ASCILITE 2026

The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

From AI fatigue to compassionate practice: Building student AI literacy through continuous feedback and reflective practice

Gitte Galea
CQ University

Michael A. Cowling
RMIT University

The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant challenges in higher education, often leading to student dependency and educator "AI fatigue." Despite policy calls for assessment reform, practical, evidence-based approaches to developing critical AI literacy remain limited. This paper addresses this gap by presenting a practice-based curriculum case study and reflective inquiry investigating the structural redesign of a multidisciplinary Information and Communications Technology (ICT) unit. Moving away from surveillance and AI detection, the curriculum was redesigned to decompose high-stakes assessments into a scaffolded, low-stakes formative feedback sequence. Employing a Reflective Teaching Practice (RTP) methodology grounded in Schön's reflective practitioner framework, the inquiry evaluates this curriculum redesign through the educator's professional reflective diary and theoretical student persona modelling. Theoretical learning archetypes were constructed to evaluate how the scaffolded structures support diverse student AI literacy profiles. Educator reflective logs highlighted strategies for managing AI dependency and inflated expectations around AI, suggesting that scaffolded AI literacy and personally relevant assessments helped mitigate cognitive offloading. Ultimately, this inquiry suggests that navigating the AI landscape requires a return to foundational, compassionate pedagogical principles, prioritising continuous feedback and structured self-reflection to support positioning AI as a meaningful learning opportunity rather than a disruptive academic burden.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI literacy, continuous feedback, reflective practice, academic integrity, higher education, reflective case study

Introduction

Since the release of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in late 2022, higher education has experienced significant shifts in learning and teaching (Lo et al, 2024). The rapid proliferation of these technologies has disrupted traditional assessment models, prompting an urgent need to reconsider how learning is evidenced and evaluated (Slimi, 2026). While national regulatory guidance, such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) discussion paper by Lodge et al. (2023), emphasises the necessity of assessment reform, these frameworks remain high-level and non-prescriptive, leaving disciplinary educators to navigate varied and complex implementations (Striepe et al., 2023). Consequently, students often lack clear, practical guidance on how to engage with these powerful AI tools productively and ethically (Alsharefeen & Al Sayari, 2025).

These challenges became particularly pronounced in late 2025 within the educator's (first author) teaching context, where managing AI use contributed to a sense of "AI fatigue," an ongoing tension between policing academic integrity and delivering meaningful learning experiences. This fatigue was compounded by the limitations of AI detection tools, which are known to produce unreliable findings, including false positives and bias toward certain writing styles, thereby undermining trust (Deep et al., 2025). Addressing this issue required rethinking pedagogical approaches beyond traditional compliance models. Rather than positioning AI use solely as an integrity concern, a more learner-centred and compassionate approach was needed to better understand students' capabilities, backgrounds, and practices.

Emerging scholarship highlights the limitations of one-size-fits all approaches for diverse AI learning behaviours and emphasises the value of adaptive strategies (Matthews, 2025; Tudor et al., 2025). Building meaningful AI literacy

requires a continuous, reflective, and feedback-rich curriculum design (Dawson et al., 2019). Scaffolding low-stakes assessments and integrating feedback loops are proven to support deeper learning and help identify student misconceptions early in the learning process (Solis Trujillo et al., 2025). Furthermore, there is a clear gap in evidence-based, practical curriculum designs that systematically develops critical AI literacy while mitigating dependency within diverse classroom environments. This paper addresses this gap by presenting a comprehensive curriculum redesign of an elective multidisciplinary ICT unit. It details the transition from high-stakes assessments to a continuous, scaffolded, feedback-rich framework. Rather than conducting an empirical study on student subjects, this paper presents a practice-based reflective case study of curriculum redesign. It explores the systematic design, implementation, and evaluation of this pedagogical model, addressing the following core question:

How can compassionate, feedback-rich assessment design support critical AI literacy and reduce patterns of cognitive offloading among higher education students?

Background

Redesigning assessments to address generative AI challenges requires grounding curriculum decisions in established educational theory rather than ad-hoc fixes. Isolated interventions, such as standalone integrity tutorials, fail to alter long-term student habits (Galea, 2025). To establish a workable pedagogical framework, this study synthesises three theoretical pillars:

First, the curriculum architecture is anchored in constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) and formative feedback theory (Dawson et al., 2019). Decomposing high-stakes tasks into continuous, low-stakes feedback loops provides early intervention points where learning misconceptions can be identified and corrected before summative submission (Solis Trujillo et al., 2025).

Second, to address student over-reliance on generative AI outputs, the design integrates research on cognitive offloading and dependency (Espartinez, 2025; Ortiz-Bonnin & Blahopoulou, 2025). Rather than banning AI tools, the curriculum incorporates prompt engineering techniques (Microsoft, 2026) and the SIFT framework (Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace) (Hendrigan et al., 2024) to scaffold critical evaluation skills, guiding students from passive acceptance of AI text toward active verification.

