

Beyond the AI spotlight: Mapping the broader landscape of educational technology research

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Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly become a dominant topic in educational technology research, raising questions about the visibility of other areas of inquiry that continue to shape the field. In this editorial we examine what the Australasian Journal of Educational Technology (AJET) has published alongside the growth of AI research. We reviewed 143 peer-reviewed research articles published from Volume 39, Issue 1 (2023) to Volume 42, Issue 3 (2026), first identifying articles in which AI was a central focus and then thematically coding the remaining non-AI articles. Fifty articles (35%) were AI-focused, while 93 (65%) addressed other areas of educational technology. These non-AI studies covered a broad range of themes, including professional learning and academic development, assessment and feedback, immersive environments and practice, learning design, learning analytics, collaborative learning, and digital wellbeing. Although non-AI research constitutes nearly two-thirds of the corpus overall, its share of AJET publications has declined as AI-focused research has increased. We argue that making this broader body of work visible matters because it reflects and sustains the conceptual, pedagogical, institutional, and methodological breadth of educational technology research.

Keywords: educational technology research, generative artificial intelligence (AI), AJET, non-AI-focused topics, editorial

An increasingly dominant story in the field of educational technology research

Since late 2022, generative artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most visible topics in the field of educational technology research. It now features prominently in conference programs, institutional initiatives, funding priorities, and journal submissions. The *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* (AJET) has followed this development closely, beginning with an editorial on the future research agenda for AI-related research in educational technology (Lodge et al., 2023), a themed issue on AI research in 2023, and continuing to publish a growing body of AI-focused research.

This attention is not surprising, but it does potentially narrow how the field is perceived. When one topic becomes dominant, other areas of research may appear less current or less important, even when the underlying educational problems remain unresolved. Questions about feedback, belonging, professional learning, assessment, learning design, digital wellbeing, and simulation have not been resolved with the

emergence of generative AI. In many cases, these questions have become more urgent as new technologies interact with longstanding issues.

This editorial therefore asks a simple question: what has AJET continued to publish alongside the rapid growth of generative AI research? The question follows directly from the first two editorials in volume 42 of AJET throughout 2026.

How the previous editorials led here

In the first issue of 2026, we revisited the generative AI research agenda that AJET had outlined three years earlier (Lodge et al., 2023) and considered whether parts of that agenda were approaching saturation point (Huijser et al., 2026). Across the five areas identified in that agenda, sensemaking, assessment integrity, assessment redesign, learning and teaching with AI, and ethics, we discussed the substantial growth in policy frameworks, cross-institutional collaborations, and empirical studies. At the same time, submission patterns suggested that some topics and contexts were beginning to produce increasingly similar contributions. Rather than proposing fixed criteria for saturation, we invited researchers, editors, and publishers to consider where further work was most needed.

The second 2026 AJET editorial considered the issue from a different perspective. In "The work technology does not do" (Deneen et al., 2026), we argued that the educational value of technology depends not only on what a tool can do, but also on the pedagogical, relational, metacognitive, and ethical work that surrounds its use. That work needs to be intentionally designed rather than assumed. Through this editorial we shifted attention from the capabilities of any particular technology to the human and educational conditions that make capabilities and technologies meaningful.

Taken together, the two editorials prompted us to look more closely at what AJET has continued to publish alongside the rapid growth of generative AI research. Rather than focusing only on areas where AI research may be approaching saturation, or on the human and institutional work surrounding technology, we wanted to examine the broader range of educational technology questions that remain visible in the journal. This led us to review AJET's recent publication record more systematically and to identify the themes represented in its non-AI research. The purpose was not to argue that AI research has become too prominent, but to make visible the breadth of educational technology research that continues alongside it.

Scope and approach

We reviewed all 143 peer-reviewed research articles published in AJET in the 21 issues from Volume 39, Issue 1 (2023) to Volume 42, Issue 3 (2026). The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, each article was classified according to whether AI or generative AI was a central focus of study. Articles were classified as AI-focused only when AI was substantively investigated. Studies that only used AI or AI-related technologies as research tools while addressing a different substantive question were retained in the non-AI corpus.

During the second stage, the non-AI articles were coded according to their primary substantive theme: the main educational technology problem, practice, or phenomenon under investigation. Where an article also engaged substantially with another area, a secondary theme was recorded. The categories were developed from recurring areas of inquiry in the corpus and were intended to provide a practical overview rather than a comprehensive taxonomy of educational technology research.

Coding was based on titles and abstracts, with the full article consulted when the primary focus was unclear. Some articles crossed thematic boundaries, and assigning one primary theme required subjective judgement. The categories should therefore be interpreted as an editorial mapping of AJET's recent non-AI publication record rather than as definitive classifications.

The other two-thirds

In the corpus, 50 of the 143 articles (35%) focused primarily on AI, whereas the remaining two-thirds (93 articles) focused on other areas of educational technology research. However, the proportion of AI-related articles has been growing to be the majority as time goes on. Table 1 shows the distribution of AI and non-AI articles published in AJET by year. AI articles rose from 21% of AJET's research articles in 2023 to 63% in the first three issues of 2026. The 2023 proportion is in fact influenced by a themed issue Volume 39(5) on "AI in tertiary education: impacts for research and practice". Excluding six articles in this themed issue, only three out of 37 articles (8%) published that year were AI-focused. If the pattern observed in the first three issues continues, 2026 will be the first year in this period in which AI-focused articles outnumber non-AI articles.

