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Early PLT Student Perceptions of the Integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Legal Education

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Abstract

This article explores the reflections of Australian law students on the use and integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in the practical legal training law curriculum. Participants were enrolled as students in the Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) between April and November 2024 and engaged with several GenAI use cases embedded in their law subjects. Surveys were used to assess participants' perceptions of the incorporation of GenAI into the subjects. The findings indicated that some participants had no prior GenAI experience, but the majority had at least a limited experience. Participants reported that all GenAI use cases improved their GenAI literacy and that they were interested in engaging with different AI tools and applications and wanted to learn how to prompt more effectively. While students' understanding of GenAI capabilities improved, they remain cautious about using GenAI in their future legal practice, particularly for tasks such as legal research, feedback on a video recordings and written communication. Having engaged with GenAI in their studies, participants reported feeling better prepared for entry into a legal profession that is increasingly incorporating the use of GenAI. Implications from this study include an increased understanding of how best to embed GenAI in legal curriculum and assessment to ensure law students are provided with opportunities to explore the appropriate and responsible use of GenAI and to develop their AI literacy skills.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence; legal education; Practical Legal Training; student perceptions.

1. Introduction

This article argues that law students should be provided with opportunities to critique the deployment of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools in legal education because their feedback can serve as a valuable indicator of both their level of understanding and their competency with GenAI technologies and their interest in using these tools. These insights can be used by legal educators to inform decisions about how specific GenAI tools are meaningfully incorporated in curriculum design, teaching and learning. Student input can help refine the integration of GenAI in legal education to better prepare law students for legal practice using GenAI technologies.

The article proceeds in four parts. Section 2 presents a review of literature on the integration of GenAI into legal education and establishes the importance of inviting student feedback on that integration. Section 3 sets out the methods and scope of a seven-month study involving students enrolled in the Queensland University of Technology (QUT)'s Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice, also known as the Practical Legal Training (PLT) Course, in 2024. The students were surveyed to examine their attitudes and opinions towards the incorporation of GenAI into the law curriculum and the use of GenAI tools for learning. The key findings detailed in Section 4 were that some students lacked any experience with GenAI before using it in the PLT Course, although the majority had at least limited experience; some had a greater need to engage with GenAI during their legal studies; the AI tool that most improved understanding of GenAI was not a generic text content creation tool; students were interested

in engaging with different AI tools, especially law-specific applications; prompting was identified as an area in which students were interested in improving their skills; and, after engaging with GenAI, students reported improved AI literacy and feeling better prepared for entry to a legal profession increasingly integrated with GenAI. Section 5 considers several implications of these findings: students require instruction, practice and support during their studies to effectively and responsibly use GenAI; experimenting with GenAI can improve AI literacy; and the integration of GenAI in curriculum design and teaching should be intentional and use high-quality GenAI tools. Section 6 presents the study's limitations and suggestions for future research and Section 7 concludes the discussion. To adequately prepare law students for contemporary legal practice, it is necessary to integrate opportunities for engagement with GenAI into both undergraduate law and PLT programs.

2. Literature Review

This section commences with an analysis of four connected literatures. The first is on artificial intelligence (AI), with a focus on GenAI in the legal industry; the second comprises studies that have addressed the advantages and disadvantages presented by GenAI in higher education; the third body of literature focuses more specifically on GenAI in legal education with an institution or legal educator focus; and the fourth consists of research on law students' perceptions of GenAI in law curriculum.

2.1 GenAI in Legal Practice

AI comprises a number of different technologies that can make suggestions and perform tasks traditionally performed by humans.[1] 'Machine learning' refers to computer systems that are able to learn from large amounts of data without needing to be explicitly trained.[2] GenAI is a type of machine learning that focuses on creating output such as text, audio, images, video and code. Examples of GenAI include OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, Meta's LLaMA and X's Grok.[3] This article concentrates on text GenAI models, or large language models (LLMs), which are designed to create new text based on user inputs (or prompts) and training data.[4] 'Prompting' or 'prompt engineering' means inputting a set of words that will generate outputs from the AI model based on statistically plausible predictions of whatever came before, giving the output a conversational feel.[5] The quality of prompts can affect the quality of the AI output and better prompts can generate better outputs.[6]

GenAI is poised to profoundly disrupt the legal profession[7] and make fundamental and pervasive changes to the legal industry.[8] To remain relevant in the era of GenAI, law will need to be more accessible and affordable, and dispute resolution will need to be quicker.[9] Rather than meaning the end of the legal profession, it is predicted that the disruption will result in changes to the way lawyers undertake legal work.[10] GenAI has the potential to enhance areas of law work including condensing, drafting, checking, learning, predicting and personal productivity.[11] It can be used to create first drafts, refine arguments and adapt past examples of legal documents to improve productivity.[12]

The potential for change resulting from GenAI technologies has been recognised in the Australian legal profession, but has not yet caused a direct upheaval of the profession.[13] Legal practitioners have begun to use GenAI tools to augment their work,[14] and practice leaders in sole, micro, small and medium law firms report that technology and a willingness to adapt are the way of the future.[15] According to one report, two in five Australian private practice professionals reported that firms are experimenting with GenAI but proceeding with caution.[16] The most common uses reported were legal research, document summary and drafting correspondence.[17] Some larger firms are investing in purpose-built GenAI platforms such as Harvey,

[1] Guihot, Artificial Intelligence, 22.
[2] Susskind, How to Think About AI, 32.
[3] Marcus, "The AI We Have Now," 24.
[4] Ali, "The Effects of Artificial Intelligence Applications," 3.
[5] Marcus, "The AI We Have Now," 25.
[6] Cain, "Prompting Change," 51; Hargreaves, "Words are Flowing," 79.
[7] Susskind, Tomorrow's Lawyers, 77.
[8] Susskind, Tomorrow's Lawyers, 137.
[9] Susskind, How to Think About AI, 126.
[10] Susskind, Tomorrow's Lawyers, 137.
[11] Robb, "It's The End of the World," 17–21.
[12] Choi, "ChatGPT," 397.
[13] Robb, "It's The End of the World," 14.
[14] Choi, "ChatGPT," 397; Ogunde, "Navigating the Legal Landscape," 3; Ajevski, "ChatGPT," 356; Bliss, "Teaching Law," 116.
[15] Timoshanko, "An Empirical Study," 106.
[16] Tech AI and the Law 2024, 3.
[17] Tech AI and the Law 2024, 11.

