

From Learner Purposes to Needs-Based English Language Teaching in Mozambican Universities: Why Do University Students Learn English?

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ABSTRACT

The question of why university students learn English is central to the design of relevant language education. Yet university English courses may remain organised around prescribed content, grammar and assessment rather than students' academic, professional and personal purposes. This conceptual paper examines the relationship between learner purposes, needs analysis and needs-based English language teaching, with particular attention to Mozambican higher education. Drawing on research on learner-centred curriculum design, motivation, communicative competence, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), curriculum development and teacher education, the paper argues that learner purpose should provide an initial point of inquiry rather than a one-time classroom question. Mozambican scholarship is considered separately from the international literature, including Cossa's (2022) study of twenty Pathological Anatomy students at the Higher Institute of Health Sciences in Maputo. The paper proposes a Discover-Diagnose-Map-Teach-Evaluate (DDMTE) framework for connecting learner purposes with target situations, current abilities, learning needs, teaching activities and assessment. The framework positions needs analysis as cyclical and evidence-informed. The paper argues that effective university English education depends not simply on years of instruction but on alignment among learner purposes, communicative opportunities, disciplinary requirements, pedagogy and assessment.

Keywords: English language teaching; higher education; Mozambique; learner purposes; needs analysis; English for Specific Purposes; English for Academic Purposes; communicative competence; learner-centred curriculum; motivation

INTRODUCTION

The question "Why do university students learn English?" appears simple, but it has substantial implications for language curriculum design. University students do not necessarily learn English for the same reasons, nor do they necessarily expect to use it in the same contexts. Some need English primarily to read scientific literature; others need it to communicate with patients, colleagues, clients or international partners. Some need to write academic assignments and research papers, while others require English for technical documentation, professional presentations, digital resources, employment or postgraduate study. Still others may learn English because it is a compulsory component of their university programme. Several of these purposes may coexist within the same learner.

The central argument of this paper is that the purpose for which English is learned should influence what English is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed. This does not mean that university students should determine the curriculum independently or that general English should be abandoned. Rather, it means that curriculum decisions should be informed by evidence about learners, their current abilities, their academic and professional contexts, and the communicative tasks they are expected to perform.

The theoretical literature provides several complementary foundations for this argument. Harmer (2015) emphasizes the importance of understanding learners and the purposes for which they learn. Nunan (1988) and Tudor (1996) place learners and learning processes at the centre of curriculum development. Brown (1995) and

Nation and Macalister (2010) conceptualize curriculum design as a systematic process involving needs, goals, content, teaching, assessment and evaluation. These perspectives challenge the assumption that a language syllabus should be determined solely by a pre-established sequence of grammatical structures.

The literature on English for Specific Purposes provides an even more direct connection between purpose and curriculum. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) conceptualize ESP as an approach grounded in learners' reasons for learning. Their distinction among necessities, lacks and wants remains particularly useful. Necessities refer to what learners need to be able to do in a target situation; lacks concern the difference between present competence and required competence; and wants concern learners' perceptions of what they would like or believe they need to learn. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) further establish needs analysis as a central component of ESP course development, while Basturkmen (2010) demonstrates how needs can be translated into course content, objectives and pedagogical activities. Long (2005) places needs analysis within a broader methodological framework in which target situations and communicative requirements are systematically investigated. Belcher (2006), meanwhile, emphasizes the importance of perceived needs and learners' imagined academic, professional and social futures.

The importance of learner purpose is also evident in English for Academic Purposes. Swales (1990) demonstrates that academic communication is organised through genres associated with particular discourse communities. Hyland (2006) similarly conceptualizes academic English as participation in disciplinary and social practices rather than simply the mastery of grammatical structures. University students therefore need to learn how to perform academic activities such as reading research articles, summarising, paraphrasing, synthesising sources, constructing arguments, presenting information and participating in scholarly discussions.

Communicative language teaching provides another important foundation. Richards (2006) emphasizes meaningful communication as a central principle of communicative language teaching, while Harmer (2015) discusses the importance of interaction, learner engagement and meaningful language use. These perspectives do not require grammar to be discarded. Rather, they position grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and other linguistic resources as components of the broader ability to communicate.

The theoretical concept of communicative competence reinforces this position. Hymes (1972) challenged narrow conceptions of language competence by emphasizing appropriate language use in social contexts. Canale and Swain (1980) developed a multidimensional model of communicative competence, while Bachman (1990) conceptualized communicative language ability as involving knowledge and strategic capacity for language use. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) and Celce-Murcia (2007) further developed models incorporating discourse, sociocultural and strategic dimensions. The Council of Europe (2001) subsequently framed language users as social agents undertaking tasks in particular contexts. Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2007), Taş and Khan (2020), and Ahmed (2023) continue this discussion of communicative competence and its implications for language education.

The question of purpose is also closely connected to motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasize autonomy, competence and relatedness in their self-determination theory, while Dörnyei (2009) highlights goals, identity and future-oriented conceptions of language learning. A university student who understands English as part of a desired professional identity may relate differently to English learning from a student who sees it only as a compulsory subject. Motivation, however, should not be understood as an isolated psychological characteristic. Learners' perceptions of relevance can be strengthened or weakened by classroom experiences, opportunities for successful communication and the extent to which teaching connects with their goals.

