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Beyond play: Exploring Indonesian university students' literacy practices in Roblox affinity spaces

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write; however, in new literacy studies, attention has shifted to how students understand and interpret multimodal texts, such as audio, visual, and spatial elements, including those embedded in games. This study aims to examine how Roblox players, particularly students at an Indonesian public university, develop literacy skills, especially reading and writing, while playing games, using two relevant frameworks: affinity space theory and new literacy studies theory. The study examined real-world literacy practices that occur when students interact with Roblox, including reading game instructions, creating narratives, writing in-game dialogue, and chatting with other players. Further, this study aimed to better understand how game-based environments, such as Roblox, give students opportunities to acquire and apply literacy skills in meaningful, creative ways outside the traditional classroom through naturally occurring activities. Additionally, this study sought to determine the kinds of literacy practices that are included in games and the textual and linguistic characteristics of students' reading and written work. Data were collected from in-game chats between players and interviews with ten Roblox players aged 17-19. Findings suggest that in-game experiences helped students develop and, to some extent, improve their literacy practice by helping them understand manuals, interpret symbols, and communicate with players. Although some students also experienced negative encounters such as being scammed and witnessed racial harassment, students still hoped that in-game experiences could be transferred to the academic setting, which then becomes the responsibility of educators, particularly literacy educators.

Keywords: Game-based learning; literacy learning; Roblox

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INTRODUCTION

Incorporating game-based learning into classrooms has become an alternative for educators who seek to transform their teaching practice while at the same time reaping the benefits of its use in the class. Literacy research has consistently argued for the integration of students' out-of-school digital literacy practices into classroom learning (von Gillern et.al., 2024). Digital literacy practices, as can be found in digital gaming, are increasing in popularity among students around the globe (Stokke et.al., 2025). In Indonesia, where this study was conducted, the Indonesian E-sports Executive Board (or *Pengurus Besar E-sport Indonesia*/PBESI) indicates that at least 44 million citizens play games every day, making the nation one of the countries with the highest number of gamers in Southeast Asia (Detik Finance, 2022).

By 2024, there are approximately 154.9 million gamers in Indonesia, with per capita spending of around USD 26 (Widyastuti et al., 2026). Meanwhile, in Norway, boys and girls aged 9-18 years old play video games, with 93% of boys spending 1 hour and 34 minutes, and 79% of girls playing games for 50 minutes daily (Stokke et al., 2025). Finally, in the United States, the

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Entertainment Software Association (ESA) confirms that in 2023, about 61% of all Americans participate in digital games weekly (ESA, 2024).

As digital games are mostly played as an out-of-school experience, many researchers shift their attention to how those games may support learning, especially literacy learning. The results are quite provocative. For example, in the field of English language arts, digital games help students improve their learning on semiotics, the existence of alphabetic texts, and the prevalence of narrative within games (Fowler-Amato et al., 2019). Furthermore, digital games have been incorporated into literacy education in various ways, including serving as literary texts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, materials for reading workshop activities, and stimuli for reflective writing and critical thinking exercises (Stufft & von Gillern, 2021; von Gillern et al., 2022). In another study, Nash and Brady (2021) believe that incorporating digital games in English classrooms has highlighted students' broader understandings of literacy, the development of diverse literacy practices, the strengthening of critical and analytical thinking abilities, greater engagement in learning, and expanded opportunities for collaboration and peer mentoring.

Historically, situated in new literacy studies, one of the prominent researchers in games and literacy learning, Gee (2004, 2007, 2011, 2018) argues that games are texts in a broader sense; games are multifaceted systems consisting of signs and symbols that players must understand, analyse, and interpret (thus, activating their reading and writing skills) to succeed. This process of interpreting symbols, audio, visual, and spatial information may help develop students' literacy practices. Other researchers have found that using digital games in both classrooms and informal settings can lead to positive learning outcomes. These include helping students gain knowledge and improving their motivation and engagement (Boyle et al., 2016; Connolly et al., 2012; Perrotta et al., 2013). In another study, Vogel et al. (2006) showed that games with interactive simulations can help students with their cognitive development.

