

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN NATURE TOURISM: SCHOLAR PERSPECTIVES ON TOUR GUIDE CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Cross-cultural communication is paramount in nature tourism, posing significant challenges for tour guides bridging diverse linguistic and cultural divides. This paper synthesizes scholarly perspectives and presents preliminary empirical findings from a survey of 11 English education scholars in a tourism course. Results revealed nuanced perceptions: while direct language barriers and misunderstandings showed divided views (18% agree/disagree), participant's strongly emphasized cultural sensitivity (100%) and the guide's facilitative role (91%). Concerns included personal discomfort (45%) and conflicts (36%) from cultural differences. However, respondents recognized technology's potential (81%) for enhancement and overwhelmingly advocated for mandatory cross-cultural communication training (81%) for guides. These findings highlight the critical need for structured educational initiatives and industry support to cultivate intercultural competence, ultimately improving tourist satisfaction and fostering respectful, sustainable interactions in nature tourism.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication; nature tourism; tour guides; communication challenges; cultural differences; sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning global tourism industry, particularly within nature-based destinations, thrives on direct human interaction and the exchange of experiences. However, effective communication in this dynamic field often presents significant and multifaceted challenges. A primary concern lies with language barriers, where the linguistic divide between international tourists and local residents, including service providers, can lead to pervasive misunderstandings and impede smooth interactions. This issue is compounded in popular tourist areas where local communities may not possess fluency in the diverse foreign languages spoken by visitors (Darmayanti et al., 2024).

Beyond linguistic hurdles, the inherent cross-cultural nature of tourism introduces another layer of complexity. Tourists from various global backgrounds bring distinct communication patterns, social norms, and ethical frameworks, which can diverge significantly from those of host communities (De Carlos et al., 2019). These cultural differences frequently manifest as misunderstandings, discomfort, or even unintentional offense, ultimately impacting the quality of the tourist experience and the warmth of local interactions. Furthermore, the advent of the digital era has introduced technological communication challenges. While tourists increasingly rely on smartphones, tablets, and travel applications for information and connectivity, many nature tourism destinations, particularly in remote or developing regions, grapple with limited or unreliable technology infrastructure (Leung, 2022). Issues such as patchy Wi-Fi, slow internet speeds, and restricted telecommunication services can hinder tourists' ability to access vital information, engage in online consultation with locals, or utilize digital guides and transaction platforms, thereby impeding the seamless dissemination of information about destinations and services.

Given these pervasive communication obstacles, the role of the tour guide emerges as critically important. Particularly within the context of facilitating transactional activities and showcasing products in an event area, a strong command of the English language becomes an

indispensable skill for these frontline professionals (Chanwanakul, 2021; Ho, 2020). As a universally recognized lingua franca, English proficiency enables tour guides to communicate effectively with a broad spectrum of international tourists, ascertain their needs, and convey comprehensive and relevant information about natural attractions and cultural nuances. Moreover, the ability to articulate engaging narratives in English about the history, ecology, and unique characteristics of a destination not only enhances the tourist experience but also significantly elevates the overall appeal of the tourism product. Strong English language skills further empower tour guides to provide superior service, offering clear directions, coordinating activities efficiently, and assisting tourists in resolving any issues encountered during their journey, thereby fostering trust and bolstering the destination's reputation.

Recognizing the pivotal role of tour guides' English language proficiency, strategic investment in training and education is imperative. Comprehensive English language education, specifically tailored to the tourism context, can substantially enhance their communication competencies. Governments and relevant tourism stakeholders have a crucial role to play in organizing supportive programs, such as free English language teaching initiatives or subsidies for specialized language courses, to ensure tour guides have accessible pathways for skill development (Hadawiyah et al., 2025). By strengthening and prioritizing tour guides' English language skills, the tourism sector can not only mitigate communication barriers but also significantly enrich the travel experience for tourists, contributing substantially to the sustainable growth and appeal of nature tourism destinations. This paper, therefore, aims to delve into scholar perspectives on the specific cross-cultural communication challenges faced by tour guides in nature tourism, providing a consolidated understanding of these issues and highlighting the critical need for enhanced communication competencies.

The existing literature broadly acknowledges the importance of communication in tourism and the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural differences. However, current scholarly attention often addresses these issues from a general tourism perspective or focuses predominantly on tourist-local interactions. While the critical role of English proficiency for tour guides is recognized, a concentrated, scholar-perspective synthesis specifically on the cross-cultural communication challenges faced by tour guides in nature tourism remains underexplored.

