

Navigating On-Site Challenges Strategies for Success in Interior Design Project

Mohd Firdaus Tugiman¹, Yulyta Kodrat Prasetyaningsih², Nur Maizura Ahmad Noorhani³,
Arniatul Aiza Mustapha⁴

^{1,3,4}Fakulti Alam Bina, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

² Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

¹firdaustugiman@uitm.edu.my, ²yulyta_kodrat@isi.ac.id, ³nmaizura@uitm.edu.my,

⁴arnia836@uitm.edu.my

*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

Interior design construction projects operate under tight spatial, technical, and aesthetic constraints, yet empirical evidence on the root drivers of on-site failures remains limited. This study identifies the dominant challenges affecting interior project delivery and the strategies practitioners rely on to manage them. Using a qualitative design, 26 experienced professionals were purposively selected for non-structured interviews, and responses were thematically coded. Seventeen problem categories emerged, with communication failures (n=13), cash-flow constraints (n=11), and poor project execution (n=11) constituting the most pervasive risks. Thirteen solution themes were identified, led by stringent site monitoring (n=14), structured communication protocols (n=11), and rigorous cost planning (n=11). The findings underscore the need for integrated management systems that strengthen coordination, financial governance, and execution control in interior construction.

Keywords: Interior design project, Issues at site during construction stage and solutions



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1 INTRODUCTION

The interior design industry is primarily driven by the role of the interior designer, a multifaceted and demanding profession that blends creativity with technical expertise to design aesthetically pleasing and functional indoor environments. Ultimately, work aims to enhance the quality of life for users (Manjunath, 2024). Construction sites, particularly those involving interior projects, present a unique set of challenges that can significantly impact the successful completion of a project. These challenges range from logistical issues and time constraints to quality control and stakeholder management. In the dynamic environment of an interior construction project, where precise details and high standards of finish are paramount, the margin for error is slim. Problems can arise at any stage, whether in the planning, execution, or final inspection phases, often leading to delays, increased costs, and dissatisfaction among stakeholders. Yusoff (2024) emphasised that delays in interior design construction projects in Malaysia are largely caused by logistical complexities, stringent time constraints, and frequent design changes, resulting in significant schedule overruns and increased costs in both private and public sectors. By leveraging visual hierarchy and strategic layouts, designers utilise typography and imagery to address specific client needs. This approach facilitates the effective communication of complex information across diverse media, ensuring clarity and alignment among various construction stakeholders (Amirul et al., 2024).

On the other hand, Jasmani (2016) agreed that one of the core issues faced in interior construction projects is the coordination of various trades and subcontractors. Unlike external construction projects, interior works demand meticulous attention to detail and seamless integration of diverse elements such as carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and finishes. Besides that, Jasmani (2016) also underlined that interior design projects require meticulous coordination between consultants and contractors, thus without proper integration of multidisciplinary drawings and site supervision, efficiency suffers and both time and budget performance are negatively impacted. The interdependence of these trades means that a delay or error in one area can have a cascading effect on the entire project timeline. Additionally, site conditions can vary significantly, posing unforeseen challenges that require immediate and effective solutions.

According to Fakhrhoseini & Ariffin (2023), the significance of effective project management in overcoming construction site problems cannot be overstated and by implementing robust project management practices, project managers can reduce the likelihood of delays, manage costs effectively, and deliver a finished product that meets or exceeds client expectations. Therefore, understanding the common problems encountered on interior construction project during construction phase and the strategies project managers employ to address the problems is critical for the successful execution of these projects. Meanwhile, according to Rosman et al. (2025), construction teams rely heavily on face-to-face interaction and shared experience. By prioritising meetings, the industry demonstrates a core need for immediate collaboration to navigate project hurdles. These findings emphasise that maintaining effective communication is a critical factor for success during the construction process. Consequently, Ullah (2018) believed that the involvement of incompetent practitioners in the installation phase can directly lead to substandard execution. This lack of expertise not only complicates long-term maintenance but also results in inflated construction costs due to errors, rework, and the inefficiency of the installation process.

