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Religious and Islamic Literacy Among Youth in the Global Literacy Research Landscape: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric Analysis (2015–2026)

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Abstract

Literacy among youth has become a prominent and rapidly expanding research field, yet it remains unclear to what extent this scholarship engages religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy and how these strands relate to the field's dominant themes. This study maps the intellectual structure and development of research on literacy among youth and examines the position of religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy within it. A bibliometric analysis was conducted on 4,193 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2015 and 2026, combining performance analysis with author-keyword co-occurrence and temporal-overlay mapping using VOSviewer. Annual scholarly output grew by approximately 9.5% per year and peaked at 708 articles in 2025. The field was dominated by institutions in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom and concentrated in adolescent-, health-, and media- or digital-literacy research. Four thematic clusters emerged, with media and civic literacies representing important areas of recent development. A targeted sub-analysis identified only 49 articles, representing 1.17% of the total corpus, that substantively addressed religious or Islam-related literacy. Importantly, no article in the validated subset explicitly examined Qur'anic literacy as a substantive literacy construct. These findings indicate that religion-related literacy remains marginal within the broader international youth-literacy research landscape and reveal a significant conceptual and empirical gap concerning Qur'anic literacy. The study provides an evidence-based agenda for researchers in Islamic studies and Islamic education seeking to clarify and consolidate these emerging areas of inquiry.

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy is no longer adequately described as the ability to read and write. Over the past decade, it has been reconceived as a family of situated and domain-specific competencies concerned with accessing, interpreting, evaluating, and acting upon particular forms of information. For young people, who simultaneously navigate formal schooling, pervasive digital media, and the formation of personal and communal identities, these competencies have become increasingly important for wellbeing, learning, and civic participation. Research on adolescents has accordingly expanded across several applied literacies, including media

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and news literacy, concerned with how young people evaluate online information and respond to misinformation (Festl, 2021) (Festl, 2021; Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021; Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021; Swart, 2023; Tamboer et al., 2022; Wineburg et al., 2022); digital literacy and competence (Falloon, 2020); (Jang, Aavakare, Nikou, & Kim, 2021); (Kendrick, Early, Michalovich, & Mangat, 2022); (Ren, Zhu, & Yang, 2022); health literacy (Nash, Patterson, Flittner, Elmer, & Osborne, 2021); (Wong et al., 2021); (Zuair & Sopory, 2022), and critical and civic literacies tied to citizenship in a volatile information environment (Garcia & Mirra, 2021); (Keegan, 2021); (Stein, 2021); (Tynes, Stewart, Hamilton, & Willis, 2021).

This development is particularly relevant to Islamic education research. Islamic education is concerned not only with the transmission of religious knowledge but also with developing learners' capacities to understand, interpret, evaluate, and apply Islamic teachings within changing social and informational environments. In this context, literacy provides an important analytical framework for examining how young Muslims engage with religious knowledge and texts. Religious literacy can support a broader understanding of religion in social life, Islamic literacy can address competence within the specific domain of Islamic knowledge, and Qur'anic literacy can focus more directly on learners' engagement with the Qur'an. These competencies have increasing significance for Islamic education because young people now encounter religious knowledge not only through formal educational institutions but also through digital media, transnational networks, and diverse sources of religious information. Mapping how these forms of literacy have been represented within international scholarship is therefore relevant not only to the broader field of literacy research but also to efforts to clarify the conceptual and empirical development of literacy as an emerging area of inquiry within Islamic education.

Conceptual clarity is essential because several closely related terms are often used interchangeably in discussions of religion and literacy despite referring to different analytical constructs. In this study, religious literacy is understood as a competence that enables individuals to access, understand, interpret, and critically engage with religious traditions, texts, beliefs, practices, and their roles in social and public life. Islamic literacy is treated as a domain-specific form of religious literacy, referring more specifically to the knowledge and interpretive competence required to understand Islamic teachings, traditions, and religious sources. Within this domain, Qur'anic literacy constitutes a more specific competence related to engagement with the Qur'an, including the ability to access, read, understand, interpret, and appropriately use the Qur'anic text according to the educational and research context in which the concept is applied. These concepts should be distinguished from religiosity, which refers primarily to an individual's religious orientation, commitment, belief, and involvement in religious life rather than to a competence or literacy. Likewise, Islamic identity refers to a sense of belonging, self-understanding, and identification with Islam and should not be treated as a form of literacy. Moral literacy is also analytically distinct, referring to the capacity to understand, evaluate, and respond to moral questions. Although these constructs may interact empirically, they represent different dimensions of young people's religious lives. Maintaining these distinctions is important for accurately positioning religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy within the broader landscape of literacy research.

Within this widening landscape, religious literacy has gained prominence as a competence with civic as well as personal significance. Broadly understood as the capacity to understand religious traditions, texts, beliefs, practices, and their roles in public life, religious literacy has been associated with tolerance and social cohesion, although its conceptual boundaries and assessment remain contested (Schweitzer, Osbeck, Räsänen, Rutkowski, & Schnaufer, 2023) Within Muslim-majority contexts, related scholarship has increasingly examined Islamic literacy and Qur'anic literacy as domain-specific forms of competence

