

EFL Learners' English Engagement in LinkedIn-Based Professional Digital Practices: Exploring Career-Oriented Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Many students today consider English as an essential requirement for entering the workforce, especially because professional activities are increasingly conducted in the digital realm. Platforms like LinkedIn are more frequently exposing students to the use of English in real professional contexts, ranging from preparing for the job application process to the demands of professional communication in English. This situation encourages students to pay more attention to learning English through various digital media outside the classroom. The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between career-oriented motivation and EFL learners' engagement in learning English on LinkedIn as a professional digital space. **Method:** This research uses a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design and involves 28 advanced students from English education programs at two universities in Probolinggo. Data were collected using two main instruments: questionnaires and daily reflection journals. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. **Findings:** The study's findings indicate that LinkedIn provides a digital professional space that familiarizes students with English-language communication practices in the workplace. This exposure is linked to students' growing awareness that English is a crucial component of professional development. Although motivation levels did not show a significant correlation with the frequency of LinkedIn use, students with stronger professional motivation tended to practice professional English communication more actively in the digital space. **Novelty:** This study expands research on informal digital English learning (IDLE) by demonstrating that professional digital platforms such as LinkedIn help shape EFL learners' perceptions of the importance of English in the workplace and encourage them to engage more actively in English learning through various digital practices outside the formal education setting.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of globalization and the increasing mobility of the international workforce have made English language proficiency a key competency in the modern workplace (Arghode et al., 2020). In the context of the global labor market, English is viewed not only as a language skill but also as a professional communication competency that supports cross-cultural collaboration, the development of international networks, and participation in global professional communities (Xu et al., 2025). Several studies indicate that English proficiency is associated with individuals' ability to access professional networks and utilize digital resources for career development and mobility (Gutema, 2026; Hanley et al., 2026; Netz et al., 2020). From the perspective of Global Englishes, English is therefore understood as a dynamic communication resource that is flexibly used across intercultural social and professional contexts (Rose., 2021)

Alongside globalization, digital transformation has reshaped the ways English is encountered and used in professional communication (Willcocks, 2026; Xu et al., 2025). Beyond formal educational settings, English increasingly emerges through digital interactions, online communities, and work-oriented communication practices, providing learners with opportunities to engage with the language in more authentic contexts (Arndt & Kusyk, 2026; Reichert et al., 2022; Iskandar, 2022). These developments indicate that professional digital environments have become important spaces where English use extends beyond traditional learning contexts.

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), which explains how English learning and use can occur through digital activities outside formal instruction (Soyoof et al., 2021). Through activities such as accessing online content, interacting with other users, and participating in global communities, learners may encounter English as part of meaningful social practices rather than as an isolated learning activity (Guo & Lee, 2023). Previous studies have shown that such digital engagement can support communication development, vocabulary growth, and learners' confidence in using English in real-world contexts (Ko, 2026; Guan et al., 2024; Shadiev & Wang, 2022).

Within these emerging digital contexts, professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn represent a distinctive environment for English use. Unlike general social media platforms that primarily facilitate informal interaction, LinkedIn is designed around professional identity construction, networking, and workplace-oriented communication (Rezai et al., 2024; Behrend et al., 2024; Stathopoulou et al., 2024). Activities such as developing professional profiles, engaging in industry discussions, personal branding, and interacting with recruiters require users to employ English in structured professional contexts (Nazzal, 2024). Consequently, English functions not only as a communication tool but also as a resource for establishing professional credibility and participating in digital professional communities (Garcia et al., 2023; Schmidt & Franz, 2024).

Although research on digital English learning has expanded through studies of general social media platforms and language-learning applications such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Duolingo, and ELSA Speak (Metruk, 2024; Lai & Wang, 2025; Pikhart, 2024), professional networking platforms remain comparatively underexplored in workplace-related English learning. Existing studies have provided limited understanding of how professional digital participation, particularly through platforms such as LinkedIn, facilitates English use beyond formal learning while simultaneously supporting career development (Lai et al., 2024; Lee & Roger, 2023). Therefore, examining LinkedIn as a professional digital environment can extend current understandings of how English learning occurs through authentic professional participation.

