

# FROM THE CLASSROOM: TEACHING REFLECTIONS AND TEACHING TIPS

## Using HotSeat to engage students in learning second language vocabulary

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*Summary:* This article introduces an offline computer application called HotSeat that can be used by language teachers to teach vocabulary. It first describes how teachers can use this app in their classrooms and then discusses how the use of this app can actively engage students by promoting Egbert et al.'s (2021) six main engagement facilitators (social interaction, authenticity, interest, support, autonomy, and challenge) in learning language.

*Keywords:* vocabulary learning, student engagement, language learning, learning app, engagement facilitators

### Introduction

At the end of one of my English classes, the whole class crowded together and yelled, “Don’t go, sir! We still want to play.” My junior high school students in the classroom in Indonesia did not realize they were learning vocabulary. It was reasonable since their learning activities were only yelling, pronouncing, and competing with one another without realizing that they were drilling English words using visualization or the use of pictures through an offline vocabulary learning application called HotSeat.

To make it clear, HotSeat (Figure 1) is an offline Adobe Flash desktop application to enhance vocabulary comprehension. It can be used for all student levels as teachers have the flexibility to input their own list of vocabulary and images into the app. This open-access app can be downloaded. (It is, however, only compatible with laptops running a Windows operating system.) The app offers interactive learning because students need to work in a group and interact with their teammates to compete and win the game. This video game can thus engage students to learn new vocabulary.

### Using HotSeat in the classroom

I have integrated HotSeat for English vocabulary enhancement in some segmented classroom levels in both high school and university classrooms. I conducted research on the use of this app in a junior high school. I have found that my students’ vocabulary achievement improved significantly based on their pretest and posttest scores (Rahman

et al., 2016). They also expressed that they felt interested in learning vocabulary with this app as they found it novel and that none of their teachers had implemented it in their classrooms.

Based on my teaching practices, to play HotSeat some tools need to be prepared in advance. First, the class must be equipped with a projector screen. Second, a laptop operated by the teacher is needed to access the app and to display the vocabulary list to the whole class. Third, although it offers some lists of English vocabulary on different topics, they are still quite limited, so the teacher has to add their own vocabulary list to the app (Figure 2). HotSeat is an offline app, and thus no internet connection is required once it has been downloaded.

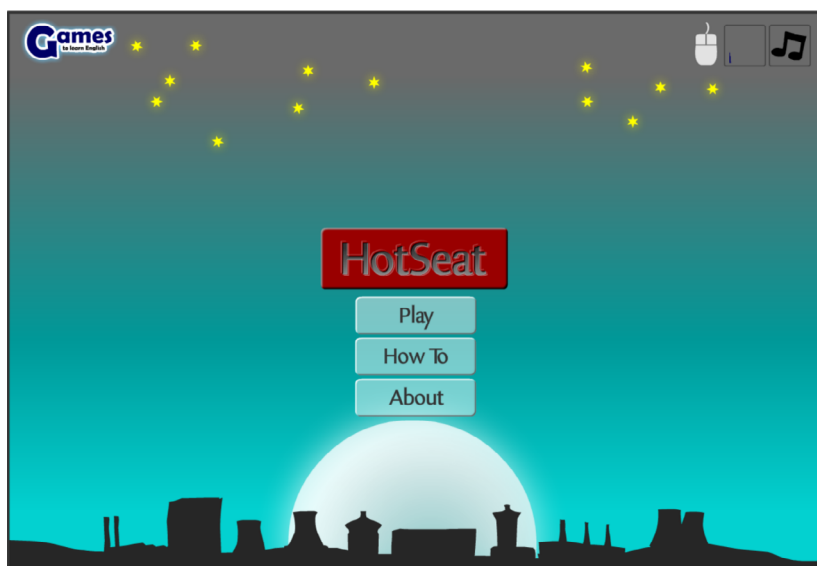


Figure 1 : Main screen of HotSeat

To use this app to teach vocabulary in classrooms, generally I have two main stages. I call the first stage ‘the presentation stage’ and the second ‘the competition stage.’ For the presentation stage, I display a group of vocabulary words on the projector screen with both the words and images while having all students drill the vocabulary (Figure 3) as a class. I pronounce the target vocabulary items one by one, and all students will also practice pronouncing each item with me. During this activity, I make sure that students pronounce each word clearly, and thus students might pronounce certain words until their pronunciation is comprehensible.

