Policy Research Journal
ISSN (E): 3006-7030 ISSN (P) : 3006-7022 Volume 3, Issue 12, 2025

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL LEARNING AND ADULTHOOD BEHAVIOUR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY FORMATION

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17983779

Keywords

Article History
Received: 19 October 2025
Accepted: 30 November 2025
Published: 19 December 2025

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Abstract

This review paper is a critical review of the thesis of Kainat Shah on the role of social learning in adulthood behaviour and forming identity in the secondary schooling in Malakand. Grounded in the Social Learning Theory of Bandura and supplemented by the views of sociocultural perspectives, the thesis examines the role of teacher modelling, peer interactions, cultural expectations and institutional norms and how they shape the behaviours and identities of learners. This review synthesises the key arguments made in the work, discusses the methodological strengths and limitations of the work and offers some theoretical and practical implications of the work. The thesis makes a substantial contribution to knowledge about identity formation in collectivist, non-Western educational contexts as it shows the processes by which cultural practices interact with school-based socialization processes.

INTRODUCTION

Identity formation and behavioural development are fundamentally social processes that are influenced by an individual's contacts with family, peers, teachers and broader cultural systems. Shah's thesis tries to overcome this complexity by looking at how adolescents in Malakand internalize behavioural patterns and markers of identity through school based social learning experiences. The study examines an under-researched cultural context, in which the values of a collectivist Pashtun society are crossed with practices of formal schooling. By applying the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) and sociocultural explanations of identity development (Vygotsky, 1978; Gee, 2000), this thesis shows that identity is not a static fixed entity but a manifestation of on-going interactions that are embedded in cultural expectations. This review assesses the depth, coherence and contribution of Shah's work while locating it within an academic discourse.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Shah's thesis draws most of its inspiration from Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) which argues that individuals will learn behaviours by observing models, storing in their memory and mimicking actions that are socially reinforced (Bandura, 1977). The thesis makes good use of the core constructs of SLT i.e. attention, retention, reproduction and motivation to describe how students in Malakand internalises behaviours demonstrated by teachers and peers

The thesis also extends SLT in that it emphasises the principle of reciprocal determinism, as put forward

by Bandura (1986), by arguing that the behaviour of students, their personal beliefs as well as the environmental conditions are constantly impacting each other. In Malakand's schools, cultural norms, teacher power and peer relationships influence the behavioural outcomes cumulatively and show reciprocity of cause-and-effect in a culturally embedded system.

Additionally, Shah uses Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that focuses on the fact that identity and cognitive growth take place through interactions mediated by culture (Vygotsky, 1978). By using this framework, the thesis explains the role of language, traditions and social narratives in the process of identity formation of the learners. Cultural transmission theory (Berry, 2001) also adds to the argument of intergenerational transmission of identity through shared norms. This theoretical integration is a major strength of thesis as the psychological and cultural dimension are integrated in explaining behavioural learning.

3. Literature Review

The thesis provides a broad review of literature that covers the global and local perspectives. Studies conducted on the social learning support the proposition that schools are powerful spaces where behavioural norms and identity markers are transmitted through daily interactions. Researchers such as Grusec and Hastings (2015) focus on the important role observational learning plays in developing children's behaviour; and Pianta and Hamre (2006) on the importance of positive teacher-student relationships when developing prosocial behaviour and emotional regulation. Shah relates these findings to the Malakand context of teacher authority which is culturally reinforced which makes modelling even more powerful.

The literature review also examines how peer interactions are involved in identity formation. Adolescence as a critical stage of exploration of identity (Erikson 1968) is characterized by an increasing sensitivity to peer approval. Studies reviewed by Shah, including studies by Wentzel (2010) and Kindermann (2016) explain the process of how peer groups set behavioural norms through reinforcement and social comparison. The thesis has made good use of these concepts in explaining the negotiation of belonging and identity among students in Malakand in their peer circles.

Furthermore, the cultural influence on learning is discussed in Shah's literature review. She puts forward an intricate discussion about the role played by mother tongue, gender norms, traditions and indigenous knowledge systems in shaping educational experiences. Research on multilingual education (Benson, 2004; Cummins, 2000) supports her argument that language has an impact on the identity and understanding. The review also highlights the role of local customs, such as Pashtunwali in shaping moral values as well as expectations for behaviour (Ahmed & Khan, 2015).

