

Article

The Use of Monologue Speaking Tasks to Improve First-Year Students' English-Speaking Skills

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Abstract: A significant number of studies are devoted to the psychological and social adaptation of students to the educational process at university. This research contributes to the solution of the problem of first-year students' academic performance in the framework of studying a foreign language by working with monologue speaking tasks. The study offers an analysis of the improvement of academic performance in this particular type of language activity. The study took place at Peter the Great Saint Petersburg Polytechnic University, Russia, and involved 274 first-year students enrolled in undergraduate programs. Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to collect and analyse data for the study. The research included the qualitative content analysis of monologue speaking tasks. Results of the study make it possible to conclude that the use of monologue speaking tasks paired with peer interaction and peer assessment can improve first-year students' English-speaking skills.



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Keywords: monologue speaking tasks; improvement of English-speaking skills; peer interaction; peer assessment; first-year students; academic adaptation

1. Introduction

The issue of adaptation is complex and multi-faceted. In this study, we pay special attention to overcoming the problems of academic adaptation, i.e., the improvement of academic achievements of first-year students. The academic or formal aspects of self-adjustment include familiarising students with new forms of educational process organisation (lectures, seminars, practical classes), technologies for conducting training sessions, methods of teaching individual disciplines, and adaptation to the educational system of a university. Although there are a large number of scientific papers on various aspects of first-year students' adaptation, they tend to look at this process on a global scale [1–12]. We want to analyse more specific areas of this process, i.e., the elimination of the problems faced in the course of performing certain types of educational tasks (monologue speaking tasks) to improve the student's English-speaking skills.

At the initial stage of the academic studies, first-year university students face several problems, entailed by the need for adjustment to the requirements of the new educational environment. These obstacles derive from the increased workload, new responsibilities, greater independence, autonomy from a teacher, and personal difficulties, which include building new relationships, adjusting to new living arrangements, coping with homesickness, etc. [1–5]. This process involves self-adjustment to the nature, content, conditions, and organisation of the educational process and the development of skills of independence in scholarly work. Many articles analyse the experience of first-year students' academic success gained by various universities. They mainly cover issues related to the sociopsychological sphere of adaptation, for instance, the influence of stress and social anxiety on first-year students' academic performance [6–9].

One of the essential research topics in the sphere of adaptation is the integration of international students and creation of multicultural academic environment [10–13]. A significant number of articles are devoted to the analysis of various psychological and behavioural characteristics of first-year students and their relationship with the development of different areas of self-adjustment. For example, the concept of educational anxiety and its impact on academic performance [14–16] and anxiety and its correlation with student motivation [17] are considered to be of great importance. Among other characteristics that contribute to the academic success, we can highlight self-regulation, one of the leading factors of academic adaptation, the importance of which for the professional culture of all students was noted in [18,19]. In the course of self-regulation, a student performs practical actions, which are crucial for the development of the first-year students' academic performance. These activities include self-monitoring of academic progress, self-tracking of the quality of performance, regulation, self-analysis, self-assessment, correction, timely self-response, and improvement of educational work.

Resourcing and planning the first-year experience can improve academic and social integration and, as a result, improve retention rates. Recent research proves that the actual academic challenges put into designing and implementing educational settings that foster faculty–student and peer interaction can facilitate the process of first-year students' self-adjustment [20,21].

Students can also be over-challenged when managing complex tasks. An analysis of scientific-methodical literature in the studies [22–24] revealed the following problems faced by first-year students: the increasing amount and complexity of educational information; lack of technical skills training activities; poor independent cognitive activity; the inability to use the information of tutorial and organisational nature; the lack of skills of independent work; the lack of skills in note-taking, working with primary sources, dictionaries, and reference books; a lack of practice in expressing opinions, writing essays, term papers, and preparing speeches and reports.

Researchers emphasise, that many students face problems related to integration and adaptation to this new context of life [25] as they are not always provided with the cohesive environment they need to connect with faculty and other students [26]. Social interaction with peers plays a vital role in facilitating the process of academic adaptation [27]. Studies show that one-third of interviewed students experiencing problems with self-adjustment believe that teachers do not contribute to accommodating students to academic life [25]. Learning environments, such as learning communities, that actively involve students, faculty members, and staff in shared learning activities can be used as an effective means of facilitation of the adaptation process [26,28]. Faculty–student interactions are crucial for developing students' academic self-concept and enhancing their motivation and achievement [29]. It is an essential component of the experience of both undergraduates and instructors. The most frequent form of faculty–student interaction typically includes students' asking for information about a course, visiting after class, or using e-mail. The authors identify such types of communication as functional interaction and mentoring [30–32].