This study lies in its dedicated focus on tour guides as central figures navigating complex cross-cultural communication in the unique and sensitive context of nature tourism. By synthesizing diverse scholarly insights, we aim to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the specific challenges these guides encounter beyond generic communication issues. Furthermore, by connecting these challenges directly to the imperative of English language proficiency and its impact on tourist experience, destination appeal, and sustainability, this research offers a targeted academic contribution that bridges theoretical understanding with practical implications for guide training and policy. The empirical component, albeit a pilot with 11 participants, further grounds this synthesis in actual insights from the field, adding a practical dimension to the scholarly discussion. What is the key cross-cultural communication challenge faced by tour guides in nature tourism, as understood through scholarly perspectives and initial empirical insights?

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey-based approach to explore cross-cultural communication challenges faced by tour guides in nature tourism. This design was chosen to systematically gather perceptions and experiences from a defined group of participants through structured questions, allowing for the collection of measurable data relevant to the research question.

The participants in this study comprised 11 scholars of English education who were also joining a Tourism course. A convenience sampling method was utilized for participant recruitment, primarily due to the specialized nature of the target group and accessibility. These participants were selected based on their unique dual perspective, combining academic insights into English language

education with an understanding of the tourism context. The small sample size, while acknowledged, provides an initial empirical insight to complement the broader scholarly perspectives synthesized in this study.

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire comprising 13 items. This questionnaire was specifically developed to gather information regarding perceived communication difficulties, the frequency of specific challenges, and the strategies used to overcome them in a cross-cultural tourism context. The items primarily utilized a Likert scale format (e.g., a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") to capture the extent of participants' agreement or disagreement with statements related to various communication issues faced by tour guides. The online survey format facilitated efficient data collection from participants.

The data collected from the 13-item online questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Given the sample size of 11 participants, the primary focus of the analysis was on summarizing and describing the responses for each questionnaire item. This included calculating percentages and frequencies for all responses to illustrate the distribution and commonality of perceived challenges, frequencies of specific issues, and the reported use of strategies. The findings from this empirical component serve to offer preliminary insights that inform and contextualize the broader scholarly discussion on tour guide challenges.

Prior to data collection, ethical considerations were meticulously addressed. Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation through an informed consent statement. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, with measures taken to ensure that individual responses could not be traced back to specific participants. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the 13-item questionnaire administered to 11 English education scholars participating in a tourism course. The data collected addresses participants' perceptions of cross-cultural communication challenges encountered by tour guides in nature tourism, including their views on language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, conflict, discomfort, the importance of cultural sensitivity, the role of tour guides, participation in training, and the potential of technology. The descriptive statistics, primarily presented as percentages and supported by corresponding figures, offer insights into the varied experiences and strong consensus observed among the respondents regarding these critical aspects of intercultural interaction in tourism

Result

The findings concerning language barriers in nature tourism activities reveal a notable divergence in participant experiences.

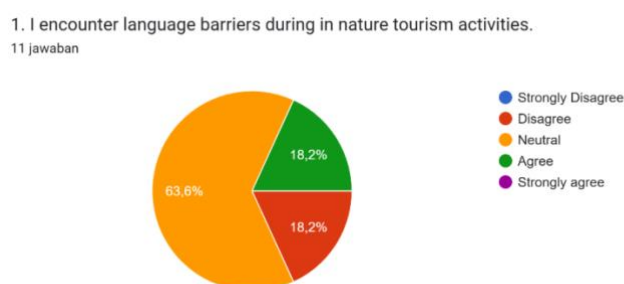


Figure1. Language barrier in nature tourism activities

As depicted in Figure 1, an identical proportion of the surveyed scholars (18%) indicated that they agreed with the presence of language barriers, while an equal 18% expressed disagreement. This symmetrical distribution suggests that the perception of language barriers is not uniform among the participants. Rather, it points towards a divided experience or differing interpretations of what constitutes a significant language barrier within the context of nature tourism activities. This balanced split warrants further qualitative exploration to understand the underlying reasons for such varied perceptions, potentially highlighting the specific contexts or types of interactions where these barriers are more, or less, prevalent for different individuals

Regarding experiences of misunderstanding due to cultural differences during nature tourism activities, participant responses were evenly split: 18% of the scholars agreed that they had encountered such issues, while an identical 18% disagreed (Figure 2). The remaining majority of participants likely held neutral or varying perspectives on this matter.