concerning engagement with Islamic knowledge and the Qur'anic text. These forms of literacy may interact with broader educational and social outcomes, including religious moderation, moral development, and identity formation, but such outcomes should not themselves be treated as equivalent forms of literacy. A growing body of empirical work, much of it from Indonesia and Southeast Asia, has examined religious literacy in relation to youth tolerance and religious moderation (Pajarianto et al., 2025), interfaith peacebuilding (Taufik, Nora, & Sulistyati, 2025), and identity and solidarity within Muslim communities (Rahmi, Nelmawarni, Sandora, Alfi, & Hutagalung, 2025), Other scholarship has reconceptualised literacy through an Islamic lens (Muhammad, 2024). Related but analytically distinct studies have examined religiosity in relation to adolescents' moral literacy (Masitah, Alsa, Partino, & Madjid, 2024), and explored how Muslim youth express religious belonging through writing (Juzwik, Ponzio, Deroo, & Wheatley, 2023), Scholarship has also examined literacy-related and educational practices within Islamic educational contexts. Studies have explored madrasah pedagogy and Qur'anic literacy-related learning (Bahri, Hanafi, Markarma, & Megandani, 2022), while other research has examined pedagogical innovation and the development of students' collaborative and creative capacities in madrasah education (Zaqiah, Hasanah, & Heryati, 2024), These developments increasingly intersect with broader transformations in young people's engagement with faith and digital life (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). Taken together, these studies indicate a growing body of scholarship concerned with the relationship between religion, literacy, youth, and education, while also demonstrating the conceptual diversity of the constructs involved.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, the evidence base has been synthesised primarily in narrow and topic-specific areas. Existing reviews address reading engagement (Lee, Jang, & Conradi Smith, 2021), language and literacy interventions for multilingual learners (Oxley & de Cat, 2021), teacher professional development for reading (Basma & Savage, 2023), school-based health-literacy programmes (Nash et al., 2021) and the systematic mapping of digital literacy (Farias-Gaytan, Aguaded, & Ramirez-Montoya, 2022). Bibliometric analysis, which uses citation and keyword data to reconstruct the structure and dynamics of a field in a transparent and reproducible way (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021), has likewise been confined to single literacy types, such as digital literacy in higher education (Tan, 2024). However, no study has mapped the youth-literacy field as a whole while quantitatively examining the position of religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy within it. It therefore remains unclear how extensively the global indexed literature on literacy and youth engages these forms of religiously related literacy, how this strand has developed over time, and how it relates to the dominant themes of the broader field.

The present study addresses this gap through a bibliometric analysis of 4,193 Scopus-indexed journal articles on literacy among youth published between 2015 and 2026. It characterises the overall field and locates the emerging strand of religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy within it. The study is guided by four research questions: (1) How has annual scholarly production on literacy and youth evolved between 2015 and 2026? (2) Which sources, authors, and countries are the most productive and influential in the field? (3) What is the conceptual and thematic structure of the field, as revealed by author-keyword co-occurrence? and (4) To what extent, and with what trajectory, do religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy appear within this corpus, and what research gap does this reveal?

In answering these questions, the study offers, to the best of our knowledge, the first quantitative positioning of religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy among youth against the broader landscape of youth-literacy scholarship. Beyond contributing to global literacy research, the study provides an evidence-based agenda for researchers in Islamic studies and Islamic education seeking to clarify, develop, and consolidate these emerging areas of inquiry.

METHOD

This study employs bibliometric analysis to map the structure and development of the scholarly literature on literacy among youth and adolescents, and to locate the emerging strand of religious, Islamic, and Qur'an-related literacy within that field. Bibliometric methods quantitatively examine large bodies of indexed publications to reveal productivity trends, influential sources and authors, collaboration geography, and the conceptual structure of a research domain, offering a reproducible and objective complement to narrative review (Donthu et al., 2021); (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Two complementary procedures were combined: performance analysis, which describes productivity and citation impact, and science mapping, which reconstructs the conceptual structure of the field through keyword co-occurrence. The identification, screening, and selection of records followed the PRISMA 2020 guideline (Page et al., 2021) and are summarised in Figure 1.

Data Source

Bibliographic data were retrieved from Scopus, which was selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed scholarly publications and the availability of standardised metadata suitable for bibliometric analysis. The exported records included the bibliographic information required for performance analysis and science mapping, including publication year, source title, authors, affiliations, citation counts, titles, abstracts, and author keywords. Scopus was therefore considered appropriate for mapping publication trends, research productivity, citation impact, geographic distribution, and the conceptual structure of the field (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). To ensure a fixed and reproducible snapshot, the complete dataset was exported on 28 April 2026.

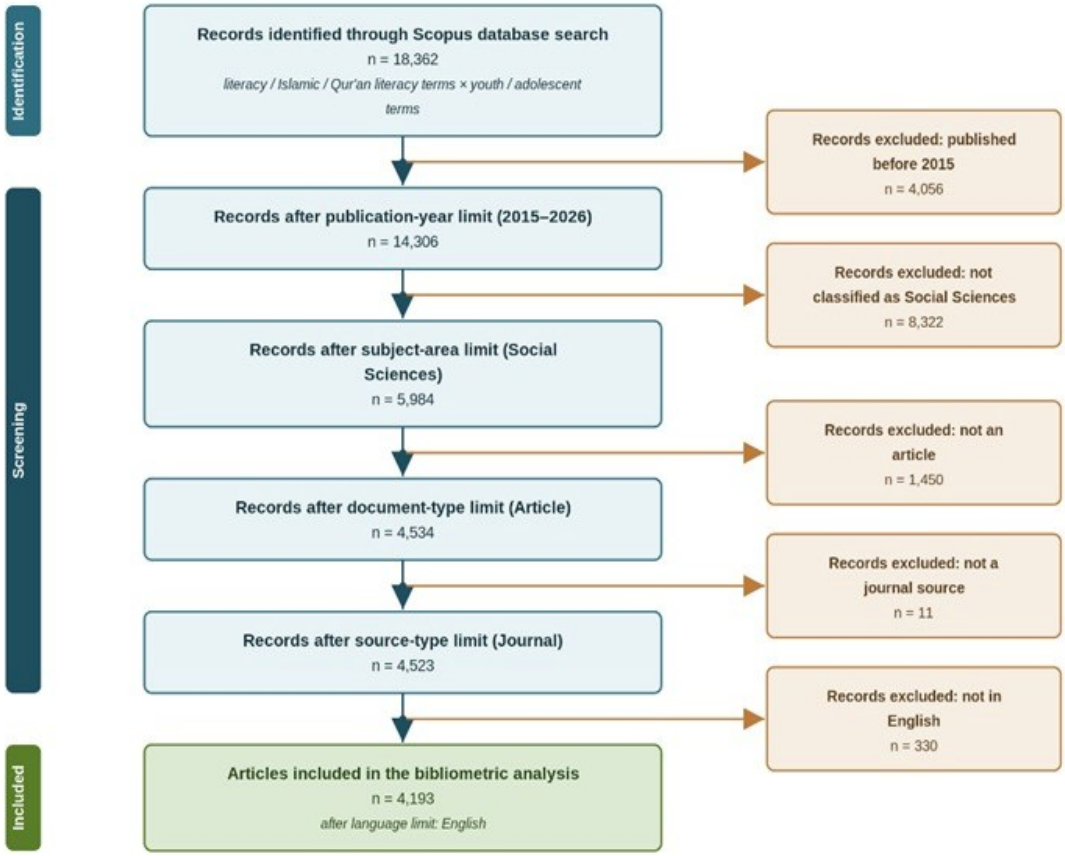


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Record Identification and Screening Process

Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria

The search strategy combined two thematic blocks within the title, abstract, and keyword fields. The first block captured the literacy construct ("literacy" OR "religious literacy" OR "Islamic literacy" OR "Qur'an literacy" OR "literasi Al-Qur'an"), while the second captured the target population ("youth" OR "adolescents" OR "young people" OR "mosque youth" OR "remaja masjid"). The two blocks were combined using the Boolean operator AND. The initial search returned 18,362 records. The records were subsequently restricted to publications from 2015 to 2026, the Social Sciences subject area, journal articles, journal source type, and English-language publications. After these eligibility criteria were applied, the final corpus consisted of 4,193 journal articles. The complete identification and screening cascade, including the number of records retained and excluded at each stage, is presented in Figure 1.

