

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study based on data collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital field notes during English-mediated interactions on the Roblox platform. The data are analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis to identify patterns that address the research questions. The findings are presented thematically and interpreted using Intercultural Communicative Competence Byram (2020) and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity Bennett (2017) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' intercultural experiences and intercultural sensitivity in the virtual environment.

4.1 FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital field notes during English-mediated interactions on the Roblox platform. The findings are organized according to the two research questions and are presented thematically based on the patterns that emerged from the data analysis. Each theme is supported by evidence from observation records, interview excerpts, and participants' statements. This section focuses on describing the participants' experiences and responses without interpreting them through theoretical perspectives.

4.1.1 Intercultural Experiences of University Students on the Roblox Platform

To answer the first research question, non-participant observation was used as the primary data collection method. The researcher observed six students from

the English Language Teaching program interacting with international users on Roblox, without directly participating in the gameplay or communication. The observations were documented in digital field notes, focusing on the participants' authentic communication practices and intercultural interactions during gameplay.

The non-participant observations took place on July 26, 2026. Each participant was observed individually during regular Roblox activities. During the observation sessions, the researcher focused on the participants' intercultural communication experiences, specifically how they shared cultural knowledge, initiated and maintained conversations with users from different cultural backgrounds, considered communication differences, responded to cultural diversity, and managed linguistic communication challenges. The observation process was guided by the theoretical framework of intercultural communication competence Byram (2020), which served as the basis for identifying communicative behaviors relevant to the first research question.

To supplement and validate the observational data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same six participants on July 27, 2026. These interviews provided participants with the opportunity to describe their intercultural communication experiences, explain the reasons for their communication behavior, and reflect on their perceptions of interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The interview results complemented the observational data and, through data triangulation, strengthened the credibility of the analysis.

The observational data revealed that participants employed various forms of intercultural communication when interacting with international users on Roblox.

Their interactions reflected varying degrees of cultural knowledge exchange, communication adaptation, openness to cultural diversity, and strategies for overcoming communication barriers.

Table 4. 1 Observation Findings

Theme	Subtheme	Representative Data
Intercultural Experiences Through Cultural Exchange	Cultural Identity	"Where are you from?"; "I'm from Egypt."
	Cultural Practices	"What language do you speak?"
	Exploring cultural practices	"What food is famous in your country?"; "Basbousa", "Kunafa", "Om Ali"
	Everyday Life	"What time do students usually go to campus?"
	Reciprocal Cultural Learning	"Have you ever learned about Indonesian culture online?"; "I prefer experiencing cultures in real life."; "I learned something new today."
English-Mediated Intercultural Communication	Shared Language	"My first language is Arabic, and I speak English as my second language."
	Communication Confidence	"Your English is very good."; "Thank you! I'm still learning every day."
	Meaningful Communication	"I'm still learning every day."; "I enjoyed learning about Indonesia too."; "I hope we can talk again someday."
Developing Intercultural Friendships	Positive Relationships	"Everyone has been very friendly."; "I felt comfortable from the beginning."
	Mutual appreciation	"You're all welcome to visit Egypt anytime."; "I had a great time."
	Future Relationships	"I hope we can talk again someday."; "Hopefully, one day you can visit Indonesia."; "You're all welcome to visit Egypt anytime."

Table 4.1 presents the results of the theory-driven thematic analysis conducted to answer the first research question: What intercultural experiences did students have while interacting in English on the Roblox platform? The analysis of observational and interview data identified three overarching themes representing the participants' intercultural experiences during their interactions with an

international user on Roblox. These themes are: intercultural experiences through cultural exchange, English-language intercultural communication, and the development of intercultural friendships.

Each theme is further divided into several sub-themes that capture specific aspects of the participants' experiences. The first theme illustrates how participants engaged in cultural exchange through conversations about topics such as nationality, language, food, education, and daily life. The second theme highlights the role of English as a common language, enabling participants to communicate effectively, exchange ideas, and engage in meaningful conversations despite differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The third theme demonstrates how positive communication fostered interpersonal relationships, enabling participants to form friendships and express their willingness to engage in future intercultural interactions.

The representative data presented in the table provide examples of participant conversations that support each subtheme and illustrate how the themes emerged from the analysis. The findings show that the participants' intercultural experiences extended beyond simply interacting with people from other countries. Rather, they actively exchanged cultural knowledge, communicated in English as a common language, and developed positive interpersonal relationships as the interaction progressed. The following sections describe each theme in detail, integrating insights from the observational and interview data. The focus is on the participants' intercultural experiences as reflected in their conversations, actions, and interview

responses. The interpretation of these findings is presented separately in the "Discussion" section.

