DEVELOPING MEDIA COMPETENCE THROUGH GENERATIVE AI TOOLS IN ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Canva AI are reshaping the landscape of digital communication and media production. For future English language teachers, these tools represent not merely technological conveniences but new objects of critical inquiry and professional competence. This article explores how generative AI can be purposefully used to develop media competence among pre-service English teachers. It examines the concept of media competence, describes specific GenAI tools and their pedagogical applications, and proposes practical strategies for integrating them into English teacher education programmes. The article concludes that when used critically and reflectively, generative AI tools can serve as powerful instruments for building the media literacy, digital authorship, and analytical skills that modern English teachers require.

Keywords: generative AI, media competence, English teacher education, ChatGPT, digital literacy, pre-service teachers.

1. Introduction

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence has introduced a new dimension to the challenge of media competence in education. Tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Canva AI can now produce written text, images, audio scripts, and multimedia content within seconds. While this technological shift offers remarkable opportunities, it also demands a new kind of critical literacy – the ability to understand, evaluate, and responsibly use AI-generated media. English language teachers are at the forefront of this challenge, as language and communication are the primary domains in which generative AI operates.

Pre-service English teachers must be equipped not only to use these tools fluently but to teach their future students how to engage with AI-mediated communication critically and ethically. Media competence – broadly understood as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media content – must therefore be reframed to include the generative AI dimension. This article argues that English teacher education programmes have a unique opportunity to use GenAI tools directly as instruments for developing media competence, rather than treating them solely as subject matter to be discussed in the abstract.

2. Understanding Media Competence

Media competence refers to a cluster of interrelated skills that enable individuals to navigate the modern information environment effectively and responsibly. It encompasses the ability to find and evaluate information from diverse sources, to critically analyse the messages, values, and techniques embedded in media texts, and to create and share original content in ethical and purposeful ways (Hobbs, 2017). UNESCO's framework for media and information literacy (MIL) describes these capacities as essential competencies for democratic participation and lifelong learning in the digital age (UNESCO, 2013).

For English language teachers specifically, media competence carries additional professional significance. The English language is the dominant medium of global digital communication – news, social media, podcasts, YouTube, and increasingly AI-generated content all rely heavily on English. Future teachers must be able to critically read and produce English-language media, understand how media messages are constructed linguistically, and help their own students develop the same capacities. Media competence is therefore inseparable from professional linguistic and pedagogical competence in the ELT field.

The rise of generative AI adds a new layer to this framework. Educators now need to understand how AI systems generate language, what biases and limitations they contain, how AI-produced text differs from human-authored text, and what ethical responsibilities accompany the use of AI-generated content. These are genuinely new media literacy competencies, and they are most naturally developed through hands-on engagement with the tools themselves.

3. Key Generative AI Tools and Their Educational Potential

Several generative AI platforms are particularly relevant to English teacher education and media competence development. Each offers distinct capabilities that can be harnessed for pedagogical purposes.

ChatGPT and similar large language models (LLMs) are the most versatile of these tools. They can generate news articles, opinion pieces, dialogues, lesson plans, and persuasive essays on demand, and they can be prompted to adopt different writing styles, tones, and perspectives. This makes them ideal for media analysis tasks: students can ask ChatGPT to write the same event as a news report from two contrasting political perspectives and then compare the resulting texts for framing, word choice, and omission. Such exercises develop critical reading and media analysis skills directly.

Canva AI and similar visual content generators allow users to create professional-looking infographics, social media posts, presentations, and short videos with minimal technical effort. Future teachers can use these tools to practice digital authorship – producing media content for real or simulated audiences – while reflecting on the aesthetic and rhetorical choices involved in visual communication. The ease of production also raises important ethical questions about authenticity, attribution, and the democratisation of media creation.

Grammarly and DeepL, though less obviously 'generative', use AI to analyse and transform written text. They provide real-time feedback on writing style, tone, and clarity, and they can be used to explore how the same message reads differently when rewritten in formal versus informal registers. For pre-service teachers, these tools offer a window into the relationship between linguistic choices and communicative effect – a core dimension of media competence.

ElevenLabs and similar AI voice and audio tools can generate realistic spoken audio from written text. Future teachers can use these platforms to produce podcast-style content, explore the rhetorical power of voice and tone, and critically evaluate synthetic media – an increasingly important skill as AI-generated audio and video become more prevalent in public discourse.

4. Practical Strategies for Integration

Integrating generative AI tools into English teacher education for the purpose of developing media competence requires deliberate pedagogical design. The following strategies offer a practical starting point for teacher educators.

