

# The Influence of Culture on Communication among Groups of the Hearing Impaired Persons in Malaysia and Tunarunggu Indonesian and Sign Language Learning Problems

Ruzimi Mohamed <sup>a,\*</sup>, Othman Ibrahim <sup>a</sup>, Mehrbakhsh Nilashi <sup>a</sup>  
<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Computing, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia

\* Corresponding author email address: [imi\\_special@yahoo.com](mailto:imi_special@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

Culture plays an important role in the formation of a community. The influence of culture not only influence way of life but also has an impact on their communication. Development and communication of hearing impaired persons in Malaysia and Tunarunggu Indonesia are also influenced by their local culture and education system. The only difference between the sign language of hearing impaired persons in Malaysia and Indonesia is the sign language itself where both countries have differences in terms of speech and words used. To study the influence of lifestyle and education culture towards hearing impaired persons in Malaysia and Tunarunggu Indonesia, one qualitative descriptive survey and interview had been implemented in Bandung, Indonesia which involved 10 hearing impaired persons from Malaysia and 15 Tunarunggu Indonesia in collaboration with Lembaga Pemberdayaan Penyandang Cacat Indonesia (LPPI) and Orang Pekak Johor (SDJO). The result showed that the culture of education system, family, friends and learning medium influence their communication with minimum score of 5.48 (education), 1.48 (family and friends) and 1.44 (learning medium). This made their minimum score for low hanging out in society quiet high that is 1.32. This study will explore more about the influence of culture and learning sign language problems in both countries.

Keywords: People with disability (PWD), Malaysia PWD, Indonesia PWD, Communication problem among deaf, Culture influence towards communication of deaf

## 1. Introduction

According to Malaysia Welfare Department (2008), definition of PWD is a person who is unable to determine for themselves to acquire the whole or part of the ordinary needs of a person and cannot live in a society entirely due to a lack of physical or mental and whether it occurs at birth or later than that. They used to be called handicap people but later on the term change to PWD (Azlinariah. A, 2007). Hearing impaired persons can be divided into three categories, has minimum level of hearing (20-<30 db), medium level (30-<60 db) and the severe level (60-90 db).

Statistic of the hearing impaired persons in Malaysia is about 15% from the total of PWD, estimated about 68,000. This figure is considered less compared to total of PWD in Indonesia. In Indonesia this group is called Tunarunggu and its population is about 6,000,000. They scatter widely throughout Indonesia because of national geographic factors and this makes them have diversity of culture. This makes them have different cultures and ways of communication

Slightly different in Malaysia, hearing impaired persons in Malaysia facing fewer problems in term of culture and communication compared to Tunarunggu Indonesia.

However, through research and interview with their society, it showed that culture still affects communication for both countries. In this research, the similarities and differences in learning problems of BIM and BISINDO are also discussed.

## 2. The previous research

According to Haziah S. and Mujibu, the significant communication gap, all these years, have made them marginalized and have difficulties in receiving information. Draft of Proposed Law Act PWD 2008 has been presented in parliament but this group still facing problems in getting information. Education System in daily normal school is not suitable for PWD and as a result special school has been built for them. However, due to unsuitable syllabus together with different sign language that they have learned earlier, majority of them fail the examination.

Almost the same situation happens in education system in Indonesia where their focus is on getting comparable performance with normal students. Their education system is 30 -40 years lag behind compared to America, Sweden and Japan because of their misunderstanding the condition of Tunarunggu (Galuh Sukmara). If their basic education is

limited, then of course communication for this group is totally different from normal people. Research has proven that education system that does not suits their needs, in both countries, cause differences in their level of communication.

To sum up, that differences in education system create changes to sign language learning culture of PWD simultaneously drag along their level of communication. A study should be made to determine the extent of the influence of culture on communication. Benefit from this further study, can provide backup solutions to the communication and learning sign language problems in Malaysia and Indonesia.

**3. Research methodology**

There were a few methodologies that had been used like observation, literature review, questionnaires and interview. Cooperation with PWD in Malaysia and Tunarunggu Indonesia had been implemented to study the influence of culture in communication and problems in learning sign language. In cooperation with SDJO and LPPI, one questionnaire had been done. An interview with Mr Indra, a representative from Tunarunggu in Jawa Barat Indonesia, also had been carried out successfully.

Instrument that had been used for 25 PWDs was in the form of survey where 15 special Tunarunggu were selected by their society. Even though only 15 Tunarunggu involved in this research, but they came from big district, Jawa Barat and Bandung Barat. Interview had been done with Mr Indra representative for Indonesia government for cases related to Tunarunggu.

