

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A. Background of the Study

Optimism is a personal characteristic that is related to one's willingness to work on problem-solving (Van der Velden et al., 2007). Optimism is an important element in a person to build self-confidence and strength. Optimism has the potential to develop personality traits that can be manipulated for a personal task, and overcome a crisis. Optimism has two different concepts, disposition optimism and situational optimism. Dispositional optimism is an expectation that the positive consequences of any action will be happen compared to negative consequences. Situational optimism refers to one's expectations of whether good things or laborers will occur in certain situations. An interest in optimism disposition arises as the development of a common design of self-regulation of human behavior. Carver & Scheier (1981) assumed that behavior addressed to a particular goal that is guided by a closed-loop negative feedback system (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Optimism is considered a common and stable disposition resource that affects the reduction in the difference between a person's current behavior and the goals or standards chosen for pursuit.

Dispositional optimism has become a new focus of theory and research on research on adaptation to a life problem and stressful events. This concept has become a resource in the literature on coping with illness and other medical stressors. Shifren & Hooker (1995) investigated and examined the characteristics of a "state" version of the Life Orientation Test (LOT; Scheier & Carver, 1985) of individuals with Alzheimer's disease. From the investigation, it found that the state of optimism changes was linked with positive and negative consequences from day to day (Shifren & Hooker, 1995). Shifren (1996) then developed a study of patients with Parkinson's disease. For three of the twelve patients being studied, he stated that the patient's optimism which increases on a certain day is predicted to decline the next day in the perception of the severity of the illness or disease (Shifren, 1996). However, optimistic individuals who have a higher score on

average daily optimism also see themselves as more independent and less in need of help from others in their daily activities.

In this study, optimism was raised to find out the tendency of Paul Kalanithi dealing with illness in his memoir *When Breath Becomes Air*. He wrote this narration about himself while he was sick. He did not know for sure whether he would survive his illness. He hopes to survive but he also knows as a doctor himself that it small chance to survive. For him, it is important to make a better life and profession. The narrator tries to accept the disease and overcome it for the rest of his life. He helps as many people as possible with chronic pain who can risk their life and death. As a doctor, he is aware of the closeness with patients, the term of time, and death. For Paul, the period of illness has contributed to the sense of self, rather than his past. He became a father towards the end of his life. He agreed with his wife and they decided to have children after he was diagnosed with the disease. The idea of having children gave Paul a new reason for hope and remains optimistic in life.

Paul Sudhir Arul Kalanithi was an Indian-American neurosurgeon and a writer. Paul Kalanithi was born on April 1, 1977, and lived in Westchester, New York. He was born to a Christian family hailing from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, India. Paul was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2013, he was a 36-year-old when he almost made a major contribution to the world with his intelligence and ambition. He was married to Lucy Goddard in 2006, with whom he had a daughter in 2014 named Elizabeth Acadia (Cady). Lucy is an internist at Stanford University and wrote the epilogue to *When Breath Becomes Air*. Paul died on March 9, 2015, in Palo Alto, California, United States.

His book *When Breath Becomes Air* is autobiographical writing, a memoir about his life and death, about his efforts in fighting the illness of stage IV metastatic lung cancer. According to the readers' review, this book is filled with motivation and life lessons, from a person who is very strong in dealing with a chronic illness that takes his life. This book has a deep meaning that makes the reader feel the emotions of sadness, happiness, and gratitude. Although some

readers conclude that the stories raised in memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* are merely ordinary. Paul's death from lung cancer is natural and painless.

The memoir cannot be separated from the review of the readers, *When Breath Becomes Air* which published by Random House in January 2016 became a Non-Fiction Best Seller list for 68 weeks on the New York Times. This book has also received four awards and honorariums from 2016 to 2017. The awards and honors include the Goodreaders Choice Award Best Memoir & Autobiography in 2016, Jan Michalski second selection in 2017, Pulitzer Price for Biography and Autobiography in 2017, and the Welcome Book Prize shortlist in 2017.

B. Problem Statements

Based on the explanation of the background, there are three problem statements to formulate the problem. They are as follows:

1. What are the indicators of optimism in the memoir?
2. How is optimism illustrated in the memoir?
3. Why optimism was addressed in the memoir?

C. Objectives of the Study

Based on the problem statements of the research above, the objective of the study as follows:

1. To find out the indicators of optimism in Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir.
2. To describe optimism illustrated in Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir.
3. To reveal the reasons why optimism was addressed in Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* memoir.

D. Limitation of the Study

The researcher of this study focuses on analyzing Paul Kalanithi's optimism dealing with illness in his memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* by using an individual psychological approach.

E. Benefits of the Study

The researcher expected that this research will with the issue: Paul Kalanithi's optimism dealing with illness in memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* bears benefits. The benefits of this research will be differentiated into two benefits:

1. Theoretical benefit

Through the results of this study, the researcher expected that it can provide information and contribute to providing research writing references. It can be also useful for further researchers who want to develop literary study, especially nonfiction literature, with new issues related to memoir *When Breath Becomes Air*.

2. Practical benefit

This research is expected to increase the writer's knowledge and experience in compiling a research proposal, understanding the meaning of a literary work, how to do an analysis based on the perspective of psychology. Based on the issue, it is expected to increase the writer's knowledge about how to lead a meaningful life with always be an optimist person.

F. Paper Organization

The paper organization of this research about Paul Kalanithi's optimism dealing with illness in memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* as follows:

Chapter I Introduction, which consists of a background of the study, problem statements, objectives of the study, limitation of the study, benefits of the study, and paper organization.

Chapter II Literature Review, including previous study, novelty, and underlying theory used in the research.

Chapter III elaborates on the research method of the research including the type of study, object of study, type of data and data source, method of collecting data, and technique of analyzing data.

Chapter IV describes finding and discussion of the research.

Chapter V elaborates conclusion and suggestion.