To further understand learners' engagement in professional digital environments, motivation can be examined through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which explains how behaviour is shaped by different levels of internalization, perceived value, and self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In relation to English learning, career-oriented motivation may influence not only learners' willingness to engage with English but also how they perceive and use English as a resource for future professional development. However, motivation does not necessarily correspond to the amount of digital participation, as learners may engage with professional platforms for different purposes and with different levels of personal relevance. Guided by this perspective, this study investigates

the relationship between EFL learners' career-oriented motivation and their engagement in LinkedIn-based professional activities. It also examines how participation in professional digital communication shapes learners' perceptions of the importance of English proficiency for career development. To achieve these objectives, this study poses three research questions: (1) What motivates EFL learners to learn English for career development? (2) How do EFL learners use LinkedIn in professional activities that provide them with exposure to English outside of formal learning? (3) How is EFL learners' career-oriented motivation reflected in their engagement in professional activities on LinkedIn?.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study examined LinkedIn use by final-semester English language education students preparing to enter the workforce. Participants were recruited using a screening questionnaire distributed to students at two universities in Probolinggo Regency. The questionnaire collected information on academic status, prior LinkedIn experience, and interest in professional development. From approximately 200 responses, 28 students were specifically selected for this study. They had completed an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, had an active LinkedIn profile, had prior experience with the platform, and demonstrated an interest in professional development (Campbell et al., 2020). They were instructed to use LinkedIn daily during the 30-day study period to support their English language learning in a professional context.

This study used a mixed-methods approach, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection was conducted using daily reflection journals and questionnaires. The reflection journals served to document and monitor participants' LinkedIn use throughout the 30-day study period. The data collected included details such as duration of LinkedIn use, professional activities undertaken, LinkedIn features used, and participants' interactions with English while using the platform (Alt et al., 2022). In parallel, a questionnaire was administered to assess participants' motivation for learning English. This questionnaire consisted of five self-assessment questions reflecting different motivational orientations. Participants were asked to select the statement that best reflected their primary motivation for learning English. The questionnaire was distributed after 30 consecutive days of LinkedIn use.

For data analysis, all information from the daily reflection journals and questionnaires was compiled into a table. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were then conducted. Descriptive statistics were used to examine general trends regarding participants' learning motivation and duration of LinkedIn use. A chi-square test of independence was then conducted to determine whether there was a significant relationship between motivational categories and intensity of LinkedIn use. Qualitative data from the daily reflection journals were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2023) to explain and expand on the quantitative findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study reveal three main patterns. First, students of English as a foreign language (EFL) largely demonstrate career-oriented motivation in the process of learning English. Second, LinkedIn serves as a space for various forms of English language use,

which are integrated into digital practices in the workplace. Third, no significant relationship was found between motivational orientation and the intensity of LinkedIn use.

Motivation of EFL Learners in Career-Oriented English Language Learning

In a questionnaire on career-oriented motivation in English language learning, students were asked to select the statement that best reflected their primary reason for learning English, or students were asked to select the statement that best reflected their primary reason for learning English. These statements were formulated based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework, specifically the distinction between autonomous and controlled forms of motivation in language learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Alamer, 2021). Open-ended response options were provided so that students could explain in more detail how they view English language learning in relation to their career goals. Figure 1 shows the details of the data obtained from the questionnaire.

