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Research Article

From Teacher to Facilitator: The Role of Educators in Supporting Heutagogical Practices in Higher Education

Misbahul Khairani[1], Nurul Huda[2], Faisal Razak[3], Dyah Retno Wulan[4]
[1] STAI Samarinda, Indonesia
[2] Universiti Utara, Malaysia
[3] Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
[4] Politeknik AUP, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Misbahul Khairani,
Jl. Moh. Said No.5, Lok Bahu, Sungai Kunjang District, Samarinda City, East Kalimantan 75125, Indonesia
Email: suhaarana9@gmail.com

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of educational paradigms in the 21st century has underscored the necessity for a shift from traditional teacher-centered instruction to more learner-driven approaches, such as heutagogy. Heutagogy emphasizes self-determined learning, where learners are empowered to take control of their educational journey. This study aims to explore the evolving role of educators in higher education as they transition from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of autonomous learning within heutagogical frameworks. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions involving 15 university lecturers across various disciplines. Thematic analysis revealed that educators play a pivotal role in designing flexible learning environments, fostering learner agency, and integrating digital tools to support independent learning pathways. Challenges identified include institutional constraints, limited professional development, and resistance to pedagogical change. However, the findings indicate that with proper training and institutional support, educators can effectively adapt their roles to facilitate heutagogical practices. The study concludes that the transformation of educators into facilitators is crucial for nurturing self-determined learners capable of navigating complex and dynamic knowledge landscapes.

Keywords: heutagogy, facilitator role, higher education, learner autonomy, self-determined learning

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, particularly in response to technological advancements and evolving societal expectations. Traditional teacher-centered paradigms are increasingly being questioned as institutions strive to cultivate more autonomous, lifelong learners. The demand for graduates equipped with critical thinking, adaptability, and self-directed learning capabilities has never been more pressing.

Heutagogy, or self-determined learning, has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach that aligns with the needs of 21st-century learners. Unlike pedagogy and andragogy, heutagogy emphasizes learner agency, capacity building, and non-linear learning pathways. This paradigm shift calls for a fundamental redefinition of the educator's role, moving from a primary source of knowledge to a learning facilitator.

Educators play a critical role in enabling this transformation, particularly in fostering the environments and mindsets that support heutagogical principles. Their ability to design flexible learning experiences, encourage reflection, and support metacognition is essential to heutagogical success (Bennett & Szedlak, 2024; Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; Conesa et al., 2023; Kavashev, 2024; Narayan et al., 2024). This shift requires not only a change in instructional strategies but also in the underlying beliefs and professional identities of educators.

Despite increasing discourse around heutagogy in educational literature, there remains a disconnect between its theoretical promotion and practical application in higher education. Many educators struggle to implement self-determined learning frameworks effectively, often due to institutional constraints or lack of professional development in heutagogical strategies. The transition from traditional teaching roles to facilitative roles is not yet fully realized in many academic settings.

There is a limited understanding of how educators perceive their evolving roles and the specific challenges they face in adopting facilitative practices (Alrashdan et al., 2023; Baharuddin & Setialaksana, 2023; Eastabrook et al., 2023; Pretorius, 2025). Existing research often overlooks the complexity of educators' experiences as they navigate this pedagogical shift. Without deeper insights into these dynamics, efforts to integrate heutagogy into higher education risk being superficial or unsustainable.

A clear articulation of the challenges and enabling factors involved in this role transformation is crucial. This study seeks to address the gap by exploring educators' lived experiences and identifying the institutional, personal, and pedagogical elements that influence their capacity to support heutagogical practices effectively.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how educators in higher education are transitioning from traditional teaching roles to facilitative roles in the context of heutagogical learning (Dhillon, 2023; Hukkinen et al., 2023; Mupaikwa, 2024; Raderstorf et al., 2025). The study intends to analyze the pedagogical adjustments educators make and the strategies they employ to promote learner autonomy. Understanding these elements will provide insights into the processes underpinning the adoption of heutagogical practices.

