

# A study on Jesuit education based on official Jesuit documents

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**Abstract:** The Jesuits, a Catholic religious order, have historically employed educational activities and institutions as a principal means to fulfill their core Christian mission of evangelization. In line with their foundational goals, the Jesuits developed their own educational methods, maintaining a faith-based approach to education that has endured for centuries across the world. Through these efforts, they have gained numerous followers and attained lasting success in disseminating their beliefs globally. This study explores the educational philosophy of the Jesuits—an order with nearly five centuries of history— and the characteristics of the key stakeholders in Jesuit education: teachers, students, and parents. Using a historical research design, the study analyzes official Jesuit documents approved by the Jesuit General Congregation through document analysis. The collected data are evaluated through descriptive analysis. The aim is to compile the general principles of Jesuit educational thought and its educational stakeholders into a comprehensive text, and to contribute to the literature by offering recommendations that may inform future research.

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## Introduction

The verse in the Bible stating, “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’” (*Mark 16:15-16*), underscores that evangelization is regarded as a divinely mandated obligation in Christianity. This obligation is expressed through the concept of mission.

Christianity, the religion with the largest number of adherents worldwide (*Share of Global Population by Religion 2022*), has diversified into numerous denominations, orders, and congregational bodies, all of which pursue the fulfillment of this missionary mandate. This diversification has not only expanded the global reach of Christianity but also endowed it with a profound and enduring historical legacy. One of the most influential religious orders in spreading Christianity across all continents has been the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits.

The Jesuits, officially known at the time of their foundation as the Society of Jesus, were established in 1528 under the leadership of Ignatius of Loyola. Born in 1491 in Spain, Ignatius pursued a military career until an injury compelled him to abandon this path. Influenced by a book he read during his recovery, he resolved to become a “Soldier of Christ” (*2 Timothy 2:3-4*) and embraced a monastic life in the Manresa Monastery (*Montserrat Monastery and Nature Park, 2025*) between 1522 and 1523. In 1523, he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and, upon his return, pursued formal education at various institutions, ultimately earning a Master’s degree in Philosophy at the University of Paris in 1534 (Tümer, 1993). During his studies, Ignatius formed a fellowship with six companions and established a group

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under the name “Society of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> These members took vows of poverty, chastity, and a commitment to immediately travel to Jerusalem to evangelize non-Christians or if this were not possible, to serve the Pope. When it became evident that traveling to Jerusalem was unfeasible, they resolved to offer their service to the Pope. As a result, Ignatius of Loyola was appointed the founding superior general of the Jesuit order, which was officially recognized by the Pope and the Catholic Church in 1540. Despite experiencing occasional tensions with Church authorities, the Jesuits have remained loyal to the Catholic Church and continue to exist to the present day (Tümer, 1993). Throughout this entire process, the Jesuits have played a significant role in the Catholic Church, representing it in the field (Şana, 2019, p. 1385).

The Jesuits undertook the mission (Gündüz, 2020) of spreading Christianity and pursued all their activities with the primary goal of disseminating the message of Jesus. This objective is clearly articulated in their foundational document, the Formula of the Institute, which states that the Society aims “to strive especially for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and for the propagation of the faith by the ministry of the word, by spiritual exercises and works of charity, and specifically by the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity” (*Formula the Institute, 1540*). St. Ignatius, who asserted that Christianity should be extended to all humanity and that Christians must live their faith uncompromisingly, established stringent rules regarding admission and commitment to the order. Furthermore, he articulated the methods by which these aims should be pursued and the character formation required within the Society in three key documents: *the Formula the Institute* (St. Ignatius, 1539), *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (Jesuits, 1996) and *the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Ignatius, 1548). Although education was not initially the Jesuits’ primary focus (McGucken, 2008, p. 6), they soon recognized its crucial role in maintaining order within the Society, training missionaries, and reaching people through educational means. This early realization is reflected in the foundational Jesuit documents and laid the groundwork for what would become the extensive network of Jesuit schools that continue to operate around the world today.

Between 1540 and 1773, the Jesuits established numerous schools. During this period, the Jesuits experienced their golden age in terms of education, as their schools gained considerable popularity, expanded globally, and attracted many followers (Tümer, 1993). By 1773, the number of Jesuits had reached 23,000, and the number of institutions, such as colleges and residences, had grown to 1,600. At that time, the Jesuits had become the primary educational organization of the Catholic world, employing 15,000 teachers in 800 colleges. Between 1773 and 1814, due to various conflicts with the Papacy, the activities of the Society were disrupted. However, from 1814 onward, Jesuit educational efforts intensified in Asia and the Far East—including India, China, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, and Malaysia—as well as in African countries such as the Congo, Madagascar, and Kenya (*Interactive Map, 2024*). As of 2020, Jesuit educational institutions remain active on all seven continents, with 839 primary and secondary schools and 195 institutions of higher education. Additionally, the Jesuits operate 1,613 local educational institutions and initiatives that provide access to education for impoverished children in remote areas, along with 75 projects and organizations dedicated to the education of refugee children and youth (*Printable Map, 2023*). Thanks to their deep historical roots and accumulated experience, the Jesuits have consistently distinguished themselves through their robust educational institutions (*Best Catholic Colleges in America, 2025*; Manney, 2010; Stone, 2023).

