ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

Exploring GenAI in assessment and feedback: Insights from postcards of practice

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As Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) rapidly enters higher education, its implications for assessment and feedback require urgent, practice-informed exploration. This study investigates how educators at UNSW - a large Australian university - are engaging with GenAI in their teaching, drawing on data from the institution's "Postcards of Practice" initiative; a short, reflective narratives of GenAI use in assessment contexts. Through a qualitative interpretive methodology, including thematic analysis of interviews and postcard content, the research explores educators' experiences, comfort levels, perceived challenges, and support needs. Findings are expected to reveal diverse levels of GenAI adoption shaped by disciplinary context, ethical concerns, and usability perceptions. The study also anticipates a strong call for targeted professional development, institutional guidance, and customisable GenAI tools. This research foregrounds educators' micro-level decision-making to contribute to the growing body of work on formative assessment, feedback literacy, and ethical AI integration. It positions GenAI not as a threat, but as an opportunity to reimagine assessment as a dialogic, developmental process.

Keywords: AI in education, postcards of practice. assessment, feedback literacy, educator experiences

Introduction

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) represents a significant shift in the landscape of higher education, particularly affecting how assessment and feedback are understood and implemented. GenAI refers to AI systems (such as ChatGPT) that generate human-like content based on user input, revolutionising traditional educational paradigms (Sol et al., 2025). Educators globally recognise the potential of GenAI to innovate assessment practices, facilitate faster feedback cycles, and enhance personalised learning experiences. However, alongside these benefits, GenAI introduces substantial challenges related to academic integrity, equitable assessment, and educator readiness (Sol et al., 2025). The significance of integrating GenAI into HE lies in its potential to transform pedagogical methods and in its ability to elevate student engagement through tailored, rapid feedback mechanisms (Henderson et al., 2025; Zhan & Yan, 2025). Nonetheless, these advantages are balanced by genuine concerns about the ethical implications of AI-generated content and the preparedness of educators to implement and manage GenAI tools effectively.

The primary aim of this research is to explore educators' experiences with GenAI through qualitative analysis of their responses to "Postcards of Practice," investigating their support needs and the demand for custom-built GenAI solutions. As data collection is ongoing at the time of submission, this paper presents the study as an early-stage investigation. It focuses on the research design, conceptual framing, and preliminary themes

arising from educator reflections. A more complete analysis will follow in future work as interview data are finalised and synthesised.

Project rationale

Evolution from summative to formative assessment

Assessment in HE has undergone significant evolution, moving from predominantly summative evaluations, which emphasise the measurement of learning outcomes at the end of instruction, towards formative approaches characterised by ongoing, developmental feedback. Formative assessment prioritises learner progression through continuous interactions and adjustments, rather than merely judging learning after the fact (Cotton et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023). Recent pedagogical shifts underscore the role of formative practices in facilitating deeper learning, highlighting feedback as central to effective teaching and student development (Nicol, 2010; Sol et al., 2025). GenAI complements this pedagogical shift by providing educators and learners with timely, targeted, and iterative feedback opportunities. GenAI technologies, such as ChatGPT, enable more frequent and immediate feedback, aligning closely with formative assessment principles by supporting continuous dialogue, personalisation, and the real-time adjustment of teaching and learning strategies (Henderson et al., 2025; Venter et al., 2025; Zhan & Yan, 2025).

Feedback literacies

Central to effectively integrating GenAI into formative assessment processes is the concept of feedback literacy. Feedback literacy refers to students' and educators' abilities to understand, interpret, and utilise feedback effectively (Carless & Boud, 2018; Winstone & Carless, 2020). Developing students' feedback literacy involves enhancing their capacity to actively engage with feedback, critically reflect on it, and incorporate feedback into subsequent learning tasks. Essential competencies include evaluative judgement, prompt engineering skills, metacognitive capabilities, and emotional regulation when processing feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018; Nicol, 2010; Zhan & Yan, 2025). GenAI can play a significant role in nurturing feedback literacies by providing highly customised, timely, and actionable feedback, thus facilitating deeper student reflection and active participation in feedback processes (Henderson et al., 2025; Venter et al., 2025). However, educators must themselves be feedback literate to effectively leverage these technologies and guide students in their productive use (Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Empirical insights from recent literature

Recent studies demonstrate varied practices among educators integrating GenAI into teaching and assessment. Applications range from employing GenAI to produce interactive learning content, generate formative feedback, and assist with project-based assessments (Belkina et al., 2025). Despite emerging practices, educators display considerable diversity in their attitudes towards GenAI adoption, highlighting both enthusiasm for innovative pedagogical approaches and caution due to ethical concerns and reliability of AI-generated content (Nikolic et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023; Wu et al., 2025). Educator attitudes towards GenAI are broadly positive when they perceive clear pedagogical benefits, such as improved efficiency, enhanced student engagement, and innovative assessment possibilities (Cotton et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025). Nevertheless, significant barriers to adoption remain, notably educators' concerns about academic integrity, authenticity of student work, potential misuse of technology, and limited personal expertise or confidence in GenAI applications (Cotton et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023).

From the student perspective, GenAI tools are generally viewed positively due to their convenience, speed of feedback delivery, reduced anxiety around assessment tasks, and the potential for personalised learning (Henderson et al., 2025; Zhan & Yan, 2025). Despite these advantages, students express persistent concerns regarding the trustworthiness, accuracy, and contextual relevance of AI-generated feedback, suggesting a cautious optimism and a need for careful integration into educational practices (Henderson et al., 2025). Similarly, GenAI significantly enhances feedback mechanisms by providing immediate, detailed, and tailored feedback, facilitating student self-regulation and reflective learning (Nicol, 2010; Venter et al., 2025).

