Teaching english speaking for FCE: using facebook as a tool of instructional practice

Викладання англійської мови для FCE: використання facebook як інструменту навчальної практики

Enseñar inglés para FCE: usar facebook como herramienta de práctica educativa

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Abstract

The current paper intends to describe the practice and analyse the results of using social networking sites as an additional extra-class tool of developing competence in Speaking in the course of preparation for the well known international exam in English: First Certificate in English. The aim of this paper is to prove the hypothesis that a social media as an effective tool to teach English speaking for upper-intermediate learners to pass the FCE exam and to examine the offered practice experimentally. The study has proven the hypothesis and provided the experimental research. Theoretical (analysis and synthesis), empirical (observation, testing, conducting pedagogical experiment) and statistical (one sample t-test) methods were used to achieve the stated aim. The main results show that the significant difference was observed in the experimental group of 24 Kharkiv non-linguistic university students of the same age where the

Анотація

Подана стаття описує практику та результати використання веб-сайтів у соціальних мережах як додатковий інструмент позакласного розвитку компетенції з усного мовлення під час підготовки до складання відомого міжнародного іспиту з англійської мови: Перший сертифікат англійською мовою. Метою даної роботи є доведення гіпотези про те, що соціальні медіа є ефективним інструментом навчання англійської мови студентів середнього та підвищеного рівня для складання міжнародного іспиту, до мети відноситься також експериментальне вивчення запропонованої практики. Проведене дослідження довело гіпотезу, що підтвердилося результатами експериментального дослідження. Для досягнення поставленої мети використовувались теоретичні (аналіз та

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experiment under the title 'All in the Same Boat' started on Facebook and was carried out in 2018/2019 academic year. Furthermore, comparing the test results according to 5-band scale in four different criteria at the different stages of the course allowed to compare the development rate of the checked English Speaking skills. The resulting data confirmed the improvement in students' performance in Speaking test on average in 21.8 % during the first term, and in 29.1 % after the experiment started, overall progress being 57.3 % that is a substantial increase. The authors' experience is significant in the world learning context as it proves the effectiveness of using social media to teach English speaking for upper-intermediate learners to pass the First Certificate in English exam.

Keywords: English; speaking; exam; site; Facebook.

синтез), емпіричні (спостереження, тестування, проведення педагогічного експерименту) та статистичні (t-тест) методи. Основні результати показують, що в експериментальній групі Харківських нелінгвістичних університетів з 24 студентами однакового віку спостерігалася суттєва різниця, де експеримент під назвою «Усі в одному човні» розпочався у Фейсбуці і був проведений у 2018/2019 навчальному році. Крім того, порівняння результатів тестування за 5-бальною шкалою за чотирма критеріями на різних етапах навчання дозволило зіставити швидкість зростання випробуваних навичок з англійської мови. Отримані дані підтвердили покращення показників студентів в тесті з усного мовлення в середньому на 21,8% протягом першого етапу експерименту, і на 29,1% після продовження експерименту. Загальний прогрес становив 57,3%, що є значним збільшенням. Досвід авторів є важливим у світовому контексті навчання, оскільки він доводить ефективність використання соціальних медіа для навчання англійської мови для студентів середнього та підвищеного рівня для складання міжнародного іспиту з англійської мови.

Ключові слова: англійська мова; усне мовлення; іспит; сайт; Фейсбук.

Resumen

El presente documento tiene la intención de describir la práctica y analizar los resultados del uso de sitios de redes sociales como una herramienta adicional de clase adicional para desarrollar la competencia en el habla en el curso de preparación para el conocido examen internacional en inglés: First Certificate in English. El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar la hipótesis de que las redes sociales son una herramienta eficaz para enseñar inglés a los estudiantes de nivel intermedio superior para aprobar el examen FCE y examinar la práctica ofrecida experimentalmente. El estudio ha probado la hipótesis y ha proporcionado la investigación experimental. Se utilizaron métodos teóricos (análisis y síntesis), empíricos (observación, pruebas, realización de experimentos pedagógicos) y estadísticos (prueba t de una muestra) para lograr el objetivo establecido. Los principales resultados muestran que la diferencia significativa se observó en el grupo experimental de 24 estudiantes universitarios no lingüísticos de Jarkov de la misma edad donde el experimento bajo el título 'Todo en el mismo barco' comenzó en Facebook y se llevó a cabo en 2018/2019 año académico. Además, la comparación de los resultados de la prueba de acuerdo con la escala de 5 bandas en cuatro criterios diferentes en las diferentes etapas del curso permitió comparar la tasa de desarrollo de las habilidades comprobadas de habla inglesa. Los datos resultantes confirmaron la mejora en el rendimiento de los estudiantes en la prueba de expresión oral en promedio en 21.8% durante el primer trimestre, y en 29.1% después del inicio del experimento, el progreso general fue de 57.3%, lo que representa un aumento sustancial. La experiencia de los autores es significativa en el contexto de aprendizaje mundial, ya que demuestra la eficacia del uso de las redes sociales para enseñar inglés a estudiantes de nivel intermedio superior para aprobar el examen First Certificate in English.

