



Original Research

Media Literacy as Linguistic Practice: English Foreign Language Learners Respond to Hoaxes and Hate Speech

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Abstract

The rapid spread of hoaxes and online hate speech has intensified the need for pedagogical approaches that extend beyond linguistic competence toward critical digital citizenship, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study examines EFL learners' perceptions of integrating media literacy into English instruction and evaluates its effectiveness in enhancing critical evaluation skills, confidence, and responsible online engagement. Using a descriptive mixed-methods design, the study involved 175 undergraduate students at an Indonesian Islamic university who participated in a structured two-week media literacy intervention embedded in English reading and writing classes. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted with 20 selected participants. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings indicate that approximately 90 percent of participants reported improved ability to assess news credibility, identify misinformation, and engage respectfully in online discussions. Additionally, 87 percent experienced reduced anxiety when encountering hoaxes, and 89 percent felt better prepared to respond constructively to hate speech. Qualitative analysis revealed three interrelated themes: enhanced critical awareness, increased communicative confidence, and a strengthened sense of social responsibility as digital citizens. By addressing hoaxes and hate speech concurrently within an EFL classroom, this study fills an important empirical gap in non-Western contexts, where these issues are often examined separately. The findings demonstrate that integrating media literacy into EFL instruction serves a dual function: supporting language development while fostering ethical and responsible digital participation. These results have clear implications for incorporating culturally responsive media literacy into EFL curricula.

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1. Introduction

The digital age has profoundly transformed how information is produced, circulated, and consumed, positioning online media as a dominant force shaping public opinion, social relations, and democratic life. Alongside these developments, the rapid proliferation of hoaxes and online hate speech has emerged as a critical global challenge, undermining social cohesion, distorting political processes, and threatening individual well-being. In digitally saturated societies, misinformation and hate-driven discourse often spread

faster than verified information, exploiting emotional triggers and identity-based divisions to amplify their reach (Finneman & Thomas, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). These conditions highlight the urgent need for educational interventions that equip learners to critically evaluate information and engage ethically in digital environments.

Indonesia provides a particularly salient context for examining these issues. With one of the highest internet penetration rates in Southeast Asia, the country's digital spaces have become fertile ground for the circulation of hoaxes and hate speech, especially during politically and socially sensitive periods such as national elections (UNESCO, 2020). Misinformation related to religion, ethnicity, and public health has repeatedly generated social tension and tangible consequences, including institutional distrust and increased polarization (Alexandra & Satria, 2023). These dynamics underscore the importance of fostering critical digital competencies among young adults, particularly university students who are both active media users and future societal leaders.

English language teaching (ELT) offers a strategic yet underutilized space for addressing these digital challenges. English classrooms routinely engage students with news texts, opinion articles, and social media content, making them a natural setting for integrating media literacy practices that emphasize critical reading, source evaluation, and ethical communication (Hobbs & Hobbs, 2011; Sharma et al., 2024). Research indicates that media-based tasks can enhance language proficiency while promoting higher-order thinking and intercultural awareness (Wahyudi & Rozimela, 2024). Despite this potential, English instruction has often remained narrowly focused on linguistic form rather than the broader communicative and civic demands of the digital era.

Existing scholarship on media literacy in education has largely concentrated on Western contexts, where sociocultural conditions, media ecosystems, and pedagogical traditions differ significantly from those of non-Western societies (Hobbs, 2019a; Kellner & Share, 2007). Studies in these contexts demonstrate that media literacy can strengthen students' ability to recognize bias, detect misinformation, and engage in reflective dialogue (Potter, 2022; Huang et al., 2023). However, empirical research on media literacy integration within Indonesian EFL classrooms remains limited, particularly studies that foreground students' lived experiences and perceptions rather than theoretical models or teacher perspectives (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025; McDougall et al., 2022).

Moreover, prior research has typically addressed misinformation and hate speech as separate phenomena, even though they frequently co-occur and reinforce one another in online environments (UNESCO, 2015; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Studies on hoax prevention emphasize fact-checking and source evaluation (Lan & Tung, 2024; Ngo et al., 2024), whereas research on hate speech mitigation highlights respectful dialogue and counter-speech strategies (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Liu & Zhang, 2025). Few investigations, however, have explored how a single pedagogical intervention can simultaneously address both digital threats within an EFL context, particularly in culturally and religiously diverse settings such as Indonesian Islamic universities.

