

The Opinions of New Zealand Veterinary Nurses to the Use and Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within Veterinary Clinical Practice

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Introduction

The use of AI in veterinary clinical practice has many potential applications (Sobkowich, 2025). Anecdotally, it is being quickly adopted within the profession in New Zealand. However, overseas studies have found that both, medical and veterinary undergraduate education is lacking AI literacy training (Reagan, 2025). Education providers need to stay abreast of the use of this new technology to ensure graduates are trained in the skills they need to effectively contribute to their industry. This study sought to investigate how AI is being used in clinical practice and the opinions of veterinary nurses (VN) on the impacts and implications on veterinary medicine to inform authentic curriculum and assessment design of veterinary nursing programmes.

Method

An anonymous Zoho survey was circulated through social media groups and the NZVNA newsletter. Demographic data and information on use and opinions of AI in veterinary practice was gathered from self-selecting New Zealand VNs over the age of 18. A mixture of multiple-choice questions, multi-select, Likert scale and open ended responses were used. Ethics approval was obtained prior to distribution of the survey.

Data collected from the online survey tool were downloaded into Excel (Microsoft Corp. Redmond, WA, USA) and analysed descriptively.

Results

Twenty two of thirty-five respondents were using AI at least weekly (Figure 1). AI was most commonly used for emails, social media posts, summarising consults, and taking meeting notes. The majority of respondents would like AI to “create discharge instructions”, “marketing drives”, and “manage inventory”, and they thought AI was currently capable of performing these (Figure 2). As expected, no respondents thought that AI was capable of completing a physical exam or providing hands on care, nor did they want AI to be capable of doing this. Most respondents did not think that AI reduced the need to critically think, problem solve, clinically reason, or be able to formulate ideas (Figure 3). Most respondents thought AI reduced the need to be able to logically sequence and summarise ideas. However, the vast majority of respondents thought that veterinary staff still required this ability. More respondents thought that VN students should learn to analyse AI generated content (17/ 24) than learn how to use and prompt AI (11/24).