Data analysis

The exported metadata were processed in Python (pandas) to compute performance indicators and in VOSviewer to construct the science maps (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Performance analysis covered annual and cumulative scientific production, the most productive and most cited sources, authors, and countries, and total and average citation counts. Science mapping used author-keyword co-occurrence to derive the thematic clusters that constitute the field's conceptual structure, complemented by a temporal overlay that traces shifts in the research front over the study period. Country attribution was based on author-affiliation records.

To address the study's specific focus, a targeted sub-analysis was conducted to identify the religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy strand within the final corpus of 4,193 articles. The sub-analysis was performed through a predefined screening of article titles and author keywords for explicit references to literacy in relation to religion, Islam, or the Qur'an. Records were coded as religious literacy when they explicitly addressed literacy concerning religious traditions, beliefs, texts, or religious understanding; as Islamic literacy when they explicitly addressed literacy concerning Islamic knowledge, teachings, traditions, or sources; and as Qur'anic literacy when they explicitly addressed literacy related to reading, understanding, interpreting, or engaging with the Qur'an. Each potentially relevant record was manually validated to determine whether these literacy constructs constituted a substantive focus of the study. Studies focusing exclusively on religiosity, religious identity, spirituality, moral development, or Islamic education were excluded unless religious, Islamic, or Qur'anic literacy was explicitly addressed as a substantive analytical construct. Records containing religion-related terms only incidentally were also excluded.

RESULTS

This section reports the bibliometric results in seven parts: the annual scientific production and citation overview of the corpus; the most productive and influential sources; the most productive authors; the geographic distribution of output; the most cited documents; the conceptual structure of the field derived from author-keyword co-occurrence; and a focused analysis of the religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy strand within the corpus. Throughout, performance indicators are reported descriptively, while the underlying structure of the field is visualised in Figures 2 to 7.

Annual Scientific Production and Citation Overview

The final corpus comprises 4,193 journal articles published between 2015 and 2026 across 1,310 distinct sources and authored by 10,917 unique researchers, who together generated 13,208 author appearances. The corpus attracted 55,823 citations in total, an average of 13.3 citations per article. The citation distribution is strongly right-skewed: the

median article has been cited only five times, while the most cited single work has accumulated 829 citations, so the mean is pulled upward by a small number of highly cited papers. By the export date, 3,353 articles (80.0%) had received at least one citation, leaving 840 (20.0%) uncited. Authorship was predominantly collaborative: only 959 articles (22.9%) were single-authored, and the corpus averaged 3.15 co-authors per article. Taken together, the 10,917 distinct authors, the 13,208 author appearances, and the low rate of solo authorship describe an established, team-based, and multidisciplinary research field rather than one dominated by individual scholarship.

Annual output rose steadily over the study period, as shown in Figure 2. Production grew from 198 articles in 2015 to 447 in 2024, a compound annual growth rate of approximately 9.5%, before reaching a pronounced peak of 708 articles in 2025, which alone accounts for 16.9% of the entire corpus. Growth was not perfectly linear: a first expansion phase around 2018 to 2019 lifted annual output above 360 articles, after which production plateaued near that level through 2023 before the sharp acceleration of 2024 and 2025. The 2026 figure (264 articles) reflects only the first four months of the year, because the dataset was exported on 28 April 2026, and should therefore be read as partial rather than as evidence of a downturn. The cumulative curve in Figure 2 confirms a near-monotonic acceleration: output in the two final complete years (2024 and 2025) exceeds the combined output of the first four years of the period. This trajectory establishes literacy among youth as a maturing and rapidly expanding research domain.

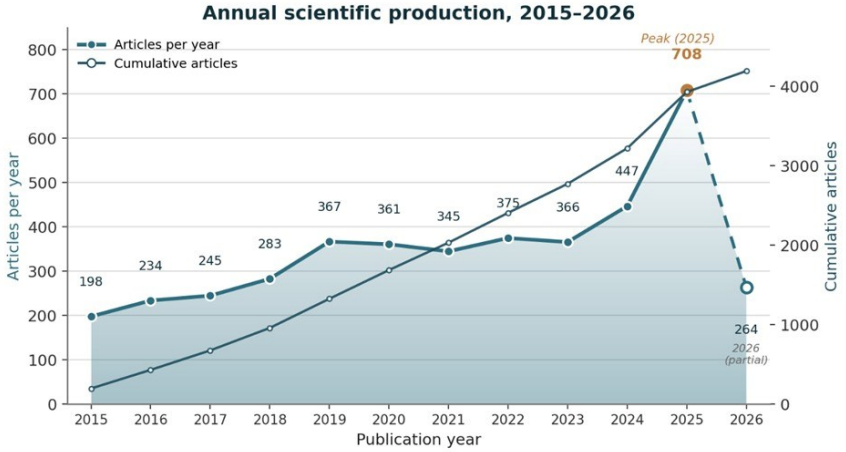


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production and Cumulative Output, 2015–2026 (The 2026 Bar is Partial)

Most Productive and Influential Sources

Publication is concentrated in a comparatively small set of specialised journals. The 1,310 sources are distributed across a long tail, yet the ten most productive journals account for 14.8% of all articles and the top fifteen for 18.1%, a Bradford-like concentration that indicates a recognisable disciplinary core surrounded by a large dispersion of occasional outlets. As Table 1 and Figure 3 show, the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* is by a wide margin the most prolific outlet, with 221 articles (5.3% of the corpus) and 2,284 accumulated citations, followed by *English Teaching* (68 articles) and *Health Promotion International* (62). Productivity and impact, however, do not coincide. When citations are considered per article, the highest-impact outlets are *Journal of Health Communication* (34.2 citations per article), *Sustainability* (25.6), and *Reading Research Quarterly* (20.2), each of which outranks the most prolific journal on a per-article basis. The composition of the leading sources reveals a tripartite structure: dedicated literacy and reading journals (for example, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Literacy*, and *Research in*

the Teaching of English); health-promotion and health-communication journals (*Health Promotion International*, *Journal of Health Communication*); and media, communication, and sustainability journals (*Sustainability*). This division foreshadows the thematic clusters reported in the keyword analysis below.

