

Mosque Library is a Source of Religious Literacy in Lombok Society

Nurul Hayati^{1)*} , Lolytasari Lolytasari²⁾ 

¹⁾²⁾UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

¹⁾nurul.hayati@uinjkt.ac.id, ²⁾lolytasari@uinjkt.ac.id

Abstract

Background: This study examines the role of mosque libraries in strengthening religious literacy within the Lombok community.

Objective: This study aims to analyze mosque library managers' perceptions of the surrounding community's religious literacy and to explore the role of mosque libraries in enhancing this literacy.

Methods: This exploratory study used a qualitative approach to collect data through interviews with informants and observations. Data analysis followed data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing stages.

Results: Findings indicate that mosque library managers in Lombok perceive the community's religious literacy as a strong religious awareness, primarily acquired through oral religious studies delivered by Tuan Guru. While mosque libraries in Lombok generally offer diverse religious literature, they often lack direct synergy with ongoing religious literacy activities organized by their respective mosque or Tuan Guru.

Conclusion: This study's findings provide a foundation understanding for the development of mosque libraries as effective sources of religious literacy, supporting the local religious traditions prevalent in Lombok society.

Keywords: Religious literacy, mosque libraries, the island of a thousand mosques

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with the most significant Muslim majority, has more than 312,545 mosques of various types spread throughout Indonesia (Kementerian Agama., 2016). In particular, Lombok Island is known as the "Island of a Thousand Mosques" (Fitriani & Naamy, 2019), reflecting the central role of Islam in the lives of its people. Lombok mosques are religiously significant and offer unique tourist attractions thanks to their historical value, architectural beauty, and cultural richness (Rachman et al., In line with this identity, the local government is actively developing the potential for halal tourism (Suyatman et al., 2018). Although the people of Lombok have high religious awareness and are highly committed to building mosques, even setting aside up to 50% of their income, the island is also known as a mosaic of diverse cultures and beliefs (Acim & Rahman, 2023).

Religious literacy is critical in the context of Lombok's religious and multicultural society. This literacy is essential to deepen understanding of history, texts, beliefs, and religious practices while critically and empathetically analyzing their intersection with social, political, and cultural dimensions (Parker, 2020; Moore, 2008). In the current era of disruption, the ability

* Corresponding Author

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to access and internalize authentic religious knowledge is crucial for Muslims in Indonesia to survive and not be easily exposed to disinformation.

Discussing religious literacy, Sofjan (2020) stated that the religious literacy program in Indonesia was first initiated by the Indonesia Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Religion, which functions as a multifaith space for joint learning between religious communities. This program involves various groups, such as religious instructors, religious teachers, and strategic groups, to integrate and share their knowledge and experiences about their respective religions.

Mosques are a characteristic of Indonesian society, especially Lombok Island, nicknamed the Island of a Thousand Mosques. The people of Lombok are committed to setting aside up to 50% of their income to build mosques. In their research, Hasanain and Muslimatusshalihah (2021) stated that although the number of mosques in East Lombok is vast, community participation in optimizing the development of mosque-based education is still lacking. Mosques are expected to teach Islamic Education and develop general knowledge to create a more religious and productive society.

In order to fulfil the need for religious literacy, mosque libraries are strategic institutions. Mosque libraries strive to manage collections of knowledge to encourage a culture of literacy among Muslims (Effendi, 2023). Then, it has the potential to serve the community without discrimination, strengthen religious literacy, and encourage religious moderation (Aziz, 2021). The presence of a mosque library not only provides access to quality collections but also creates a safe and comfortable learning space that can reduce the risk of exposure to harmful content from the internet for the younger generation (Cheris & Imbardi, 2022; Harahap Faturrahman, 2024). Historically, libraries in the Islamic world functioned as institutions for storing and disseminating knowledge (Rifai & Subchi, 2020). Ninglasari and Himmawan (2021) stated that mosque libraries in the modern era had not experienced significant development, with many studies still focusing on historical aspects rather than their use as relevant learning centres in the digital era.

Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the views of mosque library managers in Lombok regarding religious literacy patterns carried out verbally and in writing, analyzing the level of religious literacy of the surrounding community, and exploring the role of mosque libraries in strengthening religious literacy in the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have highlighted the role of mosque libraries. Sudana et al. (2022) define a mosque library as a facility in a mosque that is required to provide a special religious collection for the wider community. In line with that, Ahmed and Hashim (2020) emphasized that every country has a mosque library as a centre for religious, political, and economic knowledge. However, a common problem that often arises is the lack of adequate collection availability to meet the needs of researchers.

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On the other hand, society not only needs basic literacy but also religious literacy. Sofjan (2020) argues that religious literacy needs to be prioritized as a program of activities to realize social justice, harmony between religious communities, and multiculturalism, which are very relevant to the diversity of Indonesian culture. Even Soules (2023) emphasized the importance of religious literacy as one of the measures to prevent terrorism. However, there has not been much research that specifically examines the role of religious literacy programs in mosques. Based on research by Omar et al. (2019), mosque libraries have great potential to organize religious literacy by providing relevant collections and creating program innovations. Therefore, mosque libraries must be managed proactively and professionally with practical strategies to realize their potential.

METHODS

This research is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach, namely a research approach based on the philosophy of post-positivism, which is used to examine the condition of the object scientifically, and the research itself becomes the main instrument. Qualitative research aims to explore in-depth information related to the problem to be studied (Moleong, 2018). The data collection technique for this study uses interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted by asking unstructured questions while making a list of leading questions so that the interview remains focused on data collection. Interviews were conducted to find out the views of mosque library managers in Lombok regarding the religious literacy of the surrounding community, as well as to explore the role played by mosque libraries in strengthening religious literacy in the community.

Interviews were conducted with several informants who understand the existence and role of mosque libraries, including the Islamic Community Guidance of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of West Nusa Tenggara as the library supervisor in the West Nusa Tenggara area, the Library, and Archives Service of West Nusa Tenggara Province, the Library and Archives Service of Lombok Region, managers of mosque libraries in Lombok, mosque administrators, and community leaders who are the initiators of mosque libraries in Lombok. Meanwhile, observations were conducted in several mosques and mosque libraries in Lombok to obtain an overview of the condition of mosque libraries and the religious literacy of the community on Lombok Island. The data that has been collected is then analyzed through several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

TABLE 1.
The Source of the Research

No	The Origin of the Library Mosque	The Position in The Library
1.	Bimas Islam Kantor Wilayah Kementerian Agama Nusa Tenggara Barat	Staff
2.	Dinas Perpustakaan dan Kearsipan Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat	Staff
3.	Dinas Perpustakaan dan Kearsipan Daerah Lombok	Staff
4	Attaqwa Grand Mosque Library, Pancor Village, Selong District, East Lombok Regency	Head of Library
5	Al-Abror Mosque Library, West Lombok	Library Manager

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6	Ashhabul Haramain Mosque Library, Central Lombok	Head of Library
7	Baiturrahman Mosque Library Gili Trawangan North Lombok	Mosque Management
8	TM	Public figure

FINDINGS

This study found three things related to religious literacy in Lombok society: religious literacy practices in Lombok society, the status and condition of mosque libraries in Lombok, and utilization and community engagement with mosque libraries.

Religious Literacy Practices in Lombok Society

The people of Lombok have a high level of awareness regarding religious issues. They tend to understand religious values well and commit to carrying out religious teachings. As expressed by the informant, "*Alhamdulillah, we see that the awareness related to religious issues is extraordinary, very extraordinary*". (Noor, 2023)

Another informant said that the religious practices of the Lombok people are excellent, as evidenced by their love of going to mosques and building mosques. "*If it is religious, it can be said to be good. We think the people here like going to mosques, let alone building mosques*". (Azizah, 2023)

The statement indicates that the people of Lombok have a strong affinity for religious activities, especially in visiting mosques and being involved in mosque construction. This shows the people of Lombok's commitment to carrying out religious teachings and strong support in strengthening religious infrastructure, such as building mosques.

Religious literacy practices in Lombok society are predominantly oral. Most community members acquire religious knowledge through verbal transmission, particularly from *Tuan Guru*, who are regarded as authoritative figures in Islamic teaching. Activities such as sermons (*pengajian*), Quranic recitations (*tadarus*), and religious lectures are the primary sources of religious understanding. This strong oral tradition is culturally rooted and reinforces communal religious identity.