The first strategy is AI-mediated media deconstruction. Rather than analysing pre-existing media texts alone, students use ChatGPT to generate media texts on a given topic – a news report, an advertisement, a social media post – and then deconstruct the output using established media analysis frameworks. Questions such as 'Who is the implied audience for this text?', 'What assumptions does it make?', and 'What has been left out?' apply equally to AI-generated and human-authored media, and the exercise makes explicit the constructed nature of all media content. Students quickly discover that AI outputs are not neutral or objective but reflect the biases embedded in training data and prompt design.

The second strategy involves comparative prompt analysis. Students formulate different prompts asking ChatGPT to address the same topic and compare the outputs in terms of perspective, language, and emphasis. For example, prompting the tool to 'write a newspaper report about climate change for a conservative audience' versus 'for a progressive audience' produces strikingly different texts. This exercise develops sensitivity to the relationship between audience, purpose, and language – a fundamental aspect of media competence – while simultaneously building students' understanding of how AI systems respond to context and framing.

The third strategy is digital authorship projects. Students plan, create, and publish (or present) original English-language media content using generative AI tools as part of their workflow. A student might write a script, use an AI tool to refine its language, generate supporting visuals with Canva AI, and produce a final podcast episode or explainer video. The reflective dimension is crucial: students must document their use of AI at each stage, explain the choices they made, and consider the ethical implications of using AI-generated content in a professional context. This builds not only practical media production skills but also the metacognitive awareness that is central to genuine media competence.

The fourth strategy is AI literacy through critical evaluation. Students are given a set of texts – some human-authored, some AI-generated – and asked to identify which is which, providing evidence for their judgements. This exercise, which mirrors the professional skill of fact-checking, trains students to attend closely to linguistic patterns, internal consistency, factual accuracy, and stylistic nuance. As GenAI outputs improve in quality, this task becomes progressively more challenging and more valuable.

The fifth strategy is ethical discussion seminars. Regular seminar sessions devoted to the ethical dimensions of AI in media – plagiarism, deepfakes, misinformation, intellectual property, and the displacement of human creativity – ensure that technical skills are grounded in professional responsibility. Future teachers who have worked through these questions personally are far better positioned to facilitate similar discussions with their own students.

5. Challenges and Considerations

Despite the clear potential of generative AI for media competence development, several challenges must be acknowledged. The most widely discussed is the risk of over-reliance: if students use AI tools to complete tasks rather than to learn from engaging with them, the educational value is lost. Teacher educators must design tasks in which the process of using and reflecting on AI is itself the learning objective, not merely the production of a polished output.

A second challenge concerns accuracy and reliability. Generative AI systems frequently produce confident-sounding but factually incorrect information – a phenomenon known as 'hallucination'. For media competence development, this is not merely a problem to be

managed; it is an opportunity for instruction. Students who encounter AI-generated misinformation first-hand and must fact-check it are experiencing media literacy education in its most direct and memorable form.

Accessibility and equity present a further concern. While some generative AI tools have free tiers, the most capable versions often require paid subscriptions. Institutions must ensure that all students have equitable access to the tools being used in instruction, and must consider whether reliance on commercial platforms is appropriate given questions of data privacy and corporate influence over educational content.

Finally, there is the question of rapidly changing technology. The generative AI landscape is evolving so quickly that specific tool recommendations risk becoming outdated within months of publication. The pedagogical principles described in this article – critical engagement, reflective use, ethical awareness – are more durable than any particular platform, and teacher educators should aim to instil these transferable dispositions rather than train proficiency in specific current tools.

6. Conclusion

Generative AI tools have arrived in English language education whether institutions are ready for them or not. The question facing teacher educators is not whether to engage with these technologies but how. This article has argued that, approached critically and reflectively, generative AI tools offer rich and largely untapped potential for developing the media competence that future English language teachers urgently need.

By using ChatGPT to deconstruct media framing, Canva AI to practice digital authorship, and comparative prompt analysis to investigate the relationship between language and perspective, pre-service teachers can develop practical, transferable media literacy skills while simultaneously building their understanding of AI as a cultural and communicative phenomenon. These are not peripheral additions to English teacher education; they are responses to the professional realities that tomorrow's teachers will face.

The integration of generative AI into media competence education calls for teacher educators who are themselves reflective users of these tools – willing to model critical engagement, acknowledge uncertainty, and revise their practice as the technology evolves. In this sense, developing media competence through generative AI is not simply a curriculum challenge; it is a professional development challenge for the entire field of English language teacher education.

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