Table 1. Top 10 Most Productive Sources, With Accumulated and Mean Citations

Rank	Source title	Articles	Total citations	Mean citations
1	Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy	221	2,284	10.3
2	English Teaching	68	456	6.7
3	Health Promotion International	62	593	9.6
4	Reading Research Quarterly	47	948	20.2
5	Journal of Literacy Research	46	805	17.5
6	Journal of Health Communication	37	1,266	34.2
7	Teachers College Record	36	380	10.6
8	Literacy	35	350	10.0
9	Sustainability (Switzerland)	34	872	25.6
10	Research in the Teaching of English	33	603	18.3

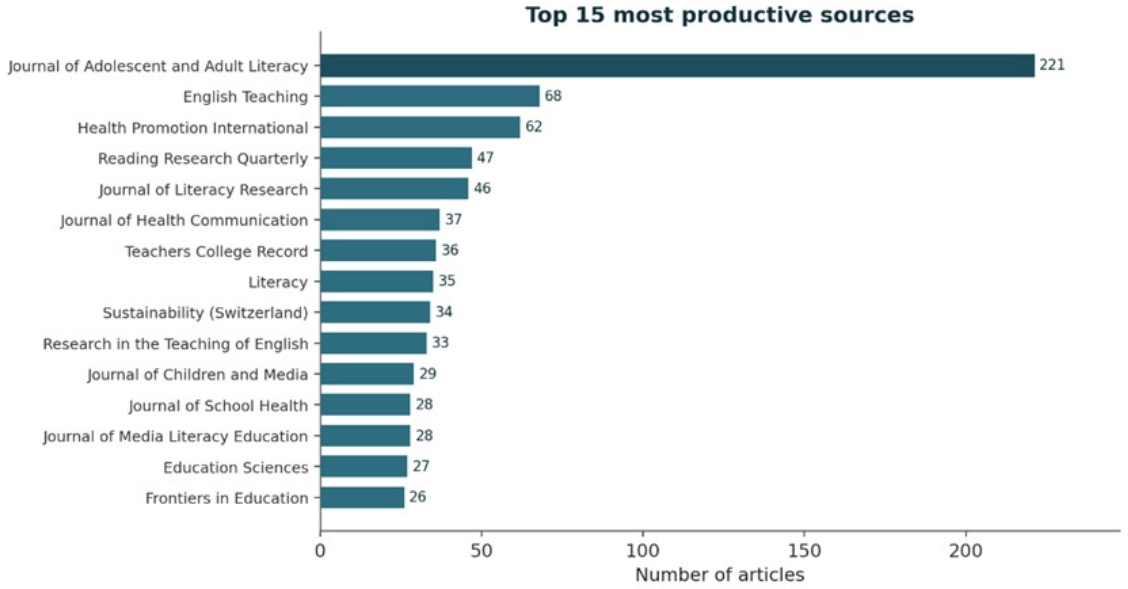


Figure 3. Top 15 Most Productive Sources by Article Count

Most Productive Authors

Authorship is highly dispersed across the 10,917 contributors. The most prolific authors, *Wang C.* and *Merga M. K.*, each contributed 12 articles, followed by *Wang Y.* and *Schey R.* with 11 each, and a cluster of authors with 10 (Table 2). No single author or research group dominates the field: the ten most productive authors together account for roughly one in forty articles, and even the leading contributors fall well short of the output expected of a field organised around a few central laboratories. Combined with the high mean of 3.15 co-authors per article and the gap between the 10,917 unique authors and the 13,208 author appearances, this dispersion indicates a broad, loosely coupled community of practice in which contributions are distributed across many independent teams. Such a structure is characteristic of an interdisciplinary social-science field that spans education, health, and

media research, and it implies that the field's coherence derives from shared themes and venues rather than from a small set of dominant authors.

Table 2. Top 10 Most Productive Authors

Rank	Author	Articles
1	Wang C.	12
2	Merga M. K.	12
3	Wang Y.	11
4	Schey R.	11
5	Chen X.	10
6	Li J.	10
7	Marciano J. E.	10
8	Frankel K. K.	10
9	Jones K.	9
10	Vaughn S.	9

Geographic distribution

Output originates from 45 countries, but production is heavily concentrated in the Anglophone Global North. The United States alone is associated with 1,763 articles, equivalent to 42.0% of the corpus, far ahead of Australia (338), the United Kingdom (335), Canada (215), and Spain (194), as summarised in Table 3. The five most productive countries are all high-income economies, and the four leading contributors are English-speaking nations, a pattern that mirrors the English-language and social-science orientation of the corpus. China (134) and Germany (105) lead the non-Anglophone contributors. Of particular relevance to the present study, Indonesia ranks eighth with 93 articles and is the most productive Muslim-majority country and the most productive country in Southeast Asia, with Malaysia close behind at 73 articles. The prominence of Indonesia and Malaysia is consequential for the religious-literacy strand examined below, because these countries anchor the international Islamic-education research community and provide an existing institutional base from which scholarship on Qur'an and Islamic literacy can develop.

Table 3. Top 10 Countries by Scientific Production

Rank	Country	Articles	Share of corpus
1	United States	1,763	42.0%
2	Australia	338	8.1%
3	United Kingdom	335	8.0%
4	Canada	215	5.1%
5	Spain	194	4.6%
6	China	134	3.2%
7	Germany	105	2.5%
8	Indonesia	93	2.2%
9	Malaysia	73	1.7%
10	India	72	1.7%

Note. Country counts are based on author-affiliation records; an article with affiliations from more than one country contributes to each, so shares are not mutually exclusive.