This paper aims to identify the problems encountered on construction sites for interior projects during the construction stage and to recognise solutions implemented by project managers to mitigate these issues.

1.1 Problems Encountered in Interior Design Projects During the Construction Phase

Interior design projects encompass the strategic planning, coordination, and execution of design elements within built environments to enhance both functionality and visual appeal. These projects extend far beyond surface-level decoration and require a thorough understanding of spatial organisation, material application, human behaviour, and compliance with safety and regulatory standards. Whether in residential, commercial, hospitality, or institutional settings, interior design demands a careful balance between artistic vision and technical precision to create spaces that are not only attractive but also practical, safe, and sustainable (Ahmad Noorhani et. al, 2024). Additionally, Renner et. al (2023) noted that interior designers often work in close collaboration with architects, engineers, and contractors to bring concepts to life while adhering to budgetary and time constraints.

The complexity of interior design projects largely arises from the involvement of multiple specialist trades working within confined and often occupied spaces. These elements must be carefully sequenced to prevent clashes and disruptions. According to Jasmani (2016), the lack of integration between consultant and contractor drawings is a recurring issue that leads to rework, cost escalation, and project delays. Similarly, Ahmad Noorhani (2024) emphasised that the dynamic nature of the construction environment, combined with rising client expectations for quality and customisation, places additional pressure on project managers to maintain precision and accountability. To address these challenges, Latupeirissa and Arrang (2024) highlighted the importance of early trade involvement, robust communication structures, and the adoption of digital tools to enable real-time coordination and effective decision-making.

Table 1 Problem at Site

Problem at Site	Descriptions	Literature Review
Communication & Coordination Issues	<p>Poor communication and coordination among stakeholders cause misalignment of expectations, rework, delays, and cost overruns. Ineffective collaboration among trades (electricians, plumbers, carpenters) leads to clashes and double handling.</p> <p>Miscommunication between clients and designers due to lack of visualisation tools (2D drawings) results in misunderstanding of design intent. Hierarchical barriers and language differences further delay decision-making. Even with BIM, unclear data-sharing protocols reduce efficiency.</p>	Gamil et al. (2019); Jones (2019); Yakub & Kamaruddin (2021); Hamid (2022); Ahmad (2023); Ardini & Wardina (2021); Abdullah (2023); Mustafa & Rahmat (2024)
Financial and Cash Flow Issues	<p>Cost overruns result from underestimated budgets, scope changes, material price fluctuations, and poor procurement strategies. Cash flow problems, delayed payments, and reimbursement cycles disrupt progress, delay procurement, and strain financial resources.</p>	Sharma & Sinha (2024); Okereke (2020)
Improper Project Execution	<p>Inadequate planning, poor supervision, and weak resource coordination cause major project delays and cost overruns. Ineffective risk management and poor documentation result in double handling and disruption of workflow. Selection of incompetent or low-bid contractors worsens site inefficiency. Poor logistics, including late material delivery and access constraints, further hinder site progress.</p>	Yusoff et al. (2024); Shah & Patil (2019); Abdullah & Yusoff (2024)
Design Issues	<p>Design changes, incomplete or inaccurate drawings, and evolving client requirements lead to cost and time overruns. Miscommunication among designers and contractors results in errors and rework. Design discrepancies can increase costs by 5%–40% of the total project budget and compromise quality.</p>	Ebekozien (2015); Shoar & Chileshe (2021); Aslam (2019)
Unforeseen Site Conditions	<p>Unexpected conditions such as outdated systems, water damage, or hazardous materials (e.g., asbestos) discovered during renovation disrupt schedules and increase costs. Poor pre-construction assessments exacerbate these problems, requiring variation orders and design adjustments.</p>	Azman (2010); Zainal (2022); Alaghbari (2007); Rahmat & Ali (2010)
Safety and Health Issues	<p>Interior fit-out work in confined or occupied spaces exposes workers to dust, fumes, noise, and hazardous materials. Poor site segregation and handling procedures increase the risk of accidents and long-term health issues. Proper safety planning and risk management are essential.</p>	Sulaiman (2019); Kamarudin (2021); Zainal (2022); Yusof (2017)
Client-Related Issues	<p>Frequent client changes, indecisiveness, and unclear communication during construction cause rework, delays, and budget overruns. Emotional involvement in design outcomes often leads to last-minute modifications, disrupting workflows. Managing expectations and maintaining documentation are crucial.</p>	Rahmat & Ali (2010); Zulhabri (2020); Kamaruzzaman (2018)