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, missionaries entered Ottoman territories and sought to spread Christianity through schools established in various cities across Anatolia (Tozlu, 2000). The Jesuits began to expand their presence within the Ottoman Empire from 1563 onward. Under the direction of Pope Gregory XIII, Jesuit missionaries designated the Saint Benoît Church in Galata as their central base (Şışman, 1999, p. 516). In 1583, the Saint Benoît School was established, marking the first school founded jointly by the French and the Jesuits in Ottoman lands (Şana, 2019, p. 61). Thus, the Jesuits began their missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire through educational institutions (Gözübüyük, 2018, p. 639). However, due to a series of disputes, the school was handed over in 1783 to another order, the Lazarists,<sup>2</sup> effectively ending Jesuit control over the institution (*Dört Yüzyıllık Bir Tarih, 2022*). In

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Jesuits' is commonly preferred in the literature; therefore, this study consistently employs this designation throughout the text. The Society of Jesus also affirms the use of this term on their official website. See: <https://www.jesuits.org/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup> The Jesuits arrived in the Ottoman territories through the mediation of French envoys. However, over time, they became central figures

addition to this school, the Jesuits established several other schools between the 17th and 19th centuries in regions such as Lebanon, Syria, and Aleppo (Şana, 2019, pp. 63–67), as well as in cities of Adana (Karlancı, 2018, p. 178), Kayseri (Tekin & Karaca, 2019, p. 514), Tokat, Amasya, and Hatay (Özkan, 2021, p. 44). Today, there are no officially recognized Jesuit schools operating in Türkiye (*Printable Map*, 2023). This is due to the Law on the Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*) enacted on March 3, 1924, which placed all schools—including foreign institutions—under the authority of the Ministry of National Education (Arı, 2002, pp. 189–190).

Throughout history, the various institutions and organizations founded by the Jesuits have remained committed to their mission: “to form men and women of competence, conscience, and compassion by imitating Jesus Christ” (ICAJE, 1993, p. 5). In line with this mission, Jesuit schools have educated globally renowned figures such as the French philosopher René Descartes, the Scottish philosopher David Hume, Ottoman intellectual Beşir Fuad, music producer Ahmet Ertegun, Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel García Márquez, former U.S. President Bill Clinton (Ata, 2016, p. IV), and Pope Francis (*Biography Francis*, 2025).

Since its foundation in 1528, the Jesuits have drawn significant attention through their religious views, way of life, activities, schools, and various institutions. This study aims to examine the Jesuit approach to education based on official Jesuit documents. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyze the philosophical foundations of Jesuit education
- To examine the stakeholders involved in Jesuit education.

Accordingly, the study is limited to the educational activities presented in official Jesuit documents and the core texts approved by the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. The official documents used in the study were obtained from official Jesuit websites.

The continued existence of this order, which has consistently emphasized education and yielded observable results throughout history, further underscores the significance of its educational activities. Moreover, because the Jesuits aim to spread religion and train candidates for the order within their schools, their educational model should be particularly considered within the context of modern religious education. Nevertheless, there appears to be no direct academic study in the literature that systematically examines Jesuit educational thought based on primary Jesuit documents. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the educational philosophy and practices of the Jesuit order as a religious institution and to contribute to the scholarly literature in the field of religious education.

The significance of this study is grounded in two main considerations. First, a review of the existing Turkish literature reveals a gap in academic studies that analyze Jesuit educational practices explicitly based on the official documents of the Jesuits and the official websites of institutions affiliated with the order. Although there are numerous studies in the literature addressing various aspects of Christian sects and orders—such as Essenism (Akalin, 2008), Evangelicalism (M. Aydın, 2005; Gündüz, 2006; Yamaç, 2022), Mormonism (Aktay, 2003; Işık, 2006; Kızılabdullah & Kızılabdullah, 2012), the Franciscans (Ayna, 2021; Şahin, 2020; Işık, 2005), Dominicans (Esen, 2017, 2020), Benedictines (Taşpınar & Güzeldal, 2020) and Orthodox (Çorbacı & Er, 2022)—there is a noticeable absence of work that systematically examines Jesuit education grounded in primary Jesuit sources. Additionally, it should be noted that the literature includes studies that examine the Jesuits from various perspectives (Akbaş, 2021; Ata, 2016; Birsal, 2013; Gözübüyük, 2018; Gür, 2024; İstek, 2019; Karlancı, 2018; Kolçak, 2016; Güngör, 2001; Özturan, 2025; Şana, 2019; Şenyurt, 2019; Tekin & Karaca, 2019; Tıglioğlu Kapıcı, 2020; Yel, 1998).

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in a number of tensions due to their involvement in political affairs as well as their inability to establish harmonious relations with other Christian communities in the region. Owing to internal turmoil in France, they were also unable to receive adequate support from their home country. As a result, the Jesuits were expelled from the Ottoman Empire in 1783. For a more detailed account, see: (Gözübüyük, 2018).

