

Communication Barriers Between Malaysian Students And Arab Tourists

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Abstract

A communication barrier is anything that comes in the way of receiving and understanding messages that one sends to another to convey his ideas, thoughts, or any other kind of information. These various barriers of communication block or interfere with the message that someone is trying to send. This paper aims to identify communication barriers occurring during interview sessions conducted by students with Arab tourists, and to analyze the situation that led to the communication barrier. Based on Effendy (2009) and Rani (2016), the research divided the communication barriers into four categories: cultural barrier, language barrier, environmental barrier, and attitude barrier. This paper applies a qualitative method, which its instrument is content analysis by analyzing 20 interview videos to study the communication barriers happening among the students and the Arab tourists. The research analysis instrument used is document analysis based on the checklist made for identifying the communication barriers. The researcher observed each scene to identify communication barriers that happened between them, while document analysis was applied to analyze the situation that triggered the communication barriers. Language barrier is the most recorded barrier for 87 times, with the lack of vocabulary found as the main issue among the students while conducting the interview with the Arab tourist.

Keywords: Communication; Barriers; Arabic Language; Tourists; Non-Native Speakers

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process of delivering orders, information, and messages from one party to another for various purposes and objectives. Communication also refers to a way of interaction, sharing opinions, ideas, or feelings with other individuals or entities. Communication is an important aspect of human life and enables the exchange of information and understanding among individuals either verbally, in writing, visually, or through electronic media. Communication is a key aspect to ensure that organizational goals are successfully achieved in the corporate world. Communication can be understood as the transfer of a meaning from one individual to another or many individuals, whether verbally or non-verbally (Maizatul Haizan, 2019). However, in the ongoing

communication process, there is no denying that the objectives and goals to be achieved are likely to fail due to communication barriers.

Communication barriers refer to interruptions or restrictions in the communication process between sender and receiver. Influence in the understanding, interpretation, or delivery of information can be formed from various factors due to these communication barriers. Obstacles can also be seen as a distortion in the context of language that is not clear about its meaning, which is used when communicating between individuals and other individuals. Various types and categories of communication barriers occur when two or more parties are exchanging information between them, and if not effectively overcome, will cause failure in achieving the desired objective (Buarqoub, 2019).

Communication between non-native speakers and native speakers faces difficulties in achieving the proper communication objectives. The difference in language proficiency is the main factor that differentiates the ability to communicate between these two parties, in addition to specific factors that differ for native speakers and non-native speakers during conversation sessions. Non-native speakers face several constraints such as lack of vocabulary, shyness, and other factors. While for native speakers, cultural differences and language understanding from a semantic point of view can lead to misunderstandings in receiving information from non-native speakers. Sometimes communication barriers that occur are successfully dealt with using non-verbal communication (Fernández-Hoya, G. & Cáceres, 2022). However, there are also communication failures due to the constraints of understanding the language being communicated (Zhang, 2023).

Communication always happens in people's daily lives, whether it is in the form of conversation, interview, notification, or something else. For non-native speakers who use other than their native language, the communication process with native speakers is difficult due to various factors such as the level of language proficiency, feelings of embarrassment, and so on. In the context of this study, Bachelor of Arabic Professional Communication students, University of Technology Mara need to conduct interviews with Arab tourists requiring them to communicate with the tourists as a task that has a weight of 30%. The interviews conducted are structured because students only ask a few questions that have been prepared by the lecturer and transcribe the results of the interview in the form of a written report. This assignment aims to improve students' communication skills and professionalism when communicating with others.

Interviews are a language learning method that hones listening and speaking skills. The interview will achieve the desired objective if the speech between the two parties is clear, and the hearing of both parties can understand the details of the proposed statement (Hasriani, 2019). Interviews can also increase the motivation of non-native speakers to dare to speak using other than their mother tongue (Heri et al., 2023), especially with native speakers of the language used.

