

INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP ON INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY: A STUDY OF JESUIT LEADERSHIP

***Binu Michael, **Sajeev H**

Abstract

This study examines the influence of Jesuit leadership on institutional quality among teaching faculty in Jesuit colleges in Kerala. Grounded in Lowney's (2003) Ignatian framework, self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism. The study adopts a descriptive analytical design using purposive sampling of 115 faculty members across four institutions. Findings reveal a consistently high perception of Jesuit leadership across all four dimensions, with largely uniform influence across age, experience, faculty stream, tenure, and institution type. Limited gender and religion-based variations were observed in specific dimensions. Overall, Jesuit leadership functions as a stable, inclusive, and values-driven model that positively shapes institutional quality, faculty commitment, and academic culture.

Keywords:- Jesuit leadership, institutional quality, higher education, faculty perception, Ignatian values.

Leadership is increasingly recognised as a central determinant of institutional quality in higher education. How stakeholders perceive leadership shapes their engagement, commitment, and professional conduct (Paola, 2023). In mission-driven institutions such as Jesuit

colleges, leadership is rooted in a distinctive set of values that transcend managerial competence. Researchers affirm that leadership concepts and practices can be taught and systematically cultivated to enhance effectiveness (Doh, 2003).

The Jesuit contribution to higher education is widely recognised; multiple

**Binu Michael, Research Scholar, Government Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram,
E-mail: binumichaelsj@gmail.com*

***Sajeev H, Associate Professor, Government Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram*

Jesuit institutions in India have consistently ranked among the top in India Today surveys (2005, 2006, 2024, 2025) and in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF, 2022–2025). This study investigates how teaching faculty in Kerala's Jesuit colleges perceive Jesuit leadership and how that perception influences institutional quality.

2. Scope of the Study

The study is confined to teaching faculty in four Jesuit-managed degree colleges in Kerala. It focuses on the perception of Jesuit leadership across four Ignatian dimensions and its influence on institutional quality parameters such as faculty morale, academic engagement, and governance effectiveness. The study does not extend to non-teaching staff, students, or Jesuit institutions outside Kerala.

3. Significance of the Study

While leadership research in Indian higher education is growing, empirical studies that specifically examine Jesuit leadership's influence on institutional quality remain scarce. This study contributes original evidence from a unique institutional context, offering insights relevant to mission-driven higher education institutions globally. The findings are significant for Jesuit educational administrators, quality assurance bodies, and researchers interested in values-based leadership and its impact on institutional effectiveness.

4. Review of Literature

Leadership is widely recognised as a central determinant of institutional quality in higher education, shaping governance structures, academic culture, faculty

motivation, and quality assurance mechanisms (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Harvey & Green, 1993; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). Bass and Riggio (2006) demonstrate that transformational leadership enhances institutional commitment by articulating a compelling vision and fostering intellectual stimulation among followers, a finding that has been extensively replicated in educational settings. Servant leadership, as conceptualised by Greenleaf (1977) and elaborated by Eva et al. (2019), emphasises trust, empowerment, and relational support. Eva et al.'s (2019) systematic review of 285 empirical studies confirms that servant leadership significantly improves faculty attitudes, work engagement, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Lamijan et al. (2025) further establish that servant leadership enhances faculty job satisfaction in higher education through the complementary mediation of trust, with motivation-to-serve as a critical antecedent.

Within this broader leadership discourse, Jesuit leadership is conceptualised as a distinctly values-based and mission-centred model grounded in *cura personalis*, discernment, integrity, community building, and a commitment to excellence and social justice (Lowney, 2005; Traub, 2008). Spears (2010) identifies ten characteristics of servant leaders including listening, empathy, healing, and stewardship that map directly onto Jesuit leadership values, underscoring the conceptual overlap between servant and Jesuit leadership models.

