

AI LITERACY AS A NEW COMPETENCE FOR FUTURE ENGLISH TEACHERS

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Abstract. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into all sectors of modern life, including education, necessitates that future educators acquire a new set of competencies commonly referred to as AI literacy. This thesis examines AI literacy as an emerging and essential competence for pre-service and in-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers.

Keywords: AI literacy, English teacher education, EFL, digital competence, artificial intelligence, pre-service teachers.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a profound transformation in the tools and technologies available to educators and learners alike. Among the most disruptive and consequential of these developments is the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational settings. AI-powered tools — ranging from intelligent tutoring systems and automated writing feedback platforms to real-time translation services and generative language models — are increasingly shaping the landscape of language learning and teaching. Against this backdrop, the question of whether future English teachers are adequately prepared to navigate, critically evaluate, and pedagogically harness such technologies has become a matter of urgent concern for teacher educators and curriculum developers.

The concept of AI literacy, broadly defined as the capacity to understand, use, evaluate, and ethically engage with AI technologies, has gained traction in both academic and policy discourse. While digital literacy frameworks have long been embedded in teacher education curricula, AI literacy represents a qualitatively distinct set of competencies that go beyond general technology use. It encompasses an understanding of how AI systems function, the ability to critically assess AI-generated content, awareness of algorithmic bias, and the capacity to design AI-integrated learning experiences that promote learner agency and critical thinking.

English language teaching (ELT) occupies a particularly important position in this conversation. As a globally taught subject and a gateway to international communication and academic participation, English language education is among the first domains in which AI tools have found widespread application. Platforms such as Grammarly, Duolingo, ChatGPT, and various AI-based pronunciation coaches are now commonly used by learners, sometimes without any guided instruction from teachers. This places English teachers in the dual role of AI consumers and AI mediators — professionals who must not only use these tools effectively but also guide learners toward responsible and critical engagement with them[1].

Despite this reality, research consistently indicates that pre-service English teachers receive insufficient preparation in AI literacy as part of their formal training (Celik et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2023). Most teacher education programs have been slow to incorporate AI literacy into their curricula, leaving graduates ill-equipped to respond to the AI-infused classrooms they will encounter upon graduation. This gap between the technological realities of contemporary language education and the preparedness of future teachers constitutes the central problem addressed by this thesis.

Accordingly, this study pursues three primary objectives: (1) to assess the current levels of AI literacy among pre-service EFL teachers; (2) to identify the key domains of AI literacy most relevant to English language teaching; and (3) to propose a domain-specific AI Literacy Framework for EFL

teacher education that can inform curriculum reform and professional development initiatives. The study is grounded in a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative thematic analysis of participant reflections[2].

Based on a synthesis of existing AI literacy frameworks (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2021; Chai et al., 2021) and the empirical data collected in this study, a five-domain AI Literacy Framework for EFL Teacher Education is proposed. The framework is organized around five interrelated competence domains, each of which has direct implications for English language teaching practice. Table 1 presents the full framework with definitions, sub-competencies, and illustrative classroom applications for each domain[4].

Table 1.
AI Literacy Framework for EFL Teacher Education

Domain	Core Competencies	Sub-Skills	EFL Application
1. AI Awareness & Conceptual Understanding	Knowing what AI is; understanding how common AI tools function	Distinguishing AI from non-AI tools; understanding ML basics	Explaining to students how grammar checkers or speech tools work
2. AI Tool Proficiency	Ability to use AI tools effectively for teaching and learning tasks	Using ChatGPT for lesson ideas; using AI feedback tools for writing	Integrating AI writing assistants into composition tasks
3. Critical AI Evaluation	Critically assessing AI-generated content for accuracy, bias, and relevance	Fact-checking AI outputs; identifying cultural and linguistic bias	Teaching learners to verify and critically read AI-generated texts
4. AI Ethics & Responsible Use	Understanding ethical dimensions of AI in education	Privacy, data security, academic integrity, equity concerns	Developing classroom AI use policies; discussing academic honesty
5. AI-Integrated Lesson Design	Designing instruction that meaningfully and critically incorporates AI	Task design with AI tools; scaffolding AI-assisted activities	Creating AI-enhanced reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks

Note. Framework developed from Long & Magerko (2020), Ng et al. (2021), and study survey data.

Of this study carry important implications for English teacher education.

First, the wide gap between pre- and post-training scores — particularly in Critical AI Evaluation and AI Ethics — underscores the inadequacy of current preparation programs and the urgency of curricular reform. Future English teachers cannot be expected to cultivate AI literacy in their own students if they themselves have not developed such competencies during their professional training.

Second, the domain-specific nature of the AI Literacy Framework proposed here reflects the particular needs of EFL teacher education, which differ meaningfully from those of other subject areas. English teachers engage with AI primarily through the lens of language: they use AI to generate texts, assess writing, model pronunciation, and create language-based tasks. The framework's inclusion of AI-Integrated Lesson Design as a core domain acknowledges that technical proficiency with AI tools is necessary but not sufficient — what matters ultimately is the teacher's capacity to design pedagogically sound and critically informed learning experiences.

Third, the ethical domain warrants particular emphasis. AI tools used in language education — including automated essay scoring systems, translation tools, and generative AI writing assistants — raise complex questions about authorship, academic integrity, data privacy, and algorithmic fairness. English teachers are often the first educators to encounter these questions in their classrooms and must be equipped not only to navigate them personally but also to scaffold productive ethical reasoning among their learners[3].

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings also highlight the potential of dedicated AI literacy modules within pre-service teacher education. The significant gains achieved through a single semester-long intervention suggest that even modest curricular adjustments can produce meaningful improvements in teacher readiness. However, for AI literacy to become a genuine professional competence rather than a transient training outcome, it must be embedded longitudinally across the teacher education curriculum — not treated as a standalone add-on.

This thesis has argued that AI literacy constitutes an indispensable new competence for future English teachers. The empirical and theoretical evidence reviewed and generated in this study converges on a clear conclusion: current EFL teacher education programs are inadequately equipping pre-service teachers for the AI-permeated professional contexts they will inhabit. The proposed five-domain AI Literacy Framework offers a principled and practically grounded tool for addressing this gap.

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