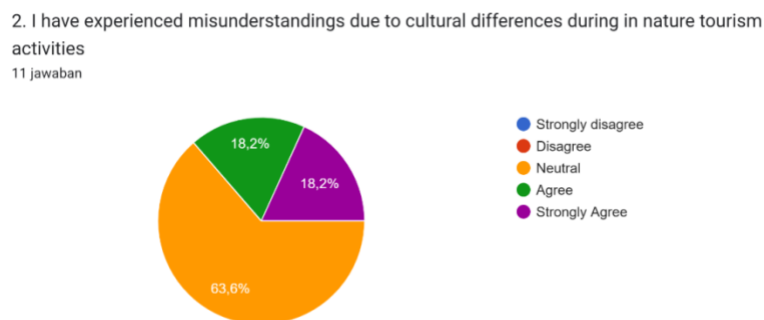


Figure 2. Experience of misunderstanding due to cultural differences

The survey results highlight a significant divergence in the perception of cultural misunderstandings among the scholars participating in the tourism course. With an equal proportion (18%) of respondents agreeing and disagreeing that they experienced such misunderstandings during nature tourism activities (Figure 2), it is clear that cultural friction is not universally felt or perceived as a consistent challenge across all interactions. This even split, coupled with a larger group expressing neutral or mixed opinions, suggests that while cultural differences can indeed lead to communication breakdowns, their impact might be highly contextual, dependent on specific cultural pairings, the sensitivity of individuals involved, or the nature of the activities themselves. Unlike a clear consensus on either side, this finding points to the complex or nuanced reality of cross-cultural communication, where factors beyond mere presence of different cultures influence the likelihood and severity of misunderstandings. Further qualitative exploration could illuminate the specific scenarios and cultural dynamics that contribute to, or mitigate, these challenges.

A striking consensus emerged among participants regarding the significance of cultural sensitivity for effective communication between tour guides and international tourists; all respondents (100%) affirmed its importance (Figure 3).

3. I believe that cultural sensitivity is important for effective communication between tour guides and international tourists in nature tourism
11 jawaban

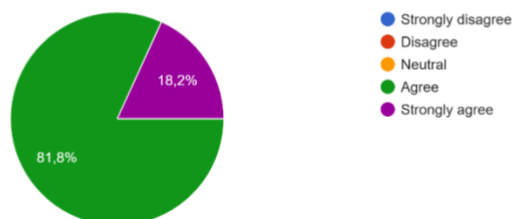


Figure 3. The importance of cultural sensitivity in communication between tour guides and international tourists

In stark contrast to the divided perceptions on direct language barriers and cultural misunderstandings, a unanimous agreement was observed among the surveyed scholars concerning the paramount importance of cultural sensitivity for effective communication in nature tourism (Figure 3). This universal consensus underscores that regardless of whether participants personally experienced specific communication breakdowns, they profoundly recognize that an awareness of, and responsiveness to, cultural nuances is foundational for fostering positive interactions. This finding aligns strongly with existing scholarly discourse that emphasizes cultural competence as a cornerstone of successful cross-cultural engagement in tourism. It suggests that while overt communication failures might be situational, the underlying principle of cultural sensitivity is considered a non-negotiable prerequisite for tour guides aiming to build rapport, convey information accurately, and ensure an enriching and respectful experience for international visitors. This collective belief highlights a critical area for training and professional development; ensuring tour guides are equipped not just with linguistic skills, but also with the empathetic and adaptive approaches necessary for diverse global interactions.

A substantial majority of participants, specifically 91%, affirmed their understanding of the tour guide's pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural communication during nature tourism activities (Figure 4).

4. I understand the role of the tour guide is to facilitate cross-cultural communication during nature tourism activities?
11 jawaban

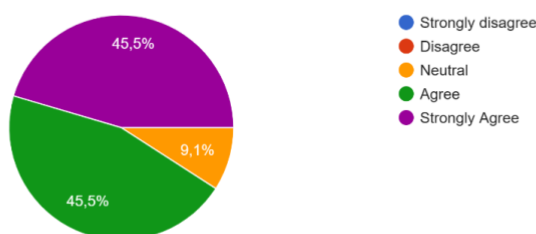


Figure 4. The role of tour guide to facilitate cross culture communication

Consistent with the high value placed on cultural sensitivity, the survey results also revealed a strong consensus among the scholars regarding their understanding of the tour guide's instrumental role in facilitating cross-cultural communication within nature tourism contexts (Figure 4). The overwhelming agreement from 91% of respondents indicates a clear recognition of

tour guides as crucial intermediaries responsible for bridging linguistic and cultural divides between tourists and local environments or communities. This finding reinforces the broader academic discourse that positions tour guides not merely as providers of information, but as cultural brokers and facilitators of meaningful interactions. It suggests that while specific communication challenges (like direct language barriers or misunderstandings) might be perceived inconsistently, the function of the tour guide in proactively managing and mediating these cross-cultural exchanges is widely acknowledged as essential for a successful and harmonious tourism experience. This collective understanding sets a foundation for exploring how this recognized role translates into practical skills and training needs for guides.

