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Reluctant, Ambivalent and Progressive: Educators' attitudes towards the use of generative artificial intelligence in Enabling Education

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Abstract

The rapidly evolving availability of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools in higher education is disrupting established teaching practices, with universities facing uncertain consequences for both educators and students. This challenge is particularly evident in Enabling Education and Pathway Programs (EEPP) across Australia, which aim to prepare students for undergraduate study by developing core academic literacy skills. Educators in these programs are navigating not only the practical implications of GenAI but also their own beliefs about its educational value. While some see GenAI as a potential aid for student learning, others fear it may undermine the development of essential academic literacies. This study comprises a survey with academics from EEPP at 14 universities across Australia examining their perspectives on GenAI, including personal use in teaching and views on student use. Educators' attitudes fell into three broad categories: *Reluctant* (GenAI's disruption viewed as a threat to learning), *Progressive* (GenAI's opportunities viewed as beneficial to learning), and *Ambivalent* (GenAI viewed with uncertainty or a mixture of *Progressive* and *Reluctant* ideas). However, these educators hold a range of views about the impact of GenAI in Enabling Education, often expressed in complex and nuanced ways. Understanding these perspectives is essential for identifying potential barriers to teaching and learning, and for supporting the effective integration of GenAI within EEPP.

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Practitioner Notes

1. Some educators see GenAI's benefits with ethical concerns about student learning outcomes.
2. Clear, nuanced policies are needed to guide responsible GenAI use in Enabling Education and Pathways Programs, balancing accessibility with academic integrity.
3. GenAI must be integrated thoughtfully to support equity students, ensuring access does not widen existing educational disparities.
4. Tailored professional development can help Enabling Educators feel more confident in using GenAI effectively while addressing academic integrity concerns.

Keywords

GenAI, Enabling Education, higher education, equity, inclusion, ChatGPT, Generative Artificial Intelligence

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Introduction

The rapid adaptation of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into higher education is sparking transformative changes in teaching, learning, and assessment. While this technological shift offers immense potential, its adoption varies significantly across educational sectors, including the Enabling sector, which caters to a diverse cohort with many non-traditional and equity students. Given that Enabling Education aims to widen access to university for non-traditional and marginalised students (Crawford et al., 2016), understanding educators' perspectives on GenAI is crucial to ensure its use supports equity rather than exacerbating existing disparities (James & Andrews, 2024).

This emergence of GenAI presents opportunities to enhance teaching and learning, but its integration into Enabling Education and Pathway Programs (EEPP) raises distinct challenges that require careful consideration. EEPP educators work with students who often enter university with limited academic experience, underdeveloped language and digital literacy skills, and heightened vulnerability to academic and non-academic stressors (James, 2024). In this context, uncritical adoption of GenAI tools could exacerbate existing inequities by privileging students with greater prior experience or digital competence, while well-informed integration has the potential to scaffold learning and support equitable access to higher education (James & Andrews, 2024). Thus, the practical problem this study addresses is twofold: first, to understand educators' attitudes toward GenAI adoption in EEPP settings, including concerns around academic integrity, pedagogical effectiveness, and ethical use; and second, to identify how these attitudes influence the potential for GenAI to either support or hinder equitable student outcomes.

By examining these challenges from the perspective of educators embedded within EEPP, the study seeks to move beyond general discussions of technology adoption to provide evidence-based insights into how GenAI can be responsibly leveraged in real-world L&T contexts. Clarifying educators' receptiveness, perceived barriers, and the conditions that facilitate adoption is essential for designing policies, professional development, and curriculum interventions that ensure GenAI serves as an enabler rather than a disruptor in equity-focused education. This framing grounds the research in a practical L&T problem—how to harness GenAI in a manner that enhances learning while maintaining integrity and supporting students who face structural and educational disadvantages. The research team, who have all worked in EEPP, initially used anecdotal experiences to categorise educators' perspectives as either Reluctant, Ambivalent, or Progressive. Those with Reluctant perspectives primarily view GenAI as a threat to academic integrity or as compromising learning processes; Progressive perspectives see it as a valuable educational tool that can enhance learning; and those with an Ambivalent perspective may be uncertain about its role and future impact in education or might have reservations about its adoption in EEPP. These categories are echoed by recent research on how Australian university staff engage with GenAI, where researchers categorised staff as either Atheists, Agnostics or Apostles based on their adoption levels of GenAI (McDonald et al., 2024). While this was a large national study of 3,421 respondents at 42 universities, and the categories proposed largely align with the perspectives we have outlined above, the research focused on professional and academic staff in a multitude of roles across Australian higher education and did not clarify the implications of the research for EEPP. Additionally, the study emphasised engagement and adoption of GenAI, while the categories proposed in this paper speak to educators' attitudes and perspectives as either Reluctant, Ambivalent or Progressive. In the Australian Universities Accord

(Department of Education, 2024), which reviewed and proposed reform to Australia's higher education system, EEPP are highlighted as a key priority to increase participation from under-represented groups. Thus, it is crucial to understand the specific perspectives, concerns and readiness of Enabling Educators to ensure that the sector can meet national priorities in the face of evolving adoption of GenAI in higher education.

The Enabling sector plays a critical role within Australian higher education, particularly in addressing issues of access, equity, and inclusion. EEPP, often viewed as preparatory pathways, serve as vital entry points for students from diverse, under-represented backgrounds (Department of Education, 2022; Pitman et al., 2016), including those from low socio-economic status (LSES), regional and remote areas, First Nations communities, and people with disabilities (Agosti & Bernat, 2018; James et al., 2024). These programs are designed to equip students with the academic skills, confidence, and social support necessary for success in higher education (Hodges et al., 2013). As James (2024) notes, Enabling students frequently face heightened anxiety driven by academic and non-academic stressors. Academic stressors include educational challenges such as underdeveloped critical thinking skills and limited academic capital (Crawford et al., 2016; James, 2024), while non-academic stressors include financial pressures, a lack of support networks, and reduced time for study due to family responsibilities (Nieuwoudt, 2021). From an equity perspective, EEPP provide an essential service by bridging gaps in educational opportunities and offering a pathway to higher education for those traditionally excluded (Chesters & Watson, 2016) through recognition and support of these multifaceted challenges (Li et al., 2024). This study was guided by the following research questions:

> **Research Question 1.** What are the attitudes of educators towards the use of GenAI tools, particularly in terms of maintaining academic integrity and its potential benefits/weaknesses for educational practices?
>
> **Research Question 2.** How do educators perceive the role of GenAI in supporting equity students, particularly in enhancing language proficiency and bridging the gap in academic performance?
>
> **Research Question 3.** What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to the implementation of GenAI in curriculum design and assessment for both students and staff?