Teacher education constitutes another part of this argument. Diniz-Pereira (2014), Netto and Azevedo (2018), and Zeichner (1983, 1994) contribute to broader discussions of teacher preparation, professional knowledge and models of teacher education. Teixeira and Santos (2003), Oliveira (2008), and Santos (2019) similarly contribute to discussions of teacher-education paradigms and professional development. These perspectives are important because needs-based teaching requires teachers to do more than deliver prescribed content. Teachers must interpret learner information, diagnose abilities, analyse target situations, select appropriate materials, design communicative tasks and evaluate learning.

Research methodology also matters. Marconi and Lakatos (2003) emphasize systematic procedures in scientific inquiry. Cossa's (2023) own research has employed documentary research, questionnaires, observation, content analysis and data triangulation. This methodological orientation is relevant to needs analysis because no single source can necessarily provide a complete picture of students' needs.

The Mozambican context provides a particularly important setting in which to examine these questions. English operates alongside Portuguese and numerous Mozambican languages. Portuguese occupies a central position in formal education, while English is generally learned as a foreign language. Students may therefore receive substantial formal exposure to English without necessarily having extensive opportunities to use it for academic or professional communication.

Mozambican scholarship has documented different dimensions of this situation. Lopes (1998) drew attention to the limitations of English learning and opportunities for communicative use. Monjane-Henriksen (2010) examined students who had experienced several years of English instruction but continued to encounter communicative difficulties. Mawere (2012) highlighted the influence of Portuguese and limitations involving teachers and learning materials. Nhapulo (2013) examined academic English needs among postgraduate students, while Cabinda (2014) addressed academic reading in the university context. Ussene (2017) identified continuing problems concerning English learning, assessment, supervision and resources. Cossa and Dias (2022) contribute further to the discussion of English education and communicative competence in Mozambique.

Cossa (2022) provides particularly relevant higher-education evidence. His study involved twenty Pathological Anatomy students at the Higher Institute of Health Sciences (ISCISA) in Maputo. The participants reported an average of 6.1 years of English instruction in secondary education and approximately 120 hours of English at higher-education level. Their CEFR-based self-assessment indicated A1 in listening, speaking and writing and A2 in reading. These findings should not be interpreted as representative of all Mozambican university students because the sample was small, programme-specific and based on self-assessment. Nevertheless, the study provides an important case demonstrating that years of formal English instruction do not necessarily correspond to functional communicative competence.

This distinction is central to the present paper. The relevant issue is not simply whether students have studied English for five, six or seven years. The more important question is what they have been able to do with English during those years and whether their previous learning has prepared them for the communicative demands of higher education and professional life.

The paper therefore proposes that the question "Why do you learn English?" should be transformed from a casual classroom question into the first stage of systematic needs analysis.

The paper addresses four research questions:

1. What purposes do university students have for learning English, and how can these purposes be translated into meaningful learning objectives?
2. How can needs analysis connect students' perceived purposes with their current abilities and the communicative demands of academic and professional contexts?
3. How can a needs-based approach inform university English curriculum and pedagogy in Mozambique?
4. How can the Discover-Diagnose-Map-Teach-Evaluate framework support continuous alignment among learner purposes, teaching, learning and assessment?

The paper is conceptual and pedagogical rather than an empirical evaluation of the proposed framework. Its contribution lies in bringing together established international scholarship and Mozambican evidence while developing a practical model for university English curriculum development.

Learner Purpose: From “Why?” to “What?”

Purpose is not the same as motivation

Learner purpose and motivation are related but should not be treated as identical.

Motivation concerns the psychological processes that initiate and sustain learning. Purpose concerns the reason or intended use associated with that learning.

A student may be motivated to learn English because the language is required for a degree. Another may learn because English is important for future employment. Another may wish to study abroad. Another may want to access scientific information.

The same learner can have several purposes simultaneously.

For example: “I need English for my future career.”

This is meaningful but too broad to determine a curriculum.

The teacher needs to ask:

- What career?
- In which contexts?
- With whom?
- For what tasks?
- Speaking or writing?
- Reading which genres?
- Which professional vocabulary?
- Which academic activities?
- Which digital environments?

The broad purpose can then be transformed into specific communicative requirements.

Thus, **Reason** → **Target situation** → **Communicative task** → **Language requirement** → **Learning outcome** becomes the central movement from purpose to pedagogy.

Common purposes among university students

University students may learn English for academic study, scientific reading, academic writing, research, professional communication, employment, international mobility, postgraduate study, digital learning, access to technical information, social communication, travel, personal development, and institutional requirements.

These categories are not mutually exclusive.

A nursing student may require English for scientific reading, professional communication and employment. An IT student may require English for technical documentation, research and international communication. An English teacher trainee may need English for academic research, classroom teaching and professional development.

Consequently, “university English” should not be understood as a completely uniform category.

Learner-Centredness and Curriculum Design

Nunan (1988) and Tudor (1996) are particularly important for understanding the learner-centred curriculum.

