

Exploring the Perspectives of General Education Instructors Amid the Reduction of GE Units in Philippine Higher Education

¹Abnir T. Arilin^{ORCID}, ²Adzfar A. Wahid, ³Aries Jay B. Reyes, ⁴Rahima T. Yusop, ⁵Nersa M. Suani, ⁶Michelle Y. Mohammad, ⁷Aden D. Talah, ⁸Reyd'z mahal Sotillo Kadil, ⁹Rhizza Mae G. Maulana, ¹⁰Cristine R. Albances, ¹¹Leslie Joy R. Del Rosario, ¹²Amira Shaika L. Junaid
Universidad de Zamboanga
¹abnirarilin5@gmail.com, ²adzfar.wahid@uz.edu.ph, ³ariesjayreyes0806@gmail.com,
⁴rahima.yusop@uz.edu.ph, ⁵nersa.suani@uz.edu.ph, ⁶michellemohammad@uz.edu.ph,
⁷aden.talah@uz.edu.ph, ⁸reydzmahal.kadil@edu.ph, ⁹rhizzamaeg.maulana@gmail.com,
¹⁰cristinealbances@uz.edu.ph, ¹¹lesliejoyresol@gmail.com, ¹²amirashaika.junaid@uz.edu.ph

Article Details:

Received: 16 June 2026
Revised: 6 July 2026
Accepted: 15 July 2026
Published: 31 July 2026
Corresponding Email:
abnirarilin5@gmail.com

Recommended Citation:

Arilin, A. T., Wahid, A. A., Reyes, A. J. B., Yusop, R. T., Suani, N. M., Mohammad, M. Y., Talah, A. D., Kadil, R. S., Maulana, R. M. G., Albances, C. R., Del Rosario, L. J. R., Junaid, A. S. L. (2026) Exploring the Perspectives of General Education Instructors Amid the Reduction of GE Units in Philippine Higher Education. The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research. 1 (9), 432-444. <https://doi.org/10.67167/vertex.635>

Index Terms:

general education, curriculum reform, higher education, faculty perspectives

Abstract. This study explored the perspectives of General Education (GE) instructors regarding the proposed reduction of General Education units in Philippine higher education. Grounded in Dewey's Theory of Progressive Education and Freire's Critical Pedagogy, the study examined how instructors perceived the rationale behind the reform and the opportunities and challenges associated with its implementation. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, involving twelve General Education instructors from higher education institutions in Zamboanga City selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that instructors generally questioned the rationale for reducing GE units, viewing the proposal as driven by workforce-oriented priorities that may undermine holistic learning. Participants expressed concerns regarding limited faculty consultation, the erosion of liberal education traditions, threats to educational quality, and potential inequities for disadvantaged students. Despite these reservations, instructors identified opportunities for curriculum redesign, stronger alignment with student needs, increased interdisciplinary collaboration, and innovative teaching practices. However, they also anticipated significant challenges, including threats to job security, difficulties in covering core learning competencies, reduced student exposure to broad knowledge areas, and uncertainty arising from unclear implementation guidelines. The study concludes that while curriculum reform may offer opportunities for innovation and improvement, its success depends on meaningful stakeholder engagement, careful planning, and the preservation of the broader educational purposes of General Education. The findings highlight the importance of balancing responsiveness to contemporary educational demands with the intellectual, civic, and humanistic goals that remain central to higher education in the Philippine context.

Introduction

General Education (GE) has long been recognized as a foundational component of higher education, designed to cultivate critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic responsibility, communication skills, and holistic human development beyond disciplinary specialization. Across various educational systems worldwide, GE serves as a mechanism for preparing students not only for professional careers but also for active participation in society. As higher education institutions increasingly respond to economic demands, workforce expectations, and technological advancements, debates have emerged regarding the place and purpose of general education within contemporary curricula. These discussions have become particularly pronounced in contexts where policymakers seek to streamline academic programs and prioritize practical or industry-oriented competencies.

International scholarship consistently highlights the continuing importance of general education despite growing pressures for curriculum restructuring. Lynton (1990) argued that liberal learning remains an essential component of career-oriented education because professional competence alone cannot adequately prepare graduates for the complexities of modern society. Similarly, Nababan (2014) emphasized that general education contributes significantly to ethical awareness, civic responsibility, and holistic student development, underscoring its role beyond technical and occupational preparation. Through a systematic review of global developments in liberal arts and general education, Satchanawakul and Lianggruenrom (2025) observed increasing concerns regarding market-driven educational reforms that may diminish the broader educational mission of higher education institutions. These studies collectively suggest that while curriculum reforms may seek efficiency and relevance, the preservation of holistic educational outcomes remains a critical concern among educators and scholars.

The debate surrounding general education reform has likewise gained international attention. Shi et al. (2024), in their qualitative case study of two Chinese universities, found that faculty members, students, and administrators held differing perspectives regarding the purpose and implementation of general education reforms. Their findings revealed tensions between specialized professional training and broader educational objectives, demonstrating that curriculum reform often involves competing educational philosophies. Likewise, Carey (2018) emphasized that meaningful reform of general education requires careful consideration of educational values and active faculty engagement to ensure that curriculum changes continue to support student learning and intellectual growth. Such findings indicate that curriculum reforms affecting GE programs often generate complex responses among stakeholders, particularly among educators directly involved in delivering these courses.

