CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research in general, which embodies the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, scope of the study, and significance of the study.

1.1. Background of The Study

Nowadays, English as the pivotal language across the world has significantly impacted education, especially for English language teaching and learning. UNESCO stipulated that as a lingua franca, English is the continual usage of language aimed to simplify the process of communication among people from diverse mother tongues (UNESCO as cited in Chew, 2013). Thence, as a lingua franca, English obtained massive attention due to the interconnected and globalized world, which is known as a global village, where English is recognized for its practical tool, as well as a working language for people around the world to engage in a conversation or society (Nagy, 2016). For that reason, language and culture are connected as the English language can be utilized in communication among people from various cultures and nationwide backgrounds. Language and culture are set side by side with each other; if these two aspects are separated, their prominent elements will disappear (Brown, 2000). Besides, it is unlikely to dissociate language and culture as the implementation of the language is linked to other cultural and societal practices in the tangible worldwide community (Risager, 2014).

Consequently, English is being used to interact with people from diverse cultures across the world in which, these days, particular governments from numerous countries, include the English language in their curriculum as one of the school subjects. Hence, in the future, learners will be able to face the working environment in this fast-shifting world, considering they not only engage with people from diverse backgrounds but also must honor cultural diversity. Thus, language learners may comprehend distinct cultures through interaction with the global community using English. Accordingly, to learn the English language better, one shall comprehend the cultural elements as well. In particular foreign language education, the cultural dimensions are included in the learning process beyond operating products utilized by individuals in numerous practices among communities through reflecting their perspectives (Moran, 2001). Further, there are five categories of cultures that English language learners must grasp (Chao, 2011), such as:

1. Source culture, which belongs to individuals' native cultures;

2. Target culture, which refers to the cultures of English-speaking countries;

3. International culture, which includes the cultures across the world aside from one's native culture and the culture of English-speaking countries;

4. Intercultural interaction, which refers to the comparison between source culture with target culture or source culture with international culture;

5. The universality across cultures concerning linguistic knowledge and practice.

Due to the interconnection of language and culture, the cultural contents in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning materials are essential for the teaching-learning processes to assist EFL learners in acquiring English. Aside from that, to diminish the misinterpretation in the communication process, familiarizing learners with culture may enhance their cultural awareness to cope with culture shock (Giyatmi, 2021). Besides, language teaching materials should contain numerous cultural aspects to assist students in developing their interest in language learning and encouraging them to learn it (McKay, 2002).

As a result, English language teaching is related to the teaching of language and its culture. Thereunto, EFL students shall recognize the variety of local cultures belonging to them, as well as cultures that are interwoven with the languages being studied by them. Because the English language is intertwined with cultures, the cultural contents in English as Foreign Language (EFL) digital learning materials are essential for English language learning.

Furthermore, in this fast-changing and interconnected world that can be considered the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era, advanced technology, namely the internet, has occurred to develop technological inventions in education, resulting in plentiful ways for teaching and learning (Gonzalez-Vera, 2016). Thereby, schools are lately functioning digital media for English as a foreign language teaching-learning activity. Additionally, due to the global pandemic, which is acknowledged as the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), the termination of 530,000 schools all over Indonesia has occurred and impacted the teaching and learning process (UNICEF, 2021). Although the pandemic is

still happening thus far, a flipped classroom system, where a face-to-face meeting is combined with an online meeting, has been carried out for classroom activity in Indonesia. As of 2020, The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia issued circular letters regarding educational policy during the COVID-19 period (Arifa, 2020). Based on the Circular Letter of Ministry of Education and Culture Number 4 of 2020, it is pointed out that teachers shall provide various activities and assignments for distance learning based on students' interests and conditions, including the accessibility of learning facilities from home. Here, the digital learning programs recommended by The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, namely *Ruangguru, Zenius,* and *Microsoft Teams,* can be used for classroom activities. Nonetheless, digital materials existing in accordance with the Curriculum 2013 for English language learning at Junior High School are still insufficient (Mayuni, et al., 2021).

In spite of the insufficiency of English language digital materials for junior high school, recently, a digital-based learning platform has been created by English Language senior teachers and researchers from the State University of Jakarta. This platform is established for junior high school students, with digital materials based on the Curriculum 2013 of the English language in Indonesia. The digital learning platform is known as *MyEnglishStep* (MES) and can be accessed via the following link: https://www.myenglishstep.com/. In addition, *MyEnglishStep* may be able to accommodate junior high school students to learn English, considering this digital learning website ensures that English language materials are provided in the form of blended learning that

has multiple learning activities to assist students in studying individually and collaboratively with or without teachers' guidance. Subsequently, *MyEnglishStep* might be beneficial for EFL teachers and students as it offers various activities for learning the English language in junior high school, especially in this 21st century throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though MES offers various English Language learning materials for junior high school students in Indonesia, this digital learning site is a brand-new teaching and learning platform, and the investigation of English language materials being provided is still scarce in terms of cultural contents.

