

SELF-DIRECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEUTAGOGY: INSIGHTS FROM THE BRITISH COUNCIL MINI-EVENT

Hery Yanto The
Institut Nalanda
heryyantothe@gmail.com

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Abstract: This research delves into the fusion of heutagogy principles with self-directed learning (SDL) to elevate my growth as a second language teacher-educator. Through the lens of intuitive inquiry, I reflect on my evolution from an applicant to a presenter at the British Council Mini-Event, where I shared my teaching insights. This qualitative approach, distinct from traditional empirical methods, facilitates a profound personal assessment, capturing the transformative journey of independent learning and achieving goals. The study underscores how heutagogy, as a framework centered on learner autonomy, works in tandem with SDL to nurture educator independence, resilience, and creativity. The insights gained shed light on navigating the hurdles of preparing for international conferences, mentorship, and effective presentation, providing a blueprint for teacher professional development. By chronicling this experience, I hope to motivate other educators to embrace self-directed learning strategies, illustrating that reflective and intuitive research can produce significant performance indicators and inspiring milestones. This study adds to the conversation on alternative pathways for professional development, championing heutagogy and SDL methodologies to empower educators in charge of their lifelong learning journey.

Keywords: heutagogy; self-directed learning; teacher professional development; intuitive inquiry; reflective practice.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has changed second language teaching, giving unique benefits but requiring careful design and planning for maximum efficacy (Zhou, 2024). Research also shows that language teachers with strong digital competency and effective technology integration improve student engagement, motivation, and language proficiency (Kanyuk & Kish, 2023). For teacher-educators to stay up to date with and acquire knowledge about technological advances requires them to guide their professional development by participating in more self-directed learning (SDL). The SDL potentially improves self-regulation, interpersonal skills, risk-taking in uncertain situations, and the underdeveloped supervision abilities of them as teachers (Avsec & Ferik Savec, 2022).

The significance of SDL and heutagogy has grown among teacher educators, resulting in a surge in research on this subject. Heutagogy emphasizes learners' ability to apply self-directed learning (SDL) principles actively in their learning process, focusing on developing capability, self-reflection, and adaptability (Mwinkaar & Lonibe, 2024). While SDL highlights learners taking initiative and responsibility for their learning activities, heutagogy extends this by fostering deeper learner autonomy and the transfer of learning to complex, real-world situation (Elderson-Van Duin et al., 2023). A survey including 513 pre-service teachers and 30 lecturers has demonstrated the significance of a learning process focused on the principle of heutagogy to equip them for the problems of contemporary development (Mwinkaar & Lonibe, 2024). Using statistical tests, Sagimbaveya et al. (2024) shown that

SDL learning improves instructors' capacity for innovation and drives learning. Multiple studies have evidenced the advantageous attributes of SDL and heutagogy (Blaschke, 2012; Canning, 2010; Sumegang, 2024; Wu, 2021).

Educators seldom examine self-directed learning and heutagogy through their own lived experience, yet personal insight and reflection can strongly inform practice. While observational, narrative, and self-study methods have grown in use (Choi, 2022; Louws et al., 2017; Mwinkaar & Lonibe, 2024), intuitive inquiry remains underused. Intuitive inquiry combines intellectual analysis with inner knowing and personal resonance (Anderson, 2019; Lapidow & Walker, 2024; Morse, 2002), and it can reveal how heutagogy and SDL influence teacher growth despite concerns about its fit with conventional empirical standards.

This study fills that gap by documenting my journey as a second-language teacher-educator moving from conference applicant to presenter at a British Council Mini-Event. It traces how my teaching, learning, and initiative developed and shows how heutagogical principles support meaningful, sustainable professional development. Using intuitive inquiry, a qualitative and reflective approach, provides deep insider perspectives on professional learning that external observation often misses.

The study's significance lies in offering an alternative, personalized pathway for professional development at a time when educators must manage international collaboration, digital competence, and pedagogical innovation. By presenting a practical model of reflective, autonomous practice, the research encourages teacher-educators to help peers cultivate self-directed, adaptive, and creative professional identities across varied educational contexts.

METHOD

This study follows a qualitative, intuitive inquiry methodology as established by Anderson (2019), which combines analytical reasoning with intuitive understanding and self-reflection. This approach is well aligned with the study's objectives, since it facilitates a comprehensive investigation of internal processes, emotions, discoveries, and transformations. Intuitive inquiry is a process that repeats and changes, allowing the researcher to deeply engage with their own experiences, making it especially good for looking into personal and evolving paths of self-directed and self-determined learning (Vaidya, 2012). For other teacher-educators, adopting this methodology can foster deeper self-awareness and reflective practice, enabling them to explore their professional growth in a nuanced and personalized way. This approach encourages ongoing adaptation and insight, which are essential for navigating the complexities of contemporary education.