Palabras clave: Inglés; hablando; examen; sitio; Facebook.

Introduction

The recent increase of economic, political, educational and cultural contacts between different countries in the world and inside the European Union creates an environment favourable for cross-border relationships that makes English proficiency a necessary requirement for being involved into the variety of cross-cultural activities. To verify the English level that corresponds to the international standards many students in the world choose to pass international exams like TOEFUL, IELTS, BEC, TOLES or Cambridge ESOL exams, the last being credited to their quality, accuracy and universality: they claim to be designed to be fair to all the L2 learners and correspond to the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), leaving aside the fact they are constantly revised and updated.

First Certificate in English (FCE) exam has always excelled other Cambridge ESOL exams offered for adult people (KET, PET, FCE, CAE and CPE) in popularity. The reason why so many people opt for FCE is as follows: providing the credibility of a qualification in upper-intermediate English which can be achieved more easily than, for example, advanced level, the exam results are recognized by over 15,000 educational institutions for study purposes and by a broad variety of employers.

The exam is designed to cover all four language competences as well as to check the fluency in use of grammar structures and lexical units. However, achieving the desired result is not so trouble-free: candidates should also demonstrate the knowledge of the examination procedure and the awareness of the main principles of communicative achievement, specifically politeness, formality, cohesion and clear conveyance of relevant ideas by the means of the English language.

So, students who study to pass international exams often need additional practice and support especially in those language aspects which appeared to be both challenging and time-consuming. One unconventional method of solving this problem is providing supplementary extracurricular training in producing an extended piece of discourse (FCE: Speaking, Part 2) via social networking sites. So, the research presented in this article intends to illustrate our original experience of using Facebook opportunities for teaching English speaking to a group of students taking a course to pass the FCE exam.

Theoretical underground

On account of its popularity, Cambridge English: First has recently been the focus of attention of educationalists from different countries: thus, there are some foreign researches about preparing for the FCE Speaking Test, its format, structure, complications, and also providing test samples, examples and tips (Betsis, & Mamas, 2015; Kwiatkowska, 2015). The literature also holds many studies related to the positive effects of using social media in the English classroom in general (Aydin, 2014; Huang, & Hung, 2013; Ryan, 2012; Sulisworo, Rahayu, & Akhsan, 2016; Voyce, 2017). M. Poore mentions different aspects such as blog definition, setting process and learning benefits as well ideas for classroom activities (2013).

Social media made 'digital literacies' "a must" (Hockly, 2012). In many countries students and teachers "made use of Facebook" (Oradini, & Saunders, 2007). Facebook is the leading social network for users as 71 % of students use Facebook (Duggan, & Smith, 2013). It means that "social networking systems have the capability to deliver a platform for learning where the student is potentially at the center of activities" (Darginavičienė, & Navickienė, 2016, p. 240) as students joined Facebook (Mitchell, 2012; Kenny, 2015). Some research articles exist in the literature concerning such a significant investment as using social media in teaching English (Karpa, 2015; Melnyk, 2011; Chernii, 2013).

The evaluation and analysis of the returns of those investments in the academic field is important in terms of determining and planning of the process of instruction. However, studies of the experience on application of social media to teaching Speaking, particularly in such a narrow area as FCE preparation, have not been given much consideration.

However, the optimization of the studying process, giving it additional stimuli and using unconventional yet efficient methods of teaching is especially significant for the upper-intermediate learners who are eager to pass an international exam, e.g. Cambridge English: First with the aim to make it easier, more understandable and less stressful and thereby achieve higher results.

