

Mapping Research on Religious Literacy: A Bibliometric Analysis of Themes, Trends, and Educational Impact

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to map the conceptual landscape of religious literacy research using a bibliometric approach. It responds to the need for a deeper understanding of religious literacy as a multidimensional concept encompassing doctrinal, pedagogical, sociocultural, and inclusive aspects, especially within pluralistic societies.

Design, methods, and approach –The study employed bibliometric analysis using Bibliometrix and VOSviewer. Bibliometrix supported geographic mapping and factorial analysis through dendrograms, while VOSviewer analyzed keyword co-occurrence, relevance, and occurrence scores to visualize thematic clusters. Data were sourced from peer-reviewed publications in international academic databases to map the structure of religious literacy research.

Findings – Four key clusters emerged: (1) theoretical foundations (e.g., literacy, faith, practice), (2) links to education and identity (e.g., school, citizenship, diversity), (3) pedagogical and teacher-oriented themes (e.g., teacher, skill, spirituality), and (4) inclusive and contextual concerns (e.g., Islam, special needs, future). The findings indicate that religious literacy is interdisciplinary and globally relevant, although gaps persist in Southeast Asia and within digital or informal learning contexts.

Research implications and limitations – This study offers a comprehensive analysis of religious literacy using VOSviewer and Bibliometrix. However, reliance on keywords may miss deeper insights from full texts, and the focus on English-language sources limits regional representation.

Originality and value – This study offers a refined conceptual mapping of religious literacy and contributes insights for educational policy, curriculum development, and future research across varied cultural settings.

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Introduction

In recent decades, the concept of religious literacy has gained increasing attention within the realms of education, public policy, and socio-cultural studies. The term refers to an individual's capacity to understand religion not merely as a system of belief, but also as a complex social, historical, and cultural phenomenon (Pepes, 2025). Religious literacy encompasses knowledge of various religious traditions, the ability to think critically about religious issues, and the skills to engage in constructive interfaith dialogue. In the context of an increasingly pluralistic, globalized, and digital society, religious literacy is regarded as an essential competence for fostering social cohesion, tolerance, and democracy (Soules & MisirHiralall, 2025).

Despite its significance, religious literacy remains an ambiguous concept that is interpreted in diverse ways by scholars, educators, and policymakers. Some approaches emphasize the transmission of doctrinal content and religious teachings (Kim, 2025), while others prioritize intercultural understanding and interfaith dialogue (Cadge, 2024). These differing perspectives give rise to critical questions: What is the trajectory of research on religious literacy within the global academic literature? What themes and issues dominate the discourse, and to what extent is the concept articulated in relation to education, identity, and citizenship?

One of the most recent and relevant studies is the work by von Brömssen et al., 2020 which analyzes religious literacy in the curricula of three European countries: Austria, Scotland, and Sweden, using a curriculum and discourse studies approach. Although the article provides an in-depth understanding of the implementation of religious literacy within formal educational settings, its scope is limited to normative perspectives and the regional context of Europe. Another study by Athoillah et al., 2023 which employed a systematic literature review (SLR) method in exploring Religious Digital Literacy of Urban Muslim Society in Indonesia, identified trends in the use of digital media and the challenges of misinformation in religious contexts. However, this research remains locally contextualized and focused on the urban Indonesian society. To date, no study has mapped the global conceptual landscape of religious literacy, particularly through a bibliometric approach involving thematic and hierarchical network analysis using VOSviewer and dendrograms generated in RStudio. Distinct from the aforementioned studies, the present research broadens the focus by adopting a global bibliometric approach, utilizing VOSviewer visualizations and dendrogram analysis through the Bibliometrix package in RStudio. This method enables a more comprehensive mapping of the conceptual network while systematically identifying research gaps and offering original contributions to enrich the literature on religious literacy. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut melalui pendekatan bibliometrik. Dengan menggunakan perangkat lunak VOSviewer dan Bibliometrix, penelitian ini memetakan jaringan kata kunci dari publikasi akademik yang berkaitan dengan religious literacy.

This approach enables the visualization of thematic relationships within the literature, while also facilitating the identification of dominant clusters, interconnections among themes, and underexplored research gaps. The background of this study stems from growing concerns over increasing intolerance and identity-based polarization rooted in religion, particularly within multireligious societies such as Indonesia (Kartono et al., 2025). On one hand, formal education tends to emphasize doctrinal aspects; on the other hand, the digital public sphere is saturated with fragmented and often provocative religious narratives. This condition highlights the urgency of approaching religious literacy in a more comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and context-sensitive manner. Therefore, this article not only contributes a conceptual mapping of the existing literature but also offers an initial framework for developing curricula, teacher training programs, and policies grounded in the values of inclusivity and tolerance.

The structure of this article begins with an explanation of the bibliometric methods employed, followed by the presentation and interpretation of the keyword network visualizations. The discussion section analyzes the results in relation to previous literature and explores their potential applications within educational and societal contexts. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and offers recommendations for future research directions. Accordingly, the primary aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive overview of the global academic landscape of religious literacy, highlighting its thematic and theoretical dynamics, as well as its relevance in addressing contemporary social challenges. Amidst the diversity of emerging approaches and perspectives, this study underscores the importance of understanding religious literacy as both a pedagogical and transformative social instrument.