which use LLMs trained on legal materials, to assist with legal work like research, contract analysis and the creation of legal documents.[18] At the date of writing this article, nearly half of the AmLaw 100 largest law firms in America had adopted Harvey.[19] The *Tech, AI and the Law 2024, Australian Edition* report records that 46 per cent of Australian in-house lawyers are also experimenting with GenAI.[20]

Some students are concerned that their traditional legal education may not adequately equip them to succeed as legal practitioners in a profession that is embracing the use of GenAI tools.[21] In that scenario, law graduates and entry-level legal practitioners need to be GenAI-literate and know how to leverage GenAI.[22] Some commentators say that, in an increasingly competitive graduate market, these skills may offer law graduates a competitive advantage,[23] and failing to develop technological competency at university is an employability risk for law students.[24] As a consequence, legal educators will need to integrate GenAI tools into legal education curriculum and to provide law students with opportunities to develop skills using GenAI to better equip them for legal practice that integrates GenAI technology.[25]

2.2 GenAI in Legal Education

Most of the literature on GenAI in higher education stems from university-driven inquiry. [26] Studies have weighed the potential of GenAI to improve student learning against ethical concerns, academic integrity issues and changes to curriculum and assessment that GenAI has compelled.[27] Academic integrity has emerged as a major theme, especially after it was found that ChatGPT was able to pass law exams at the University of Minesota.[28] A similar result was revealed in a study examining three GenAI tools (GPT-4, GPT-3.5 and Google Bard) in a criminal law examination at the University of Wollongong.[29] As a result, Alimardani argues for a fundamental shift in how law students are assessed.[30] Some researchers propose designing assessments in which GenAI do not perform well, such as those that involve critical analysis.[31] However as Hargreaves points out, as GenAI technologies continue to improve, attempting to GenAI-proof assessment will become increasingly difficult.[32]

Many scholars argue that AI literacy should be taught in law schools to prepare law students for future practice.[33] Law schools in Australia are exploring various ways to incorporate GenAI into legal education,[34] to improve teaching and learning activities and enhance curriculum design.[35] PLT Courses are also incorporating GenAI technologies,[36] which has the potential to bridge the gap between theory and practice.[37]

2.3 Law Students' Perceptions of GenAI

Although there is now a reasonable body of literature on GenAI in legal education from the perspective of universities and educators, there is less literature from the perspective of law students. Student input can help institutions to better navigate the challenges and opportunities of GenAI.[38] Studies that probe students' intersectional location can yield detailed, group-specific insights into how different students perceive GenAI tools.[39] Some argue that student feedback is critical when it comes to

[18] Ajevski, "ChatGPT," 357.
[19] Pereyra, "Harvey's Three Year Anniversary."
[20] Tech AI and the Law 2024, 28.
[21] Bliss, "Teaching Law," 113.
[22] Sharma, "The Escalation of ChatGPT," 12.
[23] Migliorini, "The Case for Nurturing AI Literacy," 12.
[24] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 6.
[25] Choi, "ChatGPT," 397.
[26] Sullivan, "ChatGPT"; Francis, "Generative AI," 7.
[27] Sullivan, "ChatGPT."
[28] Choi, "ChatGPT," 396.
[29] Alimardani, "Generative Artificial Intelligence."
[30] Alimardani, "Generative Artificial Intelligence," 806.
[31] Ajevski, "ChatGPT," 362.
[32] Hargreaves, "Words are Flowing," 92.
[33] Head, "Assessing Law Students"; Bliss, "Teaching Law"; Alimardani, "Generative Artificial Intelligence"; Alimardani, "Borderline Disaster"; Migliorini, "The Case for Nurturing AI Literacy"; Prakash, "Integrating Generative AI."
[34] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 7–14.
[35] Zhang, "A New Era," 89.
[36] Robb, "It's The End of the World," 29.
[37] Farber, "Harmonizing AI," 351.
[38] Francis, "Generative AI," 6.
[39] Daher, "Higher Education Students' Perceptions," 430.

developing familiarity, rules and trust in relation to GenAI in higher education.[40] Law students who have engaged with GenAI during their legal education have the experience and knowledge to participate in the conversation on GenAI in legal education. They can offer unique perspectives through their lived experiences. Currently, literature that focuses on the views of law students in relation to GenAI as tools for learning is limited.[41]

Buhari Bello et al. examined the views of undergraduate law students at Ahmadu Bellow University, Zaria on their awareness and the perceived ease of use and usefulness of ChatGPT.[42] The study found that the law students were generally aware of ChatGPT and had a positive perception of its ease of use and usefulness.[43] One study examined law students' perceptions of GenAI in legal document translation.[44] Empirical research on student perceptions of a GenAI-integrated ethics assessment found that student insights can help legal academics to design improved GenAI assessments.[45] First-year law students in a property law course at the University of Denver were surveyed and their reflections demonstrated sophisticated and nuanced views on AI and the future of the legal profession.[46] Surveyed law students at Peru State College who used GenAI in contract simulation activities in a legal environment and contract law course reported that, through the supported activities, they learned about GenAI capabilities, including benefits and limitations.[47] They also reported that it helped them learn the subject matter, made learning more interesting and promoted their critical thinking.[48]

Student perceptions of GenAI tools incorporated in a criminal law course at an Israeli law school were compared with perceptions of students in the same course that did not incorporate GenAI tools to assess the effectiveness of the different teaching approaches.[49] Students who engaged with the GenAI tools reported a modest improvement in understanding and knowledge and a more substantial improvement in student engagement and ease of use.[50] Student feedback was obtained on the integration of three different GenAI tools used as teaching aids in a law course on the principles of Hong Kong constitutional law.[51] Overall, student feedback was positive for AI-generated quizzes and AI lecture transcription and summarisation, with many students reporting that using the AI tools improved their understanding of the subject matter, although students were less keen on an AI-powered chatbot.[52]

The existing literature therefore acknowledges the importance of investigating GenAI technology in higher education from the perspectives of various stakeholders, particularly students, but that there is a noticeable gap in the research. To date, no published studies have examined the use of GenAI by practical legal training students. As law students in PLT engage with GenAI tools in the context of learning to 'do' law, a study specifically analysing PLT students' perceptions of GenAI in practical legal education is warranted.