Although some studies above have identified potential advantages of games in learning, only a few studies have been published on how playing Roblox may influence students' literacy learning. Most studies have explored the relationship between Roblox and education in general, from the perspectives of design and development, theoretical exploration, student health, and user experience (Han et al., 2023), and only a limited number of studies have focused on Roblox and literacy learning (Sinar et al., 2023). Therefore, to address this gap, the study aims to investigate university students' literacy practices within an online game of Roblox through interviews and in-game chat interaction. Using a New Literacy Studies approach (Barton, 2007; Gee, 2004; Heath, 1983; Street, 2016) and affinity space theory (Gee, 2004, 2018) as an analytical lens, this research examines how Roblox players participate in informal digital communication that may help them develop literacy practices and what these practices suggest for formal tertiary EFL and literacy education.

New Literacy Studies

Unlike traditional literacy that is often defined as an ability to read and write, reading and writing in New Literacy Studies (NLS) are only meaningful when examined within the framework of social and cultural practices, which also encompass historical, political, and economic factors. NLS began in the 1980s, grounded in anthropology, education, linguistics, history, rhetoric and composition studies, cultural psychology, and many other relevant areas (Gee, 2011). Renowned figures in NLS include Barton (2007), Gee 2004), Street (2016), and Heath (1983), who argue that literacy is not just a set of skills but a social practice found in specific communities at specific times. In other words, literacy within NLS is not only viewed as a cognitive practice or mental phenomenon, but as something people do inside society. In this study, literacy practice is examined within a current, popular game environment, Roblox, in a specific community (student gamers in 2025).

NLS also emphasises that literacy is shaped by social norms adapted by its communities. For example, as an academic, being 'literate' in an academic community means being able to differentiate trustworthy from fraudulent journals, identify articles written by humans versus Artificial Intelligence, and publish using certain citation and reference styles. On the other hand, being 'literate' for Gen Z (born between 1997-2012) these days may be defined as being active participants in social media communities like TikTok or Instagram and understanding how to use popular hashtags, create reels, video and audio accordingly, which is highly relevant to the multimodal literacy framework (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2020). Similarly, if you want to be considered 'literate' in running, a popular sport in Indonesia recently, you need to be fluent in using vocabulary specifically attached to this sport, such as 'fartlek', 'pacer', 'BIB', 'carbo loading', and so on. In a similar vein, within this theory, being 'literate' among the Roblox gamers community means being able to understand, analyse, and interpret different modes and symbols found in the game, solve problems, and apply knowledge from previous games. Apart from NLS and multimodal literacy theories, a framework from Gee (2004, 2018) on affinity space and literacy learning also serves as an important theory underpinning the study.

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Affinity Space and Literacy Learning

Affinity space is a term used by one of the prominent figures in literacy learning, James Paul Gee, in 2004 to refer to a place or informal environment (now, mostly digital) where people share common activities, interests or passions. Affinity space is common today "in global high-tech new capitalist world" (Gee, 2004, p. 87) as people continue to create spaces or groups around their shared interests, like hobbies and subject matter, including games where people can enter and participate at various levels (Gee, 2018). He further argues that powerful teaching and learning often arise from students' own experiences beyond schools, from social media to informal communities, for example, from learning English on TikTok to solving problems in games. Thus, Gee (2011) warned educators to recognise students' interests and passions and bring them into the classroom and to transform educators' perspective that, outside schools, students may have full access to excellent teaching and learning.

In the Indonesian context, for example, affinity groups on various social media platforms created different spaces sharing similar interests, from health issues such as intermittent fasting to photography, sports, technology, religious matters, gaming communities, and the list is countless. Inside these groups, people from different backgrounds, regardless of sex, age, education, or location, engage to support each other, share and create knowledge together, and sometimes organise social gatherings, enabling them to move freely between online and offline interaction. These are three common features that constitute a definition of affinity space that can be found in games, which Gee (2004; 2018) believed to bring benefits to teachers and students, as these features may not always be present in traditional classrooms, such as:

1. In an affinity space, individuals connect primarily through mutual interests, goals, or activities, rather than being defined by their race, gender, age, disability, or social class.
2. Beginners, experts, and everyone in between coexist in a shared environment. Unlike conventional groupings (such as classes organised by age or grade), affinity spaces combine beginners and experts, young and old alike. Newcomers and expert individuals interact as equals, contributing in whatever way they can.
3. Knowledge is shared, and experience is distributed among participants and shared among the whole group rather than being held by any single individual. Each participant may have their own area of expertise; one might be well-versed in a particular sub-topic, while another excels in a different area, collectively providing a wide spectrum of knowledge.