Regarding engagement in professional development, 36% of participants reported having participated in cross-cultural communication training or workshops specifically related to nature tourism, while 27% indicated they had not (Figure 5). The remaining participants did not provide a definitive 'yes' or 'no' response, suggesting a varied landscape of training engagement.

5. I have participated in cross-cultural communication training or workshops related to nature tourism
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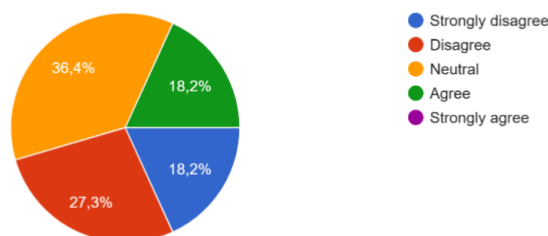


Figure.5 Participation in cross culture communication training or workshop related to nature tourism

A significant majority of participants (81%) expressed belief that technology, including digital cultural guides and online resources, holds the potential to substantially enhance cross-cultural communication within nature tourism (Figure 6).

6. I believe that technology, such as cultural guides and online resources, can enhance cross-cultural communication in nature tourism
11 jawaban

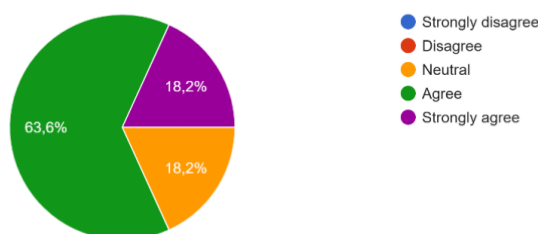


Figure.6 Technology in cultural guides and online resources can enhance cross culture communication in nature tourism

Despite the acknowledgment of existing technological infrastructure challenges, the survey revealed a strong positive outlook among respondents regarding the potential of technology to foster improved cross-cultural communication in nature tourism. An overwhelming 81% of participants believed that tools such as digital cultural guides and various online resources could

actively enhance communicative interactions (Figure 6). This finding suggests that while practical limitations may exist, there is a clear recognition of technology's promise as a facilitator, rather than solely a barrier, in bridging communicative gaps. This aligns with broader trends in tourism development, where digital tools are increasingly integrated to provide accessible information and interactive experiences. The collective perception highlights an opportunity for innovation, where investment in and strategic deployment of appropriate technologies could empower both tourists and tour guides, ultimately enriching the cross-cultural exchange and addressing some of the communication challenges outlined earlier.

A majority of respondents, specifically 54%, perceived that cultural differences significantly impact the overall tourist experience within nature tourism (Figure 7).

7. I perceive the impact of cultural differences on the overall tourist experience in nature tourism
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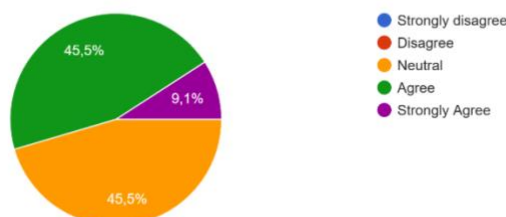


Figure.7 Impact of cultural differences on overall tourist experience in nature tourism

The survey further explored the broader implications of cultural differences, revealing that a notable majority (54%) of respondents perceived their impact on the overall tourist experience in nature tourism (Figure 7). This finding is particularly insightful when contrasted with the earlier result where only 18% of participants directly reported experiencing misunderstandings due to cultural differences (Figure 2). This disparity suggests that while overt, direct misunderstandings may not be a universal personal experience, there is a widespread recognition that the mere presence of diverse cultural backgrounds inherently shapes and influences the totality of a tourist's journey. It implies that beyond explicit communication breakdowns, subtle cultural nuances, expectations, and behaviours contribute to the richness, or sometimes the challenge, of the overall experience. This perception underscores the complex interplay between cultural elements and tourist satisfaction, reinforcing the critical role of culturally sensitive facilitation by tour guides, as unanimously agreed upon by participants (Figure 3), to ensure a positive and enriching experience for all visitors.

