

Heutagogy in English Language Teaching and Learning: Empowering Autonomous, Motivated, and Critical Learners

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Abstract:

With the current fast digital transformation and the changing expectations of the learners, the traditional teacher-centered approaches to teaching and learning English language should be re-evaluated critically. The self-determined learning approach, heutagogy, provides a considerable pedagogical change due to its focus on the agency of learners, autonomy, motivation, and critical reflectivity. In the context of English language education, it offers a purposeful platform of empowering learners in ownership of their learning processes, setting personal objectives, making informed decisions and being active participants in knowledge building. This practice is more applicable when it comes to building higher-order thinking, self-regulation, adaptability, and lifelong learning skills, which are critical in today educational settings. Heutagogical principles can turn English language classrooms into active learning environments where individuals can engage in meaningful and personalized learning by adopting learner-centered activities, reflective practices, collaborative inquiry, and technology-mediated activities. Heutagogy in the teaching and learning of English language does not only increase linguistic competence but also enables learners to be autonomous, motivated and critical constructors of their learning process.

Keywords: Heutagogical pedagogy, technology, collaborative practice, English language learning, linguistic competence etc.

Language Learning

Language learning has been a continuous process guided by teachers, following textbooks, materials and standardized curriculum. However, in current educational ecosystems known for its globalization, overflowing information, and digital connect, the present education system mode and model may not cater the needs of the legitimate communicative demands. Therefore, it has to take a new paradigm shift. Heutagogy, derived from the Greek *heuriskein* ("to discover") advocates self-determined learning philosophy where learners need to understand and identify their learning needs, setting goals, choosing resources, and evaluating progress.

Initially labelled in adult and professional education, Heutagogy is growing in relevance to English language teaching and learning (ELT). Language proficiency includes not only the distinct abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) but also adaptation, cultural awareness, and independent communicative competence, all of which correlate well with Heutagogical objectives. Traditional *pedagogy* holds the teacher as the primary decision-maker in planning, instruction, and assessment. (Teacher-centered classroom) Andragogy, developed by Malcolm Knowles shifted the focus toward adult learners, emphasizing readiness, experience, and internal motivation.

On top of these two, *Heutagogy* focuses on individual learners and their ways of acquiring knowledge. In learning approaches based on heutagogy, the learner is at the forefront of influencing their own learning process through choice not only on what they are required to know, but also how they go about learning. In contrast to traditional teacher-centered models, here the learner is regarded as a driving force with the ability to formulate goals, define his/her sphere of interests and be in charge of her/his development. Learning is thus made more significant and truly relevant since it is related to the individual needs, capacity and dreams of the learner.

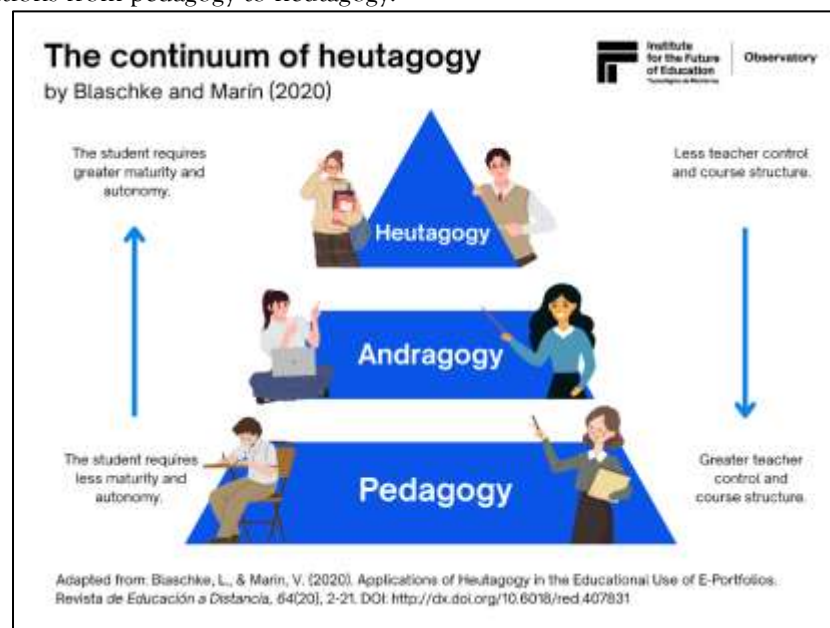
It is a flexible and self-directed process and therefore gives the learner the opportunity to move out of the pre-determined learning patterns and interact with knowledge in a manner that accommodates his/her unique learning styles. It is also advised that they select appropriate resources, techniques and techniques, and modify them based on their speed and setting. It is through this flexibility that the learner gets to be more independent and is able to make more academic decisions and resolve problems and track their own