4. Methodological Review

Shah adopts a qualitative research design, which is suitable for studying subjective experiences and processes that are linked to identity. She uses semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations to triangulate data in an attempt to capture the nuances of social learning in school environments. The selection of participants (students between 15 and 18 years old, teachers with at least five years of teaching experience) guarantees that in the study are represented the points of view of people who are immersed in a deep way in the social dynamics of their school.

The use of purposive and stratified sampling increases the diversity of the sample represented from urban and rural schools, as well as public and private schools. However, the omission of parents, although they play a central role in the socialization process of the Pashtun cultural, is a notable weakness. Including parental perspectives would have been broadening the findings and strengthening the cultural interpretation of identity formation.

The method of thematic analysis is systematic and rigorous and is a mix of inductive and deductive coding. Shah contributes to the credibility of the process with the member-checking, peer debriefing and transparency with analytical procedures which are described in detail so as to show methodological transparency and reliability.

5. Major Findings of the Thesis

Shah's findings provide insight into some of the big dimensions of social learning and claiming identity. One of the dominant themes is an element of oblique obedience. Many of the students said although they respect and follow the guidance provided by their parents, there are cases where they sometimes choose to not follow the instructions that go against their social needs or moral reasoning. This detail suggests that obedience is not a homogenous behaviour and is a negotiated process driven by notions of perceived fairness and cultural relevance as well as by the norms of peers. For example, restrictions about mobile phone use or friendships were often ignored by students because these are conflicts between their need for a relationship for social connection, which are increasingly mediated through digital platforms. This pattern is consistent with more general research on a trend toward a balancing of traditional authority structures and a newfound personal autonomy and results in selective internalization of parental norms (Erikson, 1968).

Another important finding is that of influence of siblings. Students often identified both older and younger siblings as behavioural models, implying a diversity of avenues in the family in which learning occurs. This observation is consistent with Bandura's view that modelling will be most influential if the person undertaking the modelling is seen as being admired or close to the learner (Bandura, 1977). Siblings are accessible models of behaviour that are potentially more relatable than parental expectations and in terms of being intermediaries between the home culture and the school culture. This role is especially important in collectivist societies where family cohesiveness and dependence is highly valued.

Furthermore, the dual nature of discipline learning emphasises the dual process of absorbing behavioural norms through the explicit instruction and form of implicit socialization. While the classroom rules are introduced by the teachers, a large part of the student discipline is informally constructed through school-wide routines, peer surveillance, and observational learning in communal spaces such as playgrounds and morning assemblies. This finding adds further weight to the argument that behaviour is not only taught but lived, embodied and reinforced through the repeated social performance. It also implies that identity formation is rooted in collective rather than isolated instructional moments that are deeply embedded in practices.

The study's understanding of the transmission of values illuminates further the transmission of deep internalized behaviours such as respect, hospitality and obedience. So, student descriptions of welcoming their fathers - offering water, removing shoes, serving tea - show that rituals of respect are not just behaviours, but symbolic forms of identity that have a Pashtunwali base. These rituals are part of the cultural script that guides the interaction between individuals. Such values are then learned anew in the school environment and influence interactions with school teachers and peers and contribute to long-term behavioural patterns.

6. Discussion

Shah's discussion does an effective job of relating findings to theory and cultural context. The study has shown that schools in Malakand are like microcosms of the society where cultural values, hierarchical relationships and collective expectations are reproduced on a daily basis. The classroom becomes a social scene where students not only learn academic content but also ways of thinking and behaving and positioning themselves and in a community. Through modelling done by the teacher and peer feedback, behavioural norms are established and internalised by students, which would carry into their adulthood, supporting Bandura's claim that early social experiences influence the establishment of long-term behavioural patterns (Bandura, 1986). The thesis goes on to explain that identity formation is a dynamic process that is shaped by sociocultural expectations as opposed to a static developmental milestone. For example, the selective obedience of students and negotiation of values demonstrates that they are trying to find a balance between traditional norms and individual autonomy. Their taking of siblings as role models is indicative of continuing adjustments of their identity based on relations outside the official schooling context.

Moreover, Shah does a good job in capturing the cultural conflict between tradition and modernity. The presence of digital technologies induces new

forms of learning and representing the identity which compete the traditional expectation. Adolescents must therefore form in a complex cultural landscape in which social media, peer interactions and schooling interact with age-old cultural norms related to honour, respect and gender roles. This duality points to the dynamically changing nature of possessing an identity in an educ cultural setting undergoing rapid change and implies the need for educational institutions to help students navigate between these competing influences in both directions.

