

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study. It consists of the research design, participants, research site, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of data, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative methodological framework, specifically employing a case study design augmented by netnographic techniques. The qualitative paradigm was chosen due to the study's objective to delve into and comprehend the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of participants concerning intercultural interactions within a digital milieu. In contrast to the statistical measurement of variables, qualitative research permits an in-depth exploration of social phenomena, facilitating an understanding of how individuals construct meaning from their experiences in a defined context.

Qualitative research also emphasizes understanding phenomena from the participants' perspectives within their natural settings. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, qualitative research aims to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of participants lived experiences. Therefore, this approach is considered appropriate for exploring how Generation Z university students experience intercultural communication and develop intercultural sensitivity through interactions on the Roblox platform.

The study embraced a case study methodology as it aimed to investigate a distinct phenomenon situated within a specific contextual framework. The phenomenon scrutinized in this inquiry was the intercultural experiences of Generation Z university students who engaged in active interactions with international users on the Roblox platform. The parameters of the study were delineated by participant characteristics, the Roblox platform itself, and the phenomenon of intercultural communication manifested within this selected digital environment. By employing a case study approach, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of the emergence of intercultural experiences and the development of intercultural sensitivity among participants through digital interactions.

A case study is appropriate when researchers seek to answer "how" and "why" questions about contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts. Since this study investigates how intercultural experiences occur and how intercultural sensitivity develops through online interaction, the case study design enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences within their natural digital environment. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to answer both research questions by exploring participants' intercultural experiences and examining how intercultural sensitivity was demonstrated during authentic online interactions.

To augment the case study design, this investigation also incorporated netnography as an observational methodology. As delineated by Kozinets (2002), netnography represents a modification of traditional ethnographic research methods

tailored for online communities and digital contexts. Given that the interactions analyzed in this study transpired in a virtual environment, netnography served as an appropriate framework for observing participants' communicative behaviors, interaction patterns, and their responses to cultural divergences in an authentic online setting. Combining a qualitative case study with netnography enabled the researcher to explore participants' intercultural experiences in their natural online environment.

In addition, netnography enables researchers to observe naturally occurring online interactions without manipulating participants' behavior. This method allows the researcher to obtain authentic data regarding participants' communication practices while preserving the natural context of interaction. The integration of qualitative case study and netnography therefore provides a comprehensive understanding of participants' intercultural experiences on Roblox. By combining case study and netnography, this study was able to explore participants' experiences in depth while also observing authentic intercultural interactions in their natural online environment. This approach is particularly appropriate because the study aims to observe naturally occurring intercultural interactions rather than interactions intentionally created by researchers. Therefore, this study employed a qualitative case study integrated with netnography to explore the intercultural experiences and intercultural sensitivity of Generation Z university students through naturally occurring interactions on the Roblox platform (Creswell & Creswell, 2018 and Kozinets, 2002).

3.2 Participants

This study involved six undergraduate students from the English Education Program who belonged to Generation Z, aged between 20 and 24 years. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they met the characteristics required to answer the research questions. The researcher obtained information about potential participants based on recommendations and data provided by the lecturer who taught the selected class. This information helped the researcher identify students who actively used Roblox and had experience communicating with people from different countries through the platform.

The categorization was determined based on participants' self-reported frequency of intercultural interaction on Roblox during the preliminary screening. Participants who interacted with international users once or twice a week were categorized as "rarely," those who interacted three to five times a week were categorized as "occasionally," and those who interacted almost every day or more than five times a week were categorized as "frequently." This categorization was intended to capture a variety of intercultural experiences and perspectives. By including participants with different levels of intercultural interaction, the researcher expected to gain a broader understanding of how online communication on Roblox contributes to the development of intercultural experiences and intercultural sensitivity among Generation Z students.

The number of participants was considered appropriate because qualitative case study research emphasizes obtaining rich and in-depth information rather than achieving statistical generalization. Each participant was observed during their

interactions on Roblox and later participated in a semi-structured interview. Observing and interviewing the same participants enabled the researcher to compare their actual communication behaviors with their personal reflections, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings through data triangulation. Data collection continued until sufficient information was obtained to answer the research questions.

3.3 Research Site

The investigation was executed within the confines of Roblox, an online gaming and social interaction platform that facilitates communication and collaboration among users hailing from various nations within virtual environments. Specifically, the inquiry concentrated on the “*Meet People Across the World*” server, which was chosen due to its capacity to promote discourse among individuals from diverse cultural heritages.

The “*Meet People Across the World*” server was selected because it provides opportunities for users from various countries to communicate voluntarily using English while discussing everyday life, culture, traditions, education, hobbies, and other intercultural topics. Compared with competitive game servers, this environment better reflects authentic intercultural communication, making it suitable for investigating intercultural experiences and intercultural sensitivity.

In contrast to numerous gaming servers that predominantly prioritize competition or gameplay objectives, this particular server operates as a social arena wherein users participate in dialogue, introduce themselves, deliberate on cultural matters, and share personal narratives. Participants routinely engaged with users

from disparate countries via text-based communication, thereby cultivating opportunities for intercultural interactions and cultural exchange. Consequently, this server constituted an appropriate context for investigating intercultural experiences and the cultivation of intercultural sensitivity within spontaneous digital exchanges.

To acquire comprehensive and credible data, this study implemented triangulation through three distinct data collection methodologies, specifically non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital field notes. The application of multiple methodologies facilitated the researcher's ability to attain a more profound understanding of participants' intercultural experiences while augmenting the credibility and trustworthiness of the resultant findings.