Affinity space is often a text-rich environment and therefore, interaction requires participants to activate their literacy skills. Active members aiming to share knowledge, create content, and give feedback in the space need to understand, interpret and act like a member of that space. An affinity space sharing the same interest in health issues needs to understand messages or posts before they can interact. The messages distributed in the affinity space are not always verbal; sometimes they are multimodal, such as visual, audio, spatial or other symbols. Roblox players exist in their affinity space and also interact the same way, including reading instructions, sending messages, and interacting with other players.

Roblox

Roblox, an online platform and game-building system, was first developed by David Baszucki and Erik Cassel in 2004 and was released to the public in 2006. By February 2025, Roblox reported around 85.3 million active users around the world ("Roblox", 2025). The company also notes that nearly half of all children in the United States under age 16 play on the platform each month. It has grown into a major Metaverse platform for Gen Z and Gen Alpha (born after 2012), who use it far more often than other apps (Han et al., 2023). On average, they spend about 2.6 hours a day on Roblox, roughly three times the amount of time they spend on YouTube and about seven times more than on Facebook (Kim & Kim, 2021). In Indonesia, an approximate 1.5 million people are reported to be active users of Roblox (Pratomo, 2025).

Roblox is one of the biggest multiplayer gaming communities in the world, enabling players to design their own games and play those created by others. The platform is filled with virtual worlds, hobby-based communities, and user-created content. Because Roblox offers a programmable space, players can design their own world, build games, and set up interactive experiences however they like (Rospigliosi, 2022). At this point, hundreds of thousands of users have already created their own worlds and games or what are referred to as "experiences", inside Roblox. Players can chat, hang out, or play together; every day they send nearly 60 billion messages and use the 3D spaces to meet up, trade items, and build social connections (Han et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study involved ten students aged between 17 and 18 years old and enrolled as first-year students in a public university in West Java province, Indonesia. They were recruited for this study using criterion-based selection, with the primary criterion being that they actively play Roblox and have been playing the game for 4-6 years. In this research, their

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statements were identified using R1-R10, and R stands for respondent in the study. A small number of respondents involved in this study is grounded in the concept of "information power" (Malterud et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2026), which suggests that the number of participants may be kept to a minimum as long as they have adequate and relevant information to the study being investigated. Further, Malterud et al. (2016) believed that "the larger information power the sample holds, the lower *N* is needed, and vice versa" (p. 1754).

The respondents were interviewed in Indonesian and English with the questions centred around how meaning was negotiated while playing Roblox and how students' literacy practice was situated within its affinity space. The guideline questions were adapted from the frameworks of affinity space theory (Gee, 2004, 2018), New Literacy Studies (Gee, 2011; Street, 2016) and Multimodal Literacy (Mills et al., 2017), which are connected to their relevance to literacy learning. Sample interview questions were, for example, *how do you interpret non-verbal texts in the game, such as symbols, visuals, audio, layouts, and maps?; how does the interpretation help you succeed in playing the game?; what kind of reading and writing practice do you activate while playing the game?; how do you send or receive messages during the game?; how does your involvement in the game community help your reading, writing, and communication skills?*

Apart from the interview, I asked for consent from participants to give me access to their in-game chats or other interactions with other players. Access to participants' in-game chats was needed to help me identify evidence of literacy practice as well as literacy learning that may have occurred during their game session, and to investigate students' participation in the affinity space. For confidentiality, usernames both while they were playing the game and interacting with other players in the chat rooms were protected so they were not identifiable to the public.

Data from the interview and in-game chat were analysed with an Inductive Dormant Analysis or IdA (Laari, 2025). This strategy implies that the researcher starts the analysis with the theory from the literature as a foundation (deductive) and then the researcher remains open to identifying and examining emergent themes that are not encompassed within the theoretical framework underpinning the study (inductive). As this study belongs to a qualitative study, this approach of analysing data shows a careful consideration of using both deductive and inductive inquiry because "no individual qualitative researcher can successfully perform either inductive or deductive without the back and forth from both" (Laari, 2025; pp. 9). Furthermore, in qualitative research, referring to data analysis as strictly inductive or deductive may be conceptually misleading and irrational (Armat, 2018; Harding, 2013; Marying, 2014).