The Lombok community accepts more religious literacy through *Tuan Guru* than reading because the Lombok community prefers to accept rather than have to read, which requires thinking and rational skills. The following informant states that "*the acceptance of a Tuan Guru in the social life of the Sasak community is still strong. Therefore, the Sasak community accepts more literacy about religion through Tuan Guru than reading. Why? Because reading involves personal thinking and rational skills, only a few can do it. They prefer to accept*". (Rika, 2023)

This statement indicates that in the context of Lombok society, the role of the *Tuan Guru* is vital in transmitting religious knowledge and facilitating religious literacy among the

community. The Lombok community tends to respect the expertise and authority of Tuan Guru as a spiritual leader and guardian of religious traditions. They prefer to receive direct teaching from Tuan Guru as a source of religious literacy rather than relying on their reading activities.

The people of Lombok tend to follow and rely on the advice and guidance given by the Tuan Guru or ustadz in religious matters. If the Tuan Guru or ustadz suggests doing an action or following a specific teaching, the people will follow it. This statement shows that the people of Lombok view the Tuan Guru and ustadz as religious authorities who can provide direction and guidance in carrying out religious practices. They respect the knowledge and wisdom of the Tuan Guru or ustadz, and choose to follow their advice in worship and practicing religious teachings. "... it still depends on what the Tuan Guru or ustadz who is there says. So, if the Tuan Guru or ustadz suggests doing this or following this book, they will follow it". (Puji, 2023)

The people of Lombok generally have a high level of trust in Tuan Guru. This trust may arise because of Tuan Guru's knowledge, experience, or reputation as a respected figure considered to have authority in the community. Hence, the community tends to follow and respect the advice, guidelines, or directions given by Tuan Guru in various aspects of their lives. "*Because the people of Lombok do have a strong trust in the direction of Tuan Guru*". (Puji, 2023).

The dependence of the Lombok community on Tuan Guru is likely to occur because the motivation to read in the Lombok community is still low. They prefer oral culture and listening culture. "*Because they prefer oral culture and listening culture. Therefore, for example, if there is something negative, it is likely not to be filtered. Like people who are pitted against each other. Why is that? Because the education process is lacking.*" (Rika, 2023)

This aligns with Ong's (2012) theory of primary oral culture, where communication is dominated by verbal exchange rather than written text. Similarly, Moore (2007) emphasized that religious literacy must be understood within socio-cultural contexts, including local religious authority and practice.

Recent studies support this notion. Nafisah et al. (2024) found that in many *pesantren* and Islamic communities in Indonesia, oral delivery by religious leaders remains central despite increasing access to digital texts. Yusak et al. (2021) further elaborate that religious literacy should evolve into reflective, contextual, and participatory practices to support faith resilience in modern communities.

However, reliance on oral traditions can limit the development of critical literacy—the ability to evaluate, interpret, and reflect on religious teachings independently. According to Ellis (2020), religious literacy in the modern world should empower individuals to understand religion empathetically yet critically. Imamah and Lee (2024) further stress that literacy in Indonesia must incorporate both oral and textual approaches to foster inclusive and transformative religious understanding.

Although mosque libraries offer access to religious literature, such as *tafsir* and *hadith* collections, these remain underutilized due to the community's low reading motivation and stronger dependence on verbal instruction. This illustrates a gap between available resources and preferred learning modalities.

Status and Condition of Mosque Libraries in Lombok

Despite Lombok's reputation as "The Island of a Thousand Mosques," the existence of mosque libraries is limited and uneven. The study identified only four mosque libraries that are active to varying degrees: Attaqwa Grand Mosque Library (East Lombok), Al-Abror Mosque Library (West Lombok), Ashhabul Haramain Mosque Library (Central Lombok), and Baiturrahman Mosque Library (Gili Trawangan, North Lombok).

The Attaqwa Mosque Library stands out as a model of institutional initiative. With a dedicated two-story building and a vision to serve as an Islamic educational and recreational space, it has integrated literacy with the mosque's social and spiritual mission. In contrast, the Al-Abror Mosque Library, established in the 1980s, appears inactive mainly. Observations revealed dusty shelves, damaged chairs, and a locked reading area, indicating minimal engagement and weak maintenance.