Immediate feedback opportunities offered by GenAI tools can encourage students to actively engage with feedback, iterate on their work promptly, and ultimately improve learning outcomes (Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Effective implementation of GenAI tools into higher education assessment practices necessitates substantial professional development for educators. Recent literature highlights critical training needs, including developing educators' AI literacy, supporting critical assessment of AI-generated content, and encouraging pedagogical skills for integrating GenAI into their teaching practices (Belkina et al., 2025; Nikolic et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023). Many educators currently express confusion, uncertainty, or anxiety about how to effectively and ethically use GenAI, underscoring the urgency for robust training and support mechanisms.

Identifying the research gap

The rise of GenAI in higher education raises crucial pedagogical and ethical questions, particularly concerning assessment and feedback practices. To date, substantial attention has been paid to policy-making, detection of AI-generated content, and managing academic integrity (Cotton et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023). Yet, there remains limited empirical insight into how educators are practically incorporating GenAI into their pedagogical strategies at a micro-level, particularly regarding their formative assessment and feedback practices. This research addresses this identified gap by exploring educator-led "Postcards of Practice" initiatives at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). These postcards, brief reflective narratives, capture authentic, practice-based experiences of educators trialling GenAI tools across diverse disciplinary contexts (UNSW, 2024). Guided by holistic thematic analysis informed by existing GenAI frameworks and guidelines (Liu & Bridgeman, 2023; Perkins, 2023; UNSW, 2025) , this study seeks to illuminate the nuanced, micro-level decision-making processes educators engage in when incorporating GenAI.

To address the identified gap, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do educators perceive and experience the use of GenAI in assessment and feedback practices?
2. Do educators express a need for additional support, training, or custom-built GenAI solutions to embed GenAI effectively into their assessment and feedback practices?

Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology to explore how educators are engaging with GenAI in assessment and feedback practices. The research focuses on educators' experiences, perceived challenges, and support needs; particularly in response to the institution's "Postcards of Practice" initiative. These postcards function not only as artefacts of innovative teaching practice but also as catalysts for professional reflection and community learning. The research is framed within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, which is appropriate for capturing the situated, subjective experiences of educators experimenting with GenAI tools in real-world contexts. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how educators perceive the pedagogical implications of GenAI, how they are navigating practical and ethical challenges, and what forms of support they require to embed these technologies into their assessment practices.

The Postcards of Practice - single-page, double-sided narratives contributed by educators at UNSW- serve as both research data and professional learning tools. These postcards document emerging practices in areas such as formative feedback generation, AI prompting literacy, assessment redesign, and co-creation with GenAI. Viewed holistically, they reflect a shifting landscape in assessment design, where transparency, skill-building, and ethical student use are increasingly foregrounded. Participants will be recruited from a pool of educators at UNSW who have either contributed to the Postcards of Practice or expressed interest in GenAI-supported assessment. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to ensure diversity across disciplines, levels of experience with GenAI, and types of assessment practices. Primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with educators. These interviews will explore:

- Educators' motivations and experiences in using GenAI tools
- Perceived opportunities and risks of GenAI in assessment and feedback

- Comfort levels and confidence in navigating GenAI capabilities
- Institutional and pedagogical barriers encountered
- Views on professional development, training needs, and the potential for customised GenAI solutions

Analytical approach

Thematic analysis will be used to analyse both the interview transcripts and the content of the Postcards of Practice. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the analysis will involve: 1) Familiarisation with the data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes and 6) Producing the final analysis

Coding will be both inductive and deductive: inductively to allow new insights to emerge from the data, and deductively guided by theoretical concepts such as feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018; Winstone & Carless, 2020) and the dialogic model of assessment (Nicol, 2010).

The postcards will also be analysed thematically to identify shared values, emergent practices, and discipline-specific patterns in GenAI adoption. These artefacts serve a dual purpose: they offer a window into educators' micro-level decision-making and function as boundary objects supporting professional dialogue and change across diverse academic contexts.

Expected outcomes

The study is expected to reveal a spectrum of educator attitudes and comfort levels in adopting GenAI for assessment and feedback. These differences are likely to be shaped by a range of factors, including disciplinary context, perceived usability of GenAI tools, concerns about trustworthiness of AI-generated output, and broader ethical considerations related to academic integrity and transparency. It is anticipated that the findings will identify a consistent demand for structured and ongoing professional support. This includes a need for expert-led workshops, hands-on demonstrations, and tailored training programs designed to build educators' confidence in integrating GenAI meaningfully into their pedagogical practices.

Additionally, the research is expected to surface calls for the development of customisable, institution-specific GenAI solutions. These tools would ideally accommodate the diverse assessment strategies used across disciplines and enable educators to align GenAI use with their own teaching philosophies, curriculum goals, and academic standards. Ultimately, the findings will contribute to shaping institutional strategies for responsible and pedagogically sound integration of GenAI in higher education.

While the study seeks to capture diverse educator experiences, we acknowledge limitations in how these findings may be shaped by contextual factors. Variations in discipline, educator role (e.g., teaching-focused vs. research-active), and individual digital confidence are likely to influence both the adoption and interpretation of GenAI tools. These dimensions will be explored during analysis and considered in reporting to ensure the findings reflect the complexity of real-world teaching environments.

Conclusion

This study highlights the pivotal role educators play in shaping how GenAI is integrated into assessment and feedback practices. Through the lens of Postcards of Practice, it becomes clear that while GenAI offers powerful opportunities for innovation and personalisation, its effective use depends on educator confidence, ethical awareness, and institutional support. To move forward, universities must invest in professional development and create flexible, context-sensitive frameworks that empower educators to use GenAI responsibly and creatively. In doing so, GenAI can become a meaningful companion for enhancing learning, rather than a source of disruption.

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