A learner-centred approach gives students a meaningful role in identifying their needs, establishing goals, monitoring progress and evaluating learning. It does not mean that teachers abandon professional responsibility.

Students know about:

- their experiences;
- their difficulties;
- their aspirations;
- their preferences;
- their perceived strengths.

Teachers know about:

- language learning;
- pedagogy;
- assessment;
- task design;
- curriculum development.

Disciplinary lecturers know about:

- academic requirements;
- disciplinary genres;
- professional practices.

Employers and professional stakeholders may know about:

- workplace communication;
- professional expectations;
- occupational language.

Needs-based curriculum development should therefore integrate the above perspectives.

A useful principle is Learner voice + teacher expertise + disciplinary requirements + professional demands = informed curriculum design.

This avoids two extremes.

The first is a teacher-dominated curriculum in which learners' purposes are ignored. The second is a student-dominated curriculum in which learners' preferences are accepted without investigating actual target requirements.

The teacher's role is therefore not simply to ask students what they want. It is to listen, investigate, interpret and translate.

Motivation, Agency and Future Professional Identity

Ryan and Deci (2000) identify autonomy, competence and relatedness as important elements of motivation. These concepts have direct implications for university English teaching.

Students may experience greater autonomy when they have meaningful choices. They may also experience competence when they can see progress. Furthermore, they may experience relatedness when they interact meaningfully with teachers and peers.

Dörnyei (2009) adds an important future-oriented dimension. University students may imagine themselves as future professionals, researchers, teachers, nurses, engineers, managers or IT specialists.

English can become part of the imagined identities.

A student may therefore be asked: what kind of English user do you want to become?

The next questions should be:

- Where will you use English?
- What will you have to do?
- What can you already do?
- What do you need to improve?
- How will you know that you have improved?

The above transforms an abstract aspiration into a learning pathway.

Motivation therefore cannot be separated from pedagogy. If students believe English is important but classroom activities appear unrelated to their purposes, the motivational value of English may weaken. Conversely, when students use English to perform meaningful academic or professional tasks, the relationship between present learning and future use becomes visible.

Needs Analysis

Necessities, lacks and wants

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide one of the most useful conceptual foundations for needs analysis.

Necessities concern what learners need to do in target situations.

Lacks concern the difference between current competence and target requirements.

Wants concern learners' own perceptions of what they would like to learn.

Consider the statement: "I need English for nursing."

The statement identifies a purpose but not yet a sufficiently precise need.

The teacher can investigate:

- **Target situation:** hospital or health environment.
- **Necessities:** communicating with patients, reading health information, understanding terminology, writing notes.
- **Lacks:** difficulty with medical vocabulary, questioning techniques, listening or writing.
- **Wants:** confidence in speaking with patients.
- **Learning outcome:** conduct a basic patient interview and communicate relevant information appropriately.

The statement has therefore moved from a broad purpose to an observable outcome.

Why questionnaires are insufficient

A questionnaire is useful, but it should not constitute the entire needs analysis.

Students may not know what they will be expected to do in future professional situations.

A first-year IT student may say: “I only need speaking.”

However, the student may later need to read technical documentation every week.

A nursing student may say: “I only need vocabulary.”

Yet the more important problem may be the ability to understand spoken questions or formulate appropriate responses.

Needs analysis should therefore triangulate evidence. Possible sources include:

Source	Information provided
Students	purposes, expectations, wants
Diagnostic tasks	current proficiency
Teachers	observed difficulties
Subject lecturers	disciplinary requirements
Employers	professional requirements
Documents	curriculum expectations
Authentic texts	vocabulary and genres
Observation	actual language behaviour

Long (2005) is especially relevant here because needs analysis should be understood as systematic investigation rather than merely asking students what they want.

Communicative Competence

The relationship between purpose and needs requires an appropriate understanding of language ability.

Hymes (1972) challenged the view that linguistic knowledge alone was sufficient for communication. Canale and Swain (1980) incorporated grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic dimensions, while Bachman (1990) developed a broader conception of communicative language ability.

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) included discourse, sociocultural and strategic competence, and Celce-Murcia (2007) further developed the model.

The Council of Europe (2001) conceptualizes language users as social agents who undertake tasks in particular contexts.

These perspectives support a simple proposition: Knowing English is not identical to being able to use English effectively.

A student may know medical terminology without being able to conduct a patient interview.

An IT student may know the meanings of “server,” “database,” and “network” without being able to explain a technical problem.

A student may know grammatical rules without being able to participate successfully in an academic discussion.

Communicative competence should therefore be linked to what learners need to accomplish.

English for Specific Purposes

Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), Basturkmen (2010), and Belcher (2006) provide the theoretical foundation for ESP.

ESP should not be reduced to the teaching of technical vocabulary because its concern is the relationship among:

- language;
- communicative situations;
- disciplinary practices;
- professional tasks;
- genres;
- learner needs.

For Nursing, students may need to:

- take patient histories;
- describe symptoms;
- discuss vital signs;
- explain procedures;
- discuss medication;
- provide health education;
- write clinical notes;

- read scientific literature.

For Information Technology, students may need to:

- read technical documentation;
- describe systems;
- explain software;
- discuss networks;
- troubleshoot;
- present technical information;
- write technical reports.