Research examining curriculum reform in higher education further underscores the significance of faculty perspectives. Honkimäki et al. (2022) reported that academic staff members' acceptance of university-wide curriculum reforms depended heavily on transparency, communication, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Similarly, Chan and Luk (2013) found that faculty members involved in Hong Kong's "3+3+4" curriculum reform expressed concerns regarding implementation challenges, institutional readiness, and instructional adjustments. Oliver and Hyun (2011) further demonstrated that successful curriculum reform depends on collaborative engagement between faculty members and administrators, while Awbrey (2005) argued that sustainable general education reform requires both structural and cultural transformation within institutions. Collectively, these studies suggest that educators are not merely implementers of policy but essential stakeholders whose perspectives shape the effectiveness and legitimacy of curriculum reforms.

Within the Philippine context, general education occupies a central role in higher education policy. The Commission on Higher Education (2013), through CHED Memorandum Order No. 20, Series of 2013, established the General Education Curriculum as a framework for developing holistic understandings, intellectual competencies, and civic capacities among learners. The policy emphasized that higher education should nurture well-rounded individuals capable of critical reflection, ethical decision-making, and meaningful social participation. Building upon this framework, Asio et al. (2022) analyzed the evolution of the Philippine General Education Curriculum and noted that curriculum restructuring efforts have continually sought to balance educational quality, relevance, and alignment with broader national goals. Their analysis highlighted the complexities associated with modifying GE programs and the potential implications such reforms may have on higher education institutions.

Recent developments have intensified these discussions. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II, 2025) reported concerns regarding perceived redundancies between Senior High School and college-level general education courses, arguing that Philippine college curricula devote substantial space to GE subjects at the expense of practical and specialized training. Such arguments have contributed to proposals supporting the reduction or reframing of general education units within higher education programs. However, these proposals have generated significant opposition from various educational stakeholders. According to a report by Inquirer.net (2025), faculty organizations and academic groups expressed concerns that reducing GE units could weaken the broader educational purposes traditionally associated with higher education. Similarly, Ateneo de Manila University (2026) criticized the proposed reforms, arguing that substantial reductions in GE courses may undermine interdisciplinary learning, holistic formation, and the university's broader social mission.

While the ongoing debate has generated substantial policy discussions, institutional statements, and public commentary, there remains limited empirical research focusing specifically on how General Education instructors themselves perceive the proposed reduction of GE units. Existing international studies have largely examined curriculum reforms from institutional, policy, or broad faculty perspectives (Awbrey, 2005; Chan & Luk, 2013; Honkimäki et al., 2022; Oliver & Hyun, 2011), while local literature has primarily concentrated on policy analyses and implementation experiences (Asio et al., 2022; Garcia, 2023). Although Garcia (2023) explored teachers' lived experiences in implementing the new General Education Curriculum, the study did not specifically investigate instructors' perspectives regarding the current proposal to

reduce GE units. Consequently, a gap remains in understanding how General Education instructors interpret, evaluate, and respond to this significant curriculum reform initiative.

Addressing this gap is important because General Education instructors serve as the primary implementers of GE programs and possess firsthand knowledge of the educational outcomes, challenges, and contributions associated with these courses. Their perspectives can provide valuable insights into the potential implications of reducing GE units for students, institutions, and the broader goals of Philippine higher education. Furthermore, understanding their views may contribute to more informed policy discussions by incorporating the experiences and expertise of those most directly affected by the proposed reforms.

Guided by these considerations, this study explored the perspectives of General Education instructors regarding the proposed reduction of General Education units in Philippine higher education. Specifically, it sought to examine (1) how instructors perceived the rationale behind the reform and the opportunities and challenges associated with the proposed changes of General Education within higher education institutions.

This study was anchored in John Dewey's Theory of Progressive Education and Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy. Dewey emphasized that education should extend beyond the transmission of technical knowledge and instead foster critical thinking, democratic participation, reflective inquiry, and holistic human development (Dewey, 1916). Likewise, Freire argued that education should cultivate critical consciousness, social awareness, and the capacity of individuals to engage meaningfully with societal issues rather than merely preparing learners for functional or economic roles (Freire, 1970). Together, these theories view education as a transformative process that develops intellectually, socially, ethically, and civically engaged individuals. These perspectives strongly relate to the role of General Education in higher education, as GE courses are traditionally designed to promote broad intellectual formation, critical reflection, ethical reasoning, and responsible citizenship. In the context of this study, Dewey's and Freire's theories provided a lens for understanding how General Education instructors perceived the proposed reduction of General Education units. Specifically, the theories guided the examination of instructors' views regarding whether the proposed curriculum reform supports or undermines the broader educational purposes of higher education, particularly in relation to holistic student development, critical thinking, civic engagement, and the transformative role of education in society (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and describe the perspectives of General Education (GE) instructors regarding the proposed reduction of General Education units in Philippine higher education. Descriptive qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to obtain rich and detailed accounts of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of a particular phenomenon without imposing extensive theoretical abstraction (Sandelowski, 2000). Through this design, the study examined how GE instructors understood, evaluated, and reflected upon the proposed curriculum reform, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their viewpoints concerning its rationale, implications, opportunities, and challenges.

Research Population and Sampling

The participants of this study consisted of twenty-two (12) General Education instructors employed in selected higher education institutions in Zamboanga City. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to recruit individuals who possess relevant knowledge, experiences, and insights regarding the phenomenon being investigated. To qualify for participation, individuals had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently employed as a faculty member in a higher education institution in Zamboanga City; (2) currently teaching at least one General Education course during the academic year in which the study was conducted; (3) have at least one year of teaching experience in General Education courses; (4) be aware of or familiar with the ongoing discussions and proposals concerning the reduction of General Education units in higher education; and (5) voluntarily agree to participate in the study by providing informed consent. Instructors who were not teaching General Education courses at the time of the study or who declined participation were excluded from the study. Their direct involvement in implementing the General Education curriculum enabled them to provide rich and meaningful perspectives regarding the proposed reform and its potential implications for students, faculty members, and higher education institutions.

