



Information Literacy Skills of Students in *Pesantren* Environments: A SCONUL Seven Pillars Analysis in Language Learning Contexts

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Abstract

The digital era demands complex information navigation skills, creating a paradox for *pesantren* students who possess classical literature mastery but face limited digital access. This study aims to analyze the information literacy skills of these students in composing language-based academic writing using the *SCONUL Seven Pillars* framework. This qualitative case study involved final-year students at Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, followed by analysis using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results highlight the students' proficiency in identifying, scoping, and critically evaluating printed Arabic literature. Nevertheless, technical gaps in digital literacy remain evident, including minimal application of advanced search strategies (Boolean operators), vulnerability in assessing online source credibility, and a lack of reference management software mastery. The robustness of their print literacy is not yet balanced by adequate digital competencies, hindering the management and presentation stages of international-standard academic writing. These findings contribute a strategic foundation for *pesantren* library institutions to integrate digital search literacy and citation software training to enhance the quality of students' academic discourse production.

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INTRODUCTION

The massive explosion of information in the digital era has made information literacy a fundamental necessity, especially for students engaged in the fields of linguistics and education. Information literacy is not merely a technical skill, but rather a set of capacities to recognize information needs, as well as to locate, evaluate, and use that information effectively and ethically (Al-Azri et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic-based higher education, this ability becomes crucial because students are required to validate theoretical reference sources from various classical literatures (*kitab kuning*) as well as modern digital sources, and to distinguish variations in language use within scientific texts (Adnjani et al., 2021; Dirsanala et al., 2022). Without proficient information literacy, students will struggle to distinguish between facts and hoaxes and will be hindered in developing critical language proficiency (Dodo & Saidu, 2024; Singh & Kumar, 2021).

At the level of higher education, information literacy directly influences academic success. Literate students are able to evaluate subject matter more deeply and construct solid arguments. For

students studying international languages, information literacy is a primary asset for conducting in-depth research on linguistic phenomena. The ability to search for multilingual references, evaluate the credibility of digital dictionaries, and compose scientific papers without plagiarism are highly sought-after skills. Without mastering information literacy, students' academic potential to contribute to scientific progress, particularly in global linguistic discourse, will be significantly hampered.

Students come from diverse backgrounds, one of which is the group of *mahasantri* (university-level students in a pesantren) residing in Islamic boarding school environments. Pesantren, as Islamic educational institutions with distinct characteristics, focus their goals on noble character building and the deepening of religious sciences (*tafaqquh fi al-din*) (Amri, 2025; Hadisi et al., 2022). This situation becomes unique when applied to institutions such as the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School, which holds an excellent reputation for active and profound mastery of the Arabic language. Although language mastery in this pesantren is very strong through traditional methods and an intense language environment, challenges arise when *mahasantri* must engage with information technology. Restrictions on digital devices and controlled internet access, on one hand, maintain study focus, but on the other hand, create challenges for *mahasantri* in navigating complex digital references when they are required to compose international-standard Arabic scientific papers.

Despite being in an environment with limited digital access, *mahasantri* are still faced with high academic demands. They are required to be able to construct arguments based on solid evidence in linguistic and religious research assignments. To analyze this phenomenon systematically, this study utilizes The SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Seven Pillars of Information Literacy as a framework, which includes seven pillars: identify, scope, plan, gather, evaluate, manage, and present (SCONUL, 2011).

Several previous studies have examined information literacy from various perspectives. LeMire et al. (2024) and (Mubasiroh (2023) focused on the development of student literacy in general and during the transition to online learning. A focus on specific resources is also found in the research of Pearlman et al. (2024) regarding YouTube usage, as well as Oktafiani & Wasisto (2023) concerning the utilization of electronic journals. On the other hand, Liu (2025) and Fistiyantri (2023) highlighted the role of library infrastructure in shaping literacy standards based on the SCONUL model. In the pesantren context, Ni'mah et al. (2022) explored media literacy among *mahasantri*, while Hasibuan et al. (2023) focused specifically on *kitab kuning* literacy. However, these studies have not specifically focused the analysis on how the characteristics of a pesantren that excels in Arabic language mastery influence students' strategies in meeting their academic information needs. Most studies tend to generalize students as a whole without considering the specific demands on *mahasantri* who must produce high-quality scientific works.

To fill this gap, this study aims to analyze the information literacy skills of students in the environment of the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School (UII Dalwa). This research is important to map out how *mahasantri* utilize their Arabic language skills to access and manage information from both traditional and digital sources. These findings are expected to serve as a basis for library managers to design targeted information literacy programs so that the quality of students' scientific writing can improve and their potential as writers and researchers in the fields of language and literature can develop optimally.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain a profound understanding of students' information literacy skills within a pesantren environment. The research was conducted at the Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah (UII Dalwa), which was selected because all undergraduate students at the campus are active students (*santri*) at the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School and are nurtured in an environment of intensive Arabic language mastery. Participant selection was carried out purposively by considering students who are active as *santri*, specifically final-semester students currently drafting their final thesis (*skripsi*), as they face the most complex academic demands in applying the pillars of information literacy.

