

## Autonomous Pronunciation Learning in Higher Education Via Heutagogical Strategies: Implementation, Challenges, and Solutions

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### Abstract

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This study aims to investigate autonomous pronunciation learning through heutagogical strategies. While many studies have explored heutagogy across disciplines, limited research has addressed its application in pronunciation learning. This study examines how heutagogical principles are implemented in pronunciation instruction, highlighting the importance of pronunciation in effective oral communication. This study adopts a qualitative case study design involving two pronunciation lecturers at a higher education institution. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The study addressed three questions: (1) How is heutagogy applied in pronunciation learning? (2) What challenges are encountered by lecturers? (3) What strategies are used to overcome these challenges? The findings reveal that lecturers promoted learner autonomy through self-directed tasks, flexible learning pathways, and the integration of digital tools. Pronunciation websites and mobile applications were widely used to support independent practice and provide immediate feedback. However, challenges included students' limited self-regulation, unequal access to digital devices, and lecturers' varying technological skills. To address these challenges, lecturers engaged in professional development activities such as webinars and discussions. Students were supported through device sharing and campus internet facilities. These findings suggest that heutagogy has strong potential for pronunciation learning, but requires adequate institutional support and digital readiness in practice. This study contributes to the development of learner-centered approaches by emphasizing the role of autonomy and technology in language learning contexts, particularly in higher education settings where digital resources and independent learning are increasingly essential for improving students' pronunciation competence and overall communicative performance in diverse educational contexts worldwide.

### Keywords:

heutagogy; autonomous learning; pronunciation learning; higher education; digital learning

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## INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation, a crucial but neglected skill, is a key determinant in the oral communication success. Many speakers fail to convey their ideas orally because they are hindered by their poor pronunciation skills. Even though a speaker has perfect grammar and vocabulary mastery, he will face communication problems if their pronunciation skills are poor (Pourhosein, 2016; Yates, 2002). The words they put together in sentences will not be understood and will make it difficult for



listeners to grasp the essence of what is being conveyed. As a result, speakers with poor pronunciation skills will be judged as incompetent and uneducated people (Fraser, 2006; Lear, 2012). Therefore, many experts agree that the purpose of teaching English should prioritize students' ability to communicate clearly with intelligible pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Jenkins, 2000). This could only be achieved through continuous training and learning.

Learning English pronunciation will be very challenging, particularly for Indonesian EFL students. This is because the language system differences that are very much different between Indonesian and English. First, the students must understand the difference in sound-symbol correlation between Indonesian and English (Madya, 2000). Indonesian has similarities between letters and sounds that are spoken. However, English has very little correlation between letters and the sounds they pronounce. Second, they must remember the rule that not all English letters sound the same as they are written. Third, after memorizing the rules, they must also understand the principles of word stress such as strong syllable stress, weak syllable stress, and adjacent sounds.

The existence of rules in homographs, homophones, and silent letters in English pronunciation makes the learning process more challenging for Indonesian EFL students. After mastering systems of sound productions, syllable stress, and missing sounds in English words (silent letter), they must also learn sound modification. The English sound system allows for sound changes when English words are combined in a sentence. These sounds undergo what is called assimilation, elision, and linking (Richards, 2015). All these rules require a strong determination from students and learning strategies that are not bound by time and space in practicing pronunciation.

The above-mentioned challenges require an appropriate instructional approach allowing the students to be self-determined learners in mastering English pronunciation.

Heutagogy, a self-determined learning approach, should be applied in pronunciation instruction. Conceptually, heutagogy gives students the freedom to determine topics, times, learning strategies, and how to measure their pronunciation skills (Hase, 2009). Recent studies have emphasized that heutagogy supports learner autonomy in technology-enhanced environments, enabling flexible and self-determined learning (Blaschke & Hase, 2019; Mythiri & Karthika, 2024; Zakaria et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of digital tools strengthens students' ability to engage in independent learning and develop lifelong learning skills (Imsiyah et al., 2024; Kusdiyanti et al., 2024).

Heutagogy supported by the use of technology will allow the students to practice English pronunciation without being hindered by time and space. They can learn phonological concepts and demonstrate them in their pronunciation skills anytime and anywhere. The combination of heutagogy and technology can change the condition of students who are passive to active and can increase their creativity and capabilities in the learning process (Moore, 2020). This increase in creativity and capability arises because heutagogy and technology provide opportunities for students to explore themselves in finding and solving problems they face through critical and reflective thinking processes.

