

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature supporting the present study on the intercultural experiences of Generation Z university students interacting with international users on Roblox. It discusses Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), intercultural sensitivity, Roblox as a digital environment for intercultural interaction, Generation Z and digital intercultural communication, and previous studies. These perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how students experience, interpret, and respond to cultural differences in digital communication.

2.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) refers to an individual's ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. Byram (2020) argues that intercultural competence involves more than linguistic proficiency because successful intercultural communication requires individuals to understand cultural perspectives, interpret cultural meanings, and interact appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. This perspective is particularly relevant to English language education because English is increasingly used as a means of communication among speakers who have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Rustandi et al., 2020). In digitally mediated environments, intercultural competence is also increasingly associated with opportunities for learners to communicate and collaborate with culturally diverse individuals (Zuo, 2025).

Byram's model identifies five interconnected components of ICC: knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), attitudes (*savoir être*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 2020). Knowledge refers to an individual's understanding of social groups, cultural practices, and perspectives in both their own culture and other cultures. Digital intercultural learning can provide opportunities for learners to acquire such knowledge through interaction with culturally diverse participants (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026). Online intercultural programs have similarly demonstrated that interaction with international participants can expose learners to cultural perspectives that may differ from their own (Zuo, 2025).

The first dimension, knowledge, concerns what individuals know about their own culture and the cultures of other people (Byram, 2020). In the context of the present study, this dimension may emerge when participants learn about another user's country, traditions, language, lifestyle, or cultural practices during interaction on Roblox. Research on Generation Z suggests that meaningful intercultural communication can contribute to greater awareness of cultural differences (Wahdania et al., 2026). Digital intercultural learning research also indicates that intercultural knowledge is one of the central dimensions developed through technology-mediated interaction (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026)

The second dimension, skills of interpreting and relating, refers to the ability to interpret cultural documents, events, or practices from another culture and relate them to one's own cultural framework (Byram, 2020). This skill is important when

participants encounter unfamiliar cultural behaviors because they need to interpret those behaviors without immediately judging them according to their own cultural standards. Online intercultural learning can provide opportunities for participants to compare cultural perspectives through direct interaction (Zuo, 2025). Research involving Generation Z also indicates that intercultural awareness involves understanding cultural differences through meaningful communication rather than merely being exposed to cultural diversity (Wahdania et al., 2026).

The third dimension, skills of discovery and interaction, involves the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge and use that knowledge during real-time interaction (Byram, 2020). This dimension is particularly relevant to the present study because participants may discover cultural information while communicating spontaneously with international users on Roblox. Research on virtual environments has also shown that interaction can provide opportunities for participants to exchange cultural perspectives and develop intercultural competence (Shonfeld et al., 2025).

The fourth dimension, attitudes, involves curiosity, openness, and willingness to suspend disbelief or judgment toward other cultures (Byram, 2020). These attitudes are important because individuals who approach cultural differences with curiosity and openness may be more willing to engage in meaningful intercultural communication. Yamada (2025) found that meaningful intercultural engagement can support empathy and cultural awareness among Generation Z students. Shonfeld et al. (2025) similarly found that virtual intercultural interaction can encourage participants to exchange cultural perspectives and reflect on cultural

differences. Research on Generation Z further emphasizes the importance of meaningful communication for developing intercultural communication awareness (Wahdania et al., 2026).

The fifth dimension, critical cultural awareness, refers to the ability to evaluate cultural practices and perspectives critically using explicit criteria rather than automatically assuming that one's own cultural perspective is superior (Byram, 2020). This dimension is particularly important when participants encounter cultural practices that differ significantly from their own because intercultural communication requires reflection rather than immediate judgment. Digital intercultural research emphasizes cultural reflection and critical awareness as important components of intercultural development (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026). Virtual intercultural learning research likewise demonstrates that interaction can encourage learners to reconsider cultural assumptions and develop greater cultural awareness (Shonfeld et al., 2025).

Taken together, these five dimensions provide the theoretical foundation for examining the intercultural experiences of the participants in this study (Byram, 2020). The framework allows the researcher to examine what participants learn about other cultures, how they interpret cultural differences, how they discover cultural information during interaction, how they respond to cultural diversity, and how they reflect critically on cultural perspectives. Previous research supports the relevance of these dimensions in digitally mediated intercultural interaction (Zuo, 2025). Research involving Generation Z also demonstrates the importance of

meaningful intercultural engagement for the development of cultural awareness (Yamada, 2025).