For Management, students may need to:

- participate in meetings;
- write correspondence;
- prepare reports;
- give presentations;
- negotiate;
- communicate with clients.

ESP therefore provides a bridge between general language development and disciplinary participation.

English for Academic Purposes

University students also need English for academic purposes.

Swales (1990) demonstrates that academic communication is organised through genres and discourse communities. Hyland (2006) emphasizes the social and disciplinary dimensions of academic writing.

Academic English may require students to:

- read research articles;
 - identify arguments;
 - distinguish claims and evidence;
 - infer meaning from context;
 - summarise;
 - paraphrase;
 - synthesise sources;
 - interpret tables and figures;
-

- construct arguments;
- write academic paragraphs;
- give presentations;
- participate in seminars;
- write research papers.

These abilities are not necessarily developed through general English instruction alone.

A student may communicate effectively about everyday topics but struggle to understand a scientific article.

Similarly, a student may speak confidently but struggle to construct an academic argument.

University English therefore needs to address the literacy practices of higher education.

The Mozambican Context

The international literature provides theoretical and analytical tools, but Mozambican evidence needs to be treated separately.

The studies reviewed here concern different populations, institutions and educational levels. They should therefore not be combined into a single national dataset.

English learning before university

Lopes (1998) raised concerns about the limited amount and use of English in formal schooling. Monjane-Henriksen (2010) reported students who had studied English for several years but still experienced difficulties communicating.

Mawere (2012) highlighted Portuguese-language dominance and shortages of teachers and materials.

Nhapulo (2013) focused on postgraduate students and their academic English needs.

Cabinda (2014) addressed academic reading in the university environment.

Ussene (2017) examined English learning at secondary level and identified issues related to assessment, supervision and resources.

Cossa and Dias (2022) contribute to the broader discussion of English education and communicative competence in Mozambique.

The studies differ, but together they establish an important research context: formal exposure to English cannot automatically be treated as evidence of communicative readiness.

Cossa's Higher-Education Evidence

Cossa (2022) offers a particularly relevant higher-education case. The study involved twenty Pathological Anatomy students at ISCISA in Maputo.

Their previous English experience varied:

- one student had studied English for one year;
- six had studied English for five years;

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- thirteen had studied English for seven years.

The average was approximately 6.1 years of English instruction.

The students also received approximately 120 hours of English at higher education level.

Their self-assessment indicated:

- A1 listening
- A1 speaking
- A1 writing
- A2 reading

The significance of these findings lies in the apparent gap between duration of exposure and perceived proficiency.

However, methodological caution is essential.

The study involved only twenty students from one programme and one institution. The proficiency estimates were self-assessed. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to all university students in Mozambique.

The study is more appropriately interpreted as a context-specific case that raises a wider pedagogical question: What happens when students spend years studying English but have insufficient opportunities to use English for meaningful academic and professional purposes?

That question provides a strong rationale for needs-based university English.

Historical Teacher Education and Communicative Competence

The issue also has implications for teacher education.

Cossa's (2023) historical research in the doctoral programme examined English teacher preparation at the Institute of Languages and the Pedagogical University between 1983 and 2018.

At the Institute of Languages, the initial teacher-training programme involved substantial institutional time, with approximately forty hours per week. English covered listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar, while methodology addressed teaching theories, classroom management, lesson planning, materials, skills and assessment. Teaching practice was also included.

Yet the historical context was characterised by considerable resource constraints.

English textbooks were not easily available in Mozambican bookshops during the 1980s and 1990s. Students often relied on board notes. Access to English-language radio, digital media and other resources was limited.

The Pedagogical University developed through several curriculum generations, reflecting broader changes in teacher preparation and higher education.

Cossa's thesis interprets some aspects of these historical developments through the concepts of technical rationality, practical rationality and critical rationality associated with Zeichner (1994) and Diniz-Pereira (2014), while also drawing on Netto and Azevedo (2018).

The thesis further engages with teacher-training paradigms discussed by Zeichner (1983), Teixeira and Santos (2003), Oliveira (2008), and Santos (2019).

This literature is relevant to the present argument because needs-based English teaching requires teachers who can make informed professional decisions.

A needs-based teacher must be able to:

- collect learner information;
- interpret diagnostic evidence;
- analyse target situations;
- select appropriate content;
- design communicative tasks;
- adapt materials;
- assess performance;
- revise the curriculum.

Thus, needs-based language teaching is also a question of teacher professional capacity.

Theoretical Foundations of Language Teaching

Cossa's (2023) research also draws on the work of Lopes (1987, 2013) and Leffa (1988, 2003, 2006) in discussing theories of foreign-language teaching and learning.

These contributions are useful because language education cannot be reduced to one teaching method.

The history of language teaching includes behaviourist, nativist, cognitivist and interaction-oriented perspectives.

The methodological literature reviewed in Cossa (2023) includes Cazden (1996), Crystal (1997), Richards and Rodgers (2001), Bidarra and Festas (2005), Spinassé (2006), Jalil and Procaïlo (2009), Moreira (2011), Magalhães (2012), Howatt and Smith (2014), Oliveira (2014), and Salles (2017).