Finally, the overarching philosophy is governed by compassionate pedagogy (Waddington & Bonaparte, 2024). In an era marked by punitive AI surveillance and unreliable detection tools (Deep et al., 2025), compassionate practice prioritises relational trust, student wellbeing, and flexible pathways. By valuing student lived experience and authentic voice, this framework seeks to move beyond compliance-focused approaches by addressing the educational, motivational, and contextual factors that shape student engagement with generative AI.

Methodology

This paper presents a reflective case study grounded in the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoTL), positioning teaching practice as both the context for inquiry and the object of systematic investigation. At its core, the methodology is informed by reflective teaching (RT) and reflective teaching practice (RTP) (Kolajo, 2025). Drawing on Schön's (1992) conception of the reflective practitioner, the study conceptualises teaching as an ongoing process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, enabling the educator to respond to emerging challenges while examining and refining practice over time. In this study, the educator is examining the consequences of design decisions and using that analysis to inform ongoing refinements and future practice. This is supported by contemporary discussions of RTP, which distinguish between reflection embedded within practice and reflection undertaken to inform subsequent improvement (Kolajo, 2025). Crucially, this reflective foundation is viewed through the lens of compassionate pedagogy (Waddington & Bonaparte, 2024), which extends reflection beyond cognitive processes to include ethical and relational considerations. This perspective ensures that technological interventions are human-centred, flexible, and continuously evaluated for their impact on student wellbeing and engagement (Schön, 1992). Furthermore, compassionate practice allows for flexibility in assessment design and understanding student needs and motivations.

The paper reports no empirical student data, surveys, or direct quotes from coursework. Materials consist exclusively of curriculum artefacts and the educator's reflective diary tracking generalised cohort observations. Grounded in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), student privacy was safeguarded through immediate, high-level de-identification without storing personal identifiers or individual submissions. Under institutional policy, formal ethics review was not required as the inquiry constitutes self-reflective evaluation of professional practice rather than human participant research.

Pedagogical frameworks and intervention design

The current educational landscape requires careful consideration of AI, both to develop student understanding and to support its responsible use, so that learning outcomes are achieved honestly and meaningfully. To operationalise this within the reflective case study methodology, the unit redesign focused on embedding AI literacy content and activities comprehensively throughout the curricula for an elective undergraduate multidisciplinary ICT unit. Within this integrated framework, the redesign was approached as a practice-based inquiry, drawing on the educator's prior experience as a business analyst. This informed a structured approach akin to workflow analysis, enabling the systematic identification of assessment gaps and opportunities to embed responsible AI practices. As illustrated in Figure 1, the existing assessment design reflected legacy practices from the COVID-19 period, characterised by online delivery and take-home examinations.

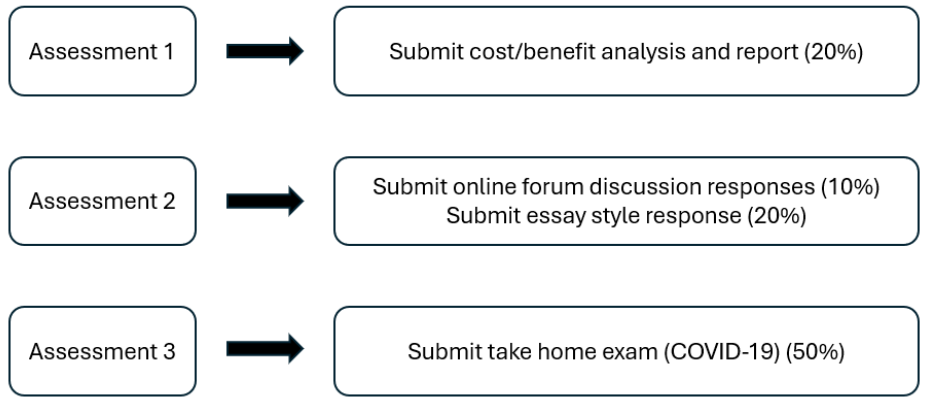


Figure 1. Current state assessments with student requirements before redesign

The redesign process, illustrated in Figure 2, involved decomposing assessment tasks to map targeted formative feedback opportunities and create continuous, low-stakes interventions that support student learning.

