

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The development of globalization and digital technology has increased opportunities for people to communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Such interaction requires individuals to understand cultural differences and communicate appropriately across cultures. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes the importance of global competence in helping young people communicate respectfully and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, intercultural communication has become increasingly important in contemporary education and social interaction.

However, intercultural communication can involve challenges because individuals may have different languages, values, communication styles, and cultural expectations. Effective intercultural communication therefore requires more than linguistic ability. Byram (1997) explains that intercultural communicative competence involves the ability to understand, interpret, interact, and critically reflect across cultures. Intercultural sensitivity is also important because individuals need to recognize and respond appropriately to cultural differences.

This issue is particularly relevant to Generation Z university students, who have grown up with digital technology and frequently use online platforms for communication and social interaction. Digital environments provide opportunities for young people to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Wahdania and Ramadhan (2026) found that Generation Z's intercultural communication awareness is related to their engagement with diverse digital environments. Yamada (2025) also emphasizes the importance of authentic intercultural engagement for developing intercultural competence among Generation Z students.

Online gaming is one of the digital environments where intercultural interaction can occur. Digital games can provide opportunities for players to communicate, collaborate, and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Zhang et al. (2022) found that 3D interactive games can support cultural learning through intercultural collaboration. Blume (2021) similarly demonstrates that digital games can function as spaces for transcultural communication.

One platform that provides these opportunities is Roblox. Roblox allows users to participate in virtual experiences, communicate with other users, and develop social relationships within shared digital environments. Previous research has shown that Roblox can support cross-cultural education among Generation Z users (Wulandari et al., 2025). Other research has examined linguistic variation and communication among Generation Z users on Roblox (Putri et al., 2025). Istikhomah et al. (2026) have also examined communication and identity formation among Generation Z users in Roblox.

The “Meet People Across the World” server provides a particularly relevant context because users can interact with people from different countries through spontaneous online communication. These interactions may involve introducing

oneself, discussing cultural backgrounds, negotiating meaning, and responding to cultural differences. However, previous studies have mainly focused on Roblox in relation to education, linguistic practices, identity, or general communication. Limited attention has been given to how Indonesian Generation Z university students experience and interpret cultural differences during spontaneous interactions with international users on Roblox.

Therefore, this study focuses on the intercultural experiences of Generation Z university students interacting with international users on the “Meet People Across the World” server on Roblox. The study examines how participants communicate across cultural boundaries, experience cultural differences, and respond to intercultural challenges. Byram (2020) Intercultural Communicative Competence framework and Bennett (2009) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity are used to provide theoretical perspectives for understanding these experiences. Through this focus, the study aims to contribute to research on intercultural communication by examining Roblox as a contemporary digital environment for authentic intercultural interaction.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of the study presented previously, the research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What intercultural experiences were encountered by university students when interacting using English on the Roblox platform?
2. How did university students navigate cultural differences and demonstrate intercultural sensitivity in the Roblox virtual environment?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

In line with the research questions, the purposes of this study were:

1. To describe the intercultural experiences of university students in interacting on the Roblox platform.
2. To analyze how students navigated cultural differences and demonstrated intercultural sensitivity in virtual interactions.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Considering the growing importance of intercultural interaction in digital environments, particularly among Generation Z, this study aims to provide meaningful contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical application. As digital platforms such as Roblox become spaces where users from different cultural backgrounds interact, it is important to explore how intercultural competence and sensitivity develop in such contexts.

Theoretically, this study also contributes to the literature by extending the understanding of how intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity emerge through naturally occurring interactions in informal online gaming environments. By using the framework proposed by Byram (1997) this study expands the discussion of intercultural interaction beyond traditional face-to-face settings into virtual platforms such as Roblox. It also enriches existing literature by focusing on spontaneous and informal intercultural experiences rather than structured learning contexts.

Practically, this study is expected to provide useful insights for several parties. For students, especially Generation Z, this study can increase awareness of the

importance of intercultural competence and sensitivity in digital interaction. For educators, particularly in English education, the findings can be used as a reference to integrate digital platforms into intercultural learning. In addition, this study can help future researchers understand how digital environments can be utilized as spaces for intercultural communication and learning.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study focused on students of English Language Education (PBI) who belong to The Generation Z category and actively interact on international servers, especially on the “*Meet People Across the World*” map on the Roblox platform. This study uses a qualitative approach with netnography and in-depth interviews.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Intercultural refers to interactions that occur between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, where differences in values, beliefs, communication styles, and social norms influence the way people communicate and understand each other. According to Byram (1997) intercultural communication is not only about exchanging information, but also about the ability to interpret, relate, and respond appropriately to cultural differences. It involves awareness of one’s own culture as well as openness and respect toward others, making intercultural interaction a dynamic and reflective process.

Intercultural experiences refer to situations in which individuals engage directly with people from different cultural backgrounds and encounter diverse perspectives, values, and communication practices. Alerd et al. (2002) explain that intercultural experiences involve both interaction and reflection, where individuals

not only experience cultural differences but also think critically about those experiences. Through this process, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of both their own culture and others, which contributes to their ability to adapt and respond in intercultural situations.

Intercultural sensitivity refers to individuals' ability to recognize, respect, and respond appropriately to cultural differences in interaction. Bennett (2009) explains that intercultural sensitivity develops through stages, moving from ethnocentric perspectives to more ethnorelative ones, where individuals become more open and accepting of cultural differences. This idea is supported by Bennett (2004), who emphasizes the importance of attitudes such as empathy, openness, and respect in intercultural communication. In this study, intercultural sensitivity is understood as the ability of individuals to respond positively and adaptively to cultural differences in digital interaction.

1.7 Research Report Organization

The study is organized into five chapters that are arranged systematically to provide a comprehensive overview of the flow of study. Chapter One (introduction) presents the foundation of research which includes background, problem formulation, objectives, significance, research scope, definition of key terms, and systematics of writing. Furthermore, Chapter Two (Literature Review) outlines the theoretical foundations and a review of relevant previous studies on intercultural sensitivity, digital cultural spaces, and characteristics of Generation Z. Chapter Three (research methodology) describes in depth the research design, participants, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. The

results of the process are presented in Chapter Four (findings and discussion) which presents field data analysis and discussion of findings in relation to existing theories. Finally, the study concludes with Chapter Five (conclusions and recommendations) which summarizes all the research findings and provides practical suggestions for future educational and research practices.