

From Telling to Wondering: Reconfiguring Student Agency and Locus of Control Beyond Behaviorist Assumptions in Social Media-Enhanced EFL Learning

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Abstract: The dominance of behaviorism, which conceptualizes learners as passive recipients of external stimuli and emphasizes reinforcement, feedback, and teacher-controlled instruction, is increasingly challenged by the widespread use of social media in education. This study investigates how social media influences English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' learning experiences, focusing on learner autonomy, active participation, and the locus of control, with the aim of examining whether these digital environments support more active and self-directed forms of learning. A mixed-methods approach was employed, using an online questionnaire to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from 192 EFL students. Quantitative data were analyzed to identify patterns of social media use, while qualitative data provided deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions. The findings indicate that social media is perceived as a flexible and open learning environment that fosters autonomy, allowing students to control content selection, learning pace, and engagement strategies. Social media also promotes active participation through collaboration, content creation, and knowledge sharing, while shifting the locus of control from instructor to learner, with students relying more on peer interaction and independent learning. These findings challenge the behaviorist assumption of the passive learner while acknowledging that reinforcement and feedback remain relevant in digital contexts. The study highlights the significance of integrating social media into learner-centered pedagogical approaches to enhance autonomy, engagement, and collaborative learning in EFL education. However, the study is limited to a specific student sample and self-reported data; future research should explore diverse populations and longitudinal effects to deepen understanding of social media learning.

Keywords: Active participation; behaviorism; EFL learners; learner autonomy; locus of control; social media.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media platforms has irrevocably transformed the landscape of human interaction, communication, and, critically, learning (Anderson & Dron, 2014). This digital upheaval presents a profound challenge to long-standing educational paradigms, particularly those rooted in behaviorist learning theories. For much of the 20th century, behaviorism, championed by figures such as B.F. Skinner (1958) and John B. Watson (1913), posited that learning is fundamentally a change in observable behavior, shaped by environmental stimuli through systems of rewards and punishments. Within this framework, the learner was often conceptualized as a passive receiver of information, a tabula rasa upon which knowledge was inscribed by an instructor who served as the primary stimulus provider and controller of the learning environment.

However, the cognitive revolution of the mid-20th century began to expose the limitations of behaviorism by highlighting the complex internal mental processes—such as thinking, memory, and problem-solving—that mediate human learning (Braat *et al.*, 2020). This theoretical shift laid the groundwork for more learner-centric models. The subsequent proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies

and social media has further accelerated this evolution, fostering learning environments characterized by unprecedented levels of active participation, collaborative knowledge construction, and individual autonomy (Anderson & Dron, 2014; Hoffman, 2013). This emergent reality directly contradicts the foundational tenets of behaviorism, creating a significant and urgent theoretical incongruence.

The enduring dominance of behaviorist learning theories, which fundamentally characterize learners as passive recipients of external stimuli and centralize instructional control within the educator, faces an unprecedented and critical challenge in the contemporary educational landscape. The pervasive integration of social media platforms into daily life has fostered a new paradigm of learning characterized by profoundly active, participatory, and autonomous student engagement. This emergent reality directly contradicts the foundational tenets of behaviorism, creating a significant and urgent theoretical incongruence (Gulzar *et al.*, 2021).

The prevailing gap in educational research lies in adequately understanding and articulating how this digital "upheaval" not only exposes the inherent limitations of behaviorist models but also

necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of pedagogical practices (Alturki & Aldraiweesh, 2024). Without a robust theoretical framework that accounts for learner agency, self-directed knowledge construction, and the distributed locus of control inherent in social media learning environments, educational institutions risk perpetuating outdated instructional designs that fail to prepare students for the complexities of the 21st-century information ecosystem (Greenhow & Lewin, 2015). This research is therefore critical to bridging this theoretical divide, advocating for learner-centric models, and informing the development of adaptive educational strategies that genuinely empower students as autonomous agents in their own learning journeys.

This study aims to critically examine the evolving role of the learner in social media-infused educational contexts, specifically focusing on the erosion of behaviorist assumptions. To achieve this, the research will pursue the following objectives: (1) To determine the extent to which social media learning environments promote students' autonomy in the learning process. (2) To investigate the extent to which the active, participatory nature of social media learning invalidates the behaviorist assumption of the learner as a "passive receiver" of stimuli. (3) To analyze the ways in which the upheaval of social media has shifted the locus of control from the instructor (stimulus provider) to the learner (autonomous agent). By addressing these objectives, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary learning dynamics, offering insights that can inform the design of effective and empowering digital pedagogies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the existing literature on the evolution of learning theories, charting the trajectory from the dominance of behaviorism to the rise of more learner-centric models in the digital age. It begins by examining the foundational principles of behaviorism and its inherent limitations, which became more pronounced with the advent of the cognitive revolution. Subsequently, the review explores the disruptive impact of social media on traditional educational paradigms. The section is structured to directly address the three core research questions of this study, examining how social media learning environments foster learner autonomy, invalidate the behaviorist concept of the learner as a passive

receiver, and shift the locus of control from the instructor to the learner.

The Behaviorist Paradigm and Its Enduring Criticisms

For much of the 20th century, educational psychology was heavily influenced by behaviorism, a theory that posits learning is a change in observable behavior resulting from an organism's response to environmental stimuli. Proponents like B.F. Skinner (1958) argued that learning could be understood and manipulated by observing the relationship between stimuli and responses, reinforced through a system of rewards and punishments. This perspective led to the development of instructional models, such as Skinner's teaching machines, that emphasized drill, practice, and immediate feedback to shape desired behaviors. In this model, the learner is often conceptualized as a "passive receiver" of information, a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) upon which knowledge is inscribed by the instructor, who acts as the primary stimulus provider and controller of the learning environment (Watson, 1913).