Foreign language speaking skills need much practice and exercise to be improved. That is why it is essential to use different teaching techniques to instruct students effectively. We consider the improvement of first-year students' English-speaking skills to be a synergetic process. The main task of an instructor is to assist students in mastering the elements of a language system, i.e., pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and elements such as language functions, and sociocultural norms [33–40]. In addition, a university teacher should not only give methodological recommendations, parameters, and criteria of assessment but also take into consideration a fact of difficulties a first-year student experiences in the process of self-adjustment to university education. The standard competence of teaching speaking is expressing meaning in a functional text in the form of a recount or narrative [41]. According to Brown, speaking classes must include three main aspects: (1) form (focused instruction on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary)

(2) meaning (focused instruction on the production of meaningful spoken message with real communicative purpose), and (3) opportunities (improvement of fluency). Those three items refer to both fluency and comprehensibility [42].

Speaking can have two main forms: dialogue and monologue. In a dialogue, the speaker needs to speak in turn to communicate, while in a monologue, the speaker is the single character that has a speech to deliver and there is no need for a partner [42]. A monologue is defined as the individual oral work of students with the aim of practicing all the areas of the language system, which enhances both the language skills and the student's self-confidence. They require a clear task and time for preparation, which is followed by the performance [43]. Oral production in the form of a monologue can be of several types: "sustained monologue: describing experience", "sustained monologue: putting a case", and "sustained monologue: giving information". In this research, a sustained monologue describing experience was used as a type of a monologue speaking task. It focuses mainly on descriptions and narratives and includes described aspects from simple everyday information, through classic functions (for example, describe plans and arrangements, habits and routines, past activities and personal experiences) and a wide range of subjects related to fields of interest, to detailed descriptions of complex subjects. The complexity of discourse ranges from simple words/signs, formulaic expressions, and simple sentences or short paragraphs, through relating as a sequence of points, to integrating sub-themes and developing particular points in a smoothly flowing description [44].

By a monologue speaking task the authors understand a process of making meaning in the form of a sustained monologue that includes receiving information, processing it, and finally producing and delivering your thoughts orally in a logical and coherent way. According to Doe, the initial phase involves transforming a conceptualized utterance into speech by converting a message into linguistic material (transformation into language by applying lexical, grammatical, and phonological rules in serial order). The appropriate vocabulary is selected and grammatical and phonological rules are applied to create a speech plan, which is further converted into spoken language [34]. Such activities as a monologue speaking task develop thinking and improve the practical use of the language in communicative situations [45].

The present-day actualisation of the use of monologue speaking tasks requires the development of technology for the formation of speaking skills. The classic approach to teaching how to get ready with monologue speaking tasks is based on instructing students and sometimes providing them with a sample. This approach applies to different types of topics for monologues. Students achieve progress steadily, and it requires significant time expenditures [33]. The competence approach, which is fundamental in the modern system of higher education, involves the formation of universal competencies in the framework of teaching foreign languages [35–38]. Partial withdrawal of foreign language teaching to the level of independent work comprises the universal competence of self-organisation and self-development. The ability to independently organise work with language material and, ultimately, create a monologue is achieved through detailed methodological recommendations and the formation of an up-to-date list of key vocabulary for each monologue. These requirements and the need to work independently cause the most considerable difficulty for first-year students. It is closely connected to the formation of universal competence, which involves the development of systematic and critical thinking, requiring the creation of conditions for the analysis of the monologue speaking tasks as a product of language activity in the course of the educational process. In the context of working on the monologue, a systematic approach can lead to high results in a short time, due to the elimination of the problems of academic adaptation, which are frequently expressed by such states as fear, shyness, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and motivation. Authors state that students tend to view speaking as important and they are willing to deal with the necessities to master it. However, many of them avoid speaking due to their fear of being criticised or laughed at [33]. Thus, the fear of mistakes becomes one of the main factors in students' reluctance to speak English in the classroom [39]. One more negative factor that

can hinder the performance while working with monologue speaking tasks is shyness that students experience when they are required to speak English in class [39]. The results of some studies of the first-year students state that there is a relationship between shyness and the motivation to speak English [40]. Some studies investigate the effect of anxiety and self-efficacy on the students' English monologue speaking skills [39,46]. Anxiety about speaking a certain language can affect the quality of oral language production and make individuals appear less fluent than they really are [39]. It has a significant negative effect on the students' English monologue speaking skills, and the contribution of anxiety (40.9%) is higher than that of self-efficacy (22.3%) [47]. The feeling of anxiety can be closely connected with factors such as self-confidence. Students who lack confidence about themselves and their English will necessarily suffer from apprehension [39]. This statement is supported by the findings made by R. Roysmanto (2018) and İ. Gürler (2015), who claim that there is a significant correlation between self-confidence and speaking skill [48,49].