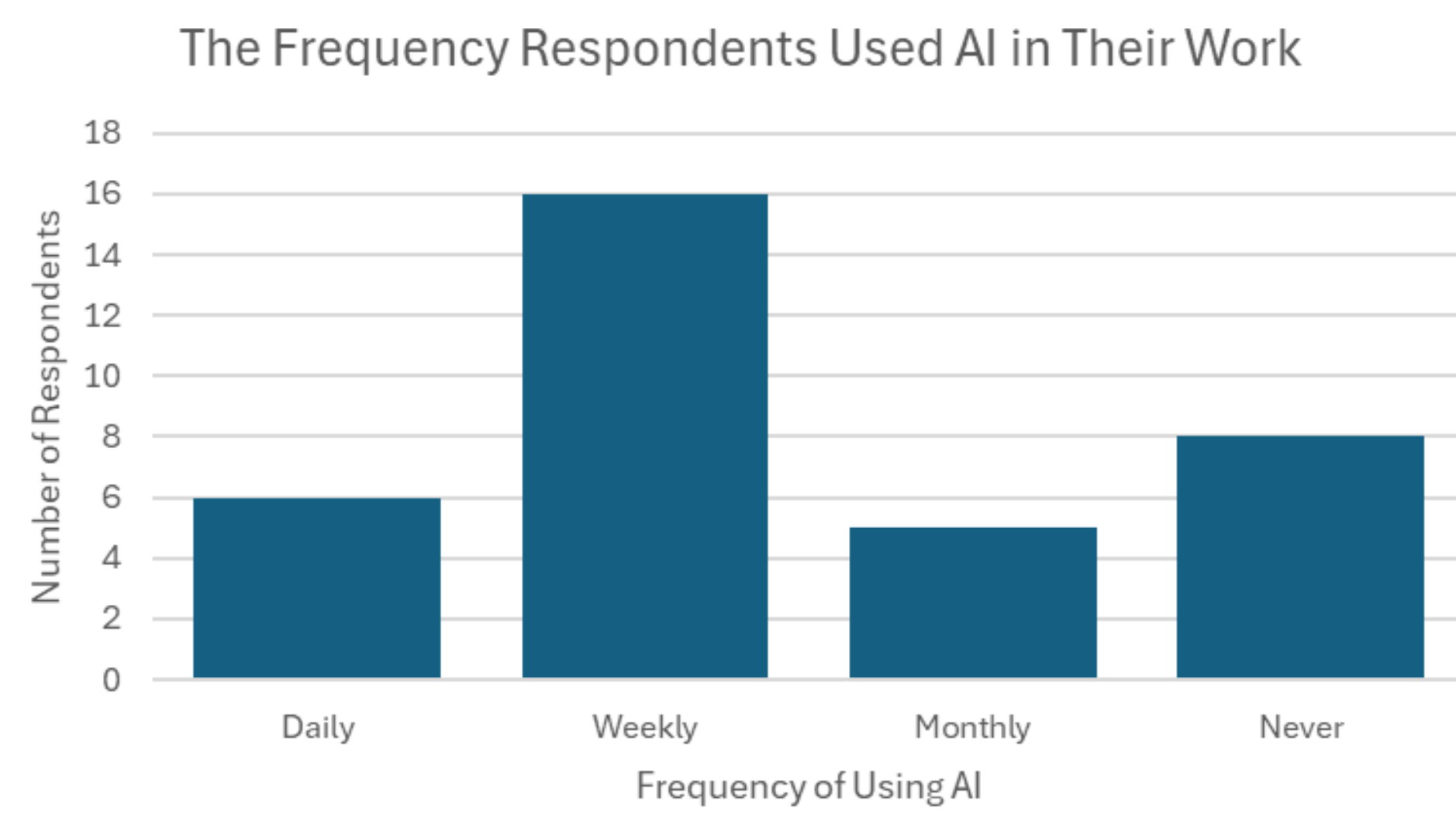


Figure 1. The Frequency Respondents Used AI in Their Work

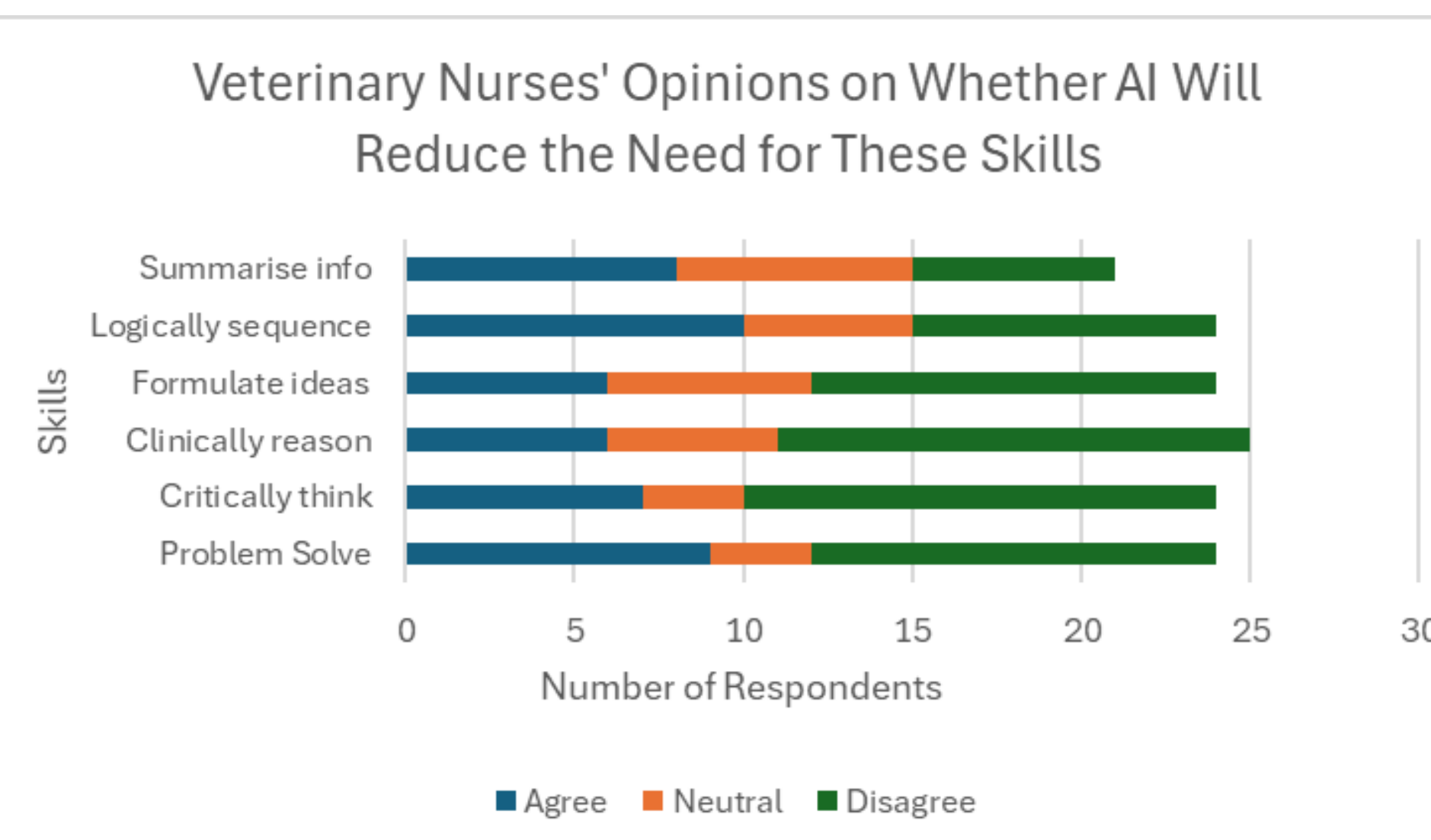


Figure 2. Tasks Veterinary Nurses' Would Like AI to Perform and Tasks They Believe AI Can Currently Perform