4.1.2 Intercultural Sensitivity in Roblox-Mediated Interactions

The findings revealed that participants demonstrated intercultural sensitivity through both their communication practices and attitudes when interacting with international players on Roblox. Based on the analysis of the semi-structured interview data, two main themes were identified: (1) navigating cultural differences through communication strategies and (2) demonstrating intercultural sensitivity. The first theme consisted of the use of simple English, seeking clarification, and using communication support. The second theme was reflected in participants' respect for cultural differences, openness and curiosity toward other cultures, positive perceptions of cultural diversity, and increased confidence in intercultural communication.

Table 4. 2 Intercultural Sensitivity Demonstrated by Participants

No.	Main Theme	Indicators	Participants
1.	Navigating Cultural Differences through Communication Strategies	Using simple English	P1, P2, P3, P6
		Seeking clarification	P1, P3, P4, P6
		Using translation tools, emojis, and visual cues	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
2.	Demonstrating Intercultural Sensitivity	Respecting cultural differences	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6
		Openness and curiosity toward other cultures	P3, P4, P5, P6
		Positive perceptions of cultural diversity	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6

As presented in Table 4.2, participants used several communication strategies to overcome linguistic and cultural differences during their interactions with

international players. The most frequently reported strategies were simplifying English, seeking clarification, and using communication support such as translation tools, emojis, and visual cues. These strategies enabled participants to maintain communication despite differences in language and cultural backgrounds.

The first strategy was using simple English. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 reported that they simplified their vocabulary and sentence structures when communicating with international players. Rather than using complex expressions, they preferred basic and direct words to make their messages easier to understand. Participant 2 stated, “When I have difficulty communicating in English, I use simple words.” Similarly, Participant 3 explained that they rephrased their thoughts using basic and direct vocabulary. Other participants also reported using simple words to support mutual understanding.

The second strategy was seeking clarification when communication difficulties occurred. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6 reported asking for repetition, requesting clarification, or confirming the intended meaning when they did not understand the other person's message. Participant 3 explained, “I'm not afraid to ask ‘What do you mean?’” while Participant 4 stated that they asked the other person to repeat the message or type it in the chat. These responses show that participants attempted to prevent misunderstandings rather than making assumptions about the meaning of unfamiliar messages.

The third strategy involved using communication support, particularly translation tools, emojis, and visual cues. All participants mentioned using at least one form of communication support to facilitate interaction. Participant 1 reported

using Google Translate when needed, while Participant 2 used translators and emojis. Participant 3 also mentioned the usefulness of quick translations and visual cues, such as in-game emotes and emojis. Participants 4, 5, and 6 similarly reported using translations, emojis, or the auto-translate feature. These findings indicate that participants were willing to utilize available resources to maintain communication when linguistic barriers occurred.

In addition to communication strategies, participants demonstrated intercultural sensitivity through several attitudes toward cultural differences. As shown in Table 4.1, these included respect for cultural differences, openness and curiosity toward other cultures, positive perceptions of cultural diversity, and increased confidence in intercultural communication.

The first indicator was respect for cultural differences, which was demonstrated by all participants. Participants acknowledged that people from different countries may have different cultural values, traditions, and perspectives. Instead of judging unfamiliar cultural practices, they expressed a willingness to understand and accept these differences. Participant 1 stated, “I respect them and try to understand their culture and opinions,” while Participant 2 explained that interacting with different cultures taught them to respect cultural differences. Similar responses were also expressed by Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6.

The second indicator was openness and curiosity toward other cultures. Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 expressed interest in learning about other countries and their cultures. Their curiosity was shown through questions about daily life, local food, time differences, and cultural practices. Participant 3 described being “excited

and curious” and considered cultural differences “fun to discover.” Participant 4 reported asking about the time and local food in other countries, while Participant 5 expressed curiosity about the culture of the Philippines. Participant 6 also stated that learning new things made them happy.

The third indicator was positive perceptions of cultural diversity. All participants reported positive experiences with people from different countries. Their interactions helped them recognize that cultural differences did not prevent people from being friendly, cooperative, and respectful. Participant 1 stated that people from different countries could be kind and friendly and that people could still become friends despite being different. Similarly, Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 emphasized shared enjoyment, friendship, and positive interactions with international players.

The final indicator was increased confidence in intercultural communication. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 reported becoming more confident when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Repeated interaction and successful experiences in overcoming language barriers helped them feel more comfortable initiating conversations and expressing themselves. Participant 1 stated that Roblox helped them feel more confident talking to people from different countries. Participant 3 similarly explained that overcoming language barriers built confidence, while Participants 4, 5, and 6 also reported increased confidence in communicating with international users.