Despite its influence, behaviorism has been subject to significant criticism for its reductionist approach. Critics argue that by focusing exclusively on observable behavior, the theory fails to account for the complex internal cognitive processes—such as thinking, memory, and problem-solving—that are fundamental to human learning. The cognitive revolution of the 1950s and 1960s marked a pivotal shift, challenging the behaviorist black box and redirecting focus toward the internal mental structures and processes that mediate learning (Braat *et al.*, 2020). This shift laid the groundwork for new theories that acknowledged the learner's active role in constructing knowledge.

The Rise of Social Media and the Challenge to Traditional Learning Models

The advent of Web 2.0 technologies and the proliferation of social media platforms have profoundly reshaped the educational landscape, presenting a direct challenge to the centralized, instructor-led models rooted in behaviorist tradition. These digital environments facilitate a move towards more decentralized, peer-to-peer networks of learning, where knowledge is co-created and shared rather than simply transmitted (Anderson & Dron, 2014). The following subsections review the literature on how these

environments address the core research questions of this study.

Fostering Learner Autonomy in Social Media Environments

Learner autonomy, defined as the ability of learners to take charge of their own learning, is a central theme in the literature on social media in education. Digital environments, by their very nature, demand higher levels of self-regulation, time management, and strategic control from learners (Maden *et al.*, 2026). Research indicates that social media platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for students to exercise this autonomy by customizing their learning paths, selecting their own resources, and engaging in self-directed inquiry. This stands in stark contrast to the prescriptive, one-size-fits-all nature of many traditional, behaviorist-influenced instructional designs (Anderson & Dron, 2014). The concept of the Personal Learning Environment (PLE) has emerged to describe how learners can use social media and other digital tools to create and manage their own learning spaces, further emphasizing the shift towards greater learner control (Hoffman, 2013).

Invalidating the "Passive Receiver" Assumption

The behaviorist assumption of the learner as a passive receiver of stimuli is fundamentally challenged by the active, participatory nature of social media. Learning in these environments is not a process of passive absorption but one of active engagement, contribution, and collaboration. Students are no longer mere consumers of information; they are active producers, curators, and distributors of content within dynamic online communities (Ebsco, n.d.). The very architecture of social media platforms—built on sharing, commenting, and user-generated content—necessitates a level of participation that is antithetical to the passive stimulus-response model. This active engagement is not only a feature of the technology but is also increasingly recognized as a critical component of meaningful learning and knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978).

The Shifting Locus of Control

Perhaps the most significant disruption caused by social media in education is the shift in the locus of control from the instructor to the learner. In traditional models, the instructor and the institution hold primary control over the curriculum, resources, and pace of learning. Social media,

however, facilitates a more decentralized, user-centric model where control is distributed among the participants (Hoffman, 2013). The instructor's role evolves from that of a "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side," a facilitator, or a more experienced node within the learning network. This shift empowers learners to take on greater responsibility for their own learning, fostering an internal locus of control where they see themselves as the primary agents in their educational journey (Rotter, 1966).

The literature demonstrates a clear and significant paradigm shift in education, moving away from the rigid, instructor-centered models of behaviorism towards more flexible, learner-centric approaches facilitated by social media. These new learning environments promote learner autonomy, necessitate active participation, and shift the locus of control to the learner. Building on these insights, the following section outlines the research methodology employed in this study to examine how social media influences learners' engagement and challenges traditional behaviorist assumptions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methodology adopted in the present study to investigate the role of social media in challenging traditional behaviorist assumptions in learning. It presents the research problem, objectives, and guiding research questions that frame the study. The section also describes the research design and research approach employed to collect and analyze the data. Furthermore, it explains the target population and sampling procedures used to select participants. Finally, ethical considerations related to the study are discussed to ensure that the research was conducted in accordance with established academic and research standards.

Research Problem

The enduring dominance of behaviorist learning theories, which fundamentally characterize learners as passive recipients of external stimuli and centralize instructional control within the educator, faces an unprecedented and critical challenge in the contemporary educational landscape. The pervasive integration of social media platforms into daily life has fostered a new paradigm of learning characterized by profoundly active, participatory, and autonomous student engagement. This emergent reality directly contradicts the foundational tenets of behaviorism, creating a significant and urgent theoretical incongruence. The prevailing gap in educational

research lies in adequately understanding and articulating how this digital "upheaval" not only exposes the inherent limitations of behaviorist models but also necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of pedagogical practices.

Without a robust theoretical framework that accounts for learner agency, self-directed knowledge construction, and the distributed locus of control inherent in social media learning environments, educational institutions risk perpetuating outdated instructional designs that fail to prepare students for the complexities of the 21st-century information ecosystem. This research is therefore critical to bridging this theoretical divide, advocating for learner-centric models, and informing the development of adaptive educational strategies that genuinely empower students as autonomous agents in their own learning journeys.

Research Objectives

In light of the identified research problem, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives in order to better understand the role of social media in contemporary learning environments.

O1. To determine the extent to which social media learning environments promote students' autonomy in the learning process.

This objective aims to quantify or qualitatively assess the degree to which social media platforms empower students to take charge of their own learning, including choices in content, pace, and method, thereby challenging traditional instructional designs.

O2. To investigate the extent to which the active, participatory nature of social media learning invalidates the behaviorist assumption of the learner as a "passive receiver" of stimuli.