Thus, following the Inductive dormant Analysis, the coding process and the formation of themes were carried out inductively so that insights could arise naturally from the students' interviews. At the same time, the interpretation of these themes was guided by the theories above (Affinity Space, New Literacy Studies, Multimodal Literacy), which served as the conceptual lenses for examining how literacy practices take shape within game-based contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to investigate the ways students shape and develop their literacy practices, especially from New Literacy Studies (NLS), while participating in Roblox affinity spaces. The following are the results of the interview and evidence from students' in-game chats, which are categorised into the following findings: (1) in-game literacy practices, and (2) affinity spaces practised by Roblox players that enhance literacy learning.

In-Game Literacy Practices

The first finding demonstrated that the reading and writing process enabled students to successfully engage in the game's affinity space, which also shows how literacy practices are treated as an important component of social interaction rather than as separate language skills. Data from the interview and in-game chats indicated that participants frequently moved between reading the game instructions and producing responses. They used the in-game chat to exchange strategies after interpreting the mission instructions. From reading simple verbal instructions like *"you have to find the key"* to a more complex non-verbal instruction found in one of Roblox experiences called *Escape Room*, respondents demonstrated that achieving the goal successfully was not entirely determined by linguistic expertise (Shafirova & Cassany, 2020), as can be seen in R6's slightly inaccurate grammar that he produced: *"that's means you will need to…"* (see Table 1 below), but rather by using different kinds of multimodal resources such as images, symbols, and sound. Although R6's sentence was grammatically inaccurate (adding the auxiliary verb 'is' after 'that'), he had accomplished his communicative goal in aiming to assist other players.

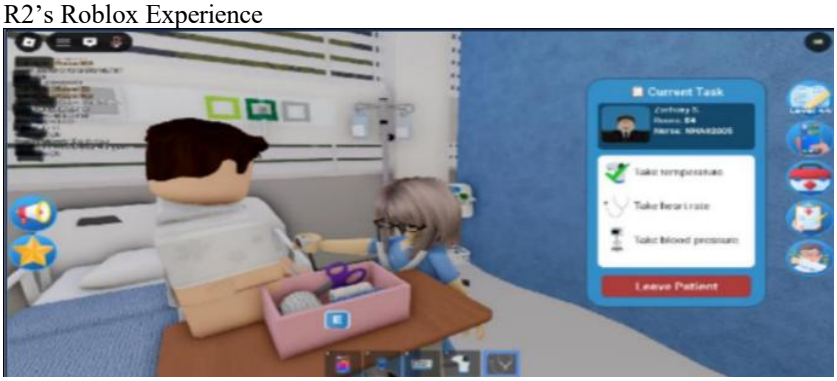
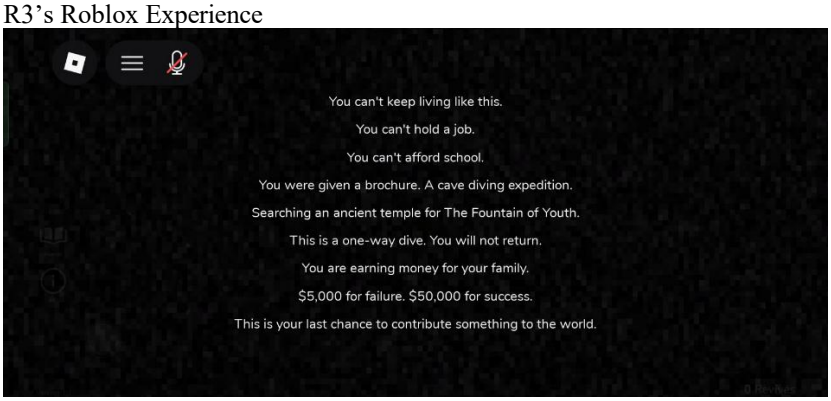
The second finding showed that respondents activated and navigated different resources of multimodality to successfully accomplish the game. This can be found in the interview with R1, who described her experience in the *Escape Room*; she said: "*In the Escape Room experience, we were given colourful cables, and we had to cut the cables in the right order. Each cable was colour coded, and you must understand them to avoid explosion".*

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From this description, the respondent moved from print-based literacy to navigating meaningful symbols in the game's semiotic system; for example, the wrong colour means game over (*"you must understand them to avoid explosion"*). In this case, meaning is negotiated through game-specific rules and symbols. Viewed from the affinity space theory, R1's understanding of the meaning of the colour-coded cables is not only an individual cognitive ability, but it can also be developed through participation in a community where players share their strategies, experiences, and knowledge about the game (Gee & Hayes, 2012; Shafirova & Cassany, 2020).