Primary data are the email correspondence and exchanged documents between the researcher and mentor, covering discovery of the British Council Mini-Event through to the final presentation. Materials include preparation instructions, slides, handouts, mentoring comments, event recordings, and a certificate. These items capture decisions, emotional and cognitive shifts, and insights during the self-directed learning journey. Data were curated over nine months and ordered chronologically.

Following the exploration ways of intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2019), defining the topic, reviewing existing research, gathering and examining data, combining results, and sharing new insights, the data were first organized to identify common themes like autonomy, resilience, self-doubt, creativity, and

growth. Simultaneous thematic analysis allowed for the development of new themes based on the researcher's intuition and the main theories involved.

The data presentation uses a narrative structure with tables to trace the researcher's professional evolution through key episodes, introspective writings, and dialogic links to literature and practice. Interpretation combines personal significance and academic discussion, linking subjective and analytical perspectives. Intuitive inquiry reveals the feelings, viewpoints, and broader connections around events, highlighting the lived interplay of practical thinking and self-directed learning (Akinci & Sadler-Smith, 2020).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The British Council webinar mentoring scheme has been an effective way to uncover the impact of heutagogy principles on re-imagining traditional professional development models. The structure of professional development for educators is typically based on predefined and linear paths. However, this program demonstrated how traditional approaches can be transformed into personalized and adaptive growth experiences that cater to individual needs. The dynamic and evolving data set was created by the innovative use of email exchanges that took place over nine months during this journey.

Table 1. Phases of Self-Directed Professional Development

Phase	Key Events	Heutagogy Principles Applied
Initial Engagement	Proposal submission, acceptance into mentoring scheme	Agency in seeking growth opportunities
Preparation	Slide revisions, rehearsal feedback, topic refinement	Reflective practice, iterative learning
Post-Event	Certificate, feedback survey, recording review	Integration of external validation into self-assessment

The interconnected roles of self-direction, reflective practice, and collaborative learning, uncovered through intuitive analysis of this correspondence, shaped my professional development. These email exchanges functioned as data, capturing authentic, self-determined moments of decision-making, adaptation, and integration. Examining these interactions enabled me to gain profound insights into how these principles influenced my growth and highlighted the potential of self-determined approaches to revolutionize educator development.

My email in April 2024 marked the beginning of the initial engagement stage, where I demonstrated proactive agency. My statements that I am 'definitely interested' and 'eager to start preparations' are crucial. My reflection is more than just passive interest. It demonstrates my commitment to active participation and willingness to invest time and effort. This aligns with Rosli et al.'s findings (Rosli et al., 2022), emphasizing a key trait of self-determined learners: the active pursuit of opportunities that contribute to their personal and professional growth objectives. I actively sought an invitation instead of waiting for one, demonstrating a fundamental aspect of heutagogy.

The British Council's response, where they offered mentoring instead of a webinar slot, is a significant milestone. I do not see the decision as a rejection. Instead, I take this offer as a redirection, encouraging me to reassess my initial plan and approach. Auqui and Furlan's concept of double-loop learning adequately depicts the dynamic interaction (Auqui-Caceres & Furlan, 2023). This learning involves questioning and changing the underlying assumptions, beliefs, or objectives that guide actions and decisions (Lukic, 2022). The 'inner loop' represents my original goal (a webinar slot), while the 'outer loop' involves a broader reflection on the learning process itself—adjusting my expectations and pursuing

a potentially more valuable, albeit different, opportunity. Although the mentoring may not lead me directly toward my initial goal, it could provide a more impactful and customized learning experience.

I am confident that mentoring will have a significant impact on my self-determined learning development. By observing how my mentor approaches the subject, receiving feedback, and reflecting on my experiences, I will improve my learning and refine my self-directed learning strategies. Through this process, I can successfully overcome potential challenges and showcase my adaptability and resilience, which are hallmarks of effective learners. I have gained new knowledge and skills, as well as learned how to navigate institutional frameworks and adjust my objectives to facilitate progress through this mentoring. As a result, this experience serves as a fundamental element for my self-directed learning endeavors.