This objective seeks to explore how student engagement in content creation, sharing, and collaborative interaction on social media directly contradicts the behaviorist view of learners as mere reactors to external stimuli, highlighting the shift towards active knowledge construction.

O3. To analyze the ways in which the upheaval of social media has shifted the locus of control from the instructor (stimulus provider) to the learner (autonomous agent).

This objective focuses on identifying and describing the mechanisms and manifestations of control transfer in social media-mediated learning. It aims to illustrate how students gain greater

influence over their educational journey, diminishing the instructor's traditional role as the sole arbiter of learning experiences.

Research Questions

To achieve the stated objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

Q1. To what extent do social media learning environments promote students' autonomy in the learning process?

Q2. To what extent does the active, participatory nature of social media learning invalidate the behaviorist assumption of the learner as a "passive receiver" of stimuli?

Q3. In what ways has the upheaval of social media shifted the locus of control from the instructor (stimulus provider) to the learner (autonomous agent)?

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory research design to investigate the evolving dynamics of learning in social media environments and their implications for established educational theories. An exploratory design is strategically chosen due to the nascent and complex nature of the phenomenon under investigation; the emergence of student agency and the subsequent challenge to traditional behaviorist assumptions within digital learning spaces (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is particularly valuable when the research aims to gain new insights, identify key variables, and develop a deeper understanding of a topic where existing theoretical frameworks may be insufficient or undergoing transformation.

The primary rationale for adopting an exploratory design is to move beyond mere description and to critically examine how the active, participatory nature of social media learning environments fundamentally refutes the behaviorist conceptualization of the learner as a passive receiver of stimuli. By exploring the ways in which social media fosters student autonomy and shifts the locus of control from the instructor to the learner, this design facilitates the discovery of emergent patterns and relationships that can inform a re-evaluation of pedagogical practices. It allows for an open-ended investigation into the theoretical incongruence between behaviorist principles and the realities of contemporary digital learning, thereby laying the groundwork for more definitive research in the future.

Research Approach

To comprehensively address the research problem and objectives, this study will employ a mixed-methods research approach. This approach is particularly well-suited for investigating complex educational phenomena that require both the breadth of quantitative data and the depth of qualitative insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By integrating both quantitative and qualitative components, this study aims to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of how social media influences student agency and challenges behaviorist assumptions in learning.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative component of this study will primarily serve to identify patterns, trends, and the prevalence of specific behaviors and perceptions among students regarding their social media learning experiences. This component will allow for the measurement of the extent to which students engage in active participation, perceive autonomy, and interpret digital rewards. Data will be collected through the structured sections of the online questionnaire, utilizing closed-ended. The quantitative data will provide statistical insights into:

- The frequency of active versus passive engagement in social media learning (Objective 2).
- The perceived degree of student autonomy and control in their learning process via social media (Objective 1 and 3).
- The reported impact of social media reinforcement on deeper thinking and self-identity (implied by the research problem).

This approach will enable the identification of generalizable patterns within the student population, offering a broad overview of the current state of social media-mediated learning.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative component will be instrumental in gaining deeper insights into students' lived experiences, motivations, and interpretations of their engagement with social media for learning. This component will explore the underlying reasons behind observed patterns and provide rich, descriptive data that elucidates the "how" and "why" of student agency and the perceived shift in control. Data will be gathered through the open-ended questions embedded within the online

questionnaire, allowing students to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. The qualitative data will specifically aim to:

- Uncover the specific ways social media environments foster or hinder student autonomy (Objective 1).
- Explore students' subjective understanding of active participation and how it contrasts with traditional learning models (Objective 2).
- Analyze students' perceptions of how the locus of control has shifted in their learning journey (Objective 3).

This qualitative exploration will provide contextual understanding and individual narratives that quantitative data alone cannot capture, offering a more profound insight into the theoretical implications of social media on behaviorist principles.

Integration of Methods

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data will occur at the interpretation stage, following a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Both types of data will be collected concurrently and analyzed separately. Subsequently, the findings from both components will be compared and contrasted to corroborate, elaborate, or challenge each other. This triangulation will enhance the validity and comprehensiveness of the study's conclusions, providing a robust understanding of the complex relationship between social media, student agency, and the evolving relevance of behaviorist learning theories.

Population and Sampling

This sub-section describes the population and sampling procedures employed in the present study. It outlines the target population, specifying the characteristics and context of the participants relevant to the research objectives. Additionally, the sampling strategy used to select participants is explained, including the rationale for the chosen approach. Finally, the procedures for data collection and participant recruitment are discussed, ensuring that the study design aligns with ethical standards and facilitates reliable and valid data for analysis.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprises English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students enrolled in English studies programs at two

Moroccan academic institutions: Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University and Sais University. This population was selected because these students are actively engaged in formal academic learning while also regularly using social media platforms, making them suitable subjects for examining the interplay between digital environments, learner agency, and the evolving relevance of behaviorist theories. Their enrollment in English studies provides a context in which language acquisition often intersects with digital communication, offering a rich setting for exploring active participation and autonomous learning.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy will be employed for this study. Purposive sampling is particularly suitable for qualitative and mixed-methods research where the goal is to select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this context, the primary criterion for inclusion is the students' demonstrable experience with social media for learning purposes. This deliberate selection ensures that the collected data directly addresses the phenomena of interest: how social media learning environments promote autonomy, challenge passive reception, and shift the locus of control.