A sample of students' literacy practices and data sources were illustrated in the following table in the form of screenshots from the respondents' accounts, and the sources from the interview were written verbatim.

Table 1
In-game Literacy Practices and Players' Interaction

Literacy Practice	**Data Source**
Reading the game instructions	R2's Roblox Experience 
	R3's Roblox Experience 
	R4's Roblox Experience 

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Table 1 (cont.)

In-game Literacy Practices and Players' Interaction	
Writing advices to assist other players	R5's In-game Chats  R6's Roblox Experience 
Interpreting multimodality	R7's Roblox Experience  R8's Roblox Experience 

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As evident in Table 1 above, communication within the Roblox community is highly multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020; van Leeuwen, 2022); players do not depend solely on written text but combine written chat with symbols, visuals, and sounds to convey meaning. For example, in R2's experience, she had to interpret the game instructions, a combination of text *"take temperature"*, *"take heart rate"*, *"take blood pressure"*, music, and symbols on the right-hand side while at the same time communicating with and helping other players through in-game chat in the top-left corner (usernames were protected).

Similarly, in R7's Roblox Experience, the respondent played the "Maple Hospital", where she acted as a nurse (as seen in the yellow satchel bag with an LPN logo on the left, which stands for Licensed Practical Nurse) and her job is to look after a patient who needs to be diagnosed or assessed. As a 'professional nurse' in this experience, she needs to treat the patient using one of six correct tools shown in symbols at the bottom of the screen.

In the interview, I asked the respondent how she identified whether she used the correct tool; she said that initially she was not aware of which tools were used to 'cure' a patient because sometimes the symbols provided in the game look similar to one another, as can be seen in the green bottle in tool 5 and the pink-yellow bottle in tool 6 in the above table. To solve the problem, she turned to other multiple 'portals' such as Discord and YouTube for complete tutorials and guides. She even watched other 'knowledgeable' player and copied their strategies. This is what Gee (2004, 2018) believes: in affinity space, learning occurs by activating multiple sources outside the space itself. In this case, R7 seems to understand the importance of having another resourceful knowledge-giver, which enables her to complete the task of curing the patient. Being able to interpret symbols, activating multiple resources and learning from an expert have given her a sense of accomplishment that may not always present in our classrooms these days. When faced with difficulties, R7 did not wait for formal instructions or official learning materials, as often found in the class; rather, she sought many relevant sources to ensure that she accomplished the task successfully.

This evidence demonstrates that respondents actively interpreted multimodal cues and turned this interpretation into powerful communication. This is in line with New Literacy Studies, which views literacy as a social practice that allows people to negotiate meaning that results in a communicative goal shared by their community. This also indicates a shift beyond a notion of literacy as the production of signs towards a greater emphasis on the social and cultural environments in which people in a specific community live and learn (Gee, 2011; Bacalja, 2026).

Students' participation in Roblox enables a space for multimodal literacy to flourish. Players are involved in interpreting verbal and non-verbal instruction, including symbols (icons that carry meanings, such as a math equation in R4's experience) and sound. In fact, sound also plays a significant role: the well-known Roblox *"oof"* sound effect that occurs when a character dies is universally recognised by Respondents 1- 10 in this research as a signal of failure or a prompt to respond. Such multimodal signals frequently complement or even substitute for text; for instance, rather than typing *"I'm dead,"* a player's avatar might simply release an *"oof"* sound, and everyone on the server interprets the cue through their shared knowledge of the game. The use of sound like this does not necessarily mean decreased communicative purposes. Instead, meaning is distributed across auditory symbols that may help students develop their multimodal literacy.

Likewise, players refer to interpreting a math equation puzzle and various symbolic icons like a water bottle, heart, or star that appear during gameplay, including the red long line in R8's experience that can be observed in the last picture in Table 1. These symbols carry significance (e.g., a heart icon representing health, a "dance" emote denoting celebration, a water bottle symbolising a break, a red long line preparing the player for an unexpected occurrence), and players must interpret these just as they do with written text.

