



Hot Seat: Intervention for Writing Persuasive Speeches

Samuel Macagba III¹; Kate Mary Queen Ebonia²; Noelle Eve Botona³; Angela Lapore⁴; Maridel Salapang⁵; Ariel Ganora⁶; Junefel Macagba⁷

¹Division Head, Scholarships and Educational Assistance Division, City Education and Development Office, Local Government Unit of CDO, CDO City, Philippines

²Teacher, SRK Child Skills Development Training Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

³⁻⁶Former Students, Xavier University School of Education, CDO City, Philippines

⁷Asst. to the Vice President for Mission and Ministry, Xavier University, CDO City, Philippines

¹Correspondence email: smacagba@xu.edu.ph

ORCID: 0000-0003-3066-4441

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Abstract. *This action research examined the effectiveness of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker in enhancing students' persuasive speech writing competence. Employing a collaborative, practical action research design, the study utilized rubric and a focus group discussion (FGD) protocol as primary tools for data collection. Conducted in a private secondary school in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, the research involved Grade 8 students studying persuasive speech writing during the third quarter. Participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling based on criteria aligned with the study's objectives. Findings indicated that while the Hot Seat activity effectively engaged students and fostered a dynamic classroom environment, it had a limited impact on vocabulary development. The newly introduced words were not consistently integrated into their written outputs. Nonetheless, the activity's interactive nature fostered confidence, collaboration, and enthusiasm, thereby indirectly improving students' persuasive writing performance. These results highlight the importance of integrating engaging and targeted strategies to support both language development and effective writing instruction.*

Keywords: classroom engagement, hot seat activity, icebreaker, persuasive speeches vocabulary development



A. Introduction

A strong vocabulary is fundamental to academic success as it enhances communication across the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020). In the Philippine context, many secondary learners continue to struggle to articulate ideas clearly due to limited lexical resources, particularly in productive tasks such as persuasive writing (Oktaviani & Mandasari, 2020). Alqahtani (2015) emphasizes that grammatical competence alone is insufficient for effective communication without adequate vocabulary knowledge. This challenge is particularly evident among Grade 8 students, who often struggle to write persuasive speeches because of limited vocabulary, thereby impeding their overall academic performance.

Vocabulary functions as a cornerstone of English language mastery, enabling meaningful expression and comprehension (Endarto & Subekti, 2020; Nation, 2022). Li (2015) further explains that limited vocabulary knowledge not only constrains writing fluency but also undermines learners' confidence and motivation. These findings suggest that vocabulary limitations affect writing performance holistically, influencing not only lexical choice but also learners' willingness to express ideas and sustain written argumentation.

In response to persistent vocabulary and writing challenges, language pedagogy increasingly emphasizes game-based and interactive instructional approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2020). Nunan (2017) advocates for purposeful strategies that embed vocabulary learning within meaningful and engaging contexts. Games have been shown to reduce anxiety, sustain attention, and promote active participation, thereby creating more supportive learning environments (Masri & Najjar, 2014).

Empirical studies further indicate that interactive activities enhance collaboration and enjoyment in English classrooms. Harati (2018) and Damara (2016) report that game-based strategies encourage participation and help learners engage more confidently in speaking and vocabulary-related tasks. These findings underscore the pedagogical value of games not merely

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as motivational tools, but as mechanisms for increasing learners' involvement in language use.

Within the broader category of game-based learning, icebreakers play a distinctive role in shaping affective classroom conditions. Icebreaker activities help establish a low-anxiety environment that supports participation, especially among adolescent learners (Harati, 2018). By incorporating movement, teamwork, and spontaneous responses, icebreakers reduce learners' fear of making mistakes and promote communicative risk-taking.

Damara (2016) highlights that icebreaker activities such as the Hot Seat game foster interaction and enjoyment while encouraging learners to access and use vocabulary in real time. Rather than emphasizing memorization, such activities foreground engagement and shared meaning-making, which are critical for developing confidence in language use. Consequently, icebreakers serve as effective scaffolds that prepare learners for more demanding, productive tasks, including persuasive speech writing.

Research Gap and Purpose of the Study

Despite the promising use of interactive strategies, classroom practices in secondary English instruction often emphasize rote memorization rather than experiential vocabulary learning. This gap underscores the need for learner-centered interventions that integrate engagement, movement, and contextually relevant language use. Addressing this need, the present action research introduces the **Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker**, a movement-based and team-oriented activity designed to support vocabulary engagement and persuasive speech writing among Grade 8 students.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker in improving students' vocabulary engagement and their ability to compose persuasive speeches. Findings from



this research may inform classroom practices that bridge engagement and vocabulary application in writing instruction.