For the present study, Byram's ICC framework will therefore function as the primary theoretical framework for interpreting participants' intercultural experiences on Roblox. The framework will not be used to assign participants a numerical level of competence; rather, it will guide the interpretation of participants' experiences, statements, and interactions. This approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand how intercultural experiences occur and are interpreted in a spontaneous digital environment. Previous digital-intercultural research has similarly examined ICC through dimensions such as intercultural knowledge, communication, adaptation, and attitudes (Basantes-Andrade et al., 2025). Research on virtual intercultural interaction further supports examining the ways participants communicate, reflect, and respond to cultural differences (Shonfeld et al., 2025).

2.2 Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and respond appropriately to cultural differences during intercultural interaction. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) provides a theoretical framework for understanding how individuals develop their perceptions and responses toward cultural differences (Bennett, 2009). The model views intercultural development as a progression from ethnocentric orientations toward increasingly ethnorelative orientations (Bennett, 2017). This framework is relevant to the present study because participants may encounter unfamiliar cultural

practices and communication patterns while interacting with international users on Roblox. Digital intercultural research also indicates that intercultural attitudes and adaptation are important dimensions of intercultural development in technology-mediated environments (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026).

Bennett's DMIS consists of six developmental orientations: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration (Bennett, 2017). The first three orientations Denial, Defense, and Minimization represent ethnocentric ways of experiencing cultural difference, whereas Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration represent increasingly ethnorelative orientations (Bennett, 2009). The model therefore provides a useful framework for examining how participants respond when they encounter cultural practices that differ from their own. Research involving Generation Z further suggests that intercultural awareness depends on meaningful engagement with cultural differences rather than merely being exposed to diverse individuals (Wahdania et al., 2026).

The first stage, Denial, occurs when individuals have limited awareness of cultural differences or avoid recognizing them (Bennett, 2009). In an online environment, this response may appear when users ignore cultural differences or fail to recognize that another person's behavior is influenced by a different cultural background. Digital environments can expose users to culturally diverse individuals, but exposure alone does not necessarily lead to intercultural competence (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). Research on Generation Z similarly emphasizes that meaningful communication is necessary for the development of intercultural communication awareness (Wahdania et al., 2026).

The second stage, Defense, involves recognizing cultural difference but responding to it negatively or perceiving one's own cultural group as superior (Bennett, 2009). This orientation can be relevant when participants encounter unfamiliar cultural practices and evaluate them negatively according to their own cultural standards. Intercultural learning research suggests that virtual interaction can involve challenges such as stereotypes and negative cultural perceptions (Shonfeld et al., 2025). Such findings demonstrate why intercultural sensitivity should include not only exposure to cultural difference but also examination of how individuals interpret and respond to that difference.

The third stage, Minimization, occurs when individuals acknowledge cultural differences but emphasize similarities to the extent that meaningful cultural distinctions are overlooked (Bennett, 2017). Although minimization may appear more positive than denial or defense, it can still prevent individuals from fully recognizing the significance of cultural differences. Intercultural learning among Generation Z requires meaningful engagement with cultural diversity rather than simply assuming that people from different cultures are essentially the same (Yamada, 2025). Research on digital intercultural competence similarly emphasizes the importance of cultural knowledge and awareness in understanding cultural differences (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026).

The fourth stage, Acceptance, involves recognizing and respecting cultural differences without necessarily evaluating one culture as superior to another (Bennett, 2009). Acceptance is particularly relevant to the present study because participants may encounter different communication styles, traditions, beliefs, or

social practices while interacting with international users. Virtual intercultural interaction can provide opportunities for participants to exchange cultural perspectives and develop greater awareness of cultural diversity (Shonfeld et al., 2025). Generation Z students may also develop greater empathy and cultural awareness through meaningful intercultural engagement (Yamada, 2025).