The Council of Europe (2001) provides an action-oriented framework, while Richards and Rodgers (2001) demonstrate the historical development of language-teaching approaches and methods.

These perspectives suggest that needs-based teaching should not be understood as a new “method” replacing all previous methods. Rather, it is a curriculum-development orientation.

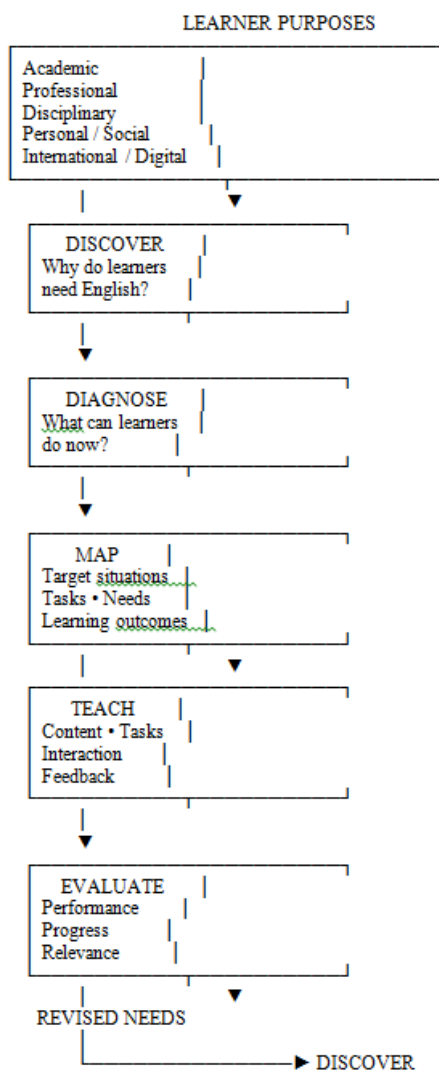
The teacher may use explicit grammar teaching, communicative activities, reading strategies, vocabulary instruction, task-based activities or other methods according to the needs being addressed.

The DDMTE Framework

The central contribution of this paper is the Discover-Diagnose-Map-Teach-Evaluate (DDMTE) framework.

The framework transforms learner purpose into a cyclical process of curriculum inquiry.

Figure 1. Discover-Diagnose-Map-Teach-Evaluate Framework



Source: Author’s conceptualization based on the literature discussed in this paper.

The framework has five stages.

Stage One: Discover

The first stage is to discover learners’ purposes.

Teachers can ask:

1. Why are you learning English?
2. Where do you expect to use English?
3. With whom do you expect to use English?
4. For what activities do you expect to use English?
5. Which skills are most important?
6. What skill is difficult?

7. What skill is easy?
8. What English tasks will your future profession require?
9. What academic activities require English?
10. What would you like to accomplish by the end of the course?

Open-ended questions should precede fixed categories to allow unexpected purposes to emerge.

Teachers should also distinguish between current use and future use. A student may currently use English very little but expect to use it frequently after graduation. That future expectation is pedagogically relevant.

Stage Two: Diagnose

The second stage identifies current ability.

Possible diagnostic activities include:

- reading;
- listening;
- speaking;
- writing;
- vocabulary;
- grammar;
- pronunciation;
- academic tasks;
- professional simulations.

Self-assessment can be valuable, particularly for identifying learner perceptions, but it should be complemented where possible by performance evidence.

The diagnostic stage answers: What can the student actually do now?

This question is crucial because two students with the same educational history may have very different abilities.

Stage Three: Map

The third stage connects purposes to target situations.

Learner purpose	Target situation	Communicative task	Main language resources
Academic study	Scientific reading	Summarise article	Vocabulary, reading strategies
Research	Literature review	Synthesise sources	Academic vocabulary, citation
Nursing	Clinical setting	Take patient history	Questions, symptoms, interaction

Medicine	Hospital	Explain health information	Terminology, explanation
IT	Technical environment	Explain system	Technical vocabulary, sequencing
Employment	Workplace	Participate in meeting	Interactional language
International study	University	Give presentation	Academic speaking
Digital learning	Online environment	Understand tutorial	Reading/listening strategies

Mapping prevents needs analysis from becoming a collection of disconnected preferences.

Stage Four: Teach

Teaching translates needs into learning experiences.

A useful sequence is:

Need → Objective → Task → Language support → Feedback

For example:

- **Need:** patient communication.
- **Objective:** ask and answer questions about symptoms.
- **Task:** patient-history role play.
- **Language support:** question forms, symptom vocabulary, polite interaction.
- **Feedback:** teacher and peer feedback.

Grammar is therefore not removed, but it is given a communicative purpose.

For example:

Modal verbs → giving advice → nursing context → patient interaction

or:

Past tense → reporting previous events → medical context → medical history

or:

Passive voice → describing processes → IT context → system explanation

Stage Five: Evaluate

Evaluation should examine both learning and relevance.

The teacher should ask:

- Did students develop the intended abilities?
- Can they perform the target tasks?

-
- Which needs remain?
 - Were the activities appropriate?
 - Did the assessment reflect the course objectives?
 - Have students' purposes changed?

Evaluation therefore creates a new cycle.