To obtain the required data, the data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with each *santri* writer participant, guided by indicators from the SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy model (*identify, scope, plan, gather, evaluate, manage, present*) (SCONUL, 2011). The interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, perceptions, strategies, and challenges faced by *santri* writers in each stage of information literacy while conducting research and writing. Observation was carried out by monitoring students' activities while working on their final thesis in the library and during information access. Meanwhile, documentation was performed to gather data from relevant documents, such as scientific work drafts and student reference lists, to observe their literacy skills within the pesantren environment.

The data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation will be analyzed using the Miles and Huberman approach, which consists of three main stages (Hardani et al., 2020; Muid et al., 2022). The first stage is data reduction, carried out by streamlining, summarizing, and synthesizing relevant information, as well as selecting data that aligns with the focus of the SCONUL pillars while disregarding irrelevant information. The second stage is data display, where the researcher presents the findings in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. The final stage is conclusion drawing or verification to produce a solid understanding regarding the information literacy profile of *mahasantri* in supporting the production of scientific works within a pesantren environment that possesses such linguistic excellence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Information Literacy Skills in the Pesantren Environment

The information literacy culture of students in the pesantren environment is heavily influenced by a strong scholarly tradition, particularly the emphasis on mastering classical Arabic literature (*kitab kuning*) through *talaqqi* (direct) guidance from the kiai. Although there are restrictions on the use of private devices, access to digital information remains accommodated through the campus computer laboratory facilities. This paradox causes students to tend to rely on physical sources in the library, where the collection of classical Arabic literature is very abundant and adequate for linguistic and sharia exploration. The information literacy skills of each student in navigating these linguistic resources are identified using The SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy model.

1. Identify

In this first pillar, students are required to realize when information is needed, especially to solve linguistic or conceptual problems in their research. This ability varies depending on the topic of the final thesis. MHZ (Arabic Language Education) shows high precision in formulating linguistic problems. *"Before I start searching, I must know exactly what I want to prove or explain from that classical Arabic text. From there, I search for relevant linguistic evidence or references (nahwu/sharaf),"* he said. This process is often calibrated through intensive discussions with the supervising lecturer. Conversely, AFA (Islamic Religious Education) and MKF (Islamic Education Management) identify needs based on observations of socio-educational phenomena. AR (Islamic Family Law) focuses on identifying evidence for the comparison of *madhahib* (schools of thought). In general, although experiencing some confusion at the beginning, students are able to formulate their information needs thanks to the dialectic with supervisors, a habit rooted in the pesantren's *mudzakarah* (discussion) tradition.

2. Scope

The scope pillar evaluates students' understanding of the types, formats, and access tools for linguistic and scholarly information. MHZ is very selective: *"For text analysis, I must refer directly to the original book, for example, classical tafsir like Tafsir al-Tabari or al-Kashshaf, not just translations."* This indicates a high awareness of primary sources in linguistic analysis. Meanwhile, MAM combines ancient manuscripts with modern journals for historical comprehensiveness. Generally, students understand the Qur'an and Hadith as primary linguistic and sharia sources. However, challenges arise when distinguishing authoritative tafsir from speculative interpretations in the digital realm, which could potentially distort the text analysis in their theses.

3. Plan

Information search strategy planning shows a disparity. MHZ appears most systematic by planning specific keywords (and synonyms in Arabic) for searches in databases such as *Maktabah Shamila* or Google Scholar. In contrast, AFA and AR tend to be intuitive: *"I just type into Google whatever comes to my mind about the thesis topic."* Interestingly, none of the informants were familiar with the use of Boolean Operators (AND, OR, NOT). All rely on simple keyword combinations, which often makes the search for linguistic literature on the internet inefficient.

4. Gather

The majority of students still rely on the pesantren library, which is rich in Arabic literature. *"The kitab kuning must be held directly, its pages must be read,"* MHZ emphasized, indicating an emotional and epistemological closeness to physical texts. On the digital side, AFA and MKF are active in downloading articles. However, the main obstacle is accessibility (paywalls) on reputable linguistic or educational journals. MKF complained: *"Sometimes when I find a suitable journal, it cannot be opened because I have to pay."* Additionally, the habit of skipping the reading of abstracts (as practiced by MHZ and MAM) shows inefficiency in the academic literature skimming process.