The fifth stage, Adaptation, refers to the ability to change one's behavior or communication patterns in response to another cultural perspective (Bennett, 2017). In the context of Roblox, adaptation may be reflected when participants adjust their English, explain cultural references, change their communication style, or modify their behavior to facilitate interaction with international users. Research on Roblox has identified linguistic variation and communication adjustment among Generation Z users (Putri et al., 2025). Virtual intercultural learning research also indicates that adaptation and communication skills are important dimensions of digitally mediated intercultural competence (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026).

The final stage, Integration, represents an increasingly complex ethnorelative orientation in which individuals can incorporate multiple cultural perspectives into their understanding of themselves and their interactions with others (Bennett, 2017). Integration does not mean abandoning one's own cultural identity; rather, it involves developing the ability to move between cultural perspectives when engaging in multicultural situations (Bennett, 2009). Research on digitally mediated intercultural interaction suggests that sustained engagement with culturally diverse individuals can support reflection and the development of more complex intercultural perspectives (Zuo, 2025). Research involving Generation Z also

highlights the importance of meaningful intercultural experiences in developing awareness of cultural diversity (Wahdania et al., 2026).

The DMIS is particularly useful for the present research because it provides a framework for examining how participants respond to cultural differences, rather than simply identifying whether cultural differences exist. Participants' experiences can therefore be examined for indications of avoidance, negative evaluation, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, or more complex engagement with cultural perspectives (Bennett, 2009). This perspective complements Byram's ICC framework, which focuses on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness required for intercultural communication (Byram, 2020). Previous research on digital intercultural learning also demonstrates the relevance of adaptation, intercultural attitudes, and communication skills when examining intercultural development in digital environments (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026).

In the present study, Bennett's DMIS will not be used as a rigid instrument for placing each participant into one developmental stage. Instead, it will serve as an interpretive lens for understanding participants' responses to cultural differences during their interactions with international users on Roblox. This approach allows the researcher to identify moments in which participants recognize cultural differences, experience misunderstandings, express judgments, demonstrate acceptance, or adapt their communication (Bennett, 2017). Such an approach is appropriate because the study focuses on participants' lived intercultural experiences rather than measuring intercultural sensitivity quantitatively. Research on virtual intercultural interaction similarly emphasizes the importance of

examining participants' actual communication and reflection processes (Shonfeld et al., 2025).

2.3 Roblox as a Digital Environment for Intercultural Interaction

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the ways in which individuals communicate and interact across cultural and geographical boundaries. Digital platforms have increasingly become spaces where individuals can communicate with people from different countries, exchange information, and develop social relationships beyond their immediate cultural environments. Research on digital media indicates that technology-mediated interaction can create opportunities for intercultural communication and the development of intercultural competence when users engage meaningfully with culturally diverse individuals (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). Social-media interaction can similarly provide opportunities for users to encounter different cultural perspectives and develop intercultural digital communication competence (Zhang et al., 2026). These developments demonstrate that digital environments can function not only as communication technologies but also as spaces for intercultural learning and social interaction (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026).

One digital environment that provides opportunities for social interaction is Roblox. Roblox is an online platform that allows users to create avatars, participate in user-generated experiences, and communicate with other users through digital interaction. According to Roblox Corporation, the platform provides users with opportunities to participate in virtual experiences and interact with other members of its online community (Roblox Corporation, 2025). Unlike digital environments

that are designed exclusively for individual entertainment, Roblox incorporates social and collaborative features that enable users to interact while participating in shared virtual experiences. Research on digital games has demonstrated that collaborative gameplay can create opportunities for cultural learning when players from different backgrounds interact within shared virtual environments (Zhang et al., 2022). Digital games can also function as transcultural communicative spaces in which learners communicate and negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries (Smith, 2021).

The social characteristics of Roblox make it relevant to intercultural communication because users can interact with people whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds may differ from their own. In multiplayer digital environments, players may need to negotiate meaning, coordinate activities, and adjust their communication in order to participate successfully with others (Lou & Justus, 2026). Research on Roblox has similarly shown that interaction among Generation Z users involves linguistic variation and communication practices that require users to adjust their language and construct shared meanings (Putri Kahayani et al., 2025). Such communication can provide opportunities for users to encounter different cultural perspectives and develop social relationships beyond national boundaries (Yuningsih & Jaizul, 2025).