Most Cited Documents

Citation impact in the corpus is concentrated in a small number of highly cited works, although no single paper dominates: the ten most cited documents together account for 5.8% of all citations, and the median article in the corpus has been cited only five times. The most cited article is Falloon's (2020) teacher digital-competency framework, with 829 citations,

followed by Kahne and Bowyer's (2017) study of democracy, motivated reasoning, and misinformation (389 citations) and (Chen et al., 2018) work on health literacy and trust in health information (345 citations). As Table 4 shows, the most influential documents cluster around three themes that recur throughout the corpus: digital and media literacy (Falloon, 2020); (Pangrazio, 2016); (Swart, 2021); (De Jans, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2018), health literacy (Chen et al., 2018); (Rasu, Bawa, Suminski, Snella, & Warady, 2015), and educational achievement, language development, and civic or environmental engagement ((Ahmed, Tang, Waters, & Davis-Kean, 2019); (Conti-Ramsden, Durkin, Toseeb, Botting, & Pickles, 2018); (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017); (Stevenson & Peterson, 2016). The strong representation of digital-, media-, and health-literacy topics among the highest-impact papers reinforces the thematic centre of gravity identified in the keyword analysis.

Table 4. Top 10 Most Cited Documents

Rank	First author (year)	Source	Citations
1	Falloon (2020)	Educational Technology Research and Development	829
2	Kahne & Bowyer (2017)	American Educational Research Journal	389
3	Chen et al. (2018)	Journal of Health Communication	345
4	Swart (2021)	Social Media + Society	335
5	Pangrazio (2016)	Discourse	265
6	Ahmed et al. (2019)	Journal of Educational Psychology	256
7	Conti-Ramsden et al. (2018)	Int. J. of Language & Communication Disorders	215
8	De Jans et al. (2018)	Journal of Advertising	205
9	Stevenson & Peterson (2016)	Sustainability	198
10	Rasu et al. (2015)	Int. J. of Health Policy and Management	197

Conceptual structure: author-keyword co-occurrence

The corpus contains 21,279 author-keyword occurrences drawn from 10,953 distinct keywords, a ratio that itself signals a thematically broad field. After the umbrella search terms (*literacy*, *adolescents*, *youth*, and *adolescent literacy*), the most frequent author keywords are *media literacy* (222 occurrences), *health literacy* (194), *social media* (178), and *digital literacy* (172), followed by *writing* (112), *identity* (103), *critical literacy* (96), *financial literacy* (91), and *mental health literacy* (83). Figure 4 ranks the fifteen most frequent substantive keywords once the population and umbrella terms are removed, making the field's specialised vocabulary visible and confirming that the most active topics are the applied literacies of media, health, and digital practice rather than reading instruction alone.

The co-occurrence network generated in VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), resolves this vocabulary into four interconnected thematic clusters, shown in Figure 5. The first is an educational and adolescent-literacy cluster organised around *literacy*, *education*, *reading*, *writing*, and *teachers*, which represents the disciplinary core and links the largest number of nodes. The second is a health-literacy cluster connecting *health literacy*, *mental health literacy*, *adults*, *questionnaires*, and *socioeconomic factors*, reflecting the strong public-health stream already evident in the source analysis. The third is a media and digital-literacy cluster linking *media literacy*, *social media*, *internet*, *fake news*, *critical thinking*, and *civic education*. The fourth is a child- and school-focused cluster centred on *children*, *schools*, *reading*, and *dyslexia*. The high density of internal links within each cluster, together with the substantial cross-links between them, confirms that the field, although multidisciplinary, is conceptually integrated rather than fragmented into isolated specialities.