Data Collection and Recruitment

The online questionnaire, designed with student-friendly language, will be distributed through social media platforms to reach the targeted EFL students. The decision to distribute the questionnaire online is purposive; it serves as a practical and efficient method to access students who are inherently active users of social media. This approach not only maximizes the likelihood of recruiting participants who possess the requisite experience with social media learning, thereby aligning the recruitment process directly with the sampling criteria, but also facilitates the collection of data shortly and from a large audience, enhancing the efficiency and potential scope of the study.

Research Ethics

The ethical integrity of any research involving human participants is fundamental to its validity and social responsibility (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2020). In the context of this study, which explores the personal experiences and perceptions of EFL students within digital learning environments, it is essential to establish a robust ethical framework that prioritizes the dignity, privacy, and autonomy

of all respondents. By adhering to rigorous ethical standards, this research aims to foster a relationship of trust with participants while ensuring that the data collection process is conducted with the highest level of professional and moral accountability. The following ethical considerations will be rigorously applied throughout all stages of the research process:

Informed Consent

Prior to participation, all prospective respondents will be provided with comprehensive information about the study. This will include a clear explanation of the research objectives, the nature of their involvement, the estimated time commitment, and any potential risks or benefits associated with participation. Participants will be explicitly informed that their involvement is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or prejudice. Digital informed consent will be obtained from each participant before they can access the online questionnaire, requiring them to actively acknowledge their understanding and agreement to participate.

Anonymity, Confidentiality and Data Security

To safeguard the privacy of participants, strict measures will be implemented to ensure both anonymity and confidentiality. Anonymity will be maintained by collecting data in a manner that does not link responses to individual identities. The online questionnaire will not request any personally identifiable information (e.g., names, student IDs, email addresses). Confidentiality will be ensured for any potentially sensitive information shared. All collected data will be stored securely on password-protected servers, accessible only to the primary researcher. Data will be aggregated for analysis and reporting, ensuring that individual responses cannot be traced back to specific participants. Moreover, all data collected will be treated with the utmost care and stored securely in encrypted digital formats. The data will be used solely for the academic purposes of this research study, specifically for analysis related to the stated research objectives and for inclusion in the final article. No data will be shared with third parties or used for commercial purposes.

Right to Withdraw

Participants will be clearly informed of their unconditional right to withdraw from the study at any time, even after commencing the questionnaire, without needing to provide a reason.

The online platform will be designed to allow participants to exit the survey at any point, and any data collected up to that point will be discarded if they choose to withdraw before completion.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section analyzes and interprets the data collected through the online questionnaire. The responses are thoroughly examined to identify key patterns and trends related to the research topic. The aim of this analysis is not only to present and summarize the data, but also to provide meaningful interpretations that deepen understanding of the issue under investigation. By

combining statistical analysis with qualitative insights, this section offers a comprehensive overview of the questionnaire findings and highlights their connection to the study's objectives.

Demographic Data Analysis

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the student population surveyed. The dataset comprises responses from a total of 192 students, with a focus on gender distribution and age demographics. Understanding these foundational demographic elements is crucial for contextualizing any further analysis or findings related to this student group.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Students

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	81	42.2%
	Female	111	57.8%
Age	Less than 21	118	61.5%
	Between 21-26	53	27.6%
	27 and above	21	10.9%

The demographic analysis of the student population in **Table 1** reveals distinct patterns in both gender and age distribution. The gender composition indicates a notable female majority, with 111 students (57.8%) identifying as female, compared to 81 male students (42.2%). This suggests that the surveyed group is disproportionately represented by female individuals, which could have implications for studies focusing on gender-specific perspectives or experiences.

Regarding age, the student body is predominantly young. A significant majority, 118 students (61.5%), are under 21 years of age, highlighting a strong presence of younger individuals, likely undergraduates or those in early stages of their academic careers. The next largest age group, comprising 53 students (27.6%), falls between 21 and 26 years. This group typically includes older undergraduates or early-career graduate students. The smallest segment, 21 students (10.9%), consists of individuals aged 27 and above, indicating a smaller proportion of mature students or those pursuing advanced degrees. The overall age distribution suggests that the student population is largely composed of younger individuals, which may influence their academic needs, social engagement, and overall student experience.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The following subsection presents the quantitative analysis of the data collected through the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to investigate students' experiences with social media in relation to three main objectives: student autonomy, active participation versus passive reception, and the shift in locus of control. Each objective was addressed through multiple items using Likert-scale or frequency-based questions, allowing for a systematic assessment of students' perceptions, behaviors, and learning preferences. By analyzing the responses statistically, this subsection aims to identify patterns, trends, and differences that reveal how social media influences learners' autonomy, engagement, and sense of control over their learning process. The results are interpreted in relation to the study's objectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on EFL students' learning experiences.

This subsection is organized according to the three research objectives. Each objective is presented through a series of tables that display the frequencies and percentages of students' responses to the questionnaire items. Following each table, a brief interpretation is provided to highlight the most significant trends and patterns. This structured approach allows for a clear and systematic examination of the data in relation to

student autonomy, active participation, and the shift in locus of control.

Student Autonomy

Table 2 presents students' perceptions of freedom in choosing what to learn on social media

Table 2: Students' Perceived Freedom to Choose What to Learn on Social Media

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	6	3.1%
Disagree	11	5.7%
Neutral	33	17.2%
Agree	69	35.9%
Strongly agree	73	38.0%

As presented in **Table 2**, the responses regarding students' perceived freedom to choose what they learn on social media indicate a strong positive sentiment. A combined 73.9% of students either 'Agree' (35.9%) or 'Strongly Agree' (38.0%) that they feel free to choose their learning content on social media. This suggests that a substantial majority of students view social media as an empowering platform for self-directed learning.