Glassner & Back, (2020) stated that the double-loop learning principle contained in heutagogy trains students to solve the learning problems they face critically and reflectively. With the help of technology, they can access information from the website, digital materials, and also videos from YouTube to solve their difficulties in both segmental and supra-segmental feature aspects when practicing English pronunciation. The flexibility of learning gained from the application of heutagogy causes this approach to be used in various fields of education.

Heutagogy, or self-determined learning, refers to an approach in which learners take full responsibility for their learning processes, including determining learning goals, strategies, and evaluation methods (Kenyon & Hase, 2010). Unlike pedagogy and andragogy, heutagogy emphasizes the development of learner autonomy and capability rather than merely competency. Capability refers to learners' ability to apply skills in unfamiliar situations, engage in reflection, and adapt to changing learning environments (Blaschke & Hase, 2019). Recent studies have further emphasized that heutagogy supports learner autonomy in technology-enhanced environments, enabling flexible and self-determined learning (Chun & Abdullah, 2025; Panta, 2025; Singh & Sisodia, 2024).

Several key components characterize heutagogical learning. First, learner autonomy is central, as students are encouraged to design and manage their own learning pathways. Second, self-reflection and double-loop learning enable learners to critically evaluate both their learning outcomes and the processes they use (Argyris, 1996). Third, the integration of digital technologies supports flexible and personalized learning experiences, allowing students to access diverse resources and practice independently (Imsiyah et al., 2024). These components position learners as active agents who continuously construct knowledge through exploration and reflection.

Previous studies have demonstrated the application of heutagogy across various disciplines, including journalism, enterprise education, and architecture, where it has been shown to enhance student engagement and provide opportunities for authentic learning experiences (Cochrane et al., 2013; Mulrennan, 2018; Narayan et al., 2019). However, despite its potential, the application of heutagogy in pronunciation learning remains underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to extend the application of heutagogical principles to pronunciation instruction, particularly in supporting autonomous and technology-enhanced learning.

However, limited studies have specifically examined the application of heutagogy in pronunciation learning. A review of recent literature indicates that most heutagogical research focuses on general language learning, digital learning environments, or other disciplines, with only a small number addressing pronunciation as a specific skill (Chun & Abdullah, 2025). This indicates a gap in understanding how heutagogical principles can be applied to support students in improving their pronunciation skills. Considering the crucial role of pronunciation in achieving effective oral communication, further investigation into this area is necessary.

Building on the successful implementation of heutagogy across various educational fields, this study aims to explore the use of heutagogy for autonomous pronunciation learning. To achieve this objective, the study is guided by three research questions:

- (1) How is heutagogy applied in autonomous pronunciation learning?
- (2) What challenges are encountered by lecturers when applying heutagogy for pronunciation instruction?
- (3) What strategies can be employed to overcome these challenges?

To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of lecturers' practices and experiences. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, which enabled triangulation of data sources and enhanced the trustworthiness of the results.

## METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate the implementation of heutagogy in autonomous pronunciation learning and to explore the challenges encountered by lecturers. This design was selected because it allows an in-depth exploration of teaching practices within their real-life contexts, particularly when the phenomenon is closely intertwined with the instructional environment.

The participants consisted of two lecturers who teach pronunciation courses at two higher education institutions (hereafter referred to as University A and University B to preserve anonymity). The participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they were considered information-rich cases relevant to the focus of this study. The selection criteria included: (1) actively teaching pronunciation courses and (2) having experience with learner-centered or autonomous learning practices.

The inclusion of lecturers with contrasting teaching experience (35 years and 5 years) was intentional. This variation was expected to provide diverse and complementary perspectives on the implementation of heutagogical practices, reflecting both long-established pedagogical expertise and relatively recent teaching experience.

**Table 1.** Research Subjects

No.	Lecturer	Gender	Teaching experience	Role
1	University A	Female	35 years	Senior Lecturer
2	University B	Male	5 years	Junior Lecturer

Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, enabling methodological triangulation. Classroom observations were conducted during pronunciation learning sessions to capture naturally occurring instructional practices. The researcher documented detailed field notes focusing on the enactment of heutagogical principles, including strategies used to promote learner autonomy, lecturer–student interactions, and challenges encountered during instruction.

Following the observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to gain deeper insights into their perspectives and experiences. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions addressing key aspects such as lecturers' understanding of heutagogy, instructional strategies employed, perceived challenges, and adaptive practices in response to classroom situations. This flexible format allowed

participants to elaborate on their responses while maintaining alignment with the research objectives.