Among of the questions used in this questions and answers were their level of education, communication factors among family and friends, current learning medium and learning problems' factors of BIM and BISINDO. Impaired hearing persons from Malaysia answered on behalf of BIM and Tunarunggu for BISINDO. All the eight questions asked related to influence of culture towards communication and sign language learning problems. Results from the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS software. The questions asked ere rational and functional, focused on problem in learning sign language.

**4. Research methodology**

This questionnaire had been taken place in fast food outlet, Mc Donald in Bandung Barat, Indonesia. Selection for the place was based on suitability and familiarity of the place. It is a regular place where Tunarunggu go to have large gathering. This place is suitable to do discussion, questioning and answering, interview and socialize with others.

**5. Culture influence towards communication**

In this section, discussion is focused on level of education, social interaction, learning of sign language and problems in mastering sign language.

*5.1 Education and Social Level*

Questions in this research will focus on education and social level, level of education received by hearing impaired persons in Malaysia and Indonesia. This section is done to see whether they could socialize better with their family members and friends and weather education factor influence their social life.

Table 1, 2 and 3 below show their country, age and sex meanwhile Table 4 and 5 show social interaction with questions related to level of education and social.

**Table 1**

Origin country of the respondent.

Origin country of respondent					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Malaysia	10	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Indonesia	15	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2**

Age of the respondent.

Age of respondent						
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	17	1	4.0	4.0	4.0	
	18	1	4.0	4.0	8.0	
	21	1	4.0	4.0	12.0	
	25	1	4.0	4.0	16.0	
	26	1	4.0	4.0	20.0	
	27	2	8.0	8.0	28.0	
	28	2	8.0	8.0	36.0	
	29	2	8.0	8.0	44.0	
	30	1	4.0	4.0	48.0	
	31	1	4.0	4.0	52.0	
	32	1	4.0	4.0	56.0	
	34	2	8.0	8.0	64.0	
	37	1	4.0	4.0	68.0	
	38	1	4.0	4.0	72.0	
	42	1	4.0	4.0	76.0	
	45	3	12.0	12.0	88.0	
	47	1	4.0	4.0	92.0	
	50	2	8.0	8.0	100.0	
	Total		25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3**

Sex of the respondent

Sex of respondent					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Men	17	68.0	68.0	68.0
	Women	8	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4**  
Education level of the respondent

		Education level of respondent			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	PMR	1	4.0	4.0	4.0
	SPM	4	16.0	16.0	20.0
	Certificate	4	16.0	16.0	36.0
	Diploma	1	4.0	4.0	40.0
	SD	6	24.0	24.0	64.0
	SMP	6	24.0	24.0	88.0
	SMA	3	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

For respondents' level of education, there are a few differences between education system in Malaysia and Indonesia. In Malaysia, we differentiate school based on level; we have primary, secondary and university level. This is almost the same as Indonesia but examination system is different. In Malaysia, we have UPSR, PMR (PT3), SPM, STPM, certificates and diploma meanwhile in Indonesia; they have Sekolah Dasar, Sek. Men Pertama, Sekolah Menengah Atas, Degree and Master.

In this research, all hearing impaired persons in Malaysia have at least PMR certificate and only one has Diploma. In Indonesia, their hearing impaired persons finished secondary school but none of them have certificates from universities. Majority of them only received primary education.

Table 5 and Table 6 shows their social level whether they have normal friend and communicate with their family and friends either normal or PWD.

**Table 5**  
Social level of the respondent

		Have many normal friends			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	21	84.0	84.0	84.0
	No	4	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6**  
Communication status with normal people

		Communicate with normal family and friends			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	13	52.0	52.0	52.0
	No	12	48.0	48.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 7**  
Social rate based on communication problem

		Less social because of communication problem			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	17	68.0	68.0	68.0
	No	8	32.0	32.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 8**  
Statistic of social rate among respondent with normal people

		Statistics		
		Have many normal friends	Communicate with normal family and friends	Less social because of communication problem
N	Valid	25	25	25
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		1.1600	1.4800	1.3200
Median		1.0000	1.0000	1.0000
Std. Deviation		.37417	.50990	.47610

From Table 6, almost half of them do not communicate with their family members. From Table 7, 32% of them said that their communication are limited making them not interested to socialize. Summary of both Tables could be seen in Table 8:

- i. Hearing impaired people have lots of normal friends
- ii. Even though they have normal friends but nearly half of them do not mix and communicate better (with min score of 1.48)
- iii. Unknown the real factor why they are not interested in communicating with normal people even their minimum score is high. (1.32). One third of them (32%) admit that they do not socialize with normal people because of their communication limitations.

Based on all the Tables above, we could conclude that one of the factors for impaired hearing person less communicates with normal people is education. They have lots of normal friends but 32% of them could not communicate well. Difficulty in expressing themselves make them feel shy and afraid to socialize and communicate with normal people.