Conversely, a relatively small proportion of students expressed disagreement, with 5.7% 'Disagreeing' and 3.1% 'Strongly Disagreeing', totaling 8.8%. This indicates that only a minority feel restricted in their learning choices on these platforms. The 'Neutral' category accounts for

platforms. The data provide insights into the extent to which students feel empowered to direct their own learning experiences within these digital environments.

17.2% of the responses, suggesting a segment of students who do not have a strong opinion or perhaps experience a mixed sense of freedom. Overall, the data strongly support the notion that social media is widely perceived by students as a flexible and open environment for personal learning exploration.

Table 3 reflects how often students independently decide their learning methods and timings on social media, without direct instruction from educators. The findings shed light on the prevalence of autonomous learning behaviors within these platforms among the surveyed student population of 192 individuals.

Table 3: Students' Frequency of Self-Directed Learning on Social Media

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always	46	24.0%
Often	80	41.7%
Sometimes	45	23.4%
Rarely	12	6.3%
Never	9	4.7%

As illustrated in **Table 3**, a substantial majority of students frequently engage in self-directed learning on social media. A combined 65.7% of students reported either 'Always' (24 %) or 'Often' (41.7%) deciding for themselves how and when they learn using social media without instructor guidance. This high percentage underscores a significant trend towards learner autonomy and the utilization of social media as a flexible educational resource.

On the other hand, a smaller proportion of students indicated less frequent self-direction. Those who 'Sometimes' decide for themselves constitute 23.4% of the respondents. The categories 'Rarely' (6.3%) and 'Never' (4.7%) collectively represent only 11% of the student body, suggesting that a

minimal number of students feel entirely constrained or do not utilize social media for independent learning. These results reinforce the idea that social media platforms are widely adopted by students for informal and self-initiated learning, complementing traditional instructional methods.

Table 4 displays the extent to which students perceive social media platforms as offering greater control over their learning paths compared to conventional classroom environments. The data provide insights into student perspectives on learner autonomy and personalization within digital learning spaces.

Table 4: Perceived Control over Learning Path on Social Media vs. Traditional Settings

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not at all	10	5.2%
To a small extent	14	7.3%
To a moderate extent	46	24.0%
To a large extent	58	30.2%
To a very large extent	64	33.3%

As depicted in **Table 4**, the data indicate a strong perception among students that social media platforms offer them greater control over their learning paths compared to traditional classroom settings. A significant majority of students, totaling 63.5%, reported feeling this control either 'To a large extent' (30.2%) or 'To a very large extent' (33.3%). These data suggest that social media is widely recognized as a medium that empowers learners to customize their educational journey.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of students perceived less control. Those who felt control 'Not at all' comprised 5.2% of the respondents, while 7.3% indicated 'To a small extent'. The 'To a moderate extent' category accounted for 24 % of

the responses, representing a notable segment that experiences some, but not extensive, increased control. Overall, these data highlight a prevailing sentiment that social media enhances learner autonomy, providing a more flexible and personalized approach to education than typically found in traditional classroom structures.

Active Participation vs. Passive Reception

Table 5 outlines the frequency with which students engage in active content creation and idea sharing activities—such as posts, videos, or summaries—when utilizing social media for learning purposes. The data offer insights into the level of participatory learning among the surveyed student

Table 5: Frequency of Content Creation and Idea Sharing on Social Media for Learning

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always	33	17.2%
Often	59	30.7%
Sometimes	73	38 %
Rarely	17	8.9%
Never	10	5.2%

As illustrated in **Table 5**, the data reveal a significant level of engagement in content creation and idea sharing among students using social media for learning. A substantial majority, comprising 85.9% of the students, reported creating or sharing content at least 'Sometimes' (38%), 'Often' (30.7%), or 'Always' (17.2%). These data underscore the active role students play in constructing and disseminating knowledge within social media environments, moving beyond passive consumption.

By contrast, a smaller proportion of students indicated less frequent participation. Those who 'Rarely' create or share content account for 8.9% of the respondents, while 5.2% reported 'Never' engaging in such activities. These data suggest that

while a core group of students are highly active, a minority either do not perceive the need or opportunity to contribute content for learning on social media. Overall, the findings highlight the potential of social media as a platform for collaborative and generative learning, where students are not just recipients but also creators and sharers of educational material.

Table 6 presents the frequency with which students actively engage in discussions, comment on others' posts, or ask questions related to their studies on social media platforms. The data provide insights into the interactive and collaborative aspects of learning facilitated by social media

Table 6: Frequency of Active Participation and Interaction on Social Media for Learning

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always	33	17.2%
Often	57	29.7%
Sometimes	75	39.1%

Rarely	17	8.9%
Never	10	5.2%

As depicted in **Table 6**, the data demonstrate a high level of active participation and interaction among students using social media for learning purposes. A significant majority, totaling 86.0% of the students, reported engaging in these activities at least 'Sometimes' (39.1%), 'Often' (29.7%), or 'Always' (17.2%). These data suggest that social media platforms are frequently utilized not just for content consumption, but also as dynamic spaces for collaborative learning, discussion, and inquiry related to academic studies.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of students reported less frequent engagement. Those who 'Rarely' participate actively constitute 8.9% of the respondents, while 5.2% indicated 'Never' doing so. These data suggest that while a vast majority of

students leverage social media for interactive learning, a minority either do not perceive the value or opportunity for such engagement, or prefer more passive learning approaches. All in all, the findings highlight the role of social media in fostering an interactive learning environment where students can actively contribute to and benefit from collective knowledge building.

Tables 7 shows how students perceive their role in learning on social media platforms, specifically whether they see themselves as active participants rather than merely passive consumers of content. The data offer insights into the level of engagement and proactive involvement students feel within these digital learning environments.