Lee (2023), in a multi-site doctoral study of Jesuit universities in Asia, identifies measurable dimensions of Jesuit

leadership and finds that collaboration is the critical mechanism linking leadership values to institutional outcomes. Senior management and faculty generally perceive Jesuit leadership as effective in promoting a collaborative and mission-driven culture. Fikiri (2024) argues that communal discernment and inclusive, synodal leadership practices are especially relevant in contemporary Jesuit higher education, as they broaden participation and strengthen shared mission in complex academic environments. Regarding perception and its impact, Espinosa (2025) demonstrates that how leaders are perceived by their teams significantly impacts workplace morale, trust, and credibility, concluding that leadership perception is more influential than formal authority. Weaver (2024) reinforces this by showing that perceptions held by team members shape their behaviour and collective performance. Sagdeo (2023) further argues that effective leaders must actively manage how they are viewed by stakeholders to improve institutional effectiveness. Mindeger et al. (2025) synthesise these insights by establishing a direct relationship between perception of leadership and the overall quality of an institution, including its culture, effectiveness, and outcomes.

Širec and Rožman (2025) highlight collaborative leadership as a key quality assurance mechanism, demonstrating through a case study that participatory approaches to developing strategic quality manuals produce more robust and institutionally owned outcomes. Cardoso, Rosa, and Stensaker (2013) complement this by examining the academic perspective on quality, finding that

institutional quality is perceived through lenses of transparency, governance, and professional autonomy. Taken together, this body of literature establishes that leadership influences institutional quality not merely through formal authority or administrative structures, but through values, relationships, participation, and perception.

5. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Lowney's (2003) framework of Jesuit leadership, which draws on the 450-year-old organisational wisdom of the Society of Jesus one of history's most enduring and globally impactful organisations. Lowney identifies four pillars that constitute the Jesuit leadership model:

- (i) **Self-Awareness:** Leaders are called to deeply understand themselves their strengths, weaknesses, values, and worldview. This ongoing self-examination fosters humility, courage, wisdom, and commitment. Jesuit formation programmes, rooted in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, cultivate this reflective capacity systematically. Self-awareness is not merely introspective but relational; it equips leaders to understand others and respond with discernment rather than reaction.
- (ii) **Ingenuity:** Jesuit leaders are trained to boldly innovate, remain flexible, and detach from the status quo. They adapt quickly to changing environments, embrace uncertainty, and approach problems creatively. This pillar explains the historic Jesuit capacity to operate effectively across vastly different cultures, nations, and

institutional contexts. In higher education, ingenuity translates into adaptive curriculum design, innovative governance models, and responsiveness to emerging academic challenges.

(iii) **Love:** Jesuit leadership is characterised by a leadership of lovean authentic concern for the wellbeing and integral development of every person in the institution. This dimension closely parallels Greenleaf's servant leadership, emphasising relational integrity, emotional intelligence, and the building of communities of trust. Love, in this framework, is not sentimental but operational: it manifests in how leaders treat faculty, support students, and govern institutions.

(iv) **Heroism:** True Jesuit leaders set ambitious goals, exercise perseverance in pursuing them, and inspire others to strive for excellence and goodness. Heroism implies a magnanimous vision for the institution and the courage to sustain it through adversity. This pillar drives the aspiration toward institutional excellence that characterises Jesuit colleges globally.

These four dimensions are theoretically distinct yet deeply interconnected. Self-awareness enables authentic love; ingenuity operationalises heroic vision; love sustains the relational fabric through which heroism is collectively achieved. Together, they constitute a holistic leadership model that is both values-driven and practically

oriented. This framework provided the conceptual scaffolding for the questionnaire design, data collection, and analysis in the present study.

6. Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing influence of corporate-style leadership in Indian higher education, mission-driven Jesuit leadership continues to operate within a distinct values framework. In an era increasingly shaped by managerial approaches to governance, it is necessary to empirically examine whether and how Jesuit leadership influences institutional quality particularly as experienced by teaching faculty in Kerala. Empirical studies on this specific question remain scarce, and the present study addresses that gap.

7. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine teaching faculty's perception of Jesuit leadership across four Ignatian dimensions.
2. To assess the influence of Jesuit leadership on professional functioning and institutional quality.
3. To identify leadership-related challenges and propose actionable recommendations.

8. Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design to examine faculty perceptions of Jesuit leadership in colleges across Kerala. The descriptive component focuses on characterising the levels of perception regarding Jesuit leadership, while the analytical component investigates the relationship between socio-demographic variables and these perceptions. The target population

comprised all teaching faculty working in Jesuit-managed colleges in Kerala. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of respondents with direct exposure to Jesuit institutional leadership. Four Jesuit colleges were deliberately selected based on criteria such as institutional diversity (aided and unaided), geographic distribution, and representation of both Arts and Science streams. This non-probability sampling approach was considered appropriate for capturing context-specific insights. The final sample consisted of 115 teaching faculty members. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two parts. Part I captured ten socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, religion, teaching experience, faculty stream, type of institution, and tenure. Part II included 15 Likert-scale statements designed to measure faculty perceptions of Jesuit leadership across the four Ignatian dimensions: self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism. Additionally, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with senior faculty members to supplement and enrich the quantitative findings. For data analysis, the collected data were processed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise perception levels, while inferential statistical techniques were applied to test relationships between variables.

9. Analysis and Findings

Table 1 reveals that the perception of Jesuit leadership is largely uniform across most socio-demographic groups. Age ($F = .469-.918$, $p > .05$), teaching experience ($F = .144-.536$, $p > .05$), faculty

stream ($F = .243-1.758$, $p > .05$), institution type ($t = -.778$ to $.417$, $p > .05$), and tenure ($t = -.692$ to 1.238 , $p > .05$) show no statistically significant differences across all four leadership dimensions. However, significant gender differences emerge in self-awareness ($t = -2.54$, $p = .013$) and love ($t = -2.51$, $p = .013$), with female faculty recording higher scores. A significant religion-based difference appears only in the ingenuity dimension ($F = 4.914$, $p = .009$), where Muslim respondents score lower than Hindu and Christian peers.

Table 2 reveals distinct perception profiles across the four Ignatian dimensions. Self-awareness is perceived as high by 80.9 per cent of faculty, reflecting strong awareness of the reflective and formative character of Jesuit leadership. Love is similarly perceived as high by 79.2 per cent, affirming the relational and caring dimensions of Jesuit governance. Heroism records a high perception among 66.1 per cent of respondents, while ingenuity is the only dimension where the majority (49.6 per cent) falls in the moderate category, suggesting a perceived gap between the espoused Jesuit value of creativity and its institutional manifestation. Overall, 54.8 per cent of faculty perceive Jesuit leadership as high and 40 per cent as moderate, with only 5.2 per cent reporting a low perception.

10. Key Findings

Based on the analysis, the following key findings emerge:

- **High Overall Perception:** Over 54 per cent of faculty perceive Jesuit leadership positively across all four Ignatian dimensions. The self-

Table 1
Relationship between Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Perception of Jesuit Leadership

Socio Demographic Characteristics	Classification	No	Jesuit Leadership Dimensions									
			Self-Awareness		Ingenuity		Love		Heroism		Overall	
			F / t Value	Sig	F / t Value	Sig	F / t Value	Sig	F / t Value	Sig	F / t Value	Sig
Age	Below 35 Yrs	50	.615	.542	.118	.888	.918	.402	.442	.644	.469	.627
	36 to 50 Yrs	47										
	Above 50 Yrs	18										
Gender	Male	47	-2.54	.013	-.488	.626	-2.51	.013	-.526	.600	-1.85	.067
	Female	68										
Religion	Hindu	36	2.574	.081	4.914	.009	2.586	.080	1.452	.238	2.126	.124
	Christian	76										
	Muslim	3										
Experience	Below 3 Yrs	28	.417	.660	.536	.587	.502	.607	.144	.866	.264	.768
	3 to 7 Yrs	49										
	Above 7 Yrs	38										
Faculty	Arts	73	.507	.613	1.758	.081	.243	.808	.635	.527	.729	.467
	Science	42										
Type	Aided	95	-.778	.438	-.548	.585	.417	.677	-.326	.745	-.360	.720
	Un Aided	20										
Tenure	Regular	50	.650	.517	-1.31	.190	1.238	.218	1.042	.299	.692	.490
	Temporary	65										

Source: Primary Data

Table 2
Perception of Jesuit Leadership Dimensions among Teaching Faculty

Dimension of Leadership	Perception Level							
	Low		Moderate		High		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Self-Awareness	8	7.0	14	12.1	93	80.9	115	100
Ingenuity	6	5.2	57	49.6	52	45.2	115	100
Love	12	10.4	12	10.4	91	79.2	115	100
Heroism	20	17.4	19	16.5	76	66.1	115	100
Overall	6	5.2	46	40.0	63	54.8	115	100

Source: Primary Data

awareness (80.9 per cent high) and love (79.2 per cent high) dimensions record the strongest perception, affirming the continued relevance and effectiveness of the values-based Jesuit model in Kerala’s higher education context.