A notable portion of participants (36%) reported having experienced situations where cultural differences culminated in conflict or misunderstanding during nature tourism activities, while 27% indicated they had not encountered such situations (Figure 8). The remaining respondents held varying or neutral positions.

8. I have experienced a situation where cultural differences led to conflict or misunderstanding during nature tourism activities
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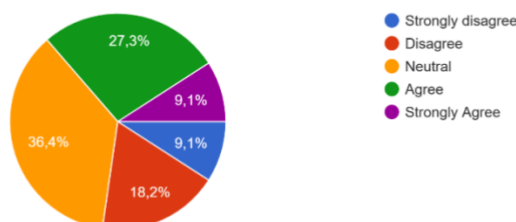


Figure.8 Experience a situation of cultural differences led to conflict during nature tourism activity

Delving deeper into the impact of cultural dynamics, the survey revealed that a significant 36% of participants had direct experience with situations where cultural differences led to outright conflict or misunderstanding during nature tourism activities (Figure 8). This finding is particularly salient given the earlier result where only 18% had reported general misunderstandings (Figure 2), suggesting that when difficulties escalate to perceptible conflict, they become more widely recognized. Conversely, 27% of respondents indicated no such experiences, further highlighting the varied nature of these encounters. The presence of a substantial proportion of participants reporting actual conflict underscores the tangible risks posed by unaddressed cultural disparities, reinforcing the critical need for effective cross-cultural communication strategies. Despite the unanimous recognition of cultural sensitivity's importance (Figure 3), the occurrence of such conflicts demonstrates that theoretical understanding must be consistently translated into practical skills for tour guides to navigate the complexities of diverse tourist groups and ensure harmonious interactions in sensitive nature environments.

Figure 9 illustrates that a substantial majority of participants (63%) believe that companies within the travel and tourism industry hold the capacity to significantly improve cross-cultural communication between tour guides and international tourists, while only 9% disagreed with this notion

9. I believe that companies in the travel and tourism industry can improve cross-cultural communication between tour guides and international tourists
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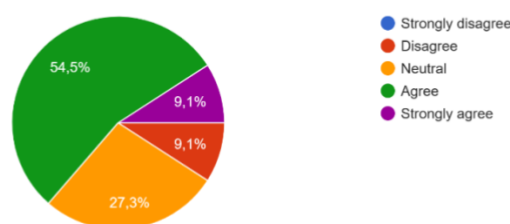


Figure.9 Beliefs those companies in travel and tourism industry can improve cross-cultural communication between guides and international tourists

Beyond individual skills and technological tools, the survey also explored perceptions regarding organizational responsibility, revealing that a notable 63% of participants believe companies in the travel and tourism industry have a crucial role in improving cross-cultural communication between guides and international tourists (Figure 9). The relatively low percentage (9%) of respondents who disagreed further strengthens this view, highlighting a widespread expectation that industry stakeholders should be proactive in fostering better communication environments. This finding resonates strongly with the earlier discussion on the importance of training (Figure 5), suggesting that companies are perceived as key enablers for providing such development opportunities. It underscores that improving cross-cultural communication is not solely an individual tour guide's responsibility but requires systemic support, investment in training programs, and the implementation of best practices at an organizational level. This collective belief indicates a clear pathway for actionable strategies within the industry to address the multifaceted communication challenges identified throughout this study, thereby enhancing both guide performance and tourist satisfaction.

A substantial proportion of respondents, 45%, reported having personally felt uncomfortable or offended due to cultural differences encountered during nature tourism activities, while 18% indicated they had not experienced such feelings (Figure 10).

10. I felt uncomfortable or offended due to cultural differences during nature tourism activities

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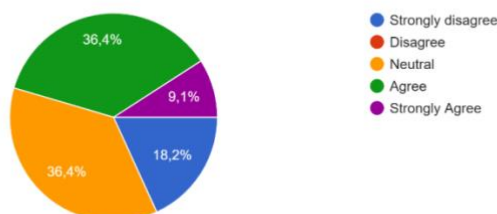


Figure.10 Comfort due to cultural differences during nature tourism activities

Delving into the personal impact of cultural dynamics, the survey revealed a significant finding: 45% of participants reported feeling uncomfortable or offended due to cultural differences during nature tourism activities (Figure 10). This indicates that cultural disparities are not merely abstract challenges but frequently translate into tangible negative emotional experiences for individuals involved. This finding is particularly striking when juxtaposed with earlier results, such as the 18% who experienced general misunderstandings (Figure 2) or the 36% who noted conflicts (Figure 8). The higher percentage here suggests that even in situations not escalating to overt conflict, cultural differences can subtly, yet significantly, affect personal comfort levels and satisfaction. This underscores the critical need for a high degree of cultural sensitivity, a trait unanimously deemed important by participants (Figure 3), to prevent such discomfort. The frequency of these negative personal experiences highlights the profound impact of cross-cultural communication challenges on the quality of interaction and overall enjoyment within sensitive nature tourism environments, emphasizing the human element at the core of these communication issues.