Research Instrumentation

Data were gathered through a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit participants' perspectives regarding the proposed reduction of General Education units. The interview guide consisted of open-ended

questions focusing on participants' perceptions of the rationale behind the reform, its perceived benefits and challenges, and its potential effects on teaching practices and student development. To establish content validity, the instrument was subjected to expert validation by three professionals with expertise in curriculum studies, qualitative research, and higher education. Their comments and recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the interview questions with the objectives of the study. To ensure reliability and consistency, a pilot interview was conducted with three General Education instructors who were not included in the final participant pool. Feedback from the pilot testing was utilized to refine the wording, sequencing, and comprehensibility of the interview questions before the actual data collection commenced. Table 1 presents the instrument of the study.

Research Objectives	Interview Questions
1. To examine how General Education instructors perceive the rationale behind the proposed reduction of General Education units in higher education.	• What are your thoughts on the reasons and justifications behind the proposed reduction of General Education units in higher education institutions?
2. To explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the proposed reduction of General Education units.	• As a General Education instructor, what opportunities and challenges do you anticipate experiencing as a result of the proposed reduction of General Education units?

Table 1: Interview Question

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed repeatedly to facilitate familiarization with the data. Initial codes were generated from meaningful statements and subsequently organized into broader categories based on recurring patterns and shared meanings. These categories were then examined and refined into themes that accurately represented the participants' perspectives regarding the proposed reduction of General Education units. The thematic analysis process enabled the identification of significant insights and common viewpoints while preserving the richness and depth of participants' experiences.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned higher education institutions and relevant authorities. Upon approval, potential participants who met the inclusion criteria were identified and invited to participate in the study. The purpose of the research, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures were explained to all participants before obtaining their informed consent. Individual interviews were then conducted at a mutually convenient time and location. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of responses. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and organized for data analysis. The researcher maintained systematic records throughout the process to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles in conducting research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from participation at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from interview transcripts and research reports. Furthermore, the study complied with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, by ensuring that all personal information and research data were securely stored, accessed only by the researcher, and used exclusively for academic purposes. All collected data were treated with strict confidentiality and were protected from unauthorized disclosure throughout the conduct of the study.

Results and Discussion

Research Objective 1: To examine how General Education instructors perceive the rationale behind the proposed reduction of General Education units in higher education.

Question 1: What are your thoughts on the reasons and justifications behind the proposed reduction of General Education units in higher education institutions?

Theme 1: Challenging the Assumptions Behind Curriculum Reduction

A dominant perspective expressed by the participants was a sense of skepticism toward the rationale underlying the proposed reduction of General Education (GE) units. Out of the 12 instructors interviewed, 11 questioned whether the justifications presented for the reform adequately captured the educational value and contributions of General Education courses. While participants acknowledged concerns regarding curriculum congestion and the perceived overlap between Senior High School and college-level content, many argued that these explanations oversimplified the role of GE in higher education. For them, the proposal appeared to be driven primarily by administrative efficiency and workforce-oriented priorities rather than a comprehensive understanding of how General Education contributes to students' intellectual, ethical, and civic development. Consequently, participants expressed reservations about whether reducing GE units would genuinely address existing educational concerns or merely diminish an essential component of holistic learning. One instructor remarked:

"I understand why they want to shorten the curriculum, but I feel like the decision is based on the idea that GE subjects are just fillers. In reality, these are the courses where students learn to think critically, discuss social issues, and understand perspectives beyond their own field. If we reduce them, we might be solving one problem but creating another."

The findings resonate with the observations of Satchanawakul and Liangruenrom (2025), who noted growing concerns that market-driven educational reforms increasingly prioritize efficiency and employability while potentially weakening the broader educational mission of higher education institutions. Likewise, Shi et al. (2024) found that curriculum reforms often generate tensions between specialized professional preparation and wider educational objectives, reflecting differing beliefs about the purpose of higher education. The participants' skepticism similarly reflects Dewey's (1916) assertion that education should cultivate reflective thinking, democratic participation, and holistic growth rather than focus solely on vocational preparation. In the same vein, Freire (1970) emphasized that education serves a transformative role in developing critical consciousness and social awareness, purposes that participants feared could be compromised by a substantial reduction in General Education offerings. This finding suggests that resistance to the proposed reduction is not merely a reaction to structural curriculum change but reflects deeper concerns about the educational values that guide reform initiatives. The perspectives of instructors underscore the need for policymakers and curriculum planners to carefully evaluate whether efforts to streamline higher education curricula remain consistent with the broader developmental goals traditionally associated with General Education.

Theme 2: Prioritizing Employability Over Holistic Learning

Another prominent perception among the participants was that the proposed reduction of General Education units reflects a growing emphasis on employability and workforce preparation at the expense of holistic education. 8 out of the 12 instructors believed that the reform was largely motivated by the desire to allocate more curricular space to specialized and industry-oriented courses. While participants acknowledged the importance of equipping students with technical competencies and career-related skills, they expressed concern that such priorities may inadvertently diminish opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, ethical reasoning, civic awareness, and interdisciplinary understanding. For many instructors, higher education should not solely function as a pathway to employment but should also cultivate well-rounded individuals capable of engaging thoughtfully with social, cultural, and global issues. Consequently, they viewed the proposed reduction as indicative of a broader shift toward utilitarian educational goals that may undermine the formative purposes traditionally associated with General Education. One participant shared:

"It seems like the focus now is producing graduates who can immediately fit into the job market. Of course, employment is important, but education should be more than training people for work. GE subjects help students understand society, values, and themselves. Those things are not less important just because they are harder to measure."