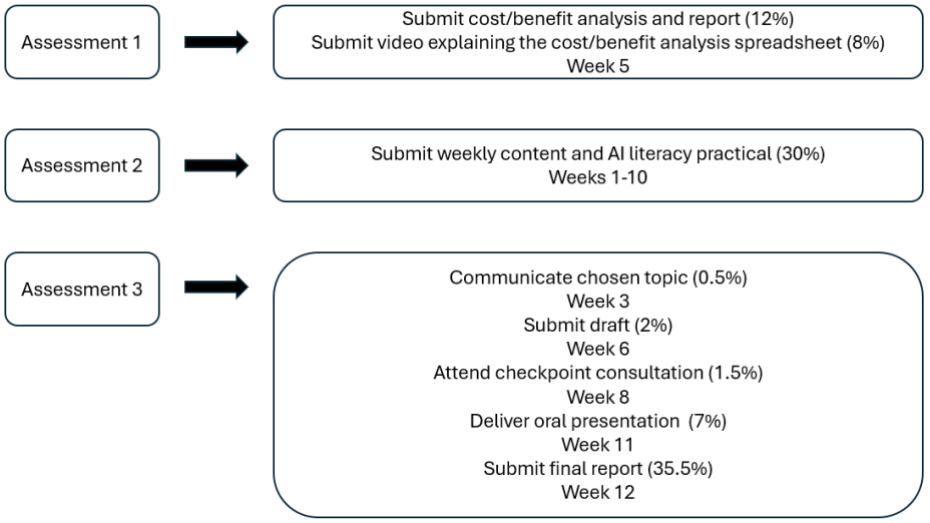


Figure 2. Target state assessments with student requirements after redesign

The curriculum redesign was structured as a practice-based inquiry. It translated workflow analysis techniques (derived from the educator's background) into pedagogical modelling, systematically decomposing legacy assessments to embed targeted, low-stakes feedback opportunities. The redesign incorporated two core literacy frameworks. The SIFT framework was used to guide students in critically evaluating and verifying AI-generated outputs (Hendrigan et al., 2024). Compassionate technology principles informed the adaptation of assessment parameters to reduce anxiety and accommodate students' diverse cognitive starting points. Guided by principles of belonging, caring, respect, kindness, and authentic educator-student relationships, the design sought to support student learning and engagement while maintaining academic standards (Waddington & Bonaparte, 2024).

Theoretical persona modelling

To account for the multidisciplinary and diverse nature of the student cohort without utilising empirical student data, this study incorporates theoretical persona modelling as an analytical planning tool (Cooper, 2004; Farooq et al., 2025). Rather than representing groupings of real students or summarising anonymised empirical responses, these personas are constructed as hypothetical archetypes and cognitive starting points to guide design choices (Cooper, 2004). Given the impossibility of addressing every potential use case, personas were used to capture different patterns of AI-related beliefs and behaviours and to systematically anticipate AI literacy. Four personas were developed from the literature, drawing on the work of Farooq et al. (2025).

Personas serve as conceptual, user-centred design models in software development and have long been used by developers to understand different users in the unpredictable world of software development (Pruitt & Adlin, 2006). Drawing on this approach, learner archetypes were developed to better understand how students with differing levels of AI literacy, motivation, beliefs about AI and technology use might engage with redesigned assessment tasks. The personas are grounded in established higher education literature regarding student AI beliefs and behaviours (Tudor et al., 2025). By mapping these theoretical archetypes against the curriculum redesign, the study evaluates how different structural elements of the redesigned unit (such as continuous low-stakes quizzes versus one-on-one checkpoint meetings) theoretically scaffold support for diverse student profiles. These personas (Table 1) provide a structured means of anticipating and interpreting variation in student AI literacy, AI capability, and learning approaches, allowing the educator to reflect and adapt targeted interventions to suit each persona.

Table 1.
Theoretical student archetypes for AI curriculum scaffolding and targeted intervention

Persona	AI Learner archetype	Theoretical grounding	Core characteristic	Intervention
1	AI hesitant	Tech anxiety (Matobobo, 2026)	Prefers manual work. Risk of low AI literacy due to manual work preference.	Week 2 Copilot tutorial
2	AI transitioner	Limited understanding of AI and implications (Metzgar, 2026)	Low AI literacy. High risk of cognitive offloading.	Continuous low-stakes quizzes
3	Pragmatic AI user	Self-directed exploration of AI (Alsharefeen & Al Sayari, 2025)	Highly proficient using AI as a tool. Medium risk of using AI as a shortcut.	SIFT Framework
4	AI output optimiser	Last minute underperformer (Tudor et al., 2025)	Focuses on high-speed output and grades. AI efficiency. Very high risk of outsourcing critical thinking.	One-on-one checkpoints and scaffolded oral milestones

Findings

The findings presented in this section arise from the structured implementation of a redesigned ICT unit and the educator's reflective evaluation of the process. Reflective diary logs and curriculum artefacts (reflective tasks, rubrics, and guides) were systematically reviewed using iterative qualitative synthesis, categorising observations

chronologically and thematically against Schön's (1992) reflective cycle and the theoretical persona archetypes. This synthesis mapped key observational patterns into core themes, examining how targeted interventions and compassionate practice principles addressed early indicators of AI dependency and informed ongoing pedagogical decisions.

