

Gen Z's Religiosity Level: A Comparative Study between Indonesia and the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to measure the religiosity levels of young Muslims in Indonesia and the United Kingdom and compare the characteristics of religiosity in the two countries. Furthermore, it analyzes whether the level of religious literacy contributes to the observed differences in religiosity.

Design/method/approach – This study is quantitative research utilizing a survey approach. The research subjects were young Muslims in Indonesia and the United Kingdom, selected through purposive sampling methods. The data collection instruments consisted of a questionnaire adapted from the five approaches developed by Yusuf (2021) to measure the level of religious literacy, as well as the Centrality of Religious Scale (CRS) developed by Huber and Huber (2012). The collected data were then analyzed using EViews® version 16 software to perform regression analysis, namely to identify the relationship between religious literacy and religiosity.

Findings – The results indicate that the religiosity level among Gen Z Muslims in Indonesia is higher (83%) than that of their counterparts in the United Kingdom (79%). This difference is primarily influenced by cultural and educational contexts, where Indonesian Gen Z tend to have higher religious literacy through religion-related courses, whereas the UK Gen Z shows significant religiosity levels through community engagement and willingness to learn as a minority. However, regression analysis reveals an R-squared of 20-21% in both countries, suggesting that religious literacy does not significantly impact their religiosity level.

Research implications/limitations – The findings of the study indicate that religious literacy does not have a significant influence on the level of religiosity of Gen Z Muslims in Indonesia and the United Kingdom. Consequently, it is suggested that increasing religiosity should focus on other aspects, including faith-based education, community engagement, and the cultural context.

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Introduction

This study is the initial stage of a major research series entitled *Literasi Keagamaan dan Narasi Religiositas Gen Z Muslim di Indonesia dan Inggris Raya* (Religious Literacy and Narratives of Religiosity of Gen Z Muslims in Indonesia and the United Kingdom). It aims to measure the religiosity level of young Muslims in Indonesia and the United Kingdom, as well as to compare the characteristics of religiosity in both countries. Furthermore, this study also analyzes the potential influence of religious literacy on the level of religiosity. The findings from this study will be used to design more in-depth data collection strategies and analysis methods for the forthcoming planned primary research.

In-depth discussions on literacy and religious literacy have been conducted in various preceding studies. These studies have strongly confirmed that reading literature and books plays a significant role in fostering literacy. Therefore, literacy encompasses not only the ability to read and write but also requires critical thinking skills to assess information from print, visual, digital, and auditory sources to develop positive behaviors. Literacy currently has a broad and complex definition, covering various types, such as basic literacy, media literacy, computer literacy, technological literacy, scientific literacy, and religious literacy (Nurzakiyah, 2018). Rackley (2010) defines religious literacy as an individual's ability to understand the teachings and practices of a religion, such as Islam, and apply them in various contexts. Religious literacy also involves understanding different religious beliefs and practices to support social harmony.

Moore (2015) contends that religious literacy does not only involve the ability to determine and distinguish between religion and socio-political and cultural aspects from other different perspectives. He further asserts that religiously literate individuals typically possess 1) a fundamental knowledge of the history, texts, beliefs, practices, and manifestations of the emerging religious traditions and are continuously shaped by socio-historical and cultural contexts and 2) the ability to identify and analyze religious dimensions of socio-political and cultural expressions beyond the limitations of time and place.

Yusuf (2021) argues that strengthening religious literacy requires systemic programs designed to increase awareness while integrating religious literacy into religious teaching. He proposes five strategic approaches to strengthen religious literacy among the millennial generation, which we believe are also relevant for Generation Z. These approaches include: 1) a cultural approach that supports the implementation of multicultural education by considering cultural diversity in both Indonesia and the UK; 2) an educational approach that emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, social piety, and religious teaching; 3) a political approach that involves institutions and government as stakeholders; 4) an economic approach that focuses on the fulfillment of basic needs through religious practices such as charity; and 5) an environmental approach that seeks to create a conducive atmosphere and social harmony by supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regardless of the approach used, education programs should be grounded in multicultural principles that respect diversity, promote equality, and strengthen human values.

