

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education and Culture, launched the *Merdeka Belajar* policy, which aims to create a flexible learning environment that is student-centered. One concrete form of this policy is the use of the *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM). *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) is a modular learning tool designed to help students learn progressively and independently, taking into account their individual pace and characteristics. (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020).

*Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) not only functions as a source of learning material, but also as a tool to develop reflection skills, self-assessment, and the reinforcement of student motivation. According to (Septiana et al., 2020), the implementation of *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) can increase student participation and encourage independence in understanding and mastering certain competencies. This aligns well with the principles of differentiated learning advocated by the Merdeka Curriculum.

In the context of English language learning, *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) offers a more directed and flexible approach. Unlike conventional methods, *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) organizes English materials into units aligned with learning objectives, such as

vocabulary, text comprehension, writing and speaking skills, as well as self-practice exercises supported by automatic feedback or feedback from the teacher. Students can access and complete the units at their own pace, without the pressure of strict time limits.

The role of the teacher in *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) system also shifts to that of a facilitator and guide. Teachers are responsible for monitoring student progress, providing guidance when needed, and evaluating learning outcomes based on the completion of units. In this way, English language learning becomes more personalized, meaningful, and impactful for students' competency development.

Furthermore, *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) is highly relevant when applied within the framework of the Semester Credit System (SKS). SKS allows students to complete learning based on their competency achievements, rather than being constrained by time. According to (Kurniawati, 2019) SKS requires learning tools that allow for such flexibility, and *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) is an ideal solution to meet this need.

However, the implementation of *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) and SKS in practice faces several challenges. Teachers need to be skilled in designing appropriate UKBM modules, students need support in adapting to independent learning, and institutions must provide adequate infrastructure and management. MTsN 1 Bukittinggi, as a leading madrasah in West Sumatra, has implemented *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM)

in English language learning and has begun adopting the principles of SKS in the learning process. Therefore, it is important to examine how *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) is implemented in this madrasah, its involvement in the SKS system, and its impact on the English learning process and outcomes for students.

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the *Merdeka Belajar* policy to encourage a flexible and student-centered learning environment. One of its concrete implementations is the use of *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM), a modular learning tool designed to support students' gradual and independent learning while accommodating individual differences in pace and characteristics. (Anggreana, Ginanto, Felicia, Andiarti, Herutami, Alhapip, Iswoyo, hartini, 2022)

UKBM functions not only as a learning material but also as an instrument to develop students' reflection skills, self-assessment, and learning motivation. (Septiana et al., 2020) emphasize that the use of UKBM increases student participation and promotes learner autonomy in achieving specific competencies, which aligns with the principles of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum.

In English language learning, UKBM is structured into units aligned with learning objectives such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing and speaking skills, and independent practice supported by teacher or system feedback. With this approach, students can progress through the units at their own pace without rigid time restrictions. The teacher's role

also shifts into a learning facilitator who monitors student progress, provides guidance when needed, and evaluates learning based on unit completion, making the process more personalized and meaningful.

The relevance of UKBM becomes even more significant when integrated with the Semester Credit System (SKS). SKS requires students to complete learning based on competency achievement rather than fixed schedules. Therefore, learning tools like UKBM are essential because they allow flexibility, individual progress tracking, and competency-based assessment.

Despite its benefits, the application of UKBM within the SKS framework presents several challenges. Teachers must be capable of designing effective UKBM modules, students need to adapt to the culture of independent learning, and schools must provide strong administrative and technological support. These challenges show that the implementation of UKBM and SKS requires a well-prepared system and educators with appropriate pedagogical competencies.

MTsN 1 Bukittinggi, as a leading Islamic school in West Sumatra, has adopted UKBM in English language learning and has begun implementing SKS-based classes. Nevertheless, research that specifically explores how English teachers in SKS classes apply UKBM in real learning practices remains limited. Most previous studies have focused on broader implementations of the Merdeka Belajar policy or UKBM in general education settings, without examining the detailed instructional strategies,

student engagement, and classroom dynamics within the SKS learning structure.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the implementation of UKBM by English teachers in SKS classes at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi and analyzing how this independent learning system influences students' learning processes and outcomes in English language classrooms.