The findings from this study have important implications for research, practice, and theory within higher education. From a research perspective, focusing on Enabling Education and Pathway Programs (EEPP) addresses a gap in the literature, which has largely considered GenAI adoption in broad higher education contexts without examining the unique challenges faced by educators working within Enabling programs. Practically, understanding educators' attitudes and perceived barriers provides actionable insights for curriculum design, professional development, and institutional policy, enabling more responsible and equitable integration of GenAI tools in teaching and learning. Theoretically, the study contributes to discussions around technology adoption and educational change by highlighting how pedagogical, ethical, and equity considerations intersect in shaping educators' receptiveness to emerging technologies. The paper begins with a discussion of the contextual growth of GenAI in higher education, followed by an exploration of its implications within the Enabling Education sector. The methodology and findings are then presented, highlighting key themes emerging from educators' perspectives. The conclusion

addresses strategies to overcome challenges and leverage opportunities for effectively integrating GenAI into educational practices.

Literature

While there has been significant attention on the ethical and philosophical implications of GenAI in higher education, empirical studies of user experiences and attitudes are still emerging. Educators' attitudes towards the integration of GenAI in higher education reveal mixed perceptions, and a recognition that appropriate use of the technology varies with context, purpose and application.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)

The adoption of GenAI in educational settings has garnered support from some educators for its pedagogical and practical benefits. Educators acknowledge GenAI's capacity to save workload time by automating administrative tasks (McDonald et al., 2024; Módné Takács et al., 2023; Kutty et al., 2024). For example, some educators report using GenAI for coding and other technical tasks, suggesting that GenAI is capable of significantly enhancing productivity and effectiveness in various projects (McDonald et al., 2024). Furthermore, outsourcing routine tasks to GenAI enables staff to engage in work that requires strategic, higher order and creative thinking (McDonald et al., 2024). In addition, some teachers have used automatic essay scoring tools to automate assessment processes (Módné Takács et al., 2023; Alwaqdani, 2024). This automation not only streamlines grading processes but also allows educators to allocate more time for personalised instruction and student engagement.

Additionally, others believe GenAI can serve as a valuable tool for improving teaching materials, creating lesson plans, and refining existing concepts (McDonald et al., 2024; Walton Family Foundation, 2024; Alwaqdani, 2024). When used in this way, teaching staff can enhance existing curricula and teaching resources to create innovative learning experiences tailored to support students' needs and engagement (Kutty et al., 2024). In addition to teaching, some academic staff recognise the value GenAI has in helping with their own research and scholarship, including assisting with brainstorming ideas, reviewing and synthesising literature (McDonald et al., 2024).

Moreover, there has been significant investigation into the personalised learning and feedback benefits GenAI can provide to facilitate a tailored educational experience. Ivanov et al. (2024) propose that personalisation of learning is a fundamental aspect of modern educational philosophy that can be enhanced using GenAI. As such, several educators have attempted to enhance teaching and learning environments by incorporating GenAI features to offer students tailored and inclusive support (Fuller & Barnes, 2024; Pantazatos et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024; McDonald et al., 2024). A key benefit of using GenAI for personalised learning is its capacity to deliver prompt feedback to students, which can improve learning outcomes and lessen the workload burden on educators to provide feedback at scale (Khlaif et al., 2024). However, other studies have found that both students and educators have mixed perceptions of GenAI feedback, preferring it in supplementary form alongside educator-delivered feedback (Roe et al., 2024; Barrett & Pack, 2023).

Overall, the literature reveals that while some educators are open to integrating GenAI in higher education teaching contexts, they emphasise the need for support. Many educators feel their

knowledge of GenAI is limited and call for professional development and training (Chan & Tsi, 2024; Alwaqdani, 2024; Kohnke et al., 2023). Such training can enhance GenAI competency and improve attitudes towards its use (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2024; Wang & Chen, 2021). Ivanov et al. (2024) argue that institutions should create an environment supporting the effective, efficient, and ethical integration of GenAI tools in teaching and research. Therefore, developing GenAI competencies is seen as a strategic priority for the future of higher education.

GenAI in Learning and Teaching Practice

Regarding educators' work, one key concern relates to the impact on pedagogical practices. This includes the potential loss of professional autonomy, creativity and critical thinking when the work of developing and creating learning materials and assessment is outsourced to GenAI (Dotan et al., 2024; Kutty et al., 2024). Over-reliance on GenAI could diminish the educator's role in making decisions about teaching and learning based on their knowledge and understanding of their students (Crawford et al., 2023). For example, outsourcing automatic grading of students' work to GenAI may not always be helpful, and shifts responsibility from the educator to GenAI system developers who lack direct knowledge of the students being evaluated, their specific contexts, or the educational systems they are part of (Walton Family Foundation 2024; Swiecki et al., 2022). These reports suggest an underlying uncertainty about the extent to which grading of student work should be outsourced to GenAI. Maintaining teacher involvement in grading processes might ensure a more nuanced and contextualised approach. Additional research also highlights potential diminution of human connection between teachers and students due to increased mediation via technology (Kutty et al., 2024; Chan & Tsi, 2024).

Furthermore, several surveys have identified that during the time since GenAI has become mainstream, minimal training, support and policy guidance has been available to educators trying to navigate this emerging landscape (McDonald et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Barret & Pack, 2023). There is also acknowledgement that, even with improved training and policy guidance, the pace of change poses a significant challenge for educators trying to "keep up" (McDonald et al., 2024; Fuller & Barnes, 2024). Finally, research has also identified potentially negative impacts of GenAI on research outputs. As Large Language Models (LLMs) sometimes produce plausible but inaccurate output, use of GenAI in research could compromise the quality and accuracy of peer-reviewed publications (Kutty et al., 2024). Furthermore, the increased efficiency and speed at which written work can be produced using GenAI may have the flow-on effect of normalising a much faster and less sustainable pace of research output (Kutty et al., 2024).

GenAI and Student Learning

When turning attention to educators' perceptions of potentially negative impacts of GenAI on students' learning, three key trends have emerged in recent literature. The first and most consistent of these concerns is academic integrity (McDonald et al, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Dotan et al., 2024; Fuller & Barnes, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024; Chan & Tsi, 2024; Kizilcec et al., 2024). Specifically, most educators (and many students) view unauthorised and undisclosed use of GenAI within assessment tasks as a form of academic misconduct (Barrett & Pack, 2023; Fuller & Barnes, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). Additionally, the nature of GenAI technology and the speed of development has led to significant disruption of traditional methods tertiary institutions have used to identify and manage academic integrity breaches, with a range of flow-

on effects for assessment design and academic integrity policies. This situation is seen as creating an increased burden on staff both to learn to use GenAI and police its use (Dotan et al., 2024). Consequently, several educators feel there is a need for greater institutional support regarding responsible use of GenAI to safeguard academic integrity values (Yusuf et al., 2024). This involves putting clear policies, regulations and guidelines in place (Chan & Tsi, 2024; Kohnke et al., 2023).