7. Strengths, Limitations, and Implications

One of the main aspects of the strength of the thesis is the way its theoretical integration is done well combining the SLT and the perspectives of the sociocultural theory and cultural transmission to explain the process of identity formation comprehensively. The qualitative methodology is another strength in which it is possible to get in touch with the lived experience of the participants in depth.

However, limitations include the limited sample size, geographical focus, as well as the exclusion of parental views. Even with these limitations, there are some useful implications to the study. For educators the results highlight the importance of culturally sensitive pedagogy that is cognizant of the powerful use of modelling and reinforcing behaviour. For policymakers, the study raises awareness in the need to address a required link between the cultural and institutional expectations that produce conducive educational learning environments with respect for local identities.

Shah's thesis demonstrates a number of noteworthy strengths which add a great deal to academic merit of the book. One of the most convincing of the strengths is the great theoretical integration of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and the sociocultural and cultural transmission views. This multidimensional theoretical framework offers the possibility of a better understanding about the development of behaviour and identity in the collectivist situation of Malakand. The study is also rich in qualitative data that was collected through interview, focus group discussion and classroom observation. This triangulated methodological approach helps to enhance the credibility of the findings by having a range of lenses through which social learning processes can be examined. Another strength is cultural relevance of the research, and the depth of the research within the context. By situating the study within the traditions of the Pashtun collectivism culture and examining the impact of cultural norms to a school-based learning process the thesis provides valuable information on a region that is often underrepresented in educational research. The subtle description of teacher power, the peer pressure and family dynamics in this study increases our understanding of the processes of identity formation in non-Western contexts.

Despite all these strengths, the thesis does have some limitations which should be noticed. One of the major limitations is the absence of parental views, which is critical when knowing how important the family is in the development of identity and behaviour in Pashtun culture. Inclusion of parents would have given a more holistic picture of the intersection between school learning and home based socialization. Another limitation is the small sample which is two schools. This limited scope limits the generality of the results to the more general region of Malakand where the school environments may widely vary. Additionally, the research has no longitudinal component so it was not possible for researchers to see the continuity of the patterns of behaviour and identity outcomes seen in adolescence into their adult years. Despite these limitations the thesis does identify some meaningful directions for future research, with a focus on broader sampling, the use of longitudinal approaches and including more family and community perspectives.

The results of Shah's thesis have important implications for educational practice and for policy making, in addition to future studies. In terms of educational practice, the study suggests that how teachers can use culturally responsive pedagogies that recognizes the cultural background and values and expectations of their students. Since observational learning has a significant impact on student behaviour, educators need to be conscious of the models that they present to their students through their day-to-day interactions and conduct. Creating opportunities for peer collaboration can also

enhance identity development and students can then learn from sharing their experiences and collaboratively solving problems. These strategy not only help to improve the dynamics of the class but also helps to reinforce positive behavioural norms.

From a policy standpoint the thesis identifies a need for educational standards which will help bridge the gap between the culture of the home and the culture of the school. Incorporating local languages and indigenous histories and cultural practices in the curriculum would make the learning more relevant and affirming for students. Policies should also facilitate education of teachers on culturally responsive modes, so that they would be aware of the sociocultural situations that affect the identity of their students. The challenge facing the policymakers in this new and complex context will be to align the practices in schools with the values of the communities so as to provide environments that support both the development of academic knowledge and the development of a healthy identity.

There are several implications then also in terms of future research. Expanding the range of people to include parents, elders and leaders in the community would provide a fuller account of the social learning processes in Malakand. Comparative studies across districts or regions could throw some light upon the difference in cultural variations in the formation of identity in different settings. Moreover, there are many questions that still need to be answered using longitudinal research to follow the development of how early socialization experiences affect adult behaviour over time. Such studies would help us gain further knowledge of the long-term effects of school-based social learning, and inform the area of educational interventions that foster positive identity trajectories.

8. Conclusion

Shah's thesis is a meaningful contribution in understanding the identity formation in a culture rich and traditional oriented region. By demonstrating the importance of processes of social learning on behavioural and identity outcomes, the present study helps to reinforce the perspective of identity as a social construct and a cultural mediation. The combination of theoretical understanding and empirical observation allows an in-depth understanding of the process of students in Malakand to learn, behave and grow into adults in the framework of collectivism. The thesis is especially successful in answering the question of extending the existing literature by locating the process of social learning in a non-western cultural setting and offering contributions for both the future of academic research and educational practice.

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