The existence of "on-mic" communication (voice chat) in the data suggests that spoken modality sometimes interacts with written chat. Some players might coordinate through voice while others prefer to text, creating a complex communication environment. Theoretically, this aligns with Kress's concept of multimodal literacies (2001) and van Leeuwen (2022), where players need to be adept at interpreting and coordinating multiple semiotic forms. In our data, symbols, such as a water bottle, heart, star, jump, and dance, are explicitly acknowledged by numerous players (R1 - R10), emphasising that these icons constitute a shared vocabulary that extends beyond text. It further prompts inquiries into how meaning-making is distributed between what is typed and what is performed or embedded within the game's design.

Apart from this, literacy as social practice (Barton, 2007; Gee, 2018; Street, 2016) exists among young Roblox players and may also indicate significant language variation widely practised among its community members. Expressions and slang, such as *"I feel so sigma"*, abbreviations like *"WYD"* (what are you doing?), *"HBU"* (how about you?), *"GG"* (good game), *"AFK"* (away from keyboard), *"NT"* (nice try), *"MVP"* (most valuable player), and *"GTG"* (got to go), appeared to be common in their in-game messages as illustrated in Table 2.

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Table 2
Specific Linguistic Resources in Roblox Affinity Space and Their Communicative Functions

Expression	Meaning	Literacy Function
I feel so sigma	I'm cool/ alright	Social bonding
AFK	Away From Keyboard	Coordination with another player, informing a temporary halt
GG	Good Game	Social cohesion
HBU	How (a)Bout You?	Maintain conversation
MVP	Most Valuable Player	Recognise expertise of others
WYD	What (are) You Doing?	Invite participation

Specific linguistic resources evident in Table 2 imply that literacy is a situated practice. Historically drawing on the seminal works of Heath (1983), Gee (2004), and Street (2016), the concept of literacy as a situated practice refers to the ways literacy practice is embedded in social interaction within a specific community. In this case, the expressions in Table 2 above are used and shaped by the social and cultural norms (Shah, 2025) as well as technological changes (Kalantzis & Cope, 2024) among Roblox players, which are not applicable in other communities. The same finding is evident in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Situated Literacy Practice by Roblox Participants



These terms represent specialised literacy practices deeply rooted in the Roblox gaming culture rather than simplified forms of language. From a New Literacy Studies standpoint, their utilisation illustrates how the social contexts in which literacy takes place shape it. In addition, from the standpoint of affinity space, these language resources serve as common knowledge that promotes engagement, cooperation, and acknowledgement among Roblox community members. Therefore, mastery of such terminology indicates both membership in the affinity space and communicative skill. Apart from that, hyperboles can also be found in the repetition of certain words that can be used to express a more intense emotion, such as "*lolol*", *"growwwww biggg"*, *"okayyy"* or even frustration, as in *"my pccccccc"*, as appeared in Figures 1 and 3.

Another example of literacy as situated practice can be observed in Figure 2 below. Previously, the context of the Roblox experience that respondents were involved in seemed to be situated in an enjoyable atmosphere. However, R10 participated in a more meaningful and intense engagement. She invited other players to discuss an academic topic in the game, as illustrated in Figure 2. For privacy and confidentiality, this was provided with the consent of R10 and the player names were covered in green.

Figure 2
Code-Switching Practice in an Academic Experience in Roblox



In this experience, R10 said that she was aware that Roblox developers provide educational experiences, not only 'fun' experiences. Therefore, she was eager to use the game to invite other players to comment and give suggestions for her own research. She intentionally code-switched between

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Indonesian and English to ensure that other players "understand the rule of this experience because this may be different to what they have played before" (Interview with R10).

Further in the interview, as seen in Excerpt 1, R10 also mentioned that she often joined literature, science, and even religious experiences in Roblox, which helped her understand some topics more clearly.

Excerpt 1

I often joined *dystopia sastra*, it's an experience developed by university students majored in arts and literature where they taught us how to read poems, how to create a theatrical performance, how to interpret meaning from a poetry and you can join them, it's cool! We're also encouraged to write a poem and read it. All the topics are real, taken from the real world, but in the form of Roblox; that's amazing, I think. You can also find and choose a server where you can read what's going on and what's being delivered. Once I joined a very famous *ustad* there because it's interesting.

(Respondent 10)

For this particular student, 'dystopia sastra' is an affinity space where she can meet, share and improve her knowledge on a specific interest and goal. She learned literature from fellow students, which makes it less threatening but maybe effective, as it enables users to select what is relevant to them, as she said: *"you can also find and choose a server…"*. It also demonstrates that high-quality teaching and learning can be found outside school, as New Literacy Studies suggests.

