

MIND THE GAP

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

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University of Malta Library



Academic Libraries

Generative AI

Gap Analysis

Service Alignment

The Problem: A Growing Disconnect

What Libraries Offer

- Backend AI infrastructure
- Copyright & ethics governance
- General AI awareness training
- Traditional OPAC-centred services

GAP

What Students Need

- Workflow efficiency tools
- AI citation verification
- Prompt engineering for research
- Practical, applied AI guidance

Without understanding the user perspective, libraries risk prioritising AI services that patrons don't need, while overlooking services they actually require.

Research Aim & Questions

To quantify the Expectation Gap between Library Professionals (Providers) and Library Patrons (Users) at the University of Malta Library.

RQ1 The Usage Gap

To what extent does daily academic GenAI use by students differ from library staff perceptions?

RQ2 The Service Gap

Do student expectations for AI-related library support align with staff readiness to provide them?

RQ3 The Ethical Gap

How do student priorities (grades/accuracy) diverge from staff ethical concerns (privacy/copyright)?

Theoretical Framework

Customer Knowledge Management (CKM)

Service innovation must be driven by external user knowledge, not internal process optimisation.

Libraries risk obsolescence if they optimise traditional workflows while users migrate to AI-driven approaches.

Service Quality Gap Model

Specifically the Knowledge Gap — the difference between what providers believe customers expect and what customers actually expect.

Measures Service Alignment rather than just AI readiness.

Together, these frameworks position the study as a measurement of misalignment between provider assumptions and user realities.

Methodology: Mirrored Survey Design

Quantitative · Cross-sectional · Dual-perspective · Concurrent

COHORT A

Library Professionals

n = 45

- Senior/Assistant Librarians
- Library Assistants & Officers
- Management
- Main Library + branch staff

COHORT B

Library Patrons

n = 108

- Undergraduate & postgraduate students
- Academic & administrative staff
- Multi-faculty representation
- Multi-channel recruitment

Both instruments used identical underlying constructs → direct paired gap analysis

01

The Usage Gap

RQ1 — How does daily academic GenAI use compare across cohorts?



Surprising Finding: No Meaningful Usage Gap

! Both cohorts report near-identical high-frequency GenAI use — the expected usage gap was not found.