The transition between these phases was not simply procedural but instead showed a profound cognitive and emotional engagement. In January 2025, when my preparation timeline was threatened by illness, I wrote, "I apologize for missing the deadline... I just have to find a way to keep [my presentation] brief." In this statement, it is shown how self-determined learners internalize challenges as part of their growth process. Melissa noted that the post-event phase had concluded by saying, 'You can view and reflect on the recordings here,' reinforcing the heutagogy principle that learning is ongoing beyond formal endpoints. This gradual development indicates that self-directed learning is a continuous process rather than a fixed event.

Table 2. Evidence of Self-Determined Learning

Data Excerpt	Interpretation
"I am excited about contributing to the British Council's Teaching English webinar event."	Demonstrates intrinsic motivation and ownership of learning.
"I will ensure to accommodate [scheduling] accordingly."	Exhibits adaptability and self-regulation in managing commitments

Email excerpts provided in table 2 effectively articulate the essential mindset adjustments needed for truly effective self-directed learning. I did not express my excitement at contributing in a superficial or perfunctory way. The internal drive to engage in activities due to their inherent satisfaction and fulfillment is what Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to as intrinsic motivation. The sustained engagement and persistence that this intrinsic motivation fuels are crucial for the successful completion of self-directed learning endeavors (Morris et al., 2022).

The remark regarding scheduling accommodations, made in November 2024, extended beyond simple logistical coordination. The concept of forethought, as articulated by Sandham and Hicksin (1982), was demonstrated to be an important aspect of self-regulated learning. The practice of forethought involves planning, goal-setting, and strategic thinking that equips learners to manage their learning processes in an effective manner (Brady et al., 2024; Muljana et al., 2023). By actively addressing scheduling needs and suggesting flexible options, I demonstrated forethought and improved my capacity to regulate my learning experience.

Table 3. Mentoring Feedback and Reflective Adjustments

Feedback Received	My Response	Heutagogy Insight
"Inga will talk about research; focus on your CPD journey."	Revised slides to emphasize personal growth narrative and deleted the research section.	Selective integration of external guidance.
"Your PPT needs sequencing adjustments."	Restructured presentation for clarity.	Critical reflection on content organization.

Melissa's willingness to offer alternative rehearsal times signaled a move toward shared responsibility in the learning process. This collaborative approach mirrors the mentoring contract, which

stresses mutual agreement to guide learning. Through mutual adaptability, I assumed greater responsibility while the mentor became an active partner, and emails document a shift from external motivation and rigid planning to internal motivation, strategic foresight, and collaborative accountability, key features of effective self-directed learning.

The exchanges also show growth from dependence to self-direction. Early messages request logistical guidance ("Please let me know the time arrangement"), whereas later ones express confidence ("I am sending you the revisions to my presentation slides"), illustrating how supported, self-regulated environments build self-trust and capability.

The mentor-learner conversations presented in Table 3 highlight the delicate balance between external input and internal processing in self-determined learning. When Melissa suggested that I concentrate on my continuing professional development (CPD) journey instead of research methodology, I interpreted her suggestion as scaffolding within the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as proposed by Vygotsky. The ZPD provides guidance that enhances my capabilities without dictating specific outcomes (Lambright, 2024; Margolis, 2020). Considering this suggestion, I chose to emphasize the significance of cultural awareness education and a profound understanding of pedagogical subjects. Such an approach exemplifies transformative learning (Singer-Brodowski, 2023; Vipler & Sawatsky, 2023), where external ideas serve as catalysts for my internal reframing.

Table 4. Post-Event Self-Assessment

Outcome	Impact on Professional Growth
Certificate of participation	Formal recognition of heutagogy competence.
Anonymous feedback survey	Opportunity to critique my own learning process.

The thorough technical comments I received on the slide sequencing of my presentation prompted a significant period of metacognitive analysis. Melissa's screen recording, which effectively illustrated the concept of a reflective learning approach (Alzayed & Alabdulkareem, 2021; Mohamed et al., 2022), was interspersed with precise timestamps and requests for attention ("Please watch here for my feedback"). This collaborative method (Abramczyk & Jurkowski, 2020; Yang, 2023) allowed me to assess my work from a fresh, external perspective, thereby facilitating objective analysis. I am grateful for your meticulous and high-quality comments, as they enabled me to see the sequence of my presentation more clearly. This experience marks a pivotal moment when internal knowledge merged with external insight. It beautifully exemplifies the principles of heutagogy, demonstrating how constructive feedback fosters not only skill development but also essential self-assessment abilities and the capacity for autonomous quality judgment (Elderson-Van Duin et al., 2023; Nandagopal & Philip, 2023). The comments served as more than mere corrections; they played a crucial role in my ongoing development through critical evaluation.