- **Uniform Influence across Most Variables:** Age, experience, faculty stream, institution type, and tenure exert no significant influence on leadership perception, underscoring the inclusive and mission-driven character of Jesuit institutions and the consistency of the leadership

culture irrespective of demographic diversity.

- **Gender-Based Variation in Relational Dimensions:** Female faculty report significantly higher perception in self-awareness ($t = -2.54$, $p = .013$) and love ($t = -2.51$, $p = .013$) dimensions, indicating that relational and reflective aspects of Jesuit leadership resonate more strongly with women. Gender differences also surface in perceived challenges around administrative support and workload management, pointing to differentiated institutional experiences.
- **Religion-Based Variation Limited to Ingenuity:** Muslim faculty rate the ingenuity dimension significantly lower ($F = 4.914$, $p = .009$) than Hindu and Christian peers, suggesting a need for more inclusive engagement in areas of institutional creativity, innovation, and change management.
- **Moderate Perception of Ingenuity:** Nearly 50 per cent of respondent's rate ingenuity as moderate, revealing a possible implementation gap Jesuit institution are perceived as rooted in reflective and relational values but less distinctly innovative in practice.
- **Qualitative Evidence of Declining Distinctiveness:** In-depth interviews with senior faculty reveal a perceived decline in the collaborative and distinctive character of Jesuit leadership compared to earlier decades, with

specific concerns raised about increasing centralisation of decision-making and reduced faculty involvement in institutional governance.

- **Positive Link between Leadership Perception and Institutional Quality:** Positive faculty perception of Jesuit leadership is strongly associated with improved morale, greater academic engagement, and a stronger quality culture. Institutions where Jesuit values are authentically practiced demonstrate higher faculty commitment and academic output.

11. Suggestions

- **Structured Leadership Formation Programmes:** Introduce periodic, structured formation programmes for Jesuit administrators and academic leaders focusing on the four Ignatian pillars particularly self-awareness and ingenuity to ensure consistent and deepened leadership practice across all institutional levels.
- **Gender-Sensitive Institutional Policies:** Implement structured dialogue forums and workload review mechanisms to address gender-specific concerns, particularly around administrative support and equitable work distribution. Leadership should adopt proactive gender-sensitive policies to ensure inclusive institutional experiences for all faculty.
- **Enhancing Ingenuity and Institutional Creativity:** Create platforms such as faculty innovation labs, interdisciplinary research

clusters, and collaborative project grants to translate Jesuit values of ingenuity into visible academic practice. Leadership should signal creativity as a core institutional value through resource allocation and recognition mechanisms.

- **Transparent and Participatory Governance:** Ensure institutional decisions and rationales are communicated openly and uniformly. Strengthen participatory governance by actively involving faculty in academic planning, quality assurance cycles, and institutional policy formulation, thereby reversing the perceived trend toward centralisation.
- **Institutionalise Regular Perception Surveys:** Annual faculty perception surveys and consultative forums should be institutionalised to monitor leadership effectiveness, identify emerging challenges, and enable timely, evidence-based course correction.
- **Interfaith and Inclusive Engagement Programmes:** Develop value-based orientation and interfaith dialogue initiatives to strengthen a shared sense of institutional mission among faculty

of all religious backgrounds, particularly addressing the lower ingenuity perception among Muslim respondents.

- **Sustained Faculty Development:** Align faculty development programmes with Ignatian values through mentoring schemes, research support, and professional growth opportunities, reinforcing the link between leadership values and institutional quality outcomes.

12. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Jesuit leadership is perceived positively by the majority of teaching faculty in Kerala's Jesuit colleges and exerts a largely uniform, inclusive influence across diverse socio-demographic groups. The four Ignatian dimensions self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism continue to shape institutional culture, faculty engagement, and academic quality. While targeted attention is needed on ingenuity, gender equity, and decision-making transparency, the overall findings affirm that Jesuit leadership remains a distinctive, values-driven model capable of sustaining academic excellence. Strengthening formation programmes, participatory governance, and inclusive practices will be essential for preserving this leadership tradition in the evolving landscape of Indian higher education.

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