In response to these gaps, the present study integrates media literacy pedagogy into English instruction to address hoaxes and hate speech concurrently from students' perspectives. Drawing on authentic learning theory (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007) and digital citizenship frameworks (Apostol & Dogariu, 2004), this research provides empirical evidence from a non-Western EFL context, demonstrating how language classrooms can serve as sites for developing both linguistic competence and responsible digital citizenship. By foregrounding student voice through a mixed-methods approach, the study extends existing research that has predominantly emphasized theoretical or instructor-centered perspectives. The significance of this study lies in its dual focus on educational and societal outcomes. Pedagogically, it examines whether a structured media literacy intervention embedded in English reading and writing classes can enhance students' critical evaluation skills, reduce anxiety toward misinformation, and strengthen confidence in responding to hate speech. Socially, it explores how such instruction contributes to students' sense of responsibility and ethical engagement in digital spaces. Accordingly, the study pursues two central aims: (1) to explore EFL learners' perceptions of media literacy integration and (2) to assess its perceived effectiveness in combating hoaxes and hate speech.

Overall, this study demonstrates that integrating media literacy into English language teaching offers a meaningful pathway for addressing urgent digital challenges while enriching language learning. For ELT practitioners, the findings suggest that culturally responsive media literacy instruction can strengthen critical

reading and writing skills while fostering ethical digital participation. More broadly, the study underscores the potential of English classrooms to contribute not only to linguistic development but also to the cultivation of informed, responsible, and critically engaged digital citizens in an increasingly complex information landscape.

2. Literature Review

Media literacy is commonly defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages across diverse formats and contexts (Hobbs & Hobbs, 2011; Potter, 2022). In educational settings, however, it extends beyond technical proficiency to encompass critical awareness of bias, ideology, and power relations embedded in media texts (Kellner & Share, 2007; Hobbs, 2019a). Recent scholarship positions media literacy as a foundational competence for navigating algorithm-driven information environments characterized by information overload and rapid content circulation (Aykut Ozel, 2025; Vieira Rodrigues, 2025). Within English language teaching (ELT), media literacy aligns closely with critical reading and writing practices. Through engagement with authentic texts, learners develop evaluative, interpretive, and argumentative skills essential for meaningful communication (Hobbs & Hobbs, 2011; Wahyudi & Rozimela, 2024). In this sense, media literacy not only complements language learning but also expands its epistemic and civic dimensions.

Hoaxes, situated within misinformation and disinformation studies, refer to deliberately false or misleading information designed to deceive and spread widely by exploiting emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Finneman & Thomas, 2018). Hate speech, defined as communication that attacks individuals or groups based on protected characteristics such as religion, ethnicity, or race, poses serious social risks and frequently intersects with misinformation to intensify polarization and exclusion (UNESCO, 2015; Alexandra & Satria, 2023). These digital threats are closely connected to digital citizenship, a framework emphasizing ethical participation, responsibility, and respect in online environments (Apostol & Dogariu, 2004). Expanded models further integrate digital literacy, etiquette, and civic engagement, positioning learners as active contributors to safer and more inclusive digital communities (Hobbs, 2019b; Zhang & Wu, 2023).

2.1 Media Literacy, Hoaxes, and Hate Speech in EFL Contexts

Empirical research demonstrates that media literacy instruction strengthens fact-checking practices, source evaluation, and resistance to misinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Huang et al., 2023). Educational interventions have reduced belief in hoaxes and limited their spread (Lan & Tung, 2024). Within EFL contexts, media literacy enhances learners' critical engagement with news texts and online discourse (Hobbs & Hobbs, 2011). Studies conducted in Vietnam and China report improved hoax detection among EFL learners following structured media literacy training (Ngo et al., 2024; Liu & Zhang, 2025).

Despite these promising findings, research in Indonesia remains limited and rarely addresses culturally specific hoaxes related to religion and ethnicity (Sarjito & Lelyana, 2025; Afrilyasanti et al., 2025). Moreover, while media literacy has been shown to support hate speech mitigation by fostering reflective dialogue and ethical counter-speech (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017), learners' willingness to confront discriminatory discourse may be shaped by cultural norms emphasizing harmony, hierarchy, and religious sensitivity (Alexandra & Satria, 2023). These contextual factors are often underexplored in existing studies.

2.2 Media Literacy in English Language Teaching

Within ELT, media literacy has been associated with improved reading comprehension, academic writing, and evidence-based argumentation (Hobbs, 2019a; Lee, 2021; Aziz et al., 2024). Media-based tasks increase learner engagement and connect classroom activities to real-world issues (Zhang & Wu, 2023). By integrating authentic materials, teachers can foster both linguistic development and critical inquiry.

Nevertheless, several challenges persist. Limited teacher preparation, unequal digital access, and institutional constraints can hinder effective implementation (Yelessiz, 2024; Akbar & Wijaya, 2024). Additionally, much of the existing literature emphasizes theoretical models or teacher perspectives, with comparatively less attention to students' lived experiences and perceptions (McDougall et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2024). As a result, the learner's voice remains insufficiently represented in discussions of media literacy integration within EFL contexts.