This perspective aligns with the observations of Satchanawakul and Liangruenrom (2025), who reported increasing concerns that contemporary curriculum reforms are being shaped by market-driven priorities that privilege economic outcomes over the broader educational mission of universities. Similarly, Nababan (2014) emphasized that General Education plays a crucial role in fostering ethical awareness, civic responsibility, and holistic human development beyond occupational preparation. The findings also reflect Dewey's (1916) view that education should prepare individuals for meaningful participation in democratic society rather than merely train them for specific professions. Likewise, Freire (1970) argued that education should nurture critical consciousness and empower learners to engage with social realities, highlighting purposes that extend beyond workforce readiness alone. The instructors' concerns therefore underscore an enduring tension between vocational objectives and the broader humanistic aims of higher education. The findings suggest

that many General Education instructors perceive the proposed reform as part of a wider transformation in higher education priorities, where employability increasingly serves as a dominant measure of educational value. This raises important considerations for policymakers and curriculum developers regarding how institutions can remain responsive to labor market demands while preserving the holistic developmental outcomes that General Education has traditionally sought to achieve.

Theme 3: Lack of Faculty Consultation in Decision-Making

A significant concern raised by the participants centered on their perceived exclusion from discussions surrounding the proposed reduction of General Education units. 7 out of the 12 instructors expressed dissatisfaction with the extent to which faculty voices were considered during the formulation of the proposed reform. Participants argued that General Education instructors, as primary implementers of the curriculum, possess valuable insights regarding the strengths, limitations, and educational contributions of GE courses. However, many felt that decisions affecting the future of General Education were being shaped predominantly by policymakers and administrative bodies with limited consultation from those directly engaged in classroom instruction. For these instructors, the issue extended beyond the proposal itself and reflected broader concerns regarding representation, participation, and professional recognition within curriculum reform processes. One instructor explained:

"What frustrates me is not only the proposal but the feeling that we were never really asked. We work with students every day and see what these courses contribute to their growth. If changes are going to affect the curriculum this much, faculty members should be part of the conversation from the beginning."

This finding is consistent with the work of Honkimäki et al. (2022), who found that faculty acceptance of curriculum reforms is strongly influenced by opportunities for participation, transparent communication, and meaningful involvement in institutional decision-making. Likewise, Carey (2018) emphasized that successful General Education reform requires active engagement from educators because faculty members possess practical knowledge that can inform more responsive and sustainable curricular changes. The participants' perspectives also reflect the principles of Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, which advocates dialogue, participation, and the inclusion of stakeholder voices in processes that affect educational practice. Rather than viewing educators as passive recipients of policy, Freire emphasized their role as active contributors to educational transformation. The instructors' concerns therefore highlight the importance of collaborative decision-making in shaping reforms that are both educationally sound and professionally supported. The findings suggest that faculty participation plays a crucial role in establishing the legitimacy and acceptability of curriculum reforms. Ensuring meaningful consultation with General Education instructors may not only improve the quality of policy decisions but also foster greater trust, ownership, and commitment among those responsible for implementing curricular changes in higher education institutions.

Theme 4: Erosion of the Liberal Education Tradition

Several participants interpreted the proposed reduction of General Education units as a departure from the long-standing educational philosophy that underpins higher education. 7 out of the 12 instructors expressed concern that the reform could gradually weaken the liberal education tradition, which emphasizes intellectual breadth, interdisciplinary learning, ethical reflection, and the cultivation of informed citizenship. Participants argued that General Education serves as the academic space where students engage with ideas, perspectives, and societal issues beyond the confines of their chosen disciplines. For these instructors, reducing GE units risks narrowing the educational experience and redefining higher education primarily as a mechanism for credentialing and professional preparation. Consequently, they viewed the proposal not merely as a curriculum adjustment but as a shift in the fundamental values that universities are expected to uphold. One participant reflected:

"A university education is supposed to expose students to different ways of thinking, not just train them for a profession. When we start reducing opportunities for that kind of learning, I worry that we are losing part of what makes higher education meaningful in the first place."

This finding echoes the arguments of Lynton (1990), who maintained that liberal learning remains an essential component of higher education because professional competence alone cannot adequately prepare graduates for the complexities of contemporary society. Similarly, the Commission on Higher Education (2013) emphasized that the Philippine General Education Curriculum was designed to develop intellectual competencies, critical reflection, ethical discernment, and civic engagement among learners. The participants' views further align with Dewey's (1916) Theory of Progressive Education, which conceives education as a means of fostering reflective inquiry and broad intellectual development rather than the

mere acquisition of occupational skills. Through this lens, General Education is viewed as a vital component of democratic and holistic education, making its reduction a matter of educational philosophy rather than simple curricular restructuring. The findings indicate that many instructors perceive the proposed reform as carrying implications that extend beyond course allocation and academic requirements. The concerns raised suggest that curriculum reforms should carefully consider how changes may affect the broader educational ideals and intellectual traditions that have historically defined the purpose of higher education.