development. Another important characteristic of heutagogical learning is that learners are granted the autonomy of determining their own means of learning such as what they want to achieve, what materials, activities and even assessment they want. This kind of freedom does not mean that there is no structure in it; instead, it welcomes a more individualistic and responsible approach to learning. The involvement in the process of its own design makes the learners feel that they possess more ownership and therefore further enhances their motivation, commitment, and thinking abilities.

Apart from this, heutagogical strategies provide learners with a chance to transform their passive position into an active and long-term one. They are not receiving the information; they are engaged in exploration, questioning, application, and construction of knowledge on their part. Such a change assists them in gaining fundamental skills that aid them to think critically, make decisions, be creative, flexible, and self-assess. This makes learning not only to be the process of acquisition of knowledge but also of capability making the learners ready to implement the acquired knowledge adequately in the face of real-life challenges and learn continuously throughout their lives.

The Pedagogical, Andragogical, and Heutagogical continuum

Despite the significant distinctions between these methodologies, Blaschke and Marin (2020) delineate a continuum that transitions from pedagogy to heutagogy:



The learning of language is a personal process since different learners are in the classroom with diverse social backgrounds, past experiences, identities, motivations, and communicative purposes. There are those learners who require English to write academic papers, others to read technical documents, to make professional presentations, to work, the other half to communicate across intercultural boundaries. This is why, motivation in language learning cannot be discussed as the homogenous or totally classroom-contained phenomenon; it is strongly related to the context in which the learner live, his/her self-concept, and further plans. The heutagogical orientation has been identified to be especially pertinent here since it acknowledges that significant learning in languages occurs when learners can associate learning with their identity, what they appreciate, and what they aspire to accomplish using the language. (Ushioda, 2016; Dornyei, 2009).

Heutagogy addresses this diversity by placing the learners in a learning position where they are not seen as passive receivers of instruction, but are seen as active participants in their own learning. Just as a theory of self-determined learning, it puts special focus on human agency, "reflection," capable and/or growing ability to control goals, processes, resources, and outcomes by the learner. In language teaching, this coincides with an existing concept of learner autonomy usually conceived as the capacity of the learner to be in charge of the learning process as well as to take into account the responsibility towards learning choices. In this regard, students can work on their academic essay writing skills, the ability to create technical presentations, speaking fluency, the vocabulary related to the particular field or area of study, and intercultural communication,

according to their personal, educational, and professional path. This variety imparts a higher level of relevance and purposefulness to language learning, as well as its sustainability. (Hase, 2016; Blaschke, 2012; Benson, 2007).

This learner-based orientation is pedagogically important since the motivation is enhanced when learners feel that they own, value and have a personal interest in what they are learning. Self-determination theory describes that among fundamental needs are autonomy, competence and relatedness, and intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation have been reinforced when learners feel initiative, and ownership, interest and value in their work. Empirical evidence of positive and dynamic relationships between supportive learning environments, motivation, and engagement has also been demonstrated in foreign-language learning. So, when students get an opportunity to deal with the areas that are closer to their interests and aspirations, e.g. cinema, engineering, digital culture, speaking in front of the audience, or social problems, they will be more active and their determination will be more successful in the duration. (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017).

Heutagogical learning is as well significant as it encourages higher order of thinking as opposed to teaching language as rules and forms. Students are also motivated to plan, choose, track and review their individual strategies; consider the feedback; review their performance and use language in real contexts. During second language acquisition, metacognition development is key in enabling a learner to make conscious strategies on how to enhance his/her performance and heutagogy clearly appreciates reflection and double-loop learning as constituents of enhanced learning. In that regard, heutagogy not only helps learners to gain linguistic proficiency, but develop critical thinking, self-regulation, adaptiveness, and lifelong learning skills. It thus provides an effective guide to English language teaching and learning within the environment where independence of learners, their motivation and meaningful engagement are becoming an important necessity. (Anderson, 2002; Hase, 2016; Benson, 2007).