2.3 Research Gaps, Novelty, and Implications

The literature reveals three primary gaps. First, empirical research on media literacy in Indonesian EFL settings is scarce, particularly studies centered on student perspectives (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025). Second, hoaxes and hate speech are typically examined as separate phenomena, despite their frequent intersection in digital environments (UNESCO, 2015; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Third, limited attention has been paid to learners' confidence and anxiety when responding to these threats, especially within culturally sensitive contexts (Alexandra & Satria, 2023).

Addressing these gaps, this study investigates a structured media literacy intervention integrated into English instruction to address hoaxes and hate speech within a digital citizenship framework. Using a mixed-methods design and centering student voice, it conceptualizes media literacy as both a linguistic and civic practice, examining how learners develop critical awareness in evaluating online information, strengthen communicative confidence in expressing informed views, and cultivate social responsibility in digital interactions. By highlighting the interconnectedness of these dimensions, the findings aim to offer practical and theoretical contributions to ELT pedagogy and curriculum development in digitally complex and culturally diverse societies. It also underscores the importance of integrating critical digital engagement into everyday classroom practices for sustainable learning.

3. Method

This study employed a descriptive sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2018) to examine EFL learners' perceptions of media literacy integration and its perceived effectiveness in addressing hoaxes and hate speech. Quantitative data were collected first through a structured questionnaire to identify general trends and patterns, followed by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to provide explanatory depth and contextual insight. This sequential design enabled methodological triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

3.1 Participants and Language Background

The population comprised 320 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in compulsory English courses at UIN Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia. Second-year students were selected because they had completed foundational English coursework, demonstrated intermediate proficiency (B1–B2 CEFR), and possessed the cognitive maturity required to engage with complex issues such as misinformation and hate speech. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table with a 95 percent confidence level, a sample of 175 students was determined. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling based on English course GPA to ensure proportional academic representation. All participants were native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia and learned English as a foreign language through formal education. Indonesian was used as the primary language during interviews to ensure clarity, authenticity, and depth of response. The questionnaire was administered bilingually (English and Bahasa Indonesia), employing back-translation procedures to maintain semantic equivalence.

3.2 Instruments and Reliability

Data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was grounded in critical media literacy theory (Hobbs, 2011) and digital citizenship frameworks (Ribble, 2015). It comprised 13 Likert-scale items organized into three constructs: (1) perceived value of media literacy (5 items), (2) attitudes toward its integration in English classes (3 items), and (3) perceived effectiveness in addressing hoaxes and hate speech (5 items). Responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The instrument underwent expert validation by three English education specialists and one media literacy specialist. A pilot test involving 30 students from a different cohort yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .82, indicating good internal consistency. After minor wording revisions, the revised questionnaire was administered to the full sample of 175 students and produced a Cronbach's alpha of .89, demonstrating strong reliability. Further, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 students selected through purposive maximum variation sampling to represent differences in academic performance, gender, social media use, and attitudes toward media literacy. Interviews followed a guide of ten open-ended questions and were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

3.3 Intervention Procedure

The media literacy intervention was conducted over two consecutive weeks as part of students' regular English reading and writing classes. Students participated in four structured 90-minute sessions aimed at strengthening their critical thinking and responsible communication skills in digital contexts. In the first week, instruction focused on media credibility and misinformation, introducing concepts such as bias detection, source evaluation, and fact-checking strategies. Students analyzed media texts and practiced verifying information using tools such as Turnbackhoax.id and Google Reverse Image Search to enhance their ability to assess the reliability of online content.

In the second week, the focus shifted to hate speech. Lessons addressed relevant legal and ethical frameworks and examined authentic case examples to highlight the social impact of harmful online discourse. Students also engaged in role-play activities and completed guided writing tasks to produce constructive counter-responses. Instruction was delivered primarily in English, with Indonesian support provided when necessary to ensure comprehension.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered online at the conclusion of the intervention to ensure that all participants had completed the instructional activities. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS Version 26, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Interview data were transcribed verbatim in Indonesian and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. NVivo 12 software was used to facilitate data management and coding. To enhance reliability, 20 percent of the transcripts were independently coded by a second researcher, resulting in a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of .82, indicating high inter-rater agreement. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the interpretation phase to generate a comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions.

4. Results

This section presents findings from the quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews conducted with 175 second-year undergraduate EFL students. The results are organized into three subsections aligned with the study objectives: (1) students' perceived value of media literacy, (2) their attitudes toward its integration into English instruction, and (3) their perceptions of its effectiveness in addressing hoaxes and hate speech. Quantitative findings outline overall response patterns, while qualitative insights provide interpretive depth by illustrating how students understood and enacted media literacy in both academic and digital contexts.