In line with this experience, Roblox also offers more formal game instruction that can be found in R3's experience in Table 1 above, such as: *"You can't keep living like this. You can't have a job. You were given a brochure. This is your last chance to contribute something to the world"*. Therefore, Roblox can be seen as an alternative learning platform that mixes entertainment and education, an informal, interest-driven learning environment consistent with Gee's affinity spaces which will be elaborated below.

Affinity Space Practised by Roblox Players that Enhances Learning

Data from the interview indicated that some characteristics of affinity space, especially how distributed knowledge is encouraged, were evident during in-game interaction, as shown in Excerpts 2 and 3.

Excerpt 2

Whatever experiences I played in Roblox, I feel so welcomed, like… people don't judge me. Everyone's welcome, everyone can share what they know without being judged. You can play with someone who's much better than you but they show you how it should be done. So that's one thing that's special from Roblox.

(Respondent 4)

Excerpt 3

"In this game, everyone can play whether you're a *newbie* or an expert, it doesn't matter. Even in some games, you can tell that someone is an MVP (most valuable player), usually there's like, a star, above their head or something like that. When this player enters, I don't feel threatened, in fact, they sometimes lead us and teach us to finish the game"

(Respondent 9)

Statements from R4 and R9 were also evident in the in-game chat interaction in Figure 3 provided to me with their consent. In Figure 3, affinity space allows novice players to learn from more experienced peers. Knowledge on how to use the sprinkler method, a method commonly played in an experience called "Grow a Garden" in Roblox, was shared and distributed between an expert and a novice. It also demonstrates how gamers share gameplay tactics with one another without any hierarchy, as in *"you should collect all the sprinkler… the master sprinkler is the most important"* in a plain but somehow friendly tone.

Positive encouragement and warm social interaction, as said by R4 in the interview, *"I feel so welcomed, like… people don't judge me "*, can also be found in Figure 3 when the players exchanged polite gratitude: *"thank you for the tip"*, *"thank you for playing with me"*, and *"(you're) welcome"*.

Figure 3

Knowledge Distribution between Players



As an illustration, in our classrooms today, students are often grouped by grade level, ability, and skills rather than being mixed across the entire spectrum. Moreover, classrooms generally promote and reward individual knowledge retained in

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memory rather than collective understanding. They rarely provide opportunities for students to connect with each other and utilise various tools and technologies, favouring personal accomplishments instead of collaborative learning. When students gain more knowledge, they are often not given opportunities to share the knowledge with other students, even with the teachers. Additionally, it is rather uncommon for the primary resources (such as textbooks or curriculum guides) to be continually adjusted based on students' interests, preferences, experiences, and interactions.

Finally, students in this study also expressed a hope that their university professors, to some degree, can transform classroom learning into a Roblox-like experience. One respondent, R10, said that engaging in Roblox experiences boosts his confidence, not only in literacy practice, but also in communicating with people anywhere in the world. A safe environment that Roblox offers, such as positive, friendly, cooperative, and non-judgemental attitudes among its users, is a characteristic that he longed for in real life. He even mentioned that for him, Roblox has become an alternative world.

This may indicate that to some users, Roblox serves as an affective support system, where emotional safety encourages risk-taking and experimentation, key conditions for literacy development in digital spaces nowadays. Roblox may also provide an inclusive literacy environment, which R10 perceives as lacking in his real-life interactions.

The study also indicates that students' literacy skills can be developed through Roblox. The advantages of Roblox also enhance its use in educational settings (Han et al., 2023). First, Roblox has attracted a large number of users over time, and its user-friendly design makes it accessible for any user to navigate. Second, Roblox encourages students to engage in learning in more flexible ways, offering customisable characters and content along with abundant resources. Third, most students have a favourable view of Roblox, which helps remove barriers to learning associated with unfamiliar platforms.

In conclusion, Roblox is a multiplayer online game and content creation platform that enables users to design, develop, and play their own games or content, featuring a range of interactive elements that can be utilised in education. The ability to customise avatars allows users to express their identities and preferences. The social interaction features enable users to communicate through live chat, participate in group activities, and more, fostering social learning and collaboration. Engaging in active creation and gamified learning presents opportunities for learners to collaborate. The simulated environment capabilities allow students to embark on virtual field trips to locations that may be challenging to visit in person.