Table 7: Self-Perception as Active Participant vs. Passive Viewer in Social Media Learning

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	7	3.6%
Disagree	13	6.8%
Neutral	27	14.1%
Agree	71	37%
Strongly agree	74	38.5%

As presented in **Table 7**, the data indicate a strong tendency among students to view themselves as active participants in learning on social media, rather than passive viewers. A significant majority, totaling 75.5% of the students, either 'Agree' (37.0%) or 'Strongly Agree' (38.5%) with the statement. These data highlight a prevailing mindset where students actively engage with content, contribute to discussions, and share ideas, reinforcing the interactive nature of social media for educational purposes.

On the other hand, a smaller proportion of students identified with a more passive role. Those who 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree' collectively account for 10.4% of the respondents (6.8% and

3.6%, respectively). The 'Neutral' category represents 14.1% of the students, suggesting a segment that may have mixed feelings or varying levels of engagement depending on the context. Clearly, these data strongly support the notion that students are increasingly leveraging social media as a platform for active, participatory learning, moving beyond traditional consumption models.

Shift in Locus of Control

Table 8 summarizes the extent to which students prioritize their own judgment and peer feedback over direct instructions from teachers when learning on social media platforms. The data offer insights into the evolving dynamics of authority and collaboration in digital learning environments.

Table 8: Reliance on Own Judgment and Peer Feedback vs. Teacher Instructions on Social Media

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	7	3.6%
Disagree	15	7.8%
Neutral	49	25.5%
Agree	77	40.1%
Strongly agree	44	22.9%

As illustrated in **Table 8**, the data show a significant inclination among students to rely on their own judgment and peer feedback for learning

on social media, rather than solely on direct teacher instructions. A combined 63.0% of students either 'Agree' (40.1%) or 'Strongly Agree'

(22.9%) with this statement. These data suggest a shift towards more autonomous and collaborative learning approaches, where students actively seek and value input from their peers and personal assessments.

In contrast, a smaller proportion of students expressed disagreement, with 7.8% 'Disagreeing' and 3.6% 'Strongly Disagreeing', totaling 11.4%. This indicates that a minority still prefer or require direct teacher guidance. The 'Neutral' category, comprising 25.5% of the respondents, suggests a notable segment of students who may balance various sources of guidance or whose reliance

varies by context. To sum up, these data highlight the growing importance of self-directed learning and peer-to-peer interaction in social media-based educational contexts, potentially challenging traditional hierarchical learning models of instruction.

Table 9 presents the extent to which students perceive themselves as the primary agents in charge of their learning processes when utilizing social media platforms. The data offer insights into student autonomy and self-efficacy within these digital learning environments.

Table 9: Students' Perception of Being in Charge of Their Learning on Social Media

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	7	3.6%
Disagree	16	8.3%
Neutral	36	18.8%
Agree	86	44.8%
Strongly agree	47	24.5%

As depicted in **Table 9**, the data elucidate a strong sense of personal agency among students regarding their learning on social media. A significant majority, totaling 69.3% of the students, either 'Agree' (44.8%) or 'Strongly Agree' (24.5%) that they are the main person in charge of their learning when using social media. These data highlight a prevailing belief in self-directed learning and personal responsibility within these digital platforms.

By contrast, a smaller proportion of students expressed disagreement, with 8.3% 'Disagreeing' and 3.6% 'Strongly Disagreeing', collectively accounting for 11.9%. This suggests that a minority of students do not feel fully in control of their learning on social media. The 'Neutral'

category, comprising 18.8% of the respondents, indicates a segment of students who may have mixed feelings or whose sense of control varies depending on the specific learning context or platform. Overall, these data strongly support the notion that social media empowers students to take a proactive and central role in managing their own educational journeys.

Table 10 demonstrates the extent to which social media platforms have influenced students' reliance on instructors for finding information and answers. The data offer insights into the perceived shift in information-seeking behaviors and the role of social media as an alternative or supplementary resource.

Table 10: Students' Perceived Independence from Instructors in Using Social Media for Learning

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	8	4.2%
Disagree	14	7.3%
Neutral	44	22.9%
Agree	80	41.7%
Strongly agree	46	24%

As shown in **Table 10**, the data demonstrate a strong perception among students that social media has reduced their dependency on instructors for finding information and answers. A significant majority, totaling 65.7% of the students, either 'Agree' (41.7%) or 'Strongly Agree' (24.0%) with this statement "Social media has made me less dependent on my instructors for finding

information and answers". These data suggest that social media platforms are increasingly viewed as valuable, independent sources for academic information and problem solving, empowering students to conduct their own research and find solutions.

Conversely, a smaller proportion of students expressed disagreement, with 7.3% ‘Disagreeing’ and 4.2% ‘Strongly Disagreeing’, collectively accounting for 11.5%. This indicates that a minority still heavily rely on instructors or do not find social media to be a sufficient alternative for information. The ‘Neutral’ category, comprising 22.9% of the respondents, suggests a segment of students who may experience a balanced reliance on both instructors and social media, or whose dependency varies by subject matter. Clearly, these data highlight the transformative role of social media in fostering greater student autonomy in information retrieval, potentially reshaping the traditional student-instructor dynamic.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This subsection presents the qualitative analysis of the data collected to gain deeper insights. Unlike the quantitative analysis, which focuses on numerical patterns, this part explores students’ personal experiences and perspectives in greater depth. The qualitative data are based on responses to three open-ended questions that allow participants to express their views in their own words. Through careful examination and interpretation of these responses, this subsection aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how students experience autonomy, participation, and control when using social media for learning, thereby complementing and enriching the quantitative findings. In this analysis, students’ responses are summarized, while some selected responses are documented verbatim to illustrate participants’ perspectives and provide a richer, more authentic understanding of their experiences.