Malaysia, who are speakers of Arabic as a specific purpose language (SPL), have a high ranking in the field of international tourism. Malaysia has experienced a remarkable increase in the number of outbound travelers annually, establishing itself as among top contributors to the global tourism industry. Malaysia was ranked the 14th in global inbound travel as approximately 26.1 million international tourists visited in 2023 (World Tourism Organization, 2024); which is also number two after Thailand in Southeast Asia.

Communication barriers can be defined as obstacles that one may face when attempting to effectively communicate with another person. These barriers can be anything that can misrepresent and/or avert someone during the communication process. This process involves a sender, receiver, and message. A communication barrier is anything that comes in the way of receiving and understanding messages that one sends to another to convey his ideas, thoughts, or any other kind of information. These various barriers of communication block or interfere with the message that someone is trying to send. There are numerous barriers to effective communication that can come in the way. It happens because the message sent by the sender might not be understood exactly as it is meant to be. It can get distorted during the communication exchange. These different types of communication barriers can come at any stage in the process of communication.

Various categories and types of communication barriers have been outlined by writers who study communication. Rani (2016) describes five types of barriers to effective communication, namely attitude, behavior, culture, language, and environment. Attitudinal barrier is a common cause of major communication barriers in situations like the workplace is people with different attitudes, values, and discrimination. Among the visible conditions are the different perceptions that people have about power and status. Some people may think that they should treat people or be treated differently based on what they perceive to be their status or power in the workplace or in a community. As for the behavioral barrier, it is one of the negative characteristics of a person. For example, bias, generalization and stereotypes where they can cause and occur in communication barriers. Having this attitude and not facing it is not only wrong, but bad for an individual.

Cultural barriers affect a situation and cause problems in communication barriers. Communicating with people of different cultures and backgrounds means being aware of the differences in values, beliefs and attitudes held by people. This cultural barrier also occurs when a person has a different culture from another. Language barriers occur when people do not speak the same language, or do not have the same level of ability in a language. However, barriers can also occur when people speak the same language. Sometimes barriers occur when we use an inappropriate level of language, or we use jargon or slang that is not understood by one or more of the people we are communicating with. Often the situation in which the conversation takes place, and whether people have prior experience of the subject being discussed, can also contribute to those barriers being formed. Environment barriers can mean a disturbance that results from the environment. Not all communication barriers are caused by people. There are many environmental factors that influence the effective communication process. Messages can be blocked by environmental factors, such as the physical setting or situation in which communication can occur.

According to Effendy (2009), communication barriers are caused by these six barriers, like differences in perception, cultural differences, language, environment, character and conditions. Everyone has different abilities in terms of interpreting a message or expression. And the one who interprets someone's yell as assertiveness. But there are also people who interpret the yelling as an act of cruelty and violence. This difference in perception is the reason why the two parties are involved in conflict. Sometimes the same words are delivered to different people. Everyone can interpret a straight line as a flagpole, but others can interpret a straight line as an exclamation point. Even though they are both straight lines.

Cultural differences are also one of the obstacles in communication, especially if each party does not understand the language used. Cultural communication deals with communication and communication processes among people with diverse cultural backgrounds and people in different social groups. Cultural differences that manifest in communication refer to the variations observed between people engaging in a conversation due to differences in their values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors. Language is often a barrier to communication; this happens when the communicator and communicant use different languages. This kind of barrier occurs among the same language but with regional accents and dialects. Different regions or social classes often have distinct ways of pronouncing words that become obstacles during the communication.

Not all communication barriers are caused by humans as communication participants. There are several environmental factors that also influence the process of effective communication. Messages conveyed by communication can experience obstacles that are triggered by environmental factors, namely the physical background or the situation in which communication occurs. As for character barriers, there are four basic human characters, namely choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, and sanguine. The four of them have opposite characters. Choleric is a strong character who sometimes likes to offend. Melancholy is a gentle and sensitive character. Sanguines are easygoing characters, and phlegmatic is a character who likes to give in. The last barrier according to Effendy (2009) is the condition barrier. It is when communicating with interlocutors is also the cause of misunderstandings. It could be that when communication between two parties is taking place, the first party is in a bad condition. As a result, the unfavorable conditions affect the way to receive messages from the interlocutor so that misunderstandings occur.