Across the three subsections, the findings indicate that integrating media literacy into English instruction generated cognitive, linguistic, affective, and civic outcomes. High levels of agreement in the survey responses suggest strong perceived effectiveness of the intervention. Interview data further reveal how media literacy became embedded in students' reasoning processes, communicative confidence, and sense of social responsibility.

Importantly, the results highlight a productive tension between competence and action. Although students developed analytical skills and ethical awareness, their willingness to confront hate speech was often shaped by cultural norms emphasizing harmony and social sensitivity. Rather than undermining the intervention's success, this pattern underscores the need for culturally responsive scaffolding that supports responsible digital engagement while acknowledging local values.

4.1 Students' Perceived Value of Media Literacy in English Learning

This subsection examines how students perceived the value of media literacy within English learning and identifies the aspects they considered most meaningful. By integrating questionnaire responses with interview data, the analysis reveals that students overwhelmingly viewed media literacy as a core component of English education rather than a supplementary skill. The findings further indicate that students attached the greatest value to media literacy practices that enabled them to evaluate news credibility and recognize media bias. While improvements in English writing were also acknowledged, these were consistently positioned as secondary outcomes that emerged from enhanced critical reading and evaluative reasoning. Table 4.1 presents students' responses concerning the perceived value of media literacy in English learning.

Table 4.1 Students' Perceived Value of Media Literacy in English Learning (N = 175)

No	Statement	Agreement (%)	Mean	SD
1	Media literacy helps me evaluate the credibility of news sources	92	4.35	0.62
2	Media literacy improves my ability to identify hoaxes	90	4.28	0.67
3	Media literacy enhances my English writing for news-related tasks	88	4.15	0.73
4	Media literacy supports my understanding of media bias	91	4.30	0.65
5	Media literacy is a valuable component of English education	93	4.40	0.58

The quantitative results demonstrate consistently high levels of agreement across all five items, with agreement rates ranging from 88 percent to 93 percent and mean scores exceeding 4.15 on a five-point scale. The highest endorsement was recorded for the statement identifying media literacy as a valuable component of English education, indicating that students did not perceive it as an optional addition to language instruction. The relatively low standard deviations across items suggest a shared evaluative orientation among students, regardless of differences in academic performance or digital engagement.

Although the item related to writing development yielded the lowest mean score, it still received strong agreement. This pattern suggests not a devaluation of writing, but a prioritization of critical evaluation and meaning construction over formal language production. Interview data from Data Set 2, post-intervention semi-structured interviews, provide insight into how students interpreted the value of media literacy in relation to English learning.

English as a Resource for Evaluating Credibility

Students frequently described English as a language associated with access to authoritative information in digital spaces. Media literacy was valued because it enabled them to critically assess this perceived authority.

“Before, if something was written in English, I trusted it more. Now I know that English does not always mean reliable.”
 (Data Set 2, Student ID S11, Interview 02, 16:31)

Another student emphasized that media literacy helped them manage linguistic limitations while still making informed judgments:

“Even when the English is difficult, I can still check the source and the date. That makes English useful for me.”
 (Data Set 2, Student ID S03, Interview 01, 12:15)

These excerpts triangulate the high agreement levels for credibility evaluation and hoax identification, showing that students valued media literacy because it transformed English from a source of unquestioned authority into a medium for critical scrutiny.

Understanding Media Bias through Language

Students also highlighted that media literacy enhanced their awareness of how bias operates through language choices and framing in English texts.

“Bias is not always about fake news. Sometimes it is in how words are used to influence readers.”
 (Data Set 2, Student ID S14, Interview 03, 24:09)

This perception aligns with the strong endorsement of media literacy's role in understanding media bias and indicates that students engaged with English texts at a discursive level, paying attention to stance and evaluative language rather than surface meaning alone.

Writing as an Emergent Outcome of Critical Engagement

Consistent with the quantitative findings, students framed improvements in writing as an outcome that followed clearer thinking and stronger evaluation skills.

“Writing became easier because I knew what I wanted to argue. The ideas came first.”
 (Data Set 2, Student ID S05, Interview 02, 19:02)

Similarly, another participant noted:

“The fact-checking tasks helped my writing because I had reasons and evidence, not just opinions.”
 (Data Set 2, Student ID S18, Interview 01, 21:47)

These reflections explain why writing development was perceived as secondary. Students viewed writing proficiency as dependent on epistemic clarity rather than isolated language practice.