Authors agree with the statement that learners with a low self-esteem, high levels of anxiety, and low motivation tend to have serious difficulties in speaking skills despite having acceptable linguistic skills, whereas those with higher motivation and lower anxiety can speak easily and effectively [39,40,46–50]. This is particularly relevant to the process of first-year students' instruction. Consequently, this factor should also be taken into consideration in the process of instruction on practicing monologue speaking tasks.

To eliminate adverse effects, students should be provided with extensive instructions on how to get ready with certain types of educational assignments [51]. The detailed information on the requirements to the monologue speaking tasks was introduced in the form of the interactive lecture. Together, with the explanation of some relevant concepts, the teacher encouraged a mini-discussion on parameters and criteria. We believe that this form of communication can increase the effectiveness of teaching and enhance the first-year students' educational performance in the process of working with monologue speaking tasks in the course of the discipline "Basic course of the Foreign language" [52–54]. This factor should be taken into consideration while dealing with monologue speaking tasks. Such types of interaction can be realised in the learning process through peer assessment, which has the potential to affect first-year students' achievement positively [55,56]. Harris and Brown suggested that teachers must provide detailed instruction on peer assessment in the conversation that identifies the specifics of this activity and highlights the aspects that require special attention and carefully manage interpersonal issues for successful implementation [57]. The findings show that, when assessment criteria are firmly set, peer-feedback enables students to judge the performance of their peers in a manner comparable to those of the teachers [58]. The detailed analysis of the monologue and its comparison with the given requirements involve students in participatory decision making. An assessment activity unconsciously evokes the students' desire to work without the teacher's supervision and find a sufficient strategy for efficient academic performance at the moment and onward facing specific global tasks [59]. Reciprocal Peer Questioning is regarded as the promotion of meta-level thinking that constructs conceptually new knowledge [60].

The theoretical studies mentioned above enable us to consider that peer interaction (including peer assessment) can positively influence the result of some English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational assignments during the first academic year, e.g., monologue speaking tasks. Therefore, the hypothesis of the study is that the use of monologue speaking tasks paired with peer interaction can improve first-year students' English-speaking skills. To prove that the use of monologue speaking tasks can positively influence the result of some EFL educational assignments and improve student's speaking skills during the first academic year, we need to answer the following research question: What impact can the use of monologue speaking tasks, paired with peer interaction and peer assessment have on the improvement of first-year students' English-speaking skills?

2. Materials and Methods

The researchers applied a true experimental research design aimed at determining the impact that the use of monologue speaking tasks (MST) paired with peer interaction and peer assessment has on the improvement of first-year students' English-speaking skills. Experimental research is widely used in education. It is a scientific approach to research that is used to identify a cause-and-effect relationship within a group and prove or reject a hypothesis. Experimental research involves two sets of variables, where an independent variable is manipulated and applied to a dependent variable to measure the effect on it. The main purpose of an experimental design is to determine the impact of treatment on an outcome, controlling for all other factors that might influence that outcome. As one form of control, researchers randomly assign individuals to groups. Two groups of participants are involved in this type of research, a control group and an experimental group. When the experimental group is subjected to treatment and the control group is not, the researcher can conclude that the treatment, and not other factors, influences the outcome [61]. In this study the independent variable was the use of monologue speaking tasks combined with peer interaction and peer assessment and the dependent variable was first-year students' English-speaking skills. The researchers tried to determine the effect of the former on the improvement of the latter. The post-test-only control-group experimental design was used where the participants were randomly assigned to groups, treatment was given only to the experimental group, and then both groups were measured on the post-test [61].

Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to collect and analyse data for the study. The research included the qualitative content analysis of monologues speaking tasks [62–64]. They were measured by the developed parameters and evaluation criteria (Table 1) and assessed with the designed MST evaluation form (Figure 1). The developed parameters and evaluation criteria (Table 1) were derived based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors for the levels of foreign language proficiency designed by the Council of Europe [44]. A student's monologue was performed orally and measured according to six categories (Table 1). The occurrence of certain words and phrases, subjects, grammatical constructions, and mistakes made were quantified and a student was given a particular score for each category and a final score for the monologue. Subsequently, the researchers carried out the quantitative analysis of the final scores the students received for each monologue speaking task presented during the experiment. The collected data consisted of the participants' scores for the MST performance obtained at the end of the term from the class register. The researchers used descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis of quantitative data, which provided them with new insights and detailed results. The evidence base for the need and effectiveness of using monologue speaking tasks paired with peer interaction and peer assessment for the improvement of first-year students' English-speaking skills was substantiated by the correlation analysis of data. The obtained results showed the level of progress in performing the monologue speaking tasks and helped answer the research question of the study.