Theme 5: Perceived Threat to Educational Quality

A recurring concern among the participants was the belief that reducing General Education units could negatively affect the overall quality of higher education. 7 out of the 12 instructors argued that the proposed reform may limit students' opportunities to engage with diverse fields of knowledge, thereby restricting the depth and breadth of their learning experiences. Participants emphasized that General Education courses complement disciplinary specialization by exposing students to multiple perspectives, strengthening critical inquiry, and fostering intellectual flexibility. Many feared that the reduction of these courses could result in a more fragmented educational experience in which students become technically competent within their fields yet possess limited understanding of broader social, cultural, and ethical issues. For these instructors, educational quality is not measured solely by the mastery of specialized content but also by the capacity of graduates to think critically, communicate effectively, and navigate complex real-world challenges. One participant shared:

"When students encounter different disciplines, they learn how to connect ideas and see issues from various angles. If we lessen those opportunities, we may produce graduates who are skilled in their field but less prepared to understand the bigger picture."

The findings correspond with the observations of Asio et al. (2022), who noted that reforms involving the Philippine General Education Curriculum require careful consideration because changes may influence the quality, coherence, and intended outcomes of higher education programs. Likewise, Awbrey (2005) argued that General Education reforms should preserve the educational foundations that contribute to meaningful student learning, emphasizing that curriculum changes must be evaluated not only for efficiency but also for their impact on educational outcomes. The concerns raised by participants also resonate with Dewey's (1916) view that meaningful education emerges from experiences that broaden learners' intellectual horizons and encourage connections across areas of knowledge. From this perspective, the breadth provided by General Education contributes substantially to the quality and richness of students' educational experiences. This finding suggests that discussions surrounding curriculum reform should move beyond considerations of unit allocation and academic efficiency. Policymakers and educational leaders may need to assess how proposed reductions could influence the comprehensiveness of student learning and the broader standards of educational quality that higher education institutions seek to uphold.

Theme 6: Equity Concerns in Curricular Reduction

A number of participants viewed the proposed reduction of General Education units not only as a curricular issue but also as a matter of educational equity. Nine (9) out of the 22 instructors expressed concern that the reform could disproportionately affect students from disadvantaged educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants explained that General Education courses often provide opportunities for students to strengthen foundational competencies in communication, critical thinking, civic awareness, and interdisciplinary understanding—areas that may not have been equally developed during their prior educational experiences. Several instructors noted that students entering higher education from under-resourced schools frequently rely on General Education courses to bridge learning gaps and broaden their perspectives. Consequently, participants feared that reducing GE units could inadvertently limit access to forms of learning that are particularly valuable for students who may already face educational disadvantages. One instructor observed:

"Not all students enter college with the same preparation. Some come from schools with limited resources, and GE subjects help level the playing field. If we reduce those opportunities, the students who are already struggling may be the ones who lose the most."

The findings reflect concerns raised in the Philippine higher education context regarding the broader social mission of General Education. According to the Commission on Higher Education (2013), the General Education Curriculum was designed to develop socially responsible, critically engaged, and well-rounded citizens regardless of disciplinary background. Similarly, Ateneo de Manila University (2026) cautioned that significant reductions in General Education may weaken interdisciplinary learning and holistic formation, both of which contribute to inclusive educational development. The participants' perspectives also align with Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, which views education as a means of empowering individuals and expanding opportunities for meaningful participation in society. From this standpoint, access

to broad-based educational experiences is particularly important for learners whose social and educational circumstances may limit such opportunities outside the university environment. The findings suggest that curriculum reforms should be examined not only in terms of efficiency and academic restructuring but also through the lens of educational inclusion. Careful consideration of how proposed changes may affect students from diverse backgrounds can help ensure that efforts to reform higher education do not unintentionally widen existing educational inequalities.

Objective 2. To explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the proposed reduction of General Education units.

Question: As a General Education instructor, what opportunities and challenges do you anticipate experiencing as a result of the proposed reduction of General Education units?

The responses of the participants revealed both perceived opportunities and challenges associated with the proposed reduction of General Education units. The opportunities are presented first, followed by the challenges anticipated by the instructors.

Theme 1: Curriculum Redesign and Innovation

Despite expressing reservations about the proposed reduction of General Education units, several participants recognized the potential opportunity to rethink and improve the design of General Education courses. 10 out of the 12 instructors viewed the reform as an opportunity to streamline course content, eliminate unnecessary overlaps, and develop more focused and meaningful learning experiences for students. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of General Education through the number of units offered, these participants emphasized the importance of curriculum quality, relevance, and intentionality. They suggested that a carefully redesigned curriculum could allow educators to prioritize essential competencies and contemporary issues while making learning experiences more responsive to the changing needs of students and society. For these instructors, the proposal presented a chance not merely to reduce content but to reconsider how General Education could be delivered more effectively. One participant explained:

"If the reduction is handled properly, it could push us to revisit what we teach and why we teach it. Instead of trying to cover too many topics, we might be able to focus on the concepts and skills that students will genuinely carry with them beyond college."

This perspective reflects the observations of Carey (2018), who argued that meaningful General Education reform can provide opportunities for institutions to reassess educational priorities and improve curriculum coherence. Similarly, Oliver and Hyun (2011) emphasized that curriculum reform can serve as a catalyst for innovation when educators are given the opportunity to rethink learning outcomes and instructional approaches. The participants' views also resonate with Dewey's (1916) Theory of Progressive Education, which advocates for educational experiences that remain responsive to changing social conditions and learner needs. From this perspective, curriculum redesign is not simply an administrative exercise but a means of enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of learning. The findings suggest that some General Education instructors view the proposed reform as a potential avenue for curricular renewal. When approached thoughtfully and collaboratively, curriculum redesign may create opportunities to strengthen the quality, coherence, and contemporary relevance of General Education programs while preserving their broader educational purposes.