Overall, the findings indicate that participants demonstrated intercultural sensitivity through both adaptive communication strategies and positive attitudes

toward cultural diversity. They adjusted their language, sought clarification, and used communication support to maintain interaction with international players. At the same time, they showed respect, curiosity, positive perceptions of cultural differences, and increased confidence in intercultural communication. These findings demonstrate that participants did not merely interact with international users on Roblox but also developed ways of responding to linguistic and cultural differences during those interactions.

4.2 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the significance of the findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and previous studies. The discussion is organized based on the two research questions of this study. The first section explains how Generation Z university students experienced intercultural communication through interactions with international users on Roblox. The second section discusses how these intercultural experiences contributed to the development of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence. The findings are interpreted using Byram (2020, 1997) framework of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Bennett (2004, 2009) concept of Intercultural Sensitivity.

4.2.1 Intercultural Experiences of Generation Z University Students on

Roblox

The findings revealed that Generation Z university students experienced intercultural communication through authentic interactions with international users on Roblox. These experiences occurred through cultural exchange, English-mediated communication, and the development of intercultural friendships. Unlike

formal intercultural learning activities that are usually structured within educational settings, interactions on Roblox occurred naturally through social communication and shared interests among users. The participants did not only exchange information about their cultural backgrounds but also negotiated meaning, adapted their communication, and developed relationships with individuals from different countries.

The cultural exchange experienced by participants reflects the concept of intercultural experience proposed by Alerd et al. (2002) they explain that intercultural experiences involve direct encounters with people from different cultural backgrounds, where individuals have opportunities to understand cultural differences through interaction and reflection. In this study, participants gained cultural knowledge by discussing topics such as nationality, language, food, education, and everyday life with international users. These interactions allowed participants to experience cultural diversity directly rather than simply learning about cultures from external sources.

Furthermore, these findings support Byram (1997) concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), particularly the dimension of knowledge. According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence requires individuals to understand social groups, cultural practices, and ways of life in both their own culture and other cultures. The participants' willingness to ask questions about other countries and share information about Indonesia demonstrates that intercultural communication involves a reciprocal process of cultural learning rather than one-sided information exchange.

The findings also demonstrate that English played an important role as a shared language that enabled participants to participate in intercultural interaction. Although participants came from different linguistic backgrounds, English functioned as a communication bridge that allowed them to exchange ideas and maintain conversations. This finding supports Rustandi et al. (2020), who argue that English learning should not only focus on linguistic competence but also prepare learners to communicate effectively in multicultural contexts. In this study, English was used as a practical communication tool that helped participants build connections and participate in global interaction.

In addition, the findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of digital platforms in supporting intercultural communication. Wulandari et al. (2025) found that Roblox can provide opportunities for Generation Z users to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and develop greater cultural understanding. Similarly, Shonfeld et al. (2025) emphasized that virtual environments can facilitate intercultural learning by allowing users to exchange perspectives and engage in meaningful communication.

The development of intercultural friendships found in this study further indicates that Roblox provided more than a space for casual interaction. Through shared activities, teamwork, and continuous communication, participants were able to establish positive relationships with international users. This finding supports argument that intercultural competence involves not only understanding cultural differences but also developing positive relationships with people from other cultures.

Based on these findings, the researcher argues that Roblox should not merely be viewed as an entertainment platform but also as a meaningful digital space that facilitates authentic intercultural learning. The natural and voluntary interactions experienced by the participants enabled them to engage in real intercultural communication beyond the structured activities typically found in formal educational settings. Unlike classroom simulations, the participants communicated with international users in unpredictable and authentic situations that required them to negotiate meaning, adapt their communication, and build interpersonal relationships across cultures. These experiences created opportunities for participants to develop intercultural understanding through direct engagement rather than through theoretical instruction alone. Therefore, this study suggests that authentic digital environments such as Roblox have the potential to complement formal English language education by providing learners with meaningful opportunities to develop intercultural experiences through real-world communication.

4.2.2 Development of Intercultural Sensitivity and Intercultural Communicative Competence through Roblox

The findings of this study indicate that intercultural experiences on Roblox contributed to the development of participants' intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence. Rather than occurring instantly, this development emerged through a gradual process of authentic intercultural interaction. Initially, participants joined conversations with international users primarily to practice English, make new friends, and satisfy their curiosity about

different cultures. As the interactions progressed, they encountered various linguistic and cultural differences, including unfamiliar accents, expressions, communication styles, traditions, and perspectives. These differences occasionally created communication challenges that required participants to negotiate meaning, adapt their communication, and reflect on their intercultural experiences. Through repeated interactions, participants gradually became more open to cultural diversity, developed greater respect for cultural differences, strengthened their curiosity about other cultures, and gained confidence in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. This progression demonstrates that intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence developed through continuous engagement, communication adaptation, and reflection on authentic intercultural experiences.