Needs → teaching → performance → feedback → revised needs.

This is why needs analysis should not be a one-time questionnaire conducted during the first week.

General English, ESP and EAP

The present argument does not propose replacing General English with ESP or EAP.

A more appropriate model is: General language foundation + academic competence + disciplinary/professional application.

University students often need general linguistic resources before they can perform specialized tasks effectively.

At the same time, specialized tasks can provide meaningful contexts in which general language resources are developed.

For example, nursing students can learn:

- present tense through symptom description;
- past tense through medical history;
- modal verbs through advice;
- imperatives through instructions;
- vocabulary through clinical cases.

The distinction is therefore not General English versus ESP, but General language resources connected to meaningful academic and professional purposes.

Academic Reading and Writing

Academic reading deserves particular attention in university English.

Students need strategies for:

- skimming;
 - scanning;
 - identifying main ideas;
 - locating specific information;
 - inferring meaning;
 - identifying arguments;
-

- distinguishing evidence;
- summarising;
- evaluating sources.

Academic writing requires:

- paragraph structure;
- cohesion;
- argumentation;
- citation;
- paraphrasing;
- synthesis;
- academic vocabulary;
- disciplinary conventions.

Students who have experienced years of general English may still require explicit instruction in the above areas.

The move into academic English should therefore be gradual. First-year students may need structured texts and guided activities, while more advanced students can progressively work with authentic journal articles, research reports and disciplinary genres.

Professional English

Professional English should likewise be understood in terms of tasks.

A health professional may need to:

- communicate with patients;
- explain procedures;
- document information;
- read guidelines;
- participate in professional discussions.

An IT professional may need to:

- read technical documentation;
- communicate with colleagues;
- explain systems;
- solve problems;
- write technical reports.

A teacher may need to:

- read research;
- present at conferences;
- communicate professionally;
- teach through English;
- participate in professional networks.

The appropriate curriculum therefore emerges from an analysis of professional activity.

Learner-Centred Teaching in Large Classes

Large classes present a practical challenge. However, learner-centred teaching does not require every student to interact individually with the teacher during every lesson.

Teachers can organise:

- pair work;
- small-group work;
- information-gap tasks;
- role plays;
- peer assessment;
- presentations;
- rotating roles;
- group problem-solving;
- collaborative reading;
- peer-assisted learning.

For example, in a health-science class:

Student A: nurse

Student B: patient

Student C: observer

Student D: language monitor

Students can rotate roles.

The teacher provides the framework, models language and monitors selected groups. The result is a structured rather than teacher-dominated classroom.

This is particularly relevant to large university classes in Mozambique, where teacher-centred approaches may be reinforced by class size and resource constraints.

Differentiation and Mixed Proficiency

Needs-based teaching is particularly valuable when students enter university with different levels of English.

A class may include students who:

- studied English for seven years;
- studied English for five years;
- had limited English exposure;
- attended different types of schools;
- had different access to English-language media;
- have different opportunities to use English outside university.

A common course does not require identical tasks for every learner.

The teacher can maintain common objectives while differentiating support.

Less proficient students may receive:

- vocabulary banks;
- sentence frames;
- model texts;
- guided questions.

More proficient students may receive:

- extension tasks;
- additional sources;
- more complex communicative roles;
- independent production.

Differentiation therefore becomes a mechanism for inclusion.

English, Multilingualism and Scientific Knowledge

The role of English in Mozambique should be understood within a multilingual environment.

Portuguese remains central to formal education, while Mozambican languages have important social and community functions. English can provide additional access to international academic, scientific and professional resources.

The objective should not be linguistic replacement.

Rather Portuguese + Mozambican languages + English can constitute complementary resources for different communicative purposes.

Students may think through one language, discuss an idea in another, consult sources in English and produce academic work in the language required by their programme.

A multilingual perspective is therefore compatible with high standards in English academic literacy.

Assessment and Curriculum Alignment

Assessment strongly influences how students understand the purpose of a course. If a course claims to develop communication but the examination consists almost entirely of grammar exercises, students receive a contradictory message.

Similarly, if academic reading is identified as a major need but students are assessed only on isolated vocabulary items, the assessment does not represent the stated objective.

Curriculum alignment should therefore follow: Needs → Objectives → Activities → Assessment → Evidence

For Nursing:

- patient interview;
- clinical dialogue;
- reading;
- clinical note.

For IT:

- technical reading;
- system explanation;
- technical presentation;
- written description.

For academic English:

- article comprehension;
- summary;
- paraphrase;
- research presentation;
- academic writing.

Assessment should measure what students are expected to learn.

A Practical First-Lesson Needs Analysis

The question “Why do you learn English?” can be transformed into a complete first-lesson activity.

Activity 1: My English Experience

Students answer:

1. For how many years have you studied English?
2. Where did you study English?
3. What was easy when you studied English?
4. What was difficult when you studied English?
5. How often do you use English outside the class?
6. What English materials do you read?
7. Do you watch English-language videos?
8. Do you communicate online in English?

Activity 2: My Future English

Students produce five responses by completing:

I will need English to...

Activity 3: Prioritisation

Students identify their three most important needs.