Methods

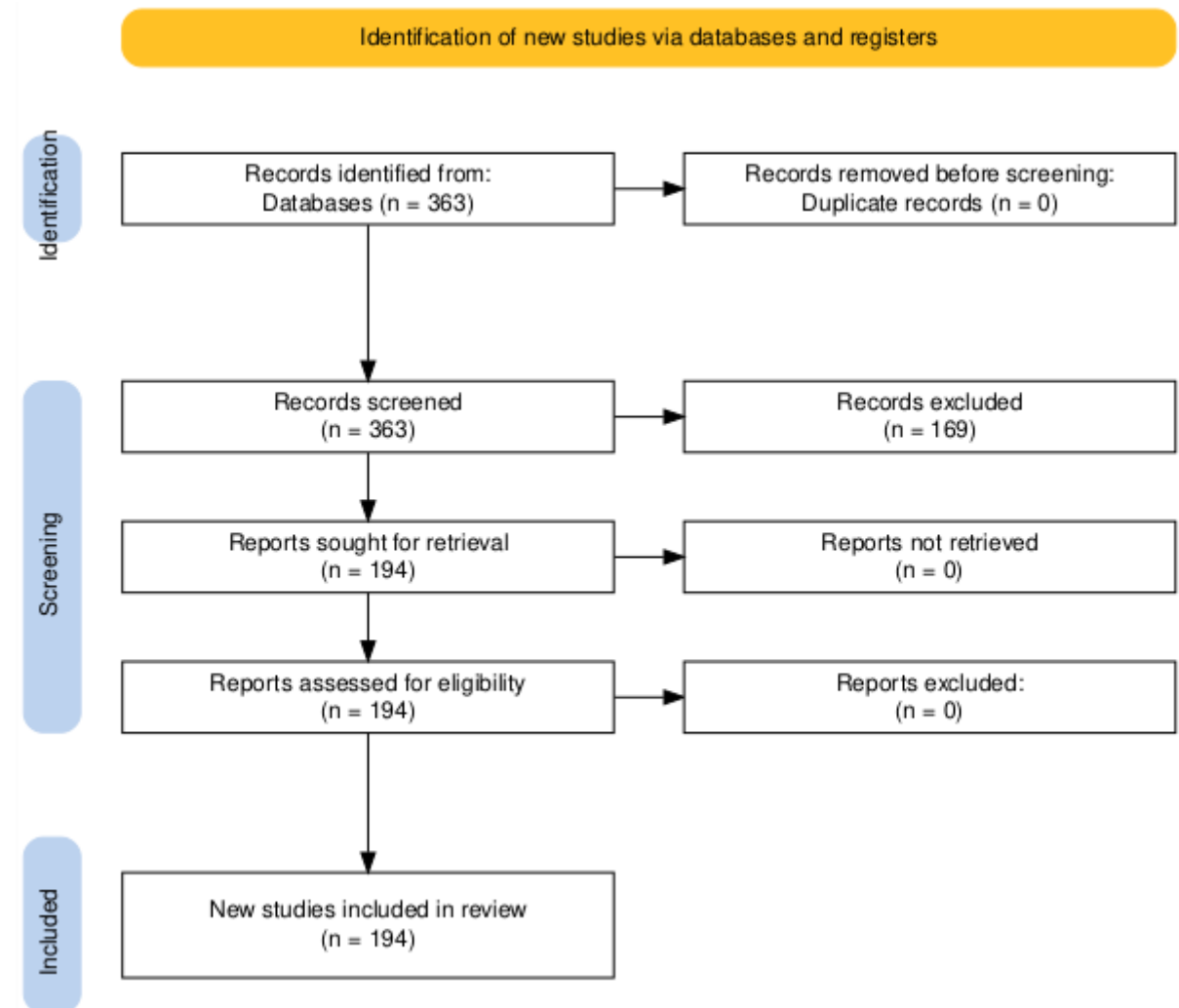
This study adopts a bibliometric approach to analyze the development and knowledge structure of research on religious literacy. At the inclusion and exclusion stage, several selection criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the documents analyzed. First, the articles considered were publications issued between 2015 and 2025. Second, all articles were sourced from the Scopus database, chosen for its reputation as a credible and widely indexed academic repository. Third, the search was limited to documents containing the keyword 'religious literacy' in the title, abstract, or author keywords. Fourth, the corpus was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles; sources such as books, book chapters, conference proceedings, dissertations, and theses were excluded. Finally, only articles written in English were included in the analysis.

This study follows a systematic procedure based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. A total of 363 initial documents were identified through a search of the Scopus database, with automatic deduplication carried out by the database system. All identified documents were then screened according to the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, which included: publication years between 2015 and 2025, document type limited to peer-reviewed journal articles (excluding books, book chapters, or proceedings), and an explicit focus on the topic of religious literacy. This screening process yielded 194 documents deemed relevant for further review, while 169 were excluded for not meeting the criteria. Subsequently, all screened documents underwent an eligibility assessment to determine their substantive alignment with the research focus. At this stage, no reports were excluded due to inaccessibility (reports not retrieved = 0) or content irrelevance, resulting in all 194 documents being considered eligible

for bibliometric analysis. The entire literature selection process is clearly illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), which transparently displays the number of documents at each stage along with the rationale for their inclusion or exclusion.

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Systematic Literature Selection Process



Out of the 194 articles retrieved from the Scopus database, all documents were imported into the Mendeley reference manager and saved in RIS format. The RIS file was subsequently imported into the VOSviewer software to perform an initial mapping of thematic relevance related to religious literacy. The data processing procedure in VOSviewer followed these steps: (i) creating a map based on bibliographic data, (ii) reading data from a reference manager file, (iii) selecting the file from a designated folder, (iv) setting the type of analysis and counting method analysis type: co-occurrence, unit of analysis: author keywords, and counting method: full counting, (v) verifying the selected keywords according to the minimum occurrence threshold, and (vi) finalizing the process to generate a network visualization. The initial thematic association analysis revealed that studies on religious literacy exhibit highly complex relational patterns, as illustrated in Figure 2. The author set the minimum number of occurrences at 10 and identified 128 keywords that met this threshold. Subsequently, the VOSviewer application, by default, selected 60% of keywords with strong linkages, revealing that the most dominant themes included literacy

(402 occurrences), study (131), approach (79), school (78), teacher (75), practice (67), analysis (56), community (56), society (52), skill (48), paper (47), person (43), identity (42), work (35), diversity (34), data (33), part (32), faith (31), program (31), field (29), and Islam (28). Other themes with fewer than 10 occurrences represent underexplored topics, which potentially serve as research gaps to be addressed in future studies.