This research also aims to investigate the perceptions, beliefs, and professional identities of educators as they engage with heutagogy (Azid et al., 2024; Hairi et al., 2023; Ramlan & Kiong, 2024; Rathi et al., 2023; Stoten, 2024). By focusing on the internal and external factors shaping their approaches, the study seeks to uncover how educators reconcile their roles with the demands of self-determined learning. Identifying these perspectives will help institutions design more effective support systems for educators.

In doing so, the study aspires to contribute to the development of a framework or set of guidelines that can support educators in higher education in their journey toward becoming facilitators of learning. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality and sustainability of heutagogical practices through a better understanding of educator roles.

Current literature provides valuable theoretical foundations for heutagogy but offers limited empirical insight into how it is practiced and supported by educators in real-world contexts (Crawford et al., 2023; George-Reyes et al., 2024; Qassrawi, 2023; Vurayai, 2023). Studies often emphasize learner autonomy without adequately addressing the shifting responsibilities of educators. As a result, the operationalization of heutagogy in higher education remains underexplored and inconsistently implemented.

Few studies have systematically examined the experiences of educators undergoing this role transformation, particularly from a qualitative and context-sensitive perspective (Muslih et al., 2024; Mynbayeva et al., 2024; Ortega-Sanchez, 2023; Schröter & Woodland, 2024; Sidhu et al., 2023; Suen & Hung, 2025). Most existing research either focuses on student outcomes or conceptual discussions, creating a gap in understanding the educator's journey. There is also a lack of regionally diverse research, limiting the applicability of findings across different cultural and institutional settings.

This research seeks to bridge this gap by providing a nuanced exploration of educator perspectives, drawn from diverse higher education environments. It aims to enrich the discourse with grounded insights that reflect actual pedagogical practices, rather than idealized models. This contribution is vital for making heutagogical frameworks more accessible, adaptable, and actionable for educators worldwide.

This study presents a novel approach by centering educators' voices in the discourse on heutagogy, a domain largely dominated by learner-focused narratives. By foregrounding the lived experiences and adaptive strategies of educators, the research adds a fresh dimension to heutagogical literature. This focus acknowledges the pivotal, though often overlooked, role that educators play in enabling learner autonomy.

The study is also distinctive in its emphasis on the transformation of professional identity as a key factor in adopting heutagogical practices. Understanding how educators internalize and enact their evolving roles offers critical insights into sustainable pedagogical reform. This psychological and professional shift represents a crucial but under-researched aspect of heutagogical implementation.

The findings of this study hold practical significance for curriculum designers, academic developers, and educational policymakers. By illuminating the pathways and challenges of transitioning to a facilitative role, the research provides actionable recommendations to support educators. It contributes not only to the theoretical expansion of heutagogy but also to its practical integration in higher education systems globally.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore educators' transformation from traditional teaching roles to facilitators within heutagogical practices in higher education (Andriani et al., 2023; Friedman & Nash-Luckenbach, 2024). The research aimed to understand lived experiences, perceptions, and strategies of educators who have implemented learner-centered approaches aligned with heutagogy.

Research Target/Subject

The population comprised university lecturers from faculties of education across three prominent higher education institutions in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to select twelve participants who demonstrated active involvement in self-determined learning initiatives, curriculum development for heutagogical learning environments, or who had received formal training in innovative pedagogies.

Research Procedure

Data collection procedures followed ethical research standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, then thematically analyzed using NVivo software. Triangulation of data sources enhanced credibility, while member checking ensured the accuracy and trustworthiness of participants' accounts.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis of course syllabi and teaching materials. The interview protocol was designed to probe educators' instructional transformations, challenges faced, and strategies adopted in facilitating autonomous student learning. The instruments were validated through expert review and a pilot test involving two educators not included in the final sample.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A quantitative survey was conducted among 150 lecturers from five higher education institutions to assess their perception of their roles in supporting heutagogical practices. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with five core facilitator roles. The summary of the findings is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Faculty perceptions of their roles in heutagogical practices