64.4%

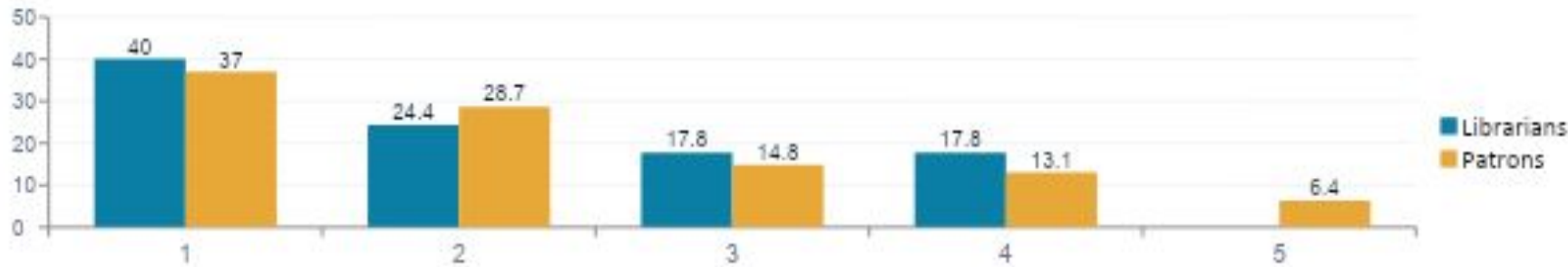
Librarians
high-frequency use

65.7%

Patrons
high-frequency use

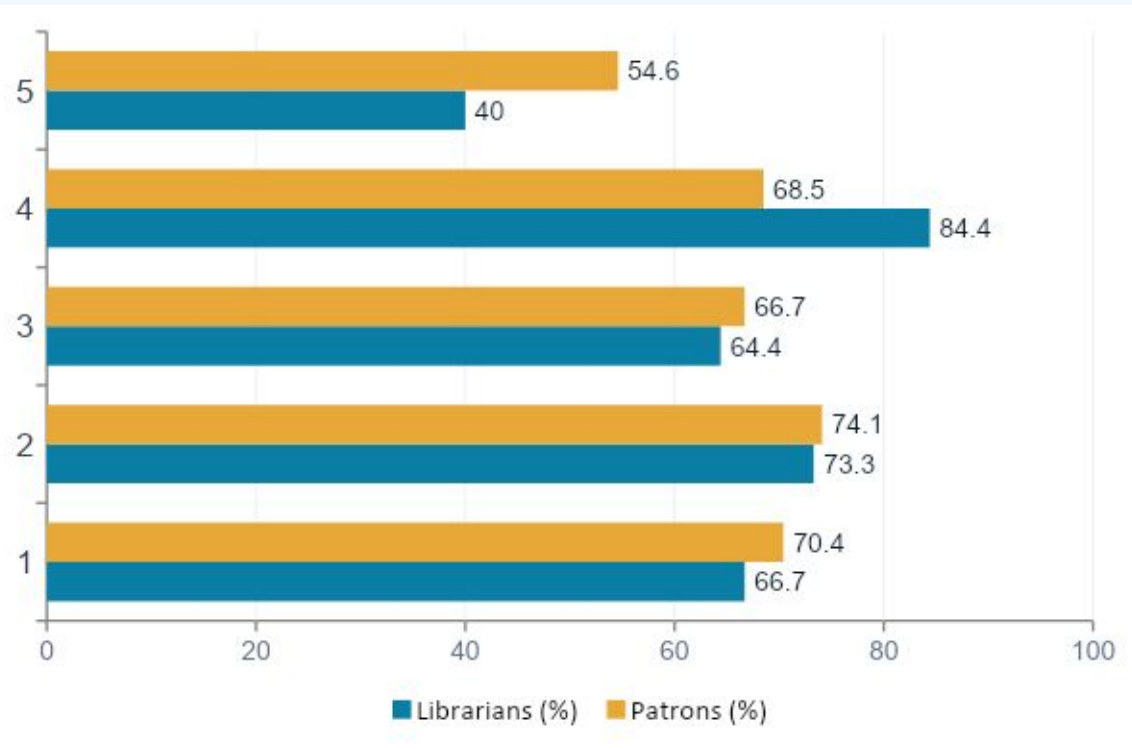
~0%

Usage Gap
(frequency)



But a Practice Gap Emerges

Frequency is similar — but how AI is used is structurally different.



Key Insights

- Patrons more likely to use AI for citations (54.6% vs 40%)
- Patrons delegate full research workflows to AI
- Librarians use AI in bounded, evaluative roles
- AI is becoming a parallel discovery layer for users

Discovery Substitution: Bypassing HyDi

Have you used AI to find academic resources instead of the Library's search portal (HyDi)?



Strategic Implication: Half of all patrons are already bypassing the library's discovery layer. AI is no longer just a content generator — it is functioning as a search engine and research access point. Disintermediation is underway.

02

The Service Gap

RQ2 — Do student expectations align with staff readiness?

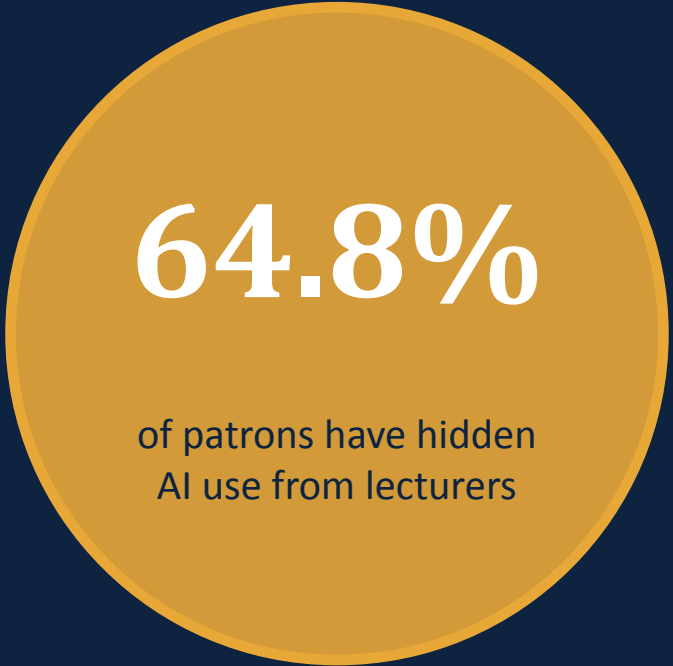


Service Priorities: Conceptual vs. Operational

Area	Librarians Prioritise	Patrons Want
AI & Research Skills	Evaluating & verifying AI info (73.3%)	AI for literature reviews (35.2%)
Academic Integrity	Understanding ethical use (66.7%)	University policies on AI (37.0%)
Writing & Referencing	Limits of AI for referencing (40%)	Improving clarity & academic tone (38%)
Practical Formats	Short hands-on workshops (40%)	Online guides & tutorials (37%)

Key tension: Librarians govern, patrons want to apply. Staff prioritise how AI should be evaluated; students focus on how AI can help them complete work.

The Hidden Crisis



64.8%

of patrons have hidden
AI use from lecturers

...due to fear of negative marking.

This concealment is a symptom of an Institutional Policy Gap — not a student ethics problem.

