CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problems, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation, and definition of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Learning is an activity to develop skills, and it is not something that can be directly observed in others. Considering the meaning, “Learning is a relatively permanent influence on behavior, knowledge, and thinking skills that come about through experience” (Santrock, 2012: 217). Once they have learned about something, they want not lose or forget about those skills. Learning also changes people’s behavior related to various aspects of personality, both physically and psychologically such as: a change in understanding, solving a problem, thinking skills, abilities, habits and attitudes.

It can be proved that when we were babies, we already learned how to eat, to gain attention, to crawl, etc., and as we developed into children and became adults, our bodies became more functional, we learn many skills. “Learning style is not abilities but, rather, preferred ways of using one’s of abilities” (Sternberg, 2009). Our ability also improves, and we can be fluent in reading, speaking, writing, and especially spelling. If we want to create a good impression in our writing, and make sure we get the meaning of words clearly and correctly, it is
important to get the spelling right. Spelling is the process or activity of writing or naming the letters of a word in correct sequence.

In spelling words, it is really important to keep learning new words to improve vocabularies. Word is a letter or group of letters that has a meaning when it is spoken or written. We need to see a new word at least five times before we are able to use it correctly. It is because “the scope of learning is broad” (Klein, 2009). It involves academic behaviors and nonacademic behaviors. It occurs in school, and everywhere else where children experience their world. It means that we can learn anything, anytime, and anywhere without limit. It can be a novel. Novel is a fictional prose that describes the actions of imaginary people.

In her research about Haikal’s motivation in getting high education on “The Rainbow Troops” novel, Sari (2011) found the factors that motivated Haikal to get high education, his efforts to get high education, and the result toward his life. In her research, Haikal was motivated by his family, Lintang, his friend, and his teachers to get high education. Finally, Haikal studied hard, he got a scholarship and successes to work at Telecommunication Company.

In this study, the writer is interested in analyzing James W. Ellison’s novel “Akeelah and the Bee” that tells about Akeelah Anderson (eleven years old) who was an African American girl from South Los Angeles who got a gift for words. She could spell better than anyone at her school. She was motivated to join and won a contest that called ‘Scripps National Spelling Bee’ that was shown in ESPN (station television in the United States) every year. It was a prestigious event where every child had to spell words from other languages such as Latin, French,
Greek, etc., and they had various difficulties and rare unknown words. It is not all children could follow it. They had taken steps starting from the selection in each school, regional level, and participated in the competition at the national level. It was uncommon for African American children to join the contest, and it was the first time for her school got the opportunity to compete in it. Akeelah got bully from her friends who called her freak and brainiac because she was smart. She also asked by Dylan, a speller, to give it up. Akeelah loved words and always learned to spell it quickly. Her family and friend, Georgia, knew about it, and they tried to motivate Akeelah to practices more. Akeelah got intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from people around her too.

According to Ormrod (2003: 368), “Motivation is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behaviors; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going.” It is the crucial element in a learning process. It influences the learning process, quality of thinking, and information processing as well as individual’s motivation to learn. Brown (2001: 59) states, “Motivation is one of principles in learning language. So, motivation is an important aspect for learners to learn a language.” People are motivated to do something because they like it, have interest, self-determination, competence, feel capable, feel challenged to learn it, and have curiosity about that.

There have been two previous research findings related to Akeelah. The first was made by Wardhani (2012) who studied about Akeelah’s struggles to get success. She found that there were four ways of Akeelah’s struggles. 1) Akeelah followed Crenshaw’s inaugural Spelling Bee where she studied and trained to
spell words by herself. 2) Akeelah had to follow L.A district school Spelling Bee. She got the support from her brother, Devon, and she tried hard to learn by watching of previous Spelling Bee. 3) Akeelah had to follow the southern California regional finals Spelling Bee. Akeelah went alone to woodland hills; she was trained by her coach, Dr. Larabee. 4) Akeelah had to follow National Spelling Bee in Washington D.C. In order that she could win, she got support from her family, and she trained 5000 words helped by people at her neighborhood.

The next one was Hamidah (2012) who also studied about the cause of Akeelah’s struggles to become the winner in Doug Atchison’s film, the way of Akeelah’s struggles to become the winner, and the effects of her personality. It focused on Akeelah’s struggles to become the winner because of people’s support around her especially her brother, Devon. It told about her struggles in facing external and internal conflicts, when she decided to follow the Spelling Bee especially her mom who lacked of attention and against her to follow the Spelling Bee, and her coach, Dr. Larabee, who did not want to teach her again. It gave an effect on Akeelah’s personality, who previously did not care to increase her ability in spelling words, but then became optimistic, and more confident than before, when she won the Spelling Bee.

In brief, the previous research focused on Akeelah’s struggles to be a winner, on the steps that Akeelah took, and on the conflicts that Akeelah got because of that. In this study, however, the writer tries to analyze Akeelah’s motivation in learning something that she loved, namely spelling words.
1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the explanation above, the problems of the study can be stated as follows:

1. How was Akeelah’s motivation in learning new words to win the Spelling Bee Contest in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee” written by James W. Ellison?
2. What kinds of motivation did Akeelah have in learning new words to win the Spelling Bee Contest in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee” written by James W. Ellison?
3. Why was Akeelah motivated to learn new words to win the Spelling Bee Contest in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee” written by James W. Ellison?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of the study are stated as follows:

1. To describe Akeelah’s motivation in learning new words to win the Spelling Bee Contest in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee” written by James W. Ellison.
2. To describe the kinds of motivation Akeelah had in learning new words to win the Spelling Bee Contest in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee” written by James W. Ellison.
3. To describe the reasons why Akeelah was motivated to learn new words to win the Spelling Bee Contest in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee” written by James W. Ellison.
1.4 **Significance of the Study**

The novel, “Akeelah and the Bee”, is a good and interesting story; it is suitable and useful to be read by teachers and students. It gave a good example as a learning guide for students. It is aimed to enrich the students’ understanding, especially in learning. It contains information about motivation in learning. Thus, this study may help students get information on how to learn and memorize words, especially English words. For the next researchers, who conduct similar research or need sources for other related topics; this finding can be used as a reference for their study.

1.5 **Scope and Limitation**

The scope of this study is on Akeelah’s motivation in learning new words, the kinds of motivation Akeelah had in learning new words, and the reasons why Akeelah was motivated to learn new words. The limitation of this study is Akeelah as the main character in the novel “Akeelah and the Bee”.

1.6 **Definition of the Key Terms**

Some definitions of the key terms are presented in order to avoid the readers’ understanding:

1. *Study* is an activity of examining a subject in detail in order to discover new information (Cambridge, 2014).
2. *Motivation* is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behaviors; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going (Ormrod, 2003).

3. *Novel* is a long printed story about imaginary characters and events (Cambridge, 2014).

4. *Spelling Bee* is a competition in which children have to spell difficult words (Macmillan, 2009).