Communication barriers occurred in various occasions and fields either among native speakers or non-native speakers. Communication barriers during the tour guiding process were differences in vocabulary, lack of international signalling skills, and English ability. The potential of accessible tourism, especially for deaf tourists, should be identified by the tourism industry and the creative economy (Umarella et al., 2022). In an energy project in Asia, several communication barriers were encountered due to cultural, linguistic, and organizational differences. Language barriers were prevalent, as the project involved stakeholders from multiple Asian countries with diverse language backgrounds. Additionally, cultural differences in communication styles and hierarchical structures posed challenges in establishing open and transparent communication channels. Misinterpretations of non-verbal cues and cultural norms further complicated communication dynamics, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts among team members. In an energy project in Africa, communication barriers stemmed from a combination of cultural, technological, and logistical challenges. Cultural differences in communication styles and norms, as well as language diversity among project stakeholders, contributed to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns (Gideon et al., 2024).

In Brunei Darussalam, communication barriers have affected the growth of the community-based tourism (CBT) industry on both local and national levels. This paper further discusses how bureaucracy can impede the success of CBT operations, and how a collaborative approach between stakeholders has inspired the formulation of a new Interactional Model of Leadership and Empowerment among CBT stakeholders, which

can be used to measure the efficacy of communication among stakeholders in the CBT industry (Chin et al, 2023).

Language and culturally competent care are the most common barriers to health care delivery. Language barrier was identified as the most common barrier. It has led to miscommunication and anxiety between patients and health care professionals. Research with 66 respondents (n = 47 patients and n = 19 health professionals) indicated that physicians and nurses were expected to speak more than one language due to limited interpreter availability. Other barriers affecting the patient's experience included unfamiliarity to the environment, culture difference, food, transportation, and employee behaviour. (Xu et al, 2020).

One of the biggest problems for the local sellers in communicating with the foreign tourists is their limited ability in English. There are only four respondents who have ability in English both in spoken and written. This case is caused by motivation and willingness in learning language, as well as many personality factors that influence success, such as anxiety, self-esteem, risk taking, and avoidance. Motivation is one of those personality factors. It deals with willingness and "open minded" learning. The interview explained that most respondents still have low motivation and willingness in learning the English language. The various educational backgrounds also give impacts on their ability in learning language. The respondents come from various education backgrounds. There are 2 two respondents who graduated from college degree, 17 respondents graduated from senior high school, 21 respondents graduated from junior high school, and 25 respondents graduated from elementary school (Apriyanti, 2018).

Fernandez-Díaz et al. (2023) confirmed the existence of barriers to communication and interaction that impede the rights of those with disabilities to travel with independence, equity, and dignity. These findings are consistent with Nitti (2018) and Buhalis et al. (2019). Digital accessibility presents a challenge within smart cities based on an assessment of their website support. These findings coincide with other tourism studies (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013; Aizpurua et al., 2015; Carneiro & Eusèbio, 2015, García-Santiago & Olvera-Lobo, 2021).

The popular problems in using English for tourism include an inability to use inappropriate words and expressions, inadequate vocabulary, and lack of grammar knowledge. It was found that tour agency delivery staff and package tour salespersons had a high problem of listening and speaking skills in English, whereas this problem showed moderate level for accommodation business receptionists and tour guides. Tourism personnel mostly faced with the listening to the different English accents from different countries, fast speaking, and low vocabulary acquisition, as well as limited vocabulary, grammar, and the correct accents of pronunciation were also the main reason for unconfident talking (Maleerat & Sakkarin, 2020; Nuemaihom et al., 2025). It points out that information and communication barriers are the major difficulties to be tackled, especially in a complicated situation involving different people and problems during prodromal and emergency phases (Chan et al, 2022).