The intercultural potential of Roblox is also reflected in previous research examining the platform as a space for cultural learning. Wulandari & Alwi (2025) found that Roblox can provide opportunities for cross-cultural education by enabling Generation Z users to communicate with people from different countries.

Their findings suggest that interaction on Roblox can encourage users to appreciate cultural diversity and reduce stereotypes (Wulandari & Alwi, 2025). Research on 3D gamified environments similarly demonstrates that collaborative digital gameplay can support cultural learning among students from different cultural backgrounds (Zhang et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with research suggesting that digital games can provide contexts for transcultural communication and learning when interaction involves meaningful collaboration (Smith, 2021).

Roblox can also be understood as a social environment in which users construct identities and relationships through virtual interaction. Digital gaming environments can support social integration when participants develop interpersonal relationships through shared gameplay and communication (Cheng et al., 2026). In Roblox, communication among Generation Z users has been associated with digital identity construction and the development of communication practices within virtual communities (Istikhomah et al., 2026). Similarly, research on Roblox as a digital cultural space indicates that users can express creativity, construct identities, and develop social relationships through virtual interaction (Yuningsih & Jaizul, 2025). These characteristics demonstrate that Roblox extends beyond the function of entertainment and can operate as a social environment where users interact with culturally diverse individuals.

The “Meet People Across the World” server is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides an environment in which users can encounter international participants and communicate in real time. Such interaction may involve introducing oneself, discussing everyday life, exchanging information

about countries and cultures, and negotiating meaning when communication becomes difficult. Collaborative gameplay research indicates that interaction in digital games can create conditions for intercultural communication because participants must coordinate their actions and communicate with individuals who may have different cultural expectations (Lou & Justus, 2026). Research on Roblox users also indicates that linguistic adjustment and negotiation of meaning occur during interaction among users from different backgrounds (Putri Kahayani et al., 2025). These characteristics make Roblox relevant for examining naturally occurring intercultural communication among Generation Z university students.

Unlike virtual exchange programs that are intentionally designed for educational purposes, Roblox provides a less structured environment in which intercultural communication may emerge through spontaneous social interaction. Virtual exchange research generally involves planned activities, defined learning objectives, and structured interaction between participants from different cultural backgrounds (Suda et al., 2026). Research on three-dimensional virtual environments also demonstrates the potential of structured digital platforms to develop intercultural competence through organized intercultural activities (Shonfeld et al., 2025). In contrast, game-mediated intercultural communication can occur through collaborative play and social interaction without the interaction necessarily being designed as a formal educational activity (Lou & Justus, 2026). This distinction is important because the present study focuses on participants' naturally occurring intercultural experiences rather than their participation in a planned intercultural learning program.

However, digital interaction does not automatically result in intercultural competence or intercultural sensitivity. The development of intercultural competence depends on the quality and nature of interaction rather than on technological exposure alone (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). Digital intercultural learning can also involve challenges related to stereotypes, language barriers, and difficulties in interpreting culturally different behaviors (Shonfeld et al., 2025). Research on Generation Z further indicates that frequent digital communication does not necessarily produce intercultural awareness unless individuals engage in meaningful communication and reflection (Wahdania et al., 2026). Therefore, Roblox should not be conceptualized as a platform that automatically develops intercultural competence, but rather as a context in which intercultural experiences can occur and be examined.

In the present study, Roblox is therefore conceptualized as a digital interactional environment in which Generation Z university students can encounter cultural differences through authentic communication with international users. Research on gaming environments suggests that collaborative play can create opportunities for intercultural belonging and social integration (Cheng et al., 2026). Research on digital games also indicates that interaction within shared virtual environments can facilitate cultural learning and intercultural communication (Zhang et al., 2022). Research specifically involving Roblox demonstrates that users can negotiate language, communicate across cultural boundaries, and construct social identities through virtual interaction (Putri et al., 2025). Consequently, Roblox provides an appropriate setting for examining how

participants experience, interpret, and respond to cultural differences in spontaneous digital communication.