Theme 2: Alignment with Student Needs and Interests

Some participants perceived the proposed reduction of General Education units as an opportunity to create a curriculum that is more closely aligned with students' academic interests, career aspirations, and learning needs. 8 out of the 12 instructors suggested that a more streamlined General Education program could allow institutions to focus on courses and learning experiences that students perceive as relevant and meaningful to their educational journeys. Participants observed that some students often struggle to recognize the connection between certain General Education subjects and their chosen degree programs. As a result, they believed that a carefully revised curriculum could enhance student engagement by emphasizing content, competencies, and learning experiences that students can more readily apply within both academic and real-world contexts. One participant noted:

"Many students ask how certain topics connect to their future careers. Maybe this is an opportunity to make General Education more intentional and easier for students to relate to without losing its broader purpose."

This finding aligns with the observations of Shi et al. (2024), who reported that curriculum reforms often emerge from efforts to make educational programs more responsive to changing learner expectations and academic demands. Likewise, Asio et al. (2022) noted that reforms within the Philippine General Education Curriculum have frequently sought to balance

foundational learning with educational relevance in contemporary contexts. The participants' views also reflect Dewey's (1916) principle that education becomes more meaningful when learning experiences are connected to learners' interests, experiences, and future endeavors. From this perspective, relevance is not merely a matter of vocational preparation but a means of fostering deeper engagement and purposeful learning. The findings suggest that some instructors see value in revisiting how General Education courses are structured and communicated to students. Strengthening the perceived relevance of General Education may encourage greater student engagement while ensuring that foundational learning remains connected to the realities and aspirations of contemporary learners.

Theme 3: Increased Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Another opportunity identified by participants was the potential for greater collaboration among faculty members across different academic disciplines. Six (6) out of the 12 instructors suggested that the reduction of General Education units could encourage educators to work more closely in designing integrated learning experiences that draw upon multiple fields of knowledge. Rather than operating through separate and isolated courses, participants envisioned a more coordinated curriculum in which faculty members collectively identify shared competencies, learning outcomes, and contemporary issues that transcend disciplinary boundaries. They believed that such collaboration could foster a more cohesive educational experience while maximizing the learning opportunities available within a streamlined curriculum structure. One participant shared:

"If we are going to have fewer GE units, then we need to be more intentional about what we teach. I think this could push departments to work together and create courses that connect ideas instead of treating every subject as completely separate."

This perspective is consistent with the position of Awbrey (2005), who emphasized that sustainable General Education reform requires institutional cultures that support cooperation, shared responsibility, and cross-disciplinary engagement. Similarly, the framework established by the Commission on Higher Education (2013) highlights the importance of developing broad intellectual competencies and integrative learning experiences that allow students to connect knowledge across diverse domains. The participants' views also align with Dewey's (1916) conception of education as an interconnected process through which learners develop understanding by relating ideas and experiences rather than acquiring isolated pieces of knowledge. Through this lens, interdisciplinary collaboration becomes a mechanism for enriching learning even within a more compact curriculum. The findings indicate that some instructors perceive the proposed reform as an opportunity to strengthen academic collaboration and curricular coherence. Encouraging interdisciplinary partnerships may help institutions preserve the breadth of General Education while promoting more integrated and meaningful learning experiences for students.

Theme 4: Strengthening Collaborative and Innovative Teaching Practices

Several participants viewed the proposed reduction of General Education units as a potential catalyst for stronger collaboration and instructional innovation among faculty members. Seven 4 out of the 12 instructors suggested that a streamlined curriculum could encourage educators from different disciplines to work together in designing integrated learning outcomes, while also providing opportunities to rethink and enhance their teaching approaches. Participants noted that a more focused General Education curriculum may reduce content congestion, allowing instructors to devote greater attention to course development, pedagogical improvement, and interdisciplinary planning. Rather than viewing the reform solely as a reduction in instructional responsibilities, these instructors perceived it as a chance to create more purposeful learning experiences through collaboration, creativity, and reflective teaching practice. One participant remarked:

"If we are given the space to redesign our courses, I think many of us would be more willing to collaborate across disciplines and experiment with new teaching strategies. Sometimes innovation happens when you are forced to rethink what is truly essential."

This perspective aligns with the findings of Oliver and Hyun (2011), who emphasized that curriculum reform can stimulate professional dialogue and collaborative engagement among faculty members, leading to more coherent educational experiences. Likewise, Chan and Luk (2013) observed that curriculum change often requires educators to adapt their instructional approaches and develop new forms of academic cooperation. The findings also resonate with Dewey's (1916) view that education is an evolving process that benefits from continuous reflection, adaptation, and engagement with emerging educational needs. Through this lens, collaboration and pedagogical innovation are not merely responses to reform but essential components of effective educational practice. The findings suggest that some instructors perceive the proposed reform as an opportunity to strengthen professional collaboration and instructional development. Supporting

faculty partnerships and innovative teaching practices may help institutions maximize the benefits of curriculum restructuring while enhancing the overall quality of student learning experiences.