A related risk is potential suppression or even loss of academic skills development among students in areas such as literacy, critical thinking and creativity (McDonald et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Fuller & Barnes, 2024; Chan & Tsi, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). GenAI might facilitate students' focus on finished products over the learning process (Ghimire, 2024). Therefore, educators worry an over-reliance on the technology could diminish critical reasoning and specialised disciplinary knowledge (Dotan et al., 2024), especially for students who have not yet adequately developed core academic literacies. Finally, many educators acknowledge a range of ethical concerns with the use of Gen AI, including the impact of bias in LLM training data (Dotan et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024), disparities in student access to more capable pay-walled versions of GenAI (Fuller & Barnes, 2024; Chan & Tsi, 2024; Ghimire, 2024; McDonald et al., 2024), and reservations about data privacy and copyright of information entered into LLMs (Tyagi, 2024). While many educators want to remain "ahead of the curve" and not dismiss new technology outright, the pace of change and the unknown longer-term impacts on student learning appear to be underlying factors for these perceived risks and challenges.

Generative AI and education for equity group students

While this review of the literature provides a general insight of educators perceived opportunities and challenges regarding the use of GenAI, there is an absence of investigation into the perceptions of educators supporting equity group students, especially in an EEPP context. Students in EEPP present with variations in English language proficiency and academic literacies that can hinder their ability to manage required reading and writing assessments (Baker & Irwin, 2016; Baker et al., 2021). Consequently, the urgent need to develop critical AI literacy can pose additional challenges for students, particularly those who speak languages other than English at home.

Essentially, while it has been argued that GenAI tools could close educational gaps for equity students (James & Andrews, 2024), they may unintentionally widen them if students lack the necessary literacy skills to use them effectively. This creates a paradox: developing critical AI literacy requires a certain level of language and writing proficiency, yet these are the very skills many students are striving to improve (Godwin-Jones, 2022; Warschauer et al., 2023). As such, while GenAI has the potential to support students with their learning, over-reliance on its use could stunt development of academic literacy. For these reasons, it is crucial to understand Enabling Educators' perceptions and attitudes regarding the integration of GenAI into Enabling curriculum and pedagogical practices, as well as their views on its role in supporting equity students' academic language and literacy development. This study addresses a gap in the literature by revealing where educators in EEPP stand on the spectrum of views of GenAI.

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of educators' perspectives on the use of GenAI in Enabling and Pathways programs. A mixed-methods design facilitated data triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), enriching the findings by combining statistical trends with participants' narratives (Bryman, 2008). This triangulation facilitated deeper analysis of educators' experiences and attitudes toward GenAI in teaching and learning contexts (Creswell, 2009). Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the lead researcher's institution (CQUniversity Approval Number 24974). Participants received detailed information about the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. A case study approach was used to examine the perspectives of educators involved in EEPP across Australia. Case studies (Merriam, 2002) are particularly suitable for exploring complex, real-world issues, offering an in-depth investigation of how GenAI is perceived and utilised in these specific educational settings. Using purposive sampling, academic staff teaching in EEPP across Australian universities were invited to participate. This method ensured that participants had relevant experience with GenAI in educational contexts, allowing for meaningful insights into its perceived benefits and challenges (Patton, 2015).

Positionality

As Enabling lecturers with personal trajectories that, in various ways, parallel those of the students with whom we work, we collectively positioned ourselves as both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Chhabra, 2020). Several of us have re-entered higher education from working-class or non-traditional backgrounds, experiences that illuminated the structural challenges students face in navigating university systems. At the same time, our roles as educators position us with new forms of social capital and authority, situating us at a distance from our students. We share the professional contexts of the participants of this study, and most of the researchers have used some GenAI tools in our teaching practice. However, we hold a variety of views and diverse attitudes towards the adoption of these tools in EEPP. By adopting the stance of 'in-betweeners' (Chhabra, 2020), we were able to navigate this dual and multifaceted positioning, balancing nearness with distance and involvement with detachment. This in-between positionality enabled us to maintain reflexivity while developing a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and the broader complexities of transition within EEPP.

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through an online survey administered via Qualtrics. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse participants' demographic characteristics and survey responses, offering insights into trends across their experiences and attitudes. Survey participants were recruited through a two-wave email invitation process (September–October 2024). The first wave targeted 150 members of the National Association of Educators of Australia (NAEEA), the professional body representing educators involved in EEPP across Australia. The second wave extended invitations to academic staff within the researchers' respective institutions, including both NAEEA members and non-members teaching in EEPP. This approach ensured a diverse participant pool, capturing a range of perspectives on the use of GenAI in EEPP.

The survey comprised 18 questions. The first four (all quantitative) gathered demographic information, including participants' institution, areas of specialty, roles within EEPP, employment type, gender, and age. Subsequent questions combined both quantitative (Questions 6–7, 9–10, and 17–18) and qualitative (open-ended) formats (Questions 5, 8, and 11–16) to capture educators past experiences with and current perspectives on GenAI. The additional quantitative questions specifically explored: participants' levels of knowledge and understanding of GenAI tools (Q6); tasks where educators may have used GenAI (Q7); current perspectives on use of GenAI (Q9); confidence in teaching responsible use of GenAI (Q10); and perceived benefits (Q17) and concerns (Q18) surrounding the use of GenAI.

Question 9 sought participants' perspectives on the use of GenAI. They were presented with seven statements crafted by the researchers to align with Reluctant (2 statements), Ambivalent (3 statements) and Progressive (2 statements) views towards GenAI. Participants were instructed to select one or two of these statements that best reflected their perspectives on using GenAI in education. While these categories guided the question development, the research team remained open to the possibility that the findings could suggest alternative perspectives.

To gain an understanding of the significant benefits and concerns Enabling Educators hold about the use of GenAI in relation to their work, participants were asked to select all applicable options from six statements that aligned with what they saw as the benefits (Q17) of using GenAI. They were also asked to select all applicable options from seven statements that aligned with their concerns (Q18) about using GenAI. These statements were based on common benefits and concerns of using GenAI expressed by educators in the literature review above. Further qualitative questions gave participants the opportunity to share personal experiences and perspectives on using GenAI in teaching practices. Specifically, they were invited to discuss: confidence in being able to teach students to use GenAI responsibly (Q11); perceptions of GenAI technology as a tool for curriculum generation (Q12); use of AI-generated content in assessments or students' use of GenAI in articulating responses (Q13); perceived impact of GenAI on students' writing skills and ability to achieve learning outcomes (Q14); ways in which GenAI supports or challenges traditional teaching approaches (Q15); and concerns regarding students' use of GenAI in the writing process in EEPP (Q16).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following the approach outlined by Braun and Clark (2022). This method emphasises the active role of the researchers in interpreting data while allowing for flexibility in identifying key themes that emerge from participants' narratives. The analysis followed the six-phase RTA process. First, familiarisation with the data was achieved by repeated reading to develop an in-depth understanding. Next, key features of the data were systematically coded to generate initial codes. A deductive approach was used to establish whether the data reflected specific attitudes—Reluctant, Ambivalent, or Progressive. These codes were then grouped into potential themes, undergoing an iterative cycle of refinement and verification against the dataset to ensure coherence and relevance. Finally, the thematic findings were interpreted within the broader research context, offering deeper insights into educators' perspectives on GenAI in EEPP.