Communication barriers between tour guides and foreign tourists are caused by cultural differences and customs as well as different perceptions, such as the fact that the language used by foreign tourists may not be familiar to tour guides, both in pronunciation, vocabulary, accent, dialect and grammar which are different so that it is difficult for tour guides to understand and differences in norms, values, and ethics between cultures. communication barriers or difficulties between tour guides and foreign

tourists, of course, requires good English language skills to communicate with foreign tourists or convey information on various tourism matters easily. For this reason, good skill and mastery of language are needed for tour guides. The use of English both actively and passively to be able to increase quality and effectiveness in promoting Gayo Lues tourism properly (Tariani et al, 2024). During intercultural communication, individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds express their cultural identity and perceptions, which surface through their interactions (Pan, 2024, & Alves et al., 2022). In such situations, communication barriers can emerge, stemming from disparities in behaviour or perception, as well as the activation of negative stereotypes. Interacting with other cultures alter a traveler's perceptions and contribute to their cultural and spiritual growth (Setiawan, 2023).

Cultural and communication barriers in international tourism mean constraints related to ecology, economics, religion, lifestyle, architecture, perception, local population, politics, and crime. Cultural and communication barriers in all these segments can cause great damage that can lead to a reduction in tourists' arrival, but also to the dissatisfaction of the local population. Cultural and communication barriers are present due to the cultural diversity tourists and the local population must accept. Only adequate management of the destination and socially responsible business can reduce the cultural and communication barriers (Matovic & Simic, 2018).

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method. Qualitative research is an exploration and understanding of a meaning attributed to an individual or a group about a humanitarian or social problem (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research aims to study the human process of explaining experiences, building lives, and interpreting the meaning of those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The research instrument is content analysis by analyzing the interview videos. Content analysis aims to systematically analyze data or documents through structured procedures to analyze the content of a communication. The focus is to measure the frequency and variety of messages to confirm the hypothesis (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher used video recordings of interviews conducted by the students with the Arab tourists as study samples of 20 videos. The research analysis instrument used is document analysis (Ary et al, 2010) based on the checklist made for identifying the communication barriers. The researcher observed each scene to identify communication barriers that happened between them, while document analysis was applied to analyze the situation that triggered the communication barriers. Based on the communication barriers stated by Rani (2016) and Effendy (2009), the researcher divided the communication barriers into four main categories; attitude barriers, cultural barriers, environmental barriers, and language barriers that were applied by the students in the videos.

The researcher also applies coding to categorize all the barriers occurred in the videos according to the specific theme mentioned in the previous paragraph. Based on the communication barriers checklist, the researcher identifies the barriers by analyzing and filling the checklist with peer debriefing or member checking among them. Debriefings are a discrete moment in the qualitative data collection process where researchers sit with a data collector (or data collection team) to discuss the resulting findings from a recently undertaken data collection activity (McMahon & Winch, 2018). The two researchers filled in the checklist separately and the results from them were the same for each video;

so, there is no further discussion needed on different results (barriers) from the checklist. The results collected are discussed in the next section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, the 20 videos recorded various issues that lead to communication barriers as follows:

Table 1. Type of Communication Barriers

Type of Barriers	Number	Percentage (%)
1. Cultural barrier	2	1.89
2. Environmental barrier	8	7.54
3. Attitude barrier	7	6.61
4. Language barrier	89	83.96
Total	106	100

The observation and analysis of 20 interview video recordings revealed several types of communication barriers experienced by students, as shown in the table. Among these, language barriers emerged as the most dominant challenge, with 89 instances recorded. This represents 83.96% of all identified barriers, indicating that difficulties in understanding or expressing language were the primary obstacles affecting students' communication during the interviews. The second most common issue was the environmental barrier, accounting for 8 cases or 7.54%. Attitude barriers were also noted in 7 cases, making up 6.61% of the total. Finally, cultural barriers were the least observed, with only 2 instances or 1.89%. Although minimal, these barriers highlight how differences in cultural background or unfamiliarity with certain social norms can still affect communication. In total, 106 barriers were identified, showing that students faced multiple obstacles, with language being the most critical issue that overshadowed other types of barriers. The four barriers are analyzed deeper as in the discussion section.

