



# One-on-one English Conversation Lessons: Evaluating Learners' Satisfaction and Self-Perceived Oral Communication Improvement

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## Abstract

For about two decades one-on-one English tutoring has attracted many Japanese English learners mainly because it contrasts previous unsuccessful learning methods that Japanese students have been exposed to. One-on-one English conversation lesson presents numerous features that are the reasons for its popularity. One of those features is that it gives the opportunity to learners to continuously participate in the conversation. The learner also has the full attention of the teacher, who often customizes the lesson to the learners' learning needs and adjusts his or her speaking speed and vocabulary to the learner. However, one-on-one English lesson style course are provided by private English conversation schools and are expensive.

This study investigates the satisfaction

and self-perceived oral communication improvement of English learners who have completed an English course with a leading one-on-one English conversation company headquartered in Tokyo. The findings revealed that learners were highly satisfied with one-on-one English lesson style, and strongly feel they have improved their English conversation skills in comparison to improvement made from English lesson in large English classes. The findings also show that one-on-one English classes contributed to increased motivation to learn English and confidence to engage in oral English exchanges.

## 1 Introduction

All Japanese nowadays do three years, 90 % do six years and at least 50 % do at least 8 years of English at school and college (Thompson 2001, p.309). Yet, most graduate

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with insufficient English oral communication skills, making them unable to sustain an extended conversation with people from other nations. Japanese students' problems with fluency and accuracy in spoken English after many years of study could be blamed on several reasons. Geographical location is one. So too is the homogeneous and monolingual nature of Japanese classrooms summarized by Kumagai (1994) when she states:

No nation upon earth seemingly has expended as much in resources, time, energy, and enthusiasm in the attempt to become bilingual and bicultural, as has Japan. Japan, a nation geographically isolated, its people ethnocentric and homogeneous, where innovation and change is not without loyalty to one's superiors, to the corporation for which one works, to the state as well as to one's family, and whose ethnocentricity has occasionally led to periods of nationalistic excess, is a country where failure does not exist - except in its English language program. Students, even after instruction in the language from 6 to 10 years, still cannot comprehend or compose more than the simplest English sentence and cannot read, write, or speak with any kind of fluency.

Besides the geographical location and homogeneous nature of Japanese classrooms, Japanese teachers often teach all the grammar in Japanese and check that the students can follow the textbook by translating the English into Japanese (Miller, 2014). The grammar translation

approach typically prepares students to enter a prestigious university affirmed in the words of (Hosaki, 2011):

Communicative English skills are not considered to be the means to achieve success in Japanese society. Rather, entrance into a prestigious university is seen as the key to success, and therefore, passing the entrance examination was the main reason to study English. As a result, reading and writing skills are prioritized over communicative English skills by both students and teachers. (p. 208)

Although there are native English teachers in schools whose roles are to help students with communicative activities and oral fluency, they are in most cases "relegated to human tape recorders, and then set free to roam the class and 'help' the students" (Miller, 2014).

Following the setbacks that hinder Japanese students from achieving fluency in oral communication and because of the need for English for work related reasons, joining an English conversation school seems to be the solution to many Japanese. English conversation schools, which can be found in almost all cities in Japan, have as their goal to support Japanese nationals in their quest to improve their English conversational skills. English language schools in Japan have a long history. They date from Edo (Blumenthal, 1992), and have evolved into an industry of its own to supplement for the shortages of oral communication skill of Japanese.

## 2. Aim

*One-on-one* English tutoring attracts many students mainly because it contrasts previous unsuccessful learning methods that Japanese students have been exposed to. Emmerson (2017) summarizes the characteristics of one-on-one English lesson sessions as follows:

One of the major features of one-on-one learning that defines it from teacher-class learning is the opportunity and requirement for learners to continually participate in turn-taking and topic negotiation with the teacher. As there are no other students, and typically, as in language support sessions, no syllabus, the teacher often adapts the learning session to the learning needs of the student (Chanock 1996, 1999; Harris 1986 as cited in Chanock, 1999) according to the student's expressed or demonstrated needs. One-on-one learning thus allows and requires learners to negotiate with the teacher what is learned and how it is learned (Woodward-Kron, 2007), and this negotiation occurs in turn-taking alongside teaching and learning. While personalized negotiation of the topic and pathway of learning is not practical in a classroom context with many students it is a feature of one-on-one learning sessions. (p. 17)

Additionally, being alone in the lesson the learner has the teacher's full attention and there's no distraction from other students that could general represent both a competition and an audience that could raise the psychological risks of learner active engagement in turn-taking.