Theme 5: Threat to Instructor Job Security

Among the challenges associated with the proposed reduction of General Education units, concerns regarding employment stability emerged as one of the most immediate and personally significant issues for participants. 11 out of the 12 instructors expressed apprehension that fewer General Education units could lead to reduced teaching loads, fewer course assignments, and diminished employment opportunities, particularly for faculty members whose primary teaching responsibilities are concentrated within the General Education program. Participants noted that while curriculum reforms are often justified in terms of academic improvement and efficiency, they may also carry unintended consequences for instructors whose professional roles are directly tied to the courses being reduced. For many participants, the proposal generated uncertainty about their future workload, income stability, and long-term place within their institutions. One instructor shared:

"My concern is very practical. If the number of GE subjects decreases, what happens to those of us who mainly teach these courses? It's difficult not to think about how this could affect our workload and even our job. We might be laid off"

This finding reflects broader concerns surrounding curriculum reform in higher education, where structural changes often extend beyond student learning and affect the professional realities of faculty members. Chan and Luk (2013) found that educators undergoing curriculum reforms frequently experience uncertainty regarding role adjustments, workload distribution, and institutional expectations. Similarly, Honkimäki et al. (2022) observed that faculty responses to reform initiatives are often influenced by how such changes affect their professional responsibilities and working conditions. From the perspective of Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy, educational reforms should consider the experiences and welfare of educators as active participants in the educational process rather than treating them merely as implementers of policy decisions. The concerns expressed by participants underscore the human dimension of curriculum reform, particularly for those whose livelihoods may be affected by institutional restructuring. The findings suggest that successful implementation of curriculum reforms requires careful attention to faculty welfare and workforce implications. Institutional leaders may need to develop strategies that support affected instructors through workload redistribution, professional development opportunities, or alternative teaching assignments to mitigate uncertainty and maintain faculty morale during periods of curricular transition.

Theme 6: Difficulty Covering Core Learning Competencies

Another challenge anticipated by participants was the possibility of struggling to adequately address essential learning competencies within a reduced General Education curriculum. 8 out of the 12 instructors expressed concern that fewer units could constrain the time available for meaningful discussion, skill development, and student engagement. Participants emphasized that General Education courses are designed to cultivate complex competencies such as critical thinking, ethical reasoning, communication, cultural awareness, and civic responsibility—outcomes that often require sustained exposure, reflection, and practice. They feared that compressing course content into a smaller unit allocation could force instructors to prioritize coverage over depth, potentially limiting students' opportunities to fully develop these foundational competencies. One participant explained:

"...and some learning outcomes cannot be rushed. Students need time to discuss, reflect, and connect ideas. If we reduce the available time too much, there is a risk that we end up covering topics without giving students the chance to really understand them."

This concern reflects the observations of Garcia (2023), who highlighted the complexities that educators encounter when implementing General Education curricula and balancing prescribed learning outcomes with available instructional time. Similarly, the Commission on Higher Education (2013) emphasized that General Education is intended to foster a wide range of intellectual and civic competencies that contribute to the holistic formation of learners. The participants' views also align with Dewey's (1916) Theory of Progressive Education, which posits that meaningful learning develops through sustained inquiry, reflection, and engagement with educational experiences. From this perspective, the achievement of complex learning outcomes depends not only on what is taught but also on the time and opportunities available for students to internalize and apply their learning. The findings suggest that curriculum planners should carefully evaluate whether a reduced unit structure can realistically support the attainment of the competencies expected of General Education courses. Ensuring alignment between learning outcomes, instructional time, and course expectations remains essential for maintaining the effectiveness and integrity of the General Education program.

Theme 7: Reduced Student Exposure to Broad Knowledge Areas

A major concern expressed by the participants was the possibility that reducing General Education units would limit students' exposure to diverse fields of knowledge and perspectives. Eight (8) out of the 12 instructors feared that a streamlined General Education curriculum could narrow students' intellectual experiences by reducing opportunities to engage with disciplines outside their primary areas of study. Participants emphasized that General Education serves as a venue where students encounter different ways of thinking, cultural viewpoints, societal issues, and bodies of knowledge that may not be addressed within specialized programs. They argued that such exposure plays a vital role in helping students develop intellectual curiosity, adaptability, and a broader understanding of the world. Consequently, participants worried that reducing GE units could contribute to a more restricted educational experience that prioritizes specialization at the expense of intellectual breadth. One instructor remarked:

"Students need opportunities to learn beyond their major. Some of the most important insights come from subjects that are completely outside their field because they help them understand people and issues from different perspectives."

This finding is consistent with the arguments of Lynton (1990), who maintained that higher education should provide learners with broad intellectual preparation alongside professional training. Likewise, Nababan (2014) emphasized that General Education contributes to the development of informed, reflective, and socially responsible individuals by exposing students to diverse areas of knowledge and human experience. The participants' concerns also resonate with Dewey's (1916) Theory of Progressive Education, which highlights the value of diverse learning experiences in expanding learners' perspectives and fostering intellectual growth. Through this lens, educational breadth is not supplementary to higher education but an essential component of students' overall development. The findings suggest that instructors view General Education as a critical avenue for cultivating intellectual breadth and interdisciplinary awareness. As curriculum reforms are considered, policymakers and educational leaders may need to ensure that efforts to streamline academic programs do not inadvertently restrict students' opportunities to engage with the wider knowledge domains that contribute to a well-rounded university education.

Theme 8: Unclear Implementation Guidelines and Support

Another challenge anticipated by the participants was the uncertainty surrounding the implementation of the proposed reduction of General Education units. Seven (7) out of the 12 instructors expressed concern that the absence of clear guidelines, detailed plans, and institutional support mechanisms could make it difficult for faculty members to effectively adapt to the proposed changes. Participants noted that while discussions regarding the reform have gained considerable attention, there remains limited information regarding how courses will be revised, how learning outcomes will be redistributed, and how instructors will be supported throughout the transition. As a result, many felt unprepared to make informed decisions about course planning and instructional adjustments, creating anxiety about the practical realities of implementation. One participant shared:

"What worries me is that we hear about the reduction, but we still do not know exactly what will happen at the classroom level. It is difficult to redesign courses when the expectations and directions are not yet clear."