Next, the competition stage has three rounds. In the first round, I display the images without the written word(s)



Figure 2: Vocabulary list available on HotSeat



Figure 3: A vocabulary picture along with the word, or text

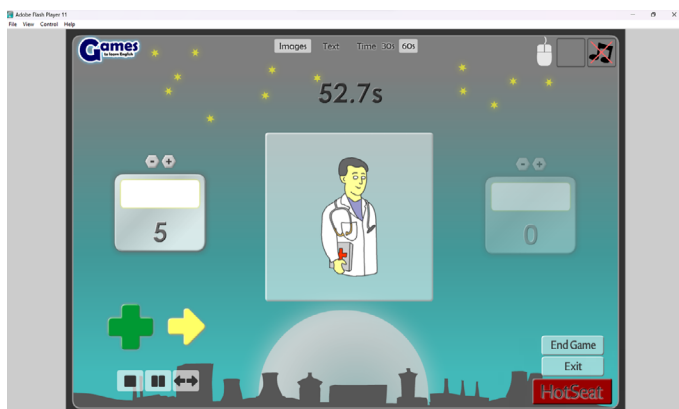


Figure 4: Picture only without the word, or text

(Figure 4). One of the groups (Group A) tries to guess as many of the words as they can in sixty seconds. They get one point for each correct answer. Next, the other group (Group B) have their turn just like the first group. In the second round, the activity is the same. The only difference is that the vocabulary items shown on the screen are now different. In other words, the first round typically presents half of the target vocabulary items, usually ranging from fifteen to twenty words, and the second round includes the other half, which is also usually composed of fifteen to twenty target words.

The last round uses the hot seat activity. One student, a representative from Group B, sits on a chair with their back to the board, or the projector screen, which displays the target vocabulary items along with the images. Thus, the student in the hot seat cannot see the words and images, but their teammates can see both. The teammates then describe the words one by one so that their friend on the hot seat can guess them. They describe each vocabulary item by giving a synonym, antonym, or definition. They could also incorporate body movements. For example, they see the word *wallet*, and they say, for example, *something that men use to carry their money*, or they could also act like they are taking something from their back pocket and pretend they are paying for something. They have sixty seconds to describe as many words as possible. For each correct answer, the group will get one point. This will also be the same for Group A. In my context, my junior high school students mainly rely on body language to describe the target words; however, those in the senior high school and university employ both their body and verbal language.

### HotSeat and student engagement

This app fulfills the six facilitators that learning applications need to meet to engage students in language learning identified by Egbert et al.’s (2021) engagement model. The facilitators include *social interaction*, *authenticity*, *interest*, *support*, *autonomy*, and *challenge*. In this game, students *socially interact* with other students when one student is seated in front of the whole class and takes the hot seat. The rest of the students then explain each target word and the student in the hot seat tries to guess it. As teachers can incorporate new vocabulary lists into the application, they can offer personalized vocabulary based on student needs in their real-life contexts, thereby promoting *authenticity*. Teachers, for example, can take authentic materials such as pictures of traffic signs that students might see when they have the opportunity to go overseas, or select materials that are useful to help students reach their real-life goals.

In terms of *interest*, students can be highly engaged with this app because it offers a gamified learning environment in which students compete with their teammates and earn points for their correct answers to win the hot seat game. Based on their research findings, Wu and Huang (2017) mentioned that students are interested in game-based English vocabulary practice as they experience a sense of

achievement and success upon solving problems or acquiring new knowledge. In the Indonesian EFL classroom context, Sudibyo et al. (2021), for example, showed that a hot seat game could arouse students' interest in learning vocabulary because it allows them to actively interact with their peers and participate in their own learning process.

To *support* student learning, teachers can have students drill the vocabulary list in advance, so they are well prepared to support one another by providing clues to their teammates in the hot seat to guess the word correctly. In addition, teachers could have students drill the vocabulary list in advance or at the beginning of the class. For example, teachers could show both pictures and texts so that students can practice their pronunciation in describing new words. After this, teachers can conceal the text and show only the pictures and students will have to guess them. During this activity, students repeat the vocabulary while teachers can monitor to ensure that all students pronounce the target words comprehensibly.

Lastly, to promote student learning *autonomy* and to further *challenge* students, the materials and the app can be accessed at any time on their own outside of the classroom. It also means that students, when learning by themselves, can opt for any lessons that match their skills. Since teachers

can upload their own vocabulary list, they could provide learning materials that match their students' interlanguage development.

## Reflections and conclusion

Based on my research and personal experience after having implemented this app several times, I have shown how the offline vocabulary app HotSeat can be used to help improve students' English vocabulary comprehension in different contexts from junior and senior high schools to university-level students. In this paper, I have also related my teaching practice using the app to meet the requirements of Egbert et al.'s (2021) engagement model. For example, this app has the potential to engage student interest since it gamifies a somewhat tedious practice activity in a fun and recursive way. It allows students to socially interact with their peers by supporting one another in acquiring new vocabulary. Finally, teachers can design or create their own vocabulary list in the app, enabling them to provide personalized learning materials to their students and promoting autonomy. Thus far, this app has the potential to effectively engage students in learning vocabulary in classrooms.

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