Theoretical Positioning of the Intervention

Vocabulary-focused interventions do not always result in immediate measurable lexical gains, particularly when implemented through short-term or game-based activities. From an affective perspective, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that reduced anxiety and increased motivation facilitate language production even when explicit linguistic gains are limited. Engagement-based and social constructivist perspectives similarly emphasize that collaborative and movement-oriented tasks enhance learners' confidence, willingness to express ideas, and participation in shared meaning-making.

In writing tasks such as persuasive speech composition, these affective and social conditions may contribute to improvements in organization, clarity, and persuasiveness without necessarily producing immediate vocabulary growth. Teng, Mizumoto, and Takeuchi (2024) emphasize that vocabulary development is a cumulative, self-regulated process that requires sustained exposure, strategic engagement, and repeated opportunities for use to achieve depth of word knowledge. Accordingly, the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker is positioned in this study not as a direct vocabulary instruction strategy, but as an **affective and motivational scaffold** that may indirectly enhance persuasive writing performance by fostering engagement, lowering anxiety, and strengthening communicative confidence.

B. Methodology

This study employed a collaborative action research design to enhance Grade 8 students' vocabulary acquisition and persuasive speech writing skills. Action research was selected for its practical orientation and its emphasis on reflective teaching improvement in authentic classroom settings. The research was conducted in a private secondary school in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, involving two Grade 8 sections handled

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by the same English teacher. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with parental consent and student assent.

Data collection utilized two assessment rubrics and a focus group discussion (FGD) protocol. The first rubric evaluated persuasive speeches on credibility, language use, persuasion, and emphasis, with a maximum score of 16 points. The second rubric assessed vocabulary usage based on correctness and quantity. The FGD gathered qualitative insights into students' perceptions of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker as a classroom strategy. To ensure instrument validity, the rubrics and protocol were reviewed by experienced English teachers.

Prior to implementation, approval was obtained from the school principal, followed by informed consent from parents and assent from students. The intervention introduced ten vocabulary words through a Hot Seat activity conducted over two sessions, promoting active recall and collaborative participation. Pre- and post-intervention persuasive speeches were evaluated using validated rubrics.

Ethical standards were strictly observed, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and transparency throughout the research process. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine significant differences in student performance, while qualitative FGD data were subjected to content analysis to identify recurring themes. Initial open coding was then conducted to identify recurring ideas related to students' perceptions of engagement, vocabulary learning, and writing support. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories, from which key themes were generated. To enhance trustworthiness, the researchers reviewed and refined the themes collaboratively to ensure consistency and alignment with the data. Representative quotations were selected based on their clarity and relevance in illustrating each identified theme.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The first research question examined students' persuasive speech performance across four components – language, emphasis, credibility, and persuasiveness – prior to the intervention. Table 1 presents the pre-test results.

Table 1

Scores of Students' Persuasive Speech (Pre-Test)

Writing Components	Average Scores	Description
Language	1.93	Unsatisfactory Use of Language
Emphasis	2.15	Beginning Use of Emphasis
Credibility	1.20	Very Uncredible
Persuasiveness	2.30	Unpersuasive
Total	7.58	Developing Persuasive Speech

As shown in Table 1, students' pretest scores were generally low across all components, indicating that their persuasive speech writing skills were still developing. The average score of 7.58 reflects an early stage of proficiency, which aligns with Berry's (2014) assertion that pre-test results serve primarily to establish a baseline of learners' existing knowledge and skills prior to formal instruction.

1.1B. Students' Performance After the Intervention

Following the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker, students showed significant improvement in persuasive writing.

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Table 2

Scores of Students' Persuasive Speech (Post-Test)

Writing Components	Average Scores	Description
Language	3.58	Satisfactory Use of Language
Emphasis	3.58	Competent Use of Emphasis
Credibility	3.15	Credible
Persuasiveness	3.55	Persuasive
TOTAL	13.85	Proficient Persuasive Speech

As seen in Table 2, all components showed marked improvement, with mean scores nearly doubling from the pre-test. Students demonstrated greater clarity, stronger structure, and increased persuasiveness in their writing.

1.2. Significant Differences in Persuasive Speech Components

The second research question determined whether there was a significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores for each writing component.

Table 3.

Test of Difference Between Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Writing Components	Pre-Test	Post-Test	t-Stat
Language	1.93	3.58	-12.08**
Emphasis	2.15	3.58	-12.06**
Credibility	1.20	3.15	-17.27**
Persuasiveness	2.30	3.55	-9.41**
TOTAL	7.58	13.85	-16.49**



All components exhibited statistically significant improvement at the $p < .001$ level. The highest gains were in credibility ($t = -17.27$) and language use ($t = -12.08$), confirming the positive effect of the intervention on students' persuasive writing abilities

Notably, the significant improvements observed in students' persuasive speech performance occurred despite limited evidence of vocabulary uptake from the intervention. While post-test results revealed substantial gains across all writing components – particularly in language use, credibility, and persuasiveness, the newly introduced vocabulary words were not consistently integrated into students' written outputs. This contrast between enhanced writing performance and minimal vocabulary application is a salient finding of the study and is intentionally highlighted in the results to distinguish the intervention's differential effects on writing quality and vocabulary acquisition.