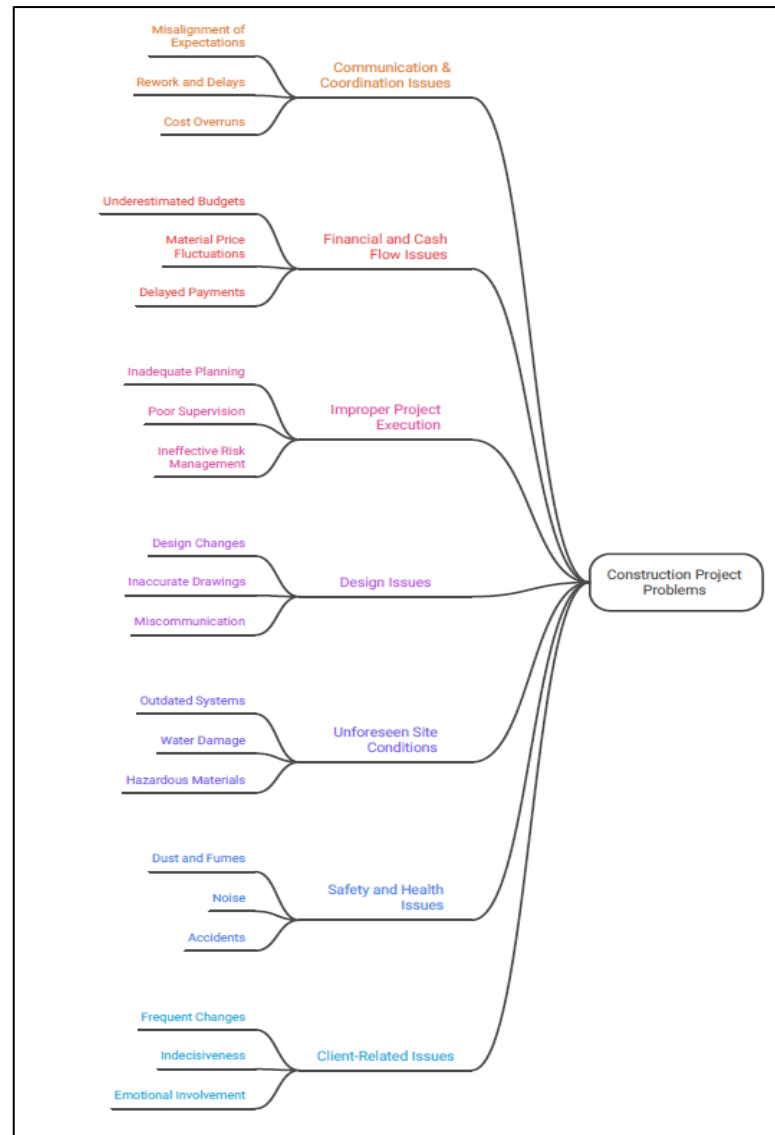


Figure 1 Problem at Site

1.2 Solutions to Problems in Interior Design Projects During the Construction Phase

In the context of interior projects during the construction stage, effective management is essential to navigating the complex challenges that arise. The execution of interior projects requires careful planning, clear communication, financial control, risk mitigation, and a strong emphasis on safety and environmental considerations. Throughout the construction phase, issues such as project delays, unforeseen costs, and safety risks are common. To overcome these, a comprehensive approach that addresses communication, financial stability, efficient project execution, and safety protocols is necessary.