2.4 Generation Z and Digital Intercultural Communication

Generation Z generally refers to individuals who have grown up during a period characterized by rapid technological development, widespread internet access, social media, and digital communication. Their everyday experiences involve extensive interaction with digital platforms for learning, entertainment, socialization, and communication. The increasing role of digital media in young people's lives has created more opportunities for interaction with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). Research on social-media interaction similarly demonstrates that digital communication can create opportunities for young users to engage with culturally diverse individuals and develop intercultural digital communication competence (Zhang et al., 2026). These characteristics make Generation Z particularly relevant to research examining intercultural communication within digital environments.

Digital communication has influenced the ways in which Generation Z establishes and maintains social relationships. Rather than depending exclusively on face-to-face communication, young people frequently participate in online communities where geographical boundaries are less restrictive. Digital media can therefore increase opportunities for young adults to encounter different cultural perspectives and communication practices (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). Social-media interaction can further support intercultural communication by enabling users to exchange information and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds

(Zhang et al., 2026). These opportunities, however, do not necessarily result in intercultural competence because meaningful communication and reflection remain important factors in intercultural development (Wahdania et al., 2026).

Recent research has specifically examined the relationship between Generation Z and intercultural communication. Wahdania et al. (2026) found that Generation Z demonstrates awareness of intercultural communication in relation to its extensive engagement with digital communication and diverse online communities. Their findings also emphasize that intercultural awareness develops through meaningful communication rather than technological exposure alone (Wahdania et al., 2026). Yamada (2025) similarly argues that Generation Z students benefit from authentic intercultural engagement because interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds can support empathy, cultural awareness, and communication competence (Yamada, 2025). These findings suggest that Generation Z's familiarity with digital technology creates opportunities for intercultural communication, but the quality of their intercultural experiences remains an important consideration.

Digital environments can provide Generation Z with opportunities to encounter cultural differences outside formal educational settings. Virtual interaction has been found to facilitate cultural exchange, international collaboration, and reflection on cultural perspectives among participants (Shonfeld et al., 2025). Research on virtual environments also suggests that technology-mediated intercultural learning can support intercultural competence when participants actively communicate and reflect on cultural differences (Naranjo-Toro

et al., 2026). Similarly, research on augmented-reality-supported language learning indicates that digital interaction can contribute to intercultural competence when learners are provided with opportunities to engage with culturally meaningful contexts (Liu et al., 2023).

The relationship between Generation Z and digital gaming is particularly relevant to the present study because gaming has become an important form of digital social interaction for young people. Online games can function as social spaces where participants communicate, collaborate, and construct relationships while engaging in shared activities (Cheng et al., 2026). Collaborative digital games can also create opportunities for intercultural communication because players may need to negotiate meaning and coordinate activities with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Lou & Justus, 2026). Research on Roblox further demonstrates that Generation Z users participate in communication and identity construction through interaction within virtual gaming environments (Istikhomah et al., 2026).

For Generation Z university students in English Education, these digital interactions are particularly relevant because English can function as a medium for communication with international users. English language education increasingly requires learners to develop intercultural awareness alongside linguistic competence in order to communicate appropriately in multicultural contexts (Rustandi et al., 2020). Digital interaction can provide learners with opportunities to practice English in situations involving authentic communication with culturally diverse interlocutors (Yamada, 2025). Virtual intercultural interaction can also

expose learners to different communication practices and encourage them to reflect on their own cultural assumptions (Shonfeld et al., 2025).

Online interaction may also require Generation Z users to negotiate meaning and adapt their communication strategies. Research on Roblox has found that Generation Z users demonstrate linguistic variation and adapt their communication practices during virtual interaction (Putri et al., 2025). Game-mediated intercultural communication similarly requires participants to coordinate interaction and respond to different communication styles during collaborative play (Lou & Justus, 2026). Such adaptation can be understood as an important part of intercultural communication because individuals must consider the linguistic and cultural perspectives of their interlocutors rather than relying exclusively on their own communication norms.

Nevertheless, Generation Z's digital fluency should not be equated automatically with intercultural sensitivity. Frequent exposure to culturally diverse content does not necessarily mean that individuals understand or respect cultural differences (Wahdania et al., 2026). Research on digital media indicates that the relationship between digital-media use and intercultural competence depends on the characteristics and quality of users' interactions (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). Research on virtual intercultural learning likewise demonstrates that meaningful communication, cultural reflection, and active engagement are important for developing intercultural competence (Shonfeld et al., 2025).