This finding aligns with the observations of Chan and Luk (2013), who found that uncertainty and ambiguity often emerge during periods of curriculum reform, particularly when educators receive limited guidance regarding implementation procedures. Similarly, Oliver and Hyun (2011) emphasized that effective curriculum change requires clear communication, institutional coordination, and sustained support to facilitate successful adaptation among faculty members. The participants' concerns may also be understood through Dewey's (1916) perspective that educational change should be grounded in thoughtful planning and reflective practice rather than imposed through abrupt or poorly communicated transitions. Without adequate guidance, instructors may struggle to translate reform objectives into meaningful educational practices. The findings suggest that the success of curriculum reforms depends not only on the proposed changes themselves but also on the quality of institutional support provided during implementation. Establishing clear policies, communicating expectations effectively, and providing faculty development opportunities may help reduce uncertainty and enable instructors to adapt more confidently to curricular transitions.

Conclusion and Implications

General Education instructors largely perceive the proposed reduction of General Education units as a reform that extends beyond curriculum restructuring and touches upon the fundamental purposes of higher education. While participants recognized the rationale of improving efficiency, reducing perceived redundancies, and strengthening workforce

preparation, many questioned whether these justifications sufficiently account for the broader contributions of General Education to holistic student development. Concerns regarding the erosion of liberal education values, potential declines in educational quality, limited faculty participation in decision-making, and possible inequitable consequences for disadvantaged learners suggest that instructors view General Education as an indispensable component of higher education rather than a peripheral curricular requirement. These perspectives underscore the continuing tension between market-driven educational reforms and the traditional mission of universities to cultivate intellectually, ethically, and socially responsible citizens.

Although participants expressed substantial reservations regarding the proposed reduction of General Education units, they also recognized that curriculum reform can create opportunities when implemented through careful planning and meaningful stakeholder involvement. Instructors identified possibilities for curriculum redesign, stronger alignment with student needs, increased interdisciplinary collaboration, and the adoption of more innovative teaching practices. However, these potential benefits were consistently accompanied by concerns regarding educational quality, faculty welfare, student development, and the preservation of the broader purposes of General Education. Rather than opposing change outright, participants emphasized that any reform should be undertaken cautiously and in a manner that safeguards the intellectual, civic, and humanistic foundations of higher education. These findings suggest that the success of curriculum reform depends not only on its intended outcomes but also on its ability to address the concerns of those most directly affected by its implementation.

The study carries important implications for policymakers, higher education administrators, and curriculum developers. First, meaningful consultation with General Education instructors should be prioritized to ensure that reform initiatives benefit from the expertise of those directly involved in curriculum implementation. Second, institutions should carefully evaluate how reductions in General Education units may affect student learning outcomes, educational equity, and faculty welfare before adopting substantial curricular changes. Finally, if reforms are pursued, clear implementation guidelines, adequate professional support, and deliberate efforts to preserve interdisciplinary and holistic learning outcomes will be essential. Higher education institutions may be better positioned to pursue innovation and efficiency without compromising the broader educational values that General Education has historically sought to advance.

Acknowledgement

The researchers would like to extend their heartfelt appreciation to the General Education instructors who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights as participants in this study. Sincere gratitude is also conveyed to the faculty members, university officials, and all individuals whose guidance, support, and encouragement contributed to the successful completion of this research. Their cooperation and assistance were invaluable throughout the conduct of the study.

Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical considerations and the protection of participant confidentiality.

References

- Abdul, & Adelfa C. Silor. (2024). Assessing the Teaching Strategies and Techniques Used by TVL Teachers: Basis for Pedagogical Training Design. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.19991>

- Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., & Rumble, M. (2012). Defining twenty-first century skills. In P. Griffin, B. McGaw, & E. Care (Eds.), *Assessment and teaching of 21st century skills* (pp. 17–66). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2324-5_2
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book246896>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>
- Garaba, A. M. (2023). WORKING PEDAGOGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: EXPLORING OBSTACLES AND WAYS FORWARD FOR TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS. Towards Excellence, 15(4). <https://hrdc.gujaratuniversity.ac.in/Publication/article?id=12517>
- Jailani, M. Y., Nok Siti, A. N.Y. Faizal, Alias Maizam, Sulthon Syahril, i, M., Lee, M. F., Tee Tze Kiong, Sri Sumarwati, Irfan, D., & Safrina Junita. (2017). Vocational pedagogy among technical vocational education and training teachers. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ieem.2017.8289869>
- Le, S. K., Hlaing, S. N., & Ya, K. Z. (2022). 21st-century competences and learning that Technical and vocational training. *Journal of Engineering Researcher and Lecturer*, 1(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.58712/jerel.v1i1.4>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/naturalistic-inquiry/book842>
- Noh@Seth, N. H., Noor, N. M., Arsat, M., Ali, D. F., Nabil, A., Nur, & Kamin, Y. (2019). *TVET towards Industrial Revolution 4.0*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429281501>
- Okolie, U. C., Ogbu, E. N., Osuji, C. U., Ogbu, F. N., Igwe, P. A., & Obih, S. O. (2021). A critical perspective on TVET teachers' pedagogical practices: insights into the guiding pedagogical principles in practice. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2021.1894221>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). *OECD skills outlook 2021: Learning for life*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/0ae365b4-en>
- UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707>
- UNESCO-UNEVOC. (2022). *Trends mapping: Innovations in technical and vocational education and training*. UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre. <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press. <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674576292>
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *The future of jobs report 2023*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023>

Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.