Q.1 Can you describe a specific time when you felt you had complete control over your learning while using a social media platform? What did you do, and how did it feel?

Students’ responses revealed diverse experiences with social media-based learning. Many highlighted that platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram allowed them to take control of their learning by choosing what content to study, deciding the pace, and selecting which resources or instructors to follow. For example, one student explained that when trying to understand a complex grammar rule, they “watched several videos, paused them, replayed parts, and even found a channel with practice exercises. It felt empowering to learn at my own pace and choose the best teacher for me.” Another student shared that for TOEFL preparation, they

“used Facebook groups to find study partners... It felt collaborative and completely driven by our needs.”

Students frequently emphasized the **flexibility and personalization** offered by social media. One participant noted, “I used a language learning community where I could ask questions about sentences or phrases. It felt like having a personalized grammar tutor.” Others described exploring topics of personal interest, combining learning with hobbies, or practicing skills independently. At the same time, some students indicated they did not rely on social media for learning, citing barriers such as limited internet access or a preference for traditional classroom instruction. One student remarked, “I never use social media; I rely only on class.”

Overall, the data suggest that social media can provide students with a sense of autonomy, self-direction, and empowerment in their learning. However, its effectiveness is often **supportive rather than primary**, depending on the student’s access, familiarity with platforms, and learning preferences.

Q2: In what ways is learning on social media different from learning in a traditional classroom, especially in terms of your role as a student (e.g., being active vs. passive)?

Students consistently highlighted that social media encourages a more **active and autonomous role** compared to traditional classrooms, where they often described themselves as passive learners. Many noted that in the amphitheater, they mostly listen to the professor, take notes, and follow instructions, while on social media they actively **search, evaluate, and share information**. For example, one student explained, “In a classroom I mostly listen to the professor, but on social media I actively search, share, and discuss information.” Another noted, “In class I participate only when called on. On social media I choose when to engage,” emphasizing the freedom to regulate their own learning.

Several students highlighted the **flexibility and personalization** of social media, which allows them to focus on topics of interest and learn at their own pace. As one participant described, “Learning stops when class ends, but social media learning continues anytime,” while another added, “I feel ownership of my learning journey through social media.” Some students also pointed out that

online learning reduces stress and fosters critical thinking: “I can experiment with language without fear,” and “It encourages critical thinking about different viewpoints.”

However, a few students noted potential drawbacks or limitations. Some mentioned that social media could be **distracting or misused**, and others emphasized the continued importance of classroom instruction, acknowledging that social media is a **supportive complement** rather than a full replacement. One student explained, “Social media can make students independent but at the same time lazy because most of my classmates use it to steal information.”

To sum up, the responses suggest that social media fosters a **more active, self-directed, and engaged learning experience** compared to traditional classrooms, providing students with opportunities to control the pace, choose content, collaborate with peers, and explore topics beyond the formal curriculum.

Q3: How has using social media for learning changed your relationship with your instructors? Do you feel more independent or do you interact with them differently?

Students’ responses revealed that social media has had a **mixed but largely empowering impact** on their relationship with instructors. Many participants emphasized that using social media allows them to become **more independent learners**, seeking answers and resources from online communities or platforms before consulting instructors. One student noted, “I search for answers online before asking them,” while another explained, “I rely less on instructors for basic information.” Some students reported that social media enables them to **approach instructors with more specific or informed questions**, enhancing the quality of interactions: “I bring more informed questions to class” and “I ask about perspectives rather than definitions.”

Several participants described a shift toward a more **collaborative or supportive relationship**, where instructors serve as guides rather than the sole source of knowledge. For instance, one student remarked, “They feel more like guides than the only knowledge source,” and another shared, “My supervisor is tracking my thesis progress online,” indicating that social media can facilitate supervision and mentorship. Some students also highlighted the ability to **access alternative explanations, expert opinions, and**

resources online, reducing their dependence on traditional classroom interactions: “I learn from global communities, not just instructors.”

However, not all experiences were positive. Some students reported **limited or unchanged relationships** with their instructors, citing that professors may not actively engage on social media or prefer traditional classroom interactions: “Professors usually prefer classroom interaction,” and “I do not reach my professors through social media.” A few participants noted that social media interactions are informal or complementary rather than replacing face-to-face guidance.

All in all, the data suggest that social media can foster **greater learner independence, more strategic engagement with instructors, and a shift toward collaborative relationships**, although the extent of these changes depends on both student initiative and instructor participation in online spaces.

Key Findings

- Social media is widely perceived as a flexible and open learning environment, supporting both personal exploration and informal, self-initiated learning alongside traditional instruction.
- The findings highlight a strong enhancement of learner autonomy, with students able to control the content, pace, and direction of their learning in more personalized ways than in conventional classrooms.
- Social media promotes active, participatory learning, where students move beyond passive consumption to engage, create, and share knowledge.
- These platforms foster collaborative and interactive learning environments, enabling peer-to-peer interaction and collective knowledge construction.
- The results indicate a growing shift toward self-directed learning, with students taking a more proactive and central role in managing their educational experiences.
- There is evidence of a transition from hierarchical, teacher-centered models to more collaborative relationships, where students engage more strategically with instructors and peers.