Another advantage for the student is that teachers can afford to adjust their language speed and vocabulary use to the ability of the student (Ingram & Bayliss, 2007, p. 43).

The characteristics aforementioned are probably some of the main reasons that more and more Japanese English learners from a wide range of age and professions enroll in one-on-one English conversation lesson course, despite their high costs.

This study is an effort to present the one-on-one English instruction style of a Tokyo-based English conversation school, and evaluate the satisfaction and self-perceived oral communication improvement of students who have completed one-on-one study courses with that English school. The study will set out to answer the following research questions:

1. Are learners satisfied with one-on-one English conversation lesson style?
2. Does one-on-one English conversation lesson style help learners expand their English oral communication skill?

## 3. Research context and procedure

This study targeted English learners from a well-established English company in Japan founded in the mid nineties and has been operating English school specialized in one-on-one conversation class. 35 people have been invited to take part in the survey on an optional basis, and 23 people out of 35 have taken part in the survey and answered all the questions. All the participants have completed a one-on-one English oral communication course with the English conversation company within two year

preceding the time this study was conducted. The level of the students varies from Beginner to Advanced. The level of the student is established based on the school level scale.

As of August 2019, the company operates 50 schools in the Kanto, Chubu, Kansai, and Kyushu region, with the highest number of schools in Kanto. The schools are basically open from the early morning to late evening on weekday and weekdays as well as public holidays. The typical school consists of a reception with a waiting space, a portioned lesson space with booths equipped with a PC, a desk and two chairs to accommodate a student-teacher pair. Students can book lessons either online on the company's website and over the phone. Students basically have the freedom to choose the school, the lesson time, the number of lessons, and the teacher for each lesson.

Every newly hired teacher has to attend a one-week training program usually before they are assigned to one of the company's school where they can start teaching. They also have to attend a one-day follow-up training session three and six months after the initial training. Additional training is provided to teachers to hone up their teaching skills and increase their pay rate.

The teaching materials consist of two types of textbooks, daily conversation and business English, organized in ten levels, with level 10 being the highest. Additional material is provided online to help students prepare and review their lessons.

### **3.1 Teaching method of the school**

Each lesson is 40 minutes, and is generally conducted following the following rubrics:

- (1) Short preparation conversation
- (2) Practice and application of target vocabulary, and phrases from the textbook, and
- (3) Feedback at the end of the lesson.

The student, however, could opt for a conversation for the whole lesson time. In which case, the teacher is responsible for keeping the lesson focused on specific topics of discussion he agrees on with the student, and assisting the student to learn and use vocabulary and phrases related to the topics.

### **3.2 Research Procedure and Ethics**

The questionnaire consisted of four questions about the participants' demographics English level, and number of lesson completed, and 11 questions with response items on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, to survey the participants' satisfaction with the outcome of their English conversation classes and their self-perceived oral communication skills. Instructions and items of the survey were given in both English and Japanese. The data was collected through a survey that was introduced individually to the participants by email and text message on social media messaging services. The students were informed that participation was optional and the survey was being conducted only for the purpose of assessing their satisfaction

with English conversation lesson style. The identities, names, and age of participants are kept confidential. With a link they were provided, participants could later access the questionnaire on a Google Forms webpage to answer the questionnaire online at their convenience within a survey period of one month.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The results and descriptive statistics for the first four items about learners' experience learning and using English are summarized in Table 1.

To item 1, all the participants (100%) disagreed, and to item 2, 83% (10 students) disagreed, 13% (3 students) were undecided, and only 3% (1 person) agreed. 56% (13 students) agreed to item 4, 35% (2 students) were undecided, and only one agreed. 96% (22 students) agreed and only 1 (3%)

disagreed to item 5.

Responses of items 1, 2, 3 and 4 suggest that English learners have extremely limited opportunity to practice or engage in oral English communication. In contrast, the results of item 5 shows that learners have a lot of opportunities to speak English in one-on-one English conversation lesson settings. With the improvement of their English conversational skill being the goal of joining one-on-one English conversation school, the conversation output opportunities provided most probably contribute to achieving learners' satisfaction in one-on-one conversation classes.