Therefore, Generation Z university students constitute an appropriate participant group for the present study because they are familiar with digital

communication and frequently engage in online social environments. Their participation in Roblox provides opportunities to communicate with international users, encounter cultural differences, and negotiate meaning in real time (Istikhomah et al., 2026). Digital gaming research further indicates that collaborative play can facilitate social integration and intercultural belonging (Cheng et al., 2026). These experiences provide a relevant context for examining how Generation Z university students experience intercultural communication and how they respond to cultural differences during spontaneous online interaction.

2.5 Previous Studies

Previous studies have examined intercultural communication, intercultural competence, digital interaction, Generation Z, and online gaming from several perspectives. Research in intercultural education has established the importance of direct intercultural experiences for developing cultural awareness, empathy, and communication skills (Alerd et al., 2002). Research in English language education has similarly emphasized that intercultural competence should be developed alongside linguistic competence because language learning increasingly involves communication across cultural boundaries (Rustandi et al., 2020). Technology-mediated communication has further been shown to create opportunities for individuals from different cultural backgrounds to exchange knowledge, negotiate meaning, and develop mutual understanding (Nurhas et al., 2019).

More recent research has investigated digital environments as spaces for intercultural learning. Virtual exchange research demonstrates that digitally mediated interaction can support international collaboration and the development

of intercultural competencies (Suda et al., 2026). Research on three-dimensional virtual environments similarly indicates that interaction through digital platforms can encourage participants to exchange cultural perspectives and reflect on cultural diversity (Shonfeld et al., 2025). A systematic review of technology-mediated intercultural learning further indicates that digital approaches have become increasingly important in the development and study of intercultural competence in higher education (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026).

Research has also focused specifically on the relationship between digital media and intercultural competence among young adults. A recent meta-analysis indicates that digital-media use can influence young adults' intercultural communication competence, although the effects vary according to the nature and quality of digital interaction (Akhmadieva et al., 2026). A systematic literature review similarly identifies social-media interaction as an important context for the development of intercultural digital communication competence (Zhang et al., 2026). These studies provide broader evidence that digital communication can create opportunities for intercultural development while also indicating that the characteristics of particular platforms and interactional contexts require further examination.

Other studies have investigated digital games and virtual environments as contexts for cultural learning. Zhang et al. (2022) found that 3D contextual interactive games can support cultural learning through collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds. Digital games have also been conceptualized as transcultural communicative spaces in which learners can interact

and negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries (Smith, 2021). More recent research on e-sports suggests that digital play can contribute to intercultural belonging and social integration among international students (Cheng et al., 2026). These studies demonstrate that gaming environments can have social and intercultural functions beyond entertainment.

Research specifically examining Roblox has begun to provide further evidence of its potential as a social and intercultural environment. Wulandari & Alwi (2025) found that Roblox can function as a medium for cross-cultural education by encouraging communication among Generation Z users from different countries. Putri et al. (2025) found that communication among Generation Z users on Roblox involves linguistic variation and adjustment as users interact with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Istikhomah et al.(2026) further examined communication and identity formation among Generation Z users on Roblox and demonstrated that the platform can function as a social environment for digital interaction.

Yuningsih & Jaizul (2025) similarly describe Roblox as a digital cultural space in which Generation Z users construct identities, express creativity, and develop social relationships through virtual interaction. These findings suggest that Roblox provides opportunities for users to encounter different cultural perspectives and establish relationships beyond geographical boundaries (Yuningsih & Jaizul, 2025). Research on game-mediated intercultural communication further suggests that collaborative play can create mechanisms through which participants negotiate social interaction and develop relationships with culturally diverse players (Lou &

Justus, 2026). Taken together, these studies indicate that online gaming environments can function as meaningful spaces for communication, socialization, and intercultural interaction.

However, the existing studies differ in their research focus and methodological orientation. Wulandari & Alwi (2025) primarily examine Roblox as a medium for cross-cultural education. Putri et al. (2025) focus more specifically on linguistic variation and communication practices among Roblox users. Istikhomah et al. (2026) emphasize communication and identity formation among Generation Z users. Consequently, although these studies establish the relevance of Roblox for communication and cultural interaction, they provide less detailed attention to how individual participants experience and interpret cultural differences during spontaneous interaction.