Integrating AI literacy into the curriculum

A systematic analysis of the unit design was undertaken to evaluate the alignment between learning outcomes, content, tutorials, and assessment. All assessment tasks were identified as high risk for AI dependency, based on the educator's professional judgement and the application of a department-issued AI prompt used to evaluate susceptibility to AI-assisted responses. In addition, the legacy assessment design provided limited opportunities for formative feedback.

Following this analysis, the assessment structure was redesigned by decomposing major deliverables into smaller, manageable components. This approach enabled the integration of regular formative feedback points, supporting the ongoing development and evaluation of students' AI literacy. Furthermore, targeted reflective activities were introduced to provide iterative feedback, allowing students to identify and address errors and progressively improve their performance over time.

While the reflective activities provided a foundation for critiquing AI and developing AI literacy, it was necessary for the broader unit design to adopt a more integrated approach. Students required exposure to diverse applications of AI, alongside opportunities to critically evaluate its use in different contexts. In alignment with the unit curriculum, students were also prompted to consider the broader societal implications of AI, thereby encouraging personal relevance and engagement. Lecture content, tutorials, and weekly reflective activities, implemented as short online quizzes, were intentionally aligned to support the unit learning outcomes and the progressive development of AI literacy (Table 2).

Table 2.
Weekly quiz topics with embedded AI literacy activities

Quiz	Unit content topic	AI literacy topic	Due date
Week 1	IT Impact on Business	Introduction to AI tools	Sunday 29 March
Week 2	Gaining Competitive Advantage	Prompt engineering basics	Sunday 29 March
Week 3	Managing IT Infrastructure	AI for business communication	Sunday 29 March
Week 4	AI in Business Systems	AI in data analytics	Sunday 5 April
Week 5	Electronic Commerce	AI ethics	Sunday 12 April
Week 6	Communication and Collaboration	Academic integrity and AI	Sunday 19 April
Week 7	Business Intelligence	AI for research	Sunday 3 May
Week 8	Enterprise Solutions	AI in decision support	Sunday 10 May
Week 9	Business Management Systems	Mini business case	Sunday 17 May
Week 10	Acquiring Business Systems	Reflection and future skills	Sunday 24 May

To further promote responsible AI use and uphold academic integrity, detailed marking rubrics were developed to enhance the quality and consistency of feedback in assessments (Dawson et al., 2019). A reflective writing guide was also introduced to support the depth and quality of student reflections. In addition, the final assessment incorporated a draft submission stage, encouraging early engagement and enabling targeted feedback on both task development and the appropriate use of AI. The inclusion of an individual oral presentation in Week 11, prior to submission of the final report, provided further opportunities for personalised feedback, particularly in refining the focus and depth of student work, areas that are often less effectively supported by AI-generated responses.

To provide students with structured learning on how to use AI, in Week 2 students were introduced to *Write a great prompt in Microsoft 365 Copilot* (Microsoft, 2026) with a practical activity in the tutorial. The prompting activities laid the foundation for AI use in the unit; using AI purposefully and responsibly. To further support student learning on how to evaluate AI output from prompting, an activity was developed using the SIFT framework (Hendrigan et al., 2024). To complement the activities of prompting and evaluating AI, reflective writing questions were developed and embedded within quizzes that deliberately intertwined unit content with AI-related topics (Table 2).

Addressing early AI dependency through reflection-in-action

Initially, evaluating the reflective writing submissions presented a significant pedagogical challenge. The ubiquity of generative AI complicates traditional assessment, as educators must navigate the nuanced distinction between the unethical outsourcing of critical thought and the legitimate use of AI for linguistic support, particularly for students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Early observations of student submissions revealed a strong tendency to copy and paste AI-generated text from some students. This challenge became particularly evident by the third week of the term; as documented in the educator's reflective diary, there were pedagogical concerns regarding cognitive dependency on AI:

> *Three students marked in the first lot of marking. Two of them used AI in a way I want to stop. Superficial responses most likely generated using AI* 😟*… How to stop these superficial responses?* (Reflective diary, Week 3)

Engaging in reflection-in-action, the educator responded to this challenge by redesigning the subsequent quiz prompts to require more personal, context-specific reflections and embed clear instructions on how the reflective writing would be assessed. While some instances of AI dependency remained evident in the quizzes, these moments were viewed as opportunities for growth (for both educator and student) rather than setbacks. This approach prompted the educator to provide timely, targeted, and constructive feedback aimed at reshaping student behaviour and understanding. Furthermore, it challenged the educator to critically evaluate and improve how reflective writing expectations were communicated. In response, the instructions for all assessments were significantly strengthened over the term.

