



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, LANGUAGE STUDIES, JOURNALISM
AND COMMUNICATION
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS IN EMPLOYEES-PASSENGERS
COMMUNICATION IN AIR TRANSPORTATION:
ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES IN FOCUS

BY
HABTAMU MELKAMU

JUNE 2023
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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Certificate of Thesis Approval

School of Postgraduate Studies

Addis Ababa University School of Journalism and Communication

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by **Habtamu Melkamu**, entitled “**Analysis of barriers in employees-passengers communication in air transportation: Ethiopian airlines in focus**”and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Journalism and Communication complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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DECLARATION

I, **Habtamu Melkamu**, the undersigned declare that this thesis entitled: “Analysis of barriers in employees-passengers communication in air transportation: Ethiopian airlines in focus” is my original work. I have undertaken the research work independently with the guidance and support of the research advisor. This study has not been submitted for any degree or diploma program in this or any other institution and the sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Declared by

Name _____

Signature: _____

Department _____

Date _____

DEDICATION

To all Ethiopians who sacrificed their life to bring absolute democracy in Ethiopia

To all innocent Amhara people who are brutally massacred based on their ethnic identity in Ethiopia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, I would like to thank my almighty God for all things he has been doing to me.

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ACRONYMS

- AABIA: Addis Ababa Bole International Airport
- AMB: Automated Messaging Board
- AVRS: Automated Voice Response System
- EAU: Ethiopian Aviation University
- ET: Ethiopian Airlines
- ETG: Ethiopian Airlines Group
- EVT: Expectancy Violation Theory
- FIDS: Flight Information Display System
- IATA: International Airlines Transport Association
- MRO: Maintenance Repair Overhaul
- PAS: Public Address System
- SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Science
- TWA: Trans World Airlines

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to analyze the barriers for employees-passengers communication effectiveness in Ethiopian airlines at AABIA. To do so, the researcher used four communication dimensions (i.e., technology factors, employee attitudes, customer responsiveness and communication skills) as a key measurement based on his observation and having a review of previous related works. To undertake the study, a questionnaire was designed and employed in Likert scales. Interview was also used. Total samples of 384 passengers were selected roughly out of 18,750 population and 360 valid responses were collected from Ethiopian Airlines passengers. Interviews were also conducted with 10 customer service officers of Ethiopian Airlines at AABIA. A descriptive statistic was used by using SPSS software version 26. The descriptive statistic result showed that on the barriers that affect employees-passengers communication effectiveness at Ethiopian Airlines' overall mean value is 3.08 with a moderate level of agreement which includes: the overall mean for the employee attitude (3.80), communication skill (3.01), customer responsiveness (2.76), and technology factors (2.62). The result shows the correlation coefficient between effective communication and customer responsiveness have a positive moderate relationship ($r=0.711$, $P=00.000$); effective communication and technology factors have positive moderate relationship ($r= 0.788$, $p=00.000$). Furthermore, communication skills and effective communication have positive strong relationship ($r=0.888$, $p=00.000$); employee attitudes has also a positive strong relationship with effective communication ($r=0.898$, $p=00.000$). The Overall findings provide significant support for the technology factors, employee attitudes, customer responsiveness and communication skills influenced the effectiveness of employees-passengers communication at Ethiopian Airlines.

Keywords: *effective communication, technology factors, employee attitude, customer responsiveness and communication skill*

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Business communication is a fundamental entity in any organization including the airline industry for the successful functionality of the overall airline business such as for safe aircraft movement, for effective organizational performance, and for the quality customer service among others. Bisen and Priya (2009) stated that business communication is a communication process employed for all business-related messages that exchanged for official purpose, for the purpose of running the business or managing the organization. Communication effectiveness in the context of business has to do with information exchange in association with business activities between the business provider and the end users and/or within the company itself. Martic (2022).

According to Bellizzi, Eboli, et al (2019) effective business communication is one of the crucial parts of air transport service quality. These days, the airline industry has become full of rivalry that every airline company strives to stand out and become a winner. In this regard, the airline industries have come to realize that communication effectiveness is the most important pillar to maintain their business intact in the market. In a business communication perspective, practicing effective communication enables the customers, the employees, and the company itself to have perfect business harmony in the process of business transaction.

Leigh (2020) stated that all time winners in the airline business are those airline companies that keep in touch with their customers through efficient communication mechanism to maintain their customers always engaged, even as they are unable to fly. Way (2016) also stated effective communication is a necessity in airline industry to maintain the loyalty of its customers and for the very existence of the company. International Airlines Transport Association (IATA,2018) explained that effective communication in the airline setting means enabling multiple airline industry stakeholders to communicate with the passengers across all touch points of their journey effectively with up to-date and accurate information.

The more passengers travel frequently, the more they seek for an effective and efficient service and communication experience (IATA,2018). In this regard, airline companies are required to develop mechanism to implement effective communication with the end user customers/passengers thereby to achieve the company's standard performance. In the contrary, failure to implement effective communication mechanism leads to a business damage. In a seminar conducted on the 21st of Nov 2022 at Ethiopian Airlines Aviation Academy for hundredth of customer service officers and stakeholders Michael Yared (VP Customer Service) said that even though Ethiopian Airlines has been honored with multiple awards in the international level over multiple measurements a lot remains in terms of the customer service handling which involves communication effectiveness between the passengers and the employees.

Ethiopian Airlines historical records show that since its inception in 1945 by Emperor Hailesillassie with the help of TWA (Trans World Airlines), it has been registering tremendous success in its extended history of business journey (Gebreegziabher, 2012). Ethiopian Airlines (a.k.a Ethiopian) is the national airline company fully owned by the government of Ethiopia. During the past seven decades of business journey, the airline has become one of the few Africa's major air transport carriers, widely recognized as Africa's most successful airline for its efficiency and operational success. The airline was also provided with multiple awards over various measurements in the past decades including the Best Airline in Africa of 2022 for nine consecutive years (Fact sheet, 2022). According to the African Airlines Association's (AFRAA) report on Jul 2021, Ethiopian has been ranked first by passenger and cargo traffic in 2020/21 and has kept its leading role till date.

John Tshole (2022), a prominent customer service strategist and entrepreneur who was invited as a guest lecturer at Ethiopian Airlines Aviation University on the 21st of Nov 2022 explained that despite the successful accomplishments in various business areas such as MRO, Catering, Cargo and others, effective customer service handling is somehow neglected by Ethiopian Airline which encompasses the employees-passengers communication practice. In his research, Naser (2017) also found out that communication problem is one of the reasons affecting the service quality on passengers' satisfaction at Ethiopian Airlines.

Tolkin (2010) said lack of effective communication is one of the main reasons for Airline companies to lose the loyalty of their customers and for their bankruptcy in the end. Communication effectiveness can be influenced by various factors such as the attitude and value of the personnel (Hordos,2018), communication skill (Campbell,2022), timely responsiveness and technological factors (Drago,2018) among others. Moges (2021) stated good communication such as timely responsiveness, friendly business approach and courtesy among others are pivotal for quality service in airline business. Kloppenborg and Gourdin (1992), in Clemes& Gan, et al (2008) asserted that air travel is one of the intangible service industries which requires flexible structure for seamless function and effective communication to fulfill customer satisfaction thereby for its survival in the market.

In this study, the researcher has tried to analyze the major barriers in employees-passengers communication effectiveness in Ethiopian airlines.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Today, air transport service has become very preferable by many travelers worldwide for its economy of time and safety. As per IATA (the International Air Transport Association) report on the first of March 2022 passengers who use air transportation are dramatically increasing on daily bases both domestically and in the international level in almost all countries (IATA,2022). For this very reason communication effectiveness is mandatory for air transport service to provide with safe, seamless, hassle free and timely services at all customer contact points to maintain customers' satisfaction and service quality intact thereby to survive in the current competitive aviation market.

Communication ineffectiveness brings massive damage to an airline business in many aspects. To mention few scenarios, on the 22nd of Feb 2023, group of passengers were clashed with Air India staff at Delhi Airport over wrong information delivery (Johny,2023); Similarly, on Jun 2022 angry passengers were reported to get into serious clashing with Jetstar staff due to the airline failure to inform them the flight delay in time (Leah,2022). Chinese air passengers were also captured conflicting with police in Japanese airport on the 26th of Jan 2018 due to the airline failure to inform them their flight cancellation in good time (Mailonline,2018). There are also records of such and similar other incidents of communication deficits in Ethiopian Airlines also which resulted for various financial and reputation damages like the serious incident of the 16th of

January 2022 which caused severe chaos between the customer service officers and the passengers due to delayed response of the airline for the flight disruption of ET917 as the researcher himself physically observed while he was on duty at Ethiopian Airlines.

Various researchers tried to deal with the business communication issues in Airline industries in general but very few focusing on Ethiopian Airlines in specific in fact with a different objectives and area specifics. Manaye (2022) tried to address the challenges of marketing communications of Ethiopian Airlines. Leigh (2020) also undertook research with an emphasis on how airlines should communicate with customers during crisis situations which is technically called crisis communication. Demarco & Catherine (2000) also studied how airline reputation can be influenced by lack of communication which also results for customer service crisis.

Similarly, Polat, Erdogan & Sesliokuyucu, (2021) examined the impact of attitude and subjective norm on airline passengers travel experience though not exclusively in terms of communication aspect. Elsamra (2017) studied how digital communications impacts passenger facilitation in general at airports. Law (2012) also portrayed the role of technology in airline transportation and its impact on communication as well.

Nonetheless, the researcher rarely found research addressing the subject of effective communication in a comprehensive approach particularly in airline industry in such a way that how the passengers' communication can be affected at airports with a detailed comprehensive approach integrating the linguistic factors, the communication skills, the attitudes of the personnel, the technology issues, timely responsiveness, and other substantial sub elements within. Thus, the researcher tried to address and analyze the barriers of effective communication between customer service officers and the passengers in a comprehensive approach in air transport industry focusing on Ethiopian Airlines.

1.3 Objective of the Study

1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of the study is to analyze the major barriers in Ethiopian Airlines employees-passengers communication.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study are: -

1. to describe the employee's attitude towards their passengers' communication.
2. to analyze to what extent communication skill affects Ethiopian Airlines passengers' information exchange.
- 3, to state Ethiopian Airlines customer responsiveness effect on their service providers communication process.
3. to explain to what extent communication technology, affect Ethiopian Airlines employees-passengers communication.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1.4.1. What is the relationship between the employees' attitude and the passengers' communication?
- 1.4.2. To what extent does communication skill affect the employees-passengers information exchange?
- 1.4.3. How does customer responsiveness effect on the service providers communication?
- 1.4.3 To what extent does communication technology affect employees-passengers communication at Ethiopian Airlines?

1.5 Significance of the study

First, this research may help Ethiopian airlines customer service officers to understand the employees-passengers communication barriers in the air transportation service and to prepare themselves to put into effect good communication practices on their daily operational areas. It

could also help Ethiopian Airlines as a company to realize the major barriers that affect the communication process in the employees-passengers information exchange in their flight experience and to implement all the necessary arrangements mainly in the physical environment of the airport. This is also significant because it may help other researchers in related areas to use it as an input in their research endeavors on related topic for the future.

1.6 Scope of the study

The setting of this research is at Ethiopian Airlines Bole International airport passengers' terminal which is the physical scope of the study. The time frame the research covered was as of December 2023 through April 2023. The sample populations included in the research are only the international passengers traveling by Ethiopian Airlines. Furthermore, Ethiopian Airlines customer service officers at AABIA are involved particularly those working at the front-line contact points, Check-in counter, Boarding gate, Baggage service and Arrival and Transfer units by purposive sampling. The research covers the practice of communication effectiveness between the passengers and the employees in the dimension of attitude, communication skill, responsiveness, and technological factors which are the scope areas. Regarding its theoretical aspect, the research is delimited in the scope of Functionalism and Interpretivism theory, Expectancy Violation theory and Interpersonal conflict theory which are the theoretical scopes of the research.