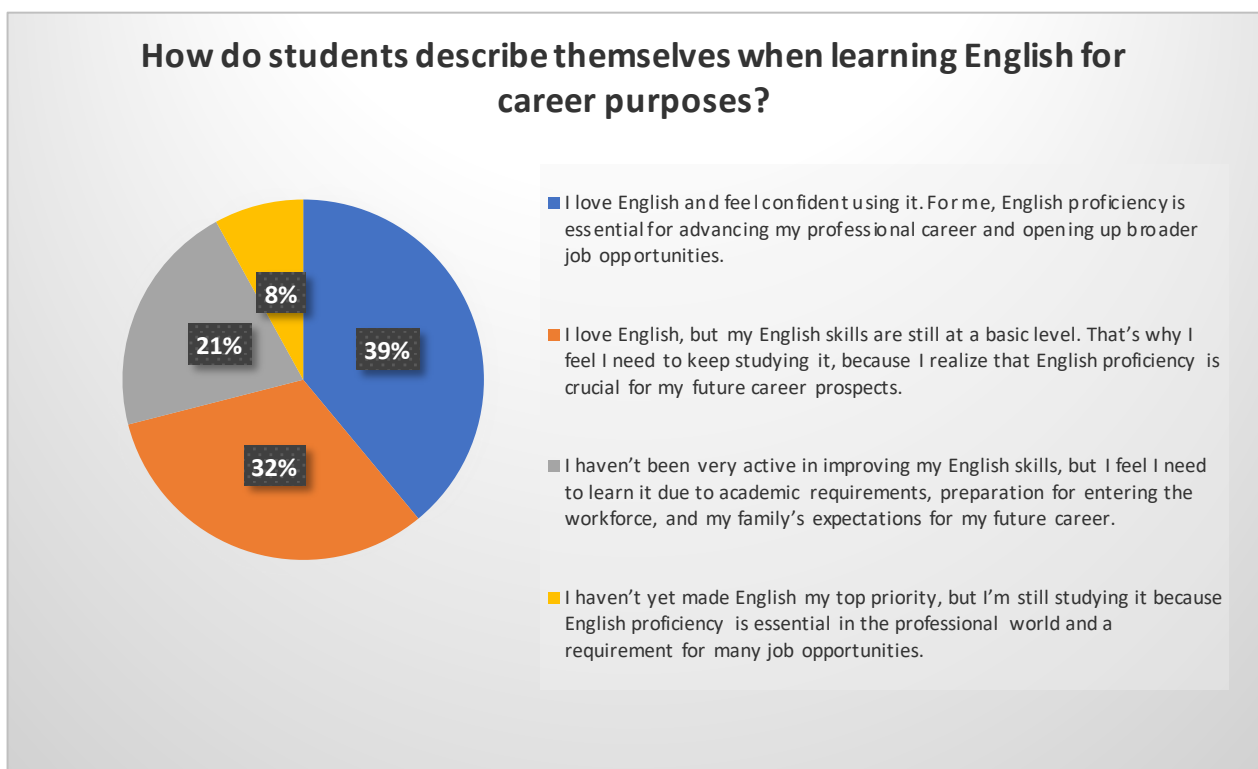


Figure 1. A Chart on Student Motivation in Learning English for Career Purposes

As shown in the graph, the majority of students expressed a positive attitude toward learning English and viewed it as an important skill in preparing for their careers. These findings align with various studies confirming that English proficiency contributes to graduates' competitiveness and employability, particularly in the context of "English for professional purposes" (Kamil & Muhammad, 2025; Rose et al., 2021). Overall, 39% of students demonstrated autonomous motivation, characterized by a commitment to learning driven by personal interest and an awareness that English plays a crucial role in opening up job opportunities and career development. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this pattern reflects autonomous motivation, as learning is linked to personal values and self-recognized career goals (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Alamer, 2021). Previous research has also shown that autonomous motivation is associated with

engagement, perseverance, and more adaptive learning outcomes (Howard et al., 2021; Al-hoorie et al., 2022). Meanwhile, 32% of students fall into the “identified regulation” category, meaning they consider English personally important for their career preparation, even though their language proficiency remains at a basic level. This group demonstrates strong motivation because they recognize the practical value of English for their future careers. Overall, 21% of students exhibit “internalized regulation,” influenced by academic demands, career preparation, and family expectations. This motivation reflects internal pressures and social obligations that drive learning, rather than being driven solely by personal interest. In contrast, 8% of students fall into the lowest level of motivation, where English is not yet a top priority, although it is still recognized as an important prerequisite in the workplace.

Overall, these results suggest that learning English is viewed not only as an academic prerequisite but also as a strategic advantage for career development. However, the lack of a significant correlation between motivational orientation and intensity of LinkedIn use suggests that career motivation does not automatically correlate with frequency of platform use. Furthermore, student engagement on LinkedIn is influenced by other factors such as digital literacy, perceived usefulness, trust in the platform, and activity design (Healy et al., 2023; Lexis et al., 2023). Therefore, English use through LinkedIn is better understood as a context-dependent digital practice, determined not only by motivation but also by the context of use and the quality of professional interactions.