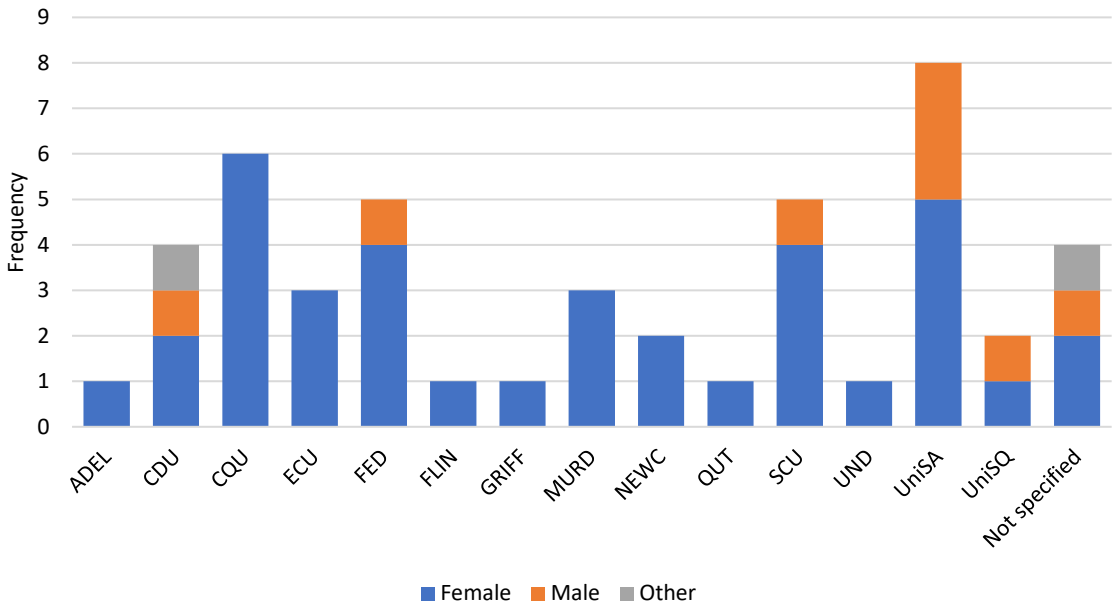
Results

Participants

The gender distribution indicated a higher number of female participants (n=37) compared to males (n=8), and non-binary (n=2) reflecting the broader trend in EEPP, which typically employs a greater proportion of female educators. Responses were received from 14 institutions, with the University of South Australia contributing the highest number of participants, followed by CQUniversity.

Figure 1:

Distribution of participants by gender and institution



The age distribution was representative of this cohort of educators. Out of forty-seven (47) participants, the 45–54 age group were the most common (n=18), while 55-64 (n=11) and 35-44 (n=10) were similar in number. More than two-thirds of participants were permanently employed at their institutions, with part-time employment (either permanent or contract) comprising the remainder. Just over half of participants were language and literacy specialists, while most of the remaining respondents were STEM specialists.

Quantitative Survey Results

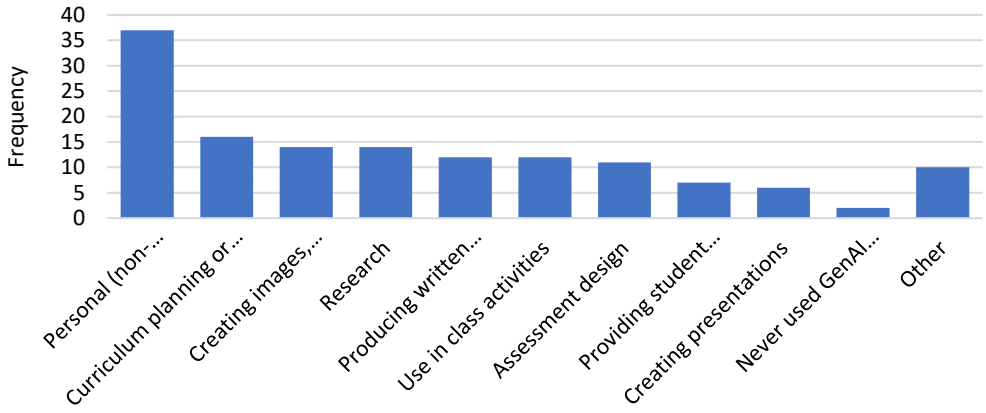
Forty-seven educators responded to the survey. When asked about their individual levels of knowledge and understanding regarding the use of GenAI tools, the majority reported a basic or moderate level of knowledge (40 of 47), with basic knowledge being the most frequently selected category.

All 47 participants indicated that they had used GenAI for a range of tasks, generating a total of 141 optional responses. Personal (non-academic) use was the most common (37 selections). Open-text responses categorised as “Other” included activities such as editing emails, writing rubrics, idea generation, revising writing, checking student work, academic integrity investigation,

creating practice questions for mathematics, proofreading, searching for articles, brainstorming, and testing assignments. These responses highlight the broad applicability of GenAI across both personal and professional contexts (Figure 2).

Figure 2:

Tasks educators have used GenAI tools for

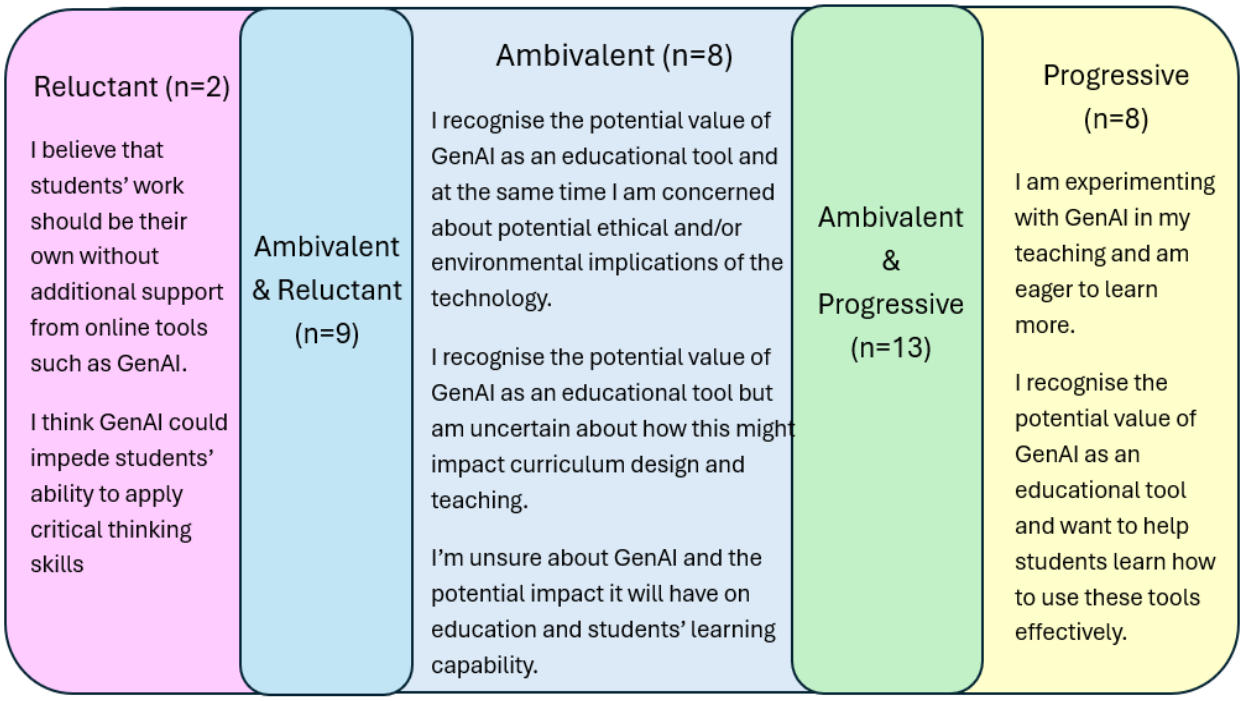


In terms of confidence in teaching students to use GenAI responsibly, participants' responses were approximately normally distributed, with a slight skew towards lower confidence levels. Most participants reported no, some, or moderate confidence, with relatively few reporting high or very high confidence.