An overwhelming majority of respondents, 90%, expressed the strong belief that tour guides should receive specific training to effectively handle cross-cultural communication challenges within nature tourism (Figure 11).

11. I believe that tour guides should be trained to handle cross-cultural communication challenges

in nature tourism

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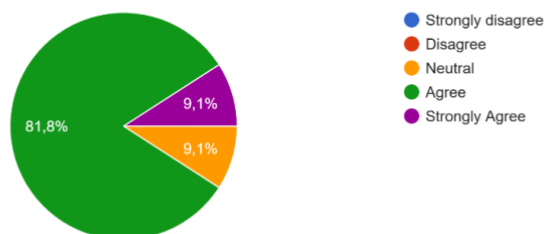


Figure.11 Beliefs that tour guides should be trained to handle cross-cultural communication challenges in nature tourism

This study concludes with a resounding consensus on the practical steps forward: a remarkable 90% of participants believe that tour guides should be formally trained to manage cross-cultural communication challenges in nature tourism (Figure 11). This overwhelming agreement serves as a powerful endorsement of structured professional development as a crucial intervention. It directly reinforces earlier findings regarding the recognized importance of cultural sensitivity (Figure 3) and the tour guide's pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural interactions (Figure 4). When viewed alongside the varied levels of past training participation (Figure 5) and the reported instances of discomfort or conflict (Figure 10), this near-unanimous call for training underscores a clear, actionable pathway for the tourism industry. It highlights that while challenges exist, there is a strong collective conviction that these can be effectively mitigated through targeted educational initiatives, equipping tour guides with the essential skills to transform potential barriers into opportunities for enriching and harmonious cross-cultural experiences in nature tourism.

Figure 12 indicates that 45% of respondents have personally experienced situations requiring them to adjust their communication style to accommodate cultural differences during nature tourism activities, while 18% reported no such experiences.

12. I have experienced situations where you have to adjust your communication style to accommodate cultural differences during nature tourism activities
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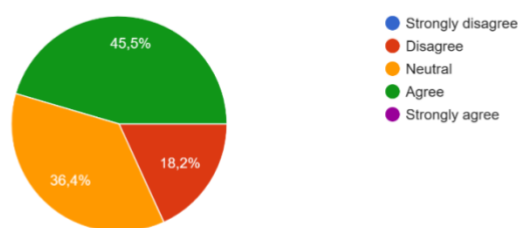


Figure.12 Experience situations of adjusting communication style to accommodate cultural differences during nature tourism activities

Finally, the survey sheds light on the practical adaptability of individuals within cross-cultural tourism contexts: a significant 45% of respondents reported having directly engaged in adjusting their communication style to accommodate cultural differences during nature tourism activities (Figure 12). This finding is crucial as it moves beyond the perception of challenges to actual behavioural responses. It demonstrates that despite varied direct experiences with language barriers or overt conflicts, nearly half of the participants actively employ adaptive communication strategies. This proactive approach aligns seamlessly with the unanimous recognition of cultural sensitivity's importance (Figure 3) and the strong belief in the tour guide's facilitative role (Figure 4). The observed willingness and experience in adjusting communication styles underscore an existing capacity for intercultural competence, which, when coupled with the overwhelming call for dedicated training (Figure 11), suggests a fertile ground for enhancing guides' practical skills. This adaptability is vital for navigating the nuances of international tourist interactions and ultimately enriching the overall experience in nature tourism.

An overwhelming 81% of respondents strongly advocated that cross-cultural communication training should be made mandatory for tour guides across the travel and tourism industry (Figure 13).