Students' Use of LinkedIn

Students use LinkedIn to engage with English outside of formal instruction, aligning with their professional motivations. Such extracurricular experiences foster language learning as learners interact with English in relevant, real-world contexts (De Wilde et al., 2020). Reflective journals indicate daily usage time of approximately 20–64 minutes, with English primarily encountered in professional contexts rather than explicit learning contexts. This suggests that language exposure occurs incidentally in work-related activities, making English engagement a byproduct of professional participation. This aligns with the concept of language exposure as a behavioral, cognitive, and social activity within authentic contexts (Hiver et al., 2024). The 30-day journals also revealed five interrelated patterns: career orientation, professional identity development, professional networking, professional learning, and professional participation. Overall, these patterns suggest that LinkedIn functions not only as a social network but also as a professional digital ecosystem where students experience authentic work English in various forms. Previous studies have also highlighted LinkedIn's role in supporting students' employability, professional networking, identity formation, and career orientation (Healy et al., 2023; Lexis et al., 2023), as well as enhancing professional contacts and work-related communication skills (Badoer et al., 2021).

Table 1. Patterns of LinkedIn-Based Professional Engagement and Associated English Practices (N = 28)

Pattern of Engagement	Participants	Representative Activities	English Practices Emerging from the Activities
Career Exploration	P1, P5, P10, P12, P14, P19, P27	Searching for internships, international vacancies, remote work opportunities, and multinational company profiles	Reading job descriptions, understanding recruitment requirements, interpreting workplace terminology, and accessing career information in English



Professional Identity Development	P2, P6, P9, P11, P18, P23, P24	Building personal brands, updating professional profiles, and preparing resumes	Writing professional summaries, presenting qualifications and experiences, and developing professional self-presentation skills
Professional Networking	P3, P7, P13, P15, P20, P25, P26, P28	Connecting with recruiters, professionals, and online communities	Understanding professional communication styles, participating in professional interactions, and communicating in English
Professional Learning	P4, P8, P16, P22	Using LinkedIn Learning, professional groups, and career-development resources	Developing workplace vocabulary, improving professional writing, and engaging with industry-related English content
Workplace Participation (Remote Work and International Internship Experiences)	P17, P21	Participating in remote work and international internships	Using English for client communication, workplace discussions, problem-solving, and interaction with international supervisors

Note. Participants were classified according to their primary pattern of engagement. Several participants reported multiple forms of engagement across categories.

As Table 1 shows, student engagement on LinkedIn extends beyond platform use and reflects diverse forms of participation in the professional digital environment. While these patterns differ in their primary focus, they share a common thread: English is consistently integrated into students' professional activities. Rather than being pursued as a stand-alone learning goal, English serves as a medium through which students gain access to opportunities, develop professional identities, interact with professional networks, and engage with workplace practices. These findings support the view that English for professional purposes should be understood within the context of workplace communication needs, employability skills, and the communicative competencies required to undertake professional activities (Kamil & Muhammad, 2025). In this sense, LinkedIn functions not only as a networking platform but also as a professional ecosystem where work-related activities simultaneously facilitate ongoing exposure to authentic English use.

Exploring career prospects emerged as the most prominent usage pattern in the reflection reports. Participants frequently used LinkedIn to search for internships, international job openings, remote work opportunities, and information about multinational companies. While these activities were primarily motivated by career goals, they simultaneously placed students in a professional environment where English was the dominant language of communication for job postings. This interpretation is supported by research showing that the LinkedIn job ecosystem organizes career-related information around job titles, skills, companies, and evaluation questions, making job postings a source of structured professional discourse (Li et al., 2020). As a result, participants encountered recruitment discourse, company profiles, qualification requirements, and workplace expectations that differed from the language used in academic settings. Some participants reported difficulties when initially encountering international recruitment materials. One participant explained "I often read job vacancies from international companies, and many of the requirements were written in English. At first, I needed extra time to understand some terms, but after reading similar postings repeatedly, I became more familiar with the language used in professional settings" (P5).

A similar experience was reported by another participant who regularly seeks remote work opportunities “Most remote job advertisements were written in English, so I had to understand the requirements carefully before deciding whether I was suitable for the position” (P10). Similarly, a participant actively seeking internships noted, “Many internship announcements required applicants to understand qualifications and responsibilities written in English before submitting applications” (P14). Overall, these reports indicate that participants are exposed not only to specialized vocabulary but also to the communication logic of modern recruitment systems. To understand job postings, they must interpret qualifications, responsibilities, competency requirements, and company expectations, many of which are communicated in English. In this context, English serves not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism through which access to international opportunities is negotiated and evaluated. More importantly, exploring career prospects appears to foster a process of informal professional socialization. Through repeated engagement with recruitment materials and company information, participants gradually become familiar with the criteria employers use to assess candidates and communicate professional expectations. This interpretation aligns with research showing that LinkedIn can support career orientation and employability learning by connecting students with professional networks, professional identities, and career-related opportunities (Healy et al., 2023; Lexis et al., 2023).