When asked to select one or two statements from seven options to best reflect their perspectives on the use of GenAI in education, responses demonstrated a continuum rather than fitting neatly into three predefined categories of educator attitude. The largest proportion of responses (22 of 40) straddled or overlapped categories: 13 responses were between ambivalent and progressive, and nine responses between ambivalent and reluctant. This overlap occurred where participants selected one option from each viewpoint. No participants selected combinations that overlapped reluctant and progressive views. Seven participants who selected more than two statements were excluded from this analysis, resulting in a sample size of 40 for this question.

Figure 3:

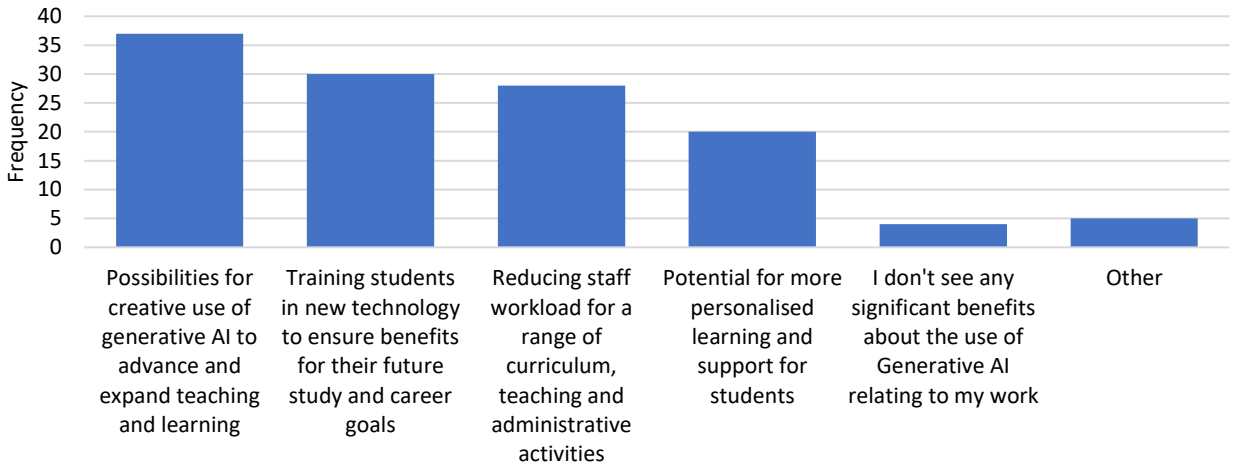
Continuum of enabling educator's reflections on their perspective(s) of using GenAI in education (n = 40 of 47), with seven statements straddling three viewpoints



In response to perceived benefits of GenAI, participants could select multiple statements from six options. A total of 124 selections were made, with the most frequently chosen benefits being: (i) creative possibilities for teaching and learning, (ii) training students to use GenAI for study and career advancement, and (iii) potential reductions in staff workload. Open-text responses highlighted additional perceived benefits, including improvements in accessibility and equity, preparation for future student careers, and consideration of negative impacts on student learning *(Figure 4)*.

Figure *4*:

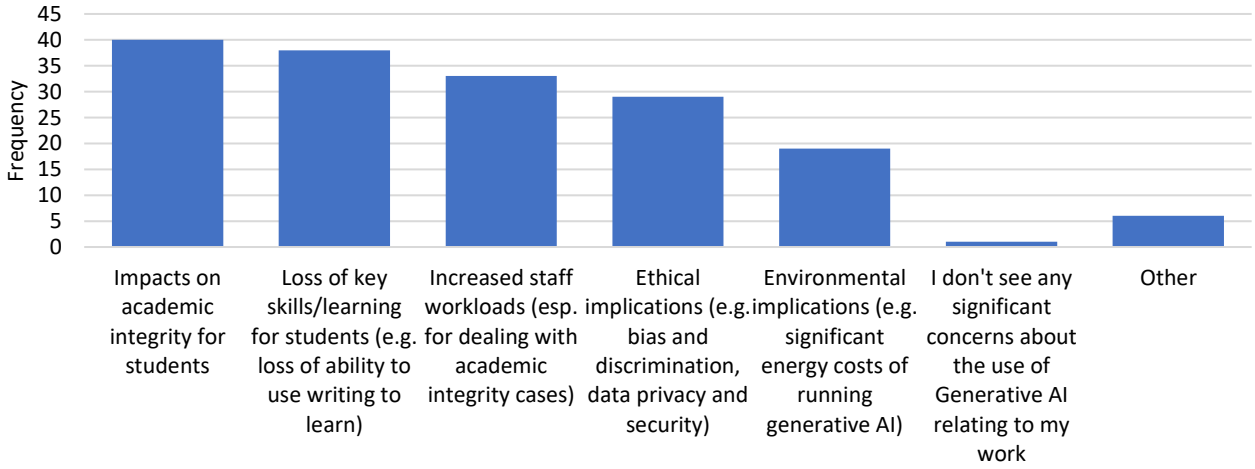
Educators' views of prospective benefits associated with use of GenAI in relation to work (124 statement selections from 45 respondents)



Regarding perceived concerns, participants could select from seven options, with 166 selections made in total. The most common concerns were related to academic integrity (for both students and staff), the potential loss of skills, and ethical implications. Open-text responses revealed a diverse set of additional concerns, which could be grouped into two main categories: concerns about students' use of GenAI and concerns about how educators themselves are adapting to and using the technology. Additional concerns included social isolation and reduced interpersonal interactions due to GenAI use. Notably, a proportionally greater number of concerns were selected per option (23.7 selections per option) compared with benefits (20.7 selections per option), indicating that participants expressed more caution regarding potential negative impacts than positive outcomes (Figure 5).