1.7 Limitation of the study

The researcher has three limitations. One of the limitations of the research is absence of related researches or published data which focused on similar topic especially in Ethiopia. Consequently, the researcher was supposed to ponder in advance to scrutinize theoretical frameworks which could best suits the research objective. This may cause potential methodological flaw which is considered as a limitation. However, the researcher strongly believes that it may open the door for the next researchers to investigate the subject in advance scale. Secondly, the researcher collected his data largely from passengers at daytime which is dominantly the regular flight schedule for African countries. This has resulted for sample representation bias which gave disproportional representation to African origins due to the time inconvenience to incorporate the night passengers equally. Finally, due to the researcher's financial constraint and time shortage as well he couldn't be able to make analysis of all the

attributes of the employees-passengers communication barriers in air transportation.

1.8 Organization of the study

The research contains five main chapters. The first chapter has the introduction of the study which includes the research background, problem statement, the objective, research question, the significance of the research, scope, limitation of the study and in the end organization of the research. The second chapter contains literature review- materials collected through secondary sources. The third chapter includes all the research design, the research approach, population size, sampling design, data collection method, research instrument, and data analysis. Chapter four contains the analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaire and interview. Chapter five has got conclusion and recommendation followed by references and appendix.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Effective Communication

The concept of effective communication refers to the process of successful exchange of information or ideas between people in such a way that is understood correctly both by the sender and the receiver of the message. It is the ability to transmit a message accurately to the target audience in various alternative communication modes either in verbal, written, or visual, electronic, digital etc. Balam and Rayudu (1999) said about the evolution of effective communication as follows:

The story of human civilization is in a way the story of effective communication. The growth of civilization has followed a peak-and plateau pattern. After years of hard work, man conquered a peak, then for a long time went over a plateau developing all its potentialities, till he encountered another peak and began exploring the possibilities of its plateau. In climbing each successive peak, he commanded a broader and grander view, and his progress became speedier... Language, Writing, Electricity, Wireless, Electronics and Satellites were the five peaks conquered by man(Ibid,1999:3).

Singla (2009) says that for any communication to be effective, it is very essential that the receiver should receive the message in the same spirit as has been conveyed by the sender of the message. The effectiveness of a certain communication is measured by the similarity between the idea transmitted and the idea received between the interlocutors.

Different communication theoreticians like Berlo (1960) described knowledge, communication skill, and attitude as a very important components for communication effectiveness. Orouke (2009) also explained that effective communication mainly focuses on ways in which one become more effective through becoming more knowledgeable as a communicator. He also said all forms of communication, whether writing, listening, or speaking are the end products of a process which begins with critical thinking.

In their Journal article, Robinson, Segal, and Smith (2022) said effective communication is not merely about information exchange but it is also about going beyond the linguistic aspect or the information and understanding the emotion and intentions deep down behind the information. According to Shannon & Weaver (1945) the art of effective communication requires comprehensive consideration of range of interrelated issues.

Practicing effective communication indeed have quite lots of benefits to the communicators. When communication is effective, it leaves all parties involved in the communication process satisfied and feeling mutually accomplished. In other words, if one deliver messages clearly and if same received exactly as intended, there would be no room for misunderstanding consequently decreasing the potential for conflict. Generally, effective communication is all what every communication interaction has got in common and to do so it involves developing various communication technicalities, semantics and many more.

2.2 Business communication effectiveness

Effective communication can be practiced in different environment such as on interpersonal level which involves the exchange of messages between two or more individuals (Devito,2017), on organizational level which takes place between people with the common goals within a specific organization (Thayer, 1986) or in political sphere between politicians and the public (McNair,2021). The concept of ‘business communication’ has to do with communication effectiveness in association with business activities between the business provider and the receiver. Bisen and Priya (2009) proclaimed that business communication is employed for all business-related messages that people exchange each other for official purpose for the purpose of running the business or managing the organization. They further underscored ‘communication is the life blood of the business. No business can develop in the absence of effective communication system’. Martic (2022) also asserted that business communications are the process of information sharing between employees within the company and outside a company as well.

Likewise, effective business communication is when communication takes place clearly between either two or more than two businesspeople. Tuhovsky (2017) says communication is one of the pillars of great business relationships. As to Fielding (2006) without effective communication a business would not exist. Business communication analyses how effective communication can

be achieved in organizations that are growing to meet the newly emerging social, economic, and technological demands. Sullivan (2016) tried to outline the formula of business communication and showed how professionals can enhance conversations. He explored in brief the best practices for any form of communication in a business environment. According to him if one put the focus on what the other person is trying to gain from the exchange, he/she will do a better job communicating, because he/she will select more pertinent information, drill down to the desired level of detail, and make the information he/she are sharing more accessible to our audience.

Furthermore, in business perspective, understanding the diversity of backgrounds, interests, and needs of our customers is essential to effective communication and good customer service. Krizan and Merrier (2008) explained that effective communication builds up trust that leads to a long-term relationship with the customers. He added in today's competitive business environment, improving communication with the customers promotes business success. It is also essential for companies to realize and put in to affect the practice of communication effectiveness both internally between the employees and externally with the customers for increased employees' productivity and for outstanding customer handling, satisfaction, and retention.

2.3 Organizational communication

Unlike business communication, which concerns external communication with an objective to establish communication with the outside customers, organizational communication mainly has to do with internal communication within the organization. Orouke (2015) tried to frame the concept of communication in the context of an organization. He said that communication in the context of an organization is an exchange of messages through various layers of authority and using various channels to discuss subjects of interest to the company we work for. Hogarty (2022) also explained the term organizational communication as a technical word that used to describe how people within an organization exchange information one another and with their clients as well. He further said a good organizational communication strategy ensures that everyone within the business is on the same page and aware of the company's goals and objectives. It helps to strengthen and maintain relationships between employees, their customers, and their clients. And it can help to improve the overall efficiency of the business by allowing

the orderly flow of information between the employees with valuable knowledge and the employees who need it (Hogarty, 2022).

Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) stated that though communication is time-consuming and very important, it was often neglected in many organizations. But today, all organizations consider effective communication as essential for the very survival of their business. In organization, people give a great deal to a human based information system in which a group of people communicate with each other to make the organization more efficient. In any business organization, it is so crucial to make people of different departments come together to achieve a common goal. To achieve this organizational goal, the people must establish a solid state of interpersonal connection so that they are able to connect with other people efficiently.

As to different communication scholars, organizational communication can have various attributes such as formality vs informality, internal and external, verbal vs non-verbal and one-way vs two-way. Therefore, there must be effective communication both to work together with various internal teams or for the company's transaction purpose with the external environment which consists of the customers, suppliers, and the public. Companies must pay a great deal of effort to effectively communicate with other companies, suppliers and all kinds of customers who come to them to buy goods and services since good relationship with them are fundamental for the very existence of the company in the market. At the top of all, the most important activities of all are communicating with the active customers for the fact that without the customers no company would exist. (Bisen & Priya, 2009)

In general, effective communication is essential for the success of any organization. Jones (n.d) in Krizan and Merrier (2008) also reminds us that business success depends on effective communication all the time. Airline companies as an organization are supposed to adapt various best practices and effective models of communication in their day-to-day organizational communication to establish stronger working relationships between members of staff, to boost loyalty and engagement, to ensure the employees voice is heard, provide feedback thereby for overall organizational growth.

2.4 Effective internal communication for external communication effectiveness

Internal communication inside the organization between the personnel is very crucial in any business spectrum to establish effective communication with the outside bodies thereby to effectively run all the business activities. Communication scholars suggest that improved internal communication brings large scale organizational benefits (Tourish,1997, in Hartley and Bruckmann, 2002). Internal communication is an entire process within an organization which includes how information is shared and flows in every direction, up, down, and laterally and diagonally as well to achieve the organization's goals. Welch (2015) and Kataria, Garg, et al, (2013) stated internal communication basically is a collective effort of the group in a certain organization to exchange information each other and achieve employee's engagement thereby for the company's overall performance. In their communication discourse Kitchen & Daly (2002) stated that internal communication is a key to organizational excellence and effectiveness. According to Bisen & Priya (2009) internal communication involves a wide range of communication activities to ensure good upward, downward, lateral, and sideways communication.

➤ Downward organizational communication

According to Bisen & Priya (2009) downward communication refers any communication types that flow from a higher level (superiors) in an organization to a lower level (subordinates) in a chain of command. This communication flow is largely employed by the managers to pass down work-related information to the employees at the lower levels.

➤ Upward organizational communication

Likewise, in the case of upward communication, the subordinates/employees use it to transfer information to their superiors or the higher bodies and to participate in the decision-making process. If achieved effectively, upward communication leads to a more committed workforce in an organization because the employees will manage to get the chance to raise any constructive information to the higher levels (Ibid).

➤ **Horizontal /Lateral organizational communication**

Horizontal communication takes place between people at the same level in the organization (between departments, peers or between an organization and its clients).

➤ **Diagonal organizational communication**

Diagonal communication is a communication that takes place between a manager and employees of other work groups is considered by communication scholars as diagonal communication.

According to Cynthia (1995) there must be communication effectiveness in all dimensions in a company internal structural hierarchy. Effective business communication both internally and externally helps companies and the employees to eliminate unnecessary problems at workplace, for better performance, to increase overall productivity. As studied by (Pumble.com, 2021) employees who communicate effectively in the workplace may see as much as a 25% increase in their productivity. To conclude, to accomplish effective communication with the outside bodies, any business organization is supposed to work on the internal communication effectiveness.

2.5 Business communication barriers

In business environment communication barriers means anything that may hinder the communicators from exchanging the correct message at the right time in the workplace. As indicated in several business communication statistics more that 80% of employees blame the absence of effective communication as the major factor for errors in the workplace thereby for the business failure. Shannon & Weaver (1964) tried to mention three fundamental barriers which can significantly affect communication effectiveness in general in every communication setting between the interlocutors.

These are: -

- 1, *Technical problems*: - is refers to the accuracy of exchange of information between the sender and the receiver with sets of symbols (such as written, speech, telephone, radio, television etc....)
- 2, *Semantics problem*: - refers to the identity or close approximation, in interpreting the meaning of the message by the receiver compared to the intended meaning of the sender. These may include incorrect message, symbols with various interpretation, faulty translations, usage of technical jargon and the like.

3, *Problem of Effectiveness*: - problem of effectiveness has to do with the success through which the meaning transferred to the receiver leads to the desired conduct on his part.

Number of other communication experts also mentioned various potential barriers in detail that could hinder the effectiveness of communication. To mention but few, physical barriers, linguistic barriers, personal barriers (fear, lack of confidence, reluctance, insufficient incentives, etc.), emotional barriers, social barriers, physiological barriers, cultural barriers, and organizational barriers among many others. In her article, Maggie (2016) tried to describe thirteen main barriers for effective communication in an organizational atmosphere such as none listening, making assumptions, body language, ineffective questions, information overload, emotional distractions, conflicting messages, physical barriers, perception difference, workplace stress and interpersonal communication issues to mention the major ones.

According to Krizan, Patricia et al (2008) in any business setting although knowledge of the communication process and skill are basic, they do not guarantee success for communication effectiveness. Both the sender must also minimize or eliminate barriers that could obstruct the process including the word choices, grammars, mechanics, appearance, the environment, the communicators capability, knowledge, interest, different cultural perceptions, language difficulty, emotional state, bias among others may affect communication effectiveness in any business organization. Thus, they recommended to minimize or eliminate such barriers through step-by-step process to realize effective communication.

2.6 Factors affecting effective business communication

Several workplace communications tend to meddle with the message sent and receive between the communicators. Absence of good communication in a business environment may cause a division among the organization and/or bring chaos with the outside customers. One of the major challenges in the company is a lack of effective communication which may result for frequent disorders inside-out. In this regard, business communication could be affected by different factors along with the barriers mentioned above. The following are some of the major factors that could affect communication effectiveness in a business organization setting as mentioned by several researchers like Polat, Erdogan & Sesliokuyucu, (2021), Elsamra (2017), Law (2012) Vieira & Santos(2010) among others.