3.4 Data Collection

To obtain comprehensive and credible data, this study employed three data collection techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital field notes. The use of multiple data sources enabled the researcher to explore participants' intercultural communication experiences from different perspectives and strengthened the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation. These techniques were selected because they complemented one another in capturing both participants' authentic interactions on Roblox and their personal reflections on those experiences.

The data collection process was guided by the research questions and the theoretical frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 2020) and Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 2009). Consequently, particular

attention was given to interactions that reflected participants' cultural knowledge exchange, intercultural engagement, communication accommodation, openness toward cultural diversity, and language-related communication challenges.

3.4.1 Non-Participant Observation

The researcher observed participants' interactions without directly participating in the communication process, allowing the interactions to occur naturally and minimizing researcher influence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Non-participant observation was conducted while the participants interacted with an international user on the “*Meet People Across the World*” server in Roblox. During each observation session, the researcher joined the same Roblox server as the participants to observe and record the interactions without participating in or influencing the conversation. By remaining a silent observer, the researcher was able to capture authentic intercultural communication as it naturally occurred within the online environment. The observation focused on naturally occurring communication among players without researcher intervention.

The observation data consisted of video conversations and conversation transcripts, which enabled the researcher to examine participants' communication behaviors and intercultural interactions in detail Creswell & Creswell (2018). Throughout the observation process, the researcher documented participants' communication behaviors, cultural knowledge exchange, intercultural engagement, communication accommodation, openness toward cultural diversity, and language-related communication challenges. These observations provided valuable

contextual information that complemented the interview data and supported a deeper understanding of participants' intercultural communication experiences.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the observation sessions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to gain a deeper understanding of their intercultural communication experiences and personal reflections. This interview format allowed participants to describe their experiences openly while ensuring that the discussion remained relevant to the objectives of the study.

The interview questions were developed based on the research questions and the theoretical framework while maintaining sufficient flexibility for probing and follow-up questions (Kallio et al. 2016). The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions and the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study. Although the interview remained flexible, the questions explored participants' perceptions of intercultural communication, cultural learning experiences, communication strategies, openness toward cultural diversity, and challenges encountered while interacting with international users on Roblox. Additional follow-up questions were asked whenever further clarification or elaboration was needed to obtain richer and more meaningful data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into participants' intercultural experiences and perceptions while allowing flexibility to explore issues emerging during the interview (Kallio et al. 2016).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted separately for the non-participant observation data and the semi-structured interview data. The analysis was guided by the research questions and the theoretical frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence proposed by Byram (2020) and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity proposed by Bennett (2009). The analysis involved data familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, comparison, and interpretation.

3.5.1 Analysis of Non-Participant Observation Data

The non-participant observation data were analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis to identify patterns in participants' naturally occurring intercultural interactions on Roblox. The observation data consisted of video recordings and conversation transcripts collected during the observation sessions. First, the researcher organized and transcribed the recorded interactions and repeatedly reviewed the observation data to become familiar with the participants' communication behaviors and interaction patterns.

Next, the researcher conducted initial coding based on the research questions and the theoretical frameworks. The coding focused on participants' intercultural experiences and observable indicators of intercultural sensitivity, including cultural knowledge exchange, intercultural engagement, communication accommodation, openness toward cultural diversity, empathy, and language-related communication challenges. The researcher then reviewed the codes and grouped similar codes into

broader categories and themes that represented recurring patterns in the participants' interactions.

The emerging themes were continuously compared with the original observation recordings and transcripts to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' actual communication behaviors. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence framework and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to explain the intercultural experiences encountered by the participants and the ways in which they demonstrated intercultural sensitivity during their interactions with international users on Roblox.

3.5.2 Analysis of Semi-Structured Interview Data

The semi-structured interview data were analyzed using the same theory-driven thematic analysis approach to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding their intercultural interactions on Roblox. First, all interview recordings were transcribed, organized, and read repeatedly to enable the researcher to become familiar with the participants' responses.

The researcher then conducted initial coding based on the research questions and the theoretical frameworks. The coding focused on participants' descriptions of intercultural experiences, cultural learning, communication strategies, communication accommodation, openness toward cultural diversity, empathy, and challenges encountered when communicating with international users. Codes that shared similar meanings were subsequently grouped into broader categories and themes.

The researcher compared the responses across participants to identify similarities and differences in their experiences and ways of responding to cultural differences. The emerging themes were also compared with the findings from the non-participant observation to support data triangulation and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' intercultural experiences. Finally, the identified themes were interpreted using Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence framework and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to explain how participants navigated cultural differences and demonstrated intercultural sensitivity in the Roblox virtual environment.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their informed consent before participating in interviews and observations. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. To protect privacy and confidentiality, all names and Roblox usernames were anonymized in the research report. Screenshots and digital notes were edited to remove identifiable information, and all collected data was stored securely and solely for scientific purposes.

Furthermore, the researcher respected the communication norms and ethics of the Roblox community to ensure that the observation process was conducted ethically and respectfully. All digital data, including interview transcripts, observation notes, screenshots, chat logs, and digital field notes, were securely stored in a folder accessible only to the researcher. Participant identities were

anonymized. The collected data was used exclusively for scientific purposes and will be deleted upon completion of the study in accordance with institutional ethics guidelines.

3.7 Concluding Remark

This chapter has presented the methodology employed to investigate the intercultural experiences and intercultural sensitivity of Generation Z university students on Roblox. A qualitative case study integrated with netnography was used, involving six undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital field notes, and analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis guided by Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence framework and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Ethical considerations were also maintained throughout the research process. The findings resulting from these methodological procedures are presented in the following chapter.