1.3. Vocabulary Acquisition After the Intervention

Despite improved writing performance, students demonstrated limited vocabulary uptake. None of the 14 vocabulary words introduced through the activity were incorporated into their post-test speeches. Observation and FGD data indicated that while students were engaged during the Hot Seat sessions, many were distracted or treated the activity as a game rather than a learning exercise. This lack of focus may have contributed to their minimal vocabulary retention.

1.4. Students' Perceptions of the Intervention

Based on Table 4, the focus group discussion revealed diverse student perceptions of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker. Thematic analysis of the FGD responses yielded four major themes reflecting students' perceptions of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker: (1) perceived effectiveness of the strategy, (2) perceived limitations in vocabulary learning, (3) suggested improvements to the intervention, and (4) overall enjoyment and engagement. These themes were generated through systematic coding and categorization of participants' recurring responses. Representative student

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quotations were selected to illustrate each theme and to demonstrate how students' experiences supported the identified patterns.

Most participants found the activity engaging and enjoyable, noting that it made classroom sessions livelier and encouraged collaboration among peers. They appreciated how the game introduced new vocabulary in an interactive way, describing it as an effective icebreaker that fostered motivation and participation. However, some students expressed that while the activity was entertaining, it did not effectively facilitate a deeper understanding of word meanings. They observed that the emphasis on guessing and memorization limited their ability to apply the vocabulary in meaningful contexts. To enhance the strategy's effectiveness, students suggested providing explanations or follow-up discussions of word meanings after the game and categorizing vocabulary to improve clarity and recall. Overall, as summarized in Table 3, the Hot Seat activity positively influenced classroom engagement but showed limited impact on sustained vocabulary acquisition without structured reinforcement.

Table 4

Thematic Summary of Students' Perceptions of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker

Question	Emergent Themes	Subthemes	Sample Responses
What do you think of the "Hot Seat" strategy in acquiring vocabulary?	Perceived Effectiveness of the Strategy	Vocabulary acquisition through gameplay	"Through the game, we gain new vocabulary words." "I discover new words and also understand their respective meanings."
		Engagement and enjoyment in learning	"It was fun and exciting." "The game is an ideal icebreaker for our generation." "I want this



Question	Emergent Themes	Subthemes	Sample Responses
		Instructional usefulness	<p>interactive game to be integrated as an icebreaker before starting the class.”</p> <p>“The icebreaker is effective.”</p>
	Perceived Limitations of the Strategy	Lack of emphasis on meaning	<p>“I discover new words, but I don’t understand their meanings.”“It highlights the game through guessing and not by conveying its meaning.”</p>
		Surface-level learning (memorization/guessing)	<p>“It’s more on memorization.”</p>
		Ineffective instructional delivery	<p>“The medium of delivering this concept of students’ vocabulary doesn’t work.”“The icebreaker is not effective.”“It may be fun but the meanings are not really important to the actual purpose of the intervention.”</p>
How do you think the strategy can be improved?	Suggested Pedagogical Improvements	Emphasis on meaning-based learning	<p>“The intervention should focus more on understanding the meaning and not memorizing.”“It should dwell on the meaning of the words.”“It is better to present the meaning, not just to guess the words.”“Meanings should be given after the activity.”</p>
		Use of categorization for scaffolding	<p>“There should be categories included for the game to be not too difficult.”“Words</p>

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Question	Emergent Themes	Subthemes	Sample Responses
			should be categorized." "Categorization helps provide clues."
Did you enjoy the game?	Affective Engagement in Learning	Positive emotional response	"I enjoyed the game and I wish to have more activities like this." "It was so exciting and energized us." "It awakened us from being bored and sleepy."
		Social interaction and collaboration	"It allowed us to build companionship with our group mates."
		Enjoyment with perceived instructional limitation	"I enjoyed the game, but in acquiring vocabulary, it's a no for me." "It was exciting, but it doesn't work in acquiring vocabulary."