Figure 5:

Educators' views of prospective concerns associated with use of GenAI in relation to work (166 statement selections from 47 respondents)



Overall, the quantitative data indicate that while EEPP educators are actively engaging with GenAI tools, their confidence and preparedness to teach students about responsible use remains limited. Most educators have at least basic knowledge and have used GenAI personally, yet relatively few feel highly confident in guiding students, suggesting a gap between familiarity and pedagogical application. The continuum of perspectives, with many respondents occupying ambivalent positions or overlapping categories, reflects uncertainty about the role of GenAI in teaching and its impact on learning outcomes. Similarly, while participants recognised multiple potential benefits, including creative teaching possibilities, skill development for students, and workload reduction, concerns were more numerous and pronounced, particularly regarding academic integrity, skill loss, and ethical considerations. These patterns suggest that educators are cautiously optimistic about GenAI but remain wary of unintended consequences, highlighting the need for targeted professional development, institutional guidance, and policy support to translate GenAI engagement into effective and equitable teaching practice.

Qualitative analysis of open-text responses provides further context for these findings, reinforcing the identification of three broad perspectives among educators, Reluctant, Ambivalent, and Progressive, and illustrating the nuanced ways educators perceive both opportunities and challenges associated with GenAI.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data are presented below as they relate to the three different perspectives, namely Reluctant, Ambivalent and Progressive. Three key themes were identified that related to each of the perspectives, and each theme is discussed under a different subheading in this section. For Reluctant perspectives, the themes are: i) concerns about academic integrity and ethical use; ii) negative impact on writing and critical thinking skills; iii) challenges in teaching and assessment. For Ambivalent perspectives, the three themes are: i) learning outcomes, guidelines and policy; ii) the needs of EEPP students; iii) lack of knowledge, training and workload when implementing GenAI. Finally, for the Progressive perspectives, the themes are: i) GenAI as a learning aid; ii) accessibility and inclusivity; iii) preparation for future workplaces.

Reluctant Perspectives

Individuals with a traditional attitude towards GenAI and learning emphasise discipline, personal effort, and established academic practices. They value critical thinking, independent research, and writing as fundamental skills developed through practice rather than shortcuts. From this perspective, the rise of GenAI is seen as a threat to academic integrity, skill development, and the authenticity of student learning. Many believe that reliance on AI-generated content undermines the educational process, making it more difficult to assess true student capability and diminishing the value of traditional learning methods.

Concerns About Academic Integrity and Ethical Use

A major concern expressed by participants is the ethical implications of using GenAI in academic work. Many believe that reliance on AI-generated content constitutes cheating and undermines the fundamental principles of academic integrity. One participant stated, "They don't achieve the outcomes. They're just cheating." Others highlighted how students ignore explicit instructions against using AI in assessments, with one noting, "Students have been using AI in assessment

tasks despite instructions stating that it cannot be used." Another participant compared the ethical concerns of GenAI to the longstanding academic caution against using unreliable sources, stating,

> We have always taught students about citing peer-reviewed/reputable sources, published by experts in the field. We have always told students not to use Wikipedia for this reason. AI to me holds the same level of expert authority as Wikipedia. Plus, it does not care if it is right or wrong.

These views reflect a belief that GenAI enables dishonest academic practices and prevents students from engaging in genuine learning.

Negative Impact on Writing and Critical Thinking Skills

Participants expressed concerns that reliance on GenAI negatively impacts students' ability to develop essential academic skills, particularly writing and critical thinking. Many noted that students who frequently use AI tools struggle to improve their writing abilities because they do not engage in the necessary practice. One participant stated, "It is not going to help students write better. As they start to rely on it more and more, they will lose the ability to write effectively." Another noted, "I have no doubt it reduces their writing skills. They DO just copy and paste, and writing needs practice."

In addition to writing, the use of GenAI was seen as detrimental to students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. One participant explained, "GenAI challenges traditional teaching approaches as it hinders students' ability to problem solve and think critically—how will I do the assignment? How will I find the resources? How will I construct the assignment and express the content cohesively?" This sentiment reflects a broader concern that students may become overly dependent on AI tools, thereby weakening their fundamental academic skills.

Challenges in Teaching and Assessment

Educators also highlighted significant challenges in assessing students' abilities due to the influence of GenAI. Some questioned whether traditional assessment methods remain valid if AI-generated work cannot be distinguished from students’ own efforts. One participant asked, "How do I know what students know and what skills they are demonstrating?" Others noted that the increasing use of GenAI creates disparities between students who use AI and those who do not. As one participant explained, "Some [students are] using it (to varying effectiveness), others not, and potentially achieving lower grades with 'clunkier' language but language that is authentically their work." Furthermore, there were concerns about the long-term consequences of AI use on students’ ability to engage with coursework. One educator shared, "With writing in particular, I am extremely concerned that GenAI will deny students the opportunity to learn how to write properly—a core skill developed in the program I teach.”

Ambivalent Perspectives

Ambivalent views about GenAI use expressed by respondents typically indicated a willingness to incorporate or accept GenAI, but with concerns about its impact. Common themes related to this ambivalence include that acceptable GenAI use is dependent upon learning outcomes and

guidelines given to students; the specific needs of the EEPP cohort; and a lack of knowledge or training among staff.

Learning Outcomes, Guidelines, and Policy

It was common for participants to express optimism about how GenAI could potentially be used in teaching and learning, with caveats related to learning outcomes, the guidelines given to students, and the way students ultimately use GenAI. For example, in response to a question about how GenAI impacts students' ability to achieve learning outcomes, a language/literacies educator stated that it would depend on how students were using it: "If they bring very little intellectual effort or critical evaluation, this is an issue. If they use GenAI critically and make their own judgements, then this [is] less of an issue." Likewise, another participant described their concern about a "grey area between using AI to help research/get ideas for an assignment/refine and polish your writing, and using AI to create content without it really being your own work." Responses like these indicate some acceptance of GenAI use but also raised concerns about how it might be used.

Several educators noted the importance of considering learning outcomes in explaining whether GenAI was deemed acceptable or not. For example, "If the learning outcomes are based on the output and this can just be generated by AI this is a problem. However, if the learning outcomes incorporate usage of AI this could be effective." Another stated that "there needs to be an awareness by the educator on purpose and reason for students to use GenAI in assessments. This is hard to answer as a blanket yes or no to using GenAI in assessment." The guidelines given to students was another factor influencing the acceptability of GenAI use. This sometimes emerged as a point of ambiguity due to a lack of consistent guidelines or wider policy around GenAI use. For example, one educator noted that, "It is hard to 'open the floodgates' when telling students they can use it for ideas for example and then set another assessment task that states 'no GenAI'". Another stated: "At this point, I am encouraging them to be careful as there are not guidelines." Several educators stated that GenAI use could be acceptable if there are clear guidelines given. For example: "If clearly articulated as part of the process and as part of learning I think [use of GenAI in assessments] could be effective."