Hence, it is necessary to fill in the gap and to provide empirical evidence of using social media as a new tool in the FCE Speaking Test preparation, which can facilitate upper-intermediate learners to make progress.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to prove the hypothesis that a social media as an effective tool to teach English speaking for upper-intermediate learners to pass the FCE exam and to examine the offered practice experimentally.

To realize the set aim, we are to fulfill the following objectives: to explain the strategies of teaching English speaking to pass the FCE exam; to illustrate the implementation of social media as an effective tool for teaching English speaking; to present the results of the experimental research aimed at investigating upper-intermediate learners' progress in the FCE Speaking Test.

Methods

In this research theoretical, empirical and statistical methods are used. Theoretical methods (analysis and synthesis) serve to analyze opportunities, advantages and disadvantages of social media as a new tool to teach English speaking as well as their application features and to prepare upper-intermediate students to pass the exam.

Empirical ones (observation, testing, pedagogical experiment) provide conducting the experiment itself, detailed and achievement tests in order to collect data for examining the efficiency of use systematic social media to teach English speaking with upper-intermediate learners.

Statistical methods (one sample t-test) helped make statistical analysis of the pedagogical experiment data; the experiment was conducted during one academic year in two upper-intermediate groups of students in Kharkiv, Ukraine. For one year, during the preparation period before passing the FCE exam the advance of the students who were taught with supporting social media speaking activities according to the 2018-19 FCE exam curriculum students' progress was carefully observed and measured.

Results

As mentioned above, using social media (e.g. social mediating sites, online forums, blogs and vlogs) to teach English speaking particularly following the register of the FCE exam is a relatively new teaching tool for Ukrainian educationalists.

Social networks are nowadays a common and convenient means of communication for millions of young people. Being easily accessible and providing the variety of opportunities of informational exchange, networks are often blamed for substituting face-to-face communication.

All things considered, one should not underestimate their overall impact on people's social intercourse and in particular their role in education: more and more professional groups are being created daily on Facebook, Researchgate, Viber, Instagram etc. uniting students of the same course, scholars, colleagues etc. However, making use of social networks for improving Speaking skills is quite a new and comparatively controversial idea.

To our mind, it's a good idea to present an alternative tool preparing students for their FCE speaking exam and to make FCE speaking practice fun and interesting. It is important to introduce different activities that make FCE speaking practice interesting, fun, easy and at the same time prepare students perfect skills and technique the FCE speaking exam requires. Students are familiar with the FCE speaking exam format and types of exam tasks. So, this article intends to prove the efficiency of using social networking sites as an additional tool for stimulating the progress in *Speaking: Long turn* in the course of preparing students for passing *Cambrige English: First*.

The members of the experiment were twenty four students of the same age from Kharkiv, Ukraine, from H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University and other universities with different non-linguistic specialties (law, computer sciences, architecture and design) attending additional course of preparation for *Cambridge English: First* that lasted for one academic year on the basis of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University Preparation Centre. However, it would be fair to mention that the experiment started in the second term after the problem with this aspect of Speaking had been revealed.

To the purpose, a group under the title '*All in the Same Boat'* was created on Facebook, its members being the abovementioned students of two groups of the FCE course and the instructor (the teacher of the course) as a group administrator (Figure 1).
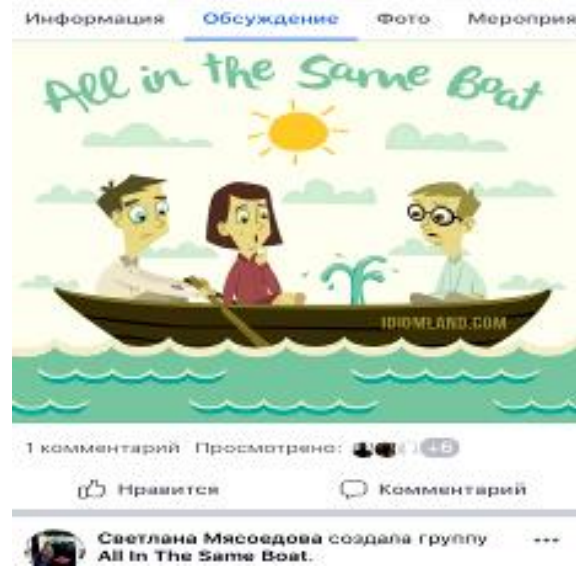
Figure 1. Facebook Group 'All in the Same Boat' Cover