Over the course of the term, the educator's diary recorded an observed progression in the depth and reflective quality of student submissions. The weekly low-stakes quizzes served as a safe, non-punitive training ground where early over-reliance on AI could be identified and addressed through constructive, relational feedback. The educator interpreted these evolving submission patterns as reflecting a shift from passive trust in generative AI tools toward more active, critical evaluation. For example, subsequent diary logs noted that students who initially presented high risk for academic offloading (aligning with the Output Optimizer/Persona 4 profile) began to explicitly document their realisation that unverified copying and pasting from generative AI tools ultimately hollowed out their own conceptual learning, indicating a growing appreciation for autonomy and ownership.

Responding to AI dependency

In Week 6, a key pedagogical encounter documented in the reflective diary highlighted the deeper psychological drivers of student AI dependency. This encounter occurred during a standard consultation with a student whose profile aligned with the AI transitioner archetype (Persona 2). This student had successfully completed the manual learning tasks in class yet chose to submit an AI-generated version for feedback. As recorded in the educator's reflective diary:

> *The student had completed the spreadsheet exercises manually and correctly but still chose to run the task through ChatGPT before submitting. When queried, the student explained that the manual task felt too simple, whereas the AI generated a much more sophisticated output that made it appear more 'professional.' The student confessed to an almost automatic reliance on GenAI, frequently using ChatGPT to perform basic mathematical calculations instead of using a calculator. This type of inflated expectations around AI capabilities and desire for perfection can lead to students outsourcing their critical thinking, even when they know how to complete the work manually.'* (Reflective diary, Week 6)

This reflection reveals that AI dependency is not always driven by a desire to cheat or by a lack of capability; rather, it can be a signal of language barriers, and a misguided trust in the generative AI tool. To better understand the underlying causes of this behaviour, the educator consulted with the student regarding their motivations and learning experiences. Insights from this discussion informed adjustments to subsequent tutorial activities, which explicitly reinforced manual verification practices using the SIFT framework (Hendrigan et al., 2024). Reviewing weekly quiz submissions provided continuous touchpoints for the educator to identify emerging trends and offer targeted feedback reinforcing critical evaluation principles.

Cultivating agency and motivation

A core tenet of compassionate pedagogy involves maintaining high standards while providing flexible, adaptive pathways to support student engagement and learning (Waddington & Bonaparte, 2024). In Week 6, the educator's reflective diary recorded pedagogical concerns consistent with Persona 3 archetype; the disengagement with the summative assessment draft submissions and the risk of final reports containing *superficial, vague and verbose* AI-generated output (referred to in-diary as "AI slop"). To address these barriers, the educator modified the assessment parameters to provide greater autonomy and personal expression, allowing students to contextualise the final report around their personal interests, lived experiences, or professional aspirations. The educator noted an increase in student participation and enthusiasm following the introduction of greater curriculum flexibility. Furthermore, the educator's reflective diary recorded ongoing difficulties with a student exhibiting characteristics of the Persona 4 archetype, where early interventions failed to reduce reliance on generative AI. Through a supportive oral consultation, the educator adapted the framing of the final assessment and presentation to connect more closely with the student's lived experience. This personalised intervention appeared to increase engagement and ultimately supported successful assessment completion, as recorded in the educator's reflective diary:

> *Adjusted the report parameters to allow students to align the brief with their personal interests. The impact on motivation was immediate. One student who had previously shown high anxiety and minimal participation, consistent with the Persona 4 archetype, reframed their project around their own lived experience. This pivot unlocked enthusiastic motivation. During the Week 11 oral milestones, this student delivered a passionate presentation featuring multiple live software demonstrations, enthusiastically explaining how these concepts would apply to a future business venture. This transition from disengagement to absolute ownership suggests that flexible, personally relevant assessments serve as a promising approach to mitigate AI offloading.* (Reflective diary, Week 11)

This reflective observation suggests that aligning assessment tasks with students' lived experiences may help mitigate the impulse to outsource critical thinking.

Sustainability and educator capability development

The approach adopted in this study was intentionally exploratory and developmental in nature. Although the intensive assessment redesign, scaffolding, and responsive interventions implemented throughout the unit may not be readily sustainable at scale, the primary objective was to investigate practical strategies for disrupting the cycle of educator fatigue associated with detecting and policing inappropriate generative AI use. Existing approaches employed in 2025 were perceived by the educator as increasingly ineffective and unsustainable, necessitating a fundamental reconsideration of assessment design practices.