3. Focus and Method

3.1 Focus

This study surveyed students on their use of GenAI in the QUT PLT Course in 2024. Data was collected from students over a seven-month period in 2024 using QUT's closed survey platform, Qualtrics.

The aim of this research was to evaluate how PLT students perceived the effectiveness, benefits and challenges of using GenAI tools in their legal studies, and how those perceptions varied based on prior knowledge, experience and demographic factors. Moreover, how does the use of GenAI in the PLT Course impact the development of critical thinking and practical legal skills of law students?

[40] Liu, 'Generative AI," 39–41.
[41] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 12.
[42] Buhari Bello, Perceived Ease of Use.
[43] Buhari Bello, Perceived Ease of Use, 7.
[44] Khoiriah, "Law Students' Perception."
[45] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 15.
[46] Bliss, "Teaching Law," 124–125.
[47] Rolf, "Using Generative Artificial Intelligence," 14.
[48] Rolf, "Using Generative Artificial Intelligence," 13.
[49] Farber, "Harmonizing AI," 353–358.
[50] Farber, "Harmonizing AI," 357.
[51] Hargreaves, "ChatGPT," 60–73.
[52] Hargreaves, "ChatGPT," 72–73.

3.2 GenAI in the QUT PLT Course

The PLT Course at QUT provides approved practical legal training, which satisfies the legal admission requirements for students wishing to practise law as legal practitioners in Queensland and is undertaken following completion of an undergraduate law degree.[53] The participants in this study were two cohorts of students enrolled in the subject Lawyers Skills in August 2024, and four cohorts of students enrolled in the subject Career Skills between April and November 2024. There was no overlap of student enrolments between the two subjects, meaning data from each subject was distinct.

Lawyers Skills runs for four weeks and gives students the opportunity to develop and demonstrate competence in ethics, professionalism, solicitor–client interviewing, negotiation, advocacy and wellness issues. In 2024, the Lawyers Skills unit did not incorporate GenAI technologies until a lecture on written communication was developed and delivered during the on-campus 'Intensive' weeks. This lecture, which embedded GenAI, was presented to two student cohorts, whose data are included in this study. Career Skills (a four-week unit) requires students to apply an understanding of workplace productivity expectations and how to meet them, an awareness of how current and future technologies can facilitate the practice of law and legal communication skills, as well as to develop a professional profile.

Of the four GenAI use cases in this study, three were embedded in Career Skills and involved mandatory assessment tasks. For three of the four cases, students engaged with a generic AI tool of their choice. QUT has approved Microsoft Copilot (powered by GPT-4) for student and staff use, but this was not mandated. Data was not gathered on students' choice of GenAI tool. For the use case in this study that did not use a generic GenAI tool, students engaged with 'Big Interview', which is an AI tool piloted by QUT designed to help students build their professional profiles and assist with interview preparation.[54] It allows students to participate in practice interviews and provides written feedback based on criteria commonly used by employers to assess candidates in real-world settings.

The first GenAI use case was a legal research assessment task in Career Skills where, acting as solicitors, students were asked to conduct legal research for a client using traditional legal research methods and to write a referenced file note detailing the results. Then students were instructed to prompt a GenAI tool to investigate the same concepts and to critically analyse the output comparing it with their traditional research, making notes on any inaccuracies and missing information. Students were required to repeat the process of prompting and analysing the output for at least three iterations and until satisfied that the AI output was as close to the traditional research results as AI tool could provide. The assessment task was a written critical analysis of the GenAI output, the process of reaching the final output and of using GenAI for legal research.

The second GenAI use case utilised the 'Big Interview' AI tool. Students formulated an answer to a mock interview question and then logged into 'Big Interview' and, with their camera on, video-recorded themselves answering the question and received AI feedback. Big Interview provides written feedback on overall performance, answer relevance, pace of speech, 'um' count per 100 words, vocabulary (using the Fleisch Kincaid grade level test), power words, filler words, pause counter, negative tone, length, authenticity score, volume and lighting.[55] The assessment task was a written reflection on this use of 'Big Interview'.

The third use case was a Lawyers Skills lecture on written communication that integrated GenAI. In this session, students were introduced to the use of GenAI tools in written communication in legal practice and asked to consider their advantages (such as producing first drafts quickly and overcoming blank page syndrome)[56] and disadvantages (such as bias and breaching client confidentiality). Then, acting in the role of solicitor, students used CoPilot to draft a client letter and concluded the session with a round-table discussion on the role of GenAI in legal written communication.

The final use case was a written assessment in Career Skills requiring students to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of GenAI in legal practice and make an evidence-based written recommendation for its adoption or rejection in a fictional legal practice.

Each of the use cases was designed to encourage students to engage with the GenAI tool in a critical, ethical and responsible manner. Students watched pre-recorded lectures that discussed the role of GenAI in legal practice, the capabilities and limitations of GenAI and the importance of verification of outputs. All students were given basic written instructions on how to create effective prompts as well as links to external resources for further guidance. The pre-recorded lectures available to all students were supplemented in Career Skills by an optional in-person workshop where prompting was explained and students

[53] *Legal Profession Act 2007* (Qld) s 30.
[54] Big Interview, "Big Interview."
[55] Big Interview Help Center, "VideoAI Feedback."
[56] Chambers, "Vox PopulAI."

were given hands-on experience prompting and analysing the outputs. The in-person lecture on written communication in Lawyers Skills emphasised the ethical use of AI in legal practice and explained prompting. Students were given written instructions and a pre-recorded lecture on the 'Big Interview' tool.

3.3 Method – Study of QUT PLT Students

I used voluntary and anonymous surveys to evaluate students' perceptions of the integration of GenAI in the PLT Course. The surveys for both subjects comprised three parts. The first collected demographic information on gender and self-evaluation of prior understanding and experience with GenAI. Questions on self-assessed knowledge and competencies were influenced by survey questions used in a study of university law students' self-perceived digital competencies.[57] The second part of the surveys asked students to rate their responses to questions posed in relation to the GenAI use cases on a scale of 0 to 100. The third part asked open-ended questions and invited participants to record their views on GenAI. The combination of open-ended questions and scaled questions allowed for a nuanced array of insightful feedback.

The Career Skills' surveys received 15 responses (44 per cent of all enrolled students) and the Lawyers Skills' surveys received 44 responses (67 per cent of all enrolled students). All 59 responses were reviewed to identify potential themes.

4. Findings

The findings reveal that QUT PLT students had differing levels of prior experience with GenAI, with some using it for the first time during the PLT Course, while most had at least limited familiarity. Although understanding of the capabilities of GenAI improved following all use cases, students remained cautious about the integration of GenAI in future legal practice, particularly for legal research, written communication and evaluating video-based performance. Students expressed an interest in exploring a range of AI tools, especially those tailored to legal practice. There was some interest expressed in developing more effective prompting skills. Overall students reported positive learning outcomes, increased AI literacy and a greater confidence in entering a changing legal profession shaped by GenAI technologies.

4.1 Previous Awareness of Possible Uses of GenAI

Students were asked to evaluate their prior awareness of GenAI uses before commencing the subjects. Respondents in Career Skills exhibited lower levels of prior awareness than those in Lawyers Skills (Table 1).

Table 1. Previous awareness of possible uses of GenAI

Statement: How would you describe your awareness of possible uses of GenAI prior to commencing this subject?			
Subject	**Response**	**n**	**%**
Lawyers skills	No previous awareness	2	5
	Limited previous awareness	9	20
	Average previous awareness	15	34
	Above-average previous awareness	12	27
	Extensive previous awareness	6	14
Career skills	No previous awareness	0	0
	Limited previous awareness	6	40
	Average previous awareness	4	27
	Above-average previous awareness	4	27
	Extensive previous awareness	1	7

[57] Martzoukou, "A Study of University Law Students."

4.2 Previous Experience Using GenAI

A significant portion of Career Skills respondents (73 per cent), compared with 48 per cent in Lawyers Skills, reported having limited or no experience using GenAI (Table 2). Over half of the respondents in Lawyers' Skills had average to extensive experience.

Table 2. Previous experience using GenAI

Statement: How would you describe your previous experience using GenAI prior to commencing this subject?			
Subject	**Response**	**n**	**%**
Lawyers skills	No previous experience	5	11
	Limited previous experience	16	36
	Average previous experience	10	23
	Above-average previous experience	8	18
	Extensive previous experience	5	11
Career skills	No previous experience	6	40
	Limited previous experience	5	33
	Average previous experience	1	7
	Above-average previous experience	3	20
	Extensive previous experience	0	0

4.3 Results of GenAI Use Cases

4.3.1 Legal Research

Table 3 records average scores for respondents in relation to using GenAI for legal research in Career Skills. Respondents felt the legal research task increased their understanding of GenAI's capacity to conduct legal research (73) and that using GenAI would benefit their future practice of law (73). Respondents were neutral about whether the task enhanced their understanding of the subject matter (52) and only moderately agreed that verifying the AI outputs helped to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills (67) and that using GenAI was quicker than traditional research (67). Respondents only slightly agreed that using GenAI for legal research was beneficial (64), and that the best approach was using GenAI in conjunction with their own research and critical analysis skills (66). Students strongly agreed (99) that human input is important when using GenAI for legal research and that they (humans) are better at legal research than GenAI (83). When asked how likely it was that they would use GenAI in the future for legal research, the average score was a low 46.

Table 3. GenAI for legal research

Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0–100	Average
Do you feel that using Gen AI in this task allowed you to engage with technology that will help your practice of law in the future?	73.33
Did the legal research task increase your understanding of the capacity of GenAI to do legal research?	72.53
Do you think this task demonstrated that legal research using Gen AI is beneficial?	63.73
Do you think this task demonstrated that legal research using Gen AI is quicker than when using traditional methods that do not include the use of Gen AI?	66.53
Did this task lead you to believe that Gen AI used in conjunction with your own research and critical analysis skills, is the best approach to legal research?	66.33
How important do you think human input is when using Gen AI for legal research?	98.53
Did your use of GenAI for legal research enhance your understanding of the subject matter	51.67
Did the process of critically analysing the GenAI results help you develop your analytical and critical thinking skills?	67.07
Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0-100	**Average**
Did this task lead you to believe that you (humans) are better at legal research than GenAI?	82.53
How likely are you to use GenAI in the future for legal research?	45.93
Do you feel you were given guidance and support regarding the use of GenAI?	77.33

4.3.2 AI Feedback on a Video Recording

Table 4 records average scores on the 'Big Interview' task in Career Skills. Respondents agreed that it demonstrated the capacity of GenAI to give feedback (72) and increased their understanding of GenAI capabilities (76). Respondents moderately agreed that the GenAI feedback gave them confidence in their performance (66) and only slightly agreed that it helped identify areas for improvement (62) and was a beneficial learning experience (64). Respondents were not particularly interested in using the technology in the future (54).

Table 4. GenAI for feedback on a video recording

Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0–100	Average
Did this task demonstrate the capacity of GenAI to give feedback on a video recording answering practice interview questions and/or a presentation?	72.40
Did this task increase your understanding of the capacity of GenAI to give feedback on a video recording answering practice interview questions and/or a presentation?	76.00
Rate how helpful the Gen AI feedback on your video recording was.	62.27
Did the process of receiving Gen AI feedback on your video recording give you confidence about your performance in the recording?	65.60
Rate how effective the Gen AI feedback on your video recording was in helping you identify areas for personal improvement.	61.60
Did you find the integration of GenAI in this task beneficial to your learning experience?	64.40
How likely are you to use GenAI technology for feedback on an interview answer and/or presentation in the future?	53.73

4.3.3 Investigation into Pros and Cons of Using GenAI in Legal Practice

The investigation into the pros and cons of using GenAI in legal practice in Career Skills increased respondents' understanding of the capacity of GenAI to help facilitate the practice of law (73) and of the benefits (74) and ethical considerations (84) involved with its use in legal practice (Table 5). However, students were neutral regarding their willingness to recommend the use of GenAI in legal practice based on their investigations (55).

Table 5. Investigating the Pros and Cons of GenAI in Legal Practice

Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0–100	Average
Did this task increase your understanding of the capacity of GenAI to help facilitate the practice of law?	73.40
Did this task increase your understanding of the benefits of using GenAI in legal practice?	73.93
Did this task increase your understanding of ethical considerations involved with the use of GenAI in legal practice?	83.53
Do you think it is a good idea for PLT students to investigate the pros and cons of using GenAI technology in legal practice?	87.29
Would you be willing to recommend the use of GenAI in practice based on your investigation in this task?	54.67
For those on-campus students who participated, how helpful was the interactive workshop in increasing your understanding of the use of GenAI in legal practice?	70.50

4.3.4 Written Communication

Table 6 shows average scores in relation to the lecture on written communication embedding GenAI in Lawyers Skills. Respondents slightly agreed that it increased their understanding of the capacity of GenAI to be used for written communication (64) and that using GenAI was easier (62) and quicker (67) than writing their own communication. Respondents found that using GenAI for written communication in legal practice was beneficial (72) and that additional prompts might improve the written communication generated by AI (70). However, respondents were only slightly interested in learning how to better prompt GenAI to produce written communication (63). Respondents strongly agreed that human input is important when using GenAI for written communication (93). Respondents said they were only marginally likely to use GenAI in the future for written communication (60).

Table 6. GenAI for written communication

Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0–100	Average
Do you feel that using AI in this lecture allowed you to engage with technology that will help your practice of law in the future?	65.44
Did the lecture on written communication increase your understanding of the capacity of GenAI to be used for written communication?	63.50
Do you think this task demonstrated that using Gen AI for written communication is beneficial?	71.91
Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0-100	**Average**
Based on your experience in this lecture, do you think using written communication generated by Gen AI will make it easier for you to write your own communication?	61.68
Based on your experience in this lecture. do you think that using written communication generated by Gen AI will make it quicker for you to write your own communication?	66.77
Do you feel that, with additional prompts, Gen AI might output improved written communication that you could use?	70.02
Would you like to learn how to better prompt Gen AI to produce written communication?	62.66
Did the process of analysing the GenAI written communication help you develop your analytical and critical thinking skills?	61.35
Based on your experience in this lecture, do you think Gen AI used in conjunction with your own written communication skills is the best approach to written communication?	59.39
How important do you think human input is when using Gen AI for written communication?	92.58
How likely are you to use GenAI in the future for written communication?	60.34

4.3.5 Use Cases Ranked According to Reported Increased Understanding of the Capacity of GenAI

As presented in rank order in Table 7, all GenAI use cases increased respondents' understanding of the capacity of GenAI with the 'Big Interview' activity first (average score of 76).

Table 7. Increased Understanding of Possible Uses of GenAI Ranked

Statement – rate using a sliding scale 0–100 your increased understanding of the capacity of GenAI	Average
1. Big Interview task	76
2. Investigation into the pros and cons of using GenAI in legal practice	73.40
3. Legal research task	72.53
4. Written communication lecture	63.50

5. Discussion

Student perceptions can provide evidence of the effectiveness of teaching, curriculum design and student approaches to learning.[58] The data show PLT students' competency and enthusiasm for engaging with GenAI tools. While some had no prior experience with GenAI, most had at least a limited experience. Interest was expressed in exploring a variety of AI tools, especially law-specific tools, and in learning prompting skills. The AI tool that most effectively enhanced comprehension of GenAI's capabilities was not a general-purpose GenAI tool, but rather one tailored for the specific task of giving feedback on a practice interview answer (Big Interview). Across all use cases, students reported increased comprehension of GenAI's capabilities. However, they remained somewhat sceptical about its performance compared with their own abilities, particularly in areas such as written communication and legal research. Nonetheless, having used GenAI in the PLT Course, students reported feeling a greater sense of readiness for entry to a legal profession where GenAI is becoming increasingly prevalent.

5.1 Previous Awareness of and Experience with GenAI

This study found that QUT PLT students' prior awareness of and experience with GenAI were unevenly distributed. Career Skills' respondents exhibited lower levels of prior awareness and experience compared with Lawyers Skills' respondents (Tables 1 and 2). This indicates that Career Skills students may have a heighted need for instruction and hands-on experience with GenAI during their studies. This is supported by Daher and Hussein, who recommend that individual background variables need to be taken into consideration when planning the use of GenAI tools in educational settings.[59] Students are not starting from an equal position, and some may have a greater need to engage with GenAI to compensate for knowledge and skill deficits.[60]

Around a third of respondents had above-average or extensive previous awareness of GenAI (41 per cent for Lawyers Skills and 34 per cent for Career Skills – see Table 1), while only around a quarter of respondents had above-average or extensive previous experience with GenAI (29 per cent for Lawyers Skills and 20 per cent for Career Skills – see Table 2). These results indicate a clear opportunity for students in both subjects to engage with GenAI to raise their level of awareness and to gain experience.[61]

Several broad factors not investigated in this study may have influenced participants' awareness of and experience with GenAI. Participants may not previously have studied subjects that integrated GenAI because their academic staff had not yet incorporated GenAI into teaching and learning.[62] Student levels of awareness and use of GenAI can be shaped by the extent to which each university discipline discusses GenAI tools directly with students.[63] Given that QUT PLT students have graduated from a range of Australian law schools, the instruction they received on GenAI in their undergraduate legal education varied.

5.2 Using GenAI in the PLT Course

5.2.1 GenAI Capability

One reported benefit of hands-on experience with GenAI is enhanced student understanding of GenAI.[64] The data in this study support this, with respondents reporting that all use cases increased their understanding of the capabilities of GenAI (Table 7). When they were asked to rate the use cases based on improving their understanding of the capacity of GenAI, respondents gave the highest average score to the 'Big Interview' activity (76), followed by the pros and cons investigation (74) and the legal research task (73). The written communication lecture scored the lowest (64), suggesting it was not very effective in improving student understanding of the use of GenAI for written communication in legal practice.