In the next chapter, we are going to discuss how sign language is learned.

*5.2 Way of BIM and BISINDO is learned*

In this section, questions were asked how sign language was learned by impaired hearing persons. In Malaysia it is called BIM and in Indonesia BISINDO. Even though BISINDO is the formal sign language in Indonesia yet there are hundreds other sign languages used because of geography factor.

Table 9 below shows time taken for them to master the sign language meanwhile in Table 10 shows the medium used, besides teacher, as references.

**Table 9**  
Time taken to learn sign language

		Time taken for skilled BIM/BISINDO			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Three to six month	7	28.0	28.0	28.0
	Six month to one year	1	4.0	4.0	32.0
	More than a year	17	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 10**  
Alternative learning medium.

Alternative learning medium after teacher					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Book	18	72.0	72.0	72.0
	Video	5	20.0	20.0	92.0
	Mobile application	2	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Another interesting fact in this research was the time taken to master the language. In Table 9, 68% of them took more than a year to master the language and the quickest time taken was about 3 – 6 months. This could be a connection why low percentage of impaired hearing persons socializes with normal people. Summary from Table 8, although they have a lot of normal friends, but they do not socialize. 32% of them confess that they do not socialize with normal people.

This could be seen clearly in Table 9; time taken for them to master the sign language is very long. This leads to their lack of communication during the period because their sign language is not perfect yet. Those who could master the language in short period of time has no problem. We could see here that education culture is one of the reasons that influence communication among hearing impaired persons. In the next chapter, we are going to discuss problems in mastering the language as shown in Table 9. Majority of them need more than a year to be an expert in this language. There are 4 main problems related to this.

5.3 Problem to master sign language

There are 4 main problems that have been identified to be the major factors why impaired hearing persons take a long time to master the sign language. First, lack of teachers in special school. Second, less education medium that could be used as references (refer to Table 10). Next, difficult to use the language outside school and lastly teaching sign language is not attractive and interactive.

Result from the research shows that difficulty to use the sign language outside school is the main reason why they take long time to master the language. Table 11, 12 and 13 summarize the factors why they take long time to master the language.

**Table 11**  
Teacher support factor.

Not enough teacher factor					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The most problematic	7	28.0	28.0	28.0
	Problematic	10	40.0	40.0	68.0
	Little bit problematic	7	28.0	28.0	96.0
	Tiada masalah	1	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 12**  
Alternative learning medium factor.

Not much alternative learning medium factor					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The most problematic	3	12.0	12.0	12.0
	Problematic	4	16.0	16.0	28.0
	Little bit problematic	11	44.0	44.0	72.0
	Tiada masalah	7	28.0	28.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 13**  
Outside practice factor.

Difficult to practice out of school factor					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The most problematic	11	44.0	44.0	44.0
	Problematic	7	28.0	28.0	72.0
	Little bit problematic	2	8.0	8.0	80.0
	Tiada masalah	5	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

**Table 14**  
Interactivity learning process factor.

Not interactive learning process factor					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The most problematic	4	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Problematic	4	16.0	16.0	32.0
	Little bit problematic	5	20.0	20.0	52.0
	Tiada masalah	12	48.0	48.0	100.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0	

Table 14 above shows difficult to use the language outside school is the main factor with the minimum score of 2.04 followed by less teacher (mean score 2.08) and education medium (mean score 2.88) and not an interactive learning (mean score 3.00).

Difficult to practice/use the language outside school, the role of communication drilling is very important. They need to use the language in order to master it quickly but unfortunately not all people know this language. The only person who could communicate with them is a person who involve directly with the programme such as their teacher.

This is also proven that culture condition also influenced communication among hearing impaired persons as shown in Table 7 where 32% of them not socialize with normal people. Not that they do not want to hang out instead they want to hang out but have limitations to socialize with normal people.

Lack of teacher is also the main reason because teacher is the source of knowledge for them. The use of books and other references could help but they are not the same as dealing directly with the experts.

Because of it, less medium of learning and teaching is not interesting / interactive contribute to the problem of mastering sign language. Together with lack of teacher, more difficult for them to master the language and their social and cultural status also affected.

#### 5.4 Interview with Mr Indra Wibowo

Besides the descriptive methods used, this research also included interview with one of the Tunarunggu representatives to discuss culture and problems in learning among Tunarunggu. Mr Indra is the president for the LPPI Jawa Barat district. Address of this society is Jalan Rd.Inten Simbarjo, No.85, Cipageran Cimahi. He is the one that always invited by the Indonesia government to discuss problems related to PWD.