Few strategies for Implementing Heutagogy in English Language Teaching

Practically, to make heutagogy a feasible concept in English language classrooms, instruction must be shifted away from preset tasks developed by the teacher and negotiated learning journeys where learners engage in process of meaningful choice. Practically, it can be understood by giving the students a chance to engage in the selection process of the topics they are going to look at, the type of genres they are going to write, the sources they are going use, and the evaluation criteria according to which their work is going to be evaluated. Such a method is congruent with the heutagogy focus on self-determined learning and with the autonomy of learning languages, where the learners are supposed to plan, implement, monitor, and assess their own learning progressively at an increasing degree of independence. This change would be particularly useful in teaching English language (ELT), as the students will tend to come to the classroom with other academic, professional, and communicative objectives, and a flexible structure will enable adaptation of teaching to meet those objectives better.

Another form and means of this practice is a real field-based learning. Teachers are also able to create general project structures in which students can follow personally and professionally prescribed objectives instead of having all students engaged in the same decontextualized activity. One group might make weekly podcasts on matters of various public concern, one might have a blog on various current events or literary topic, and another may create short video explainers about technical or scholarly articles. In both instances, it may consist of learner-determined goals, acceptance of topics, drafting, review, commentary and a presentation before a real or simulated audience. Project based learning in TESOL has been termed as a collaborative and communicative process which is more appropriate in the English classrooms and studies have demonstrated that project-based language learning is effective in enhancing the presentation related language proficiency as well as decreasing the apprehension of communicating and increasing the desire to communicate.

The digital technologies also enhance a heutagogical classroom setting in that they can expand learning beyond the time, space, and textbook-fettered learning. Mobile phones, tablets, laptops, blogs, wikis, podcasts and social media can give the learners access to authentic content, multimodal language production opportunities, and an environment where they can express themselves as well as reflect and collaborate. Technology is especially useful in learner-autonomy models since it allows students to find materials on their own, design their own learning spaces and create instead of just take in. The research of mobile-assisted

language learning and informal digital language learning has had a consistent finding that digital media can be used to facilitate self-directed practice and with possibilities of personalized and socially situated language use. Technology is not an add on in a heutagogical English classroom, rather, it is a tool that should be used as a medium where learners explore, create, interact and reflect.

Tools based on AI may be applied productively as well, yet they must be mixed with pedagogical care and teacher mediation. Writing assessment systems that are automated may assist learners in creating preliminary drafts, obtaining real-time formative evaluation, assessing the revisions over time and recognizing recurring linguistic patterns, grammar, vocabulary and structure. The same way, the automatic speech recognition applications can facilitate the speaking practice by providing the learners with a chance to practice pronunciation and oral production with the timely feedback. Nevertheless, other studies indicate that the engagement of the learners with the automated feedback also depends on the trust factors and the usability along with the critical interpretation of the machine-generated feedback by the learners. That is why the role of the teacher is crucial: not merely systematically correcting all the mistakes, but assisting learners in decoding the feedback, doubting false recommendations, prioritizing the aspects of revision, and considering the ways of using digital feedback in order to enhance performance. According to a heutagogical model, therefore the teacher becomes a facilitator, mentor and interpreter of learning instead of a source of knowledge by himself. Team learning is also relevant in a heutagogical English classroom. Students can be put into small groups to talk about readings, videos, social problems or discipline-related problems; co-construct themes to be explored; analyze language use and communication patterns; and divide responsibility in terms of presenting their results. Changing leadership in groups may guarantee the involvement of all learners and their confidence in leading discussion, feedback, and responding to the ideas of others. Peer feedback can be particularly helpful in writing-based classrooms with the help of rubrics, sample texts, guiding questions, sentence starters, and teacher modelling. Meta-analytic research findings indicate that peer comments can have a significant role to play in terms of L2 writing development, whereas other researchers suggest that the usefulness of such comments is augmented when the learners are trained and supported, as opposed to remaining alone to comment without guidance. When applied thoughtfully, such collaborative practices provide a strong communication skills, evaluative judgement, agency of the learners, and a perception of collective responsibility of learning.

Combinations of practices demonstrate that the concept of heutagogy in English language teaching is not an aversion to the classroom setup but a transformation of the classroom setup to the agency of the learner, genuine communication, contemplation, and meaningful use of technology. A heutagogical classroom designed professionally provides the learner with options without giving up support, independence without abandonment, projects, peer interaction, and digital tools to aid the student in becoming more self-directed, motivated, and critically engaged users of the English language.