Figure 2

Network Visualization Based on Keyword Analysis

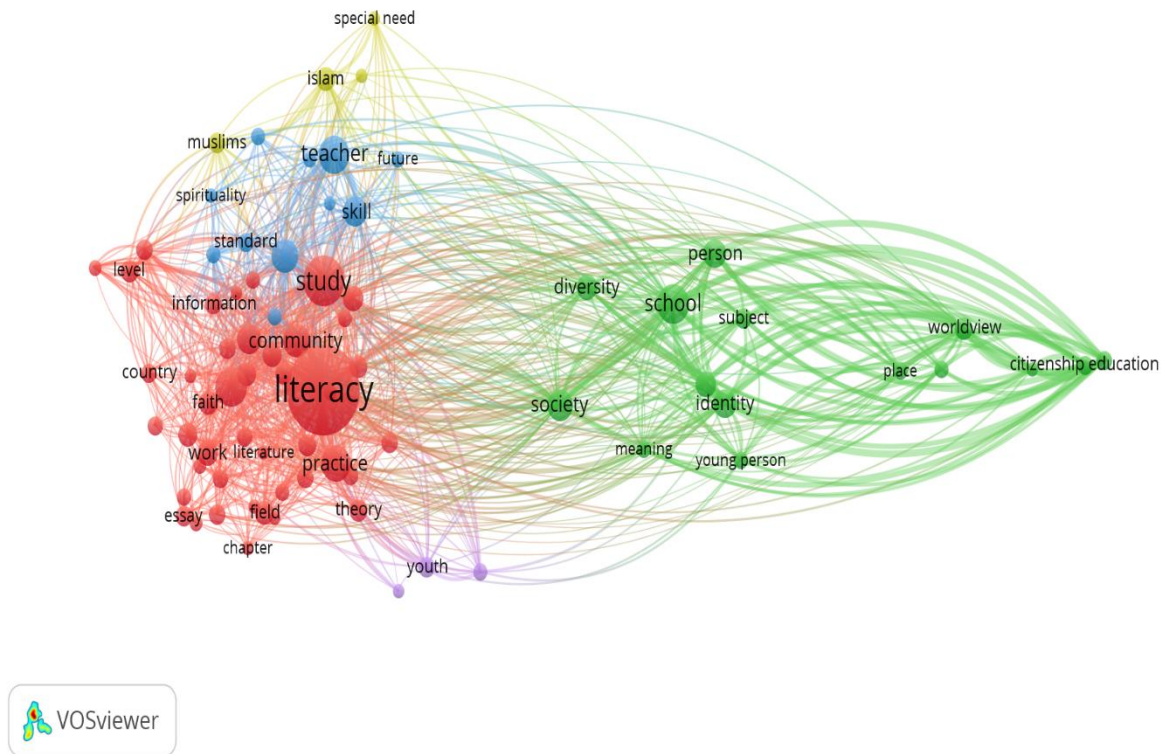
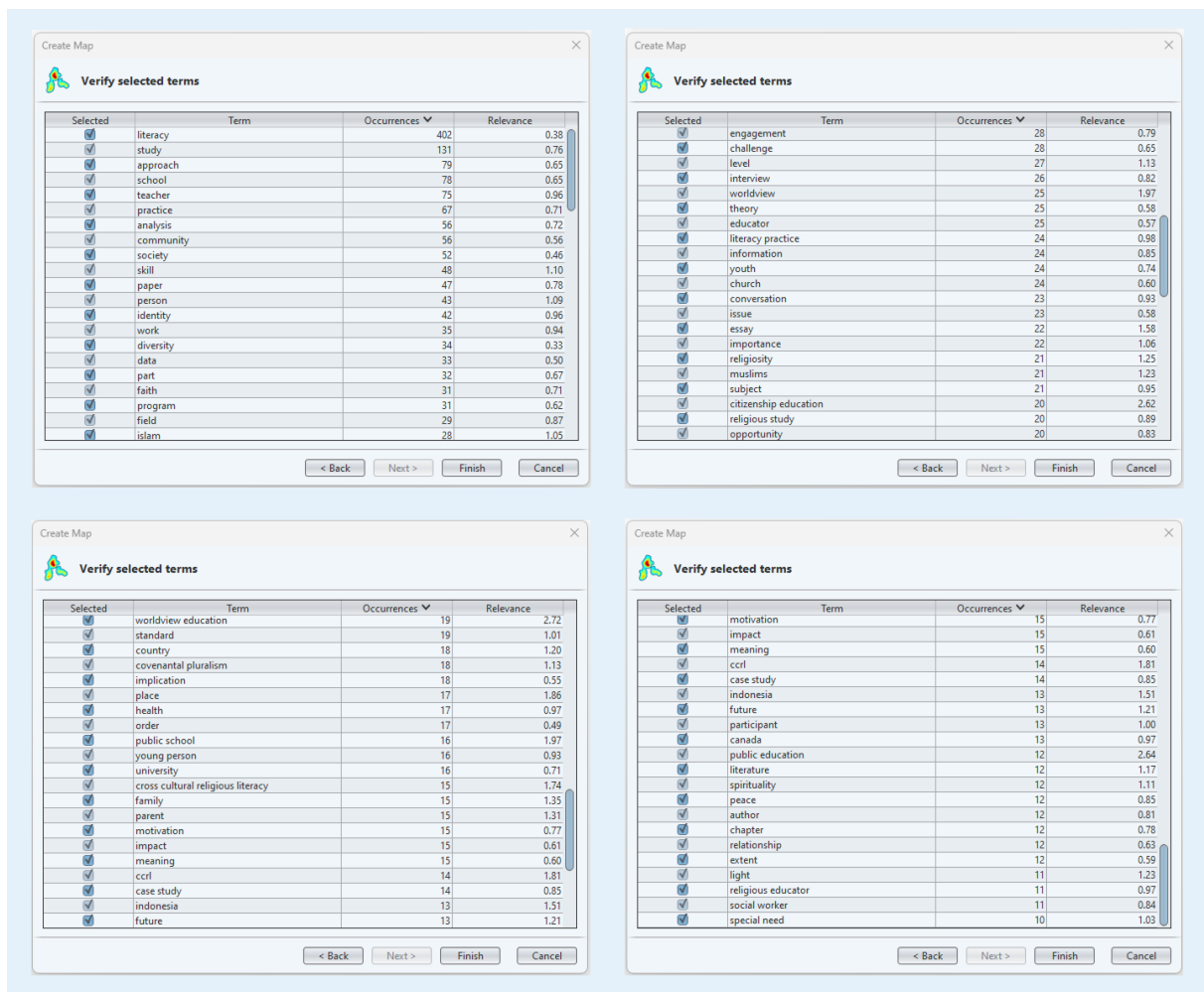