The study took place at Peter the Great Saint Petersburg Polytechnic University, Russia. The experiment was carried out during the fall semester in the period from September to December 2019. Two groups of people were involved in collecting the data for this study: the control group (working in a self-organisation mode, C group) and the experimental group (subjected to treatment, E group). The participants were selected based on the results of the placement test carried out each year by the Department of Foreign Languages among first-year students at the beginning of the first term. The participants in both groups had approximately the same level of English at the beginning of the experiment, the threshold or intermediate level (B1) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In total, the study involved 274 first-year students enrolled in undergraduate programs who volunteered to take part in the experiment. The study involved an equal number of participants in the control and experimental groups

(137 people in each group) and a detailed approach to the evaluation of the monologue speaking tasks.

Table 1. Parameters and criteria for MST evaluation.

No	Aspects	2 Points	1 Point	0 Points
1.	Content and organisation of MST (the degree of the topic elaboration and relevance of all MST elements to its plan)	The topic is elaborate and MST structure fully corresponds to the MST plan.	Lack of one structural element or content discrepancy of one structural element.	Lack of two or more structural elements or content discrepancy of two or more structural elements.
Extra point is given for the section Creative Thinking				
2.	Vocabulary (the usage of topic vocabulary from the list given to students)	The use of 75% of the vocabulary and more, i.e., 26 lexical units. NB. The lexical unit is accepted in case of its correct pronunciation and usage in the right context.	The use of 50–75% of the vocabulary, i.e., 17–25 lexical units.	The use of less than 50% of the vocabulary, i.e., 16 lexical units and less.
		1 point for each aspect	0.5 point for each aspect	0 point for each aspect
3.	Coherence	All structural elements of MST are coherent. The use of 8 linkers and more.	The use of 5–7 linkers.	The use of fewer than 5 linkers.
4.	Grammar: (1) grammatical mistakes. (2) grammatical constructions.	1. No more than 4 grammatical mistakes (that do not affect understanding) are allowed. 2. The use of 4–5 unrepeated grammatical constructions: Passive Voice, Conditionals, Modals of Past/Present Deduction, Reported Speech, and Sequence of Tenses.	1. 5–6 corrected grammatical mistakes are allowed. 2. The use of 3 unrepeated grammatical constructions.	1. More than 6 grammatical mistakes are made that affect understanding. 2. The use of only 0–1–2 listed grammatical constructions.
5.	Fluency and pronunciation (articulation of sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation)	The speech is fluent (smooth with little or no pausing). Pronunciation corresponds to the norm.	The speech is rather fluent (fast enough, but disconnected and unclear). A few phonetic and prosodic mistakes are made.	The speech is slow with lots of pausing; the speech contains repetitions of the same words most of the time. A lot of phonetic and prosodic mistakes are made.
6.	Presentation of MST (oral answer)	The speaker relies on the MST plan only while performing the utterance.	MST is supported by the plan together with the student's notes (keywords, the first word of the sentence, etc.)	MST is supported by the text.

Monologue speaking task evaluation form

№	Aspects	Comments														Points (score) (2–0) * +1 (for Creative Thinking)	
		Introduction		Step 2			Step 3			Step 4			Creative thinking *		Conclusion		
1	Content and organisation of MST																(2–0)
2	Vocabulary	1 0p.	2 0p.	3 0p.	4 0p.	5 0p.	6 0p.	7 0p.	8 0p.	9 0p.	10 0p.	11 0p.	12 0p.	13 0p.	14 0p.		
		15 0p.	16 0p.	17 1p.	18 1p.	19 1p.	20 1p.	21 1p.	22 1p.	23 1p.	24 1p.	25 1p.	26 2p.	27 2p.	28 2p.		
3	Coherence	1 0p.	2 0p.	3 0p.	4 0p.	5 1p.	6 1p.	7 1p.	8 2p.	9 2p.	10 2p.						(2–0)
4	Grammar: 1) grammatical mistakes;	1 1p.	2 1p.	3 1p.	4 1p.	5 0.5p.	6 0.5p.	7 0p.	8 0p.	9 0p.							(1–0)
	2) grammatical constructions (GC).	Passive Voice		Conditionals			Modals of Past / Present Deduction			Reported Speech		Sequence of Tenses			(1–0) NB 4-5 GC – 1 p. 3 GC – 0.5 p. 0-1-2 GC – 0 p.		
5	Fluency and pronunciation (articulation of sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation)															(1–0)	
6	Presentation of MST	Not supported by the MST plan 1 p.				Supported by the MST plan 0.5 p.				Supported by the written MST text 0 p.						(1–0)	
														Total	... out of 10 +1 (for Creative Thinking)		

Figure 1. MST evaluation form.