2.6.1 Attitude

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) defined the term attitude as a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably towards some psychological object. It is an individual's predisposed state of mind regarding a value which can be precipitated through a responsive expression towards oneself, a person or place. Any communication can negatively or positively be affected by the attitude of the personnel and by the interlocutors at large, and this increases the potential for either effective communication or miscommunication. A positive employee attitude makes it easy to interact with customers with a view to understanding their needs. Such employees remain motivated to serve the company and its customers with additional care and effort. As Newman (2016) said employee attitude affects customer behavior in multiple ways. In Airline, attitude has a significant impact on air transport passengers in general. Polat, Erdogan & Sesliokuyucu (2021) explained that there is a direct relationship between air passengers and attitude in general. Gross (2023) also mentioned various hazardous attitudes in aviation which is common among aviation industry members in general which includes impulsivity, recklessness, breaking rules among others which can in return affect communication effectiveness.

Hordos (2018) stated as follows: -

Attitude can affect business communication in both positive and negative ways. Pleasant, respectful, upbeat attitudes throughout an office improve upward and downward communication, which increases morale, productivity, and sales. Poor communication behavior on the other hand must be dealt with before it impacts the company culture or collapses the company itself ...employees with similar attitudes may inadvertently overlook instances of miscommunication because they believe they are always in agreement with one another

He further said some of the impacts of attitude on communication effectiveness are roughly incomplete communication and inaccurate judgement, inability to see problems and conflict among others.

2.6.2 Communication skill

Communication skill is also the foundation of any business relationship and is especially important in business world. If one can't effectively communicate the overall business

performance will inevitably suffer. Communication skill is the most essential skill needed in the aviation industry. This skill is needed in every branch of the airline segments including pilots, cabin crew, maintenance technicians, customer service agents and baggage handlers. Vieira & Santos (2010) said that communication skill is a mandatory competence for ground and airplane crew. They further explained that lack of communication skill tremendously affects the communication effectiveness in airline industry including bringing miscommunication and safety issues. Airline customer service agents also need to have strong communication skill to effectively communicate with customers. They need to convey information, instructions, and answer any questions that customers may have clearly and concisely.

2.6.3 Technological factors

Communication technologies are any electronic or digital tools airline company can use to exchange information. These technologies may include software, computer programs, devices, and other electronic or digital systems. Technology impacts communication by making it easier, quicker, and more efficient if efficiently used and vice versa. It allows to track conversations and therefore provide better customer experience. Balam & Rayudu (1999) stated ‘a business organization is a human decision-making system in which the quality of the decisions are determined by the effectiveness of the communication apparatus’ Law (2012) said “technology has brought about different capabilities at the airport which were not there initially. Communication technology is serving to enhance communication between airport officers and consumers”. In this regard, electronic and digital communication technologies such as mobile phones, emails, display solutions, alternative communication devices, social platforms, chat bots, etc. can be mentioned as some of the technological fruits which facilitate communication in airline industry.

Law (2012) further added: -

Dynamic signage (dynamic display solutions) is another effective technological advancement when it comes to air transport. It allows for communication of different transport impressions, flexibility, and creative content. It is the perfect medium of messaging and reaching out all passengers. It is flexible because content can be updated at any time the airport authorities feel like

Elsamra (2017) also pointed out that digital communication is one of the airline communication technology apparatuses which impacts passengers' communication at airports. Heiets, Bil & La (2021) also affirmed that the aviation industry considers digitization as one important strategy to improve its productivity and to attract more customers. They said it also plays a vital role in both customer and business aspects. To sum, communication technologies have strong relationship with communication effectiveness in making the communication experience easier and in reaching wide range of customers without too much struggle.

2.6.4 Responsiveness

In communication, responsiveness refers to the degree that what one responds quickly, clearly, and directly to what the other person just requested. By being responsive we put others first and care about their needs first. According to Jozwlak (2019), in organizational perspective, responsive communication is about providing quick, honest, and accurate client communication. She further said responsiveness is the cornerstone of our client-success focus. Arakelyan (2018) also said it is easy to say that communication is crucial in running a successful business; it is often also easy to forget to carry out this very simple but very crucial responsiveness aspect. The bottom line is that responsiveness does foster proper communication.

Sadlouskos (2019) further elaborated responsive communication may include assertiveness, taking great care to handle interactions, observing the big-picture, welcoming differing viewpoints, favoring fair, calm, honest communication among others.

In airline perspective, responsiveness means willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. The degree of responsiveness shows the level of commitment that the employees of the company have towards their work. It is very necessary for the company to concentrate on prompt & the right kind of responsiveness to the needs of the customer. As studied by Uyoga and Yagat (2019) responsiveness has to do with service performance and satisfaction among airline passengers. Generally, responsiveness is determined by assessing how quickly customer inquiries and complaints are answered in terms of grievance redress mechanism, timely updating passengers any flight disruption such as flight change, cancellation etc. and how effectively recommendations are implemented, and feedback is received.

In the following section the communication effectiveness in air transport setting will be discussed in brief.

2.7 Communication practice in aviation industry

The International Air Transport Association (IATA,2018) stated that the concept of communication in aviation industry enables to ease the passengers' travel experience by facilitating the industry stakeholders to communicate with them across all points of their journey. In addition to the expensiveness of the business which requires big capital to run (Dixon,2017), airline industry is very sensitive which needs effective business management. As Tolkin (2010) well studied air transport business is one of the very sensitive business areas which is likely to be exposed to unprecedented financial turmoil if not effectively managed including the intangible components of word mouths/communication.

Broadly speaking, airline communication includes the coordinated activity of variety of team players such as the pilots, air traffic controllers, ground handlers, cabin crew, airline staff, security personnel, ramp workers, airport operators, the customers and other aviation specialists involved in the process. Ates and Kagnicioglu (2015) stated all stakeholders in the airline business process must communicate and interact each other fast and correct to provide on time air transport services. They also said effective communication is a necessity in air transport industries.

In his journal article Garbrecht (2019) explained having effective communication is one of the very fundamental elements to improve airline customer experience. He further mentioned strategies such effective listening, effective communication with internal departments is some of the techniques to successfully achieve the airline's customer experience and for the company's business success in the end.

Lucen(ed),2022) also stated

Making it fast and easy for staff to communicate and collaborate with each other and with passengers is key to accelerating operations. Taking it one step further and integrating business systems and processes with real-time communications gives staff new power and flexibility to quickly resolve issues, improve the passenger experience, and turn decisions into actions.Lucen (ed),2022:4)

For airline industries, effective communication with their passengers is very crucial for the purpose of ensuring the passengers safety, comfort, and satisfaction. Aviation experts recommend that airline personnel must use various techniques for communication effectiveness such as using clear language, providing information in advance, being respectful, using multiple channels, pro activeness, transparency among others.

Bellizzia, Eboli, et al (2019) expressed that the air transport business is a complex service due to the very nature of its multicultural environment and its interconnections to the global networks. Various experts in airline business also recommend that employees who work at airline service need to equip themselves with positive customer service attitude, effective communication skill, linguistic intelligence, good technological skill among others to offer quality service.

2.8 Importance of effective communication in Airline setting

The physical airports are the areas where all playing actors in the air transport industry come together. Every person and every actor who works in the ecosystem of the airport needs to communicate, collaborate, and connect each other, with systems, and with passengers as well for effective service. This inter-connectivity encompasses from passenger processing and security checks to baggage handling, airport operations and air traffic control. This time aircraft is acknowledged as the most useful transportation system worldwide. Subsequently the impact of aeronautics well-being on human life has become fundamentally essential. In this regard, airline companies are supposed to ensure that their communication with the passengers is effective to create a positive flying experience in addition to ensuring their well-being. Effective communication in airline can have many importance such as customers' satisfaction, customer retention and the overall operational safety among others.

2.8.1 Customer satisfaction

‘We live in the age of the customer, an era in which customers expect to get all what they want, when they want it and in a manner of their choosing and never before have consumers been so empowered’. Morant (2017)

One of the significances of effective communication in terms of the airline industry is to provide passengers with ultimate satisfaction to the passengers/customers. Franklin (2021) also stated that customer satisfaction reflects a given company's business' health by showing how well the products or services of that company resonate with customers' expectation. According to Goodey (2022) customer satisfaction examines how happy customers are with a company's overall achievements in the customer journey. As mentioned earlier, to ensure the customers satisfaction and help to create positive flying experience, personnel in the airline business are supposed to use various techniques such as:

- Using clear languages free from aviation jargon or technical terms when communicating with their passengers which are.
- Providing information in advance during flight delays, gate changes, baggage status and the like
- Speaking respectfully and calmly to passengers in all situations
- Using multiple channels to communicate with passengers including announcements, digital signage, and mobile apps.
- Proactively anticipating passengers needs before they request.
- Being transparent and honest about any issues which arise during flight etc.

Several air transports industry experts recommend that with the right communications and applications, there are endless ways to engage passengers and interact with them to make their flight journey easier and more enjoyable. Many business communication experts also highlighted that customers do not compromise their satisfaction. Customers are much more likely to make another purchase only if they are treated well comprising the word of mouth or communication. Morant (2017) explained that poor communication results for consumer frustration in terms of delayed response to various services. Several studies show 51% of customers do not deal a business again with a company once they experience poor customer interaction at first experience. Therefore, every business needs to understand what its customers want and need.

2.8.2 Customer retention

The concept of customer retention means to maintain a healthy relationship with customers. Gillis (2019) defined customer retention as a system that businesses use to measure customer loyalty and their overall success. Customer retention is just a process where one company works on creating a better relationship with its customers who had once used their product and/or service and to keep them loyal customers.

Shukal (2013) stated that in this century customers can easily compare one product with another. The ability of an airline firm to retain a customer goes beyond the product and the service that the company is offering. Rather, the way the service is given and the company's reputation in general is being considered across the market (Reichheld, 1996). This has forced airline companies to devise various techniques including practicing effective words-of mouth or effective communication for the very purpose of the customers' retention.

Customer satisfaction and retention has in many ways to do with effective communication between the company and the customers. According to Hoffman(2018) for customer satisfaction companies are required to put in to effect effective communication mechanisms between the customers and their employees such as attentive listening to customer needs, understanding them, setting and establishing the expectations and keeping them informed at all times. Lack of effective communication leads to customer dissatisfaction and to the defection of customers in the end thereby for entire crisis of business.

2.8.3 Air transport safety

Effective communication is also very significant for the overall operational safety of the airline industry. It is a basic human requirement and in the aviation environment an essential prerequisite. Isaac (2007) said 30% of all incident events in airport environments have communication errors. 23% of all level-bust events involve communication error and 40% of all runway incursions also involve communication problems. Faylogna (2021) also asserted that effective communication is a very important aspect of aviation safety. Poor communication has contributed to number of deadly plane crashes and passengers' brutal death since the beginning of modern air travel (Faylogna,2021). Literature in the aviation industry shows that 70% of all accidents in the airline industry were caused due to communication issues.

To illustrate the importance of effective communication in aviation industry specifically in terms of safety, research show that many of the major aircraft crashes in the world such as the deadly accident of the Malaysia airplane on February 18, 1989, and the Cove Neck, NY (JFK) crash in January 25, 1990 and the Tenerife Airport Disaster (1977) were happened as a result of communication ineffectiveness (Oskamp and Granrose (1997)). For this reason, the major importance of communication effectiveness in the aviation is to increase the level of safety both to the passengers and to the airline company as well.