Beyond simply career orientation, participants demonstrated a more active engagement with constructing their professional identities on LinkedIn. This pattern was characterized by conscious efforts to present themselves in a digitally mediated professional space, where visibility and credibility were negotiated through language choices and discursive positions. Activities such as optimizing professional profiles, writing CVs, and describing academic or organizational experiences in English indicated that participants were not simply presenting information but were actively constructing their professional identities for a broader professional audience. Previous studies on LinkedIn in higher education have identified network identity, professional profile development, and social media literacy as important and career-relevant outcomes of LinkedIn-based learning activities (Lexis et al., 2023; Badoer et al., 2021). Several participants emphasized the need to align their language choices with perceived professional standards. One participant stated, “I updated my profile and wrote my experiences in English so that recruiters could better understand my qualifications and what I can offer professionally” (P11). Another participant highlighted the evaluative dimension of profile creation, stating, “I tried to make my summary sound more professional in English because I know recruiters judge candidates from how they present themselves online” P6 Another participant added a reflective dimension to this approach, “Writing my profile in English made me think more carefully about how to describe myself and what makes me different from others” (P23). Taken together, these statements suggest that constructing a professional identity on LinkedIn goes beyond simply translating personal data into English. Rather, it involves strategic identity work in which students selectively highlight accomplishments, reinterpret experiences, and align their self-descriptions with anticipated professional expectations. In this sense, English serves as a form of professional communication resource that shapes the construction and interpretation of professional legitimacy in the digital labor market. These findings also indicate a shift in English use: from passive reception to active self-presentation. While career orientation positions students as interpreters of external

professional discourse, identity development requires them to become producers of that professional discourse themselves. Therefore, the use of English is closely related to the formation of professional identity, where language skills influence perceptions of professionalism and professional position.

As students' visibility within the LinkedIn professional ecosystem increases, their engagement gradually shifts from individual self-presentation to social interactions integrated with the professional community. Activities such as contacting recruiters, following industry experts, joining professional groups, and observing ongoing discussions indicate that students are entering a communication environment characterized by implicit professional norms rather than explicit guidelines. Studies of college students' professional networks have shown that LinkedIn provides a structured space for connecting with professionals, increasing awareness of career options, and enhancing confidence in networking and communication skills (Badoer et al., 2021). Similarly, LinkedIn-based learning has been linked to building professional connections, developing a network identity, and improving social media literacy (Lexis et al., 2023). One participant noted, "I followed recruiters and professionals to see how they communicate and share information about career opportunities. I learned that professional communication on LinkedIn is different from everyday communication" (P13). Supporting this, another participant emphasized the learning that occurred through observation rather than direct participation, stating, "At first I just read comments and posts because I was not confident enough to respond, but I started to understand how professionals express opinions politely and clearly" (P7). Similarly, a participant highlighted the gradual nature of engagement, explaining, "Before I commented, I usually observed how others interact in discussions so I would not make mistakes in using English in a professional way" (P20). These accounts suggest that networking on LinkedIn enabled students to learn professional communication norms through observation, comparison, and gradual participation. In this process, English was not simply acquired as a linguistic system but encountered as a set of socially regulated practices embedded within professional communities. Students began to recognize that professional communication is not only about grammatical accuracy but also about tone management, interactional appropriateness, and discursive positioning within hierarchical and reputational networks. This interpretation aligns with English for Occupational Purposes research, which emphasizes that workplace communication competence includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions needed to perform professional tasks effectively (Kamil & Muhammad, 2025).