The one-semester experiment consisted of four stages corresponding to four monologue speaking tasks planned by the syllabus. The teacher offered both groups the same methodological recommendation (instructions) on the MST preparation and the following set of aid materials:

- the table with all parameters and criteria for MST evaluation (Table 1);
- the list of topic vocabulary that consisted of collocations and idioms to use in a monologue;
- the list of linkers to make logical connections of ideas;
- the detailed plan of a monologue, which included five steps (an introduction, three subtopics on the main topic, and a conclusion). See Appendix A, Table A1.

These aid materials and measurement instruments were specially designed for this study to assist students in the MST preparation, assess and score the participants' answers, and measure their success in the process of performing monologue speaking tasks.

At the first stage, the teachers asked the students of the C group to make up and present a monologue orally relying on the self-studied aid-materials without any teacher's assistance. The E group received an introductory lecture including a detailed tutorial on the preparation of a monologue speaking task, the explanations for Table 1, as well as the analysis of a model (sample) answer with the highest score, i.e., the eleven-point monologue performed a year ago. The preparation of a monologue lasted for two weeks in both groups. The teachers conducted the reporting session in two groups in different ways: the C group presented monologue speaking tasks in the form of oral responses evaluated according to the developed parameters and criteria for MST evaluation, while the assessment in the experimental group was carried out with the help of additional stages. Firstly, the students exchanged their papers with the written monologues, analysed them, and made their comments on all aspects. Secondly, the students presented their monologues orally, but it was not only the teacher who evaluated them, but also their classmates. The peer assessment was used as a learning tool allowing students to analyse the aspects of MST evaluation and understand their strengths and weaknesses in the MST preparation. The peer assessment was open in the sense that it provided the speakers

with the on-the-spot detailed analysis of their monologues and allowed both speakers and 'assessors' to avoid similar errors in the future. The peer assessment was not included in the final score for MST given by the teacher and the researchers did not use it in the data analysis for this study. The teachers carried out MST content analysis and evaluation based on six categories:

- (1) content and organisation of a monologue (the degree of topic elaboration and the relevance of all structural elements to the MST plan);
- (2) vocabulary (the usage of topic vocabulary);
- (3) coherence of MST structural elements and the use of linking words and phrases;
- (4) grammar (the use of grammatical constructions and the number of grammar mistakes made);
- (5) fluency and pronunciation (articulation of sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation);
- (6) presentation of a monologue.

The evaluation form (Figure 1) developed in compliance with Table 1 was used by the teacher and students for the MST assessment, according to which the speaker could get 1–11 points for a monologue speaking task (an extra, or the 11th, point could be received for the Creative Thinking section, i.e., student's ideas and the additional information on the topic). During the monologue performance, the teacher marked the occurrence of topic vocabulary, linkers, and grammatical constructions in the utterance, the correspondence of structural elements to the MST plan, and the number of grammatical, phonetic, and prosodic mistakes in the evaluation form, calculated the points for each category or aspect, and gave a student the particular score (points) for the MST. The teacher repeated the same procedure during the further stages of the experiment (Stage 2, 3, and 4).

3. Results

The data for the study were collected from the class register at the end of the semester. They included the participants' scores for the monologue speaking tasks performed during the four stages of the experiment (Stage 1, 2, 3, and 4). The researchers entered the data in SPSS Version 23 (IBM Corp., Armonk, New York 2016 <https://www.ibm.com/support/pages/downloading-ibm-spss-statistics-23>, accessed on 3 June 2021). Then, they conducted the descriptive statistical analysis to calculate the means and standard deviations in participants' MU scores in the C and E group separately for each stage of the experiment. After that, the correlation analysis of the acquired results was made by comparing the means for each stage of the experiment between the two groups. The researchers conducted a series of independent samples *t*-tests for Stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 in SPSS to identify the relationship between these findings. The *t*-values with 272 degrees of freedom and *t*-test *p*-values with the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ showed the statistically significant difference in the participants' success of MU performance. The *t*-values with 136 degrees of freedom and the *t*-test *p*-values with the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ proved the progress in performing monologue speaking tasks and developing English speaking skills by the end of the experiment (I–IV Stage). Then, the researchers applied the comparative method to analyse the obtained results. This allowed them to assess the progress in participants' speaking skills during the experiment and draw conclusions on the impact that the use of monologue speaking tasks combined with peer interaction and peer assessment has on the improvement of first-year students' English-speaking skills.