An article produced by Lucent (2022) explained the effectiveness of communication in terms of customers' information security as below

Like all businesses, airports are vulnerable to cyber security attacks. A cyber-attack can cut off access to commercial and business applications, compromise passenger information, and even put airport operations at risk. While Ethernet, IP, and converged networks bring many benefits to airport operations, integrating subsystems also increases the risk that an isolated threat could become a much bigger problem. As a result, every airport needs a comprehensive approach to cyber security and a strong containment strategy.

To sum up, effective communication has to do with an airline service quality factor and the overall security such as customer satisfaction and retention and passengers' safety which in turn will provide various benefits both to the company and the customers.

2.9 Communication challenges in Ethiopian airlines

As briefly discussed earlier, communication determines the overall service quality of a given airline which is the very existence of an airline company. Airport terminals are the main physical airport environments where customers(passengers) from all over the world with different cultural background come together and same is where various communication practice takes place.

As a business organization Ethiopian airline undertakes various types of business communication in its daily operation. Variety of the services are offered by airline companies and /or their stakeholders in the airport terminal which includes ticketing service, check-in services, baggage services, hotels services, in-flight services, catering services, customs service, immigration services and the like. All these and other front line service desks accommodate huge

number passengers every day here at AABIA. In the front-line contact points thousands of passengers from across the globe with different background and the employees of the airline undertake various job-related communication practices on daily basis both formally and informally. Thus, to give effective service to the passengers, Ethiopian airlines need to put in to practice effective business communication both in its internal communication (a.k.a, intra-organizational communication) and external communication with its customers and all the stake holders for the purpose of customers satisfaction and retention as well.

Research by Elsamra (2017) and Vieira (2010) show various factors such as digital communications, cross cultural factors, communication skill among others may bring great impacts on passengers at airport terminals which resulted for various service dissatisfaction against the customers and potential business failure in the end. Working on the continuous improvement of the attitude of the employees, adopting up-to-date alternative communication technologies in airport terminal, improving the communication skill of the airport personnel and stakeholders, and practicing the culture of effective responsiveness of the service and others must be the given a pivotal attention by Ethiopian Airlines to put into effect communication effectiveness.

This day Ethiopian Airlines has major competitors in the aviation industry including Egypt Air, Fly Emirates, Kenyan Air ways, Turkish Air, Yemenia Air, Saudi Air and Fly Dubai and others whom their emergence is inevitable sooner or later. Due to the existence of these airline companies and the emerging others, customers have a wide range of choice to select the suitable airline according to their requirements and the quality of services they received. If passengers are not satisfied with one, they will simply switch to another airline. The cost of lost customers causes loss of revenue. For this very reason, effective customer communication should be a fundamental issue for Ethiopian airlines to effective customer service experience as they say everything begins with first impression.

2.10 Theoretical frameworks

2.10.1 Functionalism vs Interpretivism

Functionalism theory is one of organizational communication theories which employs quantitative method for measuring effectiveness of communications, the structures it has, the processes, and the goals. The main target of functional approach is to develop outcomes as measured by the rate of optimal flow of communication. A functionalist, for instance, would map out the flow of communication with in formal organizational structures, identify *communication leaks* and *breakdowns*, and highlight possible strategies for improvements. Furthermore, functionalists believe that human activities occur because of *physical structures*, and they claim that managers should utilize *control systems* to enhance organizational communication efficiency. Some of the questions functionalists ask are:

- ❖ What are the efficiency and effectiveness of specific communication networks?
- ❖ What is the communication needs of organizations?
- ❖ Does the communication system have the elements required to help support the mission and the goals of organization?
- ❖ Are the existing communication mediums compatible with the communication needs of the organization?
- ❖ How well are the formal and informal systems of communication working?

Furthermore, according to functionalism, there are two main features for functionalism approach.

- 1, Humans are the product of their environment, or the physical structure precede human activities.
- 2, Functionalist approach contains a managerial bias. There is a strong focus on top down, unilateral model of communication with main purpose of transmitting information about tasks to make the communication effective.

On the other hand, interpretivism is an approach developed by Weber in 19th century and subsequently adopted by various social scientists. Interpretative approach in general believes that we need to sympathetically understand the motives for people's actions to fully understand why

they acted. From the organizational communication perspectives, in contrast to functionalists who believe that human activities occur because of physical structures, interpretative theorists claim that the physical structures of communication originate from human interaction. In other words, organizations are the abstract set of social relationships *centered on tasks and goals rather than physical structures*. Interpretive approach is *less management oriented* than the functional approach and less biased in that it views organization control as a binding member through the application of normative system of communication, which create a shared vision about common practices, expectation, and interpretation. The main goal of interpretive approach is to understand subjective experiences and how shared meanings are created through social interaction.

In fact, both functionalism and interpretivism see organizational ideology as a legitimate force that uses formal, transaction communication systems to influence employees' social reality. Although the two perspectives evolved from diverse needs, they have a common purpose that is dependent on both efficiency of communication and stability with diverse explanation and applications (Putnam, 1983; Weick, 1983). In this regard, the researcher has tried to see to what extent the airline communication practice is more affected in large scale in the perspective of functionalism and interpretivism.

2.10.2 Expectancy violation theory

Expectancy violation theory is one of the many communication theories which deals with the behavior of people in terms of their unexpected reaction while interacting. In other words, it a communication theory which explores the way how people react in various communication situations. The theory is said to be created by Burgoon (1970). It also stresses on an individual perception during interaction in a particular situation. People create an expectation of how the other people will react when communicating each other. According to the theory violation to this expectation causes to a perception that will be either positive or negative.

There are two types of expectancy

- *Predictive* – defines the communication happening within a particular context.
- *Prescriptive*– people who display a behavior appropriate to the existing environment

Furthermore, expectancy is determined by three factors

- *Interactant characteristics* – includes age, sex and other personality traits which make the listener creates an expectation of behavior
- *Interpersonal characteristics* – this character deals with the relationship that the person has with the listener
- *Environment* – refers to the cultural influence and the social situation which lead to an expectation in behavior; and the listeners can conceive the violation from the expected behavior as positive or negative.

In the airline perspective, Expectancy violation theory deals with how customers react in their communication when their expectation of products or service is not achieved and/or when they found the service they are given below their expectations.

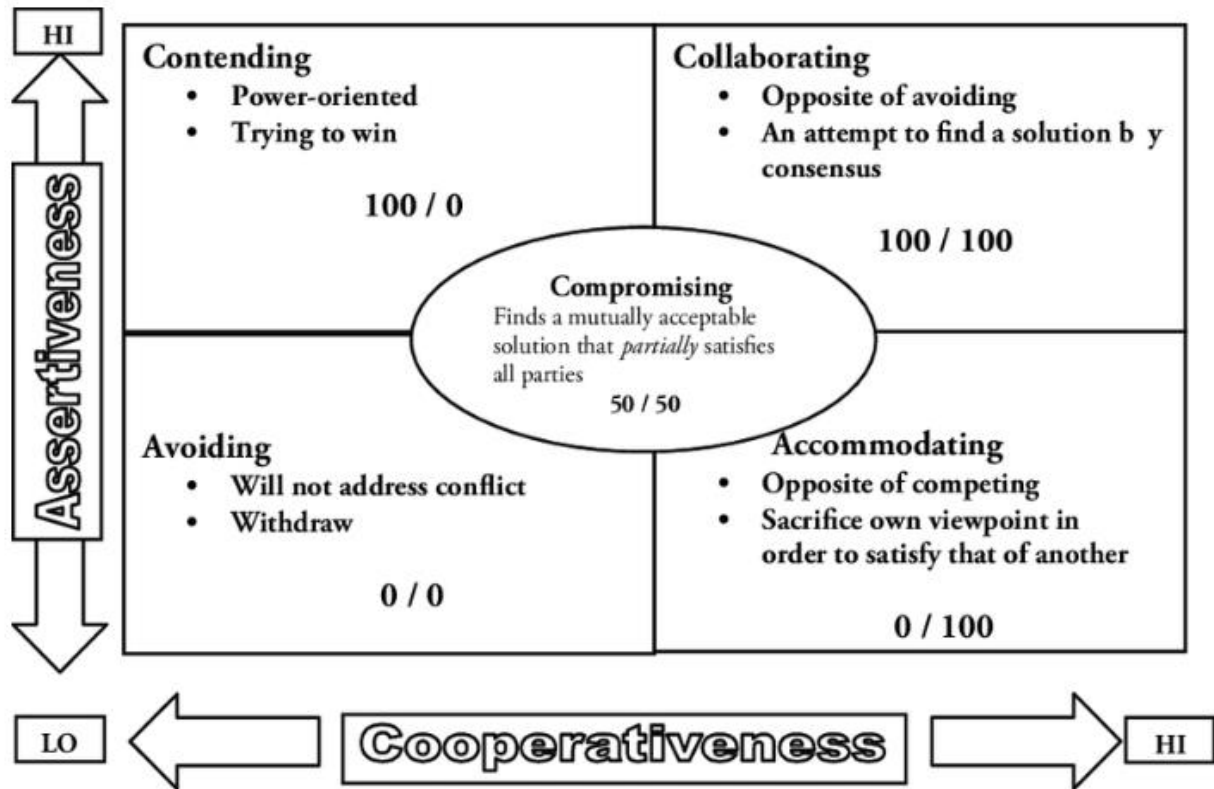
2.10.3 Conflict Resolution Theory (Thomas-Kilmann Model)

The two prominent researchers Thomas and Kilmann (1974) developed conflict resolution model having studied the routine of conflicts in the workplace with the pattern of ways in which people can resolve the conflict they get in to. Conflict resolution theory generally guides the ways of formal or informal process that two or more parties employ to find out a peaceful solution to their dispute. According to Thomas-Kilmann Model there are two dimensions of conflict resolutions:

- 1, Assertiveness: - is the ability to speak up and stand by once own opinion either positively or negatively depending on its application.
- 2, Empathy: - to put oneself into the other person's situation to find ways to resolve conflict easily.

Furthermore, according to Thomas-Kilmann Model there are five conflict resolution strategies. These are Competing, Avoidance, Accommodating, Collaboration and Compromising.

Figure 1. Thomas-Kilmann Model of conflict resolution



Source: adopted from Thomas and Kilmann (1974)

According to Thomas-Kilmann Model, the five conflict resolution strategies have their own different characteristic in fact with their own different typical strengths and weaknesses each of them.

1. Competing

- Competing has a characteristic of high assertiveness and low empathy.
- this strategy is used whenever we resort to being aggressive and when we have limited time and resources to resolve the conflict.