One of the issues discussed was interaction and communication between Tunarunggu and normal person in Indonesia. Majority of Tunarunggu do not socialize with normal people but when there is party organized by Indonesia government they attend in a large scale. They do not have serious problems with their government.

According to Mr Indra, hearing impaired persons in Malaysia are lucky compared to Tunarunggu because here they have welfare department. Tunarunggu is relatively underdeveloped, particularly in education and career. Problem in making sign language as an official language is not certified yet, at the time this interview taken place, because of diversity of culture and the different sign languages used for different districts.

In West Indonesia their sign language is different from the east and the list continues for the rest of the area. Different place has different dialect. So far Indonesia government has verified standard of sign language to be used and Tunarunggu learned this language. It is considered as official language even though it is not yet been certified.

Culture and communication in school is quiet limited. In Malaysia, government provides special school for PWD in every district. In Indonesia there are not many special schools provided so Tunarunggu have to share schools and other facilities with daily normal school. Malaysia also has PDK but not in Indonesia. Shelter and welfare home are available in Indonesia initiative from individual and company.

There are Tunarunggu who study at vocational school to make sure have easy access to career because they could not go far in academic. Government provides technical and vocational schools for them so that they could continue their study.

Not many Tunarunggu able to further their study at tertiary level, this situation also applies to impaired hearing persons in Malaysia. Here education system starts with diploma, degree, master and PhD but in Indonesia, starts with degree, master and PhD. Mr Indra said that only one out of 10000 Tunarunggu able to further study in university due to variety of factors such as not enough facilities, lack of teachers and others. In Malaysia also there are not many of them that could further their studies to higher level; they only have SPM certificates and diploma.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

Culture plays an important role in formation of the human person especially impaired hearing person.

According to Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, culture is termed as civilization, wisdom, thinking and behaviour progress. Culture for a deaf is associated with a privileged communication by using sign language. In a nutshell culture is a way of life or things custom made by individuals or local communities.

In Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, communication is communication or intermediary directly or indirectly through a particular medium such as radio, internet and newspapers. In this research, we focus on direct communication using sign language. Sign language is defined as ways to communicate without using speech or writing and use only signal language.

25 impaired hearing persons took part in the study where 10 were from Malaysia and the rest from Indonesia. It had been carried out in Bandung Indonesia with the cooperation of SDJO and LPPCI. The aim of the study was to see whether the formation of their culture influenced their communication where aspect of education and social were core of the study. The results obtained show that a cultural problem also affects their communication.

Study also showed that impaired hearing persons in both countries make friends with normal people but they less communicate with them only 32% of them communicate with normal people. This proves that their social life is quiet good even though without proper communication skill. They want to have friends with normal people but their communication competence becomes an obstacle.

In terms of education, this group is lag behind compared to normal people. Their sign language is different and this makes them unable to enter university. According to Foster (1995) and Gabbin (2002), methodology used in learning and teaching is teacher and syllabus centred. They fail to train students in problem solving, thinking skills and communication skills.

As mentioned earlier, lack of teachers and difficult to practice the language outside school are two major factors that contribute to difficulty in mastering the language. Totally depend on teacher is another factor of the issue but lack of teacher is not supposed to happen. Teachers are source of reference and without them students could not practice their language unless we have efficient language lab.

Although there is other learning alternatives like pictures, books, videos and internet but they are unable to help these students. Knowledge/information from different sources only guides them in learning the language; they need teachers to have two- way communication. Standard check and balance is the main factor in learning sign language. It could not be done alone as it is hard to check whether they use correct sign language or not.

In term of alternative medium, it is not enough to be the main reference. There are lots of books available in market about sign language but it is more towards foreign language such as ASL not BIM or BISINDO. People are not interested in publishing sign language books or videos anymore as a result they do not have enough medium alternative to study their language.

Awareness to help this group has been suggested in this study. Meaning that all PWD need help regardless of their disability, race or religion. Without awareness to help, all helps offered by any organization will have a hard time to make it success.

In social life, not only they have to make friends with normal people but normal people should also make first move. Both parties have to try to communicate with each other using other alternatives such as body language, writing or intelligent gadgets.

Impaired hearing persons have difficulty in expressing themselves due to lack of teachers and alternative medium and that are the reasons why they take longer time to master their language. Ministry of Education and PWD society should work hand in hand to solve these problems. Increase number of teachers, reference books, set up language labs and others are ways to solve the problems. Usage of application in social network site is good where they can access to it anytime anywhere.

In conclusion, ways of life and environment play an important role in communication among impaired hearing persons. Good culture and environment in society would help and make them eager to practice their language.

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After this study/research has completed, there are lots of things that have been identified related to culture and its influence to communication. Communication can change with the changes in education culture and social life as well. All parties should work together to make changes for the better for hearing impaired people.

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