A key outcome of this process was the development of a deeper understanding of student AI archetypes and the diverse ways in which learners engage with generative AI technologies. Opportunities to observe emerging behaviours, implement targeted interventions, and reflect on these pedagogical decisions provided valuable insights into factors supporting or hindering student engagement in assessments within AI-enabled learning environments. This iterative process effectively accelerated the educator's understanding of assessment design challenges and opportunities in the era of generative AI.

The inquiry also highlighted the importance of ongoing educator capability development. As the study progressed, the educator recognised the need to strengthen their own capacity to evaluate reflective writing and distinguish between superficial and meaningful engagement. This led to iterative refinements of assessment instructions, scaffolding activities, student guidance materials, and rubric design, contributing to a more robust and informed assessment framework for supporting authentic student learning.

Discussion

Reflecting on the curriculum redesign of this elective ICT unit reveals broader insights into higher education pedagogy in the era of generative AI. The central research question inquired, *How can compassionate, feedback-rich assessment design support critical AI literacy and reduce patterns of cognitive offloading among higher education students?* The

findings suggest that resolving these challenges requires moving away from surveillance-based policing and toward structured, compassionate, and self-reflective learning environments.

Combatting the cycle of AI fatigue

"AI fatigue" is not an individual educator shortfall; rather, it is a symptom of structural misalignment within legacy assessment designs (Lodge, 2023). When assessments remain high-stakes and output-oriented, educators are forced into an unsustainable policing role, using unreliable detection tools that undermine student-educator trust (Deep et al., 2025).

By decomposing the curriculum into multiple low-stakes, formative milestones, this redesign successfully aligned assessment with constructive alignment principles (Biggs, 1996). Early instances of AI dependency were successfully intercepted when the stakes were low, allowing the educator to treat these moments as valuable "reflection-in-action" learning opportunities rather than disciplinary violations. This non-punitive, developmental approach supported a safe, relational learning environment where students felt comfortable discussing their generative AI struggles and uncertainties openly.

While the practical implementation of this approach may appear resource-intensive, its purpose was to examine how educators can design learning environments that support responsibility, reflective practice, and critical thinking, thereby preparing students for the complexities of contemporary professional practice (Gəruslu et al., 2026). The educator has previously attempted one standalone assessment worth 15% to implement responsible use of AI and reflective practice and this was met with mixed findings (Galea, 2025).

Countering cognitive dependency on AI

The educator observed a relationship between student engagement and patterns of cognitive offloading, with some students exhibiting signs of cognitive dependency on generative AI. The educator-student dialogue reflected in the educator diary regarding using ChatGPT as a calculator highlights a critical challenge in contemporary digital literacy and the use of generative AI: the phenomenon of cognitive dependency (Espartinez, 2025). Furthermore, as noted by Ortiz-Bonnin and Blahopoulou (2025), students are highly susceptible to the professional appearance of AI outputs, frequently prioritising speed and presentation over accuracy. The findings indicate that standalone technical tutorials are insufficient to disrupt cognitive dependency on generative AI. Rather, critical evaluation skills must be developed through ongoing scaffolding and repeated opportunities for practice, reflection, success, and failure. Embedding the SIFT framework (Hendrigan et al., 2024) within weekly reflective activities provided students with a structured mechanism for evaluating generative AI outputs. Over time, this sustained practice appeared to shift students from passive trust in AI-generated responses towards more critical and reflective engagement.

The findings suggest that a shift from cognitive dependency to AI literacy may be achieved by establishing a safe, compassionate learning environment that replaces high-stakes policing with continuous, low-stakes reflective practice. By providing a non-judgemental space to iteratively test student understanding, early AI offloading could be redirected from an academic failure into a meaningful learning opportunity (Francis et al., 2025). Engaging with Biggs (1996), the study suggests that authentic, continuous reflective practice is more critical than ever in an era where AI can easily fabricate responses. By establishing clear boundaries while simultaneously offering targeted, relational feedback, students were guided toward a critical and ethical understanding of AI tools. Table 1 postulates targeted interventions to address different student personas with different risks of AI dependency. However, the key message is that the shift from AI offloading to AI literacy takes time and patience for both the educator and student.

Compassionate and inclusive design

Finally, viewing the curriculum redesign through the lens of compassionate pedagogy (Waddington & Bonaparte, 2024) suggests that academic integrity is intimately connected to student wellbeing. A compassionate curriculum must remain responsive to these diverse starting points and be prepared to adapt to student progress. Rather than mandating rapid technological adoption, which can drive anxiety and academic dishonesty (Ortiz-Bonnin & Blahopoulou, 2025) the findings in this reflective case study highlight the power of flexible, personally relevant pathways. By allowing students to reframe tasks around their own lived experiences, educators can facilitate authentic

voice and intrinsic motivation, proving that when students are intellectually invested in their work, the temptation to offload critical thinking to generative AI can be disincentivized. By understanding that different AI learner archetypes exist (Table 1) educators should have a variety of tools in their toolkit to draw upon.