2. Discussion

The results demonstrate that the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker significantly improved students' persuasive speech writing skills but had a limited impact on vocabulary acquisition. The substantial increase in post-test scores supports the idea that engaging, movement-based activities can enhance students' focus and writing performance by increasing active participation and lowering performance-related anxiety (Bennett, 2019). This aligns with Masri and Najar's (2014) findings that game-based learning promotes motivation and reduces anxiety, thereby encouraging students to participate more confidently in classroom tasks. In the present study, these affective and interactional conditions appeared to support students' ability to

organize ideas, establish credibility, and communicate persuasively in writing, even in the absence of consistent vocabulary integration.

However, while the Hot Seat activity successfully fostered engagement and peer interaction, it did not translate into measurable vocabulary uptake. This finding echoes Jafari, Aghaei, and Khatony (2019), who emphasized that effective vocabulary learning requires focused attention and cognitive processing rather than mere exposure. From a theoretical perspective, this outcome may be explained through Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that reduced anxiety and increased motivation facilitate language output without necessarily ensuring linguistic acquisition. Moreover, the fast-paced, game-oriented nature of the activity may have increased cognitive load, as students' attention was divided among guessing words, collaborating with peers, and maintaining game momentum. As a result, students may have prioritized the expression of ideas and writing flow over the deliberate processing and retention of new vocabulary. Taken together, these findings suggest that the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker functioned primarily as an affective-cognitive support that enhanced persuasive writing performance, rather than as a direct vocabulary acquisition tool.

The limited vocabulary gains observed in this study may be attributed to several design- and implementation-related constraints rather than to the intervention's ineffectiveness. First, the number of vocabulary items introduced during the Hot Seat activity was relatively small, thereby restricting opportunities for repeated exposure and consolidation. Second, the intervention was brief, comprising only two sessions, limiting sustained engagement with the target vocabulary. In addition, the structure of the activity emphasized rapid guessing over contextualized and meaningful use, constraining deeper cognitive processing necessary for durable vocabulary development. Finally, the absence of structured post-activity reinforcement—such as follow-up exercises, contextual writing tasks, or reflective discussions—further limited students' opportunities to internalize and transfer newly encountered vocabulary into their written outputs. Consistent with Teng, Mizumoto, and Takeuchi (2024), vocabulary

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development is a cumulative and self-regulated process that requires sustained exposure, strategic engagement, and repeated opportunities for use to achieve depth of word knowledge. While the Hot Seat strategy effectively enhanced learner engagement and persuasive writing performance, vocabulary acquisition appears to require longer implementation periods and more explicit instructional support to yield measurable outcomes.

Despite this, the improvement in persuasive writing suggests that the activity indirectly enhanced other aspects of communication – confidence, collaboration, and idea organization. These outcomes align with Harati’s (2018) assertion that icebreakers build camaraderie and increase students’ willingness to participate. Similarly, Nunan (2017) stresses the value of contextual, interactive tasks in promoting communicative competence.

Overall, the findings reveal that while Hot Seat activities effectively energize and motivate students, their contribution to vocabulary learning depends on structured reinforcement and explicit instruction. Integrating follow-up exercises – such as contextual writing, reflection journals, or peer discussions – may strengthen vocabulary retention and application in writing tasks. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence that engagement-focused pedagogies must be balanced with depth-oriented strategies to achieve sustainable language-learning outcomes.

D. Conclusion

The present study examined the effectiveness of the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and persuasive writing skills among Grade 8 students at a private school in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. While the results showed that the intervention did not significantly improve students’ acquisition or correct use of new vocabulary, it did have a meaningful impact on their overall writing performance. Notably, students demonstrated substantial progress in key components of



persuasive speech—credibility, language use, emphasis, and persuasiveness, indicating that the activity fostered greater engagement, confidence, and coherence in their written outputs. These findings suggest that although the Hot Seat strategy is limited in promoting direct vocabulary learning, it can serve as an effective pedagogical tool for stimulating motivation and improving students' writing communicative competence.

The findings highlight the importance of designing classroom interventions that integrate both engagement and comprehension. Future research may refine the Hot Seat strategy by incorporating explicit vocabulary instruction, such as contextualization and meaning-focused feedback, to strengthen word retention and application. Expanding the study to include a larger, more diverse sample, longer implementation periods, and mixed-method data collection techniques—such as surveys, interviews, and classroom observations—could yield more comprehensive insights. Comparative studies exploring the Hot Seat alongside other interactive strategies would further clarify its relative effectiveness in vocabulary development and writing improvement. Finally, examining its use among learners with varying English proficiency levels may uncover differentiated effects, guiding teachers in adapting similar approaches to meet diverse linguistic needs.

Overall, the Hot Seat Vocabulary Icebreaker underscores the value of integrating engaging and participatory learning experiences into language instruction. While it may not independently ensure vocabulary mastery, its capacity to energize learners, enhance classroom interaction, and elevate the quality of persuasive writing reaffirms its pedagogical worth within communicative and student-centered frameworks of English language teaching.

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