03

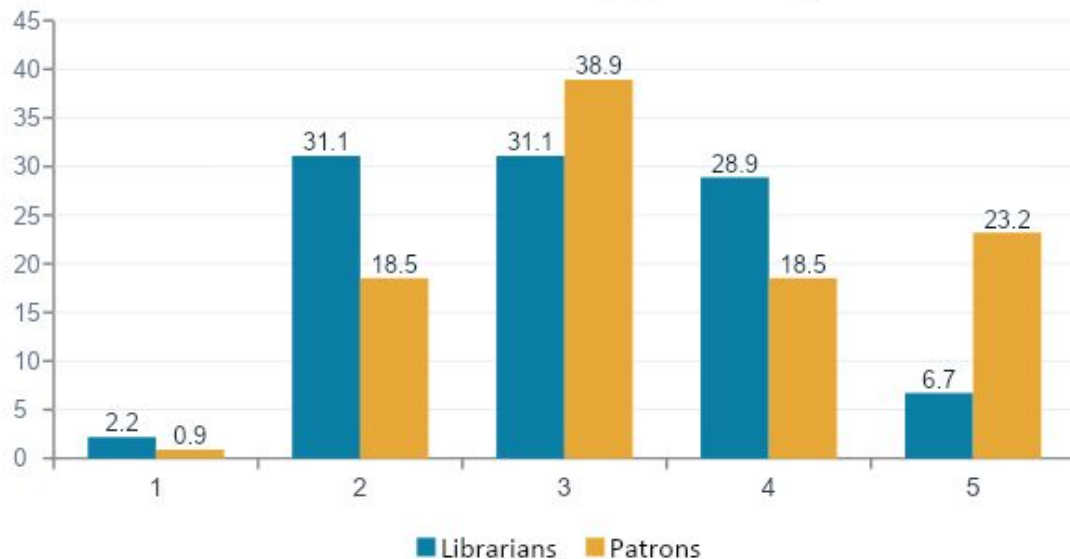
The Ethical Gap

RQ3 — How do risk frameworks diverge between librarians and patrons?



Shared Scepticism, Divergent Risk Frameworks

Trust in Free AI Tools (e.g. ChatGPT)



Risk Framing

Librarians

Institutional governance:
Evaluating info, referencing
accuracy, ethical use

Patrons

Performance outcomes:
52.8% fear misinformation
1.9% worry about privacy

Key finding: The Ethical Gap is a divergence in risk conceptualisation. Librarians apply a systemic, governance lens. Patrons apply a performance lens. Library warnings about privacy may be ignored by students focused on getting the answer right.

04

The Service Alignment Model

Translating divergence into strategy



Service Alignment Model (SAM): 4 Layers

1	Layer 1: Demand Sensing User Reality	Map how patrons actually engage: task typologies, bypass rates, friction points (e.g. 52.8% fear misinformation)
2	Layer 2: Capability Mapping Provider Reality	Audit what UML can deliver: service readiness matrix, staff capability & training roadmap aligned to actual demand
3	Layer 3: Risk & Ethics Governance Trust Conditions	Translate abstract concerns into actionable safeguards: AI evaluation checklists, integrity frameworks, privacy guidance
4	Layer 4: Service Portfolio Alignment Strategic Prioritisation	Align high-impact services: shift from theoretical ethics training to applied workflow support & AI literacy clinics

The SAM is a theoretically informed practice model — not just a survey finding, but a framework for proactive service design.

Practical Implications

Re-prioritise Training

Shift from general AI awareness workshops (staff-perceived need) to applied competencies patrons require: AI citation verification, prompt engineering for research, literature review workflows.

Re-frame Policy Communication

Move from prohibitive policies (bans and warnings) toward enablement policies that address patron fears of accidental plagiarism and unclear assessment rules.

Reposition the Library's Value

The library's unique value is not speed — AI wins on speed. It is trust: human-in-the-loop verification, Melitensia expertise, and critical AI literacy where algorithms fail.

Close the Visibility Gap

64.8% concealment signals a systemic communications failure. The library must be seen as a partner in AI navigation, not a disciplinary watchdog.

Key Takeaways

01

Both librarians and patrons are high-frequency GenAI users — the expected usage gap does not exist.

02

The real gap is a Practice Gap: patrons embed AI end-to-end in their workflows; librarians use it in bounded, evaluative roles.

03

50% of patrons bypass the Library catalogue/services using AI as a search engine — library disintermediation is already happening.

04

64.8% concealment reveals a policy vacuum, not a student ethics problem. Institutions must enable, not just police.

05

Libraries should compete on trust, not speed — verification, Melitensia expertise, and critical AI literacy are the new value proposition.

Limitations & Future Directions

Limitations

- Single institutional case study — generalisability to other contexts remains uncertain
- Modest sample size (n=45 professionals; n=108 patrons) — indicative, not definitive
- Self-reported data — subject to response bias, especially for sensitive AI disclosure behaviors
- Cross-sectional design — a temporal snapshot in a rapidly evolving technological landscape
- Broad Cohort B (undergrad, postgrad, academic, admin) — subgroup variation not fully explored

Future Directions

- Longitudinal follow-up to track how gaps evolve as AI tools mature
- Mixed-method extension: qualitative interviews to contextualize quantitative divergences
- Stratified analysis by faculty, academic level, and discipline
- Replication at other small/multilingual universities facing similar Melitensia challenges

Thank You

Closing Argument

*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.*

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