5. Evaluate

Evaluating information sources is a crucial pillar. Regarding Arabic printed sources, students' evaluation abilities are very strong thanks to the pesantren tradition. MHZ explained: *"I try to check from several tafsir books and compare the views of different scholars. If there is a*

hadith, I try to check its sanad... this is important to strengthen the argument." This capacity for textual criticism (*naqd al-nass*) is a great asset in linguistic/literary research. However, their digital evaluation abilities tend to be vulnerable. AFA assesses credibility based on popularity algorithms: *"If many people share it or it appears on the first page of Google, it means it is true and trustworthy."* This statement confirms a lack of algorithmic literacy and an inability to distinguish between academic authority and search engine popularity, a fatal risk in drafting scientific papers.

6. Manage

Information management is still dominated by manual methods, such as taking notes in notebooks. For digital files, storage is often unstructured, causing students like AR difficulty in tracing back references ("Sometimes I forget where I saved the file"). The most significant finding is the total lack of understanding regarding Reference Management Software (RMS) such as Mendeley or Zotero. As a result, citations often do not meet academic standards. AFA stated, *"I usually just write the name of the book, or if it's from the internet, the website address."* This is ironic, considering they highly value ethics to avoid plagiarism but are hindered by technical managerial weaknesses.

7. Present

In general, students are able to synthesize information into a research narrative. However, linguistic challenges arise in the presentation stage. AR and MKF admitted difficulty in composing coherent academic sentences in written language (standard Indonesian or Arabic). Consultation with lecturers, as done by MKF, becomes the main safety valve. This dependency indicates that the ability to produce independent academic discourse (academic writing) still needs to be honed.

Information Literacy Issues Experienced by Students

Even though students in the pesantren environment have a solid foundation in tracing physical Arabic literature, the transition to a digital research ecosystem brings about several structural and cognitive barriers. Based on the results of the analysis using the SCONUL framework, these information literacy issues can be summarized into four main aspects:

1. Digital Search Inefficiency

Limited knowledge of advanced search strategies, particularly the use of Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT), becomes a significant cognitive obstacle for students. Most searches are conducted linearly and passively using general search engines. Cordell (2013) asserts that digital information literacy at the higher education level absolutely requires the ability to use syntactic logic and Boolean search operators to navigate databases effectively. Without these skills, the literature search—especially to sort through thousands of language journals (linguistics/language education)—becomes very inefficient, time-consuming, and often results in references that are either too broad (information overload) or irrelevant to the specific needs of the final project.

2. Weakness in Evaluating Digital Credibility

The most crucial finding in the Evaluate pillar is the tendency of students to judge the credibility of digital information based on search engine popularity algorithms (such as ranking on the first page of Google) rather than looking at the academic authority of the author or the publishing institution. Atmojo et al. (2020) highlight that true digital literacy is not just the ability

to operate software, but the capacity to evaluate, validate, and use information critically and ethically. Furthermore, Indah et al. (2022) emphasize that the failure to distinguish between empirical facts, public opinion, and biased interpretations is very dangerous for final-year students. In the context of language studies, this evaluation weakness can distort theoretical references and lower the sharpness of textual analysis in their scientific papers.

3. Lack of Reference Management System

In the organization pillar (Manage), the majority of students still manage information manually and sporadically, both in the form of physical notes and unstructured file storage. This finding is exacerbated by the zero adoption of Reference Management Software (RMS) such as Mendeley or Zotero. Yet, mastering reference management applications is a basic competency dimension in contemporary academic information literacy (Castillo-Martínez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021; Fu & Wang, 2022). The inability to manage citations automatically not only slows down the thesis writing process but also increases the risk of technical (unintentional) plagiarism and fatal inconsistencies in writing the bibliography.

4. Academic Writing & Synthesis Barriers

The biggest challenge faced by students at the final stage (Present pillar) is the difficulty of weaving empirical data findings and literature reviews into coherent academic language (academic writing). Wahyuningsih et al. (2025) state that advanced academic literacy requires not only critical reading skills but also the cognitive capacity to synthesize various conflicting ideas into a single whole narrative for a scientific audience. Similarly, Kim (2020) expressed that writing is a manifestation of high-level cognitive functions that rely on simultaneous analysis and synthesis abilities. For *mahasantri*, this challenge is doubled because they must transpose or translate their understanding from classical texts into a rigid academic essay structure, which often forces them to become heavily dependent on linguistic revisions from their supervisors (Teng & Yue, 2023).

