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The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Understanding students' GenAI usage, attitudes, and training needs for equitable and sustainable AI adoption in higher education

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is expected to revolutionise Australian's economy with the potential to generate up to $600 billion per annum to GDP by 2030 (Australian Government, Department of Industry, Science and Resources, 2024). To keep up with the accelerating growth of AI, the higher education sector needs to transition from traditional teaching models to an AI-integrated pedagogy. One of the key concerns in this transition is to ensure equitable and sustainable adoption of AI in higher education. This concern is in line with the UNESCO's recommendation on the ethics of AI (UNESCO,2021). AI adoption in higher education is both complex and consequential, as it may affect educational ethics through economic disparities among students and heterogenous student attitudes towards task fulfillment (Oxfam, 2022; Vacarelu, 2023). Moreover, it is reframing teaching, learning and assessment design, making it increasing difficult to distinguish between authentic effort, mastery, and output (Mills et al., 2025).

Undertaken at an Australian university, this research project aims to addresses two pressing questions in contemporary higher education: how students are currently using generative AI (GenAI) for everyday learning tasks, their attitudes towards it and their AI readiness to support transition towards equitable and sustainable engagement with these tools. By revealing these issues, this project ensures student voices are central to ongoing debates about AI in higher education. Hence, this study is both equity-focused and evidenced-based as it responds to a critical gap for evidence-based insights to inform institutional policy development for a more equitable and sustainable digital ecosystem. Best practice suggests that when policies affecting students are designed with their involvement as co-designers, outcomes significantly improve. Therefore, framed as Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research, the project places reflective practice and systematic inquiry at the heart of continuous improvement in teaching and learning outcomes.

This study uses a quantitative survey method, whereby a structured questionnaire was administered during semester one, 2026. The questionnaire design is based on the Digital Divide and Self-regulated Learning framework. Data were collected from Humanities students across Law, Accounting, Business, and Education disciplines. Results reveal widespread adoption (98%), with some of it uncritical and potentially over-reliant (similar to Palmer, 2023). Notably, outliers exist where students refuse to use the tools entirely. Overall, findings indicate variation in GenAI usage, attitudes, access, and competence, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to advance equitable and sustainable AI integration. The findings are useful as they inform student-centred teaching practices, curriculum design, and policy frameworks aligned with the university's commitment to innovative, ethical, and inclusive education.

Keywords: GenAI, student learning, equity in AI, sustainable AI usage, quantitative approach

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