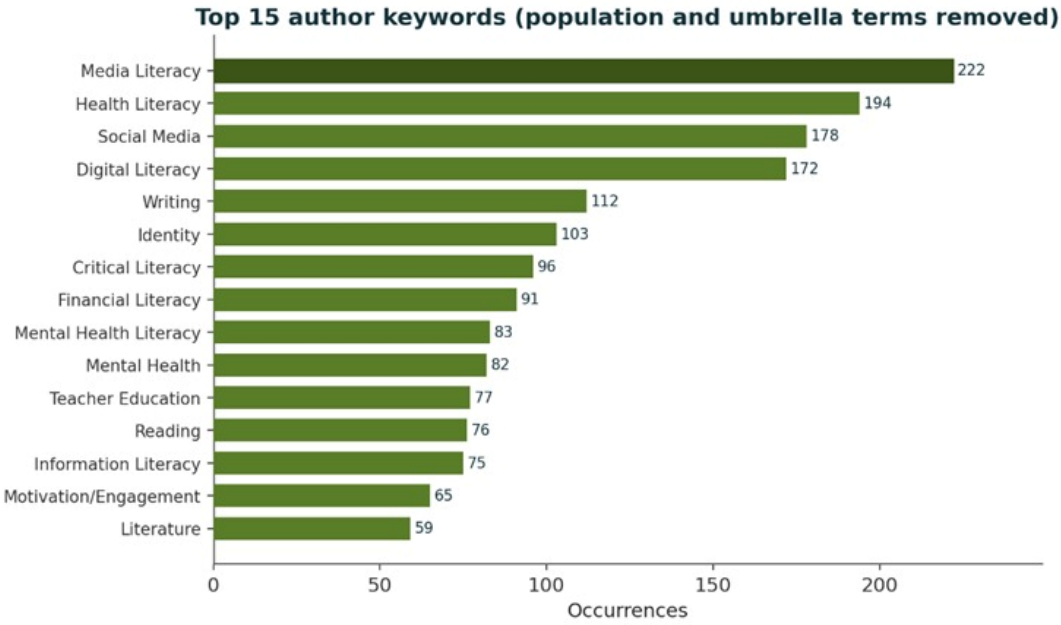


Figure 4. Top 15 Author Keywords After Removal of Population and Umbrella Terms

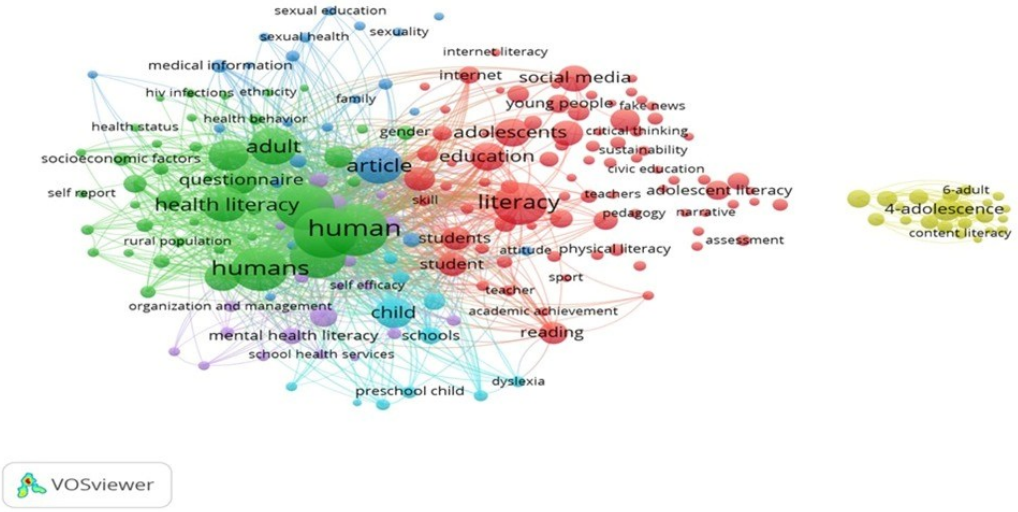


Figure 5. Author-Keyword Co-Occurrence Network; Node Colour Denotes Thematic Cluster

The temporal overlay in Figure 6 maps the average publication year of each keyword and reveals the field's evolving research front. Earlier vocabulary clusters around foundational health- and reading-literacy terms, whereas the most recent keywords, including *social media*, *fake news*, *critical thinking*, *civic education*, and *sustainability*, concentrate in the media- and civic-oriented region of the map. This shift indicates that media and digital literacies constitute the current growing edge of the field, displacing the earlier emphasis on health and reading literacy. Notably, religious and faith-related terms do not appear among the high-frequency keywords or as a distinct cluster in either Figure 5 or Figure 6. This structural absence, observed across both the frequency ranking and the network, motivates the focused analysis presented in the following subsection.

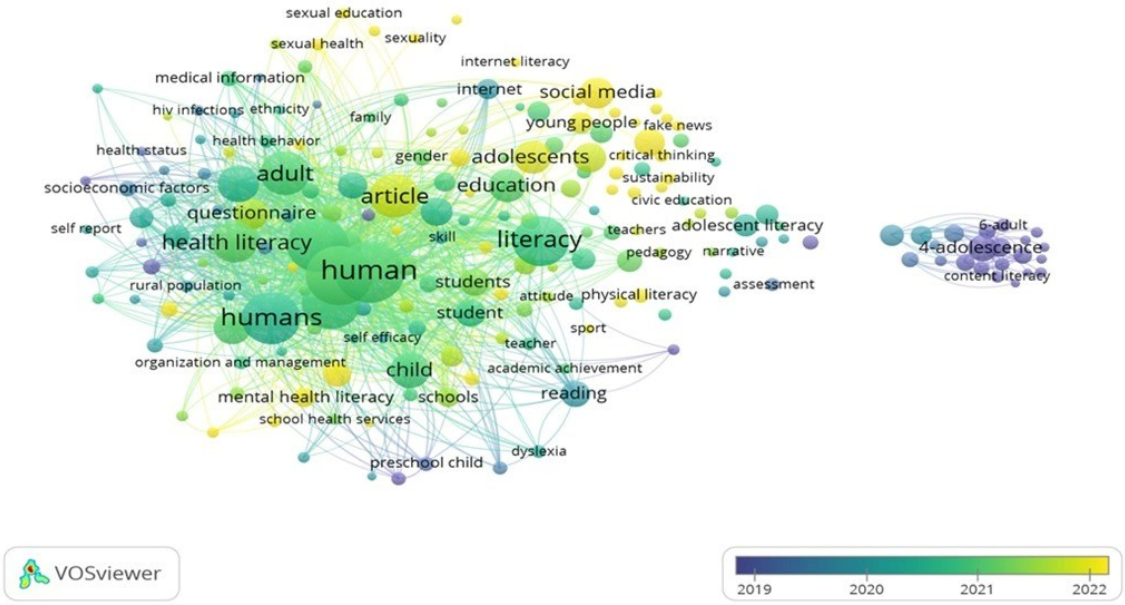


Figure 6. Temporal Overlay of the Author-Keyword Co-Occurrence Network; Node Colour Denotes Average Publication Year

Religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic Literacy within the Youth-Literacy Corpus

The targeted screening identified 49 articles within the 4,193-article corpus that substantively addressed religious or Islam-related forms of literacy. This represents approximately 1.17% of the total corpus, indicating that religion-related literacy remains a relatively marginal strand within the broader international literature on youth literacy. The limited size of this subset is therefore itself a significant finding, particularly given the growing importance of religion, religious knowledge, and digital information environments in young people's lives.

Table 5. Selected Articles in the Religious, Islamic, and Qur'an Literacy Subset

Study	Title (abbreviated)	Source
Pajarianto et al. (2025)	Religious literacy as a mediator in the ecosystem model of religious moderation towards youth's tolerance	International Journal of Law and Society
Taufik et al. (2025)	Religious literacy and youth peacebuilding: Interfaith engagements in Indonesian communities	Asian Journal of Peacebuilding
Rahmi et al. (2025)	Religious literacy for strengthening identity and solidarity of the Cham Muslim community	Record and Library Journal
Muhammad (2024)	Love, Islam, and how literacy is conceptualized	Journal of Literacy Research
Masitah et al. (2024)	Religiosity as mediator of democratic parenting and adolescent moral literacy	Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam

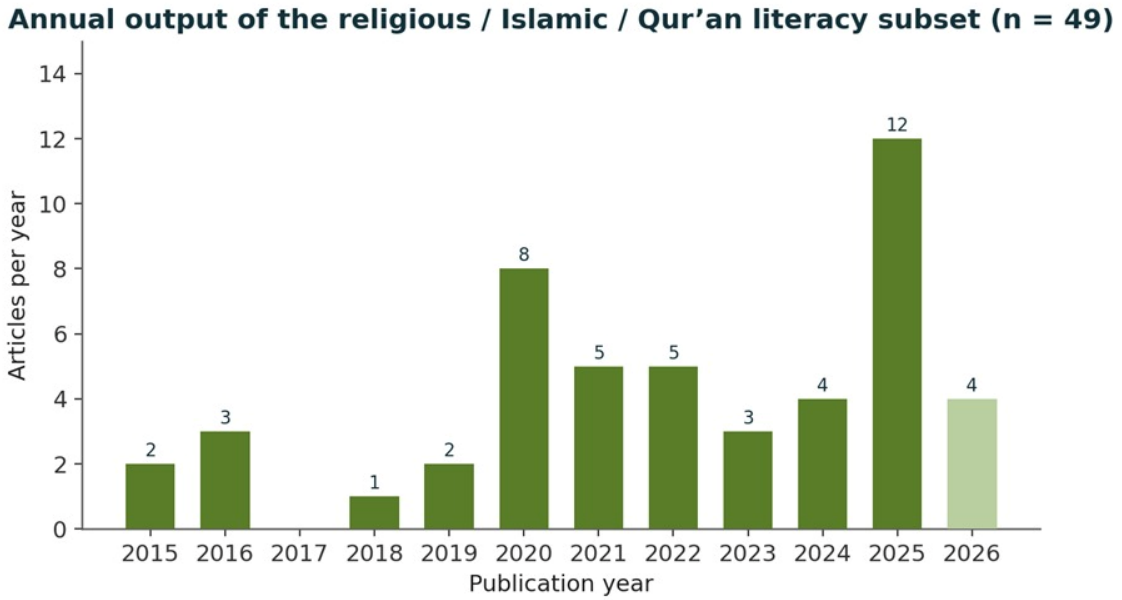


Figure 7. Annual Output of the Religious, Islamic, and Qur'an Literacy Subset, 2015–2026 (n = 49)

The manual validation and coding procedure further revealed that the identified studies were concentrated primarily in religious literacy and Islamic literacy. Importantly, no article in the final validated subset met the predefined criteria for classification as Qur'anic literacy. In other words, although the broader corpus included studies related to Islamic education, religion, Muslim identity, religiosity, and Qur'an-related educational contexts, none explicitly examined Qur'anic literacy as a substantive literacy construct related to reading, understanding, interpreting, or critically engaging with the Qur'an. This distinction is important because studies concerning the Qur'an or Islamic education do not automatically constitute studies of Qur'anic literacy.

The absence of explicitly identified Qur'anic literacy studies should therefore not be interpreted as an absence of research on the Qur'an itself. Rather, it indicates that, within the Scopus-indexed youth-literacy corpus defined by the present search strategy and eligibility criteria, Qur'anic literacy has not yet emerged as a clearly consolidated and explicitly articulated research category. This finding reveals a significant conceptual and empirical gap between the broader development of literacy research and scholarship concerning young people's engagement with the Qur'an.

Taken together, the limited number of religion-related literacy studies and the absence of explicitly classified Qur'anic literacy studies suggest that religious dimensions remain underrepresented within the broader youth-literacy research landscape. The finding provides an empirical basis for the subsequent discussion of how religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy might be more clearly conceptualised and developed within future literacy and Islamic education research.

DISCUSSION

This study mapped 4,193 Scopus-indexed articles on literacy among youth published between 2015 and 2026 and located the religious, Islamic, and Qur'an literacy strand within that landscape. Read against the wider literature, the results yield three interlocking observations: the field is maturing around a set of applied literacies; religious and Qur'an literacy form a marginal yet rapidly emerging strand; and the two are connected by a clear and timely integrative agenda. These themes are discussed in turn.

A Maturing Field Anchored in Applied Literacies

The near-tenfold cumulative growth and the conceptual concentration in media, digital, and health literacies confirm that the study of youth literacy has shifted decisively from print-reading instruction toward the applied literacies demanded by digital life. This pattern is consistent with the recent expansion of social-media and news-literacy scholarship, which has produced both new theoretical models (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021), and detailed accounts of how adolescents access, evaluate, and act on online information (Festl, 2021); (Swart, 2023); (Tamboer, Kleemans, & Daalmans, 2022). The salience of fake news and lateral reading in our temporal overlay echoes a body of work showing that misinformation now structures young people's information practices (Pérez-Escoda, Pedrero-Esteban, Rubio-Romero, & Jiménez-Narros, 2021); (Wineburg, Breakstone, McGrew, Smith, & Ortega, 2022). The parallel prominence of digital literacy mirrors recent evidence on the socio-economic stratification of adolescents' digital skills (Ren et al., 2022), the link between literacy and technology adoption (Jang et al., 2021), and the rapid accumulation of digital-literacy reviews (Farias-Gaytan et al., 2022). The health-literacy cluster identified here likewise aligns with intensified attention to school-based health-literacy programmes (Nash et al., 2021), media health-literacy interventions (Zuair & Sopory, 2022), and the digital competencies of the future health workforce (Wong et al., 2021). The most recent vocabulary in our overlay, centred on critical thinking and civic education, further coincides with an emerging civic-literacy literature on political emotion, speculative civic writing, and citizenship in a volatile information environment (Garcia & Mirra, 2021); (Keegan, 2021); (Stein, 2021). Taken together, the external literature corroborates our central structural finding: the field's research front is media-, digital, and civically oriented. By extending earlier bibliometric mapping of digital literacy (Farias-Gaytan et al., 2022) from a single literacy type to the entire youth-literacy field, the present analysis demonstrates that this orientation is not confined to one specialism but characterises the domain as a whole, a generalisation that prior single-topic reviews could not establish.

Religious and Qur'an Literacy: An Emerging yet Marginal Strand

Against this densely populated core, the most consequential result is the structural marginality of religious and Qur'an literacy, which appears in only 1.17% of the corpus and is absent from the high-frequency keyword set and the co-occurrence clusters. This quantified under-representation extends, rather than contradicts, the qualitative literature, which has repeatedly argued that religious literacy is conceptually under-developed and contested even where it is studied (Schweitzer et al., 2023). At the same time, the strand's steep recent growth is mirrored by a wave of new empirical work that treats religious literacy as a measurable competence with civic consequences: as a mediator of youth tolerance and religious moderation (Pajarianto et al., 2025), as a resource for interfaith peacebuilding among Indonesian youth (Taufik et al., 2025), and as a means of strengthening identity and solidarity in Muslim minority communities (Rahmi et al., 2025). A complementary strand reconceptualises literacy itself through an Islamic lens (Muhammad, 2024), and links religiosity to adolescents' moral literacy (Masitah et al., 2024), while ethnographic and classroom studies document how transnational Muslim youth express religious belonging through writing (Juzwik et al., 2023). The combination of low cumulative volume and high momentum is the signature of an emerging research front, and the dispersion of these studies across Islamic-education, peace-studies, library-science, and religious-education journals explains why the strand remains invisible in the field's aggregate vocabulary despite its vitality. Importantly, this marginality is one of volume rather than of influence: the subset's articles attract citation counts close to the corpus median, which indicates an emerging rather than a declining front and distinguishes genuine novelty from mere neglect.