Religiosity is a process through which a person can internalize religious beliefs and practices (Dister, 1994) and actualize them in their everyday lives (Glock and Stark, 1965). Furthermore, Glock and Stark (1965) offer five dimensions that make up an individual religiosity: 1) “beliefs,” referring to dogmatic views that should be adhered to; 2) “practices” that attest one's observance, such as prayer, obedience, fasting, etc.; 3) “experiences” between a person and the divine including emotional and perceptual aspects, 4) qualified “knowledge” about religious tenets to carry out religious practices; and 5) religious “consequences” or effects. Pultzian (1996) asserts that these five dimensions serve as a framework to measure one's level of religiosity.

Numerous studies on Generation Z religiosity and spirituality have revealed interesting dynamics across various contexts. Baskoro and Kolibu (2022) found that Christian religious education plays an important role in shaping the nationalism insights of Generation Z Christians in Indonesia, with spirituality as a significant mediator. On the other hand, Epafras et al. (2021) revealed that Generation Z has religiosity characteristics of transitional, more flexible, and influenced by modernity. In the context of the new media era, Pabbajah (2024) highlighted the role of digital media in the religious transformation of Generation Z, acting both as a tool for spiritual exploration and a challenge to authenticity. The study by Park et al. (2024) suggests that digital methods, including apps and social media, effectively support Generation Z's spiritual and mental health. Specifically, Polok and Szromek (2024) noted that Generation Z Catholics tend to be critical of church institutions while still upholding moral values as a guide to life. Furthermore, Ziang et al. (2024) discovered that the religious orientation of Generation Z in China exhibits a more individualistic character and is influenced by socio-economic factors, such as income. Collectively, these studies illustrate that Generation Z adapts their religiosity in a more personalized and contextualized form.

The primary object of this study is Generation Z, referred to as Gen Z. According to Dimock (2019), the Pew Research Center is among the few institutions to categorize individuals born between 1997 and 2012 as Gen Z. The center measures people's attitudes toward fundamental issues and records different behaviors across demographic groups. The center measures people's attitudes toward fundamental issues and documents different behaviors across demographic groups. It should be noted that their research primarily targets Americans, suggesting the boundary points between generations may not be entirely accurate. They believe that generational cohorts serve as a tool for researchers to understand how different experiences (such as world events and technological, economic, and social changes) can shape a person's perspective.

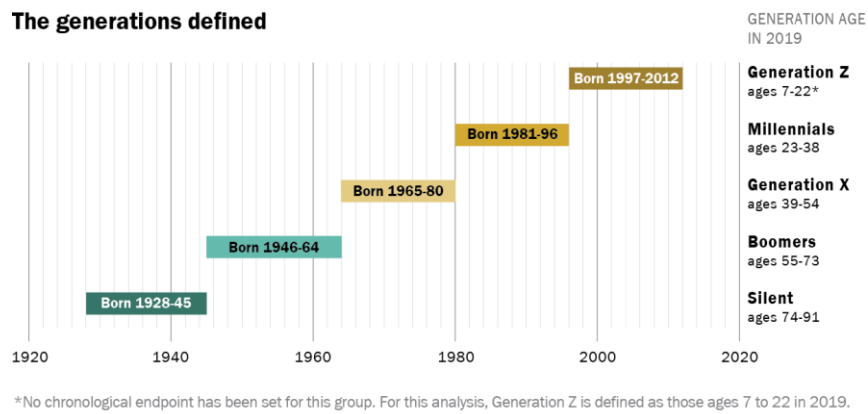
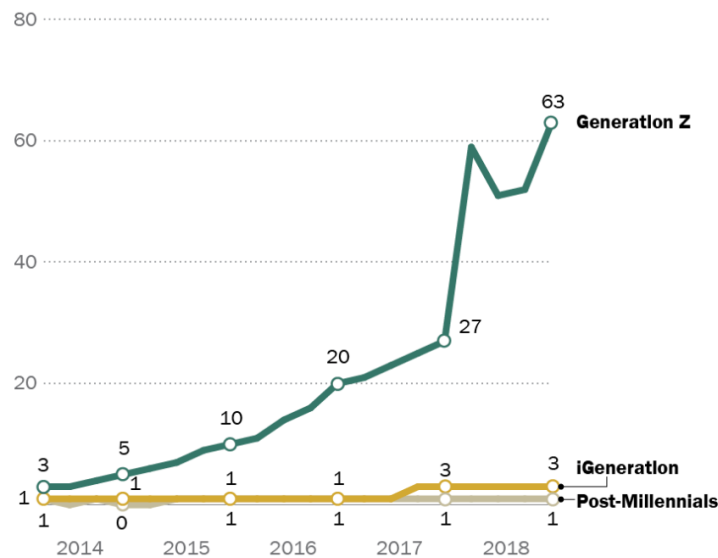