At the end of the first stage, the average score of the C group was slightly higher (6.5 scores) than the threshold, which is determined by 6 points (Table 2). The main mistakes of this group were partial inconsistency with the plan of the utterance (in the introduction and conclusion of the section), lack of lexical units and grammatical constructions necessary for use, or incomplete compliance with the requirements (all students used a quotation as a hook sentence, but did not transform it into reported speech). Many students in the C group ignored the possibility of getting an extra point. The E group received 8 points on average, which is 73%, and the main shortcomings were the insufficient amount of vocabulary and ignoring grammatical material. We registered the errors of the structural

component of the MU in the C group only. The students' comments on their results made it possible to conclude that the drawbacks were the course of some misunderstandings connected with the concepts used in the requirements to speeches. The students also found that they studied the materials on monologue speaking tasks inattentively. They omitted some vital components of the monologue speaking task as they believed that their former knowledge on it was extensive.

Table 2. Progress in monologue speaking skills.

Stages	Results (Means and Standard Deviations)		t-Test Sig. (2-Tailed) df—272 $\alpha = 0.05$
	C Group	E Group	
Stage I	6.5 SD—0.516	8 SD—0.271	0.000
Stage II	7 SD—0.437	8.5 SD—0.759	0.000
Stage III	7 SD—0.343	9 SD—0.364	0.000
Stage IV	8 SD—0.420	10 SD—0.364	0.000
Progress in performing MST	1.5 SD—0.373	2 SD—0.258	0.000 (df—136. $\alpha = 0.05$)

In the subsequent stages, we carried out the work in the same mode. In the second stage, the progress in C and E groups was identical—4.5%, that is, a 0.5 score in both cases. The main reasons for improving the results are the inclusion of a paragraph with student's own ideas on the topic in the Creative Thinking section (Appendix A, Step 4) in the structure of the monologue speaking tasks. Although this structural element is optional, if added, it gives an extra point to the student's final mark, and the addition of 1–2 grammatical constructions. At the same time, 75% of students continued to introduce the quote in the direct speech. Due to the lack of work with phonetics, incorrectly pronounced lexical units were regarded as mistakes and, consequently, the total amount of vocabulary was lower than planned by students. The qualitative leap of the C group is associated with the structural components of the monologue speaking tasks. Compared to the previous results, the C group students were able to compose a monologue that almost completely corresponded to the stated plan. The progress was due to cooperative work of students with their peers and extensive instruction rather than independent work of students.

The results of the C group in the third stage did not change quantitatively (average score—7). Qualitative transformations are based on the progress of individual students exclusively. The average score in the E group has increased by 4.5%. In the E group, there is a comprehensive approach to lexical material, which involves not only the use of topical vocabulary in the monologues, but also the study of its phonetic components. The level of phonetic literacy has risen to 80%. In this stage, we offered the E group students the ways to solve the problem of “a large number of lexical units required to include in the monologues” such as the analysis of situations in which one can use enumerations, the “vocabulary → idea” approach, etc.

The fourth stage of the experiment showed quantitatively identical progress in both groups by one point, i.e., 9%. In the C group, there is a high-quality approach to lexical material, compliance with the structure of the monologue speaking tasks, and a sufficient number of linkers. The actual problem in the C group is the lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures (especially Modals of Deduction and Sequence of Tenses) and the lack of the Creative Thinking section. Students of the E group performed more successfully

in the fourth monologue speaking task, “Language”, getting 10 points on average. It is impossible to systematize the shortcomings in this group as they have a wide variability. We should note that in the final stage, 91% of students used the offered plan of a monologue speaking task appropriately.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show that in both groups, there is an improvement in monologue speaking skills, but the E group showed better results due to the additional instruction (introductory lecture) at the beginning of experiment. The intermediate results of the E group are also higher because the adaptation of students continued until the end of the experiment. In addition to quantitative changes, there were also qualitative changes in the groups, such as working out the lexical material and following the structure and content of the monologue speaking tasks.