2. Avoiding

- low assertiveness and low empathy
- avoiding confrontation by ignoring or avoiding the conflict entirely

3. Accommodating

- low assertiveness and high empathy
- to make concessions to resolve the conflict
- doing what the other person requested instead of arguing about the matter

4. Collaboration

- high assertiveness and high empathy
- balancing the power between yourself and another person
- finding out common ground and work together towards achieving a shared goal

5. Compromising

- middle of assertiveness and empathy scales.
- middle road between opposing views
- win-win scenario

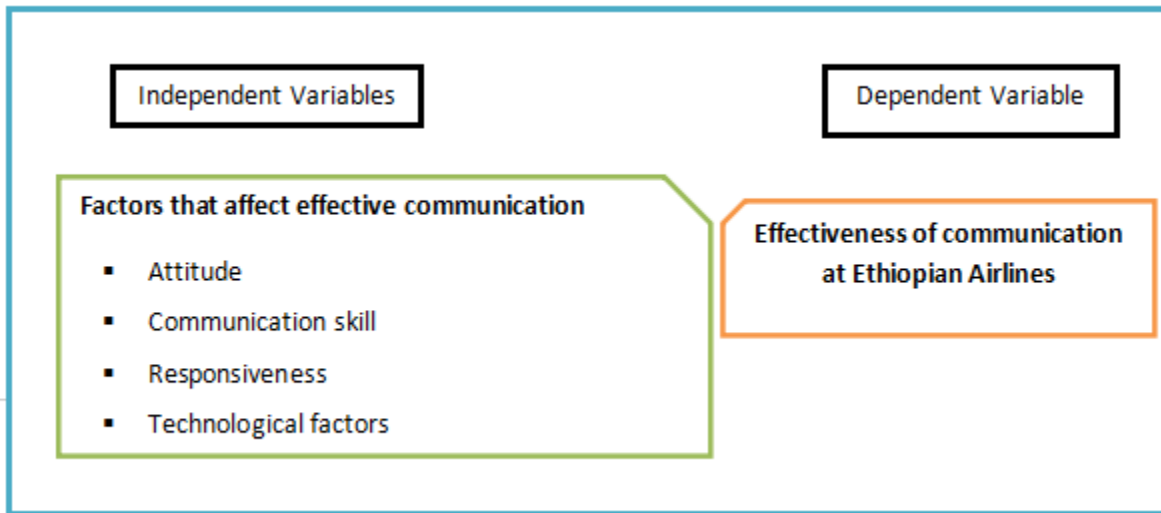
In air transportation, there are many reasons which resulted for conflict situations particularly in the physical environment of the airport. To mention but a few lost luggage, out of order working facilities or services, missed flights or connections, restriction of smoking or similar things like alcohol, canceled flights or delayed flights, fatigue among many others. During such period, conflict would be inevitable and there must be a technique to settle the situations. Thus, the researcher tried to look in to Conflict Resolution Theory for his research.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

There are two main variables which are independent and dependent variable in the research. An independent variable is one that can be changed or controlled through the research to test the effect of it on the dependent variable. A dependent variable is a variable being tested and measured in research. From the conceptual framework, effective communication is the dependent variable which has been predicted by the different factors. The extent of this relationship has been tested in the research scope and study area.

The framework was developed based on the researcher's personal observation and reviewed from various secondary materials such as Demarco & Catherine (2000), Elsamra (2017) and Erdogan & Sesliokuyucu (2021) Law (2012), Balam & Rayudu (1999) and others.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework Diagram



Source: - own for this study

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description of the Study Area

This study focuses on analyzing the barriers that affect employees-passengers communication at Ethiopian Airlines. Ethiopian Airlines is a flag carrier of Ethiopia fully owned by the government. It is currently ranked the largest airline in Africa in its Fleet size, countries of destination, number of passengers transportation, and revenue and profit earned and several other parameters. In its 7 decades of business journey the airline has managed to become one of the continent's leading carriers, unrivalled in efficiency and operational success.

Ethiopian Airlines is also called Ethiopian Airlines Group or ETG to indicates the incorporation of different service groups in one big umbrella (i.e Aviation University (EAU), Ethiopian Maintenance Repair and Overhaul(MRO), Ethiopian Cargo, Ethiopian Catering, Skylight Hotel). According to 2021/2022 fiscal year report Ethiopian Airlines has some 144 modern aircraft which could give short range, medium range and long-range air transport service for passengers and cargo. The airline has also 22 local, more than 60 continental and more than 130 intercontinental or international destinations. The airline annual revenue in 2021/2022 was \$5.1 million USD. Furthermore, currently the airline has more than 17.000.00 employees on permanent. (Fact sheet, 2023).

According to the report the airline has transported roughly 8.7 million passengers in 2021/22 fiscal year. It also transports approximately from 15,000-25,000 passengers on daily basis via AABIA which is the main hub of the airline. The airline gives air transport service in collaboration with different stakeholders such as the Immigration, Customs, NISS, Federal Police, Airports and many others. To give seamless function without barrier at all touch points of the airport the airline takes the lion's share to coordinate all concerned bodies through effective coordination and communication mechanism. The study focused on analyzing the barriers that affect the effectiveness of communication particularly between the passengers and the customer service officers in the case of Ethiopian Airlines.

Under this topic: the research design and approach, target population and sampling techniques, method of data collection and analysis, and Instrument validity & reliability test are discussed.

3.2 Research Design

The research design is the conceptual structure or master plan of the study which specifies the methods and procedure for collecting, measuring, and analyzing the needed data. It is a blueprint that plans the action and activities of the research project. A research design is the arrangement of conditions for data collection and analysis in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure Kothari (2004). To capture the logical structure of the study, the researcher used descriptive research design by using mean, standard deviation, percent, frequency correlation to analyze the data.

According to Kothari (2007), the descriptive research design is a type of research employed to obtain data that could help determine specific characteristics of a group. The main advantage of descriptive research is that it has the potential to provide us with a lot of information obtained from quite a large sample of individuals. To do so, the study employed both questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

3.3 Research Approach

In this study the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative research approach which are the mixed methods. Creswell(2014) stated, “mixed method research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative research in a single study”. The fundamental assumption is that the application of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in combined provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions than either of them independently. According to Creswell (2014), the quantitative approach is preferred as it attempts to examine the relationship between variables, which are measured numerically and analyzed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques. On the other hand, Cothari (2004) further asserted that qualitative research is a kind of research which mainly deals with the prejudiced assessment of subjects. In addition to the quantitative approach, the researcher used a qualitative approach as well to assess the day-to-day communication problems between the passengers and the employees at Ethiopian Airlines

through an in-depth investigation of the individual's perceptions via an interview and group discussions.

3.4 Population of the Study

The target populations of this research are the international passengers who travel by Ethiopian Airlines for any purpose either for Leisure, Business or any other reason and the employees of the same Airlines as well working here at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. According to the statistical information obtained from the Ethiopian Airlines BI source the airline used to transport from around 15,000 to 25,000 passengers on daily basis both as transit and their destination at Addis Ababa in spite of the major decline encountered for an extended period which left many airports almost empty because of the Covid-19 outbreak.

For the sake of manageability, the researcher has taken the daily maximum number of passengers (i.e., 25,000) as the population of Ethiopian Airlines passengers. Addis Ababa Bole International Airport provides flight information through several methods. Most passengers can receive flight information from Flight Information Display System (FIDS), but legacy platforms like SMS and email, and now in the digital age, airport apps and social media. About 75% of Ethiopian Airlines passengers have received information through FIDS and the announcer system at the airport terminal the remaining 25% are getting the information through their mobile devices. Therefore, a rough calculation will give us a population of around 18,750 passengers who get information through the FIDS, the announcer system, and other related ways. The researcher considers those passengers as the population of the study.

On the other hand, the researcher also considered a total of 320 employees of Ethiopian Airlines as population for interview particularly those working at the passenger service division at AABIA focusing on four main services delivering locations such as check-in counter, departure service, arrival and transfer service and Baggage service at AABIA Terminal. The researcher preferred to collect data from the employees via interview since it allows him to have detailed information about their communication experience, attitude and opinion and the barriers they encountered with by using enough time to discuss. The interview was relatively easy to accomplish since the researcher is also a staff member therein.

3.5 Sample Size Determination and Sampling Technique

3.5.1 Sample Size Determination

It is not feasible to study the whole population due to constraint factors like feasibility, accessibility, and cost implications. So, it's very crucial to choose a sample that is a genuine representative of the population. The practical limitation: cost, time, and other factors which are usually operative in the situation stand in the way of studying the total population (Singh, 2006). There are several methods for determining the sample size. In this paper, the researcher has adopted Cochran's sample size formula which was developed by Cronbach in 1951 to provide a measure of the internal consistency of a test or scale. Thus, *Cochran's sample size formula was used to calculate the sample size for this study which is widely used for a population of unlimited size and appropriate for large population size which is most reliable in many research fields.*

The sample size determination formula is presented below:

$$n = \frac{z^2 * p(1 - p)}{(e^2)} = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{(0.05^2)} = 384$$

Where “

$z = 1.96$ (Based on a 5% margin of error. Data are assumed two-tailed (i.e., a margin of error of 2.5% on each end of a normal distribution curve), thus a value of 0.9750 will be looked up within the z-score table.)

$\hat{p} = 50\%$ or 0.50 (**This value is often pulled from previous research/ literature. If unsure, use 50%.**)

$\varepsilon = 5\%$ or 0.05 (Same value used to get the z-score estimate but provided as a decimal/percentage.) “Thus, the total sample size is 384.

In addition, the researcher selected purposively selected 10 staff from a total of 320 customer service officers for the purpose of the interview to get detailed information about their communication experience, attitude and opinion in brief.

3.5.2 Sampling Technique

The next step after the determination of the representative sample size is selecting representative respondents and applying appropriate sampling techniques. In this study the researcher adopted stratified random sampling design. Singh and Masuku (2014) stated “Stratified random sampling is useful method for data collection if the population is heterogeneous”. Sekaran (2003) also stated that stratified random sampling involves a process of stratification, followed by a random selection of subjects from each stratum. In this research, the entire population were divided merely based on their service location (i.e Check-in Counter, Departure Service, Arrival and Transfer service and Baggage service) which is also known as strata irrespective of their linguistic or cultural background due to its inconvenience. Then the homogeneous units were sampled at random from each of these strata.

Since all the passengers pass through all the service locations the researcher decided to use different days for each location to collect data to avoid the possibility of overlapping and potential duplication in the data gathering process. Furthermore, the sample representative quantities selected from each service locations were determined by the researcher based on the lengthy of time the passengers stayed waiting for their turn for the service they need. For instance, the researcher has managed to reach relatively more passengers at the Boarding Gate than at the Baggage Service area since the passengers at the Baggage Service area left the Airport within fraction of minutes once they collected their luggage.

In addition, the researcher used a *purposive method* (non-probability) sampling technique to select employees for interview on a specific requirement such as educational level, work experience and gender to get reasonable insights from them which support his study.

Table 1 Sample size by Service Location of Passenger participants

NO*	Service Location	Total estimated number of passengers who used communication services per day	The sample size of strata	Percentage of Strata
1	Check-in	4012	80	21%
2	Boarding	6043	121	32%
3	Arrival and transfer	5067	102	27%
4	Baggage service	1610	33	9%
5	Passenger waiting area	2018	43	11%
	Total	18,750	384	100%

(Source: Researcher's Survey, 2023)

3.6 Data Sources and Collection Instrument

The researcher utilized primary data collection methods through survey methods by using standard questionnaires. According to Krishnaswami and Ranganathan (2007), the advantage of survey method is that it is relatively less expensive. It also permits anonymity and may result in more responses. The five-point Likert scale (i.e., Strongly Agree, Agree, Moderately Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) was applied in the questionnaire to obtain and measure the responses of the respondents. The advantages of using the Likert scale are that it is simple to construct a questionnaire, and easy and less time taking to read and complete.

The questionnaire was designed from different previous literature on related topics and customized to fit the research problem. Sample questionnaires were distributed to pre-test and check their appropriateness for gathering all the required information and adjusting based on initial recommendations. The reason for the selection of the questionnaire is that they extract level of agreement. It is also relatively inexpensive, faster, and efficient way of collecting extensive data at a lesser cost and to have access to wide geographical area coverage in a relatively reasonable period.

In addition, the researcher conducted interviews to gather primary data from Ethiopian Airlines employees who provide customer service at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport Terminal. Interviewing is one of the most appropriate methods of gathering information that researchers commonly used in their study. In this study the researcher used the structured face- to- face way of interviewing in accordance with the prearranged questions for it helps the researcher to get accurate information and various information coming out through the interview time with the respondents.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the quantitative data analysis method. Descriptive analysis such as frequencies and percentages are used to present quantitative data in form of tables. Data were coded and entered in the computer using the statistical package for social science (SPSS Version 26) for analysis. It gives means, standard deviations and correlations of variables, the mean and standard deviation are the most descriptive statistics used in this study to describe the data. In addition, the researcher also used the content analysis method to analyze the qualitative data collected from employees through interviews. The researcher found interview so convenient in dealing with the employees since it enables to get their communication experience with their own words in brief.

3.8 Reliability Test

The term reliability is the degree to which the measure of a construct is consistent or dependable. This study adopted Cronbach's alpha, which is a widely used method in social research to estimate the internal consistency of the entire instrument. In Cronbach's alpha, a value of 0.70 is recommended; The reliability test was executed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and items that scored above the acceptable value were retained.