Similarly, the Ashhabul Haramain Mosque Library faces institutional ambiguity as it operates within the mosque but remains administratively under the village office. This duality complicates access to resources and external support. The Baiturrahman Mosque Library, however, provides a promising example of a grassroots literacy initiative. Run by youth volunteers, it hosts creative learning programs such as reading classes and craft workshops, emphasizing community ownership and adaptability.

These findings echo Nasrullah (2022), who argues that mosque libraries generally suffer from poor infrastructure, limited collections, and a lack of professional management. A systematic review by Hasan (2024) also highlighted that mosque libraries function more as symbolic institutions than active learning centres. Similarly, Mahfooz (2020) observed comparable conditions in Nigeria, where mosque libraries were underfunded and poorly integrated into religious life. Aziz (2021) emphasizes the need for proactive, strategic development to bridge the gap between the mosque library's ideal and its real function. Without reform, mosque libraries risk becoming irrelevant in an increasingly digital society. Hariyah (2023) adds that mosque libraries should be reframed as inclusive spaces that foster social harmony and religious learning for diverse groups.

Utilization and Community Engagement with Mosque Libraries

The level of community engagement with mosque libraries is relatively low. Most people prefer using digital tools such as Google for information, which they perceive as more accessible and convenient. One respondent noted, "Browsing and reading can be done casually while lying down, at home, anywhere, and anytime" (Noor, 2023). This shift toward digital consumption indicates changing literacy behaviour, consistent with Kusumawatie et al. (2022),

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who advocate for the digital transformation of libraries through inclusive, technology-based services.

Moreover, the lack of integration between mosque libraries and community religious activities hampers library utilization. Although *Tuan Guru* plays a central role in shaping religious consciousness, they rarely participate in library programming. This institutional disconnect reduces the mosque library's perceived relevance and contribution to religious life. Maulidya et al. (2024) stress the importance of collaboration between religious leaders and literacy institutions to counter misinformation and strengthen community resilience.

Conversely, the case of the Gili Trawangan Children's Beach Library (ABGT Library) illustrates the value of participatory models. Initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic by a local woman and supported by youth volunteers, this library offers religious reading materials and dance, cooking, and craft classes. Such holistic programs embody UNESCO's (2023) vision of adaptive literacy: community-driven, context-sensitive, and socially empowering.

In addition, Cokrohadisumarto Sari (2024) proposes a mosque-based integrated empowerment model that combines religious education with skills training, financial literacy, and social services. This integrative approach increases mosque library utilization and makes the mosque a true centre of community development. Labibah et al. (2023) demonstrate how academic-community partnerships—particularly through Islamic higher education—can enhance community engagement with library and information services.

To enhance mosque library utilization, there needs to be a more integrated approach involving *Tuan Guru*, mosque administrators, local government, and the broader community. Programs combining oral and written traditions—such as book reading guided by *Tuan Guru* or community study circles—can bridge cultural norms and modern literacy goals.

DISCUSSION

Lombok, an island in Indonesia, is known for its many mosques. However, although the number of mosques on the island reaches thousands, not all are equipped with libraries. Most mosques in Lombok do not have library facilities. This can be considered a deficiency in the island's religious infrastructure. The lack of libraries in most mosques in Lombok can have several implications. First, access to literature and reading materials related to religion and science may be limited. This can limit the opportunities for residents to deepen their religious knowledge and improve their understanding. Second, mosque libraries can provide information and knowledge for the surrounding community. With the presence of libraries in mosques, the community can access various books and references that are useful in everyday life, such as prayer guides, religious literature, and educational books.

Mosque libraries have not significantly contributed to religious study activities in mosques. Mosque libraries have not become the primary source or link in the series of religious study activities carried out in the mosque. The limited contribution of mosque libraries to religious study activities can have several implications. First, teachers or preachers may have

limited access to relevant reading materials or references when conducting religious studies. This can limit the quality and diversity of teaching materials delivered to the congregation. Second, a mosque library that does not significantly contribute to religious studies activities may also mean a lack of initiative from the management to expand the collection and promote the use of the library as a learning resource and reference for teachers and congregations. In order to improve the role of the mosque library in religious studies activities, several steps can be taken. First, it is important to increase the awareness and understanding of mosque managers of the benefits that libraries can provide in supporting religious studies activities.