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach following an iterative and inductive process. First, the observation notes and interview data were organized and repeatedly reviewed to achieve data familiarization. Next, meaningful segments of data were coded inductively, allowing patterns and categories to emerge from the data. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that addressed the research questions.

To enhance analytical rigor, data from observations and interviews were continuously compared and integrated using a constant comparison technique, ensuring consistency and depth in the interpretation of findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Methodological triangulation was achieved by combining data from observations and interviews. Member checking was conducted by sharing interpretations with participants to verify accuracy and ensure that their perspectives were appropriately represented. In addition, peer debriefing was carried out to review the coding process and thematic development, thereby enhancing the credibility and dependability of the findings.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

### **Research question 1: How is heutagogy applied in autonomous pronunciation learning?**

The findings reveal that the implementation of heutagogy in autonomous pronunciation learning is reflected through three interrelated dimensions: learner agency, self-directed learning, and capability development.

First, learner agency is evident in the autonomy given to students to determine their own learning materials and strategies. Rather than relying solely on lecturer-provided resources, students were encouraged to explore various digital tools and platforms that support pronunciation learning.

Lecturer 1: “Students are free to choose learning materials such as YouTube videos or pronunciation applications based on their needs.”

Lecturer 2: “I provide initial guidance, but they mostly practice independently outside the classroom.”

These responses indicate that students are positioned as active agents who make decisions about their learning process. In practice, this autonomy allows learners to select resources that align with their individual pronunciation difficulties, such as focusing on specific phonemes, stress patterns, or intonation features. This flexibility reflects a shift from structured, teacher-directed instruction to more personalized and adaptive learning experiences. Furthermore, learning is not limited to classroom settings but extends to independent practice, enabling continuous engagement with pronunciation development.

Second, self-directed learning is reflected in students’ ability to manage, monitor, and evaluate their own learning progress. The lecturers emphasized reflective practices and encouraged students to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in pronunciation.

Lecturer 1: “Students usually practice independently and try to evaluate their pronunciation using available tools.”

Lecturer 2: “I ask them to reflect on their progress and identify the parts they

still find difficult.”

This finding suggests that students are actively involved in the learning cycle, including planning their practice, monitoring their performance, and evaluating outcomes. The use of digital tools, such as pronunciation applications or audio recordings, supports this process by providing immediate feedback. This approach promotes deeper engagement with learning, as students are not only practicing but also critically reflecting on their progress. As a result, learning becomes a continuous and self-regulated process rather than a one-time classroom activity.

Third, capability development is emphasized through performance-based assessment, where students are evaluated based on their ability to apply pronunciation knowledge in real communicative contexts. To support this, lecturers used an analytic rubric as an assessment tool.

*Instruction: Please evaluate the EFL learners' utterances by circling the number representing the characteristics.*

Sound accuracy	Sound accuracy refers to learners' ability to produce individual sounds (consonants and vowels) properly.				
	1	2	3	4	5
	A great number of mispronunciations are present	Many mispronunciations are present	Some mispronunciations are present	Few mispronunciations are present	Almost no mispronunciations are present
Word stress	Word stress refers to the combination of stressed or unstressed syllable in words				
	1	2	3	4	5
	A great number of incorrect placements of word stress are present	Many incorrect placements of word stress are present	Some incorrect placements of word stress are present	Few incorrect placements of word stress are present	Almost no incorrect placements of word stress are present
Adjustments in connected speech	Adjustments in connected Speech refers to the process of blending words within a single thought group, including the consonant to vowel linking, vowel-to-vowel linking, consonant assimilation, and palatalization.				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Almost no adjustments in connected speech occur.	Few adjustments in connected speech occur.	Some adjustments in connected speech occur.	Many adjustments in connected speech occur.	Almost all adjustments in connected speech occur.
Intonation	Intonation refers to the way varies the voice in tone, pitch, and volume of speech to reflect the meaning.				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Extremely disturbing; great additional listeners' effort is required.	Disturbing; much additional listeners' effort is required.	Somewhat disturbing; some additional listeners' effort is required.	Little disturbing; little additional listeners' effort is required.	Not disturbing at all; no additional listeners' effort is required.
Rhythm	Rhythm refers to the regular, patterned beat of stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses.				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Extremely disturbing; great additional listeners' effort is required.	Disturbing; much additional listeners' effort is required.	Somewhat disturbing; some additional listeners' effort is required.	Little disturbing; little additional listeners' effort is required.	Not disturbing at all; no additional listeners' effort is required.

