

## **AI Literacy as a Core Competency for In-Service English Language Teachers: Implications for Competency-Based Teacher Education and Professional Development**

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### **Abstract**

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into English language teaching (ELT) creates new demands for teacher competencies that extend beyond functional tool use towards critical, human-centred AI literacy. This qualitative study explored how eight in-service English language teachers made sense of their developing AI literacy following a postgraduate course on AI in language teaching and learning. Through reflexive thematic analysis of their reflective narratives, the analysis generated three interconnected themes. First, participants negotiated the tension between AI's efficiency and cognitive outsourcing, emphasising the need to preserve learner agency, creativity, and authorship. Second, professional identity was reconstructed around critical mediation, positioning the teacher as a human-in-the-loop professional who evaluates, contextualises, and governs AI outputs. Third, AI literacy extended to ethical and inclusive responsibilities, highlighting concerns regarding the digital divide, native-speaker algorithmic bias, academic integrity, and data privacy. The findings suggest that AI literacy in ELT is a multidimensional professional capacity rather than a discrete technical skill. The study concludes with implications for competency-based teacher education and continuing professional development, proposing that professional learning should cultivate critical-pedagogical, mediational-professional, and ethical-inclusive competencies to ensure that technology enhances, rather than diminishes, human expertise in language education.

### **Keywords**

Generative AI, AI literacy, English language teaching, competency-based teacher education, continuing professional development, human-in-the-loop, teacher agency.