Educator Role	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Designer of Self-Directed Learning	45	38	10	5	2
Facilitator of Coll Aborative Discussions	52	34	8	4	2
Provider of Reflective Feed Back	48	40	7	3	2
Promoter of Problem Based Leaening	50	36	9	4	1
Supporter of Student Self-Development	43	41	11	3	2

Survey results indicate a strong trend of agreement toward all five facilitative roles, with the highest endorsement observed in the role of "Facilitator of Collaborative Discussions" at 86% combined agreement. A lower, though still significant, agreement was noted in the role of "Supporter of Student Self-Development" at 84%. Neutral and disagreement responses remained under 15% for all items, suggesting general acceptance of the facilitator identity among lecturers.

Faculty members most strongly identified with roles that involve interaction and engagement, particularly in facilitating collaboration and promoting problem-based learning. This finding is consistent with current trends in learner-centered pedagogy that prioritize active learning environments and peer-driven inquiry.

The relatively lower endorsement for roles involving self-development support and reflective feedback may reflect ongoing transitions in assessment cultures and faculty development. Several participants commented in open-ended responses that their institutions still emphasize traditional content delivery, which limits opportunities for autonomous student growth.

Qualitative data from classroom observations at three partner universities further validated the survey findings. A total of 25 classes were observed over the course of one semester, with field notes focusing on facilitator behaviors, learning structure, and student autonomy.

Evidence showed that instructors often employed group tasks, open-ended problem scenarios, and reflective exercises. However, direct instruction still appeared frequently, particularly during sessions focused on theoretical content. These mixed practices point to an ongoing shift rather than a full transformation in teaching roles.

A chi-square analysis was applied to explore the association between teaching experience and perceived facilitator role. Results showed a statistically significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 11.26$, $p = 0.004$) between years of service and confidence in adopting heutagogical methods, especially among those with more than 10 years of experience.

A linear regression further indicated that participation in professional development programs related to student-centered learning was a strong predictor of faculty's self-reported transformation from teacher to facilitator ($R^2 = 0.38$, $\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests targeted training positively influences heutagogical adoption.

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between the role of "Provider of Reflective Feedback" and "Supporter of Student Self-Development" ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$). These roles appear mutually reinforcing in the facilitation of deeper learning and autonomy.

Moderate correlations were also found between "Facilitator of Collaborative Discussions" and "Promoter of Problem-Based Learning" ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that collaborative environments naturally lend themselves to problem-solving frameworks. These interrelated roles form a foundation for holistic heutagogical design.

At Universitas Citra Mandiri, a pilot heutagogical learning model was implemented in the Faculty of Education. Lecturers redesigned courses to emphasize self-paced projects, digital portfolios, and peer

review systems. Faculty members served as learning coaches, with minimal lecturing and increased mentoring sessions.

Student responses from this program indicated enhanced ownership of learning, with 74% reporting increased motivation and self-confidence. Faculty noted that students were more proactive in seeking resources and initiating collaboration, which was attributed to the shift in pedagogical roles.

Interviews with faculty involved in the pilot program revealed that institutional support, such as flexible assessment criteria and workload adjustments, facilitated the transition toward heutagogical facilitation. Participants highlighted the importance of clear guidance during the initial implementation stages to prevent learner confusion.

Students expressed appreciation for the increased freedom but also emphasized the value of structure and feedback. A common theme in their responses was the necessity of balance between autonomy and scaffolding, particularly for first-year learners adapting to self-directed learning models.

Educators in higher education are increasingly adopting facilitative roles aligned with heutagogical principles. The transformation is most evident in areas involving collaboration and reflection, while support for self-development continues to evolve.

Findings suggest that successful implementation depends not only on individual educator readiness but also on institutional alignment, training, and student adaptability. The shift from teacher to facilitator is not uniform, but it is gaining momentum as heutagogical awareness grows across academic settings.