Tavakol&Dennick (2011) recommended if a test has more than one concept or construct, it would be senseless to report alpha for the test for the fact that the larger number of questions will inevitably inflate the value of alpha. Therefore, alpha should be calculated for each of the concepts rather than for the entire test or for the whole scale. The coefficient of alpha varies from 0 to 1. In Cronbach alpha a value of 0.5 or less coefficient generally indicates unsatisfactory internal consistency reliability which refers unacceptable (Ramayah, 2011). In fact, according to

Zikmund et al., (2000) scales with a coefficient alpha between 0.6 and 0.7 indicate fair reliability and acceptable.

Table 2 Reliability Test

Each Variable Reliability Statistics

	Item	N	Cronbach's Alpha
Technological Factors	5	40	.931
Customer Responsiveness	7	40	.943
Communication Skill	6	40	.932
Attitude	6	40	.941
Effective Communication	4	40	.964
Total Item	28		

(Source: Researcher's Survey, 2023)

Based on Table 3 above all the 40 variables designed were found to be a good measure of internal consistency. The overall variable's alpha coefficient is greater than 0.900 which implies that the data reliability is excellent and acceptable.

3.9 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

3.9.1 The Passenger Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

The research questionnaire includes a segment of the passenger profile such as an assortment of demographics and the variable items which are meant to be a barrier for employees-passengers communication at Ethiopian Airlines. The background information comprised of gender, age, educational level, cultural background, the purpose of travel, travel frequency and methods of check-in, helps the researcher to show the degree and mode of communication barrier experienced between the employees and the passengers at Ethiopian Airlines.

Table 3 Demographic characteristic analysis of respondents

No of Item	Item	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	228	63.3
		Female	132	36.7
2	Age	18-30	144	40.0
		31-45	116	32.2
		46-60	84	9.4
		Above 60	16	4.4
3	Educational Level of Participant	Intermediate	48	13.3
		Diploma	28	7.8
		Degree	184	51.1
		Masters	58	16.1
		Ph.D.	42	11.7
4	Culture Background	Africa	188	52.2
		Middle East	60	16.7
		Europe	24	6.7
		Asia	56	15.6
		North America	12	3.3
		Australia	20	5.6
5	Frequency of travel in a year with Ethiopian	Once a month	152	42.2
		Every three months	136	37.8
		Every six months	60	16.7
		Once a year	12	3.3
6	Methods to check-in	Online check-in	72	20.0
		Airports self-check-in(kiosks)	120	33.3
		Agent check-in	168	46.7

Source: own survey 2023.

According to table 4, most participants were young adult passengers (18-30 years) that are 40% followed by adults (30-40) covering 32.2% and those middle-aged adults (45-60) 23.3 %. Old adults were only 4.4 %. This shows that young adult passengers cover the majority ratio, and this finding suggests of the customers were found in the working-age bracket as they might be much used in air transport services.

Regarding education, the respondents were predominantly first-degree, Master and PhD holders with 51.1 %, 13.3% and 11.7 respectively. There are only 11.7 and 7.0 % of respondents who were intermediate and diploma. This shows that the respondents had high literacy levels and it has given the researcher an opportunity to get responses with sound reasoning.

Most of the participants regarding to nationality was African who share 52.2%, followed by Middle Eastern and Asians who cover 16.7% and 15.6% respectively. Only 6.7%, 5.6% and 3.3 respondents were Europe, Australia, and North America's nationality. From this, we can infer that most of the Ethiopian airline passengers are African nationals. Knowing the respondent's cultural background allows the researcher to identify the miscellanea of communication effects.

The researcher considered that knowing the passengers' frequency of travel enables him to figure out how often they have been going through troubles in their communication experience at the Airport. Table 4.7 described that 42.2% of the respondents travel via Ethiopian Airlines at least once a month, followed by 37.8% who responded they travel about every three months, and 16.7% travel every six months. Only 3.3 respondents travelled via Ethiopian Airlines about once a year. So, one can infer that frequent communication experience is inevitable between the passengers and the employees at the airport on large scale.

Regarding the methods to check-in, half of the respondents (46.7%) preferred to check in through an agent at the Airport check-in counter desk which is the biggest area of communication experience between passengers and employees. 33.3% of the respondents also answered they usually use self-check-in kiosks which are installed in the terminals. Only 20 % of respondents used online check-in. This shows that the passengers and the employees undertake frequent face to face-to-face which triggers the researcher to think of dealing with the factors which affect communication effectiveness between them.

3.10 Validity Analysis

Kothari (2004) said that validity is the extent to which differences which are found with a measuring instrument reflect accurate differences among those being tested. In other words, content validity is the extent to which a measuring instrument provides adequate coverage of the topic under study. Validity is the most critical criterion which indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. If the instrument contains a sample which can representative universe, the content validity is said to be good. It can also be determined by using a panel of persons who shall judge how well the measuring instrument meets the standards, but there is no numerical way to express it. Based on this the content validity was verified by Dr Abdulaziz Dino by looking into the contents between line and approving and by some senior colleagues.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

The personal integrity of each participant was respected in the process of conducting the research. Every participant in the research was informed properly about the purpose of the research and asked for his/her consent before any information asked. No information was requested from the participant without his/her prior consent. The information provided by each respondent was kept confidential and was used only for the research purpose. Furthermore, the researcher tried his best to stay neutral and free from bias in the course of his study not to inculcate his personal feelings due to his affiliation to the airline as an employee of the company.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter deals with the data presentation, analysis and discussion based on the primary collected from Ethiopian Airlines passengers and employees at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. Questionnaires were distributed to 384 sampled international passengers who were due to take their flight at Bole Airport. Besides, interview was also conducted with 10 Ethiopian Airlines customer service officers purposively sampled from four service units such as the Check-in counter, Boarding Gate, Arrival and Transfer and Baggage Service section based on the educational and professional requirements to get expertise observation and opinion. For convenience the interviewee employees from Check-in counter were coded as CSA1, Boarding Gate coded as CSA2, Arrival and Transfer coded as CSA3, and Baggage Service coded as CSA4.

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 384 questionnaires were personally handled by the respondents with close follow-up and guidance in filling the questionnaire and 360 respondents filled and returned their questionnaire. Thus, constituting approximately 94% of the questionnaires were returned, while 24 of the respondents didn't respond and never returned the questionnaire due to different reasons including minimum connecting time to their flight which constituted only 6%. According to Saunders (2002), a response rate of 70% and above for a questionnaire survey is sufficient to carry out the analysis.

The questionnaires were distributed to passengers of Ethiopia Airlines at the main hub of Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. The basic assumptions of the major barriers that affect the employees-passengers communication are technology, customer responsiveness, communication skill and attitude. The researcher came up with the mentioned assumptions both based on his own personal observation and having reviewed several secondary materials as mentioned in chapter two. The researcher applied descriptive data analysis methods and the result of this descriptive analysis is discussed in this chapter. The statistical analysis of this study was done by SPSS software version 26, and the result of the study is shown in the descriptive section. In the descriptive section tables, and charts were used and in the inference section, the correlation was analyzed.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

For each question that was included under each dimension of the predictor variable. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviations) of the respondent scores were computed. Analysis has been done by comparing these mean scores and deviations among respondents. The reason for using descriptive statistics is to compare the different factors that affect the level of communication effectiveness by using the means and standard deviation values.

As far as this descriptive statistic is concerned, the effectiveness of communication at Ethiopian Airlines is satisfactory level with a mean value of **3.08** on a 5-point Likert scale. This implies that technology, customer responsiveness, communication skill and attitude influence the effectiveness of communication. The analysis of this study was done using descriptive statistics; from these, the researcher used the mean scores of each variable. The main reason for using this measurement was to demonstrate the average responses of respondents

The interpretation is made based on the following measurement scale intervals or ranges. *Mean scores are 4.51-5.00 excellent or very good, 3.51-4.50 good, 2.51-3.50 average or moderate, 1.51-2.50 fair and 1.00-1.50 is poor* (Btawee:1987) as cited by Hailu (2013)

4.2.1 Descriptive Analysis on Employee Attitude

When evaluating the overall perception of respondents regarding the relationship between the employees' attitude and the passengers' communication, the aggregate mean and standard deviation scores show 3.80 and 0.706 which demonstrates the employee attitude has strong relationship with communication in the airlines with a higher level of agreement.

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis on Employee Attitude**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employees' attitudes are positive	360	4.89	.315
The staff are courteous in their communication with passengers to assist	360	3.45	1.338
The employees are respectful while approaching the customers	360	4.84	.363
The employees are always honest to customer inquiries	360	2.58	1.266
The employees have a service mindset to serve the customers.	360	3.48	1.558
Employees proactively interact going beyond extra mile to solve problems	360	3.53	1.595
Employee Attitude (Grand Mean and Standard deviation)	360	3.80	.706

Source: own survey, 2023

From table 6 the descriptive statistics performed, all items of the employee attitude dimension mean score are the good and excellent level of agreement; including employees' attitudes are positive (4.89) and the employees are respectful towards the customers (4.84). In addition, the employee's proactive interaction with the passengers going beyond extra mile to solve problems have been at a good level with a mean score of 3.53 which has a positive effect on communication effectiveness. Furthermore, the employees have a service mindset to serve the customer (3.48) and the staff are courteous in their communication with passengers to assist has got a mean score of 3.45. According to the passenger perspective, the way of honest responsiveness to customer inquiries has been needed improvement with a mean score of 2.58 which is a moderate score. Overall, the descriptive analysis result indicated that the employee attitude has got a strong relationship towards passengers' communication effectiveness in Ethiopian Airlines.

In this regard, based on the employee's interview about the relationship between employees' attitude toward their profession and the effect it poses on their overall communication with the passengers. According to many of them their strong customer-oriented mentality in some way has been improving their communication experience rather than affecting it. The researcher forwarded for the customer service officers how attitude impacts the employees-passengers communication in the airline. Many of the interviewees believe that maintaining positive attitude towards our job and in dealing with the passengers is very essential for communication effectiveness.

One interviewee from CSA3 (Arrival and Transfer Service agent) said as follows

A positive attitude in customer service means always staying calm during flight irregularities, making all possible efforts to build broad-shouldered relationships with customers and ensuring that the airline is trustworthy all the time towards them through their department. Being honest and always updating the passengers with the true information during flight service and any flight disruption and always working hard to put into effect the culture of positive attitude is very essential. Nevertheless, we frequently fail to comply accordingly due to fear of potential negative consequences from our passengers' side (Personal Interview, 24 Mar 2023)

The researcher presented the similar question for CSAI (Check-in counter Agents) also. In terms of the employee attitude dimension particularly regarding giving honest and timely response to customers inquiries one customer from CSA1 replied as follows

As an airline business industry, we always do have a binding agreement between our passengers and the airline. Sometime breach of contract or failure to honestly fulfil the promise we give our customers is inevitable in our business which means not honoring the contract due to the company's or the employees under performance which in turn creates service dissatisfaction and communication ineffectiveness. As front-line agents in charge of frequent communication experience to our customers, we are prone to be responsible for the breach of the contract which thereby damages our communication integrity (Personal interview, 24 Mar 2023)

In general, most of the interviewees agreed that despite many of the employees have a good customer service mindset to go extra mile to approach the passengers, some improvement is still needed in terms of improving the attitude of the employees in terms of complying with the standard customer service guidelines in their interaction.