In addition to networking and developing professional identities, participants used LinkedIn Learning, professional groups, and various career-oriented resources on the platform for more structured and self-directed learning. Unlike formal classroom instruction, where learning paths are typically predetermined and exam-oriented, learning on LinkedIn evolved into an individualized process driven by personal career interests, perceived relevance, and pressing professional needs. This reflects a shift from curriculum-driven learning to interest-driven skill acquisition, with English serving more as a supporting medium than a core subject. This pattern aligns with studies of extracurricular English language exposure, which show that learners can acquire and develop English through activities not originally designed for formal language instruction (De Wilde et al., 2020). It also aligns with research on language proficiency, which defines it as a learner's active engagement with language in a variety of learning

environments and communication situations (Al-hoorie et al., 2022). Several participants emphasized that their initial use of LinkedIn Learning was motivated not by language development, but by the need for job-related skills. One participant explained, “I often use LinkedIn Learning to explore topics related to communication and workplace skills. Many of the materials are in English, so I learn both the content and the language at the same time” (P8). Complementing this, another participant highlighted the pragmatic orientation of learning, stating, “I use LinkedIn mostly to understand how professionals work and communicate in real situations, not just to improve my English, but it happens naturally while learning” (P16). A further participant emphasized the role of content relevance in sustaining engagement, noting, “The courses are interesting because they relate to my future job, so I don’t feel like I am studying English, but I still use it all the time” (P4). These statements indicate that English use in professional learning contexts is largely incidental and embedded in the acquisition of work-related knowledge. Rather than viewing linguistic structures as an end in itself, participants use English as a functional tool to access knowledge they consider directly relevant to their future careers. This suggests that language learning has become partially deinstitutionalized, shifting from formal instruction to contextualized knowledge consumption in professional digital environments. A recurring pattern in the reflective journals was frequent engagement with workplace-specific vocabulary, genre conventions, and communication practices that are underemphasized in traditional English language instruction. This included classroom discourse, corporate communication styles, and subject-specific terminology closely related to professional practice. Importantly, participants viewed these linguistic elements not as isolated language input, but as integral components of meaningful professional content.

The most advanced pattern identified in the reflection journals was participation in work life through telework and international internships. Although this form of participation was reported by only a few participants, it differs significantly from other patterns because it involves direct participation in authentic professional practice, rather than preparation for future employment. In this context, English is no longer simply a means to access professional opportunities, but becomes a tool for fulfilling professional tasks. For telework and international internship participants, English is integrated into daily work routines, such as communicating with clients and superiors, clarifying instructions, coordinating tasks, responding to work-related questions, and maintaining ongoing workplace interactions. Research on English for professional purposes supports this interpretation, emphasizing that professional communication skills are crucial for graduates' ability to meet workplace communication demands and effectively perform work-related tasks (Kamil & Muhammad, 2025). One participant who worked remotely as a Virtual Assistant for a U.S.-based client explained, “Almost all communication with clients is conducted in English. I need to discuss tasks, clarify instructions, and sometimes solve unexpected problems through online meetings and messages” (P17). Similarly, another participant described the experience of completing an internship with an international organization: “During my internship, I communicated with international supervisors and followed work instructions in English. Sometimes I had to ask questions to make sure I understood the tasks correctly” (P21). Unlike previous forms of collaboration, where participants could decide when and how to use English, working in the workplace brings communication demands shaped by job responsibilities. The use of English is no longer optional or exploratory but becomes a practical necessity, tightly

integrated into job performance. Success depends not only on language comprehension but also on the ability to use English strategically to manage professional responsibilities, foster professional relationships, coordinate collaboration, and address workplace challenges in real-time. In this context, communicative competence becomes closely linked to professional competence, as effective job performance relies heavily on the ability to operate in English in an international work environment. The five patterns identified in this study collectively reveal a continuum of engagement that ranges from career guidance to active participation in daily work. This continuum illustrates how professional digital platforms can pave the way for increased integration of English into professional practice. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that LinkedIn can support career guidance, professional identity development, networking, and learning to enhance students' employability (Healy et al., 2023; Lexis et al., 2023; Badoer et al., 2021). These findings also extend existing discussions on English for professional purposes by demonstrating that students' engagement with English can arise not only from formal instruction but also from participation in digital professional practices where English provides access, identity, interaction, learning, and performance in the workplace (Kamil & Muhammad, 2025; Al-hoorie et al., 2022).