Figure 3*Verified Terms: Merged and Duplicate Eliminated*

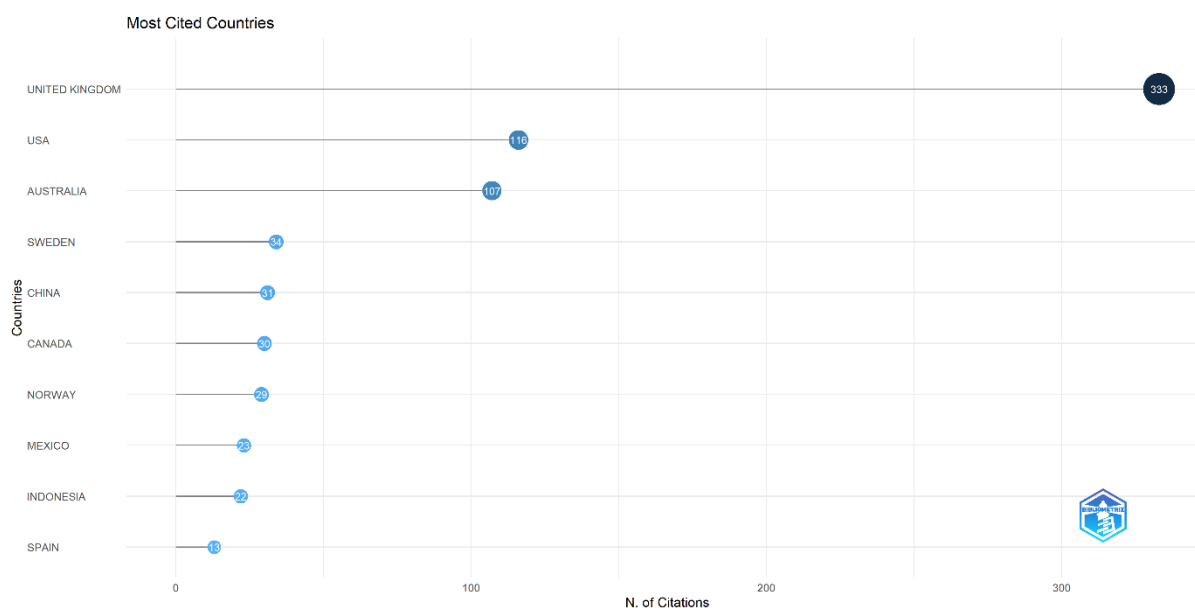
Result

1. Geographical Distribution in Religious Literacy Literature

Before proceeding to thematic mapping through keyword analysis, it is essential to examine the geographical distribution of the publications under review. The distribution of citations by country, based on the authors' institutional affiliations, provides an initial indication of which actors are most influential in shaping the global discourse on religious literacy. This analysis also reflects the epistemic landscape of religious literacy, potentially revealing the social, political, and educational contexts that inform its theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. Figure 4 presents the ten countries with the highest citation counts, as identified through bibliometric analysis using the Bibliometrix package in RStudio. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia rank among the top contributors to the academic literature, indicating a concentration of research in Western regions. In contrast, countries from Asia and Africa remain underrepresented, which may point to a gap in global participation within this scholarly field. These findings underscore the importance of fostering cross-cultural research and international collaboration in order to expand the range of perspectives in religious literacy studies.

Figure 4

Citation Distribution by Country of Origin in Religious Literacy Literature



Based on the visualization above, the United Kingdom (333), the United States (116), and Australia (107) are the top three countries with the highest citation counts in the literature on religious literacy, indicating a discourse dominated by Western nations. Sweden, China, and Canada also show a notable number of citations, reflecting a strong academic interest in this issue in regions characterized by inclusive and secular educational systems.