The geography of the corpus clarifies where this front is concentrated. Indonesia is the most productive Muslim-majority country and the leading Southeast Asian contributor, and the religious-literacy studies cited above are overwhelmingly anchored in the Indonesian and wider Southeast Asian research community. Work on madrasah pedagogy (Zaqiah et al., 2024), and on sharia-based literacy as a vehicle for religious moderation (Bahri et al., 2022) indicates that an institutional and scholarly base already exists; what is missing is consolidation into a recognisable subfield with shared constructs, instruments, and venues.

Toward Integrating Religious Literacy with the Media and Civic Frontier

The thematic adjacency between the field's growing edge and the religious-literacy strand points to a high-value integrative agenda. Several recent studies already sit at this intersection, examining how transnational religious identity is negotiated against misinformation (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022), and how adolescents require critical digital competencies to resist online disinformation and racialised propaganda (Tynes et al., 2021). Because the media- and news-literacy cluster has developed robust accounts of how young people evaluate online claims (Swart, 2023); (Wineburg et al., 2022) and of how fake news circulates among them (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021), it offers a ready framework for positioning Qur'an and religious literacy as a protective, critical competence in young people's digital lives, capable of inoculating against the distortion of religious texts, extremist recruitment, and sectarian misinformation. Such a framing would align religious-literacy research with one of the field's most active and visible streams rather than leaving it isolated at the periphery. For transnational Muslim youth in particular, who negotiate religious belonging across national borders and online platforms (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022); (Juzwik et al., 2023), an integrated literacy of this kind would address both the interpretation of sacred texts and the digital environments in which religious meaning is increasingly produced and contested.

Methodological and Practical Implications

The dominance of health- and media-literacy research also supplies a methodological template. These adjacent fields have produced validated models and intervention designs, including the Social Media Literacy model (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021), systematic reviews of school-based health-literacy programmes (Nash et al., 2021), and meta-analytic evidence on media health-literacy interventions (Zuair & Sopory, 2022). Adapting these designs would move the study of Qur'an and Islamic literacy beyond conceptual essays toward measurable, comparable, and replicable evidence. Cross-national collaboration between Muslim-majority and Global North research communities could accelerate this shift, transfering validated instruments while grounding them in the local religious and educational contexts in which Qur'an literacy is taught and practised. Practically, the findings invite Islamic educators, curriculum designers, and youth and mosque organisations to treat Qur'an literacy not only as a devotional skill but as a measurable competence linked to tolerance, religious moderation, identity, and resilience to online harm, building on existing classroom and madrasah innovations (Kendrick et al., 2022); (Zaqiah et al., 2024). They also invite editors of Islamic-studies and education journals to provide a consolidated home for a conversation that is currently dispersed, so that an emerging and socially significant strand can mature into an established field of inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This study mapped the intellectual structure and development of research on literacy among youth and examined the position of religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy within the field through an analysis of 4,193 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2015 and 2026. The findings show that youth-literacy research is a large and expanding field with a

clearly differentiated intellectual structure. Annual scholarly production increased substantially over the study period and peaked in 2025, while the field was strongly represented by institutions in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Its conceptual structure was organised primarily around educational, health, and media or digital literacy, with media and civic literacy representing important areas of recent development.

Within this broader landscape, religious and Islam-related literacy constituted a relatively marginal strand. The targeted sub-analysis identified only 49 articles, representing 1.17% of the total corpus, that substantively addressed religious or Islam-related literacy. Consistent with the screening and coding results presented in the Results section, no validated article explicitly examined Qur'anic literacy as a substantive literacy construct. This finding should not be interpreted as an absence of research on the Qur'an or Islamic education more broadly. Rather, it indicates that Qur'anic literacy has not yet emerged as a clearly consolidated and explicitly articulated research category within the Scopus-indexed youth-literacy corpus examined in this study. The findings therefore reveal a significant conceptual and empirical gap concerning the development of religious, Islamic, and particularly Qur'anic literacy within the broader international literacy research landscape.

These conclusions should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study relied on a single database and was restricted to English-language journal articles classified within the Social Sciences subject area. Country attribution was based on author-affiliation records, and the data for 2026 were necessarily partial. Future research may therefore expand the evidence base through multilingual searches, additional databases, and broader disciplinary coverage. Further studies may also develop clearer conceptual frameworks and empirical measures for Islamic and Qur'anic literacy among young people, while examining how these competencies intersect with digital and media literacy in contemporary religious information environments.

By demonstrating both the expansion of youth-literacy research and the limited position of religion-related literacy within it, this study provides an evidence-based foundation for future scholarship. The findings particularly highlight the need for researchers in Islamic studies and Islamic education to develop more clearly defined conceptual, methodological, and empirical approaches to religious, Islamic, and Qur'anic literacy. Such efforts may contribute to consolidating these areas as more visible and analytically coherent strands within international literacy research.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) utilized ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language editing, grammatical refinement, and the improvement of academic clarity and organization. All outputs were subsequently reviewed and revised by the author(s), who assume full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Sri Hartati Saleh: Conceptualization, development of the main research idea, formulation of the research objectives, study design, and preparation of the initial manuscript. Seipah Kardipah: Academic supervision, guidance on the structure and development of the bibliometric article, critical review, and assessment of the manuscript's readiness for journal submission. Aidil: Manuscript improvement, content refinement, language and structural editing, adaptation of the manuscript to the journal template, and revision of the manuscript. Muhammad Iqbal Rahman: Manuscript revision, supplementation and refinement of data sources, and final checking of the manuscript and

supporting information. Nuraini: Technical assistance in the use of Scopus metadata and support in conducting the bibliographic data search and retrieval process. All authors contributed to the preparation and improvement of the manuscript, reviewed the final version, and approved it for submission.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study were derived from Scopus. The bibliographic metadata used in the analysis are subject to Scopus access and licensing conditions. The search strategy, eligibility criteria, and analytical procedures are described in the manuscript to support transparency and reproducibility.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The author(s) declare that they have no known financial or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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