The educator observed a relationship between student engagement with assessment tasks and patterns of AI offloading. Observing student behaviour carefully, an agile, just-in-time approach (Valacich & Schneider, 2017) to respond to shifts in student behaviour was utilised. This approach mirrors continuous quality improvement methodologies and aligns strongly with Kolajo's (2025) framework for RTP. By embedding frequent, low-stakes reflective quizzes, the pedagogical approach could be continuously adjusted based on student progress. The educator observed the process of student learning and using targeted interventions (Table 1) AI offloading was redirected. Beyond AI learner archetypes, it is also important to acknowledge that AI adoption may be influenced by demographic factors such as gender. Matobobo (2026) and Otis (2025) reported gender-related differences in students' AI use, confidence, and perceptions. However, investigating these effects was beyond the scope of the current study and warrants further research.

The study's findings suggest that when students exhibit diverse AI literacy needs, a compassionate pedagogical approach enables educators to identify behavioural patterns through ongoing engagement and respond with timely, targeted interventions. By embedding multiple formative touchpoints throughout the curriculum, educators can adapt support to individual learner needs, redirect reliance on generative AI, and support AI literacy within low-stakes assessments. This presents a promising avenue for future research.

Conclusion

This reflective case study suggests that addressing the challenges of generative AI in higher education requires more than punitive detection and isolated interventions. By shifting from a stance of "AI fatigue" and policing, toward a pedagogical redesign centred on continuous, low-stakes reflective feedback, it is possible to actively guide students from AI dependency to critical AI literacy. Aligning with compassionate practice was observed to support student engagement; in reflective evaluations, students met the required learning outcomes while demonstrating sustained engagement for the subject matter that will likely support their future professional careers.

Crucially, this approach aligns with the need for compassion and connection in a digital society. By acknowledging the diverse technological and educational backgrounds of student cohorts, redesigned assessments can treat early instances of AI dependency as pivotal learning opportunities. This shift was associated with perceived enhancements in student engagement and critical thinking, while transforming the teaching experience from a surveillance burden into a valuable opportunity to authentically integrate core content with responsible AI use.

While the reflective evaluations of this pedagogical redesign are encouraging, it is recognised that the use of AI remains a developing skill. As the four persona archetypes suggest, some students will require further explicit guidance. While the redesign required a considerable increase in educator workload, this was an intentional aspect of the exploratory approach. The objective was to generate practice-based evidence that could inform iterative refinement and ultimately support the development of a sustainable and scalable assessment model. Future work will focus on refining these continuous feedback practices and testing their scalability across larger units and diverse student cohorts. Additionally, future research should explore additional personas and perspectives, behaviours, and attitudes such as male and female students using AI in higher education. Ultimately, the findings suggest that successfully navigating the AI landscape in higher education relies on returning to foundational pedagogical principles, prioritising continuous feedback, structured reflection, and adaptable compassionate teaching practices over an emphasis on detecting academic misconduct.

References

Alsharefeen, R., & Al Sayari, N. (2025). Examining academic integrity policy and practice in the era of AI: A case study of faculty perspectives. *Frontiers in Education*, *10*, Article 1621743. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1621743

Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, *32*(3), 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00138871

Chan, C. K. Y., & Hu, W. (2023). Students' voices on generative AI: Perceptions, benefits, and challenges in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, *20*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-023-00411-8

Cooper, A. (2004). *The inmates are running the asylum: Why high-tech products drive us crazy and how to restore the sanity* (Vol. 2). Sams.

Dawson, P., Henderson, M., Mahoney, P., Phillips, M., Ryan, T., Boud, D., & Molloy, E. (2019). What makes for effective feedback: Staff and student perspectives. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *44*(1), 25–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1467877

Deep, P. D., Edgington, W. D., Ghosh, N., & Rahaman, M. S. (2025). Evaluating the effectiveness and ethical implications of AI detection tools in higher education. *Information*, *16*(10), Article 905. https://doi.org/10.3390/info16100905

Espartinez, A. S. (2025). Between innovation and tradition: A narrative inquiry of students' and teachers' experiences with ChatGPT in Philippine higher education. *Social Sciences*, *14*(6), Article 359. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14060359

Farooq, A., Alabed, A., Msefula, P. S., Tamime, R. A. L., Salminen, J., Jung, S.-g., & Jansen, B. J. (2025). Representing groups of students as personas: A systematic review of persona creation, application, and trends in the educational domain. *Computers and Education Open*, *8*, Article 100242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2025.100242

Francis, N. J., Jones, S., & Smith, D. P. (2025). Generative AI in higher education: Balancing innovation and integrity. *British Journal of Biomedical Science*, *81*, Article 14048. https://doi.org/10.3389/bjbs.2024.14048

Galea, G. (2025, November 5). *Critiquing AI in workflow analysis* [Conference presentation]. *ACDICT Symposium*.