**Table 1.**

Descriptive Statistics of Items 1-5 about Participants' Experience with learning and using oral English

Questions	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Undecided N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly agree N (%)	Mean (SD)
1. In my junior high, high school and university days the focus of English teaching was on speaking	11 (48%)	7 (30%)	5 (22%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1.7 (0.81)
2. I had opportunities to use English out of school	16 (70%)	3 (13%)	3 (13%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	1.6 (1.04)
3. I use English at my work place now	5 (22%)	4 (17%)	9 (39%)	3 (13%)	2 (9%)	2.7 (1.22)
4. I use spoken English more than the other skills at my workplace	7 (30%)	6 (26%)	8 (35%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	2.3 (1.1)
5. I speak a lot when I come to one-on-one English school	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	6 (26%)	16 (70%)	4.7 (0.57)

Scale: 1=Never, 2=A little; occasionally, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always

The results and descriptive statistics for items 5 to 9 about learner's self-evaluated satisfaction with one-on-one English lessons are shown in Table 2.

Items 6, 7, 8, and 9 were used to answer the first research question. To item 6, 87% (20 students) agreed in contrast to 4% (1 student) that expressed disagreed. To item 7, 78% (18 students) agreed, in contrast to 4% (1 student) that disagreed.

In response to item 9, 65% (15 students) agreed, in contrast to 4% (1 student) that disagree. 30% (7 students) were undecided. This response might be due to the fact that some students' studies is subsidized by their company. Therefore, they might not know the cost of the English course. Despite the high cost of one-on-one English study courses, to item 8, 52% (12 students) agreed, in contrast with no students disagreeing, and 48% (11 students) being undecided.

The response to item 7 and 9 not only

show that learners are content and satisfied with one-on-one lesson style, but they also revealed a high level of motivation to study English conversation, especially in a one-on-one English lesson setting.

The results and descriptive statistics for items 10 and 11 about learner's self-evaluated oral communication improvement after attending one-on-one English lessons are shown in Table 3.

Item 10 and 11 of the questionnaire were used to examine whether one-on-one English conversation lesson style helps learners expand they English oral communication skill.

To item 11, 96% (22 students) agreed, no students (0%) disagreed, and only 1 student (4%) was undecided. In response to item 10, 87% (20 students) agreed, no students expressed disagreement, and 13% (3 students) were undecided. This result is

**Table 2.**

Results and descriptive statistics for questionnaire items 6-9 about learners' self-evaluated satisfaction with one-on-one English lesson

Questions	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Undecided N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly agree N (%)	Mean (SD)
6. I like the teaching style at one-on-one English school	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	5 (22%)	15 (65%)	4.5 (0.85)
7. Each week I look forward to coming to one-on-one English school	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	4 (17%)	8 (35%)	10 (43%)	4.1 (1.01)
8. I will continue studying one-on-one English conversation	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (48%)	5 (22%)	7 (30%)	3.8 (0.89)
9. I think one-on-one English classes are expensive	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	7 (30%)	8 (35%)	7 (30%)	3.9 (0.9)

Scale for items 6 to 9: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Scale for Item 8: 1=Definitely won't, 2=Won't, 3=Undecided, 4=Will, 5=Definitely will

**Table 3.**

Results and descriptive statistics for items 10 and 11 for learner's self-evaluated oral communication improvement

Questions	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Undecided N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly agree N (%)	Mean (SD)
10. One-on-one English conversation has helped me have more confidence in speaking English	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (13%)	7 (30%)	13 (57%)	4.4 (0.73)
11. One-on-one English conversation helped improve my English speaking skill faster than classes in school (high school, college)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	7 (30%)	15 (65%)	4.6 (0.58)

Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

very similar to the result of item 11. The improvement of students' self-confidence in their English oral communication shows improvement in their oral communication ability. Numerous studies have shown that self-confidence is an imperative aspect of L2 acquisition and high levels of self-confidence tend to effectively coincide with speaking performance ability (MacIntyre, Célment, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997; Park & Lee, 2005, as in Wojtowicz, 2017). In other words, the higher the learners' confidence level, the higher oral performance they showed (Park & Lee, 2005).

In a study conducted to investigate the effective correlation between L2 self-confidence and self-evaluation of L2 speaking skill, Wojtowicz (2017) concluded, "there is evidence of a distinct correlation between L2 self-confidence and self-evaluation of L2 speaking skills that result in improved L2 speaking performance" (p.53).