The task of the instructor was to offer two photos for comparison and a question to them which were expected to be commented by the students (group members) according to FCE Speaking, Part 2 (Long turn) format (Figure 2).
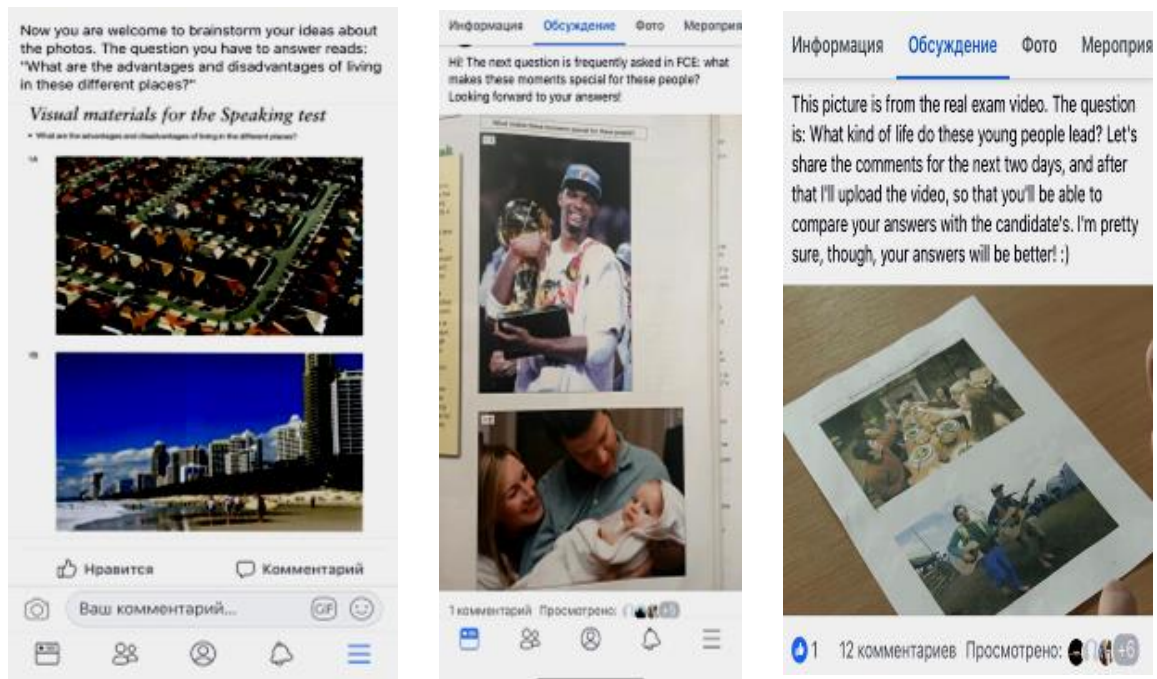

Figure 2. Visual Materials for FCE Speaking

The instructor attempted to provide a feedback to the entry of every student
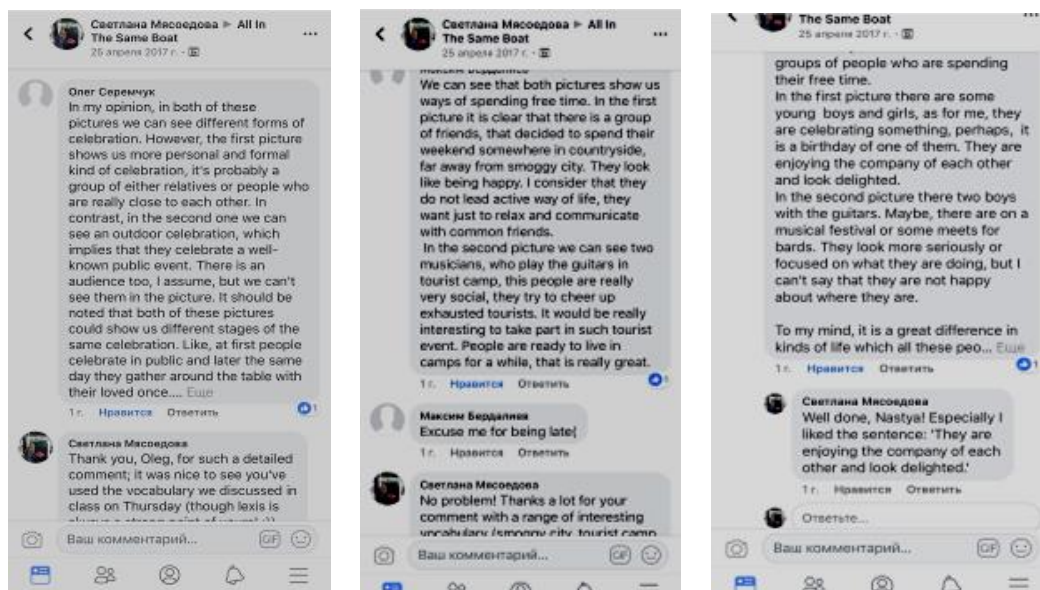

