

Hot Seat: Enhancing Speaking Fluency and Vocabulary Mastery through the Word-Guessing Games

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main obstacles in foreign language learning is the lack of speaking practice caused by students' anxiety and limited vocabulary. In the context of ESL/EFL (English as a Second or Foreign Language) teaching, the traditional teacher-centered methods often lead to a lack of immersion and participation among students. This is why the use of games in the language classroom has become so important (Hasbi, 2025; Novalina & Sari, 2025). A study called "The Effect of Using Educational Games as a Tool in Teaching English Vocabulary to Arab Young Children: A Quasi-Experimental Study in a Kindergarten School in Saudi Arabia" shows that when educational games are used as an instructional method for young learners, it can increase student engagement, facilitate knowledge absorption and retention, and provide students with opportunities to see the practical applications of the language (Saleh & Ahmed Althaqafi, 2022). Furthermore, research by Taheri (2014) substantiates that language games are effective and suitable for reinforcing both long-term and short-term vocabulary mastery among elementary EFL learners.

The Hot Seat is a highly effective gamification technique for developing speaking skills and expanding vocabulary. The structure of this game forces students to think quickly and describe concepts spontaneously using the target language. According to Wright et al. (2006), games that involve healthy competition and teamwork can stimulate deeper cognitive engagement compared to mechanically memorizing word lists. Through Hot Seat, student interactions become more dynamic due to the need for rapid communication to help their team achieve victory.

The use of the Hot Seat in the classroom is also consistent with the constructivist learning concept, in which students build their own understanding through social interaction. Hamer argues that a successful classroom activity is one in which students are given the opportunity to truly use language as a tool for communication, not merely as an object (Harmer, 2007). By prioritizing meaning (meaning-focused) over form (form-focused), the Hot Seat helps students shift from passive understanding to active language use. Correspondingly, communicative games can enhance students' vocabulary and increase their interest in the learning process, thereby improving the communication between teachers and students (Hasbi et al., 2022).

2. DISCUSSION

The use of games in language teaching is not merely an icebreaker, but a deliberate strategy to stimulate active language use. In the following discussion, we will look at why the Hot Seat is one of the most effective methods for training students' critical thinking skills through its unique word-guessing mechanism. This discussion covers the technical aspects of the game, its contribution to semantic mastery, and its impact on reducing students' psychological barriers when communicating in the target language.

2.1 Basic Concepts and Mechanics of the Hot Seat Game

Hot Seat is a word-guessing game in which one word is given to a student sitting in the “Hot Seat,” and the other students or team members provide clues or descriptions to help that student guess the word. The core of this game is to practice courage and fluency in speaking. In this game, students must use synonyms, antonyms, definitions, or contextual clues to help their peers guess. This is known as circumlocution, a communication strategy where the speaker uses alternative descriptions when they do not know the exact word in the target language. This aligns with the findings of a study titled “Implementing Circumlocution to Improve Speech Performance in Public Speaking” by Santoso which states that the circumlocution communication strategy can improve students’ speaking skills (Santoso & Taufiq, 2021).

This approach is important because it is considered effective in helping students speak more fluently. Within a limited time, students must provide various clues so that their classmates can correctly guess what they are trying to convey (usually a word). This activity creates an energetic and competitive classroom atmosphere while still maintaining an educational focus. Even students who tend to be passive are encouraged to participate actively, making the class lively and engaging.

2.2 The Benefits of the Hot Seat Method in Vocabulary Development and Speaking Fluency

The primary benefit of Hot Seat is the reinforcement of new vocabulary in memory. When students repeatedly utilize a word within a competitive context, that word is more likely to transition from short-term to long-term memory. This aligns with the principle of repetition in language learning, yet it is executed in an engaging, non-repetitive manner. Furthermore, this game helps students gain a deeper understanding of meaning; for example, to describe the word “huge,” students might use phrases like “not small” or “very, very big,” which reinforces the semantic relationships between words.

In terms of speaking fluency, Hot Seat is expected to help reduce fear. As students' attention is redirected toward the desire to win, they tend to pay less attention to minor grammatical errors and focus more on getting their message across. This practice in spontaneity is crucial for real-world communication, where speakers have limited time to perfectly plan their sentences.

2.3 The Role of Teachers as Facilitators

In the Hot Seat game, the teacher's role shifts from an information provider to a facilitator. This is consistent with the teacher's capacity to act as a facilitator within educational games (Hasbi et al., 2025; Reuter et al., 2022). Before the game commences, the teacher is responsible for selecting words relevant to the current lesson material, whether they be nouns, verbs, or adjectives. Furthermore, the teacher must ensure that the game rules are clearly understood, particularly the prohibition of using the native language (L1) or body language (pantomime) if the objective is purely verbal practice.

While the game is in progress, the teacher must actively observe common errors made by students without interrupting the flow of the activity. Interruptions can disrupt momentum and undermine students' confidence. Instead, the teacher should note these errors and provide them as feedback at the end of the game session. This ensures that the aspect of accuracy is maintained without sacrificing the excitement of the activity.

2.4 Hot Seat Modifications for Different Skill Levels

Another advantage of Hot Seat is its flexibility. For beginner levels, teachers may utilize images instead of written words or permit the use of several keywords as prompts. The focus might be limited to simple nouns found within the classroom environment. Conversely, for intermediate or advanced levels, the challenge can be heightened by incorporating abstract terms, idioms, or historical figures.

Modifications can also be made to technical aspects, such as “Forbidden Words” (similar to the game Taboo), where students are prohibited from using certain words that are most commonly used to describe the target word. This forces advanced students to seek out more specific and complex vocabulary. With the right modifications, Hot Seat remains relevant for use from elementary school through college, even in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes.

3. RECOMMENDATION

To maximize the effectiveness of the Hot Seat, teachers are advised to integrate this game as part of a closing session or a review of the material, instead of just as an icebreaker. Students should be grouped heterogeneously, mixing high- and low-ability students to encourage peer teaching. It is highly recommended that teachers prepare a list of words that varies in difficulty in order to give every student the opportunity to contribute. Additionally, offering small rewards (such as stickers or extra points) can encourage positive competition in the classroom.

According to research by Sochetra (2017), the success of games in language classes depends on the teacher's preparation in establishing fair and consistent rules. Teachers are also recommended to conduct a brief reflection after the game ends and have students discuss which strategies were most effective for difficult words (Astawa et al., 2026). In this way, students not only learn the language but also learn how to communicate and gain the confidence to speak. The use of technology, such as displaying words via a projector, can also enhance students' critical thinking during the game (Al Abid et al., 2025).

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