Table 2 Solution for Problem at Site

Solution	Explanation	Author(s)
Communication & Coordination Management	<p>Effective communication ensures clear information exchange, reduces misunderstandings, and aligns all stakeholders with project objectives. In interior construction, clear and timely communication prevents costly errors and delays while fostering collaboration. Establishing formal communication channels (meetings, emails, software) ensures efficient information flow among multiple stakeholders. Regular monitoring of these channels ensures consistent use and alignment with project goals. Continuous evaluation helps maintain communication effectiveness and supports timely decision-making throughout the project lifecycle.</p>	<p>Schwalbe (2015); Cohen (2017); Bercovitz & Mitchell (2020); Acker (2019); Todorovic (2015); Turner & Müller (2017); Laufer et al. (2020)</p>
Financial and Cashflow Management	<p>Effective financial and cashflow management ensures project continuity and stability. Using milestone-based payments, contingency budgets, and financial tools helps manage risks. Real-time budget monitoring anticipates shortfalls and stabilises cash flow. Proper staffing and budget allocation prevent inefficiencies and cost overruns. Progress payments maintain liquidity and ensure timely payments to contractors and suppliers. Accurate cost estimation and contingency planning prevent cost overruns and financial strain. Continuous cost tracking and adjustment maintain project control and financial health.</p>	<p>Lee & Tan (2023); Rahman & Aziz (2021); Molenaar et al. (2017); El-Sayegh (2019); Gido & Clements (2018); Walker (2020); Ingram & Seong (2020); Shrestha (2019); Turner (2018); Smith (2020)</p>
Project Execution Management	<p>Successful execution depends on competent contractor selection, clear contracts, and strong planning. Experienced contractors ensure timely and quality delivery. Comprehensive contracts clarify responsibilities, timelines, and deliverables, reducing disputes. A structured project management plan defines goals, resources, and monitoring strategies. Effective risk management identifies and mitigates issues such as material delays and design changes. Standardised documentation ensures consistency and transparency, supporting coordination and communication across stakeholders.</p>	<p>Turner (2018); Schwalbe (2015); Kerzner (2017); Gido & Clements (2018); Hillson (2016); Cleland & Ireland (2007)</p>
Safety and Health Management	<p>Managing health and safety in interior construction is critical, particularly during renovations involving hazardous materials such as asbestos or lead. Proper identification, removal, and disposal are necessary to avoid long-term health issues. Adequate ventilation, dust control, and noise management reduce risks to workers. Working in confined spaces requires training, use of mechanical aids, and strict access control. In live environments, safety planning and barriers protect occupants and workers. Implementing comprehensive safety procedures ensures a safe working environment.</p>	<p>Zainal (2022); Sulaiman (2019); Kamarudin (2021); Yusof (2017)</p>
Managing Client-Related Issues	<p>Clear communication and documentation from the project outset help manage client expectations and minimise disruptive changes. Realistic discussions about project timelines and budgets prevent misunderstandings. Detailed contracts define work scope, change request procedures, and related costs. Educating clients through visual tools or mock-ups improves understanding and reduces indecision. Consistent updates and engagement maintain alignment, minimise rework, and support smoother project delivery.</p>	<p>Rahmat & Ali (2010); Zulhabri (2020)</p>



Figure 2 Solution for Problem at Site

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining a literature review and semi-structured interviews to examine common problems encountered during interior construction projects and the strategies used to address them. The methodology aims to obtain in-depth insights from professionals experienced in interior design and construction.

Respondents were selected purposefully using a purposive sampling method to ensure the respondents had relevant experience and expertise in managing interior construction projects. The selection focused on professionals directly involved in project management, design coordination, and site execution, including project managers, interior designers, contractors, and suppliers. This approach ensured that all participants could provide knowledgeable and practical perspectives on the challenges faced in interior construction.