Figure 3. Instructor'sFeedback to Some of the Students' Answers.

After the students had posted their answers, the instructor provided the model answer and gave an analysis of commentaries posted as well as the list of words and grammar structures recommended for use (Figure 4).
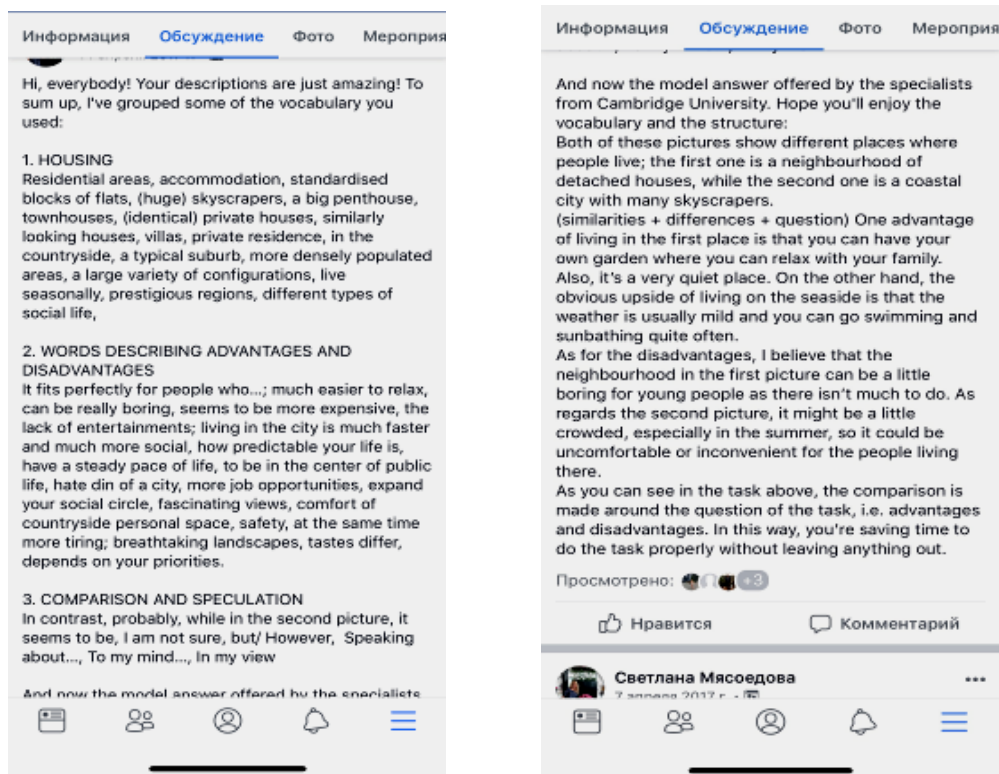

Figure 4. Instructor's Analysis of Commentaries and Recommended Lists of Topical Vocabulary

As for grammar and spelling mistakes, some of them were discussed during the individual consultations with students, although the majority of them was regarded as those which do not impede communication and hence were not taken into consideration.

In order to provide the credibility of the results, the students were tested at the beginning of the course, mid-term (that coincide with the beginning of the experiment) and at the end of the course, which allowed to define their progress in Speaking.