The post-event phase concluded the heutagogy cycle by transforming experience into consolidated knowledge. The certificate served not just as paperwork but as a boundary object (Riis & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2020). In this context, a boundary object is defined as an item that links my personal achievement with institutional recognition (Øgård, 2025). The request for feedback through a survey provided an opportunity for critical reflection. This critical reflection allows me to examine the beliefs and practices that shaped my learning journey (Hickson, 2011; Indrašienė et al., 2023).

My evaluation of the recorded webinar session facilitated retrospective reflection (Krogstie, 2009), when I re-engaged with events, benefiting from temporal distance and enhanced comprehension. This phase was key to moving from action to understanding, as I could see my presentation and my interactions with the audience and co-presenters. The British Council's use of Facebook viewer numbers ("where it garners numerous views and comments") introduced a degree of social validation, underlining that self-directed learning need not be solitary to be genuine.

The results indicate that professional development in heutagogy fosters positive learning loops in the overall process. The email correspondence shows that self-direction flourishes not in isolation but through relational agency (Wright, 2015), which enables individuals to align their personal learning goals with institutional opportunities. My journey from the initial idea to the post-event reflection demonstrates how heuristics transform professional development from a passive activity imposed on teachers into an active process where instructors can exert influence. The British Council's mentoring strategy effectively cultivated a "growth mindset" environment, offering structure without constraints and guidance without imposition.

This study posits that effective teacher professional development in the twenty-first century requires a reinvention of outdated paradigms that honor educator agency while providing thoughtful support structures. As global education systems navigate rapid changes, the heutagogy approach discussed here offers a practical strategy for developing educators who are not only skilled practitioners but also adaptable, self-reflective learners capable of guiding their growth in unpredictable environments. Email correspondence, rather than merely serving as administrative documents, provides compelling evidence of how professional development can be both personally meaningful and professionally transformative when rooted in self-directed learning.

This study indicates how heutagogy, as a paradigm focused on self-directed learning, can transform conventional professional development methods for educators (Sumeg-ang, 2024; Wu, 2021). Notably, this study examines the author's experience in a mentorship program with the British Council, based on email correspondence over a period of nine months. It highlights how heuristic principles, including agency, reflective practice, and collaborative learning, facilitated personal and professional development. This research analyzes the results using key concepts in heutagogy and related educational theories to demonstrate how self-directed learning can be effectively promoted in schools and other institutions.

Heutagogy fundamentally revolves around the principle of learner agency, the ability of individuals to take initiative in their educational pursuit (Wright, 2015). This research illustrates that concept through active participation in the mentorship program by the British Council webinar. I feel a strong sense of ownership over my professional development, from presenting a proposal expressing enthusiasm for initiating preparations upon receiving approval. This aligns with Avsec and Savec's assertion that self-determined learners actively seek opportunities that align with their goals (Avsec & Ferik Savec, 2022).

The preliminary stage of involvement emphasizes how institutional frameworks can facilitate agency by providing accessible avenues for participation (Wright, 2015). The British Council's invitation to participate in a mentorship program instead of a fully scheduled webinar event established a double-loop learning setting (Auqui-Caceres & Furlan, 2023). In this environment, learners are actively involved in

skill acquisition while simultaneously reflecting on and modifying the learning process. The interaction between institutional structure and human agency enabled customization of my experience while obtaining personalized assistance.

Reflective practice (Alzayed & Alabdulkareem, 2021) is a fundamental aspect of heutagogy, allowing me to critically evaluate experiences and incorporate new ideas into my work. During the preparation phase, I participated in iterative learning processes, modifying presentation slides in response to criticism and honing their study emphasis. These behaviors exemplify the reflective learner agency wherein professionals acquire knowledge through reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

My adjustment to difficulties, such as illness affecting the preparation schedule, further exemplifies the significance of reflective practice in cultivating resilience. The author's statement, "I just have to find a way to keep [my research] concise," exemplifies metacognitive reflection, as they reassess their methodology to achieve their objectives. Adaptive thinking is fundamental to modeling self-regulated learning, which highlights the importance of planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning processes (Gambo & Shakir, 2021).

