

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become increasingly employed in the field of higher education and it has been used by university students for academic writing activities. However, a lack of research has explored how students conceptualize and manifest AI literacy through their actual interactions with generative AI tools. Therefore, this study aimed to explore AI literacy among final-year EFL students in generating research proposal topics, specifically investigating how students conceptualized AI literacy and how it was manifested in their actual use of generative AI tools. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design and involved seven students in their final-year in the English Education Department at a private university in Ciamis, Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings revealed that participants conceptualized AI as a supporting and collaborative tool rather than merely an automated answer-generating system. Their conceptualizations reflected four dimensions of AI literacy (knowing, using, evaluating, and ethics). AI literacy was manifested through participants' interactions with AI during title generation, background development, previous studies exploration, and research design formulation. Analysis of the chat evidence revealed that most participants engaged in three interaction phases (initial prompting, debating, and finalizing). Based on the interpretation of participants' AI literacy, most of the participants exhibited characteristics associated with the Intermediate (L2), Advanced (L3) levels, and no participant categorized at the Foundation (L1) level. Finally, the AI literacy skills demonstrated by the participants went beyond technical competence as they included critical thinking, reflective judgment, and ethical responsibility. The findings highlight the importance of developing such literacy skills in order to facilitate the use of AI technology in academic writing.