Benefits of Heutagogy

Basing on the ideas about heutagogy shared by D'Souza (as a student-centred and professionally relevant learning process) and Muncey (2024), a practical description of self-determined learning), it is possible to state that a heutagogical approach has a number of valuable advantages to students. Among the major effects, there is the boost of motivation and confidence. When learners are granted with meaningful choice of what, how and when to learn, they come to realize that they are not just the receiver of instruction but they are also capable participants in the learning process. This transition promotes self-efficacy, promotes initiative, and also makes learners more inclined to take part in the challenging tasks. In this regard, motivation is more internal and long-lasting as it is linked to learner choice, relevance, and personal accountability and not just outside pressure (D'Souza, 2024; Muncey, 2024).

Another significant advantage is that it generates purposeful learning. With the help of heutagogy, learners can see learning activities in relation to their personal goals, interests, and future aspirations, and this leads to more engagement and knowledge. Since learners are forced to look back on their progress, challenge their assumptions, and adjust their strategies, learning is not only the process of obtaining information, but it is a dynamic, reflective process of knowledge building. This form of learning is particularly advantageous in modern day learning since it assists the learner to go beyond the performance level of rote learning and gain a more conscious sense of the way in which he or she learns optimally. Consequently, heutagogy facilitates

the development of academic skills and the metacognitive awareness and reflective judgement (Muncey, 2024; Hase, 2014).

Heutagogical learning is also a major contributor to enhancement of skills. The literature links this strategy to emerging critical thinking, ability to solve problems, research capacity, teamwork, flexibility and control over oneself. These are not some independent academic abilities but transferable skills that prepare learners to operate the transforming educational, work, and social environment. Hase points out that the self-determined learning environments need the learners to acquire process skills, which include team work, continuous improvement, problem-solving skills, and learning how to learn. Similarly, the recent research on teacher education suggests that heutagogy can develop among students critical thinking, self-regulated learning, autonomy, competence, and lifelong learning dispositions (Hase, 2014; Mwinkaar et al., 2024).

The other significant benefit of heutagogy is that it promotes creativity. Since learners do not go through strict systems, they have the freedom to get access to a variety of resources, test out various solutions and solve problems in novel ways. This kind of freedom helps in providing room to imagination, innovation and learner generated responses which is very fundamental in contemporary learning. The acknowledgement of a non-linear learning and the ability to design a flexible curriculum of Heutagogy, in its turn, accounts to this creative aspect, granting a learner the ability to pursue the changed questions and find new paths of his/her learning experience. This way, creativity does not constitute an enrichment activity but a natural outcome of agency and intellectual freedom of learners (Muncey, 2024; Hase, 2014).

Thus, a lifelong learning orientation occupies one of the long-lasting legacies of a heutagogical approach. D'Souza proposes heutagogy to be very relevant to modern education since it produces independent and flexible learners that are ready to respond to the twenty first century demands. On the same note, Hase contends that learning in learning to learn is a life skill that is vital in self-determined learning. Having created a sense of autonomy, reflection, flexibility, and capability, heutagogy provides the learner the ability to succeed academically in the short term, as well as to be able to grow constantly in new contexts as long as they live. Thus, the advantages of heutagogy are much wider than classroom success and it also allows building confident, reflective, creative and lifelong learners (D'Souza, 2024; Hase, 2014; Mwinkaar et al., 2024).

Heutagogy: How Teachers can Apply Heutagogy

Flexibility and acceptance of learners are brought into the limelight of the learning process in a heutagogical learning context. Instead of providing equal treatment to all students regardless of how they learn, it is based on the understanding that there are differences in the interests of learners, pace, goals, and their preferred methods of engagement. In this connection, students can be offered with purposeful opportunities to select the topics, texts, tasks, or project themes in the general context of the prescribed syllabus, whereas the teachers are inclined to align the instruction with personal learning and the requirements of the curriculum. Early research on heutagogy refers to this as a change where the learner gradually takes on more roles in creating the direction of the learning process, becoming more curriculum oriented-assessment orientated, and the role of the teacher is to act as an facilitator and collaborator on the learning process. In language teaching, it can be combined with the concept of classroom autonomy, which treats teachers as the ones who assist students to build responsibility towards the student learning despite the institutional and curricular limitations.