2.1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the key challenges faced in interior construction projects during the construction stage and to understand ways of project managers address these challenges through effective management strategies. To achieve this aim, the study focuses on two (2) main objectives. Firstly, to identify the problems commonly encountered at interior project sites during the construction stage, and secondly, to explore the solutions implemented by project managers to address and mitigate these issues.

2.2 Results and Discussion

This research adopts a qualitative approach and involves a total of twenty-six (26) respondents to identify the key challenges faced during the construction stage of interior projects and the solutions implemented by project managers. All respondents were purposefully selected based on their professional involvement in interior construction projects, including consultants, design and build (D&B) contractors, general contractors, and suppliers.

2.3 Results and Discussion

According to Table 3, a total of twenty-six (26) respondents participated in this study, representing various stakeholders involved in interior construction projects. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling approach to ensure that only individuals with relevant experience and expertise in the field were included. Among the participants, design and build (D&B) contractors formed the largest group with 14 respondents (54%), followed by consultants with 9 respondents (35%), contractors with 2 respondents (8%), and suppliers with 1 respondent (3%).

This distribution reflects the dominant role of D&B contractors in interior construction projects, as they are typically responsible for both design coordination and project execution. The representation of consultants highlights the managerial and design perspectives within the industry, while the inclusion of contractors and suppliers provides additional insight into on-site implementation and material management. Collectively, this respondent composition offers a comprehensive view of the challenges encountered and the management strategies applied during the construction stage of interior projects.

Table 3 Background of Respondents

Stakeholders	Numbers	Designation
Consultant	9	Project Manager
D&B Contractor	14	
Contractor	2	
Supplier	1	
Total	26	

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Problems Encountered in Interior Design Projects During the Construction Phase

After gathering qualitative responses from 26 participants, a total of 69 problem statements were identified. Each problem mentioned by the respondents was listed, coded, and then grouped into broader categories based on themes from the literature review (LR). This step helped organise similar problems under common themes such as communication issue, budget and cash flow issue, improper project execution, incompetent contractor, and others.

Each response was reviewed and placed into the most suitable category according to its meaning. For example, statements like “poor communication” and “miscommunication between contractor and other parties” were grouped under Communication Issue, while “cash flow issue” and “payment delay by client” were placed under Budget and Cash Flow Issue.

In total, 17 problem categories were identified. The frequency for each category was then counted to find out which problems occurred most often. Results showed that communication issue was the most common problem (n=13), followed by budget and cash flow issue and improper project execution (n=11 each). This shows that most challenges faced by respondents are related to communication gaps, financial constraints, and poor project implementation.

Table 4 Frequency and Ranking of Problem Categories

No.	Problem Category	Frequency	Rank	Description / Notes
1	Communication issue	13	1	Issues involving poor communication, miscommunication, or coordination failure between project stakeholders.
2	Budget and cash flow issue	11	2	Financial constraints, payment delays, and poor cash flow management affecting project progress.
3	Improper project execution	11	2	Problems related to poor planning, poor site marking, workmanship, and inadequate project implementation.
4	Incompetent contractor	7	3	Unskilled or inexperienced contractors and site workers affecting project performance.
5	Safety and health issue	5	4	Concerns regarding worksite hazards, risks, and safety compliance.
6	Demanding client	3	5	Excessive client expectations, frequent changes, or unrealistic demands during project execution.
7	Time management	3	5	Delays and inability to adhere to project timelines and deadlines.
8	Design change	2	6	Modifications to design and client expectations during construction stage.
9	Lack of monitoring	2	6	Inadequate site supervision and tracking of project progress.
10	Logistic issue	2	6	Issues related to material delivery, transportation, and coordination of logistics.
11	Poor documentation	2	6	Incomplete or improper documentation and record-keeping at site.
12	Poor time management	2	6	Ineffective scheduling and planning of project timelines.