Activity 4: From purpose to task

Students transform:

“I need English for medicine.”

into:

“I need to read medical articles, understand terminology, communicate with health professionals and explain health information.”

The above process gives the teacher information that can immediately inform curriculum planning.

A Needs-Analysis Model for University English

A practical university needs-analysis instrument can contain five sections.

Section A: Background

- years of English study;
- previous learning context;
- frequency of English use;
- access to English-language resources.

Section B: Academic purposes

Students rate the importance of:

- reading textbooks;

- reading scientific articles;
- writing assignments;
- writing research papers;
- presentations;
- seminars;
- academic discussions.

Section C: Professional purposes

Students rate:

- workplace communication;
- professional reading;
- reports;
- presentations;
- meetings;
- communication with international professionals.

Section D: Personal purposes

Students identify the relevance of:

- travel;
- entertainment;
- social communication;
- digital media;
- international friendships;
- personal development.

Section E: Diagnostic performance

Students complete:

- short reading;
- short listening;
- short writing;
- brief oral interaction.

The combination provides richer evidence than either questionnaire data or testing alone.

Implications for Teacher Professional Development

Needs-based English teaching requires a particular conception of the teacher. The teacher is not merely a transmitter of language knowledge.

The teacher is also a curriculum analyst, facilitator, materials designer, assessor and researcher of classroom learning. This connects directly with the teacher-education literature discussed by Zeichner, Diniz-Pereira, Netto and Azevedo, Teixeira and Santos, Oliveira, and Santos and referred to in this paper.

Teachers should receive preparation in:

- needs analysis;
- curriculum design;
- communicative methodology;
- assessment;
- discourse analysis;
- ESP;
- EAP;
- materials development;
- classroom research.

This is particularly important in contexts where teachers have inherited syllabi rather than participated in their design.

Professional development can help teachers move from “What does the syllabus tell me to teach?” toward “What do these learners need to accomplish, and how can the syllabus help me prepare them?”

Implications for University Policy

The argument presented in the previous chapter has implications beyond classroom teaching.

Universities should consider:

1. conducting periodic needs analyses;
2. identifying discipline-specific English requirements;
3. establishing realistic proficiency outcomes;
4. aligning contact hours with expected outcomes;
5. supporting English teachers’ professional development;
6. providing access to academic and digital resources;
7. integrating English with disciplinary study where appropriate;
8. developing diagnostic assessment at entry;

9. monitoring progress;

10. reviewing curricula periodically.

Cossa's (2022) study illustrates why this institutional perspective matters. If students enter higher education with limited functional proficiency, simply assigning them a generic English course may not be sufficient.

The institution must consider the relationship among: entry proficiency + programme demands + instructional time + pedagogy + resources + assessment.

Research Agenda

The DDMTE framework generates several possible empirical research programmes.

University-wide learner-purpose study

A large-scale survey could investigate why students from different faculties learn English.

Discipline-specific studies

Separate needs analyses could examine:

- medicine;
- nursing;
- pathology;
- engineering;
- information technology;
- management;
- education;
- agriculture;
- Tourism;
- other courses.

Graduate follow-up

Research could investigate what English tasks graduates actually perform after university.

Employer research

Employers could identify professional communication requirements.

Longitudinal proficiency studies

Students could be assessed at entry and graduation.

Curriculum-alignment research

Studies could compare: curriculum objectives → classroom activities → assessment → graduate needs.

Classroom research

Observation could investigate whether learner-centred and communicative objectives are reflected in actual classroom practices.

Such research would extend the work of Lopes (1998), Monjane-Henriksen (2010), Mawere (2012), Nhapulo (2013), Cabinda (2014), Ussene (2017), Cossa and Dias (2022), and Cossa (2022) rather than assuming that the existing evidence is already sufficient.

DISCUSSION

The central question of this paper is deceptively simple: Why do university students learn English?

The answer cannot be reduced to motivation.

The question concerns:

- curriculum relevance;
- learner identity;
- academic participation;
- professional preparation;
- communicative competence;
- disciplinary discourse;
- assessment;
- teacher expertise.

The international literature establishes a strong conceptual basis for this position.

Harmer (2015) highlights learners and learning purposes and Nunan (1988) and Tudor (1996) establish learner-centred curriculum principles.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), Long (2005), Basturkmen (2010), and Belcher (2006) establish the importance of needs analysis and ESP, while Swales (1990) and Hyland (2006) demonstrate the importance of academic genres and discourse communities.

Richards (2006) and Harmer (2015) emphasize meaningful communication, in turn, Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990), Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995), Celce-Murcia (2007), and the Council of Europe (2001) demonstrate the multidimensional nature of communicative competence.

Ryan and Deci (2000) and Dörnyei (2009) explain why autonomy, competence, goals and future identity matter for language learning; Brown (1995) and Nation and Macalister (2010) provide systematic curriculum-development perspectives, while the work of Lopes, Leffa, Cazden, Crystal, Richards and Rodgers, Bidarra and Festas, Spinassé, Jalil and Procaïlo, Moreira, Magalhães, Howatt and Smith, Oliveira, and Salles broadens the theoretical and methodological background concerning language learning and teaching.