4.2.2 Descriptive Analysis on communication skill

The researcher wanted to know to what extent communication skill do affect Ethiopian Airlines passengers' information exchange with the employees. Communication skills in terms of business communication essentially mean the ability one uses when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Accordingly, the descriptive statistics point out that the overall mean of the communication skill dimension was computed to be 3.01 with a standard deviation of 0.689

Table 5 Descriptive Analysis on communication skill

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Adequate multilingual staff are available to accommodate a variety of passengers	360	3.08	1.257
The employees have good empathy while communicating with the passengers	360	3.45	1.338
Customer service standards are well kept in meeting service targets: -assertiveness, timeliness, accuracy	360	1.97	.949
The announcements given before departure, in-flight and post-departure are clearly heard without confusion	360	2.11	1.131
The stakeholders in the airport give quick answer and promptly solve the passengers demands	360	2.65	1.229
Customers are kept engaged with latest update even away from the airport.	360	4.80	.477
Communication skills (Grand Mean and Standard deviation)	360	3.01	0.689

Source: Own survey, 2023

Table 7 depicted that almost all items of the communication skill dimension mean score are below the average. To show specifically the mean score of customer service standards are well kept meeting service targets (assertiveness, timeliness, accuracy) (1.97), the announcements given before departure, in-flight and post departure are clearly heard without confusion (2.11), the stakeholders in the airport give quick answer and promptly solve the passengers demands (2.65), Availability of multilingual staff to accommodate variety of passengers from different linguistic background scored a mean value of 3.08 and the empathy of the employees while communicating with the passengers (3.45).

From all these analyses, we can conclude that delays in providing the requested service in a timely manner, a lack of stakeholder prompt answer, unsustainable customer service standards, not timely announcing the flight information before departure, in-flight and post departure are the major barriers for employee-passengers communication effectiveness at the airport. On the other hand, according to the analysis result the item score titled ‘customers are kept engaged with latest update even away from the airport’ has got excellent level of the mean score (4.80) from the communication skill dimension.

In addition, the researcher conducted interview with the employees regarding to what extent communication skill affects Ethiopian Airlines passengers’ information exchange. Accordingly, many of them responded that in terms of the multilingual speech most of them did not speak any other international language but only English which is taken as a barrier. Likewise, one interviewee (CSA2) said

Communication skill in airline encompasses quite number of issues such as social and linguistic skill, intercultural awareness and many more. It may also include active listening and speaking with good interpersonal communication knowledge along many other communication technicalities and capabilities. There is no doubt that lack of communication skill is one of the major problems in our airlines in the employees and the stakeholders’ side which has been affecting the employees-passengers communication effectiveness in our daily business activities. Thus, we need to work hard at least to minimize the major barriers through step-by-step process to realize effective communication.

Moreover, one employee (CSA4) replied on the lack of giving prompt answer to the passengers by stake holders at the airport and its potential effect on the employees-passengers communication experience. She spoke: -

Stakeholders in the airport can be divided into two broad categories which are internal and external stakeholders. We frequently witness a problem in terms of establishing a convenient platform in the terminal in such a way that all stakeholders undertake their share activities with efficient coordination and communication each other for mutual benefit and for efficient customer service experiences. Stakeholders should provide quick answer for passengers demands so that all the passengers would experience effective customer service experience at all touch points (pre-flight, in-flight and post flight) of the airport. Unfortunately, on many occasions we see number of our passengers improperly treated by various stakeholders such as NISS, Immigration and Customs and their demands unattended at times which in return damages the overall communication effectiveness in the airline industry and causing business damage in the long run. (Personal interview, 29 Mar 2023)

Another interviewee (CSA2) added: -

One of the communication skills anyone who work at airline industry should be aware of is the intercultural communication skill for the fact that airport area is a place where different people with different cultural background from different parts of the world come together. Those passengers use various verbal and non-verbal communication to convey according to the culture they came from. In this regard, all staff and stakeholders working in the airline setting should prepare themselves for the essentials of intercultural communication entities such as the linguistic, value, culture, ideology, belief, needs, interests, preferences and the like. Thus, we have got a lot to do in that aspect (Personal interview, 29 Mar 2023)

In general, most of the employees agreed that there is a huge gap in their side in terms of complying with customer service standards (timeliness, accuracy, suitability) due to

various unexpected flight disruption, in terms updating the flight announcements facilities in the terminal and learning more languages.

4.2.3 Descriptive Analysis on Customer Responsiveness

Based on Table 6, the customer responsiveness result showed that the lack of timely responsiveness to customer may affect the service providers communication which resulted in the average mean value and standard deviation of 2.76 and 0.753 respectively which indicated that customer responsiveness has affected the communication effectiveness with a moderate level.

Table 6 Descriptive Analysis on customer responsiveness

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Immediate response to passengers' request	360	2.65	1.335
Response to canceled or delayed flights	360	3.08	1.257
Responsiveness in unexpected and emergency situations	360	3.73	.966
Passengers' grievance redress mechanism	360	1.89	.821
Response to missing or lost baggage	360	3.67	1.566
Response to transferring services	360	1.79	.894
Response to cancellation or change of travelling date change of travelling date	360	2.51	1.447
Customer Responsiveness (Grand Mean and Standard Deviation)	360	2.76	0.753

Source: own survey, 2023

Table 8 above showed that almost all items of the customer responsiveness dimension mean score are moderate level. Show specifically the mean score of responsiveness in unexpected and emergency situations to is 3.73, the response to missing or lost baggage mean score is 3.67 and the response to canceled or delayed flight mean score is 3.08. This implies that the responses to unexpected and emergency situations, responses to missing/lost baggage and the response to the

canceled/delayed flight are positive effects on employees-passengers communication. On the other hand, according to the analysis result the item score titled immediate response to passengers' request, response to cancellation or change of travelling date, Passengers' grievance redress mechanism and response to transferring services has got a relatively fair level of mean scores of 2.65, 2.51, 1.89 and 1.79 respectively.

In connection to this according to the interviewed employees regarding how customer responsiveness may affect the service providers communication many of them were hesitant on many occasions to give on-time information to passengers who were particularly faced with flight irregularities such as flight delays or cancellations.

They said, they step back when irregularities happened oftentimes due to fear of possible negative reactions from the passengers which in return affect the service providers communication.

One employee (CSA3) said: -

We have experienced various occasions of flight disruptions at the airport. In such moments you must be as flexible as possible to persuade passengers with effective interpersonal communication skills. Many passengers are business traveler as we can see in their itinerary documents in addition to tourists and government officials. Disruption of their flight means disruption of their business, programs, and vacations. One must have the confidence to convince those passengers their flight disrupted with appealing communication skills. I admit that I don't have that quality (Personal interview, 02 Apr 2023)

Another employee (CSA3) added

In airline context, responsiveness has to do with intensive engagement and interaction with the passengers in terms of providing immediate response to the passengers' inquiries politely and updating them any flight irregularity issues in good time and always understanding and addressing complaints and grievances empathically. As employees of the airline, we are not consistently doing it due to various reasons but largely because of fear of possible negative consequences and reactions from the passengers' side. (Personal interview, 02 Apr 2023)

In general, many participants responded that Ethiopian Airlines has flight irregularity recovery program to compensate passengers who would be affected by any flight disruption. However, nearly all passengers are not usually interested in their flight being disrupted in the first place. Many of them replied that they usually hesitate to openly communicate particularly during flight cancellation, delay, baggage missing and the like and this usually happen particularly with passengers to Western Africa regions due to fear of possible negative consequences including physical reaction.

4.2.4 Descriptive Analysis on Communication Technology Factors

The evaluation of technology factors of the communication dimension is based on the average respondents' rating of the first five items (See Table 9). The descriptive statistics point out that the mean score of the technology factor dimension was computed to be 2.62 with a standard deviation of 0.886.

Table 7 Descriptive Analysis on Communication Technology Factors

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There are alternative communication tools in the airport for a variety of communication needs (disabilities, ageing traveler etc.)	360	1.83	.772
There is widespread accessibility of electronic communication platforms (telephone, PAS, email alerts, AVRS, Chat bot, etc.)	360	3.08	1.257
Adequate digital communication facilities like dynamic display solutions (flight Information systems, AMB etc.) are available.	360	2.47	1.228
Information centers or desks are always availed at the terminal to get timely information and to keep in touch with all updates.	360	3.67	1.566
The guidance signage and information display in the terminal clearly and adequately show me the right information I need	360	2.04	1.155
Technology Factors (Grand Mean and Standard Deviation)	360	2.62	0.886

Source: own survey, 2023

Table 9 showed that the effect of accessibility of electronic communication platforms (telephone, email, Chat-bot) and Information centers and desks are always availed at the terminal to get timely information and to keep in touch with all updates to effective communication mean score value is 3.08 and 3.67 respectively. Their mean value is above the cut point of the agreement which implies the agreement levels of both variables are moderate agreement.

On the other hand, the remain technology factors' actual average mean score is less than half such as adequate digital communication facilities, the guidance signage and information display in the terminal clearly and adequately showing the right information and the alternative communication tools in the airport for a variety of communication needs (disabilities, ageing traveler etc.) mean score is 2.47, 2.04 and 1.83 respectively. This implies that Ethiopia Airlines is implicated or used the communication tools partially.

In addition, the researcher questioned to what extent communication technology affect Ethiopian Airlines employees-passengers communication and whether multiple communication technology platforms exist in the airline. Many of them replied to the airline somehow lacks technological instruments in terms of reaching all kinds of customers including physically impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired etc. They said in the current competitive airline market all kinds of alternative communication facilities at the physical environment of the airport terminals is mandatory to provide passengers with enjoyable flight experience.

One employee (CSA4) answered

In airport, various communication technology gadgets are very useful for good and alternative communication experience. For instance, the basic electronic communication tools in airline include public address system (PAS), mobiles apps, email, cellphones, computers, social networking, electronic message boards and the like. These are very necessary entities for any airline company to facilitate communication effectiveness both for internal and external communication purposes. Despite this fact, many of them are not adequately and widely accessible in AABIA terminal which in turn affect the communication effectiveness between the passengers and the employees. For instance, all Ethiopian airline employees are restricted to use mobile phones in workplaces across the terminal (except very few in a

higher position) over unjustifiable reasons which in return hinder the overall efficiency of communication (Personal interview, 05 Apr 2023)

Another employee (CSA2) admitted

We do have a lot to do in terms of being familiar with the airline communication procedures and multiple communication facilities out there in the aviation industry to provide our variety of passengers (including deaf, blind, cognitively disabled, aged etc.) with standardized and seamless airline service. This time we have gaps in adopting multiple communication alternatives like Automated Voice Response System (AVRS), Chat bot, Automated Messaging Board (AMB) etc to provide the passengers with enriched communication experiences for access mobility and standardized service (Personal interview, 29 Mar 2023)

Another interviewee (CSA1) replied

Ethiopian Airlines has introduced a Chat bot communication platform which is called 'Lucy' to the passengers/customers which is a computer program app designed to simulate conversation with the passengers/customers over the internet to put into effect communication effectiveness. The Airline use the application over Facebook messenger and Telegram platforms to increase the communication and service quality via advanced customer engagement, by meeting customer expectations and balancing automation with human touch. Nonetheless, we have still obliged to provide various information from our working desks to the passengers in addition to our regular duty as the platforms are not accessible in all alternative social media platforms at the terminals and also due to functional limitation of the program like failure to answer multi-part questions (Personal interview, 05 Apr 2023)

In general, regarding the technological factors such as the public address system, information booths, information kiosks(interactive information kiosks), Automated voice response systems most of the employees admitted the gaps and they also said visual communication tools in the airport such as digital information signage, direction displays, drawings, charts, graphs, and diagrams installed across the terminal require upgrading to make the complex information exchange easier thereby to facilitate employees-passengers communication process.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation is the most basic and useful measure of association between two or more variables (Marczyk, Dematteo and Festinger, 2005). Cooper & Schindler (2009) suggested that a correlation coefficient above 0.8 between explanatory variables should be corrected because it is a sign of multi-collinearity problems. Malhotra (2007) argued that a correlation coefficient can be 0.75. Furthermore, Hair et al. (2006) argued that a correlation coefficient below 0.9 may not cause a serious multicollinearity problem. A correlation analysis of the dependent variable and the independent variables has been presented below.