The integrated findings indicate that students conceptualized media literacy as foundational to the purpose of learning English in a digital context. English was not understood merely as a system of grammar and vocabulary, but as a language through which credibility is evaluated, bias is recognized, and knowledge claims are negotiated.

The prioritization of credibility assessment and bias recognition reflects students’ awareness of English as a dominant language in global information flows. Media literacy enabled them to engage with this dominance critically rather than deferentially, repositioning learners as evaluators of information rather than passive recipients.

The secondary positioning of writing development further reinforces this epistemic orientation. Students did not diminish the importance of writing but reframed it as a consequence of knowing what to say and why. Writing became meaningful insofar as it allowed students to articulate evaluated knowledge and justified positions.

In this sense, media literacy did more than enhance English learning outcomes. It reshaped students’ understanding of what English learning is for by aligning language use with epistemic responsibility and critical participation in digitally mediated environments.

4.2 Student Attitudes toward the Integration of Media Literacy in English Instruction

This subsection investigates students’ attitudes toward the integration of media literacy into English instruction, with particular attention to engagement, perceived relevance, cognitive stimulation, and confidence in application. By integrating questionnaire results with interview data, this section demonstrates that students largely welcomed media literacy as a meaningful and motivating pedagogical approach in English classes. At the same time, attitudes toward applying media literacy to confront hate speech were more differentiated, indicating that positive pedagogical reception did not always translate into full emotional readiness for public action in culturally sensitive contexts. Table 4.2 presents students’ responses regarding their attitudes toward the integration of media literacy in English instruction.

Table 4.2 Student Attitudes toward Media Literacy Integration in English Classes (N = 175)

No	Statement	Agreement (%)	Mean	SD
6	I feel confident countering hate speech after media literacy activities	85	4.05	0.82
7	Media literacy makes English classes more engaging	93	4.38	0.60
8	Media literacy activities are relevant to real-world challenges	91	4.32	0.64
9	Media literacy activities are easy to understand and apply	87	4.10	0.78
10	Media literacy encourages me to think critically about media content	94	4.45	0.55

The quantitative results indicate strongly positive attitudes overall, with agreement levels ranging from 85 percent to 94 percent and mean scores consistently above 4.00. The highest level of endorsement was associated with the statement that media literacy encourages critical thinking, followed closely by increased engagement in English classes. These findings suggest that students perceived media literacy integration as an instructional enhancement that enriched learning rather than as an additional cognitive burden.

In contrast, confidence in countering hate speech displayed the lowest agreement and the highest variability, suggesting that students differed in their affective responses to applying media literacy in socially sensitive situations. Further, interview data from Data Set 2 (post-intervention semi-structured interviews) provide insight into how these attitudes were formed and why certain aspects of media literacy integration were more strongly endorsed than others.

Engagement and Perceived Relevance

Students consistently described media literacy activities as making English classes more engaging and more closely connected to their everyday experiences with digital media.

“Usually English class focuses on textbooks. This time it felt connected to what I see online every day.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S07, Interview 02, 14:18)

Another student highlighted how authenticity increased motivation:

“Because we discussed real news and real hoaxes, I was more interested and focused in class.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S12, Interview 01, 10:41)

These accounts directly support the high levels of agreement related to engagement and real-world relevance, indicating that students’ positive attitudes were grounded in the authenticity of instructional materials rather than novelty alone.

Critical Thinking as a Valued Learning Outcome

Students frequently framed their positive attitudes around the perception that media literacy reshaped their thinking processes rather than simply adding new content knowledge.

“Now I read information more slowly and carefully. I always ask questions first.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S14, Interview 03, 22:06)

This reflection aligns with the strongest quantitative endorsement and demonstrates that students valued media literacy integration because it fostered sustained critical awareness that extended beyond classroom tasks.

Confidence in Application and Cultural Considerations

In contrast, attitudes toward using media literacy to confront hate speech were more cautious. Although many students acknowledged increased knowledge and skills, their confidence was often tempered by social and cultural considerations.

“I know how to respond now, but I still hesitate to comment online, especially on religious topics.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S17, Interview 02, 20:34)

Another participant expressed concern about potential conflict:

“Sometimes it is not about knowing what to say. It is about avoiding problems and misunderstandings.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S20, Interview 01, 18:09)

These qualitative insights help explain the higher standard deviation observed in the survey results. Students’ attitudes were influenced not only by instructional effectiveness but also by cultural norms that prioritize social harmony, respect, and conflict avoidance.

The integrated findings suggest that students’ attitudes toward media literacy integration were strongly positive at the pedagogical and cognitive levels, yet more nuanced at the affective and behavioral levels. Media literacy was enthusiastically received as a way to make English learning engaging, relevant, and intellectually meaningful. However, applying media literacy practices in contexts involving hate speech introduced emotional and cultural complexities that shaped students’ willingness to act.