Interestingly, Indonesia emerges as the only Southeast Asian country to appear in the top ten list, although its citation count (22) remains relatively low compared to Western countries. This indicates that, despite the high relevance of Southeast Asia's social and religious context to the study of religious literacy, academic contributions from the region are still limited in the global literature. This highlights the need to encourage more research from countries such as Indonesia and its neighbors, including Malaysia, which share similar geographical and cultural characteristics. Strengthening contributions from Southeast Asia could enrich global perspectives with more contextual and responsive approaches to the dynamics of religious pluralism in the region.

The bibliometric analysis in this study was conducted to identify trends and conceptual relationships in the field of religious literacy. Utilizing the VOSviewer software, keywords from academic articles were visualized in the form of a network map to reveal dominant thematic clusters.

2. Thematic Network Visualization of Keywords in Religious Literacy Studies

The keyword network visualization presented in Figure 2 illustrates the interconnected relationships among keywords, forming distinct thematic clusters. Each color represents a specific cluster, indicating a group of thematically related terms that frequently co-occur within the same documents. The size of each node (circle) reflects the frequency of that keyword's appearance across the analyzed literature. The larger the node, the more frequently the term appears.

As shown in Figure 3, the keyword "literacy" stands out as the most prominent term in the visualization, appearing 402 times. This highlights its central role as the dominant theme in the overall dataset. Other highly frequent and strongly connected terms include "study" (131), "approach" (79), "school" (78), "teacher" (75), and "practice" (67). These findings suggest that research on religious literacy is often associated with educational practices, instructional strategies, and the roles of schools and educators. Based on the visualization, at least four major thematic clusters can be identified:

- (1) The red cluster centers on key concepts such as literacy (occurrence: 402, relevance: 0.38), study (occurrence: 131, relevance: 0.76), community (occurrence: 56, relevance: 0.56), practice (occurrence: 67, relevance: 0.71), and faith (occurrence: 31, relevance: 0.71). This cluster represents the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of religious literacy, encompassing religious communities, scholarly work, and academic inquiry. The dominance of the term "literacy" indicates that religious literacy constitutes the core focus of the analyzed research network. The strong association between "study" and "practice" suggests that approaches to religious literacy are not solely theoretical but also emphasize practical applications within faith-based communities. The presence of the keyword "faith" further highlights the significance of spiritual dimensions as a foundational element in shaping a holistic framework for religious literacy. Accordingly, the red cluster illustrates an integration of theoretical foundations with practical expressions of literacy rooted in faith-based values.
- (2) The green cluster is dominated by terms such as school (occurrence: 78, relevance: 0.65), society (occurrence: 52, relevance: 0.46), identity (occurrence: 42, relevance: 0.96), person (occurrence: 33, relevance: 0.66), diversity (occurrence: 34, relevance: 0.33), citizenship education (occurrence: 21, relevance: 2.62), and worldview (occurrence: 25, relevance: 1.97). This cluster highlights the interconnection between religious literacy, citizenship education, identity formation, and social diversity. The high relevance scores of "citizenship education" and "worldview" indicate that research in this area often frames religious literacy as an integral component of multicultural and democratic education. Moreover, the inclusion of terms such as "identity" and "person" underscores the significance of personal dimensions and identity development in inclusive religious education. This cluster reflects an approach that views religious literacy not merely as the comprehension of religious texts, but also as a means of cultivating socially conscious citizens who embrace tolerance and openness to diversity.
- (3) The blue cluster is closely associated with terms such as teacher (occurrence: 75, relevance: 0.96), skill (occurrence: 48, relevance: 1.10), standard (occurrence: 19, relevance: 1.17), spirituality (occurrence: 12, relevance: 1.11), and Muslims (occurrence: 13, relevance: 1.06), reflecting the pedagogical dimension and professional competencies of educators in the context of Islamic or interfaith religious education. The high relevance of the terms teacher and skill underscores the importance of educators' capacity to deliver religious content in an effective and context-sensitive manner. Meanwhile, the presence of the term spirituality indicates that reinforcing the spiritual dimension remains a crucial aspect of meaningful religious instruction. The inclusion of the term standard further suggests an orientation toward curriculum development and quality benchmarks in religious education. Overall, this cluster highlights a research focus that positions

educators as key actors in fostering a holistic understanding of religion, encompassing both intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

- (4) The yellow cluster comprises terms such as Islam (occurrence: 28, relevance: 1.05), special need (occurrence: 10, relevance: 1.03), future (occurrence: 13, relevance: 0.97), and program (occurrence: 31, relevance: 0.68). This cluster indicates a particular concern for learner diversity and inclusivity in religious education. The high relevance of the term special need suggests that religious literacy, as explored in these studies, is not solely directed at general student populations but also encompasses differentiated approaches for those with specific educational needs. The term future reflects a strategic orientation toward visionary planning in religious education, while program indicates the presence of targeted interventions or curriculum designs. Overall, this cluster underscores the importance of religious education that is contextual, inclusive, and responsive to the challenges of increasingly plural and complex societies.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that religious literacy in academic discourse is not solely concerned with religious knowledge, but is also closely related to pedagogical approaches, the strengthening of individual identity, the development of inclusive societies, and the inculcation of civic values. This reinforces the position of religious literacy as a key competency in twenty-first-century education, particularly within the context of diversity and the challenges posed by globalization. This visualization also provides an important foundation for guiding future research and innovations in religious education curricula, both in Islamic and interfaith contexts, so that they may become more responsive to contemporary issues and the diverse needs of learners.