The post-event phase reinforced these reflective practices. Reviewing the recorded webinar and completing an anonymous feedback survey provided opportunities for retrospective reflection, allowing me to re-examine performance with new insights. Re-examining performance is a critical component of deep learning, where temporal distance enables me to gain fresh perspectives on my work (Bhardwaj et al., 2021).

While heutagogy emphasizes self-direction, it does not imply isolation. This case study demonstrates how collaborative learning environments enhance self-directed growth. The mentor-learner relationship with Melissa played a pivotal role in scaffolding the author's development. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development offers a useful lens here; the mentor provided targeted feedback that extended the author's capabilities without prescribing outcomes (Margolis, 2020).

When Melissa suggested focusing on the author's CPD journey rather than research methodology, it prompted transformative learning (Singer-Brodowski, 2023) as an internal reframing of priorities. Similarly, technical feedback on slide sequencing led to deeper metacognition, with the author recognizing the value of external perspectives in refining their work. This aligns with reflective practice, where learners engage in dialogue and critique to enhance their understanding.

Social validation also emerged as a significant factor in the post-event phase. The inclusion of Facebook viewer statistics introduced a communal dimension to the author's learning experience, reinforcing that self-directed learning can thrive in socially connected environments. Wenger's theory of communities of practice underscores this, emphasizing how participation in social networks contributes to identity formation and knowledge construction (Wenger, 1998).

The chronological progression through the phases of engagement, initial proposal submission, preparation, and post-event reflection, reveals a natural arc of heutagogic development. Stages of self-direction provide a framework for understanding this evolution: moving from dependence on external guidance to increasing autonomy in decision-making. Early emails show the author seeking clarity on scheduling, whereas later correspondence reflects confident self-assertion in presenting revised materials.

This phased development reflects the concept of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016), which posits that individuals can develop their abilities through dedication and effort. The mentoring approach of the British Council supported this mindset by offering structure without constraints, enabling the author to explore, experiment, and refine their work. The certificate of participation acted as both formal recognition and a boundary object (Wenger, 1998), linking personal achievement with institutional validation.

Synthesizing these findings with theoretical frameworks reveals how heutagogical professional development fosters virtuous cycles of engagement. The email correspondence illustrates that self-direction thrives not in isolation but through relational agency (Wright, 2015), which can be understood as the ability to align personal learning goals with institutional opportunities. The British Council's mentoring approach was successful by balancing autonomy with support, thereby creating an environment where the author could take charge of their growth while also benefiting from expert guidance.

Moreover, this study underscores the importance of integrating heutagogy principles into teacher professional development. Traditional models often prioritize standardized training over personalized growth, limiting opportunities for educators to develop as lifelong learners. By contrast, the heutagogy approach documented here fosters adaptability, self-awareness, and reflective practice, qualities essential for navigating the complexities of 21st-century education.

This study offers compelling evidence of how heutagogy can transform professional development for educators. Through proactive engagement, reflective practice (Alzayed & Alabdulkareem, 2021), collaborative learning, and phased development, I had tried to exemplify the principles of self-determined learning within an institutional context. Theoretical frameworks of learning also enrich our understanding of these dynamics, highlighting the potential of heutagogy to cultivate educators who are not only skilled practitioners but also autonomous, reflective learners. As education systems continue to evolve, embracing heutagogy approaches may prove vital in preparing teachers to lead their growth in an ever-changing landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that heutagogy, especially learner agency, reflective practice, and relational feedback, can turn traditional mentoring into a highly personalized and effective professional development experience. Self-directed learning emerged as a cyclical process: the participant repeatedly sought opportunities aligned with personal growth goals, adapted based on mentor feedback, and used external validation to inform retrospective reflection. The interaction between institutional support and individual autonomy functioned as double-loop learning, enabling skill acquisition alongside deeper reassessment of how learning occurs.

For teacher educators and PD designers, the findings argue for shifting from standardized training to structured yet flexible mentoring that fosters intrinsic motivation, metacognitive reflection, and transformative learning. The British Council's mentoring scheme illustrates how programs can empower teachers to set goals, reflect critically, and engage in collaborative dialogue that scaffolds self-regulated growth.

Future research should test how heutagogical principles scale across institutions, through longitudinal, multi-site studies, and explore tools like digital portfolios and peer feedback to document reflection and enhance accountability. Methodologically, combining email data with interviews and observations would offer richer insight. Ultimately, professional development ecosystems that honor educator agency while providing intelligent scaffolding are likely essential for cultivating resilient, lifelong learners able to navigate ongoing educational change.

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