Consequently, the responses to items 10 and 11 show that one-on-one English

conversation lesson style helps learners expand their English oral communication skill.

## 5. Conclusion

The questionnaire results and data analysis have suggested that English learners' engaged in one-one English conversation lesson style are highly satisfied with this learning method and are certain to have improved their English oral communication skill. These results probably help to understand the increase in popularity of one-on-one English conversation lesson style despite its relative high tuition fee in the private English conversation industry.

Despite the quantitative findings conclusively answer the two research questions, they are limited to a relatively small number of one-on-one English conversation learners. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. Consequently, a follow-up study with a larger number of participants, possibly from different learning environments, and more

detailed analysis should be conducted to make a definite conclusion on the effectiveness of one-on-one English conversation lessons for oral communication ability improvement.

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## Appendices

### Questionnaire

Dear student,

I hope you can spend some minutes of your time to answer the following questions. Please answer honestly each of the following questions about your English study experiences at One to One English school.

マンツーマン英会話レッスンの有効性について調査を行っており、アンケートにご協力をお願いいたします。

マンツーマン英会話学校での英語学習の経験について、以下の質問に率直にご回答下さい。

**Gender:** (a) Male (b) Female

性別: (a) 男 (b) 女

**Age:** (a) 23-29 (b) 30-39 (c) 40-49 (d) 50 and above

年齢: (a) 23~29歳 (b) 30~39歳 (c) 40~49歳 (d) 49歳以上

**Your current English level:**

現在の英語レベル:

(a) beginner (b) lower-intermediate (c) intermediate (d) advanced

(a) 初級 (b) 初中級 (c) 中級 (d) 上級

**Number of one-on-one English lessons completed:**

完了したマンツーマン英語レッスンの数:

(a) 20-39 (b) 40-59 (c) 60-79 (d) 80 and above

(a) 20~39 (b) 40~59 (c) 60~79 (d) 79以上

**Instructions:** Please mark only one number (1-5) for each of the items below:

次の各質問に対し、1から5の番号から一つを選択し丸で囲んでください。

**1= never 2= a little, occasionally 3= sometimes 4= often 5= always**

**1= 全然ない 2= 少し、たまに 3= 時々 4= 頻繁に 5= いつも**

1. In my junior high, high school and university days the focus of English teaching was on speaking

中学、高校及び大学時代の英語教育の中心は話すことでした

**1-2-3-4-5**

2. I had opportunities to use English out of school

学校の外で英語を使う機会がありました

1-2-3-4-5

3. I use English at my work place now

今は職場で英語を使っています

1-2-3-4-5

4. I use **spoken English** more than the other skills at my workplace

職場では英語の読み書きやリスニングよりも英語を話すことが多いです。

1-2-3-4-5

Instructions: Please mark only one number (1-5) for each of the items below:

次の各質問に対し、1から5の番号から一つを選択し丸で囲んでください。

**1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= Undecided 4= agree 5= Strongly agree**

**1= 全く同意できない 2= 同意できない 3= どちらともいえない 4= 同意できる 5= とても同意できる**

5. I speak a lot when I come to one-on-one English school

マンツーマン英語学校に行った時は沢山話します

1-2-3-4-5

6. I like the teaching style at one-on-one English school

マンツーマン英語学校での授業スタイルが好きです

1-2-3-4-5

7. Each week I look forward to going to one-on-one English school

毎週マンツーマンの英語学校に行くのを楽しみにしています

1-2-3-4-5

8. I will continue studying one-on-one English conversation (for work related reasons)

私はマンツーマン英会話の勉強を続けます。(仕事上の理由で)

1-2-3-4-5

**1= definitely won't 2= won't 3= undecided 4= will 5= definitely will**

**1= 全くそう思わない 2= そう思わない 3= どちらでもいえない 4= そう思う 5= 強くそう思う**

9. I think one-on-one English classes are expensive

マンツーマンレッスン料は高いと思います。

1-2-3-4-5

10. One-on-one English conversation has helped me have more confidence in speaking English

マンツーマン英会話のおかげで、英語を話すことにより自信を持つことができました。

**1-2-3-4-5**

11. One-on-one English conversation helped improve my English speaking skill faster than classes in school (high school, college)

マンツーマン英会話は、学校の授業(高校、大学)より、より早く英会話スキルを向上させることに役立ちました

**1-2-3-4-5**