The Needs of Enabling Education Students

Several responses raised concerns that academic skills development among EEPP students could be compromised by GenAI use. One educator explained that students using AI-generated content in assessments was "quite ok[ay] as long as the guidelines have been carefully articulated," but also noted that, "I still think enabling students in particular need to learn how to write independently of GenAI as many of them have never had the opportunity to learn how to take a position and use scholarly sources," which the educator described as a "key skill for a graduate." This acknowledgement of the potential utility of GenAI, but also the need for Enabling students to learn core skills without it, was a notable tension in some responses. On this point, another educator described students and teachers as being in a "difficult space" and a "grey area," explaining that "GenAI needs to be phased into learning, but with enabling students, this could be the most challenging cohort to do that with due to their difficult learning journeys before entering tertiary studies." Likewise, another educator stated: "I'm concerned that perhaps pathways/EEPP are not the best place to use AI, and that it might be more appropriate in an undergraduate degree

from year 2 onwards." These educators were not outright opposed to GenAI use but expressed concerns about it with respect to the specific student cohort.

Lack of knowledge, training, or workload

One issue driving ambivalence amongst some responses was a lack of knowledge or experience of GenAI among the educators, which was cited as a reason for lacking confidence in teaching responsible use. For example, "I have had very little experience with GenAI so therefore little confidence," and "Until I feel comfortable with AI, and its ethical use I am hesitant to use it as an educational tool." Relatedly, some educators noted a lack of training and support to learn more about GenAI. An indicative response from one participant explained that they were "open" to students using it in their assessments and they "would love to explore the options if there were some staff development around it" because GenAI "is here to stay." The need for training and support noted in several responses has significant workload implications. While workload concerns were rarely brought up in the open-ended text responses, increased staff workload was cited as a concern by 33 of the 47 participants in the quantitative data. Responses indicated that because Enabling curricula are often intensive, it would be difficult to teach responsible use of GenAI or to add GenAI activities into existing curricula. One respondent alluded to these workload and curriculum implications: "[My] ideas [about teaching GenAI] need some refinement to scaffold well into an already full curriculum." Another respondent explained: "I feel I have so much to cover already ... I am reluctant to incorporate GenAI but I can see it is already being used and currently difficult to manage."

Progressive Perspectives

Participants demonstrating a progressive attitude towards the role of GenAI in learning focused on the potential of AI tools to improve learning processes and outcomes. These participants emphasised that being skilled in using GenAI would be indispensable for work in various industries in the future, and that it was the responsibility of educators to prepare learners to use GenAI responsibly in their careers. Progressive attitudes thus embraced the positive contributions that GenAI could make in educational settings, particularly in EEPP, and many of these participants noted that they were actively exploring the use of GenAI in their teaching practice.

GenAI as a Learning Aid

One of the most significant themes that emerged in relation to the progressive attitude to GenAI was its use in enhancing student learning through scaffolding literacy practices. Some participants noted that they demonstrated the responsible use of GenAI to their students in a transparent way rather than avoiding discussing the tool. One participant who works in a STEM field explained: "I recently showed students how to use Copilot to summarise a reading. They were shocked that this was possible. I have encouraged them to use it as an assistant in their learning." Participants noted multiple uses of GenAI to enhance learning, including "assisting learning/finding content/summarising or locating information," "as a time-saver, interlocuter and adjunct," "reduce cognitive load [and] generate ideas beyond one person's cognitive ability," and "to articulate responses and ideas." One participant explained that GenAI could be supportive when learning complex content "to enable them to take a deeper dive. For example, breaking down terms, giving explanations in simple terms. From this, students are building their understanding and discourse." Participants with progressive views also emphasised that GenAI did not necessarily restrict critical

thinking, but could even encourage criticality, as one participant explained: “If done correctly, it teaches them to think about the question being asked, to analyze [sic] the responses to see if they are appropriate or not, re-direct/re-ask their questions, focus on particular points.” Interestingly, participants likened GenAI to other assistive tools that have become commonplace and accepted in learning. A participant explained: “I’ve found it to be a bit like a smarter version of myself using a thesaurus when I was in primary school,” and another noted, “It is similar to Googling (for research) and Microsoft Word error correction.” This comparison to other assistive tools demonstrates how progressive attitudes were much less threatened by GenAI in education and were often already embracing these tools as a normalised part of learning processes.

Accessibility and inclusivity

One of the major benefits of GenAI in education emphasised by progressive participants was that it could increase access to education and create more inclusive learning environments for learners with diverse needs. One participant explained that their inclusion of GenAI tools as resources for students “has helped some of the students who struggle with reading and writing, and those who are neuro-divergent or have a disability.” Another participant echoed this sentiment by explaining: “It can help students with disabilities, so it is a great tool to increase accessibility ... I think GenAI has the capacity to significantly empower students with learning and language challenges.” Within EEPP, some participants with more progressive perspectives noted that GenAI could help improve students’ written outputs so that they are not constrained by their potential lack of access to traditional academic literacies. For example: “It has the potential of allowing equity students with lower literacy levels to produce a higher standard of writing.”

Preparation for future workplaces

A final significant theme characterising progressive responses was that working with GenAI in educational spaces would better prepare learners for future work in various industries as AI becomes increasingly commonplace. One participant explained that they saw it as a responsibility for educators to prepare learners to use GenAI: “In the modern working world, they are potentially going to use it anyway so I feel we should be teaching them to use it effectively now.” Another participant felt that working transparently with AI tools was important both in educational spaces and in workplaces, noting that a useful activity is “for students to use GenAI and explain how they used it, and how they improved on what they found from GenAI generated texts or ideas. This is what they will need to know how to do in their workplaces.” Another participant explained that being able to use GenAI would be a marketable and even essential skill for employees: “I think the employees of the future will be evaluated on their AI crafting prowess ... not whether they wrote every word themselves over a much longer timeframe, and with associated angst and struggle.” For those with a progressive attitude, AI is integrated with work in industry and will increasingly be relied on to improve efficiency. Essentially, these participants view GenAI as an inevitability and as something that cannot be avoided but must be acknowledged and embraced to authentically prepare learners to participate in modern workplaces.

Discussion

This study explores educators’ perspectives and attitudes on the use of GenAI within EEPP. The research team undertook the study to investigate how GenAI is perceived among the educators in the Enabling sector. The study has shown some of the major concerns that Enabling Educators

have about GenAI, as well as demonstrated how educators are already using these tools in productive ways to enhance learning. Understanding educators' perspectives is crucial for developing effective strategies to integrate GenAI into EEPP while addressing important concerns. The analysis reveals that, while the perspectives expressed by Enabling Educators can be categorised as Reluctant, Progressive and Ambivalent, the participants themselves often do not neatly fit into these discrete categories. Participants often expressed complex views on a continuum across these categories. Notably, a significant proportion of educators expressed Ambivalent views (20%) or had a mixture of Ambivalent and either Reluctant or Progressive views (55%). Some participants even expressed views ranging across the three categories. This finding shows that the initial assumption of clear-cut categories is in fact more nuanced, as many participants demonstrated complex and even seemingly contradictory attitudes. The findings also demonstrate that interventions in this space, such as professional development opportunities or the integration of AI assistive tools, could be very effective to help staff become more comfortable with GenAI.