Students' performance was assessed according to 5-band scale in four different criteria: Grammar and Vocabulary, Discourse Management, Pronunciation, Interactive Communication. The average results of the assessment are shown in Table 1 with *Mean* standing for average scores for sample population of 24 students (two groups 12 students each).

Table 1. The results of students' academic performance in FCE speaking, part 2 (long term) at the different stages of the course

Test	Results (Mean ± SD)	Average Progress (%)
Placement Test Data	2.75 ± 0.68	21.8
Mid-term Test Data	3.35 ± 0.53	
Mid-term Test Data	3.35 ± 0.53	29.1
Final Test Data	4.325 ± 0.51	
Placement Test Data	2.75 ± 0.68	57.3
Final Test Data	4.325 ± 0.51	

The resulting data prove that students significantly improved their performance in Speaking competence on average in 21.8 % during the first term, and in 29.1 % after the experiment had started, overall progress being 57.3 %.

Discussion

According to C. Pesce the advantages for using social media as a learning tool are the following (n.d.): it engages, encourages, enhances students. They can express themselves, collaborate, interact, share information, communicate freely and easily. Teachers can share resources like images, worksheets, and engage creative homework tasks. Teachers can also make comments, have feedback and share suggestions. By analyzing some national sources about teaching English with new technologies in general (Melnyk, 2011; Chernii, 2013; Danilina, & Shabunina, 2018; Kovalchuk, & Krasnokutska, 2017), and through Facebook in particular (Karpa, 2015); by proving our previous experience (Kostikova, 2018; Kostikova, 2017), we have defined finally several tips of using social media as a learning tool in the classroom. The authors' experience deals with positive effect of how social media can be used as an effective tool to teach English speaking for

upper-intermediate learners to pass the FCE exam. The authors' positive experience is unique in Ukrainian learning context.

The findings of the present study confirm the idea that social media providing both collaborative and at the same time individual approach can serve as an effective instrument to enhance the progress in teaching Speaking, namely the FCE Long turn.

Besides, when it comes to competence in foreign language speaking, the image that most people bear in mind is a small talk on different topics of everyday life. However, in *Cambridge English: First*, Speaking is represented by four parts each having its specific purposes; with part 2 being considered the most challenging and hard to follow by the most of candidates.

This part, also known as 'Long turn' gives students 1 minute for the task to talk about two photographs offered by the examiner. Students are supposed to provide a well-organized, cohesive, logical comparison of these photos demonstrating the vocabulary variety, use of linking devices, grammar accuracy, discourse management and intelligible pronunciation within certain time limits, which appeared to be demanding even for the students who demonstrated good commands in other formats

of Speaking (e.g. the interview, collaborative task, further discussion).

Many learners lack confidence while performing in this task and the instruction in the classroom is not often enough: in-class process in Speaking skills training is usually time-consuming, it can cause time imbalance allocated to practicing different competences. Thus, for all intends and purposes the idea of the experiment to use social media to help students to develop skills necessary to successfully perform in FCE Speaking, Part 2 has proven to be quite productive: students demonstrated significant progress during the experiment and got high marks in *Cambridge English: First exam.*

Conclusions

On balance, the article represents the results of the experiment that was organized to explain the strategies of teaching English speaking to pass the FCE exam, to comprehend the determination of pedagogical practices, advantages, benefits, and challenges of social media to prepare upper-intermediate students for the FCE Speaking Test. It can be concluded that the illustration of the social media implementation showed that it is really an effective tool for teaching English speaking; being focused primarily on preparation for the FCE Speaking Test, it turned out fairly useful for the learners striving to achieve B2 level.

The obtained results of the experimental research demonstrate learners' progress in the FCE Speaking Test and can be regarded as the evidence that social media do have a positive impact on mastering upper-intermediate learners' speaking skills. Provided that they are implemented systematically with a careful consideration of learners' problems and needs, social networking sites can be said to have an obvious correlation with upper-intermediate learners' progress.

The article has confirmed that upper-intermediate learners who participated in preparation for the FCE Speaking Test supported by social media expressed ideas to continue using them in further English language practice. The survey findings provide justification that social media can serve as a perfect tool for better learning and more efficient teaching.

Further research will be focused on demonstrating our own experience of some other unconventional teaching tools of preparing

upper-intermediate learners for passing their Cambridge English: First exam.

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