This developmental process is consistent with Bennett (2009) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which proposes that intercultural sensitivity evolves progressively through meaningful intercultural encounters. According to Bennett (2009) individuals gradually move from ethnocentric perspectives, where cultural differences are interpreted mainly through the lens of their own culture, toward ethnorelative perspectives characterized by acceptance, adaptation, and appreciation of cultural diversity. The participants in this study demonstrated this progression by becoming increasingly willing to understand unfamiliar cultural practices, appreciate different communication styles, and interact respectfully with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, Chen & Starosta (2000) explain that intercultural sensitivity represents the affective

dimension of intercultural communication, encompassing qualities such as openness, empathy, interaction confidence, and respect for cultural differences. The participants' reflections and communication behaviors observed in this study illustrate the gradual development of these affective characteristics through sustained intercultural interaction.

The findings also reflect Byram (2020) framework of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which emphasizes that intercultural competence develops through the integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills acquired during intercultural communication. The development observed in this study followed a sequential process. Participants first demonstrated attitudes by expressing curiosity, openness, and willingness to communicate with international users despite linguistic and cultural differences. Through continuous conversations about traditions, daily life, education, food, languages, and cultural practices, they acquired knowledge that expanded their understanding of other cultures while encouraging them to reflect on their own cultural identity. Subsequently, participants demonstrated skills of discovery and interaction by negotiating meaning, asking questions, clarifying misunderstandings, and adapting their communication strategies whenever communication barriers occurred. These interconnected dimensions indicate that intercultural communicative competence was developed through authentic communication experiences rather than through language practice alone.

The communication adaptation strategies employed by participants further illustrate how this developmental process occurred. When encountering

misunderstandings, participants did not terminate the conversation; instead, they simplified their English, requested clarification, used translation tools, and relied on emojis or other visual cues to maintain interaction. As these adaptive strategies were repeatedly practiced, participants became increasingly confident and more effective in communicating with international users. This finding supports Deardorff (2006), who argues that intercultural competence is a dynamic process developed through continuous interaction, reflection, adaptation, and appropriate communication across cultural contexts. Similarly, Alerd et al. (2002) emphasize that meaningful intercultural learning emerges from authentic intercultural experiences in which individuals actively engage with cultural differences and critically reflect upon those experiences. The present findings demonstrate that each intercultural encounter on Roblox contributed incrementally to participants' intercultural growth by encouraging them to learn from communication challenges and cultural differences.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce previous studies highlighting the educational value of authentic digital intercultural interaction. Shonfeld et al. (2025) argue that virtual environments provide meaningful opportunities for intercultural learning because they enable learners to communicate, collaborate, and exchange perspectives with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in authentic settings. Similarly, Wulandari et. al (2025) identified Roblox as a digital platform that facilitates intercultural communication among Generation Z users and promotes greater cultural understanding through direct interaction. While previous studies primarily focused on the educational potential of digital platforms, the

present study extends this literature by demonstrating the developmental process through which intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence are formed. Specifically, the findings reveal that authentic communication, repeated interaction, communication adaptation, and personal reflection collectively contribute to participants' intercultural development.

These findings are also consistent with Yamada (2025), who argues that sustained intercultural communication encourages learners to develop empathy, intercultural awareness, and communication competence. Likewise, Wahdania et al. (2026) emphasize that intercultural awareness develops through meaningful communication experiences rather than through exposure to digital technology alone. The present study supports these perspectives by showing that Roblox itself did not automatically foster intercultural competence. Instead, it was the authenticity, continuity, and quality of intercultural interactions experienced by participants that promoted the development of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the development of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence occurred through a continuous process consisting of authentic intercultural encounters, communication challenges, communication adaptation, cultural reflection, and repeated interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Through this process, participants gradually developed greater openness, empathy, intercultural understanding, communication confidence, and the ability to communicate effectively across cultures. Therefore, this study extends previous research by

providing a clearer explanation of how authentic intercultural interaction within an informal digital environment such as Roblox contributes to the development of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence among Generation Z university students.

4.3 Concluding Remark

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Roblox provided a meaningful digital environment for Generation Z university students to experience intercultural communication with international users. The participants experienced intercultural interaction through cultural exchange, English-mediated communication, and the development of intercultural friendships. At the same time, they demonstrated intercultural sensitivity and communicative competence by adapting their communication, seeking clarification, using communication support, and showing respect, openness, and curiosity toward cultural differences. These findings indicate that intercultural development was not a result of digital exposure alone, but emerged through authentic, continuous, and meaningful interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds.