

Mind the Gap: Exploring AI Expectations of Librarians and Patrons at the University of Malta in the GenAI Era

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Abstract (TAKE 2026)

a) Purpose

The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in late 2022 precipitated a new academic reality, fundamentally altering information behaviors in higher education. While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward remote digital services, the GenAI era challenges the core function of the academic library: the mediation of information discovery and verification.

Current discourse within Library and Information Science (LIS) often treats librarian readiness and student adoption as separate phenomena. However, anecdotal evidence and emerging literature suggest a growing disconnect, an expectation gap, between the services libraries are preparing to offer (often focused on backend infrastructure and copyright governance) and the services students actually require (often focused on workflow efficiency, citation assistance, and grade preservation).

The primary purpose of this research is to bridge this provider-only perspective by quantifying the divergence between Library Professionals (Providers) and Library Patrons (Users) at the University of Malta Library (UML). By juxtaposing professional assumptions against user realities, the study aims to:

1. Identify the specific areas where student usage of AI outpaces staff awareness (The Usage Gap).
2. Determine if the service interventions proposed by staff align with the immediate "pain points" of the student body (The Service Gap).
3. Propose a "Service Alignment Model" to help the UML prioritize AI initiatives that yield the highest value to the user community, moving beyond reactive policy-making toward proactive, user-centered service design.

b) Design/methodology/approach

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional, dual-perspective research design method. Rather than relying on disparate datasets collected at different times, this research utilizes a mirrored survey methodology to capture the concurrent viewpoints of library professionals (Providers) and library patrons (Users).

Two structured questionnaires will be distributed simultaneously over a four-week period to two respondent cohorts:

- Cohort A (Providers): targeting t UML staff members, measuring their readiness, willingness to train, and perceptions of student behavior.
- Cohort B (Users): targeting registered UM patrons (undergraduate and postgraduate students, academics and administrative staff), measuring their actual usage patterns, service expectations, and ethical priorities.

The instruments are designed with identical underlying constructs to allow for a direct paired gap analysis. Key measurement areas include:

- Usage Constructs: Comparing staff *estimates* of AI adoption against patron *self-reported* usage frequency, specifically probing for concealment behaviors (hiding AI use due to fear of penalization) and discovery substitution (using LLMs instead of the library catalog).
- Service Constructs: Mapping patrons' demands to emerging Intelligent Library staff roles (e.g., AI literacy workshops, verification clinics) and comparing these demands against staff willingness and readiness to provide these new services.
- Ethical Constructs: Ranking ethical concerns to measure the divergence between provider priorities (data privacy/governance) and user priorities (grades/accuracy).

c) Theoretical base

This research is theoretically grounded in Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) and Service Quality (Gap Analysis) Theories.

CKM logic argues that in dynamic information environments, service innovation must be driven by the systematic collection of *external* user knowledge rather than *internal* process optimization. In the context of the Intelligent Library, libraries risk obsolescence if they focus only on optimizing traditional workflows (e.g., OPAC searching) while users migrate to novel workflows (e.g., conversational approaches to searching via ChatGPT and AI search engines).

Furthermore, the study draws on the Service Quality Gap Model, specifically the knowledge gap, the difference between what service providers *believe* customers expect and what customers *actually* expect. By quantifying this gap, the research moves beyond abstract discussions of AI readiness to a concrete measurement of Service Alignment. This framework is particularly relevant in the post-pandemic context, where user expectations for seamless, remote, and smart services have intensified.

d) Expected results

As the survey is forthcoming, results are hypothesized based on a synthesis of preliminary staff data gathered in a 2025 survey and broader global literature on student AI adoption. We anticipate three primary divergence patterns:

1. A Usage Gap : It is expected that patron self-reported usage will significantly exceed staff estimates, particularly regarding shadow tasks. We hypothesize that a significant portion of patrons are already using AI for discovery and synthesis, bypassing the library catalog, while staff may perceive AI usage as limited to brainstorming and text generation. We also anticipate high rates of concealment, where patrons use AI but hide it due to lack of clear policy, a behavior likely unknown to staff.
2. A Service Gap : We expect to find that staff are over-investing in theoretical readiness (e.g., willingness to learn about backend AI tools) while under-serving immediate practical needs. Specifically, we hypothesize high patron demand for verification clinics (help checking if AI citations are real) and prompt engineering for Research, which may not currently be on the library's training roadmap.
3. An Ethical Gap : We anticipate a sharp divergence in ethical orientation. Staff are expected to prioritize data privacy and copyright (governance concerns), consistent with professional library ethics. In contrast, patrons are expected to prioritize accuracy (hallucination risks) and grade validity (outcome concerns). This gap suggests that current library warnings about privacy may be ignored by patrons who are more focused on getting the answer right.

e) Originality/value

The originality of this research lies in its relational approach. While existing studies often examine librarian attitudes *or* student applications in isolation, this study treats them as a single service ecosystem. By using the mirrored survey methodology, it provides empirical evidence of the *relationship* between provider assumptions and user realities.

f) Practical implications

The primary practical output of this research will be a Service Alignment Model (SAM) for the UML. This framework will move the library from a reactive stance towards a proactive strategy by:

1. Re-prioritizing Training: Shifting user training from the staff perceived need for general AI awareness training to specific competencies that patrons require, such as AI citation verification.
2. Policy Communication: Moving from prohibitive policies (bans) to enablement policies that address patrons fears of accidental plagiarism.
3. Strategic Positioning: Validating the library's new value proposition not as a search engine competitor (competing on speed) but as a human-in-the-loop verifier (competing on trust).

Ultimately, the study argues that closing the expectation gap is not just about adopting new technology; it is about ensuring the library remains relevant in the cognitive workflow of the modern student.

Key Words: Academic Libraries, Generative AI (or GenAI), User Expectations, Gap Analysis, Service Alignment, University of Malta Library.

1. Introduction

The public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 signaled a revolution in higher education comparable to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as the pandemic forced a sudden migration to remote digital services, this AI Revolution forced a re-evaluation of information creation, retrieval, and verification. For academic libraries, this shift presents a pressing challenge: how to remain relevant in an information ecosystem where users can generate answers in seconds.

In the post-COVID world, library users, having been acclimatized to instant, remote digital access, possess heightened expectations for technological integration. However, while the rapid adoption of Generative AI (GenAI) among university students is anecdotally well-observed, the response from academic libraries has often been cautious, focusing on the ethical and logistical complexities of implementation. This disconnect creates a potential expectation gap between the services libraries are preparing to offer and the services students actually require.

Recent research conducted at the University of Malta Library (UML) provided a comprehensive snapshot of the workforce's stance on this technology. The findings revealed a staff body that is cautiously optimistic but hindered by significant ethical concerns regarding data privacy and a lack of formal policy. While 83% of staff expressed a willingness to undergo training, the study features a critical limitation: it focused exclusively on the service providers' perspective (Galea, 2025).

Without understanding the user perspective, the library risks prioritizing AI services which are not required by its patrons, and overlooking other beneficial services such as AI literacy workshops or guidance on AI-assisted citation. If the library's strict ethical red-taping (e.g., copyright) prevents it from adopting tools that students use daily, the library risks becoming obsolete in the contemporary researcher's workflow. .

1.1 Aim and Research Questions: A Paired Gap Analysis

This study adopts a dual-perspective research design which overcomes the limitations of a single-subject design. By simultaneously surveying library professionals and library patrons at the University of Malta, the research employs a mirrored methodology to capture concurrent viewpoints on AI integration. The primary objective is to quantify the Expectation Gap across three key dimensions: a Usage Gap, where patrons are likely already using AI

for discovery and synthesis, often covertly, while staff underestimate this adoption; a Service Gap, where staff investment in theoretical AI readiness may not align with patrons' more immediate practical needs, such as citation verification and prompt engineering support; and an Ethical Gap, where staff concerns centre on governance issues like privacy and copyright, while patrons are primarily focused on accuracy and academic outcomes.

This approach draws on Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) logic, which prioritizes capturing customer knowledge to inform service innovation (Daneshgar & Parirokh, 2012), and service-quality gap perspectives that emphasize measuring the misalignment between expectation and delivery (Kebriaei & Akbari, 2008).

To achieve these objectives, the study is structured around three research questions that map onto established UML library AI concerns regarding roles, readiness, and ethics:

- RQ1 (The Usage Gap): To what extent does daily academic GenAI use by students differ from library staff perceptions of how these tools are utilized?
- RQ2 (The Service Gap): Do student expectations for AI-related library support align with staff readiness and willingness to provide them?
- RQ3 (The Ethical Gap): How do student priorities (e.g., grades/accuracy) diverge from the ethical concerns (privacy/copyright) emphasized among library staff?

In answering these questions, this paper argues that the future role of the academic librarian is not to compete with AI for speed, but to complement it through verification and critical AI literacy, provided that librarians first understand the reality of their users' constantly changing information world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Post-Pandemic Digital Acceleration

The COVID-19 pandemic did more than drive the shift to online learning ; it fundamentally altered the psychological contract between the university and its users. The emergency remote teaching phase precipitated large-scale shifts to online delivery and assessment, creating institution-wide pressures to sustain academic integrity under digitally mediated conditions (Al-Hajri et al., 2021). However, the legacy of this period is a permanent change in user behavior. Evidence indicates that the pandemic functioned as an accelerator of digital service dependence, reinforcing the centrality of remote, technology-enabled access

channels (Shimray et al., 2025). Users who grew accustomed to the seamless, 24/7 availability of commercial digital platforms now expect similar responsiveness from the academic infrastructure. For academic libraries, this creates a service imperative: they must operate within an ecosystem where physical barriers are viewed as service failures, and digital friction is less tolerated than ever before.

Into this high-expectation landscape, the public emergence of ChatGPT in November 2022 acted as a catalytic event. It triggered an interest in GenAI across professional programs (Harris et al., 2025) and rapidly generated both excitement and concern regarding educational futures (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023). As institutions struggle to implement policy frameworks at a suitable pace, the role of AI is rapidly evolving. Initial studies focused on AI's cognitive benefits, such as for brainstorming (Chan & Hu, 2023); however, more recent empirical evidence suggests a swift transition from casual experimentation to routine integration (Deschenes & McMahon, 2024; Kim & Desaire, 2024). This study builds on this foundation, critically investigating whether this common integration directly results in discovery substitution and an active bypassing of formal library infrastructure.

The allure of these tools for students lies in their ability to bypass the cognitive load of traditional research. Student perceptions are broadly positive; they perceive significant benefits for brainstorming, summarizing complex texts, and structuring arguments (Chan & Hu, 2023). This implies that demand for AI-enabled support is expanding from casual experimentation into routine academic practice. However, this adoption creates a dangerous visibility gap. Research on assessment behavior suggests that students may intentionally conceal AI use to avoid academic penalties (Kirsanov et al., 2026). Furthermore, students are increasingly bypassing complex library discovery layers (OPACs) in favor of the conversational simplicity of Large Language Models (LLMs). This trend places libraries at risk of disintermediation, where the library is cut out of the research loop entirely because its tools are perceived as too slow or complex compared to AI tools (Shimray et al., 2025).

2.2 The Librarian's Evolution: Professional Prudence vs. Technological Inevitability

For academic libraries, the AI revolution presents an operational dilemma: safeguarding information integrity while adapting to a transformed information ecosystem. The literature reveals a distinct evolution in librarian attitudes. Early studies (Wood and Evans, 2018) reflected a skepticism where many believed AI would have little or no effect on the profession. This has been replaced by a realization of inevitability. By 2022, research noted

that a majority of librarians believed AI would fundamentally transform library functions (Yoon et al., 2022), and recent global surveys indicate that integrating AI is now a higher priority than upgrading traditional library management systems (Clarivate, 2024).

However, prioritizing AI does not equate to implementing it. A usage gap remains, where personal adoption outpaces professional integration. Hervieux and Wheatley (2021) identified that while 40% of librarians used AI tools personally, only 8% believed their libraries were actively adopting them. This hesitation is often rooted in professional prudence. Unlike students, who prioritize output speed, librarians prioritize accuracy and copyright compliance. The fear is not just job displacement, but the black box nature of AI technology makes librarians reluctant to recommend tools they cannot fully audit or explain (Bradley, 2022).

This hesitation is exacerbated by a severe governance lag. Technology has moved faster than policy-making, and the literature emphasizes that concrete AI ethical guidelines for libraries are limited (Bubinger & Dinneen, 2021). This leaves individual librarians to navigate a complex landscape of data privacy, bias, and security without an institutional air cover (Bradley, 2022).

Consequently, the role of the librarian is forcibly expanding to include AI literacy, defined as the ability to use, understand, and critically evaluate AI output (Lo, 2024). Yet, there is a disconnect between the desire to learn and the confidence to teach. Self-assessments often reveal only moderate confidence in AI skills among library staff (de Leon et al., 2024). This highlights a critical need for structured professional development that moves beyond mere awareness toward functional competency, giving staff the confidence to guide students who may already be more technically proficient than they are.

2.3 Local Context: The University of Malta and the Melitensia Challenge

The global trends described above are mirrored, and in some cases amplified, within the UML. A 2025 workforce snapshot revealed a staff body characterized by cautious optimism: while 83% expressed a clear willingness to undergo AI training, this enthusiasm is tempered by a 52% concern rate regarding data privacy and security (Galea, 2025).

Crucially, the UML context highlights a specific limitation of global AI models which is their bias toward dominant languages and cultures. UML staff noted that AI tools effectively hallucinate or fail when dealing with the Maltese language or Melitensia (written material

related to Maltese history and culture and/or written by Maltese authors) content, which has a significantly minimal presence in the training data of large language models. It suggests that the future value of the UML librarian is not just in finding information, which AI can do for general topics, but in validating and curating local, niche, and heritage information where AI fails (Galea, 2025). However, without understanding whether students realize this limitation, the library cannot effectively market its human expertise. Service quality research warns that gaps between user expectations and staff readiness persist unless organizations systematically align their internal capabilities with external user needs (Kebriai & Akbari, 2008). Thus the current data leaves a blind spot: if students trust AI blindly for Maltese content, the library's unique value proposition is being undermined without their knowledge. Thus, bridging the gap between staff readiness and student expectations is not just a service improvement exercise; it is a strategic necessity for the library's relevance.

2.4 Theoretical Framework for the Usage Gap (RQ1)

A survey-based approach to capturing student use of GenAI is established in the literature, demonstrating the feasibility of quantifying task-level usage patterns (Deschenes & McMahon, 2024). Cross-context evidence indicates substantial early adoption of tools like ChatGPT (Kim & Desaire, 2024). However, the phenomenon of concealment, whereby students use of but do not disclose use of AI tools in high-stakes assessment contexts, suggests that staff perceptions may systematically undercount usage (Kirsanov et al., 2026). This aligns with library-focused scholarship implying a perception gap whereby staff do not fully track student behaviors due to their own uncertainties regarding AI service integration (Hussain, 2023; Ocholla & Ocholla, 2020).

2.5 Theoretical Framework for the Service Gap (RQ2)

The intelligent library paradigm positions libraries as active agents in AI infrastructure and literacy (Cox et al., 2019). Such research suggests that as user behavior shifts toward AI-assisted retrieval, service expectations will rise accordingly (Gul & Bano, 2019). Empirical evidence shows students are already pivoting away from OPACs toward LLMs for discovery (Shimray et al., 2025). On the workforce side, service-quality research defines misalignment as a quality gap reducible through training (Kebriai & Akbari, 2008). However, qualitative work warns that while librarians have an empowerment role, they must upgrade skills to respond to evolving risks, reinforcing the plausibility of a service gap even when staff willingness is high (Filson & Atuase, 2025).

2.6 Theoretical Framework for the Ethical Gap (RQ3)

In higher education, student concerns often center on outcomes: accuracy, grade validity, and the risk of accidental plagiarism (Livberber & Ayvaz, 2023). This outcome-focused ethics contrasts sharply with the governance-focused ethics of the library profession, which places privacy and trust at the core of service delivery (Sutlieff & Chelin, 2010). Research indicates that while privacy is a major concern in digital libraries (Avuglah et al., 2020), students may trade privacy for convenience, creating a divergence in ethical priorities. Furthermore, librarians heavily weigh copyright concerns (Padron & Paige, 2024), a nuanced issue that may be secondary to students who are primarily concerned with assessment survival.

2.7 Conceptual Framework: Expected Divergence Patterns (Hypotheses)

Since the available empirical evidence is drawn from contexts outside Malta, UM-specific magnitudes should be established through the proposed paired dataset rather than inferred. However, the literature supports testable directional hypotheses which form the conceptual framework of this study:

- **Usage Gap Hypotheses:** Student self-reported daily academic GenAI use will exceed staff estimates, particularly for assessment-adjacent tasks. This is hypothesized because students may conceal AI use in online assessment contexts and because integrity pressures in remote assessment are significant, while libraries face awareness and deployment uncertainties.
- **Service Gap Hypotheses:** Students will report strong expectations for practical AI literacy and research/writing support consistent with perceived GenAI benefits. Conversely, staff readiness will cluster around cautious optimism constrained by privacy/policy concerns (Galea, 2025), reflecting broader readiness constraints documented in academic libraries.
- **Ethical Gap Hypotheses:** Students will prioritize grade-related fairness and accuracy risks associated with GenAI. In contrast, staff will prioritize privacy/trust and copyright governance consistent with library ethics and mediator roles. This divergence is potentially amplified if students exhibit privacy relaxedness due to limited awareness or trust in the library to protect privacy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design: A Concurrent Dual-Perspective Approach

To overcome the limitations of a unilateral assessment, this research utilized a cross-sectional, dual-perspective design. Rather than relying on historical baselines, primary data was collected simultaneously from two distinct cohorts: UML professionals (the providers) and registered patrons (the users).

This mirrored approach was designed to capture concurrent viewpoints on AI integration. By administering parallel instruments during the same timeframe, the study minimized temporal validity threats (e.g., rapid changes in AI technology rendering old staff data obsolete). This design aligns with CKM frameworks (Daneshgar & Parirokh, 2012) and service-quality methodologies (Kebriaei & Akbari, 2008), specifically aiming to measure the divergence between professional assumptions of library service providers and the actual immediate demands of the user base for necessary services.

3.2 Participants and Data Collection

Two distinct data collection streams were executed in parallel over a four-week period in April 2026.

- Cohort A (Library professionals/service providers): Responses composed of 45 library professionals (out of a total of 60 full-time employed librarians) across the University of Malta, comprising Senior Assistant Librarians, Assistant Librarians, Library Assistants, Library Support Officers and Management. Respondents represented staff from the Main Library and its various branches. The survey was distributed internally to all UML staff members via the institutional email system. Participation was voluntary but encouraged by management to ensure a comprehensive view of workforce readiness.
- Cohort B (Patrons/students/users): Responses composed of 108 library patrons, capturing a broad cross-section of the university ecosystem. This included full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students, academic staff (e.g., from the Faculties of Medicine and Surgery, Arts, FEMA, and Science), and administrative personnel. The student survey was distributed electronically to registered students at the University

of Malta. To maximize reach across different faculties and years of study, a multi-channel distribution strategy was employed, utilizing the University's institutional email system, the Library's official social media pages, and physical QR codes placed strategically within Library premises.

3.3 Instrument Development and Measurement Constructs

Two structured questionnaires were developed for this study. While the phrasing was adapted to suit the specific context of each group (e.g., "*In which area would you value ...*" vs. "*In your role as a Library professional, ...*"), the underlying thematic categories were identical to ensure direct statistical comparability. The instruments comprised three key measurement areas:

- **Measuring Usage (RQ1):** To quantify the Usage Gap, constructs were anchored in empirically demonstrated survey approaches (Deschenes & McMahon, 2024). The instrument measured the divergence between staff *perception* of student AI use and *actual* self-reported student use. It distinguished between frequency (Likert scale) and task typology (e.g., brainstorming vs. citing). Crucially, the student instrument probed for concealment behaviors in assessment (Kirsanov et al., 2026) and discovery substitution (Shimray et al., 2025), variables that staff were asked to estimate.
- **Measuring Service Expectations (RQ2):** To assess the Service Gap, questions mapped demands to intelligent library roles (Cox et al., 2019). Students rated their desire for specific interventions (e.g., AI-search support, verification clinics), while staff rated their *readiness* and *willingness* to provide these specific services. This allowed for a direct comparison of Demand vs. Supply.
- **Measuring Ethical Priorities (RQ3):** To evaluate the Ethical Gap, both groups were asked to rank their primary concerns regarding GenAI. This section was structured to test the hypothesis that staff priorities focus on governance (privacy, copyright) (Sutcliffe & Chelin, 2010), while student priorities focus on outcomes (grades, accuracy), quantifying the misalignment in ethical orientation.

To ensure construct validity, survey items were aligned directly with established dimensions from the Service Quality Gap Model (specifically the Knowledge Gap) and adapted for the GenAI context. A preliminary pilot test was conducted with a small subset of library staff and students to ensure clarity of terminology (e.g., defining GenAI vs. specific tools like

ChatGPT). The complete survey instruments, including example questions and specific scale definitions, are available in Appendix A (Librarians) and Appendix B (Users).

3.4 Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis focused on quantifying the perceptual and behavioral divergence between the two concurrent cohorts: library patrons (users) and library professionals (providers).

First, descriptive statistics were generated to establish behavioral baselines. This included quantifying the frequency of GenAI adoption, the typologies of AI-assisted tasks (e.g., drafting, finding sources, summarizing, and citation management), and system bypass rates, specifically measuring the percentage of users who utilize AI tools as a substitute for the library's traditional search portal (HyDi).

Subsequently, a comparative gap analysis was conducted by mapping paired responses for matching service constructs. Both cohorts were asked to identify top priorities across distinct support domains: *AI & Research Skills*, *Academic Integrity & Ethics*, *Search & Discovery*, *Writing & Referencing*, *Data & Methodology*, and *Practical Support Formats* (e.g., hands-on workshops vs. online guides). By calculating the percentage point differences between patron demands (what users want) and librarian priorities (what providers believe should be offered), the raw data was transformed into actionable management intelligence.

This gap-oriented methodology enabled the identification of critical service misalignments. By plotting these differences alongside qualitative insights from the open-ended responses, the study pinpointed areas where the library was potentially over-investing (e.g., prioritizing theoretical ethics and online guides) versus under-serving (e.g., immediate workflow support and drop-in verification clinics). Ultimately, these quantitative and qualitative divergences formed the empirical basis for the Service Alignment Model (SAM) proposed in the discussion.

3.5 Limitations

This study should be interpreted within the context of several methodological and contextual limitations.

First, the research is based on a single institutional case study at the University of Malta. While the findings provide valuable insight into the interaction between library professionals and patrons within this environment, the extent to which these patterns generalize to other

institutional, cultural, or disciplinary contexts remains uncertain. Academic libraries operate under varying technological infrastructures, policy frameworks, and user demographics, all of which may influence AI adoption and expectations.

Second, the sample size, although sufficient for an exploratory comparative analysis ($n = 45$ library professionals; $n = 108$ patrons), remains relatively modest. As such, the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive, particularly in relation to subgroup variation across faculties or levels of study.

Third, the study relies on self-reported survey data. While this approach is appropriate for capturing perceptions, expectations, and behaviors, it is subject to known limitations including response bias, recall bias, and potential discrepancies between reported and actual practices, particularly in relation to sensitive behaviors such as AI use in assessment contexts.

A related limitation concerns the interpretation of fine-grained sub-group percentages. Where response categories attract small absolute counts, for instance, the 6.7% 'strongly distrust' figure among librarians represents approximately three individuals, percentage-point comparisons should be read as indicative of directional trends rather than precise estimates. Readers are advised to exercise proportionate caution when interpreting differences derived from low-frequency response categories.

Additionally, Cohort B (patrons) encompasses a deliberately broad population, undergraduate students, postgraduate students, academic staff, and administrative personnel, whose AI needs, workflows, and risk perceptions may differ substantially. The aggregate patron figures reported throughout should therefore be understood as a composite snapshot rather than representative of any single user sub-group. Future work with larger samples would benefit from stratified analysis by academic level and role.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design captures a single moment within a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Given the pace of change in GenAI tools, user practices and institutional responses may shift significantly over short periods. The findings should therefore be understood as a temporal snapshot rather than a stable baseline.

Finally, while the mirrored survey design enables direct comparison between providers and users, it does not capture deeper qualitative nuance in how participants interpret AI use within their academic workflows. Future research could extend this work through mixed-method or longitudinal designs to provide richer contextualization.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in conformity with the University of Malta's Research Ethics Code of Practice and Procedures. All participants received an information letter outlining the study's purpose and their rights, and voluntary informed consent was obtained prior to participation, in line with Section 3.1.3 of UM's Research Code of Practice.

No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were recorded anonymously. Data were stored securely in accordance with the principles of necessity, minimisation, and proportionality stipulated by UM's ethical guidelines, and participants were informed of data retention arrangements at the point of consent.

The study presented no foreseeable risk of harm to participants, who did not constitute a vulnerable group under UM guidelines. Findings have been reported accurately and transparently, consistent with UM's standards of research integrity.

3.7 Funding Disclosure

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

4. Results

The table below (Table 1) presents the two surveys' questions and mirrored responses of librarians and patrons in percentages. The question number tags (Q1, Q2 etc.) are used for the purpose of easier reference in the Results and Discussion and do not correlate to the separate survey question numbers.

	Questions	Answers	
		Librarians - 45 responses	Patrons - 108 responses
Section 2 Questions about general AI use	Q1 - How frequently do you use Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini) for university-related work?	40% - Very frequently (multiple times per week)	37% - Very frequently (multiple times per week)
		24.4% - Frequently (weekly)	28.7% - Frequently (weekly)
		17.8% - Rarely (a few times per semester)	14.8% - Occasionally (monthly)
		17.8% - Occasionally (monthly)	13.1% - Rarely (a few times per semester)
		0% - Never	6.4% - Never
	Q2 - Have you used AI tools to help with brainstorming?	73.3% - Yes	74.1% - Yes
		26.7% - No	25.9% - No
	Q3 - Have you used AI tools to help with drafting	84.4% - Yes	68.5% - Yes
		15.6% - No	31.5% - No
	Q4 - Have you used AI tools to help with summarising texts?	64.4% - Yes	66.7% - Yes
		35.6% - No	33.3% - No
	Q5 - Have you used AI tools to help with finding sources?	66.7% - Yes	70.4% - Yes
		33.3% - No	29.6% - No
	Q6 - Have you used AI tools to help with citations?	60% - No	54.6% - Yes
		40% - Yes	45.4% - No
	Q7 - Have you ever used an AI tool to find academic resources instead of using the Library's HyDi search portal?	64.4% - No	50% - No
		35.6% - Yes	50% - Yes
	Q8 - Have you ever refrained from disclosing your use of AI to a lecturer due to fear of negative marking? (Users survey)	N/A	64.8% - Yes
		N/A	35.2% - No

	Questions	Answers	
		Librarians - 45 responses	Patrons - 108 responses
	Q9 - Are you aware of any AI-powered tools or support services currently offered by the UM Library?	53.3% - Yes	63% - No
		26.7% - No	31.5% - Not Sure
		20% - Not Sure	5.5% - Yes
Section 3 - The UM Library and AI support	In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? / What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library?		
		73.3% Evaluating and verifying AI-generated information	35.2% - Using AI for literature reviews
		20.1% - Using AI to refine research questions	27.8% - Evaluating and verifying AI-generated information
		2.2% - Using AI to summarise academic articles	15.7% - Using AI to summarise academic articles
		2.2% - Using AI for systematic or scoping reviews	12% - Using AI for systematic or scoping reviews
		2.2% - Using AI for literature reviews	9.3% - Using AI to refine research questions
	Q11 - Academic Integrity & Ethics	66.7% - Understanding ethical use of AI in assignments	37% - Understanding University policies on AI and assessment
		15.6% - Avoiding plagiarism when using AI	31.5% - Avoiding plagiarism when using AI

	Questions	Answers	
		Librarians - 45 responses	Patrons - 108 responses
		11% - Understanding University policies on AI and assessment	23.2% - Understanding ethical use of AI in assignments
		6.7% - Guidance on disclosing AI use to lecturers	8.3% - Guidance on disclosing AI use to lecturers
	Q12 - Search & Discovery	48.9% - Combining AI tools with HyDi and library databases	48.2% - Finding reliable academic sources using AI
		28.9% - Finding reliable academic sources using AI	25% - Combining AI tools with HyDi and library databases
		17.8% - AI-assisted keyword and search strategy building	16.7% - Discovering open-access resources with AI
	Q13 - Writing & Referencing	4.4% - Discovering open-access resources with AI	10.1% - AI-assisted keyword and search strategy building
		40% - Understanding limits of AI for referencing accuracy	38% - Improving clarity and academic tone with AI
		35.6% - AI support for academic writing structure	28.7% - Understanding limits of AI for referencing accuracy
		13.3% - Improving clarity and academic tone with AI	17.6% - AI-assisted citation checking and formatting
	Q14 - Data & Methodology	11.1% - AI-assisted citation checking and formatting	15.7% - AI support for academic writing structure
		46.7% - Using AI to interpret data or results	47.2% - Understanding AI's role in research methodologies
		31.1% - Understanding AI's role in research methodologies	27.8% - Using AI to interpret data or results

	Questions	Answers	
		Librarians - 45 responses	Patrons - 108 responses
		22.2% - AI support for qualitative analysis	25% - AI support for qualitative analysis
	Q15 - Practical Support Formats	40% - Short hands-on workshops	37% - Online guides and tutorials
		31.1% - Drop-in AI help sessions	26.9% - Short hands-on workshops
		22.2% - Online guides and tutorials	23.1% - One-to-one AI research consultations
		6.7% - One-to-one AI research consultations	13% - Drop-in AI help sessions
	Q16 - If the Library offered a workshop on “How to use AI for Research”, how likely are you to attend?	N/A	30.6% - Likely
			24.1% - Very likely
			22.2% - Very unlikely
			14.8% - Neutral
			8.3% - Unlikely
	Q17 - What concerns you most when using AI for assignments?	N/A	52.8% - Incorrect or misleading information
			39.7% - Other
			5.6% - Receiving a lower grade
			1.9% - Data privacy and surveillance
	Q18 - Do you trust free AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) with your personal data or research ideas?	31.1% - Neutral	38.9% - Neutral
		31.1% - Trust	23.2% - Strongly distrust
		28.9% - Distrust	18.5% - Distrust
		6.7% - Strongly distrust	18.5% - Trust
		2.2% - Strongly trust	0.9% - Strongly trust

(Table 1)

4.1 RQ1 - From Usage Gap to Practice Gap: AI as a Parallel Discovery Layer

The descriptive baseline data does not indicate a meaningful Usage Gap between library professionals and patrons in terms of overall frequency of GenAI use. High-frequency engagement remains closely aligned across both cohorts: 64.4% of librarians report using AI tools either frequently (24.4%) or very frequently (40.0%), compared to 65.7% of patrons (28.7% frequently; 37.0% very frequently) (Q1). Lower-frequency engagement is also broadly comparable, with 35.6% of librarians (17.8% occasionally; 17.8% rarely) and 27.9% of patrons (14.8% occasionally; 13.1% rarely) reporting less regular use (Q1). While patrons show a slightly smaller proportion of infrequent users, the overall distribution suggests similar levels of routine engagement.

However, this parity at the level of engagement frequency does not extend to how AI tools are integrated into academic workflows. The data instead points toward a Practice Gap, characterized by differences in functional application rather than mere access or exposure. This divergence becomes visible when examining task-oriented uses of AI. Patrons report high levels of active engagement across multiple academic activities, including brainstorming (74.1%, Q2), summarizing texts (66.7%, Q4), and finding sources (70.4%, Q5). Notably, patrons are more likely to use AI for generating citations (54.6%) compared to librarians (40.0%) (Q6), suggesting a greater willingness among the student/researcher cohort to delegate technical research tasks to AI.

This pattern is reinforced when examining substitution behaviors. When asked whether they had used AI tools to locate academic resources instead of using the Library's search portal (HyDi), 50.0% of patrons responded affirmatively, compared to only 35.6% of librarians (Q7). This 14.4 percentage point difference indicates that patrons are significantly more inclined to position AI as a primary alternative access point to scholarly information.

In contrast, librarian priorities reflect a more evaluative and cautious orientation. Within the sample, 73.3% of librarians identify evaluating and verifying AI-generated information as the top priority for library support (Q10). Patrons, however, view this as a lower priority (27.8%), instead identifying using AI for literature reviews (35.2%) as their primary area of interest (Q10).

Taken together, these patterns indicate that while both cohorts engage with AI at comparable frequencies (Q1), they do so in structurally different ways. Patrons appear more likely to embed AI within end-to-end research processes, encompassing ideation (Q2), synthesis

(Q4), discovery (Q5), and even citation management (Q6). Librarians, by contrast, tend to position AI within a more bounded role, emphasizing oversight, critical verification, and the preservation of institutional standards (Q10). This distinction supports the interpretation of AI as an emerging parallel discovery layer: an informal, user-driven system operating alongside institutional infrastructures (Q7).

4.2 RQ2 - The Service Gap: Conceptual Priorities vs. Operational Demand

A more pronounced divergence emerges when comparing how each cohort conceptualizes the role of the academic library in supporting AI use. This Service Gap is not rooted in differences in awareness or baseline engagement (Q1), but in the types of support perceived as most valuable.

Librarians demonstrate a strong preference for services grounded in critical evaluation and responsible use. This professional orientation is centered on information literacy and risk mitigation, as evidenced by their top priorities:

- 73.3% prioritize "*evaluating and verifying AI-generated information*" (Q10).
- 66.7% prioritize "*understanding ethical use of AI in assignments*" (Q11).
- 40.0% prioritize "*understanding the limits of AI for referencing accuracy*" (Q13).

Patron responses, conversely, indicate a more application-driven set of priorities. Their behavior, illustrated in integrating AI into practical tasks like finding sources (70.4%, Q5), summarizing (66.7%, Q4), and drafting (68.5%, Q3), aligns with a demand for support that enhances efficiency. For patrons, the most valued areas of support include:

- "*Using AI for literature reviews*" (35.2%, Q10).
- "*Understanding University policies on AI and assessment*" (37.0%, Q11).
- "*Improving clarity and academic tone with AI*" (38.0%, Q13).

Additional indicators reinforce this operational orientation and suggest a degree of anxiety regarding institutional policing of AI. While 54.7% of patrons indicate they are likely or very likely to attend an AI workshop (Q16), their primary concern remains incorrect or misleading information (52.8%, Q17). Perhaps the most indicative of the gap between institutional policy and student practice is the finding that 64.8% of patrons have refrained from disclosing their use of AI to a lecturer due to fear of negative marking (Q8).

Differences are also evident in preferred support formats. Librarians lean toward structured delivery, with 40.0% favoring brief hands-on workshops (Q15). In contrast, patrons show a preference for immediate, self-directed resources, with 37.0% identifying online guides and tutorials as their preferred format (Q15) for receiving AI support from the Library.

This divergence suggests a misalignment between a conceptual service model favored by librarians and an operational demand model required by patrons. While librarians prioritize how AI should be governed and evaluated (Q10–Q13), patrons focus on how AI can be effectively applied to specific academic outputs and how to navigate the risks of assessment within the current institutional climate (Q8, Q17).

4.3 RQ3 - The Ethical Gap: Shared Skepticism, Divergent Risk Frameworks

The data provides support for the existence of an Ethical Gap, characterized not just by the intensity of skepticism, but by the distribution and framing of risk. When examining levels of trust in free AI tools (Q18), combined negative trust positions (distrust and strongly distrust) represent 35.6% of librarians and 41.7% of patrons.

However, a significant divergence is visible in the internal distribution of these responses. Patron responses are notably more polarized: 23.2% indicated "*strongly distrust*," compared to only 6.7% of librarians, a difference of 16.5 percentage points (Q18). This suggests that while more librarians harbor a general "*distrust*" (28.9%), a specific segment of the patron population holds a much deeper suspicion of the technology. Furthermore, 38.9% of patrons adopt a "*neutral*" stance (Q18), indicating a state of cautious ambivalence despite their high usage rates.

Librarians exhibit a more stabilized, middle-ground perspective. Their highest response categories are "*neutral*" (31.1%) and "*trust*" (31.1%), with very few taking the extreme position of "*strongly trust*" (2.2%) or "*strongly distrust*" (6.7%) (Q18). This suggests a professionally tempered view of AI, likely informed by institutional awareness of both risks and utilities.

The qualitative patterns in reported concerns (Q17) further illustrate this divergence in risk framing. Patron concerns are heavily weighted toward immediate operational reliability and academic integrity:

- 52.8% are most concerned about "*incorrect or misleading information.*"
- 5.6% are primarily concerned about "*receiving a lower grade.*"
- 1.9% prioritize "*data privacy and surveillance.*"

Although Q17 was not applicable to librarians, their priorities expressed in Q10–Q13 (Section 4.2) suggest their risk framework is systemic, focusing on evaluation, ethical standards, and referencing accuracy.

The resulting Ethical Gap can therefore be understood as a divergence in how risk is conceptualized. Librarians approach AI through a lens of institutional governance and reliability (Q18), whereas patrons interpret risk through a performance-oriented framework (Q17). For patrons, the risk of AI is not just a theoretical or ethical concern, but a practical one related to the accuracy of outputs and the potential for negative assessment outcomes, a fear substantiated by the high rates of non-disclosure to faculty (Q8).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study challenge a dominant assumption in current discourse: that the primary divide between library professionals and users lies in technological adoption. Instead, the data suggests that both cohorts engage with GenAI at near-identical frequencies, with 64.4% of librarians and 65.7% of patrons reporting high-frequency use (Q1), effectively eliminating the notion of a meaningful usage gap. The divergence is instead located in how AI is operationalized, valued, and governed within academic work.

This distinction is critical when situated within broader concerns surrounding LLMs. While LLMs can generate highly plausible academic content at scale, their outputs remain probabilistic, with well-documented risks related to hallucination, bias, and unverifiable synthesis (Gao et al., 2023). Similarly, concerns within scholarly communication highlight that AI-generated content can introduce inaccuracies or untraceable borrowing that traditional peer review mechanisms may fail to detect (Zielinski et al., 2023).

Within this context, the findings reinforce that the academic library's comparative advantage does not lie in competing with AI at the level of answer generation, but rather in strengthening its role in verification, interpretation, and governance. This is reflected in the overwhelming professional consensus among librarians, 73.3% of whom identify evaluating and verifying AI-generated information as the primary area for library support (Q10). This aligns with established models of the intelligent library, where the focus shifts toward navigation, evaluation, and data literacy, and with smart library frameworks that emphasize aligning technological integration with actual user behavior rather than institutional assumptions (Cox et al., 2019; Gul & Bano, 2019).

Crucially, the data reveals that users are already integrating AI into core academic workflows, particularly in discovery. With 50% of patrons reporting that they have used AI tools to find academic resources instead of the Library's discovery portal (HyDi), compared to 35.6% of librarians (Q7), it is noted how the role of AI changed from content generation (peripheral) to that of a search engine and a parallel discovery tool. This shift is further evidenced by the high percentage of patrons using AI to find sources (70.4%, Q5) and summarize texts (66.7%, Q4).

This supports emerging evidence that users prefer LLM-mediated systems for their clarity, accessibility, and responsiveness (Shimray et al., 2025). However, the tension between integration and organizational cautionary approach in policy is palpable, as 64.8% of patrons refrain from disclosing their AI use due to fear of negative marking (Q8). As such, the strategic challenge for libraries is not to defend legacy systems in isolation, but to embed guidance, quality control, and critical literacy within the AI environments users already inhabit.

5.1 The Service Alignment Model (SAM): Translating Divergence into Strategy

To operationalize these findings, this study proposes the SAM, a four-layer iterative framework designed to reconcile the identified Practice Gap, Service Gap, and Ethical Gap. It should be noted that while the framework's structure is grounded in the empirical divergences identified in Sections 4.1–4.3, its specific service recommendations also draw on the broader CKM and intelligent library literature; the SAM should therefore be read as a theoretically informed practice model rather than a finding that flows directly from the survey data alone.

Layer 1: Demand Sensing (User Reality)

Purpose: To capture how users actually engage with AI in academic work. The data clearly shows that patrons are not passive adopters but active integrators of AI into core academic tasks. The results show that 50.0% of patrons bypass traditional discovery systems in favor of AI (Q7) which signals a structural behavioral shift rather than isolated experimentation. This demand is further defined by high engagement in functional tasks such as finding sources (70.4%, Q5) and summarizing texts (66.7%, Q4).

- Outputs: AI task typologies; Frequency–task mapping; Identification of friction points (e.g., 52.8% concern regarding misinformation, Q17).

Layer 2: Capability Mapping (Provider Reality)

Purpose: To define what the UML can realistically deliver. Despite similar usage levels, 64.4% high-frequency use among librarians and 65.7% frequency use among patrons (Q1), the data indicates that staff engagement remains bounded and cautious. Librarian priorities are heavily weighted toward "*evaluating and verifying information*" (73.3%, Q10) and "*ethical use*" (66.7%, Q11). This results in a service model that traditionally prioritizes conceptual guidance over the applied, task-based support demanded by users.

- Outputs: Service readiness matrix; Staff capability audit; Training roadmap aligned with actual service demand.

Layer 3: Risk & Ethics Governance (Trust Conditions)

Purpose: To translate abstract concerns into actionable safeguards.

Both cohorts demonstrate comparable overall distrust of AI (35.6% for librarians vs. 41.7% for patrons, Q18), but they differ significantly in how that distrust is structured. Patrons exhibit a much higher "*strong distrust*" (23.2% vs. 6.7% for librarians), while librarians adopt a more moderate, neutral distribution (31.1%, Q18). More importantly, the framing of risk diverges:

- Librarians - Focus on systemic and ethical concerns (e.g., referencing accuracy, Q13).
- Patrons - Focus on performance and outcomes (e.g., fear of "*negative marking*" leading to 64.8% non-disclosure, Q8).
- Outputs: AI evaluation checklists; Privacy and data-use guidance; Integrity-focused usage frameworks.

Layer 4: Service Portfolio Alignment (Strategic Prioritization)

Purpose: To align services with high-impact user behaviors. The key insight from the data is that misalignment is not due to a lack of awareness, but a mismatch in priorities (Q10). Librarians emphasize understanding AI, while patrons prioritize applying AI effectively to tasks like literature reviews (35.2%, Q10) and improving academic tone (38.0%, Q13).

- Outputs: Ranked AI service portfolio; Phased implementation strategy (e.g., prioritizing "*online guides*" favored by 37.0% of patrons, Q15).

This model is inherently iterative. Both AI capabilities and user practices are evolving rapidly, and static service models risk becoming obsolete. Continuous recalibration is therefore essential.

The SAM directly operationalizes the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. Specifically, it maps to CKM by treating the Practice Gap, patrons' real-world shadow workflows, as external knowledge that must drive internal service innovation. Furthermore, SAM addresses the Service Quality Knowledge Gap by transforming the measured misalignments in service expectations (e.g., librarians prioritizing theoretical ethics while patrons demand practical verification tools) into targeted, layered service interventions.

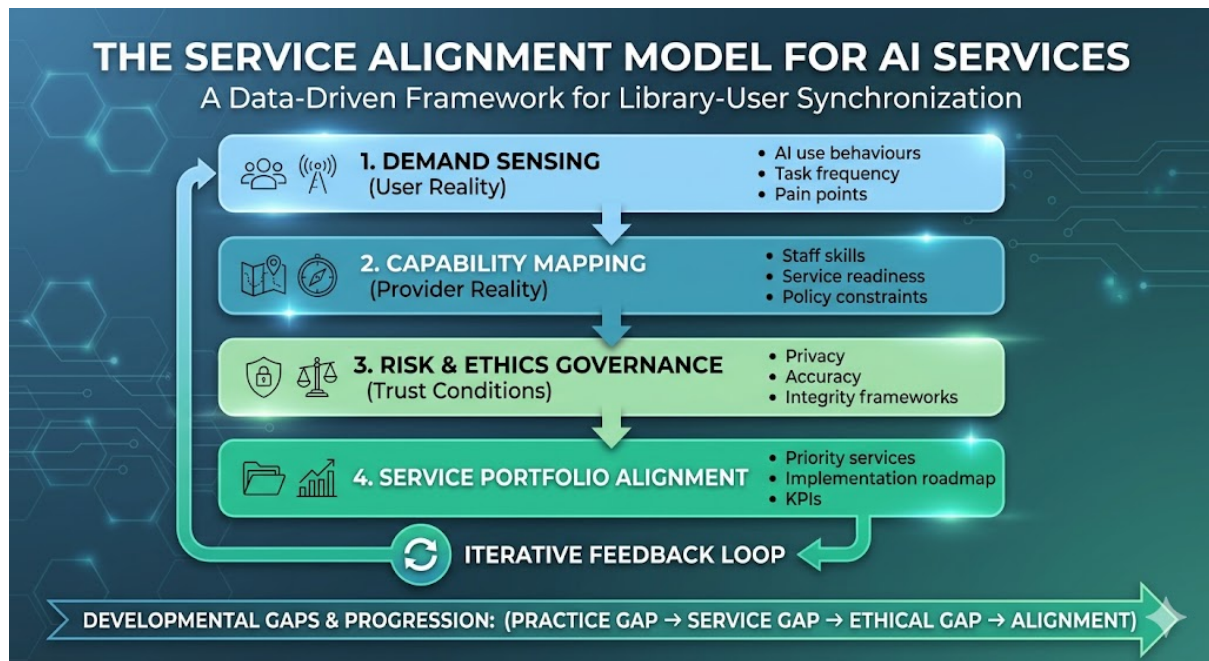


Figure 1. The Service Alignment Model (SAM) operationalizes the alignment between user AI practices and library service provision through a four-layer iterative cycle. The model translates observed divergences, practice, service, and ethical gaps, into structured service design, ensuring responsiveness to evolving user behaviors and risk conditions

5.2 Prioritization logic: High-value user services first, infrastructure second

The findings in this study necessitate a recalibration of service prioritization away from infrastructure-led innovation toward practice-led service design. Given that 65.7% of patrons and 64.4% of librarians report frequent or very frequent use of GenAI (Q1), the question is no longer whether AI should be introduced into library services, but how those services can be aligned with already embedded user behaviors.

Most critically, the data indicates that 50.0% of patrons use AI tools instead of the Library's discovery system (HyDi), compared to 35.6% of librarians (Q7), revealing a 14.4 percentage point divergence in discovery practices. This indicates that AI is not functioning as a supplementary tool, but as a parallel and, for many users, preferred access point to retrieval of academic information.

Instead, the prioritization principle underpinning the SAM is to invest first in high-value, user-facing services that directly address observed behaviors, needs, and risks. This approach is consistent with CKM, which positions user behaviour as a primary driver of

service innovation (Daneshgar & Parirokh, 2012), and with emerging evidence that users increasingly favour LLM-mediated systems for their accessibility and clarity (Shimray et al., 2025). It also aligns with service-quality gap research, which emphasises that responsiveness to user expectations is central to perceived service value and satisfaction (Kebriaei & Akbari, 2008).

Importantly, the study's findings show that divergence is not located in access or frequency of use, but in application (Practice Gap), expectations (Service Gap), and risk framing (Ethical Gap). The prioritized services below are therefore designed to directly address these three dimensions.

AI Literacy & Verification Clinics (Frontline, User-Facing)

Justification: Although patrons demonstrate high levels of AI adoption, their trust profiles reveal significant epistemic uncertainty, with 41.7% expressing distrust or strong distrust, alongside a substantial 38.9% remaining neutral (Q18). Notably, 23.2% of patrons report "*strong distrust*," compared to only 6.7% of librarians. This indicates that students are actively using AI while simultaneously questioning its reliability. Simultaneously, 73.3% of librarians prioritize "*evaluating and verifying AI-generated information*" (Q10), highlighting a professional expertise that is ready to be mobilized.

Library role alignment: This service directly operationalizes the intelligent library model, positioning the library as a facilitator of navigation, evaluation, and data literacy (Cox et al., 2019). It also aligns with the use of frameworks such as the ACRL Information Literacy Framework to embed AI literacy within existing pedagogical structures.

Gap targeted: Addresses both the Service Gap by shifting from conceptual to applied support and the Ethical Gap by equipping users with practical verification strategies.

AI-Assisted Citation, Attribution, and Copyright Guidance

Justification: The study reveals that while librarians frame AI risks in terms of ethics (66.7%, Q11), patrons interpret risk through academic performance outcomes. This is most evident in the findings which show that 64.8% of patrons have refrained from disclosing AI use to a lecturer for fear of negative marking (Q8). Furthermore, patrons are more likely to use AI for citations (54.6%) than librarians (40.0%) (Q6). This disconnect necessitates translating abstract integrity concerns into assignment-level guidance. Given that AI-generated text can introduce unverifiable or misleading content (Zielinski et al., 2023), structured support around attribution and responsible use becomes essential.

Library role alignment: This service reinforces the established role of librarians as mediators of ethical information use and copyright compliance, extending these responsibilities into AI-mediated environments.

Gap targeted: Primarily addresses the Ethical Gap, by reframing institutional concerns into practically actionable guidance for students.

Privacy-Aware GenAI Guidance and Policy Communication

Justification: While librarians express strong concerns regarding "*evaluating and verifying*" information, patrons prioritize "*understanding University policies on AI and assessment*" (37.0%, Q11). Only 1.9% of patrons explicitly cite "*data privacy and surveillance*" as their primary concern (Q17), compared to their much higher anxiety regarding incorrect information (52.8%). This reflects a divergence in risk framing rather than overall distrust, which remains high for both groups (Q18).

Library ethics scholarship consistently links privacy to trust, academic freedom, and sustained engagement, while empirical studies highlight gaps in both staff implementation and user awareness of privacy practices. In data-intensive AI environments, these risks are dynamic and require continuous mediation.

Library role alignment: This service aligns with governance-oriented roles within AI policy education frameworks, particularly in areas of privacy, transparency, and accountability.

Gap targeted: Addresses the Ethical Gap by converting abstract institutional concerns into clear, user-facing decision-making guidance, thereby reducing the disconnect between staff priorities and user awareness.

AI-Integrated Discovery Support

Justification: The most significant behavioral divergence identified is in discovery practices, with a 14.4 percentage point gap between patrons and librarians in the use of AI as a substitute for library systems (Q7). Patrons are heavily utilizing AI to retrieve sources (70.4%, Q5) and literature reviews (35.2%, Q10).

Given that users are drawn to AI for its clarity, speed, and conversational interface (Shimray et al., 2025), the strategic response should not be to reinforce legacy systems in isolation, but to integrate library expertise into AI-mediated workflows. This includes supporting hybrid discovery practices that combine AI-generated leads with verified academic sources and databases.

Library role alignment: This service aligns with both the technological integration focus of the smart library model (Gul & Bano, 2019) and the navigation and mediation roles of the intelligent library (Cox et al., 2019).

Gap targeted: Addresses the Practice Gap (how AI is used) and Service Gap (misalignment in support expectations), rather than a non-existent usage gap.

5.3 Workforce enablement: Translating willingness to train into verified capability

The findings indicate that the primary constraint in service delivery is not a lack of adoption, but a misalignment between staff competencies and user practices. With 64.4% of librarians reporting frequent or very frequent AI use (Q1), it can be affirmed that staff engagement with AI tools is comparable to patrons' engagement (65.7%). However, this engagement does not consistently translate into applied, user-facing service innovation, contributing directly to the observed Service Gap.

This reflects a broader pattern in service-quality gap research, which identifies training and capability development as essential for aligning service provision with evolving user expectations (Kebriaei & Akbari, 2008). In the context of AI, this alignment requires moving beyond general awareness toward task-specific, practice-oriented competencies.

At the same time, librarian responses indicate that their engagement with AI is shaped by broader institutional concerns, prioritizing ethical use (66.7%, Q11) and evaluation techniques (73.3%, Q10). While these concerns are valid and supported by wider literature on AI risks (Gao et al., 2023; Zielinski et al., 2023), they can inadvertently constrain service innovation if not translated into operational frameworks. For example, while librarians focus on the "*limits of referencing accuracy*" (40%, Q13), patrons are more focused on the immediate task of "*improving clarity and academic tone*" (38%, Q13).

Workforce enablement therefore functions as a process of translation, converting:

- Conceptual understanding into Applied service design (e.g., turning "*AI awareness*" into the "*Verification clinics*" proposed in the SAM).
- Ethical concern into User-facing service guidance (e.g., addressing the 64.8% of patrons who hide their AI use due to fear of negative marking, Q8).
- Individual experimentation into Institutional capability (e.g., supporting the individual use of ChatGPT and similar LLMs by offering hands-on workshops as indicated by a positive response rate for practical support, Q15).

Evidence from LIS education and professional development research supports the need for structured, targeted training programs that address emerging technological competencies while integrating ethical considerations (Cox, 2023; Pho & Tranfield, 2024). Additionally, the widespread adoption of GenAI suggests that workforce development can be empirically guided, using survey data, such as the identified gaps in discovery practices (Q7) and citation usage (Q6), to identify specific gaps in skills and service alignment.

Ultimately, effective workforce enablement requires a shift from passive readiness to active capability, ensuring that librarians are equipped not only to understand AI, but to mediate, integrate, and operationalize it within user-centered academic workflows.

6. Conclusion: Closing the Gap as a Relevance Strategy

This study set out to examine whether a disconnect exists between library professionals and library users in their engagement with GenAI, and how this divergence might inform future academic library services. The findings challenge a prevailing narrative in both professional discourse and institutional strategy: that the primary issue is uneven or insufficient adoption of AI technologies.

Instead, the data suggests that adoption is already widespread and remarkably consistent across both cohorts, with 64.4% of librarians and 65.7% of patrons reporting frequent or very frequent use of GenAI tools (Q1). This suggests that AI is no longer an emerging technology within the academic context, but an embedded component of everyday scholarly practice.

The divergence, therefore, does not lie in whether AI is used, but in how it is used, what it is expected to do, and how its risks are understood.

Three interrelated gaps define this misalignment:

- A Practice Gap: This is most clearly evidenced by the 14.4 percentage point difference in AI-mediated discovery behaviors, with 50.0% of patrons using AI powered search tools instead of the library's discovery system, compared to 35.6% of librarians (Q7). This suggests an emerging shift in information-seeking behaviors, where AI appears to be functioning as a parallel discovery layer.
- A Service Gap: This is evident in librarians prioritizing a conceptual and ethical understanding of AI (73.3% prioritizing evaluation and 66.7% ethical use, Q10-11), while patrons demand applied, task-oriented support focused on research efficiency, such as literature reviews (35.2%) and improving academic tone (38.0%).
- An Ethical Gap: Although levels of distrust in AI systems are comparable at 35.6% for librarians and 41.7% for patrons, the Ethical Gap manifests in framing risk. Patrons exhibit a significantly higher "*strong distrust*" (23.2% vs. 6.7%, Q18) and frame risk through immediate outcomes like grading and accuracy (Q8, Q17).

Taken together, these findings reframe the core challenge facing academic libraries. It is not a question of technological lag, but of misaligned integration paradigms.

In response, this paper advances the SAM as a practical and conceptual contribution. By structuring service design around Demand Sensing, Capability Mapping, Risk Governance, and Service Alignment, the model provides a replicable framework for translating empirical user behavior into strategically prioritized, user-centered services. Crucially, SAM is not a static model, but an iterative cycle, recognizing that both AI technologies and user practices are evolving rapidly.

The study's central contribution lies in its shift from an adoption-focused narrative to a practice-oriented framework. From a researcher's perspective, it highlights the need to move beyond measuring access toward analyzing workflow integration. From a practical perspective, it underscores that the future relevance of the academic library will depend less on implementing AI tools and more on embedding library expertise within the AI-mediated environments that users already inhabit.

This requires a fundamental strategic shift:

- From systems to practices,
- From instruction to integration,
- And from control to guidance.

Failure to enact this shift risks further marginalizing library services within an increasingly decentralized information landscape. Conversely, successful alignment positions the library as a key stakeholder in ensuring responsible, effective, and academically rigorous use of AI, rather than facing the risk of becoming irrelevant in an AI academic environment. Ultimately, the question posed is no longer whether libraries should engage with AI, but whether they can do so in ways that remain visible, relevant, and trusted within the transformed ecology of academic knowledge production.

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Appendix A - Librarian's AI Expectations Survey

Dear Participant,

The University of Malta Library is currently conducting research on artificial intelligence (AI) usage and service expectations among users. This study aims to explore the gap between library professionals' perceptions of the AI services users may need and what users actually expect or want from such services.

You are invited to take part in this research by completing the following survey. This survey forms part of a mirror survey instrument, where responses from library professionals will be compared with those of library patrons. The survey should take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part.

Please note that there are no direct benefits or known risks associated with participation. The survey is completely anonymous, and at no point will you be asked to provide personal information that could identify you. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

As a participant, you have the right, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and applicable national legislation, to access, rectify, and, where relevant, request the deletion of any data concerning you.

All data collected will be used solely for the purposes of this research and will only be accessible to the researchers involved. The data will be securely stored and deleted one year after the publication of the completed research.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact us at library@um.edu.mt

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your participation is highly valued and will help inform the future direction of library services.

Participant Consent

I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in this study. I also understand that my identity will not be revealed at any time. I am also aware that I can keep a copy of this form including all the above information.

☒ I hereby give my consent to participate in this study

Section 1 - Demographics

Before you proceed, we would like to collect some demographic information to better understand the diversity of the respondents. Please note that this survey ensures anonymity, and your personal details will never be shared or published.

01 - Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

02 - Age Bracket

- 18 – 25 years
- 26 – 30 years
- 31 – 35 years
- 36 – 40 years
- 41 – 45 years
- 46 – 50 years
- 51 – 55 years
- 56 – 60 years
- 61 years and over

03 - Library Position

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Director | • Library Assistant |
| • Manager | • Library Support Officer |
| • Senior Assistant Librarian | • Administrative staff |
| • Assistant Librarian | |

Section 2 - Questions about general AI use

In this section, you will be asked about your personal use of AI tools.

05 - How frequently do you use Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini) for university-related work?

- Never
- Rarely (a few times per semester)
- Occasionally (monthly)
- Frequently (weekly)
- Very frequently (multiple times per week)

(Mirrors Q10 in the Patrons Survey)

06 - Have you used AI tools to help with brainstorming?

- No
- Yes

(Mirrors Q11 in the Patrons Survey)

07 - Have you used AI tools to help with drafting documents/essays/emails/messages?

- No
- Yes

(Mirrors Q12 in the Patrons Survey)

08 - Have you used AI tools to help with summarising texts?

- No
- Yes

(Mirrors Q13 in the Patrons Survey)

09 - Have you used AI tools to help with finding sources?

- No
- Yes

(Mirrors Q14 in the Patrons Survey)

10 - Have you used AI tools to help with citations?

- No
- Yes

(Mirrors Q15 in the Patrons Survey)

11 - Have you ever used an AI tool to find academic resources instead of using the Library's HyDi search portal?

- No
- Yes

(Mirrors Q16 in the Patrons Survey)

12 - Are you aware of any AI-powered tools or support services currently offered by the UM Library?

- No
- Yes
- Not Sure

(Mirrors Q18 in the Patrons Survey)

Section 3 - The UM Library and AI support

In which of the following areas do you, as a Library professional, expect the Library to offer the most support?

13 – In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? - AI & Research Skills

(Pick the most important to you)

- Using AI for literature reviews
- Using AI to refine research questions
- Evaluating and verifying AI-generated information
- Using AI to summarise academic articles
- Using AI for systematic or scoping reviews

(Mirrors Q19 in the Patrons Survey)

14 - In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? - Academic Integrity & Ethics

(Pick the most important to you)

- Understanding ethical use of AI in assignments
- Guidance on disclosing AI use to lecturers
- Avoiding plagiarism when using AI
- Understanding University policies on AI and assessment

(Mirrors Q20 in the Patrons Survey)

15 - In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? - Search & Discovery

(Pick the most important to you)

- Finding reliable academic sources using AI
- Combining AI tools with HyDi and library databases
- Discovering open-access resources with AI
- AI-assisted keyword and search strategy building

(Mirrors Q21 in the Patrons Survey)

16 - In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? - Writing & Referencing

(Pick the most important to you)

- AI support for academic writing structure
- Improving clarity and academic tone with AI
- AI-assisted citation checking and formatting
- Understanding limits of AI for referencing accuracy

(Mirrors Q22 in the Patrons Survey)

17 - In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? - Data & Methodology

(Pick the most important to you)

- Using AI to interpret data or results
- AI support for qualitative analysis
- Understanding AI's role in research methodologies

(Mirrors Q23 in the Patrons Survey)

18 - In your role as a Library professional, which area do you believe the Library should prioritise when offering support to patrons? - Practical Support Formats

(Pick the most important to you)

- One-to-one AI research consultations
- Short hands-on workshops
- Online guides and tutorials
- Drop-in AI help sessions

(Mirrors Q24 in the Patrons Survey)

19 - Do you trust free AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) with your personal data or research ideas?

- Strongly distrust
- Distrust
- Neutral
- Trust
- Strongly trust

(Mirrors Q27 in the Patrons Survey)

20 - What is one thing you wish the Library would do to help patrons with AI?

(Mirrors Q28 in the Patrons Survey)

Appendix B - Users AI Expectations Survey

Dear Participant,

The University of Malta Library is currently conducting research on artificial intelligence (AI) usage and service expectations among users. This study aims to explore the gap between library professionals' perceptions of the AI services users may need and what users actually expect or want from such services.

You are invited to take part in this research by completing the following survey, whether or not you are a library user. The survey should take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part.

Please note that there are no direct benefits or known risks associated with participation. The survey is completely anonymous, and at no point will you be asked to provide personal information that could identify you. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

As a participant, you have the right, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and applicable national legislation, to access, rectify, and, where relevant, request the deletion of any data concerning you.

All data collected will be used solely for the purposes of this research and will only be accessible to the researchers involved. The data will be securely stored and deleted one year after the publication of the completed research.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact us at library@um.edu.mt

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your participation is highly valued and will help inform the future direction of library services.

Participant Consent

I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in this study. I also understand that my identity will not be revealed at any time. I am also aware that I can keep a copy of this form including all the above information.

☒ I hereby give my consent to participate in this study

Section 1 - Demographics

Before you proceed, we would like to collect some demographic information to better understand the diversity of the respondents. Please note that this survey ensures anonymity, and your personal details will never be shared or published.

01 - Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

02 - Age Bracket

- 18 – 25 years
- 26 – 30 years
- 31 – 35 years
- 36 – 40 years
- 41 – 45 years
- 46 – 50 years
- 51 – 55 years
- 56 – 60 years
- 61 years and over

03 - Current status

- Full time undergraduate student
- Part time undergraduate student
- Full time postgraduate student
- Part time postgraduate student
- Full time academic member of staff
- Part time academic member of staff
- Full time University Administrative staff
- Part time University Administrative staff
- Other (visiting/temporary)

04 - Faculty/Institute/School/Centre/Office

Section 2 - Current Library Resource Usage

This section will help us understand the current usage of Library resources.

05 - How often do you use the University of Malta Library resources - Print resources?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Annually
- Very rarely
- Never

06 - How often do you use the University of Malta Library resources - Electronic resources?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Annually
- Very rarely
- Never

07 - How often do you use the University of Malta Library spaces for reading, studying, researching or collaboration?

- Daily
- Weekly

- Monthly
- Annually
- Very rarely
- Never

08 - How do you prefer to request support when you need help with library resources?

- Ask in person any Library staff present
- Check the Library website
- Check the Help A-Z page on the Library website
- Use the How-to videos on Youtube
- Ask my friends
- Send an email at Library@um.edu.mt
- Send a message on the Library social media pages
- I do not ask

09 - What kind of help do you most often need from the library?

- Finding academic sources (Journal articles, books, ebooks, dissertations, etc...)
- Finding physical books on the shelves
- Accessing online resources
- Improving search strategies, systematic reviews, etc...
- Citation and referencing
- Technical assistance
- I don't usually need support from the Library
- Other

Section 3 - Questions about general AI use

In this section, you will be asked about your personal use of AI tools.

10 - How frequently do you use Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini) for university-related work?

- Never
- Rarely (a few times per semester)
- Occasionally (monthly)
- Frequently (weekly)
- Very frequently (multiple times per week)

11 - Have you used AI tools to help with brainstorming?

- No
- Yes

12 - Have you used AI tools to help with drafting documents/essays/emails/messages?

- No
- Yes

13 - Have you used AI tools to help with summarising texts?

- No
- Yes

14 - Have you used AI tools to help with finding sources?

- No
- Yes

15 - Have you used AI tools to help with citations?

- No
- Yes

16 - Have you ever used an AI tool to find academic resources instead of using the Library's HyDi search portal?

- No
- Yes

17 - Have you ever refrained from disclosing your use of AI to a lecturer due to fear of negative marking?

- No
- Yes

18 - Are you aware of any AI-powered tools or support services currently offered by the UM Library?

- No
- Yes
- Not Sure

Section 4 - The UM Library and AI support

In which of the following areas do you expect the Library to offer the most support?

19 – What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library? - AI & Research Skills

(Pick the most important to you)

- Using AI for literature reviews
- Using AI to refine research questions
- Evaluating and verifying AI-generated information
- Using AI to summarise academic articles
- Using AI for systematic or scoping reviews

20 - What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library? - Academic Integrity & Ethics

(Pick the most important to you)

- Understanding ethical use of AI in assignments
- Guidance on disclosing AI use to lecturers
- Avoiding plagiarism when using AI
- Understanding University policies on AI and assessment

21 - What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library? - Search & Discovery

(Pick the most important to you)

- Finding reliable academic sources using AI
- Combining AI tools with HyDi and library databases
- Discovering open-access resources with AI
- AI-assisted keyword and search strategy building

22 - What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library? - Writing & Referencing

(Pick the most important to you)

- AI support for academic writing structure
- Improving clarity and academic tone with AI
- AI-assisted citation checking and formatting
- Understanding limits of AI for referencing accuracy

23 - What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library? - Data & Methodology

(Pick the most important to you)

- Using AI to interpret data or results
- AI support for qualitative analysis
- Understanding AI's role in research methodologies

24 - What is your preferred method of receiving AI related support from the Library? -
Practical Support Formats

(Pick the most important to you)

- One-to-one AI research consultations
- Short hands-on workshops
- Online guides and tutorials
- Drop-in AI help sessions

25 - If the Library offered a workshop on “How to use AI for Research”, how likely are you to attend?

- Very unlikely
- Unlikely
- Neutral
- Likely
- Very likely

26 - What concerns you most when using AI for assignments?

- Receiving a lower grade
- Incorrect or misleading information
- Data privacy and surveillance
- Other

27 - Do you trust free AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) with your personal data or research ideas?

- Strongly distrust
- Distrust
- Neutral
- Trust
- Strongly trust

28 - What is one thing you wish the Library would do to help you with AI?