5.2.2 GenAI Tools

Respondents found the 'Big Interview' task effective in demonstrating how GenAI has the capacity to give feedback on a video recorded answer (72 – Table 4). Nonetheless, respondents reported that they were unlikely to use GenAI for feedback on a video recording in the future (54 – Table 4). Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of feedback provided by the 'Big Interview' tool: 'The feedback tool appeared to be set at a level well below that of an Australian Legal Practitioner. I practised using simple language and understandable short phrases with pauses for comprehension. The AI considered these

[58] Darwin, "Moving beyond Face Value," 734.
[59] Daher, "Higher Education Students' Perceptions," 15:14.
[60] Kelly, "Generative Artificial Intelligence," 9.
[61] Ventura, 'Unlocking the Future," 1142.
[62] Kelly, "Generative Artificial Intelligence," 9.
[63] Kelly, "Generative Artificial Intelligence," 10.
[64] Chan, "Students' Voices," 13.

attributes negatively.' Another respondent stated: 'Unhelpful. The entire experience was so generic.' Another criticism was 'the emotionless manner that feedback was given'.

Some scholars argue that the successful integration of GenAI into legal education depends on the quality of the GenAI tool used. Students in a Hong Kong constitutional law course who used a basic chatbot for revision that could only respond with information directly from PowerPoint slides were ambivalent about its value compared with other AI tools they used in the course.[65] I suggest that there is scope for the integration of AI tools that provide personalised feedback and immediate support in law courses, provided the tools are high quality. The cost of AI tools is an important factor shaping universities' decisions about which to integrate in legal education.[66] One respondent reflected on the learning experience using 'Big Interview': 'The AI was useful in that there was no need to schedule someone to either do a mock interview or to mark my recording. It also made writing the reflection on the feedback more efficient.' Scholars have reported that the benefits of using GenAI for personalised and real-time feedback include enhanced student learning[67] and the ability for students to learn at any time of the day without having to wait for a teacher.[68]

A medical education trial demonstrated the effectiveness of a Virtual Operative Assistant that provided objective auditory feedback using a human-like voice.[69] The feedback was designed to replicate real-life training based on an apprenticeship model and was delivered to medical students performing simulated surgery.[70] There is potential for this sort of speaking AI assistant to be used in legal education to give feedback to law students in simulated legal exercises. The use of AI for simulated experiences has been implemented in clinical legal education settings and found to be beneficial to the learning process.[71] A bot has been developed to improve law students' advocacy skills in a simulated courtroom environment.[72] The researchers in the Virtual Operative Assistant study caution that AI teaching platforms should be constructed carefully and evaluated rigorously to assess the transferability of expertise to real-life scenarios, as these AI systems cannot always tailor feedback in a contextually appropriate manner.[73] In this study, many respondents felt the 'Big Interview' tool could not provide adequate feedback. One respondent commented: 'It was so lacklustre. There's no depth to the feedback at all.' Another said that what most surprised them about the feedback it gave was 'how much it struggled to provide useful criticism'. Another reported: 'There was not much new information given. I already knew most of the weak areas that the AI picked up on' and yet another stated: 'I'd be curious if it can actually evaluate the answer and not just visual or verbal cues.'

Respondents in this study expressed an interest in trialling GenAI tools that draw on authorised legal databases and tools designed for legal applications. One argument that has emerged in support of integrating law-specific AI technologies in legal education is that lawyers are starting to adopt these tools in practice.[74] I suggest that the more important reason for law students to be introduced to law specific applications is so they can critically engage with the limitations of these tools, including their potential to make mistakes or fabricate information. Research on the leading three law-specific AI tools for legal research found they are not hallucination-free and sometimes provide inaccurate or incomplete responses.[75] A 2025 study that compared the performance of generic AI tools and a law-specific tool to answer general law questions found that while the law-specific tool performed better than the generic applications, it still outputted inaccuracies, incomplete responses and hallucinations.[76] A participant in this study stated: 'AI tools that only draw from authorised law reports will be highly valuable when available.' This perspective may reflect a broader over-estimation of the capabilities of law-specific AI tools by law students who have not yet experimented with them or been taught about their limitations. While exposure to law-specific tools might be useful to demonstrate their capability compared with generic AI tools, such exposure must include guidance on the need for students to fact check their outputs.

5.2.3 Student Learning

Respondents in this study were generally neutral about whether using GenAI was beneficial for their learning, giving an average rating of only 52 that using GenAI for legal research increased their understanding of the subject matter (Table 3). This finding

[65] Hargreaves, "ChatGPT," 73.
[66] Serra, "AI Lawyering Skills," 100.
[67] Wang, "What Matters."
[68] Ventura, 'Unlocking the Future," 1136; Chan, "Students' Voices," 13.
[69] Mirchi, "The Virtual Operative Assistant."
[70] Mirchi, "The Virtual Operative Assistant," 11.
[71] Hargreaves, "Words are Flowing," 92.
[72] Serra, "AI Lawyering Skills."
[73] Mirchi, "The Virtual Operative Assistant," 12.
[74] Bliss, "Teaching Law," 115, 137.
[75] Magesh, "Hallucination-Free?," 13.
[76] Munir, "Evaluating AI," 5–8.

is supported by the results of another study which found that a GenAI-integrated ethics assessment did not materially assist students with their substantive legal knowledge.[77] Even though participants in this study who used GenAI for legal research were first required to conduct traditional legal research and to use it to help verify the accuracy of the GenAI outputted legal research, they did not find this process of critical analysis overly effective, giving an average rating of only 67 that it helped develop their analytical and critical thinking skills (Table 3). Respondents gave an average score of only 61 that analysing GenAI-outputted written communication helped develop their analytical and critical thinking skills (Table 6). Respondents were also neutral about whether integrating 'Big Interview' GenAI technology in the curriculum was beneficial for their learning, giving it an average rating of 64 (Table 4). The perception of respondents in this study that GenAI did not make any meaningful improvement in their learning is supported by emerging research, which found a decrease in learning skills caused by GenAI. A 2025 study by scientists at MIT on the effect of brain function when using ChatGPT for essay writing found that it impacted cognitive development, diminished critical enquiry, increased vulnerability to manipulation and decreased creativity.[78]

5.2.4 Improved Job-readiness

The data shows that engaging with GenAI gave respondents a general sense of feeling better prepared for future legal practice. Respondents reported that using GenAI for legal research was beneficial for their future practice of law (73 – Table 3), but were more neutral on the usefulness of the written communication lecture (65 – Table 6). They reported that the pros and cons investigation increased their understanding of the benefits of using GenAI in legal practice (74 – Table 5), but students were unwilling to recommend its use (55 – Table 5).