13. I believe that cross-cultural communication training should be mandatory for tour guides in the travel and tourism industry
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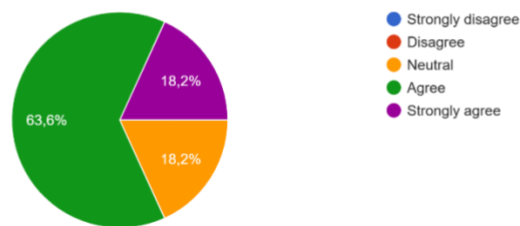


Figure.13 Beliefs that cross-cultural communication training should be mandatory for tour guides in travel and tourism

The final empirical finding provides a conclusive and emphatic call to action: a substantial 81% of respondents believe that cross-cultural communication training should be mandatory for tour guides in the travel and tourism sector (Figure 13). This strong endorsement for mandatory training goes beyond merely acknowledging its importance (as seen in Figure 11's 90% agreement on "should be trained") and directly addresses policy implications. This collective conviction underscores that given the persistent challenges of language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and potential conflicts, voluntary participation in training (Figure 5) is insufficient to guarantee effective communication across the industry. This firm recommendation directly implicates tourism companies (Figure 9), suggesting that their recognized capacity to improve communication should be channelled into structured, non-optional professional development. This highlights a critical pathway for the industry to systematically enhance the intercultural competence of its tour guides, thereby proactively mitigating risks, improving tourist experiences, and fostering more harmonious interactions in nature tourism settings.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the key cross-cultural communication challenges faced by tour guides in nature tourism, integrating scholarly perspectives with initial empirical insights gathered from scholars of English education participating in a tourism course. The findings from the 13-item questionnaire offer a nuanced understanding of how communication difficulties, cultural dynamics, and technological potentials are perceived within this unique context.

Perceptions of Communication Barriers and Cultural Impacts

The empirical data revealed a notable divergence in the direct experience of language barriers and cultural misunderstandings among participants. For both issues, an equal proportion of respondents (18% for language barriers, Figure 1; 18% for cultural misunderstandings, Figure 2) either agreed or disagreed that they encountered these challenges, with a significant majority likely holding neutral or mixed views. This parity suggests that while these challenges are undoubtedly present in nature tourism, their impact may be highly contextual, varying based on specific destinations, the nature of interactions, or individual guide proficiency. This aligns with a broader understanding that cross-cultural communication is complex and subjective (De Carlos et al., 2019), and that perceived difficulties might not be universal across all encounters (Darmayanti et al., 2024). This complexity contrasts with the general acknowledgement of language as a main problem in tourism communication, as highlighted in the introduction. Furthermore, the survey found that a notable 36% of participants had direct experience with situations where cultural differences led to

outright conflict or misunderstanding (Figure 8), indicating that when difficulties escalate, they become more widely recognized, while 27% reported no such experiences. Delving into the personal impact, a significant 45% of respondents also reported feeling uncomfortable or offended due to cultural differences (Figure 10), underscoring that these disparities can translate into tangible negative emotional experiences, even when not leading to overt conflict.

The Role of Cultural Competence and Tour Guides

In stark contrast to these divided perceptions, a striking consensus emerged regarding the importance of cultural sensitivity. All respondents (100%) unanimously affirmed that cultural sensitivity is crucial for effective communication between tour guides and international tourists (Figure 3). This strong agreement underscores that despite varying direct experiences with specific communication breakdowns, there is a profound recognition among these scholars that an awareness of cultural nuances is fundamental for positive interactions. This consensus supports the academic view that cultural competence is a cornerstone of successful intercultural engagement in tourism (Kovalenko et al., 2021; Mirzayeva, 2025).

Similarly, a substantial majority of participants (91%) also affirmed their understanding of the tour guide's pivotal role in facilitating cross-cultural communication during nature tourism activities (Figure 4). This reinforces the notion of tour guides as crucial cultural brokers, a role that goes beyond mere information dissemination, emphasizing their active part in bridging divides. The shared belief in the importance of cultural sensitivity and the tour guide's role collectively points towards a strong theoretical understanding of effective communication, even if direct experiences of specific barriers are not universally shared. Moreover, the study shed light on practical adaptability, with 45% of respondents reporting direct experience in adjusting their communication style to accommodate cultural differences (Figure 12), showcasing proactive intercultural competence.

Training Needs and Industry Responsibility

The findings on training participation highlight a potential gap between perceived importance and practical implementation. While 36% of participants reported having engaged in cross-cultural communication training or workshops related to nature tourism, a notable 27% indicated they had not (Figure 5). A significant proportion of respondents also did not provide a definitive 'yes' or 'no' response. This indicates that formal, specialized training in cross-cultural communication, while crucial for enhancing guides' skills (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022), may not be consistently widespread among this cohort. Given the participants' background as scholars of English education, their insights into pedagogical approaches, such as integrating popular culture into communication training (Wijirahayu et al., 2024), become particularly valuable for designing effective programs. This underscores an opportunity for increased investment in targeted educational programs and accessible workshops to equip tour guides with the necessary competencies to navigate diverse interactions effectively (Hadawiyah et al., 2025).