As pointed out from the findings in the results section, followings are the details that occurred between the students and the tourists.

1. Cultural barriers

As the cultural barriers also found in the videos, followings are the issues that occurred while conducting the interview:

Table 2. Issues Related to Cultural Barriers

Issues	Numbers	(%)
1. Avoid having conversation with stranger (the father referred the students as a stranger and interrupted the interview)	1	50
2. Do not allowed to have conversation with different genders (the father explained that he did not allow the male student to conduct the interview to his daughter)	1	50
Total	2	100

Consequently, due to identity concerns, especially the type of information that conflicts with public identity, people are reluctant to disclose identity-related information to strangers for the identity concern (Chen & Gal, 2023). People may avoid pleasant conversations with strangers because of mis calibrated concerns about starting them (Schroeder et al, 2022). Based on a video, there is a father who referred to the student as a stranger and interrupted the interview when he realized about the recording.

In the other video, there is a father who explained that he did not allow the male student to conduct the interview with his daughter. This matter is aligned with differences in beliefs about gender that may be defined as differences in beliefs about differences, concluding that gender ideologies are implicated both in linguistic processing and in social judgments of value between groups (Tripp & Munson, 2022).

2. Environmental barriers

Some students faced this type of barrier as follows:

Table 3. Issues Related to Environmental Barriers

Issues	Numbers	(%)
1. Non-suitable location for conducting an interview. (Malls, pedestrians (bus honk), airport)	4	50
2. Non suitable time for conducting an interview (mealtime)	2	25
3. Non-suitable weather for conducting an interview. (Sudden heavy rain and strong wind)	2	25
Total	8	100

Some students conducted the interview at the airport and bus station. Loud or distracting noises in the environment, such as flight announcements and buses calling for the passengers had disturbed the students because they did not hear what the tourists were saying, and the tourists had to repeat the answers again. There were disturbances also in the malls when other people's voices were captured in the videos because the interview was held in the middle of the mall, as well as the cleaning equipment's sounds were also recorded. Some other students conducted the interview near the street and transportations' sounds of transportation were interrupting them, such as cars' honking and loud motorcycle engines. As for the weather problem, some videos showed that the interviews were recorded in heavy rain and captured the lightning of thunder and made some of the students and tourists uncomfortable. One video showed that both student and tourist were holding their scarves due to the intense winds blowing and interfering with the sound quality when conducting the interview near to the bus station. These scenarios showed that certain noises, such as loud sounds, classroom bells, sirens, the radio or the TV, and traffic noise, may induce an uncomfortable and distracting environment that can interfere with effective communication by making it difficult to hear or concentrate on the message being conveyed (Caldas et al, 2023).

3. Attitude barriers

This type of barrier happened for both sides with different scenarios as follows:

Table 4. Issues Related to Attitude Barriers

Issues	Numbers	%
1. Students did not show confidence	5	71.42
2. Arab tourists feel annoyed and cut the interview	1	14.29
3. Arab tourist starts to lecture the students rather than continue the interview	1	14.29
Total	7	100

Based on the 20 videos, two students showed low self-esteem and could not deliver the interview well due to low confidence level. One of them even stuttered and spoke with an incredibly low voice (Kaur et al, 2023). Fortunately, the Arab tourist showed companionship and support to finish the interview. The Arab tourist applied positive attitude communication and tried to break the barrier by helping the student to overcome her shyness to complete the interview. Regardless of what the tourist did to smoothen the interview, the attitude barrier still occurs when the students face confidence issues (Nur Ilyia et al, 2024) while conducting the interview.

Some of the tourists hold a lower opinion or are not willing to make an effort to understand the students (Tan et al, 2021), then walk away from the interview session. One tourist changed the interview to a language class session by teaching the student about how to pronounce, speak, and rephrase the sentence while the student conducted the interview. These actions happen sometimes among the native speakers who feel superior and more intelligent while having conversations with non-native speakers who are having difficulties to deliver their speech and message; but it is individual behaviors that does not represent the whole tourists.