This distinction highlights an important pedagogical insight. Positive attitudes toward media literacy do not necessarily imply immediate readiness for public confrontation or direct counter-speech. Instead, students appeared to internalize media literacy primarily as a cognitive framework for analysis and reflection, while selectively negotiating its enactment in public digital spaces.

From a language education perspective, these findings indicate that successful integration of media literacy into English instruction requires attention not only to task design and content relevance but also to emotional safety and cultural positioning. Students' attitudes reveal media literacy integration as a negotiated practice, enthusiastically embraced within the classroom yet carefully moderated beyond it.

Recognizing this negotiation is essential for understanding how media literacy operates in English education contexts where cultural values shape communicative behavior. Such recognition allows educators to design instruction that supports both critical engagement and culturally appropriate forms of expression, thereby strengthening the sustainability of media literacy practices in EFL settings.

4.3 Perceived Effectiveness of Media Literacy in Addressing Hoaxes and Hate Speech

This subsection examines how students evaluated the effectiveness of media literacy in addressing hoaxes and hate speech, with attention to emotional responses, ethical communication, and readiness for responsible digital participation. By integrating questionnaire data with interview evidence, the findings show that students largely perceived media literacy as effective in improving their ability to respond to misinformation, promoting respectful online interaction, and strengthening their sense of digital citizenship. At the same time, the data reveal that emotional outcomes, particularly anxiety reduction and confidence in confronting harmful content, were experienced with varying intensity, indicating that effectiveness was shaped by both cognitive mastery and affective adaptation. Table 4.3 presents students' responses concerning the perceived effectiveness of media literacy in addressing hoaxes and hate speech.

Table 4.3 Perceived Effectiveness of Media Literacy in Addressing Hoaxes and Hate Speech (N = 175)

No	Statement	Agreement (%)	Mean	SD
11	Media literacy reduces my anxiety about encountering hoaxes	87	4.12	0.76
12	Media literacy encourages respectful online discourse	89	4.20	0.70
13	Media literacy prepares me for responsible digital citizenship	94	4.48	0.53
14	Media literacy helps me respond effectively to misinformation	90	4.25	0.68
15	Media literacy enables me to contribute to a safer online environment	92	4.35	0.61

The quantitative results demonstrate consistently high levels of agreement across all indicators of effectiveness. The strongest endorsement was recorded for preparedness for responsible digital citizenship, which also showed the lowest variability, indicating a stable and shared perception among students. In contrast, anxiety reduction displayed the highest standard deviation, suggesting greater individual differences in emotional responses to encountering hoaxes and hate speech, even after the intervention.

Interview data from Data Set 2, post-intervention semi-structured interviews, provide insight into how students interpreted the effectiveness of media literacy beyond numerical ratings and how cognitive and emotional dimensions interacted in practice.

Effectiveness as Emotional Regulation and Sense of Control

Many students described media literacy as effective because it reduced feelings of confusion, fear, and helplessness when encountering hoaxes, even if negative emotions were not entirely removed.

“Before this class, hoaxes made me anxious because I did not know how to check them. Now I feel calmer because I have a method.”

(Data Set 2, Student ID S09, Interview 01, 15:27)

Another student emphasized a similar shift from emotional vulnerability to cognitive control:

“The hoaxes still appear, but I am not panic anymore. I know what steps to take.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S04, Interview 02, 18:03)

These accounts triangulate the survey result showing reduced anxiety and clarify that effectiveness was experienced primarily as increased emotional regulation through procedural knowledge, rather than as complete emotional detachment.

Respectful Discourse and Ethical Communication

Students also perceived media literacy as effective in guiding how they communicate in online spaces, particularly when responding to contentious or provocative content.

“I think more about my words now. Even when I disagree, I try to respond respectfully.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S13, Interview 03, 21:12)

This reflection supports the quantitative finding that media literacy encourages respectful online discourse and indicates that students internalized effectiveness as an ethical orientation toward communication rather than merely a technical response strategy.

Digital Citizenship and Collective Responsibility

The strongest qualitative evidence of perceived effectiveness emerged in relation to digital citizenship. Students consistently articulated a growing sense of responsibility toward others in their digital communities.

“I feel it is my responsibility to correct misinformation, especially in family group chats where hoaxes spread quickly.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S06, Interview 02, 17:44)

Another participant linked effectiveness to social impact:

“If I stay silent, the hoax continues. Now I feel I should do something, even if it is small.”
(Data Set 2, Student ID S02, Interview 01, 13:58)

These excerpts support and triangulate the strong quantitative findings on digital citizenship preparedness. They indicate that students understood effectiveness not merely as a matter of individual protection, but as a relational and communal responsibility grounded in interaction, empathy, and collective well-being.