Across the four volumes examined, most AJET research articles were not primarily about AI. These articles constitute a substantial body of research rather than simply the remainder of the AI-focused literature. Taken together, they show several sustained areas of inquiry that continue to define educational technology research.

Table 1

AI-focused and other research articles published in AJET, 2023–2026

Year	Volume	Research articles	AI-focused	Not AI-focused	AI share
2023	39	43	9	34	21%
2024	40	40	12	28	30%
2025	41	36	14	22	39%
2026*	42	24	15	9	63%
Total	39–42	143	50	93	35%

Note: * Volume 42 covers issues 1–3 only, published to September 2026.

Mapping the other two-thirds

Table 2

Primary themes of the 93 non-AI research articles by year

Theme (primary focus)	Articles	2023	2024	2025	2026*
Professional learning and academic development	11	3	4	1	3
Assessment design, feedback and integrity	10	3	5	2	0
Immersive environments and practice	10	1	4	3	2
Learning design, quality and institutional practice	9	2	3	1	3
Online, blended and flipped learning	9	6	1	1	1
Learning and data analytics	8	2	4	2	0
Collaborative learning	7	3	1	3	0
Technology acceptance and adoption	6	4	0	2	0
Attention, wellbeing and belonging in digital environments	6	2	3	1	0
Equity, inclusion and access	4	2	1	1	0
Doctoral education and research supervision	4	4	0	0	0
Digital literacy and competence	3	1	2	0	0
Self-regulated learning and metacognition	3	1	0	2	0
Language learning	2	0	0	2	0
Research methods	1	0	0	1	0
Total	93	34	28	22	9

Note. Volume 42 covers issues 1–3 only. Counts show primary theme only.

The people and practices that make technology work

The largest cluster in the non-AI corpus concerns the people, practices, and institutional arrangements that support educational technology. Twenty articles fall within professional learning and academic development or learning design, quality and institutional practice. Professional learning and academic development is the most frequently represented non-AI primary theme, accounting for 11 of the 143 articles reviewed. This body of work is an important part of AJET's recent contribution. Tay et al. (2023) examined tensions between teaching academics and learning designers in Australian higher education; Ng et al. (2023) studied the professional conversations of learning designers during the pandemic; Bearman et al. (2024) considered how a centralised approach to learning design can be sustained; and Papageorgiou and Bennett (2026) examined whether online learning design can be genuinely collaborative in higher education. Related work has also examined teachers' technological and pedagogical knowledge and digital competence, including Bueno et al. (2023), H. Cui et al. (2026) in vocational colleges, and Bibi et al. (2026) on the role of context in teachers' planning decisions. Collectively, these studies address professional expertise, institutional capability, collaboration, and educational decision-making, issues that remain important regardless of changes in particular technologies and are also highly relevant to the adoption and use of generative AI.

Assessment beyond AI

Assessment has become closely associated with the current AI debate, particularly through concerns about academic integrity. However, the non-AI corpus shows that assessment research extends well beyond generative AI. Ten articles focus directly on assessment, many from the 2024 special issue "advancements in technology-enhanced assessment in tertiary education". Henderson et al. (2024) examined factors shaping students' experiences of online examinations at scale; Slade et al. (2024) evaluated a digital assessment platform from pedagogical, technical, and contextual perspectives; Zong et al. (2025) investigated why familiarity with feedback influences students' responses to peer review; and Quesnel and Stoesz (2025) examined authorship quizzes as a response to contract cheating. These studies demonstrate that questions of assessment design, feedback, and academic integrity remain broader than AI alone.

Immersive environments and practice

Immersive technology represents a different pattern in the data. Ten non-AI articles focus on immersive technologies or simulation, and this theme appears in every volume examined. The questions have also moved beyond whether immersive environments are engaging. Thompson et al. (2026) evaluated virtual reality for construction skills training; Syed et al. (2025) examined whether simulated lessons can provide a valid alternative to face-to-face classroom observation in teacher education; and Y.-T. Cui et al. (2026) evaluated an immersive virtual environment designed to reduce anxiety among university students. This work draws attention to physical skill, spatial experience, and situated practice, areas that are not well captured by current discussions around text- and language-based generative AI.

Attention, wellbeing and belonging in digital environments

A smaller but coherent group of six articles examines the effects of digital environments on attention, wellbeing and belonging. Palalas et al. (2024) argued that students should be explicitly supported to develop the capacity to manage attention in digital learning environments; Zhou and Deng (2024) examined in-class smartphone multitasking; Suárez-Perdomo et al. (2025) investigated fear of missing out and its relationship with academic goals; and Adlington et al. (2024) explored how a sense of belonging develops in online initial teacher education. These articles highlight the potential costs and pressures associated with digital learning environments. They provide an important counterbalance to research focused primarily on technology adoption and capability.