3. Hierarchical Thematic Structure (Dendrogram)

In addition to identifying four main clusters, the network visualization also illustrates inter-cluster linkages through connecting lines that represent the frequency and strength of co-occurrence between keywords. This indicates that religious literacy is a multidimensional concept that cannot be separated from its social, educational, and cultural identity contexts. For instance, the keyword teacher from the green cluster is closely related to society and diversity from the yellow cluster. This suggests that the role of teachers in promoting religious literacy is directly connected to the broader aim of cultivating inclusive and tolerant societies. Similarly, theology from the red cluster is linked to worldview and citizenship education, indicating an integration between theological understanding and the development of global civic perspectives. This analysis reinforces earlier findings that religious literacy is not merely about knowledge of religious doctrines, but also involves critical thinking skills, tolerance, and the capacity for interfaith dialogue (Robertson, 2022). Moreover, this study highlights a shift from normative-doctrinal approaches toward more interdisciplinary and contextual frameworks that address issues such as social justice, pluralism, and freedom of religion.

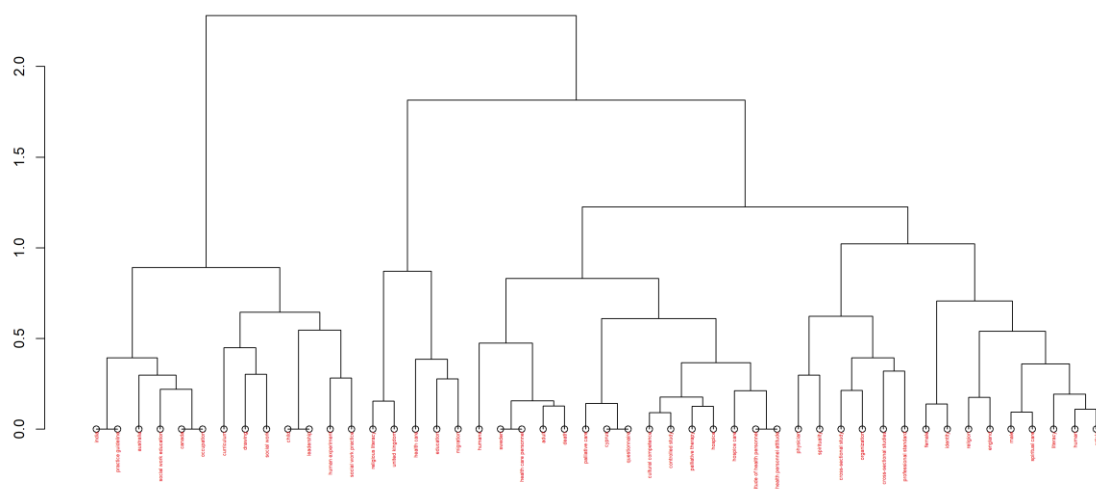
From a methodological perspective, these findings offer a significant contribution to the mapping of literature by organizing research themes that have previously been scattered and unstructured. This network visualization serves as a starting point for researchers to identify potential research gaps, such as:

- (1) The limited number of studies on the implementation of religious literacy in non-formal education.

- Thus, the findings of this study can serve as an initial conceptual map for the development of educational policies, teacher training programs, and curricula grounded in the values of diversity, tolerance, and humanity.

To complement the thematic mapping based on network visualization using VOSviewer, a hierarchical analysis was also conducted using the dendrogram feature from the Bibliometrix package in RStudio. This dendrogram presents the conceptual structure in the form of a hierarchical clustering of frequently co-occurring keywords, allowing for a more systematic identification of the semantic proximity between concepts. Through this approach, deeper thematic relationships can be interpreted, not only based on the frequency of occurrence but also by examining the conceptual distance between terms within the research landscape of religious literacy.

Thematic Cluster Structure of Religious Literacy Based on Dendrogram Analysis (Bibliometrix – RStudio)



The results of this analysis are visualized in the form of a dendrogram (Figure 3), which illustrates the patterns of interconnection among keywords derived from the 194 selected articles. The dendrogram reveals that the keywords related to religious literacy form several major thematic clusters. For instance, one cluster groups terms such as "religion," "school," "teacher," and "curriculum," indicating a strong focus on religious literacy within the context of formal education. Another cluster highlights the connection between terms such as "cultural competence," "pluralism," and "intercultural education," emphasizing the intercultural and pluralistic dimensions of religious literacy. Additionally, a cluster containing keywords such as "health care," "spirituality," and "human services" demonstrates the relevance of religious literacy in the domains of social services and healthcare. Thus, the dendrogram reinforces the findings of the previous visualizations while also revealing a more systematic and hierarchical thematic structure within the body of research on religious literacy. This analysis further identifies interconnected research areas and clarifies the thematic concentration within the analyzed literature.

Discussion

Findings from this bibliometric analysis reveal that research on religious literacy has evolved beyond traditional understandings focused solely on doctrinal or normative aspects. The keyword network visualization demonstrates that religious literacy is now understood as a multidimensional concept spanning education, cultural identity, social engagement, and even healthcare. These results align with studies emphasizing that religious literacy entails critical understanding, dialogical skills, and sensitivity to diverse beliefs and values (Schliesser, 2024). This finding reflects coherence with interdisciplinary approaches in previous literature, in which religious literacy is positioned as part of global citizenship competencies (Sofjan, 2020).