The integrated findings suggest that students perceived media literacy as effective because it transformed their role in digital spaces from passive exposure to responsible engagement. Effectiveness was not defined by the elimination of hoaxes or hate speech, which students recognized as unrealistic, but by their enhanced capacity to respond thoughtfully, ethically, and with greater emotional control.

The variability observed in anxiety reduction highlights a critical distinction between analytical competence and emotional adaptation. While media literacy equipped students with tools to evaluate and respond to misinformation, emotional reactions to harmful content persisted for some learners. This suggests that effectiveness unfolds progressively as students repeatedly apply critical strategies and develop confidence through experience.

The prominence of digital citizenship as the strongest outcome indicates that students interpreted media literacy as a collective moral practice. Effectiveness was associated with contributing to safer online environments, educating others, and maintaining respectful discourse. In this sense, media literacy functioned not only as a defensive skill set but as a foundation for ethical participation in digitally mediated communities.

From an English language education perspective, these findings demonstrate that media literacy achieves its greatest effectiveness when it is understood as part of learners' ethical self-concept rather than as a discrete instructional outcome. Integrating media literacy into English instruction therefore supports not only linguistic and critical development but also the formation of responsible digital actors capable of navigating complex information environments with discernment and care.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that integrating media literacy into English as a Foreign Language instruction produces meaningful outcomes across cognitive, linguistic, affective, and civic domains. Three principal findings emerge. First, students perceived media literacy as an integral component of English learning that strengthened their ability to evaluate credibility, identify hoaxes, and recognize media bias. Second, they expressed positive attitudes toward its integration, particularly in terms of engagement, relevance, and critical thinking, although confidence in confronting hate speech remained uneven. Third, students viewed media literacy as effective in reducing anxiety, promoting respectful discourse, and fostering responsible digital citizenship. Collectively, these findings position media literacy as both a linguistic and civic practice within EFL education.

Students' strong endorsement of media literacy confirms that they no longer perceived English learning as confined to grammar and vocabulary. Instead, high agreement levels regarding credibility evaluation and bias recognition indicate that learners associated English with epistemic responsibility in digital environments. This aligns with research emphasizing that media literacy enhances critical reading and evaluative reasoning in language education (Hobbs, 2019a; Potter, 2022; Wahyudi & Rozimela, 2024).

Qualitative findings further reveal a shift in learners' epistemic stance. English texts, previously viewed as inherently authoritative, became objects of scrutiny once media literacy practices were introduced. This supports Potter's (2004) cognitive model, which suggests that repeated analytical engagement fosters automatic evaluative processing. The internalization of fact-checking routines and source evaluation strategies indicates schema development that enables learners to exercise critical judgment even when linguistic comprehension is partial.

Although writing development received slightly lower endorsement, students' reflections suggest that improvement in writing emerged from clearer reasoning and stronger evidence evaluation. This corroborates Lee (2021), who found that media literacy-based tasks provide authentic purposes for academic writing. Writing proficiency, therefore, was not perceived as a discrete linguistic outcome but as an extension of critical engagement with information. Media literacy strengthened English learning by aligning language use with meaning-making, argumentation, and ethical communication.

Students' attitudes toward integration were overwhelmingly positive, particularly regarding engagement and real-world relevance. Media literacy activities connected classroom learning with students' daily digital experiences, reinforcing previous findings that authentic media-based tasks enhance motivation in EFL contexts (Hobbs, 2019b; Zhang & Wu, 2023). Moreover, learners described adopting slower, more reflective reading habits, consistent with critical media literacy frameworks that emphasize inquiry and interpretive depth (Kellner & Share, 2007; Hobbs, 2019a). Media literacy was thus experienced not as additional content but as a transformative way of thinking.

However, confidence in confronting hate speech was more variable. While students reported improved knowledge and strategies, hesitation persisted due to concerns about social conflict, religious sensitivity, and respect for others. This finding resonates with Mihailidis and Viotty (2017), who argue that counter-speech involves emotional and contextual challenges beyond technical competence. From a social cognitive perspective, it reflects Bandura et al.'s (1999) distinction between perceived self-efficacy and behavioral enactment: learners may possess the skills to respond yet remain cautious in applying them publicly.