The findings of this research reveal a notable transformation in the professional identity of educators in higher education. Educators are increasingly embracing their roles as facilitators rather than sole sources of knowledge. Participants reported intentional shifts in their teaching approaches, focusing on promoting learner autonomy, designing flexible learning paths, and encouraging critical reflection. This transition aligns with the core principles of heutagogy, where learners are expected to take responsibility for their learning process.

A comparative analysis with previous studies highlights both convergences and divergences in the findings. While earlier research, such as Blaschke (2012), emphasized the theoretical framework of heutagogy and its compatibility with online learning environments, this study extends the understanding by focusing on educators' lived experiences and pedagogical practices across various modalities. In contrast to studies that reported resistance from faculty due to institutional constraints or lack of awareness, the present research documents a gradual but firm acceptance of the facilitator role, especially among educators with access to ongoing professional development.

The findings signify a larger shift in the educational landscape that reflects the evolution of teaching and learning philosophies (Ávila García, 2025; Bizami et al., 2023; Lofandri, 2024; Mwinkaar & Lonibe, 2024; Stelmark, 2024). Educators' adoption of facilitative roles indicates a recognition of the need to prepare students for complex, unpredictable future challenges. This change signals that higher education is responding to the call for deeper engagement, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. The trend also underscores a broader cultural and institutional acknowledgment of the value of learner agency and personalized learning trajectories.

The implications of these findings are both practical and strategic for higher education institutions. Faculty development initiatives must prioritize heutagogical training and provide platforms for educators to share best practices and engage in reflective dialogue. Course design standards should be revised to incorporate learner autonomy, real-world problem-solving, and interdisciplinary approaches. Policy frameworks need to support educators in reimagining assessment methods that capture both content mastery and learning agility. These shifts could foster more resilient, self-regulated learners equipped to navigate an ever-changing global landscape.

The emergence of this trend is shaped by several interrelated factors. Increased access to digital tools has expanded the capacity for learners to take control of their educational journeys. Institutional support structures, including communities of practice and mentorship programs, have empowered educators to rethink their pedagogical identities (Corraya et al., 2023; Hainsworth et al., 2023; Pawar et al., 2024). A growing body of literature supporting the benefits of heutagogical approaches has legitimized this transformation, reinforcing educators' confidence in the new role. Cultural shifts within academia that value collaboration, inclusivity, and innovation have further accelerated the transition.

Future directions must focus on sustaining and expanding this transformation within higher education. Institutions should integrate heutagogical principles into strategic planning and accreditation processes to institutionalize this pedagogical shift. Educators require continued access to professional

development opportunities that support experimentation and reflective practice (Gultom & Daryanto, 2023). Research should explore how students perceive and respond to facilitatory teaching methods and what support they need to thrive in such environments. Embedding heutagogy into institutional cultures will be essential to ensure long-term impact and relevance in a rapidly evolving educational ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals a significant shift in the role of educators within higher education, transitioning from traditional knowledge transmitters to facilitators of self-determined learning. The key finding highlights that the implementation of heutagogical principles fosters greater learner autonomy, critical thinking, and adaptive learning capabilities. Unlike previous studies, this research provides empirical evidence of how educators' adaptive strategies directly impact students' capacity for self-directed learning in diverse academic contexts.

This research contributes to the advancement of heutagogical practices by offering a conceptual framework that maps the transformation of educators' roles in alignment with learner-centered paradigms. The study introduces a novel integration of facilitation strategies with digital learning tools, bridging conceptual understanding and practical application. The framework serves as a guide for institutions aiming to develop faculty competencies in supporting heutagogy, thereby enriching the pedagogical discourse in higher education reform.

The study is limited by its contextual scope, focusing on a specific academic setting with a relatively small sample of educators and learners. Future research is encouraged to explore longitudinal impacts of educator facilitation on learner outcomes across various disciplines and cultural environments. Expanding the investigation to include comparative studies across institutions could yield broader insights into scalable and sustainable heutagogical models.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing; Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 2: Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.
Author 3: Supervision; Validation; Other contribution; Resources; Visuali-zation; Writing - original draft.

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