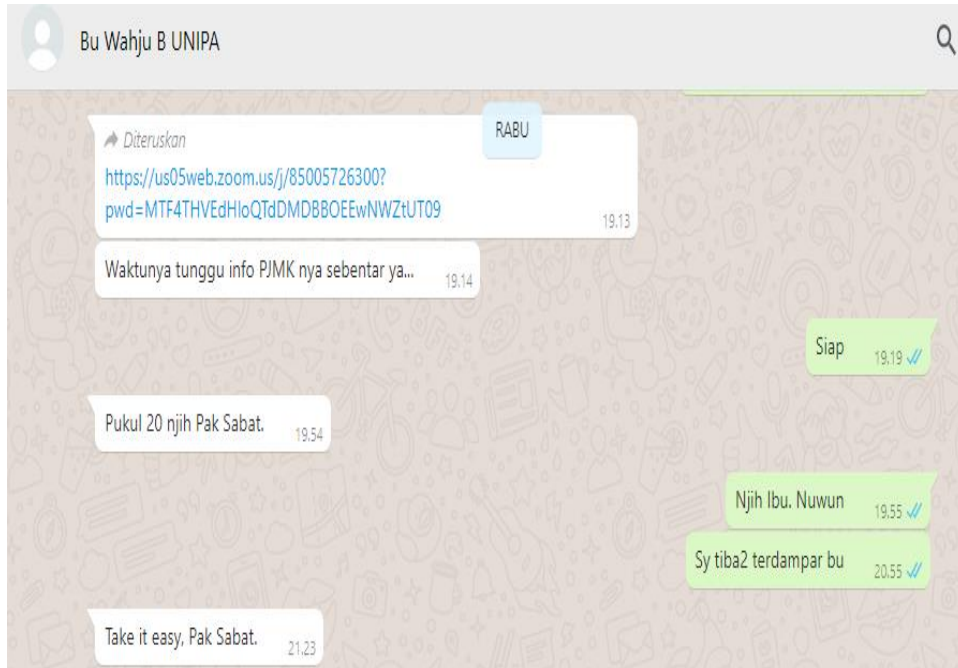
Figure 1. Rubric for Evaluating EFL Learners' Pronunciation

The rubric includes key components such as sound accuracy, word stress, connected speech, intonation, and rhythm. These elements represent both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. The use of this rubric indicates that learning is oriented toward practical performance rather than mere theoretical understanding. Students are expected not only to recognize correct pronunciation but also to demonstrate it in authentic speaking situations. This focus on capability highlights the importance of applying knowledge in dynamic and real-life contexts, which is central to autonomous learning.

**Research question 2: What are the obstacles faced by lecturers when applying heutagogy in teaching English pronunciation?**

The findings indicate that the implementation of heutagogy is not without challenges. Several obstacles were identified, particularly related to communication constraints and institutional coordination.

One of the primary challenges is the delay in receiving important academic information, which directly affects the organization and scheduling of learning activities.



**Figure 2.** Lecturer–Student Interaction in an Online Learning Environment

As illustrated in Figure 2, the lecturer experienced delays in obtaining information related to academic scheduling. This situation suggests that external administrative processes can interfere with the implementation of flexible learning designs. Since heutagogy relies heavily on adaptability and responsiveness to learners' needs, delays in communication can disrupt the planned learning activities and reduce instructional effectiveness.

In addition, the findings reveal that communication between lecturers and institutional stakeholders is often informal and lacks structured coordination. This condition may lead to misunderstandings or uncertainty in planning and executing learning activities. The absence of a clear and systematic communication framework limits the ability of lecturers to implement heutagogical practices effectively.

Furthermore, these constraints reduce the flexibility required in autonomous learning environments. When schedules are uncertain or frequently changed, it becomes difficult for lecturers to design consistent learning experiences. As a result, the implementation of self-determined learning approaches may not reach its full potential.

### **Research question 3: How to overcome these obstacles?**

Despite these challenges, the findings show that lecturers adopt several adaptive strategies to maintain the implementation of heutagogy.

Lecturer 1: “We try to communicate earlier and confirm schedules in advance to avoid delays.”

Lecturer 2: “I adjust the learning plan and give more flexible tasks so students can continue learning independently.”