This can involve counselling, training, and cooperation with related parties. Second, mosque managers can work with local communities, educational institutions, or other libraries to expand the collection of religious books and references available in the mosque library. This can enrich learning resources and open opportunities for teachers and congregations to develop religious knowledge and understanding. With these steps, it is hoped that mosque libraries can make a more outstanding contribution to religious studies activities, enrich the religious and educational experiences of the congregation, and improve the quality of teaching in the mosque.

Unfortunately, the mosque library has not supported religious literacy or religious activities of the community around the mosque. The mosque library still lacks fulfilling religious books for the congregation because the existing collection tends to be more about general knowledge. This means that the book collection in the mosque library does not adequately accommodate the congregation's religious literacy needs. The lack of support from the mosque library in religious literacy and community religious activities can have a significant impact. First, the congregation may have limited access to religious reading materials that can be used as sources of learning and increasing religious understanding. Second, the availability of relevant religious book collections can affect the quality and diversity of teaching materials delivered by preachers or teachers in the mosque. This can also limit the development of the congregation's religious knowledge and the development of a deeper understanding of religion. Steps can be taken to increase the support of the mosque library for religious literacy and community religious activities. First, mosque managers need to pay attention to the congregation's needs and expand the collection of religious books relevant to various aspects of religion. Second, the mosque library can collaborate with educational institutions, religious organizations, or other libraries to gain access to more complete religious books. In addition, mosque managers also need to integrate libraries in the planning and implementing of religious activities so that libraries can be a helpful source of reference for the congregation and the community around the mosque.

With these steps, it is hoped that mosque libraries can actively advance religious literacy and support more affluent and beneficial religious activities for the congregation and the community around the mosque. Nurdin Laugu (2006) stated that the role of mosques is a determinant in the development of Islamic religion and civilization. With this role in prosperity, the mosque has three essential functions in society: social, political, and educational. With these three functions, the mosque is not only a place of worship but also a place where the mosque can function to prosper and educate the community. One approach to prospering the mosque is to establish a mosque library as one of the efforts to practice a culture of learning throughout

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time. This is proof of the mosque as a symbol of the greatness of Islam, which purifies the soul, increases intellectuality, and develops social relations in society (Nordin Bin Ahmad, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that mosque libraries in Lombok play a limited yet potential role in strengthening religious literacy within the community. Religious literacy practices are predominantly oral, with *Tuan Guru* as the central figure in transmitting religious knowledge through sermons and religious gatherings. While this oral tradition fosters communal religiosity and cultural continuity, it has contributed to a lower engagement with written texts and independent learning.

The condition of mosque libraries across Lombok varies widely. Some libraries, such as the Attaqwa Grand Mosque Library, demonstrate progress in facilities and programming, while others remain inactive or under-resourced. These disparities stem from limited budgets, lack of trained personnel, and insufficient coordination with mosque and community leaders.

Community engagement with mosque libraries remains generally low. The rise of digital technology, the dominance of oral culture, and the absence of integrated programs with religious authorities such as *Tuan Guru* have all contributed to the marginalization of mosque libraries. Nonetheless, grassroots initiatives like the Baiturrahman Gili Trawangan Library show that youth participation and community-led literacy programs can revitalize interest in religious learning.

To enhance their impact, mosque libraries in Lombok must develop inclusive, adaptive, and participatory literacy models. These should integrate oral and written traditions, align with cultural and technological shifts, and engage key stakeholders in religious education. By doing so, mosque libraries can transform into vibrant knowledge centres that promote critical and reflective religious literacy.

This study has several limitations. It focused on only a few mosque libraries and relied primarily on qualitative interviews and observations. The absence of recent statistical data on the total number and condition of Lombok mosque libraries limits the findings' generalizability. In addition, the study did not include direct input from *Tuan Guru*, who is central to religious life in Lombok. Future research could explore the perspectives of *Tuan Guru*, examine the impact of digital religious platforms on literacy practices, or conduct a quantitative survey on mosque library usage across different regions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

[Nurul Hayati]: Conceptualization, methodology, original draft writing, review and editing, supervision. [Lolytasari Lolytasari]: Software development, investigation, data curation, writing the original draft.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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