Efforts to Improve Student Information Literacy Skills

Based on the problems identified through the SCONUL Seven Pillars framework, there is a clear gap between students' high ability to examine classical physical literature (*kitab kuning*) and their low proficiency in navigating, evaluating, and managing digital information systematically. Therefore, structured intervention from the library and policy makers at UII Dalwa is required to ensure the quality of students' scientific papers can compete at national and international levels. The following are recommendations for improvement:

1. Advanced Search Strategy Training

The main problem in the Plan and Gather pillars is search inefficiency because students only rely on basic keywords on general search engines. To overcome this, the library needs to design a syllabized information literacy class focusing on Advanced Search techniques. The main material should include the use of Boolean Operators (AND, OR, NOT), truncation techniques, wildcards, and specific navigation of reputable journal databases (such as DOAJ, Scopus, SINTA) and classical digital libraries (such as *Maktabah Shamila*). This urgent need is in line with the findings in Afyani & Alfariza (2023), which highlight that students in Islamic universities are often already able to determine relevant sources but fail to maximize searches because they do not fundamentally master the function of Boolean operators. With this training, language

program students can sort through thousands of specific linguistic articles, save research time, and avoid search algorithm bias (hoaxes/invalid information).

2. Integration of Scientific Writing Training and Reference Management Software (RMS)

Failure in the Manage pillar (disorganized file management) and the Present pillar (manual citation practices) represents a serious threat to students' academic integrity. A tactical solution to this problem is to mandate training in the use of Reference Management Software (RMS), such as Mendeley or Zotero, which is synchronized directly with Research Methodology courses or thesis supervision. This training should not only teach installation but also the practice of importing metadata from journals, managing reference folders (libraries), as well as automating citations and creating bibliographies that comply with the campus style guide (e.g., APA or Turabian). According to research published in Nuraedah & Kapile (2024), training in the use of Mendeley has been proven to significantly accelerate the student scientific writing process, reduce the risk of technical plagiarism due to ignorance, and is an absolute prerequisite if students or institutions wish to publish their articles in reputable international journals (Scopus).

3. Hybrid Collection Development Transformation

To support all pillars of information literacy (from Identify to Present), the UII Dalwa library needs to evaluate its collection development policy. Students face paywall obstacles when finding high-quality linguistic or educational journals. Therefore, the library must not only focus on the physical procurement of *kitab kuning* (which is currently very good) but must transform into a Hybrid Library. A concrete step that can be taken is to institutionally subscribe to premium electronic journal databases, or at least facilitate mass student integration and registration into the National Library of Indonesia (PNRI) e-Resources service. A systematic literature review study in Ningsih & Sayekti (2023) asserts that the role of libraries in increasing information literacy does not stop at providing a room but acts as a proactive agent (hub) that provides digital access infrastructure (such as institutional repositories and subscription journals) while training patrons to exploit those collections for the creation of new knowledge. Through the synergy of these three efforts, the pesantren library will not only function as a storage place for classical literature but will transform into a dynamic information literacy laboratory, producing scholars who are not only *mutafaqqih fi al-din* (experts in religion and language) but are also digitally and academically literate.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that *mahasantri* in the Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah (UII Dalwa) environment possess a paradoxical information literacy profile in supporting the writing of their linguistic scientific papers. Based on the SCONUL Seven Pillars analytical framework, *mahasantri* show a very strong comparative advantage in traditional print-based information literacy. Through the intensive Arabic language mastery climate in the pesantren, they are proven capable of identifying information needs, determining the scope of primary literature, and critically evaluating classical texts (*naqd al-nass*). This epistemological strength is an essential basic asset in producing profound linguistic and literary discourse.

However, the transition toward a digital research ecosystem reveals a significant literacy gap due to limited access and a lack of advanced searching skills. The absence of search strategies using Boolean operators, vulnerability in evaluating the credibility of digital sources often distorted by

search engine popularity algorithms, and the lack of mastery in Reference Management Software serve as structural barriers at the information management and presentation stages. This technical gap, if not immediately addressed through sustainable digital literacy training and hybrid library integration, has the potential to hinder the capacity of *mahasantri* to synthesize academic discourse that meets international standards for writing and publication.

Although providing comprehensive insights, this study has limitations as it uses a single case study approach at an institution with specific linguistic excellence; thus, its findings are contextual and cannot be generalized to all models of pesantren higher education. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on final-year students and reliance on self-reported data through interviews potentially give rise to perception bias and fail to capture the longitudinal evolution of student literacy. Therefore, subsequent research is highly recommended to conduct comparative studies between traditional and modern pesantren, as well as quasi-experimental research regarding the effectiveness of reference management training interventions on the quality of thesis writing. Future research could also apply discourse analysis directly to student scientific work drafts to measure the correlation between the type of digital literature accessed and the sharpness of their syntactic structures and written argumentation.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author utilized ChatGPT solely to enhance the readability and linguistic clarity of the text. All AI-generated outputs were thoroughly reviewed, edited, and validated by the author, who maintains full responsibility for the final content and the integrity of the publication. The author confirms that this technology served strictly as a supporting tool for language refinement and was not used to generate original research ideas, perform data analysis, or formulate substantive scientific conclusions.

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