For example, a heutagogical ELT classroom can enable students to select their speaking or writing topics, to work with digital sources on their own, to make their own linguistic aims, and assess their development with the self-reflection and peer-feedback, and the teacher can play the role of a facilitator of learning, but not as the source of knowledge.

Such a model is marked with a long-term partnership between the teachers and the learners in communication with respect to the learning process, aims and goals, resources and anticipated results of learning. In this manner, Learning is negotiated as opposed to imposed. A flexible curriculum implies the lack of academic organization, but it is understood that the curriculum is responsive to the questions, incentives, thoughts, and new needs of learners. Blaschke distinguishes learner-defined learning contracts, learner-directed questions, flexible curriculum and negotiated assessment as significant methods of integrating into the formal education process, and Hase makes comparable points that the curriculum cannot be treated as an unalterable order of teacher-controlled curriculum. At school, one might also negotiate such learning plans with parents in the relevant situations so that the needs of the learners and their future

ambitions are recorded and backed up in a more organized manner. Such joint planning has the ability to empower ownership, relevancy and long-term interest of the learner.

When students have the opportunity to customize their curriculum and contribute to the decisions regarding the way they will learn, their commitment is likely to be enhanced since learners will start viewing learning as something meaningful to them, as well as not forced upon them. Simultaneously, heutagogical model is not always simple to transition to. Since self-determined learning requires a sense of responsibility, reflection, and initiative, initially certain learners might struggle with such freedom, particularly when they are used to being dependent on a teacher during their instruction. This is why cooperation is a significant linkage between the state of dependence and self-reliance. Hamper et al. (2014) state that literature on the concept of heutagogy highlights collaborative learning as an important aspect of the classroom rather than its antithesis, but it should facilitate the development of autonomy. Students collaborate with learners in order to create a mutual meaning, to contemplate about learning strategies, and to develop confidence in their ability to guide their own learning. Empirical research in English writing situations has indicated that peer assessment is capable of increasing learner autonomy, decreasing dependency on the instructor and increasing the confidence in learning capability, arguing that cooperation can be used in a practical way to assist students in stepping to a more independent state.

Evaluation is also vital in a heutagogical approach, since no pedagogical methodology can be comprehensive without a significant method of tracking learning, ability and development. This is a limitation of assessment in heutagogy because assessment is not restricted to teacher-controllable testing. Rather it becomes a part of the very learning process and is usually bargained with learners. According to Blaschke, learner-defined and negotiated assessment may make assessment enhance motivation, heighten learners' involvement and also alleviate the fear of threat presented by overwhelming instructor authority. Hase also argues that assessment needs to be part of learning and not an end product and subsequent review reports have indicated that negotiated assessment can be a motivating experience since students feel that they have more control over their learning. Practically, this does not imply that students merely give themselves marks, instead, they can be involved in the co-design of criteria, learning journals, portfolios, self and peer-assessment using rubrics, comparing drafts over time and critical reflection on strengths, weaknesses and improvements. These processes are particularly useful in English language classrooms where one can not only measure the final performance but also revision, the strategies of communication to use, and also be able to gauge the building of confidence and competence over the time.

These aspects demonstrate that the idea of heutagogy does not reject the role of the teacher or the curriculum, but it re-conceptualizes them. The role of a teacher is changed to providing rather than passing on the content but creating supportive conditions with regard to inquiry, reflection, collaboration and learner choice. The curriculum will be flexible enough to accommodate the interests and objectives of learners, but at the same time be organized in a way that will give it an academic purpose. The testing is participatory and developmental. Through a close integration of all these features, heutagogy can be relevant in creating a classroom culture where learners become increasingly more engaged, self-directed, collaborative and capable of organizing their own learning in even more independent means.

CONCLUSION

Heutagogy transforms the English language acquisition to be a teacher-centered experience to a learner-centered experience. Heutagogical techniques are aligned with the actual communicative needs that learners experience in an academic setting, career, and interactions with other nations by focusing on the issues of independency, enthusiasm, and higher-order thinking. Heutagogy, when applied with care, will complement reflective tasks, project-based learning and adaptive technologies. Heutagogy will boost the ability of learners to go through convoluted linguistic tasks on their own and with confidence. Heutagogy would be able to persuade teachers and students to re-imagine language classrooms as participatory environments in which the learners take control of the direction and evaluate their own progress and develop lifelong learning skills, adaptability, and communication.

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