1. The Relationship Between Religious Literacy and Formal Education

One of the key contributions of this study lies in highlighting the interconnections among clusters, which indicate an epistemological intersection between religious issues and contemporary social problems. For instance, the link between teacher, diversity, and society reflects the pivotal role of educators in shaping a classroom culture that promotes tolerance and inclusivity (Maxwell & Hirsch, 2020). This network connection suggests that the role of teachers in the context of religious literacy goes beyond merely delivering religious instruction; it also encompasses the responsibility of fostering classroom environments that embody the values of inclusivity and diversity (Hashmi, 2021). This aligns with research emphasizing that teachers hold a strategic position in cultivating students' social awareness through dialogical and reflective pedagogical approaches (Rasool, 2024). Teachers serve not only as facilitators of learning but also as agents of social transformation who instill attitudes of tolerance and respect for difference. In this regard, educators act as key socialization agents who convey knowledge related to civic education, national integration, cultural understanding, and who serve as role models for their students (Naidu & Majid, 2021). In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, these competencies are particularly crucial to prevent polarization and religiously motivated radicalism within formal education settings (Sofjan, 2020). These findings underscore the urgent need to integrate multicultural approaches into teacher training and curriculum development, ensuring that religious

education can contribute meaningfully to the formation of a more inclusive and harmonious society. Similarly, the connection between theology and citizenship education points to the essential role of religious understanding in shaping democratic and globally oriented perspectives (Hanafi et al., 2022).

The findings of this study are consistent with the growing importance of introducing innovations in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) that can enhance students' religious literacy (Ghiyats Aiman & Dwi Ratnasari, 2022). It examined the animated series *Nussa and Rara*, episodes 1 to 10, which revealed that digital media can serve as an effective medium for conveying Islamic values in an engaging and applicable manner. The series contains various Islamic aspects, including faith (aqidah), Islamic law (sharia), and ethics (akhlaq), delivered through narrative approaches and problem-based learning strategies. Through such media, students are not merely passive recipients of religious information but are encouraged to reflect upon and apply it in their daily lives. Within the framework of religious literacy, the use of media such as *Nussa and Rara* strengthens religious understanding beyond rote memorization of concepts. It promotes the development of critical thinking skills, empathy toward differences, and a contextual religious attitude. This demonstrates that integrating modern media with religious values can serve as a bridge to broaden Islamic understanding while fostering strong character formation. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education should be encouraged to become more adaptive to technological developments and contemporary needs. One of the strategies is by utilizing digital educational media to comprehensively strengthen students' religious literacy (Yakin et al., 2024).

The development of education laboratories based on digital literacy can serve as a strategic approach to support inclusive and adaptive learning in the digital era. These laboratories function not merely as technical spaces, but also as learning hubs that facilitate the integration of religious values with relevant digital skills within the context of religious literacy (Setiyawan, 2021). This approach is particularly crucial given that contemporary religious literacy education requires cross-media understanding, reflective capacity, and interfaith dialogue skills within an open and dynamic digital environment. With stable laboratory support, educational institutions can provide spaces for both teachers and students to access interreligious resources, engage in online collaborative projects, and develop religious content that is tolerant, creative, and contextually grounded. This reinforces the article's key finding that religious literacy cannot be separated from contemporary social and technological dynamics, and underscores the need for responsive educational infrastructure to promote inclusive, humanistic forms of religious literacy in practice.

2. Religious Literacy in the Social Context

In an increasingly pluralistic and digitalized global context, religious literacy holds strategic potential in addressing pressing challenges such as intolerance, radicalism, religious disinformation, and identity polarization (Maiden, 2024). The prominence of keywords such as diversity, identity, and inclusion in recent scholarly publications reinforces the view that religious literacy is not solely the responsibility of religious institutions, but rather constitutes a broader societal endeavor aimed at fostering social cohesion and justice (Seiple & Hoover, 2021). Religious literacy is now understood as an essential component of broader social initiatives that aim to strengthen collective identity and promote justice within pluralistic societies. This perspective highlights the importance of enabling individuals to understand, navigate, and respond to religious

differences with reflection and respect (Liagkis, 2022). In this context, religious education is not confined to religious institutions. It also becomes the responsibility of public education systems, communities, and the state to cultivate tolerant, open-minded, and socially responsible citizens. These findings emphasize the need for adopting a civic-oriented approach in religious literacy policy and practice, especially in highly diverse countries such as Indonesia (Abdullah, 2024).

In the yellow cluster, the emergence of keywords such as Islam, future, program, and special need opens an important discourse on the accessibility of religious literacy for marginalized groups. The inclusion of special need issues in this discussion underscores the significance of adopting inclusive approaches in religious education (Parker & Gill, 2021). In societies with a significant Muslim population, the challenges of religious literacy education are layered. They involve not only content that is sensitive to intra-religious diversity, but also pedagogical methods that are adaptive to the specific needs of students with disabilities (Sumarna et al., 2022). This highlights the urgency of developing a religious literacy curriculum that is responsive, non-discriminatory, and capable of reaching all social groups in an equitable manner (Sumarna et al., 2022). The necessity of such curricular development is strongly reflected in this bibliometric mapping, particularly through the interconnection of keywords such as inclusion, diversity, identity, and public school. These findings indicate that contemporary religious literacy can no longer be confined to purely normative or dogmatic approaches. Instead, it must be grounded in an awareness of the plural and complex social realities that shape educational contexts. A curriculum that fails to account for differences in cultural identity, belief systems, and learner needs risks reinforcing bias, social exclusion, and even intolerance within classroom environments (Brooks et al., 2020). Therefore, the design of a religious literacy curriculum must ensure equal access for all groups, including those from minority religious backgrounds, Indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, and populations in remote or underdeveloped areas. This also affirms scholarly literature asserting that religious education should serve as a site for intercultural learning, rather than merely a means of doctrinal transmission. It should contribute to the development of social cohesion within multicultural societies (Sirry et al., 2024). Hence, the formation of an inclusive and equitable curriculum is not merely a normative aspiration, but a strategic necessity for building a harmonious and mutually respectful society.

