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Executive Summary

Undergraduate ENCN Courses in Mahatma Gandhi University: An Evaluative Assessment and  
Exploration for Modification

English is a mandatory subject for the undergraduate programs of the arts, science and commerce streams in the universities in Kerala. Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam took up a revamping of the structure of undergraduate education, which brought in new patterns in the teaching of English at the general level. This study considers these changes from an angle of retrospection. It evaluates the present pattern of general English education in Mahatma Gandhi University, and looks out to possible innovations. The investigation hopes to be a document of the efforts of the past till the present, as well as a pointer that attempts to peep into what lies ahead.

This document is an executive summary of the detailed study report presented as the findings of the Minor Research Project. The study report falls into 4 chapters.

Chapter 1, titled 'English Education for Undergraduates in Mahatma Gandhi University' starts with a profile of the progress of English language in India from the status of a foreign language to that of an official language. English has become part of the curriculum in schools and colleges. At the University level, it is the medium of instruction for a majority of programs.

Text books and examination patterns are mostly in English. Moreover, English is a mandatory subject of study. The study then moves to explain the general patterns of the undergraduate system of education in Kerala, with its three components of Part I English, Part II additional language, and Part III main and subsidiary subjects.

The next point is a detail on the instruction and evaluation under Part I English – its division into Papers, and the execution of study through the first two years, and the pattern of examination.

Chapter 2- ‘Redesigning the Undergraduate English Patterns, and the Emergence of ENCN’ is on the changes in Mahatma Gandhi University in the area of undergraduate English studies in Part I. As a backdrop, the chapter highlights the spectrum of general changes in Kerala and the university in the horizon of university education. This includes the abolition of Pre Degree from the Universities, introduction of internal assessment, and the shift in the academic calendar from annual to semester pattern. The significant change in Mahatma Gandhi University is explained next: the introduction of the Choice Based Course-Credit-Semester System (CBCSS), and the Grade system of evaluation in examinations.

The study mentions the teething problems of the new structure in Mahatma Gandhi University and elsewhere in Kerala, the issues that came up, and the constructive efforts to rectify the general issues at the State level through the Hridayakumari Commission. The recommendations of the Commission were adopted by the Mahatma Gandhi University and implemented to benefit the new intake of undergraduates in 2013.

Chapter 3 (‘ENCN Courses – An Assessment’) takes up an aspect of the study: an evaluative and critical assessment of the ENCN Courses of the Mahatma Gandhi University. It starts with a comparison between the ENCN courses and its predecessor – Part I English. Though

the two patterns have little of structural difference, a development to be observed is the significance given to skill development along with the earlier tasks of improving linguistic and grammatical abilities. The focus on literature in 4 semesters is observed as redundant. Preference of interest given by the student to the Core/ Complementary subjects over Common subjects and the overpopulated classrooms are issues that affect ENCN courses. A lessening of exposure to English literature as such is another situation in the new package, which needn't be considered as a problem.

Module-wise break up has brought in clarity in the process of instruction. The introduction of technology, especially with the audio cd in ENCN1 text book is welcome. The oral test for ENCN1, done as an external evaluation by the University, proved to have practical difficulties. Now done as an in-house optional test, it appears to have lost its seriousness. The Hridayakumari Commission's recommendation to replace the direct grading system with marks is a positive reform.

The study thus sees the ENCN courses as a point of development and improvement in the system of Higher Education in Kerala.

Chapter 4 has the title 'ENCN Courses – Problems, Prospects and Promises'. This takes up the second aspect of this study: exploration for modification.

Elements of positive impact are:

- a. enhancement of soft skills, insight into critical thinking and research, and input regarding academic writing and presentation
- b. The shift from pure literature to introduction of ideas on social, political, gender and environment concerns

- c. Inculcation of technology through audio cd, and the significance given for this at the level of evaluation
- d. Module-wise, thematic classification of teaching segments
- e. The timely revision brought out by the Hrydykumari Commission to check and correct certain pitfalls in the system
- f. The patterned internal assessment, with clear break-up

The study suggests the following modifications:

- a. A partial shift from the textbook oriented study, with some importance given to electronic resources, updated and made available through the internet.
- b. Immediate and periodical updating of text books
- c. Publication of text books by the University than by outside publishers
- d. Consideration of the unwieldy class size in the planning of activities such as paired/ group discussions
- e. Inculcation of a segment which can cater to students with learning disabilities

The study concludes on an optimistic note that the ENCN Courses brought in for undergraduate English studies in Mahatma Gandhi University answer many of the demands of the time, and can go ahead to offer more through timely revision and modification.