Figure 1. Generational cohorts by Pew Research Center

The Pew Research Center used to refer to the term post-millennial before. Still, the term Gen Z has been used massively in popular culture and journalism, as well as dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster, Oxford, and Urban Dictionary. Google Trends also indicates the use of the term Gen Z far surpasses other terms in online information searches.

Generation Z dominates online searches for information on the post-Millennial generation

Relative U.S. search volume of generation terms (Google Trends)



Note: Google Trends data are based on weekly query volume for a given query relative to the highest weekly volume of any queries being compared within the time period and geographic region examined. The maximum relative search volume in the period is 100. The trends above are quarterly averages of weekly relative search volume and include shortened versions of search terms (for example, "Generation Z" also includes "Gen Z"). Values do not reflect the absolute number of searches.

Figure 2. The Pew Research Center Analysis of Google Trends

What makes Gen Z unique is the fact that technology has been a part of their lives since the beginning. Recent studies reveal notable changes - both positive and worrisome - in their behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles. This phenomenon can be attributed to their preferences in food, fashion, entertainment, and communication styles that are highly

dependent on trends emerging in the digital world (Rastiti, 2018; Regita and Sebayang, 2020; Rosyida, Kusumaningrum, and Anggraheni, 2020).

Specifically regarding Indonesia's Gen Z, Alvara Research Center (2020) has published a thorough report on the comparison between millennials and Gen Z. In contrast to the Pew Research Center, which defines Gen Z as individuals born from 1997 to 2012, Alvara narrows this range to those born between 1998 and 2010. Alvara conducted face-to-face interviews from August 12 to August 31, 2019, with 1,800 respondents aged 14 to 55 across all 34 provinces in Indonesia. The findings revealed that 39% of Indonesian Gen Z individuals engage in the so-called digital lifestyle, where they use the internet for approximately 4 to 6 hours every day, categorizing them as heavy users or internet addicts. Additionally, 20.6% of them even use digital payments as their daily transactions. When it comes to faith and religion, there is a trend that the older a person is, the more consistent they are in performing their five daily prayers and other religious rituals. Statistics also show that the internet has become one of Gen Z's learning sources for religious knowledge apart from conventional sources such as Ustaz or clerics, parents, and religious teachers.