The introduction emphasized the need for strengthening English language skills (Chanwanakul, S., 2021; Ho, Y. Y. C., 2020) and this finding suggests formal training is a key pathway to achieve that, moving beyond mere linguistic proficiency to broader communicative competence. This aligns with the overwhelming 90% of participants who believed that tour guides should be formally trained to handle cross-cultural communication challenges (Figure 11), and a significant 81% who advocated for such training to be mandatory (Figure 13). Furthermore, a notable 63% of participants believe that companies in the travel and tourism industry have a crucial role in improving cross-cultural communication between guides and international tourists (Figure 9), with only 9% disagreeing, highlighting a widespread expectation for systemic support from stakeholders.

The Role of Technology and Overall Experience

Finally, the study identified a strong positive outlook on technology's potential to enhance cross-cultural communication. An overwhelming 81% of participants believed that digital tools, such as cultural guides and online resources, could substantially improve communicative interactions in nature tourism (Figure 6). This perception suggests that while practical limitations may exist, there is a clear recognition of technology's promise as a facilitator, rather than solely a barrier, in bridging communicative gaps. This aligns with broader trends in tourism development, where digital innovations are increasingly seen as vital for accessible information and enriched experiences (Leung, 2022), including the promotion of cultural tourism (Mele et al., 2021). This strong positive outlook identifies a strategic area for development, where investing in and deploying appropriate technologies could empower both tourists and tour guides, thereby mitigating some communication challenges and enriching the cross-cultural exchange. Furthermore, a majority (54%) of respondents perceived the impact of cultural differences on the overall tourist experience (Figure 7), highlighting that while overt misunderstandings may vary, the broader cultural context inherently influences the tourist journey.

Limitations and Future Research

This study's findings, while insightful, should be interpreted within its limitations. The small sample size of 11 participants, who are scholars of English education in a tourism course rather than active, full-time tour guides, means the empirical results provide initial insights rather than generalizable conclusions. Their academic background may influence their perceptions and understanding of challenges and solutions differently from practicing tour guides. Future research would significantly benefit from a larger and more diverse sample of active tour guides from various nature tourism destinations, employing mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or ethnographic observations. This would allow for a deeper exploration of the nuanced experiences, specific challenges in different cultural contexts (Nomnian et al., 2020), and the effectiveness of various communication strategies and technological tools from the perspective of those directly on the ground.

CONCLUSION

This study embarked on an exploration of the cross-cultural communication challenges encountered by tour guides in nature tourism, drawing insights from scholarly perspectives complemented by preliminary empirical data from English education scholars engaged in tourism studies. The findings illuminate a multifaceted landscape of communication dynamics, reinforcing the critical importance of effective intercultural interaction in enhancing the tourist experience.

The research indicates that while specific instances of direct language barriers and cultural misunderstandings may be perceived inconsistently among respondents, the broader impact of cultural differences on the overall tourist experience, including discomfort and potential conflict, is tangibly recognized. Crucially, there is a resounding consensus on the paramount importance of cultural sensitivity and a clear understanding of the tour guide's pivotal role as a facilitator and cultural broker in mitigating these challenges. Furthermore, the study highlights a strong belief in technology's potential to enhance cross-cultural communication, suggesting avenues for innovative solutions.

A significant implication of this research lies in the overwhelming call for dedicated training. Despite varying levels of past participation in cross-cultural communication training, a near-unanimous conviction emerged that tour guides should be formally trained, with a substantial majority advocating for such training to be mandatory. This underscores a clear demand for structured pedagogical competencies, emphasizing that while individual adaptability exists, systemic support from the travel and tourism industry is crucial for comprehensive skill development. By prioritizing such training, the industry can proactively address communication

gaps, elevate service quality, and ultimately foster more harmonious and enriching interactions between international tourists and local communities in nature tourism settings.

In conclusion, effective cross-cultural communication is not merely an auxiliary skill but a foundational pillar for sustainable growth and enhanced satisfaction in nature tourism. Investing in the intercultural competence of tour guides through systematic, and potentially mandatory, training programs, coupled with strategic leverage of technology, will be instrumental in transforming potential challenges into opportunities for deeply enriching and respectful global exchanges. This study's insights call for concerted efforts from educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to ensure that tour guides are adequately equipped to navigate the complexities of our increasingly interconnected world.

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