Students' Motivation for Learning English and Their Use of LinkedIn

Results so far indicate that students generally demonstrate a high level of motivation to learn English for their professional development and actively use LinkedIn as a professional learning platform outside the classroom. However, as reflected in the daily reflection journals, the amount of time students spent on LinkedIn varied considerably, ranging from approximately 20 to 64 minutes per day. This variation suggests differences in the intensity of students' engagement with the platform. Since students also demonstrated different motivational orientations toward learning English, it was necessary to examine whether these motivational differences were associated with differences in LinkedIn usage intensity. Previous motivation research suggests that learners with stronger self-determined motivation tend to invest greater effort and engagement in learning activities. Therefore, a Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the association between students' motivational orientation and LinkedIn usage intensity.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation and Chi-Square Test between Students' Motivation and LinkedIn Usage Intensity

Cross-tabulation				
Motivation Orientation	High	Moderate	Low	Total
Identified-regulation-oriented	2 (2.25)	6 (5.14)	1 (1.61)	9
Lower self-determined	1 (1.25)	2 (2.86)	2 (0.89)	5
Autonomous-oriented	4 (3.50)	8 (8.00)	2 (2.50)	14
Total	7	16	5	28
Chi-Square Test				
Test	Value	df	p	
Pearson Chi-Square	2.870	4	.579	
Likelihood Ratio	3.214	4	.523	
N of Valid Cases	28	—	—	

Symmetry Measure

Measure	Value	Approx. Sig.
Phi	.320	.579
Cramer's V	.226	.579

Note. χ^2 = Pearson chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; p = asymptotic significance (2-tailed); – = not applicable. Students' motivational orientation was classified into three categories (autonomous-oriented, identified-regulation-oriented, and lower self-determined). LinkedIn usage intensity was categorized as high, moderate, or low based on participants' average daily usage time.

As shown in Table 2, moderate LinkedIn usage was the most common pattern across all motivational categories. Students with autonomous-oriented motivation were predominantly classified as moderate users (8 of 14 participants), followed by high (4) and low (2) usage. Similarly, most students with identified-regulation-oriented motivation were moderate users (6 of 9 participants), whereas students with lower self-determined motivation were more evenly distributed across the three usage categories. The Chi-square test of independence showed no statistically significant association between students' motivational orientation and LinkedIn usage intensity, $\chi^2(4, N = 28) = 2.87, p = .579$. The likelihood ratio test produced a similar result ($\chi^2 = 3.214, df = 4, p = .523$). Furthermore, the effect size was small (Cramer's $V = .226$), indicating that motivational orientation had only a weak association with differences in LinkedIn usage intensity. Although no statistically significant association was identified, the reflection journals revealed meaningful differences in how students engaged with LinkedIn. Students described various forms of professional engagement, including career exploration, professional identity development, professional networking, professional learning, and workplace participation. These findings suggest that motivational orientation was reflected more strongly in the nature and quality of students' professional engagement than in the amount of time they spent using the platform.

Discussion

The findings suggest that career orientation reshapes not only students' reasons for learning English but also the way English itself is conceptualized. Rather than functioning primarily as an academic subject, English is increasingly perceived as a professional resource that enables access to employment opportunities, workplace communication, and participation in international professional communities. This shift reflects a broader transformation in the function of English—from disciplinary knowledge to professional capital that supports future career trajectories. Such an interpretation extends the Global Englishes perspective, which views English less as a fixed linguistic system than as a communicative resource for participating effectively in multilingual and intercultural professional contexts (Rose et al., 2021). From this perspective, career-oriented motivation should not be interpreted merely as a factor that increases learners' exposure to English, but rather as a force that shapes how learners perceive, value, and strategically use English within meaningful social and professional contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Alamer, 2021; Xu et al., 2025).

The absence of a significant relationship between motivational orientation and LinkedIn usage intensity provides an important theoretical insight into the relationship between motivation and digital engagement. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, internalized goals do not necessarily manifest through higher behavioural

frequency because motivation primarily regulates the quality, direction, and meaning of behaviour rather than the amount of time allocated to an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Alamer, 2021; Alrabai & Alamer, 2024). In other words, highly career-oriented learners are not necessarily those who spend the longest time on LinkedIn; instead, they may differ in how they utilize the platform to achieve personally meaningful professional goals. Therefore, the non-significant statistical association does not indicate the absence of motivational influence, but rather suggests that motivational orientation operates through a more complex pathway than simple behavioural intensity. In professional digital environments, motivation may be expressed through strategic choices, such as selecting relevant professional content, constructing professional identities, or engaging in purposeful communication, rather than through prolonged platform use.