These responses indicate that lecturers actively respond to institutional constraints by improving communication and adjusting their instructional strategies. Early communication and confirmation of schedules help minimize uncertainty, while flexibility in learning design ensures that students can continue learning even when disruptions occur.

In addition, lecturers tend to redesign learning activities by incorporating more independent and asynchronous tasks. This approach allows students to engage in learning at their own pace, reducing dependency on fixed schedules. As a result, learning continuity can be maintained despite external constraints.

These adaptive strategies demonstrate that heutagogy is inherently flexible and can be adjusted to different contexts. By emphasizing learner autonomy and flexible learning design, lecturers are able to sustain autonomous pronunciation learning even in less-than-ideal institutional conditions.

### ***Discussion***

The findings of this study demonstrate that heutagogy provides a meaningful framework for promoting autonomous pronunciation learning through learner agency, self-directed learning, and capability development.

The implementation of learner agency highlights the shift toward granting students greater control over their learning process. This finding reflects the fundamental principle of heutagogy, which emphasizes autonomy and flexibility in learning. Similar findings have been reported in various educational contexts, where learner autonomy is associated with increased motivation, engagement, and ownership of learning.

Furthermore, the emphasis on self-directed learning indicates a transformation in the role of lecturers, from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of learning. In this approach, students are encouraged to take responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own progress. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that self-directed learning is essential for developing independent and lifelong learners, particularly in skill-based domains such as language learning.

The focus on capability development further strengthens the application of heutagogy. Unlike traditional approaches that emphasize knowledge acquisition, heutagogy prioritizes the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. The use of an analytic rubric in this study supports this perspective by assessing both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. This indicates that students are not only learning about pronunciation but are also developing the ability to use it effectively in communication.

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of heutagogy is

influenced by contextual factors, particularly institutional constraints. Communication delays and lack of coordination can hinder the flexibility required in heutagogical practices. This finding aligns with studies from other fields, which highlight that institutional support is a critical factor in the successful implementation of learner-centered approaches.

Without adequate administrative support, lecturers may face challenges in designing and managing flexible learning environments. This suggests that the success of heutagogy depends not only on pedagogical design but also on organizational readiness.

To address these challenges, lecturers adopt adaptive strategies such as improving communication and redesigning learning activities. These strategies reflect the flexible and dynamic nature of heutagogy, which allows learning to continue despite external limitations. The use of flexible tasks and independent learning activities ensures that students remain engaged and continue developing their skills.

Overall, this study confirms that heutagogy has strong potential in enhancing autonomous pronunciation learning. However, its successful implementation requires a balance between pedagogical innovation and institutional support. Future research may further explore how organizational systems can better support the application of heutagogy in different educational contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to explore the application of heutagogy in autonomous pronunciation learning, the obstacles encountered by lecturers, and the strategies used to overcome those challenges.

First, in response to the first research question, the findings indicate that heutagogy is implemented through learner agency, self-directed learning, and capability development. Students are given the autonomy to select learning resources and strategies, engage in independent and reflective learning processes, and demonstrate their pronunciation ability through performance-based assessment. This confirms that heutagogy supports a shift toward more flexible and student-centered pronunciation learning.

Second, addressing the second research question, the study reveals that the implementation of heutagogy is constrained by communication delays and limited institutional coordination. These challenges affect the flexibility required in autonomous learning environments and may disrupt the planning and execution of learning activities.

Third, in response to the third research question, the findings show that lecturers adopt adaptive strategies to overcome these obstacles. These strategies include improving communication, confirming schedules in advance, and redesigning learning activities to be more flexible and student-centered. Such approaches enable the continuity of autonomous learning despite institutional constraints.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of heutagogy by demonstrating its applicability in pronunciation learning, particularly

in fostering learner autonomy and capability development. It also extends existing literature by highlighting the importance of contextual and institutional factors in implementing self-determined learning approaches.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that lecturers should integrate flexible learning designs, utilize digital tools effectively, and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition, institutional support is essential to ensure the successful implementation of heutagogical practices.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited to two lecturers, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focused primarily on lecturers' perspectives, without including direct input from students. Third, the research was conducted in a specific institutional context, which may differ from other educational settings.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants, include students' perspectives, and explore the implementation of heutagogy in different contexts and disciplines. Further studies may also investigate the effectiveness of heutagogical approaches in improving specific language skills, particularly pronunciation, using more diverse research designs.

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