Table 8 Correlations

Correlations

		Technological Factors	Customer Responsiveness	Communication Skill	Attitude	Effective Communication
Technological Factors	Pearson Correlation	1	.965**	.943**	.829**	.788**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	360	360	360	360	360
Customer Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.965**	1	.902**	.759**	.711**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	360	360	360	360	360
Communication Skill	Pearson Correlation	.943**	.902**	1	.867**	.888**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	360	360	360	360	360
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	.829**	.759**	.867**	1	.898**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	360	360	360	360	360
Effective Communication	Pearson Correlation	.788**	.711**	.888**	.898**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	360	360	360	360	360

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own survey, 2023

Table 10 provides the correlation matrix between the variables with Pearson correlation coefficient to show the strength of the relationship among the variables (dependent variable effective communication and independent variables such as technology, customer responsiveness, communication skill and attitude). Pearson correlation analysis was used to provide evidence of convergent validity and Pearson correlation coefficients reveal the magnitude and direction of relationships either positive or negative and the intensity of the relationship.

Based on the above correlation coefficient result table, *the correlation coefficient between effective communication and customer responsiveness has a positive moderate relationship ($r=0.711$, $P=00.000$); effective communication and technology factors have positive moderate relationship ($r= 0.788$, $p=00.000$). Furthermore, communication skills and effective communication have strong positive relationship ($r=0.888$, $p=00.000$); employee attitudes have also a positive strong relationship with effective communication ($r=0.898$, $p=00.000$). The Overall findings provide significant support for the technology, employee attitudes, customer responsiveness and communication skills influenced the practice of effective communication at Ethiopian Airlines.*

The Overall findings provide the significant effects of technology, employee attitudes, customer responsiveness and communication skills on the employees-passengers communication process at Ethiopian Airlines.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the overall summary, the conclusion, and recommendation of the research. In fact, the recommendations are consisted of two parts. It is made up of the main recommendation as well as recommendations for future research. It is also very important to mention that the recommendations provided in this research are emanated from the findings of the study.

5.1 Summary of findings

This study has attempted to analyze the barriers that affect the employees-passengers communication effectiveness at Ethiopia Airlines. To undertake the study, 384 questionnaires were distributed and 360 has been duly filled and returned.

Descriptive analysis revealed that most of the customers in Ethiopian Airlines were male, and most of the respondents, which were 72.2%, were fallen under the age group of 20-30 and 31-40 altogether. Thus, it can be implied that the randomly selected respondents were mature. The finding indicated that the respondents were predominantly first-degree, Master and PhD holders with 51.1 %, 13.3% and 11.7 respectively and it enhances the quality of expected responses that ultimately increase the quality of the study. About 52.2% of respondents were of African nationality, it can be implied that the randomly selected respondents knew the respondent's cultural background allowing the researcher to identify the miscellanea of communication effects. About 42.8% of respondents have travelled via Ethiopian Airlines with the term of every three months. Regarding the methods to check-in, more than half of the respondents (55.3 %) preferred to check in through an agent at the Airport check-in counter desk which is the biggest area of communication experience between passengers and employees. On the other hand, the demographic variables (gender, age, and education) of the employee interviewees have been analyzed.

Furthermore, the descriptive statistic result showed that employees-passengers communication effectiveness at Ethiopian Airlines' overall mean value is 3.08 with a moderate level of agreement included: the overall mean responses of extent levels of respondents in employee

attitude (3.80), communication skill (3.01), customer responsiveness (2.76), and technology factors (2.62).

Additionally, regarding the employee attitude toward effective communication, most of the participants responded that the employees are in an excellent level in terms of having positive mind setup (4.89) and respectful communication approach (4.84) followed by a good proactive interaction with passengers with a mean score of (3.53). The employees' courtesy and service mentality and honesty for customers inquiries scored a moderate score of 3.45, 3.48 and 2.58 respectively.

Regarding communication skills, according to the questionnaire findings customers are kept engaged with latest update even away from the airport with a mean score of (4.80). The employees' empathy while communicating with the passengers is good with 3.45. Adequate multilingual staff availability and stakeholders' communication skill scored a moderate mean value of 3.08 and 2.65 respectively. The flight announcements quality and observation of customer service standards (timeliness, accuracy and suitability) were scored a fair value of 2.11 and 1.97 respectively. Likewise, most of the employees pointed out that the effect of multilingual skill, breach of contract due to flight disruption, lack of being familiar with some communication platforms are the factors that affect their communication effectiveness. Many of them said that they did not speak any other international language but only English which inhibit them to address non-English speakers and/or those passengers with limited proficiency.

The overall result of the employee responsiveness to grievance redress mechanism, flight change, immediate response to passengers' request, response to canceled or delayed flights, response to missing or lost baggage and responsiveness in unexpected and emergency situations scored poor and moderate.

The summarized point of view of the employees regarding the technology factors the basic electronic communication tools, accessibility of electronic and digital communication platforms such as telephone, Passenger Address System (PAS), email alert, cell phones, Automated Voice Response System (AVRS), Chat bot, Automated Messaging Board (AMB) etc. are not widely in use to the passengers and for the staff on many occasions which hinder communication effectiveness. As they say, all Ethiopian airline employees at the airport are restricted even to use

mobile phones in workplaces (except very few in a higher positions) over unjustifiable reasons which in turn hinder the overall communication effectiveness. Furthermore, they pointed out that Ethiopian Airlines have not worked in advance to install up-to-date and interactive visual communication facilities in a modern design across the terminal buildings to depict the intended message to the passengers.

The result of the correlation coefficient between effective communication with customer responsiveness and technology factors have positive values of 0.711 and, 0.788 respectively implying that there is a moderate correlation between them. Based on the correlation results communication skills and employee attitudes have a positive and strong or significant relationship with effective communication with the coefficient of 0.888 and 0.898 respectively.

The Overall findings provide significant support for the technology, employee attitudes, and customer responsiveness and communication skills influenced the practice of effective communication at Ethiopian Airlines.

5.2 Conclusion

The main focus of the study is to analyze the employees-passengers communication barriers at Ethiopian Airlines by using the four dimensions (technology factors, employee attitudes, customer responsiveness and communication skills). Based on the analysis findings regarding employee attitudes, the over mean score of (3.80) at a good level of agreement. For this, the study concluded that the positive level of employees' *positive attitude, employee courteously, respectfulness, honesty and service mindset* are good and excellent which implies the employees' good professional mentality. Nonetheless, the honesty to customer inquiries was scored poor which requires improvement. The dimension of communication skills earned an overall mean score of (3.01) which is the average point. From this, the study concludes that the *availability of multilingual staff, the employees' empathy while communicating with the passengers, providing of clearer flight announcement before departure, in-flight and post departure, quickly answering the passengers' problems by stakeholders and compliance with customer service standards* (assertiveness, timeliness, accuracy) is average and below average. This implies that much improvement is needed to enhance the employees and the stakeholders communication skill as same is also affirmed by the interview with the employees.

Regarding the dimension of customer responsiveness, the study indicated that most of respondents were below average in terms of *responsiveness at transfer services, response to passengers' request, response to passengers' grievance, immediate responses to flight cancellation/change* etc. This implies that the Airline and the employees should work hand in hand to improve the timely responsiveness of the employees for passengers needs and inquiries.

The final dimension of technological factors mean score is (2.62) which is below the average level of agreement. The study concludes that the *accessibility of electronic communication platforms* (telephone, email, Chat bot) and *the availability of information centers and desks* are above the average level of agreement which implies a little work still needed for advanced achievement though. On the other hand, the remaining technology factors' actual average mean score such as availability of *adequate digital communication facilities* (flight information systems are available), the *guidance signage and information displays*, the availability of *alternative communication tools* are less than half which implies the necessity of immediate solution. The Overall findings revealed that effective communication can significantly be influenced by technology, employee attitudes, customer responsiveness and communication skills at Ethiopian Airlines.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn above, the researcher forwards its recommendations. According to the finding of the result, Ethiopian Airlines' communication methods with passengers required improvement particularly in the three dimensions such as communication skill, technological factors, and timely responsiveness. Therefore, the student researcher suggests implementing the following recommendation:

- Ethiopian Airlines should focus and practice on the implementation of effective communication entities such as up-to-date technologies, ways of timely customer responsiveness, communication skills and other related issues.
- Ethiopian Airlines should establish and implement beyond principles effective communication strategy such as multilingual communication strategies to reach as many customers as possible from different linguistic background and to stand its rivalries.
- The airline should install and implement adequate digital and electronic communication facilities in the terminal for a variety of communication needs including for disabilities, ageing travelers etc.
- Ethiopian Airlines should play its leading role in coordinating and collaborating the stakeholders in the Airport for effective communication experience of the passengers.
- Ethiopian Airlines should provide open, clear, and timely information all the time especially during flight disruption to its service users to simplify and avoid confusion in its aviation service.
- Various training should be prepared and given on regular basis to the personnel and stakeholders to advance their communication skill.
- Regular observation should be taken on the employees-passengers communication process at the airline to assess its effectiveness and to identify potential barriers for early correction.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire

Addis Ababa University School Of Journalism and Communication

Questionnaire to be filled by Ethiopian Airlines customers/passengers

Dear Respondents,

This questionnaire is designed to collect data about “factors affecting effective communication between passengers and employees in the air transport industry: Ethiopian Airlines in focus”. The information you provide through this questionnaire will be used as a primary data in the case study I am conducting in partial fulfillment for the requirements of degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and communication

Confidentiality

Please be assured that this research is conducted only for the academic purpose authorized by Addis Ababa University School of Journalism and Communication. No other person can access the collected data. In any report I may publish, I will make sure that no information is included that may make it possible to identify any respondents. I kindly request that you take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire.

General Instructions

1. No need of writing your name.
2. If you have some queries, use the following contact address.

The Researcher: Habtamu Melkamu

Contact Address: +251-913-78-2140

E-mail: habtamumelkamu41@gmail.com

Thank you for your cooperation!

clearly and adequately show me the right information I need					
Customer Responsiveness					
Immediate response to passengers' request					
Response to canceled or delayed flights					
Responsiveness in unexpected and emergency situations					
Passengers' grievance redress mechanism					
Response to missing or lost baggage					
Response to transferring services					
Response to cancellation or change of travelling date change of travelling date					
Employee communication skill					
Adequate multilingual staff are available to accommodate a variety of passengers					
The employees have good empathy while communicating with the passengers					
Customer service standards are well kept meeting service targets: -assertiveness, timeliness, accuracy...)					
The announcements given before departure, in-flight and post-departure are clearly heard without confusion					
The stakeholders in the airport give quick answer and promptly solve the passengers demands					
Customers are kept engaged with latest update even away from the airport.					
Attitude					
Employees' attitudes are positive					
The staff are courteous in their communication with passengers to assist					
The employees are respectful while approaching the customers					
The employees are always honest to customer inquiries					
The employees have a service mindset to serve the customers.					

Employees proactively interact going beyond extra mile to solve problems					
Effective communication					
Technology affects communication by making it easier, quicker, and more efficient					
Efficient Customer response is important for effective communication.					
Communication Skills are important for effective communication.					
Good attitude of employees will improve the effective communication					

24. Please circle on your overall communication experience satisfaction as a customer with EAL

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
1	2	3	4	5

Write any additional idea that challenges communication effectiveness at AABIA terminal based on your flight experience with Ethiopian Airlines.

Thanks again for your time!!!

Appendix 2: Interview questions

1. What major factors could affect the employees-passengers communication in Ethiopian Airlines?
2. Do you think the attitude of the employees, the communication skill, timely responsiveness, and technological factors have to do with communication effectiveness? How?
3. What is the relationship between the employees' attitude and the passengers' communication?
4. To what extent does communication skill affect the employees-passengers information exchange?
5. How does customer responsiveness affect the service providers communication?
6. To what extent does communication technology affects employees-passengers communication in Ethiopian Airlines?