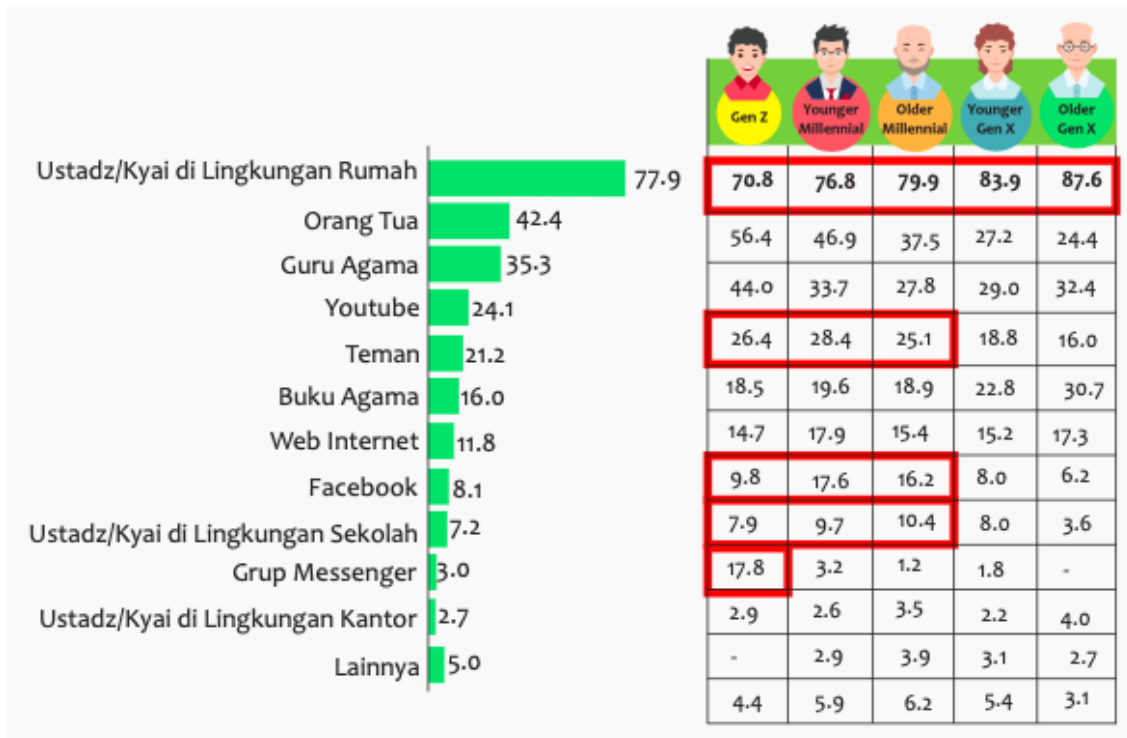


Figure 3. Alvara statistics on learning resources about Islam

According to the 2021 census conducted by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), there has been a significant increase in the Muslim population, particularly in England and Wales, establishing Islam as now the second-largest religion in the UK. Despite this growth in the number of Muslims, the events of 9/11 or the London bombings have led others to see them as aliens, not to mention vulnerable to radicalization.

There are three worth-mentioning studies regarding religious literacy, religiosity, and Gen Z's expression of religion. Research by Yusuf (2021) proposes that religious literacy is measurable. We can measure religious literacy based on five different perspectives:

cultural, educational, political, economic, and environmental. Specific to the Indonesian context, the research was conducted on millennials rather than Gen Z. Husein and Slama (2018) assert that social media platforms, including Facebook and instant messaging like WhatsApp and Blackberry Messenger, are commonly used to enhance individual religiosity. Examples include the One Day One Juz (ODOJ) program and charities raised through social media. However, the study did not explore the relationship between social media usage and religiosity levels. Concerning Gen Z, Hasanah and Huriyah (2022) discussed their religious awareness and how they can actualize their piety. Using an exploratory method with probability sampling, supplemented by surveys and interviews, the study used Likert scales targeting university students aged 18-24 in Kalimantan. The findings revealed that Gen Z is generally unaware of their radical tendencies in expressing their religion. Unfortunately, the study failed to address whether this radical tendency is related to their sources of learning. Considering the previous studies, it can be inferred that the religiosity of Gen Z Muslims in Indonesia and the UK remains underexplored. Therefore, this study focuses on the level of religiosity and whether religious literacy affects religiosity. A review of the previous studies indicates no research examining the influence of religious literacy on individual religiosity.

Numerous researchers have proposed a hypothesis suggesting that religious literacy affects religiosity. However, it should be noted that a survey by Media and Religious Trends in Indonesia (MERIT) and the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) in 2020 revealed that millennials and Gen Z exhibit low levels of religiosity. This finding aligns with other PPIM research (2021). Interestingly, these results seem to contradict the findings of this current study, where both Indonesian and UK Gen Z demonstrate significantly high levels of religiosity.

This Introduction section has outlined the context of why researching this topic is significant and the theoretical frameworks employed to investigate the issue. The Methods section below details the research design implemented in this study. This is followed by the Results section, presenting the findings of this research, which are further elaborated in the Discussion section. Lastly, the Conclusion section offers a concise summary and notes on the research altogether.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative method that has provided answers to two problem formulations: 1) the level of religiosity, and 2) the effect of religious literacy on religiosity. Regarding the level of religiosity, data was collected through a questionnaire. In terms of positive aspects, "strongly agree" had the highest score, and "strongly disagree" had the lowest. Conversely, about negative things, "strongly disagree" had the highest score while strongly agree received the lowest. For measuring religiosity, the researchers adapted Huber and Huber's (2012) Centrality of Religious Scale (CRS) which consists of 20 items from five fundamental dimensions: intellectual, ideology, public activity, private practice, and religious experience. Concerning religious literacy, the researchers developed a measuring instrument based on Yusuf (2021) to measure religious literacy, comprising 21

statements on five different approaches: cultural, educational, political, economic, and environmental

The questionnaire was made available in both Indonesian and English, which was subsequently disseminated online in Indonesia and the UK. In Indonesia, the survey was intentionally only administered to Islamic university students, as they had taken courses on religion. The collected data were then analyzed using EViews® version 16 to measure the level of religiosity and the impact of religious literacy on religiosity using the least squares method.