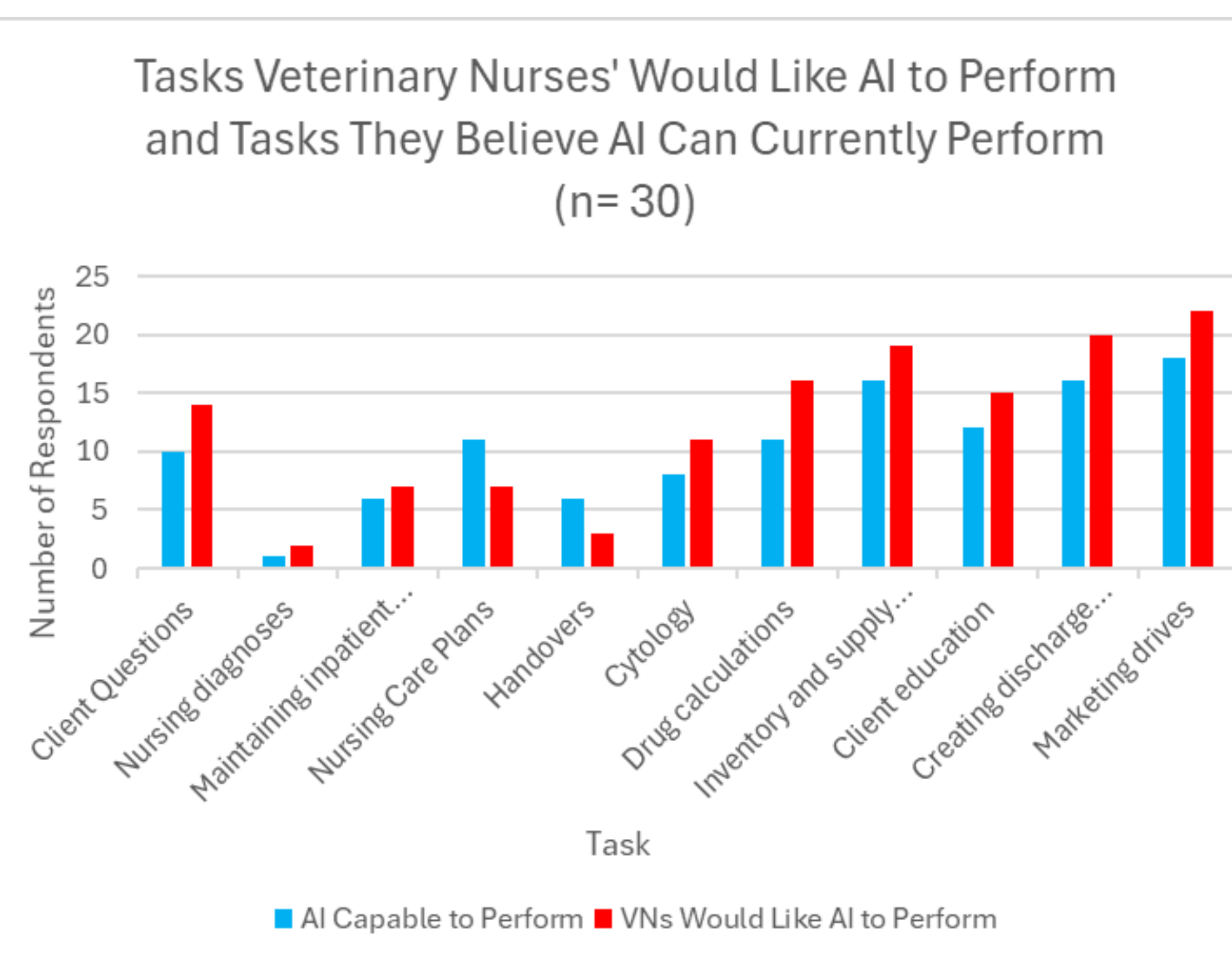


Figure 3. Veterinary Nurses' Opinions on Whether AI Will Reduce the Need for These Skills

Discussion and Conclusion

This study found that respondents were using and wanting AI for mundane and repetitive tasks. Similar results were found amongst Australian veterinarians who recognised the value of AI in performing menial tasks (Currie et al, 2023). Understanding how AI is currently used helps to inform how its use could be authentically incorporated into students learning, e.g. creating discharge instructions.

Critical thinking is a fundamental criterion of a degree programme, and the opinion of the majority of veterinary nurses is that AI does not reduce the need for this skill, nor for the ability to problem solve (The New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2025). However, veterinary nurses thought that AI reduced the need to logically sequence and summarise ideas. The question would be that if students don't learn to logically sequence or summarise ideas because AI can do this, will this impact the development of higher order skills such as critical thinking and problem solving? Although VNs thought that AI would reduce the need for these skills they still recognised these as essential skills to learn.

Interestingly, less than half of respondents thought that prompting AI should be incorporated into the curriculum but the majority thought that students should be taught to critically analyse the information. This may be an acknowledgement that AI is prone to inaccuracies. Worthing et al. (2024) found that incorporating critical analysis of AI-generated content in an assessment was more effective at highlighting inaccuracies than merely passively informing students of this.

The information gathered in this study will be used to inform how AI is taught to VN undergraduates and how it could be used in assessments. However, it also gives evidence to ensure that the fundamental skills taught to VNs does not change.

References

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