3. Implications for the Indonesian and Southeast Asian Contexts

The findings of this study also reveal certain limitations. Geographically, research on religious literacy remains predominantly situated within Western contexts. The limited representation of keywords and publications from Southeast Asia particularly from Indonesia and Malaysia indicates an urgent need to develop both theoretical and empirical frameworks that are grounded in local realities. Given Indonesia's rich religious and cultural diversity, academic contributions from this region have the potential to enrich global discourse and offer more inclusive alternative perspectives. Overall, this study affirms that religious literacy constitutes a critical interdisciplinary competency for fostering democratic, tolerant, and inclusive societies. The findings broaden the understanding of religious literacy beyond the mere mastery of religious doctrines, positioning it instead as a conceptual and practical tool for navigating diversity and strengthening social cohesion in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (MisirHiralall & Soules, 2025).

When situated within the context of Indonesia, a nation marked by its profound religious and cultural diversity, this study holds particularly strategic implications. Challenges such as intolerance, identity-based polarization, and religiously motivated radicalism can be addressed through the strengthening of religious literacy grounded in principles of inclusivity and citizenship (Hopid et al., 2023). However, the visualization results indicate that research rooted in the Indonesian context (for example, the appearance of the keyword Indonesia within a limited scope in the blue cluster) remains relatively marginal. This highlights a significant opportunity for Indonesian scholars to make more contextually grounded and practically relevant contributions to the development of religious literacy theories and practices that are locally distinctive yet globally resonant. These findings open avenues for further development, including:

(1) **Integration of Religious Literacy into Formal Education Curriculum**

The curriculum should not be limited to the transmission of religious doctrines, but must also create spaces for dialogue on religious diversity and interfaith tolerance. Such efforts enable students to develop a deeper understanding of religious pluralism, thereby fostering societal tolerance and reducing prejudice toward religious and cultural differences.

(2) **Teacher Training Grounded in Multiculturalism**

Teachers must be equipped with both pedagogical and social competencies to manage classroom diversity through dialogical approaches that promote inclusive educational environments.

(3) **Utilization of Digital Literacy in Religious Education**

There is a growing need to explore digital religious literacy, particularly in relation to the dissemination of religious discourse through social media, which significantly influences younger generations.

(4) **Empirical Studies on Marginalized Communities and Religious Minorities**

Religious literacy must also be addressed within contexts of social inequality, vulnerability, and the marginalization of religious communities, ensuring that the concept is relevant and inclusive across diverse societal groups.

Considering the overall findings and emerging trends, religious literacy can be positioned as a key competency in fostering democratic, pluralistic, and peaceful societies. It also represents a strategic contribution of the education sector in responding to the increasingly complex dynamics of globalization and diversity. Overall, the visualizations indicate that religious literacy extends beyond the domain of religious education. It intersects significantly with issues of identity, multiculturalism, social engagement, and the cultivation of civic character. This pattern reflects a growing body of recent scholarship that frames religious literacy as a cross-disciplinary competence highly relevant to contemporary social life (Girivirya, 2023).

Conclusion

This study affirms that religious literacy has evolved into an interdisciplinary concept that extends beyond the confines of formal religious education. It now encompasses broader social issues such as citizenship, identity, diversity, and social justice. Through bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer, a thematic mapping was produced, revealing four primary clusters: spirituality and well-being, education and pedagogy, text-based religious studies, and identity and citizenship. These findings indicate that religious literacy is

currently positioned as a vital socio-cultural competency in navigating the complexities of multireligious and multicultural societies.

One of the central arguments reinforced by this study is that religious literacy must be understood contextually and interactively. It should not be viewed merely as the accumulation of doctrinal knowledge, but rather as a set of critical thinking skills, interfaith dialogue capabilities, and tools for fostering social cohesion. By identifying connections among keywords within the network, this study also demonstrates that religious literacy is closely linked to contemporary issues such as inclusive education, tolerance, pluralism, and the dynamics of digital spaces and social media algorithms.

The thematic framework generated from this visualization can be practically applied in several key areas:

1. Designing religious and civic education curricula that are more inclusive and dialogical.
2. Developing teacher training programs that emphasize sensitivity to diversity and the cultivation of intercultural competencies.
3. Promoting the use of digital media as a constructive and transformative tool for advancing religious literacy.

Despite these insights, this study also reveals significant gaps in the existing literature, particularly concerning the limited representation of the Southeast Asian context, the minimal exploration of non-formal education, and the insufficient attention to the dynamics of digital platforms in the dissemination of religious understanding. Therefore, future research should consider the following directions:

1. Empirical studies in the Global South, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, to develop a framework for religious literacy that is both locally relevant and connected to global discourse.
2. Interdisciplinary approaches involving fields such as media studies, educational psychology, and communication science.
3. Further investigation into the role of religious literacy in conflict mediation and peacebuilding within pluralistic societies.

In conclusion, religious literacy can and should be positioned as a fundamental cornerstone in future education. This approach aims to cultivate global citizens who are open-minded, critical, and empathetic. This study provides an initial foundation for developing educational policies and practices that not only acknowledge but also celebrate religious diversity as a significant social strength.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Both authors contributed significantly to this research. Lukman Nur Rohman was primarily responsible for conceptualizing the study, conducting the data analysis, and presenting the research findings. Sulmi Badar contributed to the development of the theoretical framework and provided critical revisions during the writing process. Both authors approved the final manuscript and take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of this research.

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Data availability statement

The data used in this study were obtained through a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in the Scopus database. The selection process followed established PRISMA guidelines, including the use of specific keywords, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and quality assessment procedures. All data analyzed are publicly available through the Scopus database and have been appropriately cited in the reference list. For further details regarding the search strategy or article selection, please contact the corresponding author.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Additional information

This study highlights how religious literacy functions as a multidisciplinary construct connected to education, identity, and social cohesion. Future research may explore religious literacy in Southeast Asian contexts using localized frameworks and empirical approaches.

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