However, there were also negative experiences from playing Roblox that students reported in this study. First, one student reported that she was being scammed by other players while playing "Grow a Garden". Secondly, another student witnessed racial harassment by one player toward another player while playing the same game. Therefore, as Han et al. (2023) suggest, students must be equipped with skills in cybersecurity.

In line with this concern, teachers wishing to use Roblox as teaching activities are encouraged to design and develop relevant teaching materials with parental supervision, especially in younger classes, to prevent students from accessing the platform only for entertainment purposes. The findings also challenge how to translate the literacy practices that emerge within these spaces into meaningful academic activities. Literacy educators are encouraged to bring knowledge distribution practices found in the affinity space into their real classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study found that playing Roblox helped students shape and develop their literacy practice, especially from a New Literacy Studies approach and affinity space framework. First, literacy practices were regarded as a main component of social interaction rather than as separate language skills, from reading simple verbal instructions to more complex non-verbal instructions, which were not entirely determined by students' linguistic expertise. Second, students actively interpreted multimodal cues (combining written chat with symbols, visuals, and sounds) and turned this interpretation into powerful communication. From the affinity space theory, knowledge distribution was highly encouraged and evident during in-game interaction.

Therefore, this research illustrates that Roblox serves as a vibrant platform for modern literacy practices, where young users actively participate in creating meaning through a network of multimodal, collaborative, and socially-contextual activities. The communication data collected within the game, for example, encompassing narrative comprehension, symbolic interpretation, rapid text exchanges, multilingual expressions, and peer support, indicate that literacy in Roblox goes well beyond traditional print-centric skills. Instead, players navigate a fluid semiotic landscape that demands they interpret visual signals, understand auditory inputs, respond to procedural directions, negotiate identities, and collaboratively construct knowledge with their peers. These outcomes support the claims of New Literacy Studies that literacy is inherently social, cultural, and ideological, emerging from daily practices situated in distinctive contexts.

From the view of affinity spaces, Roblox illustrates Gee's concept of a participatory

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environment (2004) characterised by shared expertise, where novice and seasoned players engage seamlessly, and learning arises naturally from collective efforts. The data demonstrates how players assist one another's actions, resolve technical challenges, share strategies, and partake in enjoyable social connections. Such exchanges emphasise the platform's ability to nurture genuine peer learning and community development, highlighting how youth gaming cultures inherently reflect principles of collaborative learning that are frequently challenging to realise in formal educational environments.

The linguistic characteristics observed, such as abbreviated terms, informal language, stylised spellings, expressive communication, and code-switching, may establish Roblox as a venue for examining digital youth vernaculars and identity expression. Players fluidly utilise various linguistic resources to convey emotions, align with peers, create a sense of belonging, and maintain conversational flow. These mixed language practices not only represent globalised digital youth culture but also question restrictive definitions of what constitutes "legitimate" literacy.

In summary, this study has expanded current knowledge and debate on the interconnection between literacy learning in an affinity space by showing how, in this particular case, students participating in an international online space develop their literacy learning by making the most of their semiotic, linguistic, and discursive resources in English. These findings encourage educators and literacy researchers to reevaluate the limits of literacy practice and recognise the educational potential of game-based environments. This is not a petition for educators to use video games in school, especially in the Indonesian context, where the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education issued a statement that Roblox should not be played by Indonesian students (Pratomo, 2025). Rather, it is an appeal for educators to reconsider what the world of video games gets right and to recognise just how much high-quality teaching and learning is going on outside school (Gee, 2018). Furthermore, it is also a call for English learning and literacy education in a postdigital age to find a safe and enjoyable space to support young people to engage with and use technologies within their social and cultural context (Bacalja, 2026).

However, the self-reported interviews in this study mean that participants' explanations may be influenced by their own interpretations of their experiences. Consequently, the findings should be understood as participants' perceptions of literacy learning within the affinity space rather than as direct evidence of observable learning outcomes.

Future investigations might expand this research by studying how young players move between in-game literacies and their wider academic or social contexts. Future research could also examine whether the multimodal literacy practices students developed during their interaction in Roblox are transferred to students' literacy practices inside the classroom. However, from this research, it can be inferred that Roblox and digital gaming in general significantly influence how young individuals read, write, communicate, and learn in an increasingly interconnected digital landscape.

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