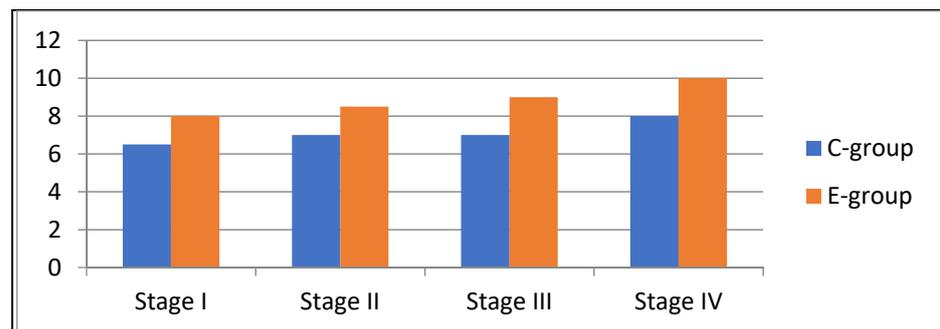


Figure 2. Progress in monologue speaking skills.

4. Discussion

The quantitative analysis of the data obtained in the course of the experiment allowed us to establish that the results of the E group are significantly higher even at the initial stage of training, which, in the end, resulted in a high level of academic performance in the course on the English language ($p = 0.000$; $\alpha = 0.05$). The independent work on the material is possible for individual students only, for others the distorted understanding of the requirements is actual. Misunderstandings and inattentiveness lead to low performance and slow down progress.

Academic success requires a systematic approach, i.e., the introduction of a series of activities in the educational process that facilitate the process of improving skills. We developed the set of measures based on the difficulties encountered by students when performing a particular type of activity. We believe that an introductory lecture-consultation is necessary when teaching the monologue speaking tasks in which we explain all the nuances that require special attention. It is valid to analyse the ideal variant of a monologue and then analyse the groupmates' ones using the developed evaluation form, which is filled out by each student individually.

Identifying unexpected difficulties in the learning process requires the development of additional measures to eliminate them. Therefore, in the process of teaching the monologue speaking tasks in the third stage, the other lecture was needed on how to include the maximum number of lexical units in the monologue, the explanation of some required grammatical constructions, the phonetic features of words, and the meanings of certain collocations.

The conducted research allowed us to justify the effectiveness of peer interaction implemented in the General English course for first-year students. The series of adaptive measures the students were provided with showed its expediency in the course of the experiment with the C and E groups. The active assistance of teachers and peers allowed students to develop the productive mechanism for improving monological speaking skills. The achieved results make it possible to conclude that peer interaction, as an element of the assessment process, positively influences the improvement of the developed skills. It supports the findings of Da Re et al. and Poling that prove the significance of the

student–tutor interaction realised in the peer tutoring model that provides quicker academic success [65,66]. The provided observational study was founded on a series of activities aimed at the encouragement of first-year student’s initiative to face new challenges. The active practice of peer interaction forms a positive attitude to learning. It is based on the psychological effect when the involvement in a constructive dialogue results in academic progress [67]. Kollar also noted the stronger connection to collaborative learning in the context of teacher–student interaction than to individual work on the project [68].

The analysis of the data proved that efficient peer interaction helps to develop metacognitive strategies and stimulates self-regulation. Similar results are introduced in the work of Schunk et al. where the constructive approach to working on the specific material, namely, discussing strategies in the context of individual tasks, is defined as a mechanism for developing the skill of finding an effective way to solve tasks [69]. In terms of the described research, peer interaction is considered to be the supportive element of learning, although Brinkworth et al. state that the commencing students face the differences between their expectations and reality, i.e., the difference between secondary and higher education [70]. On the contrary, the works of Gonta et al. and Voronova et al. claim that peer interaction (or system of feedback) is the fundamental mechanism in the adjustment to the new educational environment and is thus required [20,25]. Peer interaction encourages and motivates a student to analyse and perform the task, taking into account all the requirements. We found that properly organized peer interaction allows the teacher to motivate both students with Upper-Intermediate and Advanced English, which becomes evident from their constant feedback, and those who usually avoid speaking because of the low-level knowledge. The group of researchers Kuhn and Anderson et al. depicted failures in the peer interaction practice as the examined students chose the facilitated way to task completion, producing utterances devoid of the proper grammar and lexical material [71,72]. To avoid this, we proposed both the detailed instruction to each monologue speaking task and a transparent system for evaluation discussed in advance and throughout the experiment with the E group. Due to the continuous peer interaction, the low efficiency at the beginning of the experiment was almost neutralised.

