation was used to extract the correlation between each item's score and the total score for (100) forms. Correlation values ranged between (0.35 and 0.58), all statistically significant at the (0.01) level, confirming the consistency and homogeneity of items. Items (10, 15, 18, 20) showed weak, non-significant correlations and were excluded. The scale in its final version consisted of (24) items, as shown in Table (1).

**Table (1): Item Validity of the Emotional Disclosure Scale Using Item-Total Correlation**

Item	Correlation Coefficient	Significance	Item	Correlation Coefficient	Significance	Item	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
1	0.45	Sig.	11	0.43	Sig.	21	0.35	Sig.
2	0.51	Sig.	12	0.53	Sig.	22	0.46	Sig.

3	0.42	Sig.	13	0.46	Sig.	23	0.35	Sig.
4	0.58	Sig.	14	0.41	Sig.	24	0.52	Sig.
5	0.39	Sig.	15	0.08	Not Sig.	25	0.43	Sig.
6	0.49	Sig.	16	0.40	Sig.	26	0.47	Sig.
7	0.36	Sig.	17	0.50	Sig.	27	0.44	Sig.
8	0.44	Sig.	18	0.05	Not Sig.	28	0.48	Sig.
9	0.48	Sig.	19	0.47	Sig.			
10	0.12	Not Sig.	20	0.18	Not Sig.			

### Psychometric Properties of the Emotional Disclosure Scale

**First:** Validity: Two approaches were used:

1. Face Validity: Established by presenting the scale to a group of experts and judges as detailed above.
2. Construct Validity: Confirmed through: (a) discriminatory power of items, and (b) item-total correlation.

**Second:** Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha method was applied to the sample of (100) students, yielding a reliability coefficient of (0.86), which is high and acceptable in educational and psychological research (generally required to be no less than 0.70). This indicates that the scale possesses a high degree of stability and internal consistency and is suitable for actual application.

Standard Error of Measurement (SEM): To determine the precision of the scale, the SEM was calculated using the formula based on standard deviation and reliability coefficient, yielding a value of (3.47) a low, reassuring value confirming the accuracy of the instrument and the reliability of results upon re-application.

### Descriptive Statistical Properties of the Scale

The researcher used parametric statistical methods to analyze the data. Results showed that the arithmetic mean of the sample's scores on the scale was (82.56) with a standard deviation of (9.42). When compared to the hypothetical mean of (60.00) the product of the number of items and the relative weight of the mean response alternative the mean was found to be higher than the hypothetical mean. A one-sample t-test indicated a statistically significant difference at the (0.05) level in favor of the sample's arithmetic mean, indicating that sample members possess a high level of emotional disclosure.

### Chapter Four: Presentation and Interpretation of Results

#### Objective One: Identifying the Level of Emotional Disclosure among Secondary School Students

The researcher applied the Emotional Disclosure Scale to the research sample of (100) students. Results showed that the arithmetic mean of scores was (82.56) with a standard deviation of (9.42). When compared to the hypothetical mean of (60.00) using the one-sample t-test, the difference was statistically significant in favor of the arithmetic mean, as the computed t-value exceeded the tabulated value of (1.98) at degrees of freedom (99) and significance level (0.05). This result indicates that research sample members possess a high level of emotional disclosure. Table (2) illustrates this.

**Table (2): One-Sample T-Test for the Difference between the Sample Mean and the Hypothetical Mean of the Emotional Disclosure Scale**

Sample Size	Mean	SD	Hypothetical Mean	Computed t	Tabulated t	df	Significance
100	82.56	9.42	60.0	23.95	1.98	99	Significant

This result of a high level of emotional disclosure among secondary school students can be interpreted in light of Pennebaker's model, which emphasizes that disclosing disturbing experiences and events yields important psychological benefits for the individual, as expressing feelings and traumas contributes to emotional catharsis and alleviates suppressed emotions associated with those experiences. The current research result is consistent with Al-Jubouri's study (2024), which emphasized the importance of expressing feelings and emotions in achieving psychological and social adjustment among students, and with Abd Al-Qadir's study (2022), which confirmed the effectiveness of an emotional intelligence-based counseling program in improving emotional disclosure. Students who possess a better ability to understand and express their feelings are more inclined toward emotional disclosure, and the school environment and social interaction contribute to enhancing this aspect.

#### Objective Two: Examining Statistically Significant Differences in Emotional Disclosure according to Gender (Males – Females)

Data were statistically processed using the independent samples t-test. Results showed no statistically significant difference between males and females in emotional disclosure. The mean score for males was (81.34) with a standard deviation of (9.65), while the mean for females was (84.04) with a standard deviation of (8.98). The

computed t-value was (-1.32), which is less than the tabulated value (0.19) at significance level (0.05) and degrees of freedom (98), indicating no differences between males and females. Table (3) illustrates this.

**Table (3): T-Test Results for Differences in Emotional Disclosure according to Gender**

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Computed t	Significance Level	Significance
	Male	55	81.34	9.65	-1.32	0.05	Not Significant
	Female	45	84.04	8.98			

In light of these results, the researcher presents the following conclusions, recommendations, and proposals for future research.

#### **First: Conclusions**

The finding that the arithmetic mean (82.56) exceeded the hypothetical mean (60.00) indicates that secondary school students possess a strong desire and high capacity for emotional disclosure. This age stage is characterized by an outpouring of feelings, and the results reflect that today's adolescents have a good ability to express their inner world and are not necessarily emotionally closed off.

The finding of no gender differences also demonstrates that the old stereotype assuming 'adolescent males tend toward concealment and aggression while females disclose more' has changed. Modern education and openness to knowledge have made emotional expression an equally human need for both male and female adolescents.

The scale in its final form of 24 items is found to possess excellent psychometric properties that make it comprehensible and appropriate for the psychological characteristics of secondary school students and suitable for use in the school environment.

#### **Second: Recommendations**

- Activating the role of educational counseling in school: directing psychological counselors in secondary schools to open safe and continuous channels for listening to students, given their high readiness to disclose their feelings and concerns.
- Incorporating emotional intelligence into school activities: including pioneering sessions or interactive activities focused on self-awareness and emotion management to help students channel their emotional disclosure positively and constructively.

#### **Third: Proposals for Future Research**

- Emotional disclosure and its relationship to self-esteem among preparatory school students.
- The effect of written emotional disclosure on reducing test anxiety and improving academic performance among secondary school students.
- Emotional disclosure and its relationship to academic psychological flow among university students.

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#### **Author Information**

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**Iman Mutashar Khalaf Muhammad**

Asst. Lecturer, (General Directorate of Education in  
Wasit Governorate , Ministry of Education )

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