Not all respondents felt the integration of GenAI in the PLT Course was necessary. One respondent suggested that further development of GenAI technology is needed before it can be embedded effectively:

> I think GenAI is still too much in its infancy to be something we really have to investigate deeply in assessment. In even the next three to five years, it's going to get even more advanced and be even more relevant for students to understand. But right now, the exercises feel a little redundant.

Nonetheless, there is growing support for law schools to actively nurture students' AI literacy to adequately prepare them for an emerging job market,[79] especially given the increased adoption of AI tools in legal practice reported above. Researchers involved in a 2025 empirical research study on how GenAI is being used across the legal profession in Australia suggest that if law students are taught how to use GenAI tools during their studies, they will be able to engage with them in legal practice.[80] Alimardani proposes that developing law students' ability to know when to appropriately use GenAI and how to critically assess its output is crucial to ensure they can then apply those skills after graduation in their professional legal careers.[81]
One respondent in this study made the following suggestion on the integration of GenAI:

> Rules for AI use in legal practice should be developed to address quality and ethical considerations. Even if initially, they are developed and presented at the PLT level for use in assignments where part of the assessment is the oversight of the human to ensure compliance with legal requirements.

This suggestion is supported by literature that recommends law students should not only learn to use GenAI tools during their studies, but that should be taught about the ethical risks of GenAI used in both university and professional contexts.[82] Ajevski et al. recommend that having discussions with law students about how misuse of GenAI at university can breach academic integrity policies and impact their future admission to the profession can also assist in emphasising the importance of the ethical use of GenAI in legal practice.[83] In Queensland, a finding of academic misconduct impacts the determination of a law student's suitability when seeking admission to practise law.[84] It can preclude a graduate from admission to the profession.[85] Courts in other states and territories in Australia have made similar findings.[86]

[77] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 13.
[78] Kosmyna, "Your Brain on ChatGPT," 141.
[79] Migliorini, "The Case for Nurturing AI Literacy," 13.
[80] Robb, It's the End of the World, 24.
[81] Alimardani, "Borderline Disaster," 8.
[82] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 14–15; Robb, It's the End of the World, 31.
[83] Ajevski, "ChatGPT," 363.
[84] *Legal Profession Act 2007* (Qld) s 37.
[85] "Re an Appln by AJG for Admission as a Solicitor of The Supreme Court of Queensland BC200401539."
[86] Dal Pont, Lawyers Professional Responsibility, 54.

Participants in this study emphasised the importance of being taught about potential risks and the responsible and ethical use of GenAI in legal practice. Respondents strongly agreed that the investigation into the pros and cons of using GenAI in legal practice was effective in teaching the ethics of using GenAI, giving an average score of 84 that the investigation increased their understanding of ethical considerations involved with using GenAI in legal practice (Table 5). They were firmly of the view (87) that it is a good idea for PLT students to investigate the benefits and risks of using AI in legal practice.

The value of incorporating a critical examination of GenAI uses in legal practice into legal education, is reflected in the following comments from respondents: 'I do think it's a good way of highlighting the benefits and pitfalls of using AI before anyone enters practice'; 'Highlighting dangers is important, such as inputting potentially confidential information'; and 'It is a good idea to have students do their own investigation on GenAI'. One respondent suggested that 'an exercise on advantages and also potential disasters when using AI would improve student experience with the software and reinforce the idea of technology as a tool and a threat, depending on the user'.

5.3 Concerns and Challenges with Using GenAI

Respondents had several concerns relating to GenAI, including the quality and reliability of its outputs, ethics and the negative impact it might have on the development of the competencies required of a legal practitioner.

5.3.1 Quality and Reliability

Commenting on the quality and reliability of GenAI for legal research, one respondent stated: 'There is nothing that GenAI can do for research that a human can't, and any answers that it gives must be checked as it has a tendency to be incorrect. This means any research essentially must be done twice.' This negative perception is reflected in the average score of only 46 that students gave when rating the likelihood of them using GenAI for future legal research (Table 3). Respondents also had limited enthusiasm for using GenAI for written communication, giving an average score of only 60 as to the likelihood of using it (Table 6). Respondents reported that they were also unlikely to use GenAI technology for feedback on an interview answer or presentation in the future (see Table 4).

Respondents were neutral regarding whether the best approach to legal research is GenAI used in conjunction with their own research and critical analysis skills (66, Table 3). They did not think this combined approach was best for written communication in legal practice (59 – Table 6). Respondents felt strongly that humans are better at legal research than GenAI (83, Table 3). Nearly all respondents agreed that human input is important when using GenAI for legal research (average score of 99 – Table 3) and written communication (93, Table 6). One student stated: 'Human quality assurance by appropriately experienced legal practitioners is essential where AI is used for legal work.'

These sentiments were shared by students in another study who reported feeling better prepared and less concerned about AI threatening their future careers after experimenting with the technology and noticing its limitations and how the human elements of legal practice could not be replicated by AI.[87] Ajevski et al. suggest that an important aspect of teaching AI technologies in law schools is having discussions with law students about the skills they possess and bring to their future careers as legal practitioners – skills that technology cannot replicate.[88] Humans in legal practice can think innovatively, use their judgement to consider different perspectives and choose the best course of action, feel empathy and human connection and provide nuanced advice.[89]

5.3.2 Skills Development

Despite learning about some of the limitations of GenAI, participants in this study still reported concerns about the potential for GenAI to erode the acquisition and development of the fundamental skills required to be a legal practitioner. A respondent reflected:

> I think there's been a craze to embrace AI technology like it's the new iPhone, but ultimately it will lead to the erasure of basic communication skills as professionals increasingly rely on AI to write material for them without critically analysing it. I suppose it could be used to supplement manual drafting, but if you have to double check every line you may as well write the whole thing yourself anyway. There are no shortcuts for experience, and an experienced solicitor would not need this tool. Students shouldn't rely on it in lieu of gaining actual experience.