This interpretation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of LinkedIn within the framework of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE). Previous conceptualizations of digital English learning often emphasize frequency of exposure and opportunities for language interaction; however, professional platforms demonstrate that digital engagement is embedded within broader social purposes. Unlike language-learning applications that are explicitly designed to maximize language practice, LinkedIn generates English use indirectly through participation in professional activities. English exposure occurs because learners pursue career-related objectives, not because they intentionally seek language practice. This perspective is consistent with IDLE research, which emphasizes that digital English learning increasingly emerges through personally meaningful participation beyond formal instructional settings (Lee, 2019; Garcia et al., 2023; Sch & Franz, 2024). Thus, this study extends the IDLE framework by demonstrating that professional digital environments create a form of incidental language learning in which English development is embedded within occupational participation rather than separated as an independent learning activity (Sockett, 2014).

The findings further challenge the assumption that the amount of digital participation can adequately represent learning engagement. In professional digital contexts, duration alone provides only a limited indication of learners' experiences because identical amounts of platform use may involve substantially different levels of linguistic, cognitive, and professional involvement. A student spending less time on LinkedIn may engage in highly meaningful activities, such as communicating with professionals or preparing professional materials, whereas longer usage may involve more passive browsing. Therefore, the educational value of digital platforms is determined less by exposure quantity and more by the purpose, complexity, and authenticity of engagement. This interpretation aligns with recent research suggesting that digital learning outcomes are better explained by engagement quality, self-regulation, and authentic participation rather than behavioural frequency alone (Zheng & Xiao, 2024; Paul et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the non-significant association between motivational orientation and LinkedIn usage intensity should be interpreted as evidence of a mismatch between the construct being measured and the behavioural indicator used. Usage duration captures the quantity of participation, whereas career-oriented motivation represents learners' internalized values, goals, and perceived relevance of English for future professional development. Within professional digital environments, behavioural frequency is strongly influenced by contextual conditions, including available opportunities, professional demands, task requirements, and users' immediate purposes. Consequently,

learners with different motivational orientations may demonstrate similar usage durations while engaging in qualitatively different ways. This finding reinforces the argument that digital English learning should be examined through the lens of meaningful participation rather than exposure time alone (Rose et al., 2021; Lai & Wang, 2025). More broadly, the present study suggests that motivation in professional digital environments functions less as a predictor of how much learners participate and more as a mechanism that shapes why and how they participate.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that integrating professional digital platforms into English language education should prioritize meaningful professional participation rather than simply increasing students' time spent online. Greater exposure time alone is unlikely to generate richer language learning experiences unless learners are engaged in activities requiring authentic communication, professional identity construction, critical interaction, networking, and workplace problem solving. Therefore, English for Professional Purposes (EPP) instruction may benefit from positioning platforms such as LinkedIn not merely as supplementary learning tools but as authentic professional ecosystems where language development, employability, and digital professional literacy develop simultaneously. Activities involving professional profile development, interaction with professional communities, participation in workplace-oriented discussions, and engagement with discipline-specific content can create contexts in which English functions both as a communicative resource and as a professional competency. This pedagogical perspective aligns with contemporary approaches emphasizing contextualized language learning, digital participation, and professional communication competencies in globally connected workplaces (Hyland, 2022)(Jones & Hafner, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that career orientation influences not only students' reasons for learning English but also the ways they engage with English in professional digital environments. The findings position LinkedIn as an emerging context of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), where the quality and purpose of engagement provide a more meaningful explanation of learners' digital English practices than usage duration alone. Pedagogically, these findings suggest that university English instruction should move beyond exposure-based approaches by incorporating authentic professional participation into blended learning designs. Professional digital platforms can be integrated into English for Professional Purposes (EPP) through structured activities that support workplace communication, digital professional identity construction, and engagement with discipline-specific communities. Thus, future blended learning curricula should be reshaped from exposure-oriented models toward professionally situated learning designs that prepare students to use English meaningfully as future professionals. This study is limited by its reliance on perceptual data and the absence of direct measures of language development. Future research should employ longitudinal approaches to examine how sustained participation in professional digital environments contributes to learners' English development over time.

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