Cultural context plays a decisive role in shaping this gap between competence and action. In Indonesian society, where collectivism, hierarchy, and harmony are emphasized (Hofstede, 2011), publicly correcting misinformation or hate speech may be perceived as confrontational. Alexandra and Satria (2023) note that hate speech often intersects with religious and ethnic identities, heightening the risks of confrontation. These findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive media literacy pedagogy that supports dialogic, indirect, and context-sensitive forms of engagement. Students also perceived media literacy as effective in addressing hoaxes and hate speech, particularly in fostering emotional regulation and civic responsibility. High agreement regarding preparedness for digital citizenship suggests that learners internalized media literacy as a moral orientation rather than merely a technical skill (Apostol & Dogariu, 2004; Ribble, 2015). Effectiveness was described not as the elimination of anxiety but as increased emotional control through structured evaluation methods. This aligns with Huang et al. (2023), who found that media literacy enhances perceived control and reduces vulnerability to misinformation.

Respectful discourse emerged as another key outcome. Students emphasized not only what they responded to, but how they communicated. This supports research linking media literacy to ethical counter-speech and reflective dialogue (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Madrid Morales & Wasserman, 2024). The strongest evidence of effectiveness appeared in students' articulation of civic responsibility, particularly their willingness to intervene in family or community digital spaces. In this sense, learners positioned themselves as community-based information mediators, extending UNESCO's (2015) digital citizenship framework.

At the same time, ethical tensions warrant careful consideration. As Tufekci (2017) cautions, encouraging citizens to monitor misinformation may intersect with restrictive information policies. In Indonesia, where misinformation regulation has occasionally been politicized (Tri Astuti & Mulyadi, 2025), media literacy education must emphasize ethical judgment and contextual sensitivity rather than surveillance. Authentic learning approaches that engage students with real-world dilemmas remain essential (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single Islamic university, limiting generalizability to other Indonesian contexts (Yelessiz, 2024). The short duration of the intervention restricts conclusions regarding long-term sustainability, particularly as media literacy competencies may decline without reinforcement (Aziz et al., 2024; Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019). Reliance on self-reported data also introduces potential social desirability bias, especially within collectivist cultures (Sharma et al., 2024; Hofstede, 2011). Furthermore, although the study identifies a gap between competence and willingness to act, it does not track behavioral enactment longitudinally in authentic digital environments.

The study's novelty lies in its integration of hoax prevention and hate speech mitigation within a single media literacy intervention embedded in EFL instruction in a non-Western Islamic higher education context. Unlike previous research that treats these issues separately (Ngo et al., 2024; Liu & Zhang, 2025), this study demonstrates that media literacy can function as a unified pedagogical framework addressing interconnected digital threats.

Theoretically, the findings illustrate how cultural values mediate the enactment of media literacy, extending critical media literacy frameworks (Kellner & Share, 2007) by foregrounding contextual adaptation. Pedagogically, they suggest that English classrooms can simultaneously foster linguistic development, critical awareness, and ethical digital participation.

Future research should adopt multi-site and longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability and transferability of media literacy competencies across diverse Indonesian contexts. Studies incorporating behavioral data, such as analysis of authentic online interactions or documented use of fact-checking tools, would strengthen empirical validity. Including teachers' perspectives could also illuminate curricular constraints and institutional support needs (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Yelessiz, 2024). Finally, cross-cultural comparative research across Southeast Asia may clarify which aspects of media literacy are universally applicable and which require localized adaptation (Sarjito & Lelyana, 2025; UNESCO, 2020). Such work would contribute to culturally responsive and globally relevant media literacy frameworks within English language education.

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the value of integrating media literacy into English as a Foreign Language instruction as a meaningful response to the challenges of hoaxes and online hate speech in digitally saturated contexts. The findings indicate that EFL learners perceived substantial benefits, including enhanced critical evaluation of media content, improved ability to identify hoaxes, reduced anxiety when encountering misinformation, and increased preparedness for responsible digital citizenship. Students also demonstrated heightened awareness of ethical communication and social responsibility, although their willingness to confront hate speech publicly remained influenced by cultural norms emphasizing harmony and respect.

The novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous examination of hoax prevention and hate speech mitigation within a single media literacy intervention conducted in a non-Western Islamic higher education context. By foregrounding student perspectives, the study reveals a significant gap between competence and behavioral enactment, highlighting the role of cultural mediation in digital engagement. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that English classrooms can serve as effective spaces for fostering both linguistic development and critical digital citizenship, particularly when instruction is grounded in authentic materials

and culturally responsive approaches. Nevertheless, the implications should be interpreted cautiously, as the intervention was short-term and context-specific. Future research is recommended in three directions. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustainability of media literacy competencies and civic engagement over time. Second, multi-site investigations across diverse institutional and cultural contexts would help assess transferability and contextual variation. Third, research that triangulates self-reported perceptions with observable digital behaviors is essential to better understand how media literacy translates into real-world practice.

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