Result and Discussion

1. The religiosity level of Indonesian youth

Levels of religiosity were measured using an online survey completed by a total of 326 students enrolled in semester 3 to 5 across 13 Islamic universities: Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu al-Qur'an (PTIQ) Jakarta, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII), UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Al-Hikam Malang, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sunan Giri Bojonegoro, STAI Sangatta Kutai Timur, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palopo, and IAIN Sorong, Papua Barat Daya. The data was analyzed using EViews® version 16, and the results of the regression analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Regression analysis results measuring religiosity in Indonesian Muslim youths

Dependent Variable: RELIGIOSITY				
Method: Least Squares				
Date: 03/08/24 Time: 22:53				
Sample: 1 326				
Included observations: 326				
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	41.91013	4.679195	8.956697	0.0000
RELIGIOUS_LITERACY	0.698728	0.077567	9.008023	0.0000
R-squared	0.200285	Mean dependent var		83.86810
Adjusted R-squared	0.197817	S.D. dependent var		9.000740
S.E. of regression	8.061483	Akaike info criterion		7.018188
Sum squared resid	21055.95	Schwarz criterion		7.041421
Log likelihood	-1141.965	Hannan-Quinn criter.		7.027459
F-statistic	81.14447	Durbin-Watson stat		1.895403
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000			

The results indicate that the mean value of the dependent variable is 83.86, which pertains to the level of religiosity. Furthermore, the F-statistic value is 81.14 while the p-value is 0.00, and the R-square value equals 0.20. A more in-depth analysis of the meaning of these figures will be discussed in the Discussion section.

2. UK youth religiosity levels

An online survey was conducted with 53 students from various institutions, including the City University of London, Cardiff University, Queen Mary University of London, Swansea University, Bath University, Warwick University, Greenwich University and Lincoln University. The data obtained were analyzed using EViews® version 16, and the results of the regression analysis are presented in the table below:

Table 2. Regression analysis results measuring religiosity among British Muslim youths

Dependent Variable: RELIGIOSITY				
Method: Least Squares				
Date: 03/08/24 Time: 22:57				
Sample: 1 53				
Included observations: 53				
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	37.11684	11.51407	3.223607	0.0022
RELIGIOUS_LITERACY	0.733620	0.198703	3.692043	0.0005
R-squared	0.210907	Mean dependent var		79.32075
Adjusted R-squared	0.195435	S.D. dependent var		11.20229
S.E. of regression	10.04818	Akaike info criterion		7.489666
Sum squared resid	5149.262	Schwarz criterion		7.564016
Log likelihood	-196.4761	Hannan-Quinn criter.		7.518257
F-statistic	13.63118	Durbin-Watson stat		2.485066
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000542			

The results above illustrate that the mean value of the dependent variable is 79.32, representing the level of religiosity. Additionally, the F-statistic value is 3.63 while the p-value is 0.00, and the R-square value is 0.21. These figures will be further elaborated in the Discussion section.

3. The effect of religious literacy on religiosity

The influence of religious literacy on religiosity can be seen from the R-squared values obtained from the regression analysis conducted for both Indonesia and the United Kingdom. The R-square values are 0.20 for Indonesia and 0.21 for the United Kingdom, respectively. A detailed analysis will be provided in the Discussion section.

The first problem formulation in this study measured the level of religiosity through an online survey, which was then analyzed using EViews® software version 16. Based on the analysis results, the level of religiosity was measured by the mean value of the dependent variable, where Muslim youth in Indonesia scored 83.86, while Muslim youth in the UK scored 79.32. Despite the observed difference in scores between the two groups, this disparity is not statistically significant. This finding leads to a deeper understanding of the contextual and cultural factors that influence religiosity in both countries.