13	Unforeseen site condition	2	6	Unexpected ground or environmental conditions encountered during project.
14	Delay of product	1	7	Late delivery of materials or products from supplier.
15	Poor risk management	1	7	Inadequate assessment and mitigation of project-related risks.
16	Drawing and design issue	1	7	Errors or ambiguities in construction drawings and design details.
17	Quality control	1	7	Deficiencies in inspection or control of material and workmanship quality.
Total		69		

3.2 Solutions to Problems in Interior Design Projects During the Construction Phase

From the responses of 26 participants, a total of 65 solution statements were identified. Each solution was listed, coded, and grouped into broader categories to find common themes. This helped to summarise the key strategies suggested by respondents to overcome the problems faced in their projects.

The solutions were grouped into 13 main categories, including Proper Monitoring and Execution, Establish Communication Channel, Set up Rigorous Cost Estimation and Contingency Planning, and Award Competent Contractor. For example, solutions such as “carry out site visits regularly” and “monitoring to ensure project execution aligns with planning” were grouped under Proper Monitoring and Execution, while “establish clear communication channel” and “transparent communication among parties” were grouped under Establish Communication Channel.

Results showed that Proper Monitoring and Execution was the most common solution (n=14), followed by Establish Communication Channel and Set up Rigorous Cost Estimation and Contingency Planning (n=11 each). These findings show that respondents believe strong supervision, clear communication, and effective cost planning are the main ways to improve project performance and prevent similar issues in the future.

Table 5 Frequency and Ranking of Solutions to Problem in Interior Design Projects During the Construction Phase

Item No	Summary of Solution Category	Frequency	Rank	Description / Notes
1	Proper monitoring and execution	14	1	Emphasises the importance of continuous supervision, timely follow-up, and adherence to planned schedules to ensure project success.
2	Establish communication channel	11	2	Highlights the need for clear, transparent, and consistent communication among all project stakeholders to avoid misunderstandings.
3	Set up rigorous cost estimation and contingency planning	11	2	Suggests that early and realistic cost planning, along with emergency budgeting, helps manage financial uncertainties.
4	Award competent contractor	8	3	Recommends selecting qualified contractors with proven experience to improve project quality and efficiency.
5	Develop comprehensive project management plan	6	4	Stresses the need for a structured project plan covering objectives, timelines, responsibilities, and risk mitigation.
6	Effective communication	3	5	Encourages open and efficient information exchange among team members and departments.
7	Establish safety culture	3	5	Focuses on promoting safety awareness and consistent enforcement of safety protocols at the worksite.
8	Adequate staff and budget	2	6	Calls for sufficient manpower and funding to ensure smooth project execution without delays.

9	Comprehensive contract document	2	6	Suggests that clear and detailed contract documentation helps prevent disputes and aligns expectations.
10	Implement change management protocol	2	7	Advises structured handling of design or scope changes to reduce project disruptions.
11	Client to provide progress payment as per contract	1	8	Points to the importance of timely client payments to maintain project cash flow.
12	Develop comprehensive risk management	1	8	Encourages identifying potential risks early and preparing action plans for unforeseen events.
13	Set up standard documentation format	1	8	Proposes the establishment of uniform documentation procedures to ensure clarity and record accuracy.
Total		65		

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings from both the interviews and literature review revealed three main issues commonly faced during the construction stage of interior design projects are communication breakdowns (n=13), budget and cash flow issues (n=11), and poor project execution (n=11). These issues are still common in the industry and often interrelated. Poor communication between designers, contractors, and clients can lead to misunderstandings, delays, and design errors. At the same time, weak financial management and poor project supervision contribute to delays, rework, and reduced quality, as also highlighted in previous studies by Rahmat et al. (2023), Chan and Adabre (2019), and Li et al. (2022).

To overcome these challenges, the study suggests adopting a more integrated project management approach. This includes strengthening communication through structured protocols and regular coordination meetings, improving financial control through accurate cost estimation and timely payments, and enhancing monitoring through competent supervision. The use of digital project management tools such as BIM can further improve coordination and efficiency. Finally, engaging qualified contractors and encouraging continuous professional training are essential to ensure better project execution and long-term success.

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All authors participated equally in the conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, and writing of this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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