This study differs from previous research that has focused on the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy or the use of *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in general educational contexts, as it specifically investigates how English teachers at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi implement UKBM within the Semester Credit System (SKS) class setting. The purpose of this research is to explore how English teachers apply UKBM in their teaching activities and how this independent learning approach influences students' learning processes and outcomes in SKS-based English classes. To achieve this goal, the study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach, which allows for a deep exploration of relationships among various pedagogical and contextual factors while providing a comprehensive understanding of classroom practices in relation to relevant theories.

The case study design is considered appropriate because it captures the authentic and detailed process of UKBM implementation, including instructional strategies, student engagement, and the challenges encountered in promoting independent learning within the SKS framework.

Based on these considerations, the researcher conducted a study entitled “The Implementation of *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) at SKS Class in English Language Learning at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi.”

## **B. Focus of the Study**

This study focuses on the implementation of the *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in English language teaching at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi, especially within the Semester Credit System (SKS). The study aims to explore how UKBM is used as a competency-based learning tool that allows students to learn independently and move to the next unit only after mastering the previous one. This approach supports the principle of mastery learning and allows students to learn at their own pace and based on their individual abilities. In this research, the implementation of UKBM is examined through several indicators. These indicators are identifying the strategies used by the teacher to facilitate students' independent learning, and examining students' engagement in completing UKBM modules. These indicators are used to provide a clear picture of how UKBM is applied in English learning.

In one semester, students in the SKS class are required to complete four UKBM modules. However, this research is limited to only one UKBM, which is the UKBM on “Invitation” for Grade VIII students. This limitation is intended to provide a deeper and clearer understanding of how this UKBM is implemented by the teacher and how students work through it in the context of English learning under the SKS system.

### C. Research Questions

This study examines the implementation of the *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in the Semester Credit System (SKS) class in English learning at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi. In general, this study aims to find out how UKBM is implemented in English learning in the SKS class. And spesifically the research questions are:

1. How are student engaged in completing and implementing *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in English learning in the SKS class at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi?
2. What strategies are used by the English teacher in implementing *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in the SKS class at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi?

### D. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to analyze the implementation of *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in English language learning within the SKS class at MTsN 1 Bukittinggi. This research aims to explain how English teachers apply UKBM in their instructional practices, identify the strategies used to facilitate independent learning, and examine students' engagement in completing UKBM modules.

### E. Significance of Study

#### 1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of English language teaching, especially in the area of independent

learning strategies. It is also expected to strengthen existing literature on the implementation of the *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) in secondary education settings.

## 2. Practical Significance

- a. **For English Teachers:** This study provides insights into how UKBM can be applied effectively in the English classroom, including useful strategies and potential challenges to anticipate.
- b. **For Students:** The findings may support the development of independent learning habits, help them understand how UKBM works, and encourage more active engagement in their learning process.
- c. **For Future Researchers:** This study can serve as a reference or comparison for those who are interested in exploring similar topics, particularly in relation to the application of UKBM or the Semester Credit System (SKS) in language education.

## F. Definition of Key Terms

### 1. *Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM)

*Unit Kegiatan Belajar Mandiri* (UKBM) is a structured and sequenced learning module designed to help students learn independently according to their individual pace, needs, and abilities. It is developed based on Basic Competencies (*Kompetensi Dasar*) and organized from the simplest to the most complex materials to achieve mastery learning.



(Khasanah & Saptono, 2022) define UKBM as a small unit of learning based on competency-based textbooks. It is intended to train students' independence in learning and ensure they reach minimum competency standards through systematically arranged content.

## 2. **Learning English**

Learning English refers to the process of acquiring English as a foreign language, involving interaction between learners, teachers, and learning resources in order to develop language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Brown (1994) describes learning as a process of interaction between learners and educators within a learning environment, aiming to gain knowledge and skills.