- Overall, social media enhances learner independence, engagement, and empowerment, although its effectiveness remains context-dependent, influenced by factors such as access, digital literacy, and individual learning preferences.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives and the existing literature. The results provide insight into how social media influences EFL students' learning experiences, particularly in terms of autonomy, active participation, and the shift in locus of control. By linking the quantitative and qualitative findings, this discussion highlights the significance of the results and situates them within the framework of Behaviorism while acknowledging the shift toward learner-centered approaches.

The findings indicate a high level of perceived autonomy among students when engaging with social media platforms. Participants reported having control over what, how, and when they learn, highlighting the flexibility and self-directed nature of digital learning environments. These results resonate with previous research emphasizing learner autonomy in social media, where students can select resources, customize their learning paths, and engage in self-directed inquiry (Maden *et al.*, 2026; Hoffman, 2013).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings partially challenge behaviorist assumptions. While Behaviorism, as proposed by Skinner (1958) and Watson (1913), emphasizes stimulus–response patterns and teacher-directed reinforcement, the study shows that learners actively make decisions, organize learning sequences, and reflect on their progress. This indicates that social media learning extends beyond mere responses to external stimuli, supporting a more autonomous and self-regulated model of learning.

The results suggest that social media fosters active engagement, allowing students to contribute, share ideas, and interact more freely than in traditional classrooms. Learners reported participating in content creation, discussion, and collaborative knowledge building, behaviors that directly challenge the passive learner model central to behaviorist theory (Watson, 1913; Skinner, 1958). These findings align with Anderson and Dron (2014), who highlight that online communities and social media platforms facilitate peer-to-peer interaction and participatory learning, enabling

students to act as both consumers and producers of knowledge.

Although some behaviorist elements remain—such as reinforcement through feedback, likes, or peer acknowledgment—the overall pattern shows that learning in social media environments cannot be fully explained by stimulus–response mechanisms. Students' proactive engagement demonstrates the limitations of behaviorist frameworks in capturing the complexity of contemporary digital learning.

The study reveals a clear shift in the locus of control from instructor to learner. Students reported greater independence in decision-making, relying on their own judgment and peer support rather than solely on instructor guidance. This aligns with Hoffman's (2013) work on Personal Learning Environments, which highlights how learners manage their own educational experiences. The shift towards an internal locus of control is also consistent with Rotter's (1966) theory, demonstrating that social media empowers students to take responsibility for their learning trajectory.

Behaviorist models, which conceptualize learning as externally controlled and observable, are therefore challenged. While reinforcement and repetition still play a role in motivating engagement, the study indicates that learners are no longer passive recipients; they actively direct their learning, making choices that influence outcomes.

Overall, the findings show that social media promotes a significant departure from rigid, teacher-centered models of behaviorism. The platforms studied enhance learner autonomy (Maden *et al.*, 2026), foster active participation (Anderson & Dron, 2014), and facilitate a shift in the locus of control from instructor to learner (Hoffman, 2013; Rotter, 1966). At the same time, behaviorist elements such as feedback and reinforcement remain present, suggesting that contemporary social media learning environments combine both traditional and modern learning principles.

These findings are significant because they highlight the need to reconsider pedagogical approaches in EFL education. By acknowledging the active, self-directed nature of learners in social media contexts, educators can design more flexible, student-centered learning experiences that complement traditional instruction and leverage the benefits of digital platforms.

Taken together, this study demonstrates that social media provides EFL students with flexible, participatory, and self-directed learning opportunities that extend beyond traditional behaviorist models. Social media fosters autonomy, encourages active engagement, and shifts the locus of control to the learner, while still maintaining elements of reinforcement and feedback. These insights have important implications for educational theory and practice, emphasizing the value of learner-centered approaches and the potential of social media to enhance engagement, collaboration, and self-directed learning in contemporary educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study demonstrates that social media plays a significant role in reshaping EFL students' learning experiences by fostering autonomy, promoting active participation, and shifting the locus of control from instructor to learner. The findings highlight a clear departure from traditional behaviorist models, which conceptualize learners as passive recipients of knowledge, toward more dynamic, learner-centered environments where students actively construct and manage their own learning.

The findings of this study carry important implications for both educational theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the results challenge key assumptions of behaviorism, particularly the notion of the learner as a passive responder to external stimuli. Instead, the study supports a more nuanced understanding of learning that incorporates elements of autonomy, collaboration, and self-direction. While behaviorist principles such as reinforcement and feedback remain relevant, they are no longer sufficient to explain the complexity of learning in digital environments.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings suggest that educators should reconsider traditional teacher-centered approaches and integrate social media as a complementary learning tool. By leveraging social media platforms, instructors can create more flexible, interactive, and student-centered learning environments that encourage engagement, collaboration, and independent learning. Additionally, the shift in the instructor's role—from knowledge provider to facilitator—highlights the need for teaching strategies that support guidance, mentorship, and learner empowerment.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the findings are based on a specific sample of EFL students, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other contexts or educational settings. Second, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by participants' perceptions and subjective experiences. Third, the effectiveness of social media as a learning tool appears to be context-dependent, varying according to factors such as students' access to technology, familiarity with platforms, and individual learning preferences.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by exploring more diverse populations across different educational contexts and cultural settings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how social media influences learning over time and whether its impact leads to measurable improvements in academic performance. Additionally, further research could investigate the role of specific social media platforms and features in shaping learning behaviors, as well as the ways in which instructors can effectively integrate these tools into formal educational practices.

In closing, the findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of social media in education. By fostering autonomy, encouraging active engagement, and redefining the roles of both learners and instructors, social media offers valuable opportunities for enhancing learning in the 21st century. Embracing these changes is essential for developing educational practices that are responsive to the evolving needs of modern learners.

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