The teacher-education literature represented by Zeichner, Diniz-Pereira, Netto and Azevedo, Teixeira and Santos, Oliveira, and Santos highlights the professional knowledge required to translate theory into practice.

The Mozambican literature serves a different purpose.

Lopes (1998), Monjane-Henriksen (2010), Mawere (2012), Nhapulo (2013), Cabinda (2014), Ussene (2017), Cossa and Dias (2022), and Cossa (2022) provide evidence from particular Mozambican contexts.

These sources should not be treated as interchangeable or as evidence for one homogeneous national condition. Their value lies in identifying recurring questions:

- Why does substantial exposure not always produce communicative competence?
- How much English do students actually use?
- What resources are available?
- What kinds of English are students expected to use?
- What academic and professional tasks require English?
- How closely does university English correspond to the academic and professional tasks?

Cossa's (2022) study makes the question particularly concrete. Twenty health-science students with an average of 6.1 years of previous English instruction and approximately 120 higher-education English hours assessed themselves at basic CEFR levels across several skills.

The study does not establish that all Mozambican university students have similar proficiency. It does, however, provide evidence that years of instruction alone are insufficient as an indicator of communicative readiness.

The above distinction is fundamental. The problem is therefore not simply: "Students need more English." The more precise question is: What English do students need, what can they currently do, what prevents them from performing required tasks, and how should university teaching respond?

That is the question that needs analysis can answer.

The DDMTE framework responds by placing learner purpose at the beginning of a continuous process.

- **Discover** identifies reasons.
- **Diagnose** identifies current abilities.
- **Map** connects purposes to target situations.
- **Teach** translates needs into learning experiences.
- **Evaluate** determines progress and relevance.

The cycle then begins again.

The framework therefore treats needs analysis as dynamic.

Students change. Their academic demands change. Their professional aspirations change.

The same applies to technology which changes and disciplines that also change.

Consequently, university English curricula should not be regarded as permanently fixed.

Limitations

The present paper has some limitations.

First, it is conceptual rather than an empirical test of the DDMTE framework.

Second, the Mozambican literature reviewed here represents different populations and contexts. The evidence cannot be treated as a single nationally representative dataset.

Third, Cossa's (2022) study involved only twenty students and used self-assessment. Independent proficiency testing would provide additional evidence.

Fourth, learner purposes may not always accurately predict future professional requirements. Students may have limited knowledge of the communicative practices of professions they have not yet entered.

Fifth, needs-based curriculum development requires institutional support, teacher preparation and access to appropriate materials. These conditions may not be equally available across institutions.

These limitations identify opportunities for further research rather than weaknesses that invalidate the framework.

CONCLUSION

The question "Why do university students learn English?" should occupy a more central position in higher-education language curriculum development.

University students learn English for multiple and overlapping reasons. They may need English for academic study, scientific reading, research, professional communication, employment, international mobility, digital learning, postgraduate education and personal communication.

The international literature demonstrates why these purposes matter. Learner-centred curriculum design, needs analysis, ESP, EAP, communicative competence, motivation and curriculum alignment all point toward the importance of connecting language teaching with meaningful uses of language.

Mozambican scholarship adds a necessary contextual dimension. Lopes (1998), Monjane-Henriksen (2010), Mawere (2012), Nhapulo (2013), Cabinda (2014), Ussene (2017), Cossa and Dias (2022), and Cossa (2022) document different aspects of English education in Mozambique. Cossa's (2022) higher-education study is particularly significant because it illustrates the potential difference between years of formal instruction and perceived functional proficiency.

The implication is not that Mozambican students simply need more English. The implication is that universities need to examine more carefully the relationship among: purpose, proficiency, opportunity, pedagogy, disciplinary requirements and assessment.

The DDMTE framework provides one way of doing this: Discover → Diagnose → Map → Teach → Evaluate.

The framework begins with a simple question but transforms it into a systematic curriculum process.

Why do you learn English?

becomes:

Where will you use English?

which becomes:

What will you need to do?

which becomes:

What can you do now?

which becomes:

What needs to be learned?

which becomes:

How should it be taught and assessed?

The central pedagogical principle can therefore be stated as follows: Learner purpose should initiate curriculum inquiry, but curriculum decisions should be based on the interaction among learner voice, diagnostic evidence, disciplinary requirements, professional expectations and teacher expertise.

Such an approach does not reject general English, grammar or teacher authority. Instead, it gives them a clearer purpose:

- Grammar becomes a resource for communication.
- Vocabulary becomes a resource for disciplinary participation.
- Reading becomes a means of accessing knowledge.
- Writing becomes a means of academic and professional participation.
- Speaking becomes a means of interaction.
- Listening becomes a means of understanding others.

English itself becomes not merely a university subject but a communicative resource.

For Mozambican higher education, this shift is particularly relevant. Students may arrive at university after several years of English instruction while still requiring substantial support to participate in academic and professional communication. The appropriate response is therefore to move beyond counting years of English and to examine what learners can actually do with the language.

The most important curriculum question is consequently not simply how long have students studied English?, but: What do students need to accomplish through English, what can they currently accomplish, and how can university education help them move from one to the other?

That is the foundation of needs-based English language teaching.

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