4. Language barriers

As the main barrier, the videos showed multiple evidence of language barrier happened for most of the students and tourists as follows:

Table 5. Issues Related to Language Barriers

Issues	Numbers	%
1. Arab tourists use their own dialect that is different from the standard Arabic.	23	25.84
2. Arab tourists did not understand students' pronunciation	25	28.29
3. Lack of Arabic vocabulary among the students	41	46.07
Total	89	100

Based on Table 5, the factor of using the local accent contributed to the language barrier for (24.14%). Letter sound changes in the accent of some Arab countries such as the letter Jim (ج) sounds Ga (ك), the letter Qaf (ق) becomes Ga (ك), the letter Qaf (ق) becomes Hamzah (ء), the letter Zho (ظ) becomes Dhad (ض), and the sound /a/ becomes /e/ (Abu Nuwas & Aṭawābiyya, 2018). This change in sound made it difficult for students to understand. As the third language among the students, they were only familiar with the standard Arabic sounds and faced difficulty understanding different sounds of Arabic dialects. This also involved some other vocabularies that are considered local words from different regions and countries (Wang & Talin, 2025). Students' pronunciation that Arab tourists did not understand recorded 25 times (28.74%) also led to questions not being clearly asked to the Arab tourists as this finding is supported by (Ruslan et al, 2022) that pointed out the Arabic articulation and the features of letters in pronunciation are the main factors. Wrong pronunciation is a frequent problem for non-native speakers (Fitria & Al-Farisi, 2023) and as the Arabic is considered as the third language among the students (Al-Sulaiman et al, 2014), the problem became worse when they conducted the interview with the Arab tourists as the native speakers.

Words rarely heard by students or lack of Arabic vocabulary (Ruslan et al, 2022; Uli & Cahyo, 2022) triggered the language barrier among students when interviewing Arab tourists recorded 41 times (47.12%). During the interview, some tourists used words that were uncommon among the students, such as *al-kharuf* (lamb) are rarely heard by students compared to *al-ghanam*, *al-dar* (house) compared to *al-bayt*, *nataghadda* (having meal) compared to *na'kul*, *al-ta'am* (meals) compared to *ma'kulat*, *sakhin* (hot) compared to *har*, *jawwal* (mobile) compared to *hatif*, and some other words. Some videos showed that the students did not understand simple and basic words due to lack of vocabulary. This issue has been discussed many times and it still becomes debated and studied issues among scholars due to low mastery among the students (Zulkepli et al, 2023; Rosni et al, 2023). The researcher noticed that the students had this language barrier because they repeated the words that were spoken

by the Arab tourist wrongly, as well as interview reports written by the students with many spelling errors.

Based on the analysis from Table 2 until Table 5, it is obvious that language barrier is the most common issue that makes the communication between the students and the tourists face challenge, as well as other issues that affected the communication during the interview.

CONCLUSIONS

Non-native speakers face challenges when they are communicating with native speakers. The UiTM students who take Degree in Arabic Communication also had to deal with communication barriers while conducting the task of interviewing the Arab tourists. Language barriers were the most challenging problem among the students with lack of vocabulary recorded the highest number for 38.68%, which equivalent to 41 times out of 106 other issues, while the least barrier recorded was the cultural barrier which a tourist avoided to have an interview with the student who he assumed as a stranger; and a father who forbid his daughter from being interviewed by a male student. As for enhancing the communication skills among students, efforts from lecturers and students need to be organized neatly to overcome communication problems among students (Wahidiyati et al., 2025; Ullah et al., 2021). Lecturers need to diversify activities in learning sessions to increase students' confidence in speaking Arabic. Colloquium subjects can also be introduced so that students can listen to various Arabic accents and not be bound by one standard accent. Students are advised to regularly watch Arabic videos to increase vocabulary and improve listening and speaking skills which are the basis for effective communication. Extended studies may be applied to overcome these barriers, especially regarding the language barriers that need further suitable communication strategies in order to smoothen the communication between non-native Arabic speakers and Arabic native speakers.

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