A reassuring observation from our survey is that all participants reported some level of knowledge and understanding of GenAI tools, with the majority indicating basic to moderate levels of knowledge. However, some educators did note a lack of knowledge in actually implementing GenAI in teaching and learning, suggesting that training and professional development support would be beneficial. There was also very little evidence of outright opposition to GenAI use or its incorporation in teaching and learning, and there was a widespread acknowledgment of GenAI's potential to enhance teaching and learning experiences, even among those with more Reluctant views. Despite this openness, those with Reluctant and Ambivalent perspectives raised concerns about academic integrity, achieving learning outcomes and the appropriateness of GenAI in the Enabling sector. This final point is especially significant as EEPP is seen as a key priority for increasing participation from under-represented groups in the Australian Universities Accord (Department of Education, 2024). It is important that Enabling Educators' openness to GenAI is leveraged to the benefit of students but also that it is balanced with tailored solutions to meet the needs of the unique student population. Students in EEPP require holistic support as they might lack confidence in their ability to succeed in higher education (Nieuwoudt et al., 2025). Enabling students require appropriate academic literacies, and GenAI-related policies and practices must take into account recent research showing that frequent AI tool usage might lead to reduced critical thinking abilities due to increased cognitive offloading, particularly among younger people (Gerlich, 2025). There is a clear need to re-evaluate and potentially redesign curricula and assessment tasks to incorporate GenAI in ways that support, rather than undermine, the development of critical academic skills. Thus, the Progressive attitudes of those in EEPP should be balanced with sound research on the outcomes for students in programs that incorporate GenAI tools, as well as students' success in subsequent undergraduate degrees.

The survey results also highlight a tension between perceived benefits and concerns regarding GenAI use. While educators recognised potential benefits such as creative possibilities for teaching and learning, student preparation for future careers, and potential workload reductions, more concerns were expressed overall which encompassed maintaining academic integrity, students meeting learning outcomes, and the ethical implications of using GenAI. This imbalance between benefits and concerns underscores the complex challenges facing Enabling Educators as they navigate the integration of GenAI into their teaching practices. Academic integrity and

responsible use of GenAI are major considerations across the higher education sector (Yusuf et al., 2024). A significant challenge is the lack of consensus on what constitutes responsible use of GenAI in academic contexts (Griffin & James, 2025). Universities have vastly differing policies, discourses and support services regarding GenAI use, and very few EEPP have clear guidelines around the type of uses that would be appropriate for their students. As one participant in the survey aptly stated: “Responsible is a relative term—and in our area, highly debated. No agreement has been reached on what is responsible, therefore at the moment no use is accepted. It produces a situation of mutual suspicion.” This sentiment highlights the urgent need for clear guidelines and ongoing dialogue within the EEPP community to establish shared understandings of responsible GenAI use.

One significant aspect highlighted in the Progressive perspective is GenAI's potential as a learning aid and a tool for enhancing accessibility and inclusivity in education. James and Andrews (2024) argue that GenAI could potentially close educational gaps for equity students and that critical GenAI literacies must become an important part of EEPP. However, this must be balanced against concerns about equity of access to advanced AI tools and the potential for these tools to exacerbate existing educational disparities. If the Enabling sector is to meet the goal of increasing participation and reaching equity of outcomes in higher education, they must guard against GenAI becoming a further tool that entrenches inequalities due to a lack of access or insufficient training in the Enabling space. Institutions need to develop clear, nuanced policies on GenAI use that go beyond simple prohibitions. These policies should provide guidance on responsible use and help students and educators in the Enabling space navigate the ethical complexities of AI. An example of this is the *Responsible Use of GenAI* framework developed by Griffin and James (2025) to help students use critical thinking whilst immersed in the productive struggle required for deeper cognition and understanding. There is also a pressing need for comprehensive professional development programs for Enabling Educators to have sufficient AI literacy and confidence in integrating GenAI into their teaching practices. The voices of those with Reluctant, Ambivalent and Progressive viewpoints must be valued in debates and must be taken seriously in charting a way forward for EEPP in the age of AI.

Practical implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for the Enabling Education and EEPP sector. First, there is a clear need for targeted professional development to build educators’ confidence and skills in integrating GenAI into teaching and learning, particularly in ways that support equity students and maintain academic integrity. Institutions should provide structured guidance and clear policies around responsible GenAI use, moving beyond blanket prohibitions to frameworks that support both ethical and pedagogically effective adoption. Further to this, curricula and assessment tasks may need to be redesigned to incorporate GenAI in ways that enhance learning without undermining critical thinking or foundational academic skills. Additionally, given the diverse and nuanced perspectives among educators, from Reluctant to Progressive, ongoing dialogue and consultation within EEPP communities are essential to ensure that interventions reflect educators’ experiences and address their concerns. Finally, careful attention must be paid to equitable access to AI tools, so that GenAI acts as a supportive resource rather than exacerbating existing educational disparities, affording students from non-traditional backgrounds to fully benefit from these emerging technologies.

Limitations

This study is limited by the sample size of 47 participants. While diverse and generally reflecting the Enabling sector's demographics, this sample may not be fully representative of the perspectives of all Enabling Educators across Australia. Second, the self-reported nature of the data may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly given the contentious nature of GenAI in education. Third, the rapid evolution of GenAI technology means that educators' perspectives may have shifted since data collection. Finally, the study's focus on Enabling Educators' perspectives does not capture the views of others in the field, including students and professional staff. These perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of GenAI's impact in EEPP. Future research should address these limitations to build a more robust picture of GenAI's role in this context.

Conclusion

This study reveals a complex landscape of educator perspectives on GenAI in EEPP, with attitudes spanning Reluctant, Ambivalent and Progressive viewpoints. The article responds to the research questions by finding that educators hold both concerns and optimism about GenAI's role in teaching and learning. Issues surrounding academic integrity, skill development, and pedagogical appropriateness were frequently raised, yet participants also recognised the potential for GenAI to enhance creativity, streamline workload, and support more effective learning experiences. These findings illustrate that perspectives are not neatly bounded; instead, many educators occupy overlapping or shifting positions along a broader continuum. In addressing the research question relating to equity, the study shows that educators see meaningful potential for GenAI to support students who are developing academic literacies or navigating the transition into higher education. Participants noted possible benefits for language development, accessibility and confidence-building. However, concerns were also expressed about equitable access to tools, varied levels of digital literacy, and the risk of over-reliance on GenAI undermining core academic skills, highlighting the need for thoughtful, context-sensitive implementation. The research question concerning barriers and facilitators to GenAI integration were reflected in educators' emphasis on the importance of clear institutional policy, coherent definitions of responsible use, and targeted professional development that builds confidence and capability. Participants indicated that curriculum design and assessment will need re-thinking to ensure GenAI supports rather than compromises learning outcomes. Collectively, these insights provide a nuanced understanding of educators' current positions in relation to GenAI and suggest practical directions for supporting adoption in the Enabling sector. By recognising the diversity of views and addressing both opportunities and concerns, EEPP can integrate GenAI in ways that uphold equity, safeguard academic integrity and enhance learning. Future research could examine the impact of tailored professional development, evolving GenAI policy settings and the long-term outcomes of GenAI use for equity students transitioning into undergraduate study.

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