A similar limitation can be observed in research on digital intercultural learning more broadly. Yamada (2025) examines strategies for developing intercultural competence among Generation Z in higher education, particularly through structured opportunities for intercultural engagement. Shonfeld et al. (2025) investigate three-dimensional virtual environments in a structured educational context. Suda et al. (2026) likewise examine virtual exchange as an organized intervention for developing international competencies. These studies demonstrate the value of technology-mediated intercultural interaction, but their structured educational contexts differ from the spontaneous social interaction examined in the present study.

Research on digital games provides a closer connection to the present study but still leaves important questions unanswered. Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrate that collaborative digital games can facilitate cultural learning, while Smith (2021) emphasizes the transcultural communicative potential of digital games. Cheng et al. (2026) further demonstrate that digital play can contribute to intercultural belonging and social integration. However, these studies do not specifically examine how Indonesian Generation Z university students experience intercultural communication while interacting spontaneously with international users on Roblox.

The existing literature also suggests that digital exposure alone should not be assumed to produce intercultural competence. Wahdania et al. (2026) emphasize that Generation Z's intercultural awareness develops through meaningful communication rather than technology exposure alone. Research on digital media similarly indicates that the relationship between digital-media use and intercultural communication competence depends on the nature of users' engagement Akhmadieva et al. (2026). Research on virtual intercultural learning further highlights the importance of active interaction, cultural reflection, and engagement with different cultural perspectives (Naranjo-Toro et al., 2026). Therefore, understanding participants' actual experiences is necessary to examine how digital interaction may contribute to intercultural development.

Based on these previous studies, a research gap can be identified. Existing research has examined intercultural competence in formal educational environments (Yamada, 2025). Other studies have examined virtual environments and structured digital interaction (Shonfeld et al., 2025). Research on digital games

has demonstrated their potential for cultural learning, transcultural communication, and intercultural belonging (Zhang et al., 2022). Meanwhile, studies specifically examining Roblox have focused on cross-cultural education, linguistic variation, identity, and communication practices (Wulandari & Alwi, 2025). However, limited attention has been given to the lived intercultural experiences of Indonesian Generation Z university students during spontaneous interactions with international users on Roblox.

The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining intercultural experiences within the “Meet People Across the World” server on Roblox. Rather than treating Roblox simply as an educational technology, the study considers it a naturally occurring social environment in which participants communicate with international users. Game-mediated communication can involve negotiation of meaning, coordination, adaptation, and social relationship building (Lou & Justus, 2026). Research on Roblox also indicates that users engage in linguistic adjustment and identity construction through virtual interaction (Putri et al., 2025). These characteristics provide an appropriate context for examining how participants experience and respond to cultural differences.

The theoretical framework of the present study further distinguishes it from previous research. Byram's framework provides the basis for interpreting participants' intercultural communicative competence through knowledge, interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2020). Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity provides an additional lens for examining how participants respond to

cultural differences through ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations (Bennett, 2009). By combining these theoretical perspectives with a qualitative examination of participants' experiences, the present study seeks to understand not only what intercultural communication occurs, but also how participants interpret, negotiate, and respond to cultural differences during authentic interaction on Roblox.

Consequently, the present study employs a qualitative case study integrated with netnography to investigate the intercultural experiences of Generation Z university students interacting with international users on Roblox. This approach is intended to provide a deeper understanding of naturally occurring communication, cultural encounters, misunderstandings, adaptations, and reflections that may not be fully captured through quantitative measures. The study therefore contributes to the existing literature by connecting research on intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity, Generation Z, and digital gaming within a specific and relatively underexplored context: authentic intercultural interaction among Indonesian university students on the “Meet People Across the World” server in Roblox.

2.6 Concluding Remark

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature supporting the present study on the intercultural experiences of Generation Z university students interacting with international users on Roblox. It discusses Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), intercultural sensitivity, Roblox as a digital environment for intercultural interaction, Generation Z and digital intercultural communication, and previous studies. These perspectives provide a foundation for

understanding how students experience, interpret, and respond to cultural differences in digital communication.