Gəruslu, V., Jafarov, Z., Mövsümova, A., Namazov, A., & Mirzayev, H. (2026). Encouraging responsible GenAI use in software engineering education: A design-oriented model. *The Journal of Systems and Software*, *237*, Article 112846. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2026.112846

Hendrigan, H., Tan, S., & Cukierman, D. (2024). Combining SIFT and the information needs, types, and qualities approaches: A framework-informed strategy for information literacy instruction. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *15*(2). https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotlrcacea.2024.2.15558

Kolajo, Y. (2025). Advancing pedagogical excellence through reflective teaching practice and adaptation. *Reflective Practice*, *26*(6), 832–847. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2025.2504143

Lo, C. K., Hew, K. F., & Jong, M. S.-y. (2024). The influence of ChatGPT on student engagement: A systematic review and future research agenda. *Computers & Education*, *219*, Article 105100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2024.105100

Lodge, J. M., Howard, S., Bearman, M., & Dawson, P. (2023). *Assessment reform for the age of artificial intelligence. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).* https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/assessment-reform-age-artificial-intelligence-discussion-paper.pdf

Matobobo, C. (2026). A systematic review of gender differences in students' use of AI tools for learning in higher education. *Discover Education*, *5*(1), 90–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-026-01116-6

Matthews, K. (2025, Nov 30 – Dec 3). Leading beyond roles: Relational leadership for collaborative futures. [Workshop Presentation]. Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education Conference, Adelaide, Australia. https://doi.org/10.65106/apubs.2025.2782

Metzgar, M. (2026). Student use of generative AI in higher education: Patterns, gaps, and institutional readiness. *Acta Educationis Generalis*, *16*(1), 41–52. https://doi.org/10.2478/atd-2026-0004

Microsoft. (2026). *Write a great prompt in Microsoft 365 Copilot*. Retrieved 30 April 2025 from https://support.microsoft.com/en-au/topic/write-a-great-prompt-in-microsoft-365-copilot-7b614306-d5aa-4b62-8509-e46674a29165

Ortiz-Bonnin, S., & Blahopoulou, J. (2025). Chat or cheat? Academic dishonesty, risk perceptions, and ChatGPT usage in higher education students. *Social Psychology of Education*, *28*(1), Article 113. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-025-10080-2

Otis, N. G., Delecourt, S., Cranney, K., & Koning, R. (2025). Global evidence on gender gaps and generative AI (Working Paper No. 25-023). Harvard Business School. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/h6a7c

Pruitt, J., & Adlin, T. (2006). *The persona lifecycle keeping people in mind throughout product design*. Elsevier.

Schön, D. A. (1992). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237473

Slimi, Z. (2026). A systematic critical review of generative AI's impact on authorship, pedagogy, and integrity (2023–2025). *Frontiers in Education*, *11*, Article 1769680. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2026.1769680

Solis Trujillo, B. P., Velarde-Camaqui, D., Gonzales Nuñez, C. A., Castillo Silva, E. V., & Gonzalez Said de la Oliva, M. de P. (2025). The current landscape of formative assessment and feedback in graduate studies: A systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Education*, *10*. Article 1509983. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1509983

Striepe, M., Thomson, S., & Sefcik, L. (2023). Understanding academic integrity education: Case studies from two Australian universities. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *21*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-021-09429-x

The University of Edinburgh. (n.d.). *Gibbs' reflective cycle.* Reflector's toolkit. https://reflection.ed.ac.uk/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle

Tudor, I., Holenko Dlab, M., Đurović, G., & Horvat, M. (2025). Using clustering techniques to design learner personas for GenAI prompt engineering and adaptive interventions. *Electronics*, *14*(11), Article 2281. https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics14112281

Valacich, J., & Schneider, C. (2017). *Information systems today: Managing in the digital world* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Waddington, K., & Bonaparte, B. (2024). *Developing pedagogies of compassion in higher education : A practice first approach*. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67543-0

Galea, G., & Cowling, M. A. (2026). From AI fatigue to compassionate practice: Building student AI literacy through continuous feedback and reflective practice. In Cochrane, T., Narayan, V., Poole, T., Lai, P., Lake, P., Moore, O., & Li, L. (Eds.), *The Future is Connection: Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society*. Proceedings ASCILITE 2026. Brisbane (pp. 169–179). https://doi.org/10.65106/apubs.2026.3186

Note: All published papers are refereed, having undergone a double-blind peer-review process.

The author(s) assign a Creative Commons by attribution license enabling others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon their work, even commercially, as long as credit is given to the author(s) for the original creation.

© Galea, G., & Cowling, M. A. 2026.