Several prior studies dealt with cultural contents of English language materials through EFL textbooks, in which the number of consisted cultural elements tends to be unequal. For instance, the current study of Faris (2014) emphasizes that the target culture aspect of the high school textbook in Cianjur was presented dominantly, while the cultural elements appeared only in the form of the aesthetic aspect. Additionally, Fauza (2018) examines two different English textbooks of senior high school level. Notably, the research reveals that the first textbook represented source culture predominantly. In comparison, the second textbook shows that target culture frequently appeared, which indicates that there must be a balance portion of cultural elements in EFL textbooks. Besides, Matsurah (2019) investigates the representation of the cultural content underlying an English textbook at the senior high school level in Indonesia. The findings show that the Product dimension frequently emerged in the textbook. Meanwhile, the cultural category primarily occurred in the target culture.

Further, Rahmawati (2020) analyzes cultural contents regarding the English language textbook in senior high school. The study elucidates how the source culture category dominates the book and the insufficiency of the intercultural interaction category. Meanwhile, Setiadi (2020) identifies cultural contents in a 9th-grade textbook which emphasizes that cultural products appear in the local culture. On the other hand, the community as a cultural dimension has the least number of results in the textbook. Finally, Angelina, et al (2022) examine the cultural contents of digital authentic greeting cards for junior high school. Her research might be slightly different compared to the previous ones as she used digital materials. The findings show that the cultural contents occurred in the universality across cultures and are represented by the practice dimension by means of activities and language expressions.

Previous studies indicate that the cultural content analysis research regarding EFL digital learning materials for junior high school level remains inadequate compared to textbooks as the basis of cultural content analysis study. While, present days digital learning materials are being used in classroom teaching and learning process, precisely throughout the global pandemic. Moreover, there are certain limitations regarding textbooks' research; for instance, textbooks are more likely not to prepare students for real-life language use (Özdemir as cited in Tüm & Uĝuz: 2014).

According to the above explanation, there are two fundamental reasons why the researcher aims to analyze the cultural contents of *MyEnglishStep* digital materials. Firstly, to examine the types of cultural content provided in

MES to foster students' cultural awareness, considering MES provides various learning materials. Secondly, the previous research underlying the cultural content analysis of EFL digital learning materials remains scarce as they mostly focused on EFL textbooks, where the impact of cultural distribution provided in their English language learning materials has not been revealed. Thus, the current study is expected to fill the gaps mentioned above. Finally, analyzing *MyEnglishStep* must be taken into account as this digital learning platform was recently launched for EFL teaching and learning activity at the junior high school level during the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, examining the *MyEnglishStep* website may be worthwhile since language learning cannot be separated from cultures. The present research analysis will be based on the five categories of culture from Chao (2011) and the five dimensions of culture adapted from Moran (2001).

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the research questions formulation in the present study will be conveyed as follows:

1. What kind of cultural categories are represented on *MyEnglishStep* digital learning materials for junior high school students?

2. What kind of cultural dimensions are represented on *MyEnglishStep* digital learning materials for junior high school students?

1.3. Purposes of the Study

According to the research questions being formulated above, the researcher aims:

1. To examine the representation of cultural categories on *MyEnglishStep* digital learning materials for junior high school students;

2. To examine the representation of cultural dimensions on *MyEnglishStep* digital learning materials for junior high school students.

1.4. The Scope of the Study

The discussion of this study covers the analysis of cultural contents regarding EFL digital learning materials at the junior high school level from an English language learning website named *MyEnglishStep*, which can be accessed through the following link: https://www.myenglishstep.com/. The current study examines the cultural contents according to the framework proposed by Chao (2011), which contains categories of culture, as well as the cultural framework constructed by Moran (2001), which consists of dimensions of culture.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The findings of the present study are intended to extend beneficial contributions that will be addressed as follows:

1. For English Teachers

   The research findings will possibly be beneficial to present teachers with knowledge regarding the representation of cultural contents in *MyEnglishStep* as the digital materials for EFL teaching at the junior high school level.

2. For EFL Students

   The present research findings will possibly develop EFL students' understanding of English language learning and the cultures portrayed in the English language digital materials through a digital platform.

3. For Researchers

   The present study findings may encourage researchers to grasp the process of conducting cultural content analysis, provide up-to-date information relating to EFL digital learning materials and its analysis, as well as become an insight and reference to attain further research, especially for researchers whose studies are being constructed based on cultural matters.