Learning analytics and responsible data use

Eight articles focus primarily on learning analytics. A notable feature of this work is its attention to the conditions under which data are interpreted and used, rather than to algorithms alone. Liu et al. (2024), for example, examined the cognitive load associated with data storytelling dashboards for teachers, while Soffer and Cohen (2024) considered students' privacy concerns in relation to the pedagogical benefits of learning analytics. These studies show that questions of privacy, interpretation, governance, and responsible use of learning analytics data were already established within educational technology research before generative AI brought them renewed visibility.

Where attention has waned

The publication record also shows a decline in the visibility of some themes that were more prominent earlier in the period. Research on online, blended, flipped, and remote modes accounts for nine non-AI articles, but six were published in 2023 and only one in each subsequent year. Within AJET, this suggests that the pandemic-era focus on modes of delivery has receded. Doctoral education and research supervision shows an even more concentrated pattern: all four articles only appeared in the 2024 special issue and none appeared in the following years. Themed issues can create periods of concentrated attention, but these patterns also show how quickly some lines of inquiry can become less visible in the journal.

Three trends in recent AJET publications

First, many of the conceptual traditions represented in the non-AI corpus remain highly relevant in the age of AI. Self-regulated learning, TPACK, technology acceptance, feedback literacy, and second language acquisition have not been replaced by generative AI. They provide established ways of examining how learners and educators engage with technologies, how learning is supported, and how educational practices change. New technologies may alter the context in which these constructs are studied, but they do not remove the need for the underlying research traditions.

Second, the human and institutional work surrounding technology already constitutes a substantial area of research in AJET. The argument made in our June editorial (Deneen et al., 2026) is visible in the journal's publication record. Twenty non-AI articles address professional learning, academic development, learning design, and institutional practice, all of which involve the pedagogical, relational, and organisational work that we identified as necessary for technology to have educational value. The assessment and feedback studies, as well as the work on wellbeing and belonging, reinforce the same point. Bearman et al. (2024), for example, examined what is required to sustain a centralised approach to learning design, while Papageorgiou and Bennett (2026) explored collaboration between educators and digital learning professionals in online learning design. Together, these studies highlight the importance of professional expertise, collaboration, and institutional structures in shaping how educational technologies are designed and used rather than of technological novelty itself.

Third, the non-AI corpus is geographically diverse. Across the period, AJET published research from a wide range of national and institutional contexts. Examples include Leite et al. (2023) on the digitalisation of thesis processes at a university in Ghana, Nugroho et al. (2026) on technology-enhanced action research in English language teaching in Central Java, Indonesia, and Sánchez Díaz et al. (2024) on the use of technologies to support inclusion by university lecturers in Spain. This diversity matters because educational technology is shaped by institutional, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions, and findings from a limited set of contexts cannot represent the field as a whole.

What we still need to see

The publication record also points to areas that deserve greater attention. Equity, inclusion, and access account for only four articles as a primary focus across the four volumes. The studies that have appeared make important contributions, including Sánchez Díaz et al. (2024) on the use of technologies for inclusion by university lecturers, and Heiser et al. (2025) on equitable videoconferencing. However, the small number of articles suggests that these areas are not currently prominent in AJET's publication record. This is notable at a time when access to increasingly capable AI systems is creating new questions about participation, resources, and educational equity. Because we analysed published rather than submitted articles, these patterns may reflect what was submitted, what passed review, or both.

The provisional 2026 data further suggest that several established themes have become less visible. Among the nine non-AI articles published in the first three issues of the year, none focuses primarily on assessment, learning analytics, collaborative learning, or digital wellbeing. This does not indicate that these areas have become less important. It does, however, suggest a narrowing of the range of non-AI topics represented in the journal during this part of the year.

For this reason, the editorial is also an invitation. AJET will continue to welcome strong research on AI, but we also encourage submissions that address the wider set of questions that shape educational technology. These may include peer feedback without a chatbot, the work of learning designers, simulation and physical skill, or equity, inclusion and access. Such work contributes to the conceptual and methodological breadth of the field.

This invitation builds on a point made in our June editorial: relational, metacognitive, and ethical dimensions of educational technology need to be deliberately designed rather than assumed. The same principle applies to the development of a research field: important areas of inquiry need sustained attention if they are to remain visible and continue to develop. If areas such as assessment, learning analytics, collaborative learning, or digital wellbeing are to remain part of the educational technology research agenda, they need continued attention from researchers, reviewers, and journals. The rapid growth of research in one area can expand the field, but it does not automatically maintain the breadth of inquiry needed to address other enduring educational questions.

In March, we asked whether some areas of generative AI research were approaching saturation point. In June, we asked what human work must surround technology for it to support meaningful education. The present analysis connects those questions to AJET's own publication record. Nearly two-thirds of the research articles published since 2023 have focused on topics other than AI, including professional learning, learning design, immersive environments and practice, digital wellbeing, and learning analytics, although the proportion of non-AI-focused work is shifting over time. Making this non-AI work visible is important not because it competes with AI research, but because it shows the broader educational questions that continue to shape the field.

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