In Indonesia, the high religiosity scores observed among Muslim youth can be attributed to their educational background. Most of the respondents are students in their third to fifth semesters at Islamic universities who have completed religious courses, allowing them to have a more in-depth understanding of religion. Such a context

strengthens the argument that formal religious education plays a role in shaping religiosity levels, a finding that aligns with the current discourse on the critical role of religious education in shaping young people's religious identity and behavior. Consequently, Indonesian youth appear to be more exposed to systematic religious education, potentially enhancing their religiosity scores.

In the United Kingdom, despite Muslims being a minority group, they exhibit high levels of religiosity, reflected in a score of 79.32. A key factor contributing to this phenomenon is the tendency of Generation Z in the UK to participate in socially oriented religious activities. Such engagement serves not only to preserve their religious identity but also to broaden and deepen their understanding of Islam in a wider context. In the current discourse, it aligns with the global trend regarding the importance of diversity of religious experiences in a pluralistic society. Young Muslims in the UK seem to utilize involvement in socio-religious communities to strengthen their ties to religion while simultaneously bridging the gap between religious and social identities.

Statistically, the regression analysis results showed significant F-statistics of 81.14 for Indonesia and 13.63 for the United Kingdom, both accompanied by p-values of 0.00. It suggests that the religious literacy variable can significantly predict the level of religiosity, albeit with a limited level of influence. The R-squared values were 0.20 for Indonesia and 0.21 for the UK, indicating that religious literacy can only predict 20-21% of religiosity levels in both countries. Consequently, the remaining 80-79% of religiosity levels, which cannot be explained by religious literacy, are likely to be influenced by other factors that require further investigation, such as social, cultural, political, and economic aspects. This finding confirms that religious literacy plays a role but does not fully explain variations in religiosity levels.

These results show that the initial hypothesis, which assumed a significant effect of religious literacy on religiosity, was not fully proven. It suggests that although there is a correlation between religious literacy and religiosity, its influence is limited, and other more dominant factors may play a role in shaping the religiosity of young Muslims. It is consistent with findings in the current literature, suggesting that young people's religiosity is influenced by a complex range of factors, including social experiences, media, cross-cultural interactions, and identity dynamics in a globalized world.

This study encourages further exploration of other variables that may contribute more significantly to shaping religiosity. Such variables may include family factors, the role of social communities, the effects of digital media, and social and political policies that either support or inhibit religious expression. While this study did not seek to investigate the dimensions of religiosity in-depth, the findings provide a direction for future studies that are more comprehensive, aiming to broaden the understanding of the dynamics of religiosity among young people in the contemporary era.

Conclusion

This research focused on both Indonesian and British Gen Z, attempted to measure and compare their religiosity levels, and investigated whether religious literacy can

influence religiosity. To date, there has been no research addressing the above specific issues. This research is crucial as the findings provide an overview of how data should be collected and analyzed for primary research.

This study addressed the initial problem statement regarding the level of religiosity among Gen Z Indonesians, revealing a significant religiosity score, with an average of 83.86. This high score can be attributed to the participants' backgrounds, as they are students in their third to fifth semesters at Islamic universities, where they have taken or completed religious courses, including the history of Islamic civilization, Qur'anic studies, Hadith studies, Jurisprudence studies, and Arabic language. Such coursework enhances their religious literacy. Moreover, some participants also have taken religious courses during their year-long residency in student dormitories. In comparison, Gen Z individuals in the UK showed a religiosity score of 79.32, which is quite significant given their status as a minority. This level of religiosity may stem from their active involvement in social activities within the broader communities, as well as their willingness to learn more about Islam, which contributes to their high level of religiosity.

The second research problem formulation pertains to whether religious literacy affects religiosity. From the online survey, it can be concluded that there was little to no influence of religious literacy on religiosity, as the survey indicated only 20-21% influence. The remaining 80% of the influence may come from other factors that require further investigation.

With regard to future research, it may be beneficial to explore other aspects that may influence Gen Z religiosity, including prior education and family background. The findings will be useful for selecting Islamic learning resources for parents, schools, and government authorities.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

All authors were involved in the conceptualization and development of the idea and design of this study. Jamilah, Devi Pramitha, Asep Ubaidillah, and Md Mahmud Bin Sayeed contributed to the finalization of the manuscript. All authors approved this final manuscript for submission.

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Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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