[87] Bliss, "Teaching Law," 125.
[88] Ajevski, "ChatGPT," 363.
[89] Migliorini, "The Case for Nurturing AI Literacy," 10–11.

One respondent echoed these sentiments: 'GenAI does not help with issues of grammar and punctuation. Relying too much on AI will not improve skills but rather mask the inability to write clearly.' Others said: 'It's important that lawyers don't get the impression that assisted writing can replace improving upon writing for themselves' and 'I feel like people need to first learn how to professionally write a letter before using AI. I learnt this invaluable skill through professional work experience and having older mentors.'

Given these concerns and fears expressed by some participants in this study, it is important for educators to emphasise to law students that engaging with GenAI will not be to the detriment of the development of traditional legal skills. This is supported by scholars who recommend a balanced approach where changes to legal education are considered and intentional, and where GenAI complements traditional legal teaching methods.[90] This is important, as even though some law graduates will engage with GenAI immediately upon their entry to the profession, others may be more reliant on traditional legal skills.[91]

5.4 AI Literacy

5.4.1 Prompting

Some respondents expressed an interest in improving their GenAI competencies, particularly how to craft better prompts to achieve more detailed and reliable outputs. One respondent reflected: 'Gen AI can only deliver good responses to good prompts and great responses to great prompts.' Another respondent suggested: 'Introduce how to structure practical AI prompts to create useful AI workflows for close to complete legal material in practice.' Scholars propose that understanding how to choose phrases, words and sentences to influence the AI-generated response is central to a tailored education experience using GenAI,[92] and is essential for both university educators and students.[93] Head and Willis contend that teaching law students to prompt and evaluate the outputs can also help them to better understand and responsibly use GenAI in their academic and professional lives.[94]

Even though some respondents in this study expressed an interest in improving their prompting skills, others were not particularly interested in learning how to better prompt GenAI to produce written communication (63 – Table 6). This lack of interest is not necessarily a pedagogical concern for educators, as recent research suggests that although prompting is now considered an important skill for inclusion in legal education, as GenAI technologies continue to improve, it may be less relevant to critical analysis skills, which are needed to verify and interrogate GenAI outputs.[95] Alimardani recommends that legal educators should place greater emphasis on developing students' critical analysis skills,[96] especially given the risk of heightened confidence and over-reliance on GenAI outputs, which diminishes the rigor of critical evaluation of the outputs.[97]

5.4.2 Instruction on GenAI

In this study, respondents felt that they were given adequate guidance and support to use GenAI for legal research (77). Yet, of all survey questions, they gave the lowest average score to the question asking about the likelihood of them using GenAI for legal research in the future (46 – Table 3). This suggests that instruction alone may not be sufficient for students to learn GenAI skills and that they may also need guided practice and instructor feedback.

A combination of in-person and online instruction is the best approach for teaching GenAI skills. In-person lessons give students the opportunity to practise using AI tools and to receive feedback on their attempts, as demonstrated in another study that found in-class lessons were useful, especially for students with little or no experience of GenAI.[98] Alimardani proposes that a well-defined, structured GenAI program should be developed for the entire duration of a student's university degree because even if students are provided with explicit instructions on and practical opportunities to use AI tools effectively and responsibly, they may not fully engage with or apply those lessons effectively.[99] I agree, and suggest that students should receive instruction and practice using GenAI in both undergraduate law and PLT Courses.

[90] Farber, "Harmonizing AI and Human Instruction in Legal Education," 361; Goswami, Revolutionizing Legal Education: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Shaping the Future of Law Teaching and Learning, 24.
[91] Robb, It's The End of the World, 25.
[92] Cain, "Prompting Change," 52.
[93] Francis, "Generative AI," 7.
[94] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 14.
[95] Robb, It's The End of the World, 27.
[96] Alimardani, "Generative Artificial Intelligence," 812–813.
[97] Alimardani, "Borderline Disaster," 8.
[98] Rolf, "Using Generative Artificial Intelligence," 15.
[99] Alimardani, "Borderline Disaster," 9.

As to who will teach GenAI skills, while some scholars view computer scientists and software engineers as best equipped to develop and deliver courses for legal education,[100] it is legal educators who have taken on the work for GenAI initiatives. Some have only just begun to think about the technology themselves and are not familiar with the tools available.[101] This places a significant burden on educators operating in a resource-constrained environment to keep up with GenAI technological advances.[102] I support the view of Head and Willis that the challenge for universities is to provide necessary resources and support for legal academics to gain the GenAI skills that are urgently required to teach and assess law students in a GenAI disrupted world.[103]

6. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations apply to this study. Respondents made self-assessments about their prior GenAI awareness, experience and perceptions of GenAI tools, and these are subjective and can be inaccurate. The sample size was small, and all students were from the QUT PLT Course. However, as an approved practical legal training course, the QUT PLT Course complies with competency standards to ensure PLT students attain the prescribed knowledge, values, attitudes and skills required to practise law competently, so it shares similarities with other Australian practical legal training courses.[104] Future research could build on these findings, exploring how student perceptions change over time and considering the impact of GenAI in legal education on employment outcomes for law students.

7. Conclusion

This article has reported on the findings of QUT PLT students' perceptions of the effectiveness, benefits, and challenges of using GenAI tools in practical legal education. Most students had encountered GenAI before and reported that engaging with the use cases improved their AI literacy, although they remained cautious about the use of GenAI in future legal practice, particularly for legal research and written communication. The findings underscore the importance of providing students with targeted instruction and practical opportunities to engage with GenAI tools during their legal studies and the value of seeking student feedback on those experiences. Doing so will identify risks and gaps, support the ethical and responsible adoption of GenAI and build professional readiness. Student insights help shape pedagogically sound decisions on the integration of GenAI tools into legal education, ensuring law students are well prepared for future legal practice in which the use of GenAI technology is ubiquitous.

[100] Hildebrandt, "Grounding Computational Law," 123.
[101] Bliss, "Teaching Law," 147–148.
[102] Robb, It's The End of the World, 10.
[103] Head, "Assessing Law Students," 15.
[104] PLT Competency Standards for Entry Level Lawyers.

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