Peer interaction is based on three principal approaches that were used in the research: algorithmisation, peer-to-peer review, and reciprocal teaching dialogue. Step-by-step task performance results in the high-evaluated product tracking all students. The proposed mechanism of peer reviewing in the E group and its systematic processing has developed an operation algorithm that students could follow in the course of their monologue preparation. Moreover, the peer-reviewing practice of the groupmate’s monologue brought a clearer understanding of the task and minimised the number of shortcomings in the work. Van Rooij et al. and Voronova et al. approved the need for the reciprocal teaching dialogue involving face-to-face interaction [19,20]. Though van Rooij et al. states the significance of this approach in the case of some disabilities, otherwise, students operate their knowledge on the cognitive level (disabilities in this context are the lack of the proper skills to perform the definite task efficiently) [19]. According to our multi-stage research, this affirmation is valid only if students have completed a full course on skill formation and have reached the highest assessment level as the students from the E group.

The works on peer interaction are mostly dedicated to generalized studies, although the implementation of adaption measures is supposed to be reasonable even in terms of separate disciplines. The series of activities were undertaken to overcome the anticipated problems in the General English course in the research of Odínokaya et al. where the students were trained to cope with the speaking task individually [73]. The comparison of the obtained results suggests that adaptation is relevant even when teaching specific skills based on reading skills, as in the research of McMahon et al. (2003) [74].

The contributions of the conducted study may raise interest among both methodologists of English and other disciplines and psychologists. The practical implication of our research is seen in the further algorithmisation of the learning process that is actual in terms of non-linguistic specialties that generally show an intermediate level of English.

The results and the procedure may be introduced in the English for Specific Purposes course where terminology and academic style become dominant and make a difference from the General English course. The importance of the detailed instructions as supportive elements to assignments inspires the teachers to provide practical learning along with methodological assistance, i.e., the introduction of simplified practice-oriented methodological material for students. The conducted experiment allowed us to identify the features of peer interaction in offline learning, while the online learning format, which involves minimizing face-to-face communication with the teacher, may also be of interest.

5. Conclusions

The need for adaptation to the definite subject often arises in the context of a student's transfer from one stage of the educational system to another, more advanced one, which imposes new requirements on them. The success of training, in this case, depends directly on the speed of learning the new rules. Self-organisation, i.e., the ability to systematise knowledge independently and transform it into skills, is a task of higher education, implemented in the formation of universal competencies. A limited number of first-year students can solve educational problems at the expense of their internal reserves. Thus, adaptation measures should be applied to them, i.e., a system of consultations and exercises that will allow them to make a qualitative leap immediately.

This study focuses on a specific aspect of EFL instruction, i.e., the use of monologue speaking tasks, which require the ability to speak a foreign language in front of an audience. Such negative factors as fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, or lack of motivation can hinder the performance of first-year students and that is why special measures should be taken to eliminate the difficulties that students can face while working with monologue speaking tasks. Therefore, the designed set of instructions was provided to students and combined with the peer assessment and additional instruction. These activities resulted in the improvement of the first-year students' English-speaking skills, which can be inferred from the results of the study.

Thus, the implementation of preventive measures, i.e., peer interaction and assessment for first-year students is a mandatory measure in the educational process to improve the performance of certain types of activities. It makes it possible to conclude that the use of monologue speaking tasks paired with peer interaction and assessment can improve first-year students' English-speaking skills.

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Appendix A. The Example of the MST Plan on the Topic “Personality”

Table A1. Monologue speaking task plan. Monologue on PERSONALITY.

You Are Going to Give a Talk about PERSONALITY	Vocabulary	Linking Words and Phrases
<p>REMEMBER!</p> <p>Your speech will be graded according to the following criteria: relevance, coherence, fluency, grammar & vocabulary (see ‘Parameters and criteria for MST evaluation’).</p>	<p>Fill in the columns with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • words, collocations and idiom, • linking words <p>on the topic ‘Personality’ (see Appendix A. The list of topic vocabulary).</p>	
<p>Step 1. Introduction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make up a hook sentence that will attract listener’s attention to your speech (a quote, proverb, tongue-twister, etc.) 2. Lead your speech steadily to the 2nd step. 3. Introduction consists of 4–6 sentences. 		
<p>Step 2. Personality Types (PT)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speak about PTs (extroverts and introverts). 2. Does your future profession correspond with your PT? Is it right to choose the profession relying on the PT? 		
<p>Step 3. Exploring Personality</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speak about the problems that are connected with personality tests. 2. Do you trust them? Why? When can they be used? 		
<p>Step 4. Charisma</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speak about what charisma is. Is it inborn? 2. . . . the person with charisma. Does he/she use it in the right/wrong way? 		
<p>Step 5. CREATIVE THINKING</p> <p>Introduce your own extra idea(s) on personality that hasn’t/haven’t been mentioned before. Substantiate your choice.</p>		
<p>Step 6. Conclusion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repeat the main idea of the introduction in other words. 2. Summarise the ideas of steps 2, 3, 4, 5. 		

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