The second reason for the importance of this study lies in the global scope and sustained growth of Jesuit educational activities. Jesuit education has reached a wide international audience and continues to expand across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Understanding the underlying principles, methodologies, and pedagogical techniques that contribute to this development offers valuable insights for the field of educational pedagogy. A study of this nature not only addresses a gap in the academic understanding of Jesuit educational aims and practices but also makes a meaningful contribution to the broader literature on religious and value-based education. The introduction section should also include current literature. In this context, studies published in the last three years indexed in Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus should be taken into consideration.

## 1. Methodology

### 1.1. Research Design

Historical research seeks to answer the question “What happened in the past?” by carefully examining historical documents and, where applicable, conducting interviews with individuals who witnessed the events. The researcher aims to understand what occurred during that time as accurately as possible and to explain why it happened (Büyükoztürk et al., 2022, p. 21). This study employed a historical research design. The rationale behind selecting this design is that the analysis was based on historical documents, a method considered ideal for examining such sources. Initially, official Jesuit documents were reviewed, and those pertaining to the field of education were selected. In addition, the official websites of the Jesuits were consulted as secondary sources. The documents related to education during the establishment and expansion periods of the Jesuits were analyzed in detail, with particular attention given to educational issues. The data collected through this process were compiled to reveal the fundamental educational philosophy of the Jesuits.

### 1.2. Sources of the Research

This study is grounded in official Jesuit documents related to the field of education. These sources include *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (Jesuits, 1996), *Ratio Studiorum* (Farrell, 1970), *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (Jesuit Institute, 2014), and *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (ICAJE, 1993). A common feature of these documents is that they were prepared and officially approved by the Jesuits for use in the field of education. All of these documents are publicly accessible in PDF format via the official websites of Jesuit educational institutions.<sup>3</sup>

*The Constitutions* (Jesuits, 1996)—approved during the First General Congregation (*The Portal to Jesuit Studies*, 2025) in 1558—represent a foundational document outlining the rules governing religious practices, missionary activities, and educational policies of the order. Several decrees adopted during subsequent General Congregations also address the field of education. For instance, Decree 28 of the 31st General Congregation and Decrees 17 and 18 of the 34th General Congregation provide insights into the educational practices of the order. The *Ratio Studiorum* (Farrell, 1970), written in 1599 by a committee chaired by Claudio Acquaviva, the Superior General, served as the official educational manual of the Jesuits until 1773. This document provides guidance on the duration of lessons, class timetables, approved reading materials, and classical authors to be taught (particularly Latin and Greek), as well as instructional methods and techniques. Additionally, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (Jesuit Institute, 2014), approved in 1986, aims to define the distinct identity and mission of Jesuit educational institutions. *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (ICAJE, 1993) was adopted in 1993, and offers practical insights into classroom management and Jesuit teaching traditions (*Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm*, 2025). Alongside these documents, other texts produced during General Congregations were also reviewed and utilized when directly relevant to the specific focus of this study.

<sup>3</sup> See the following for access to these documents: [https://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/characteristics\\_en.pdf](https://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/characteristics_en.pdf) [https://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/pedagogy\\_en.pdf](https://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/pedagogy_en.pdf); <https://www.educatemagis.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/2019/09/ratio-studiorum-1599.pdf> <https://www.manresa.ie/sites/default/files/2024-9/Constitutions%20and%20Norms%20SJ%20ingls.pdf>

### 1.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data for this study were gathered through document analysis, a method commonly employed in historical research. Document analysis is a systematic qualitative research technique used to examine and interpret in depth both printed and electronic materials. This method requires deriving meaning from texts and analyzing the data to develop an understanding of the subject matter.

A preliminary literature review was conducted to identify existing studies relevant to the research topic. Subsequently, official Jesuit documents and publications were selected and analyzed. During the selection process, particular attention was given to whether the documents were authored by Jesuit founders, approved in any General Congregation for educational use, or specified for use in Jesuit schools (Kiral, 2020, p. 173). When necessary, the official websites of Jesuit organizations and schools were consulted to provide additional context or data. The information obtained during the data collection process was analyzed through descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis involves summarizing and interpreting data based on predetermined themes (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2016, p. 224). In the context of this study, official Jesuit documents were analyzed in relation to the educational philosophy of the Jesuits, the stakeholders in Jesuit education, and the nature of higher religious education within the order.

## 2. Jesuit Education

### 2.1. Philosophy of Jesuit Education

According to the foundational constitution, the ultimate aim of the Jesuits is “to serve apostolic objectives, that is, to be helpful to oneself and others with the assistance of God” (Jesuits, 1996, p. 132). The critical element here is the meaning of the expression “apostolic objectives.” The term “apostle” refers to those who believed in and supported the prophets of God, particularly the twelve individuals chosen by Jesus Christ to assist in his mission of preaching and guidance (Cilacı, 1997). In Western languages, the term “apostle” is derived from the Greek word *apostolos*, meaning “one who is sent with authority to fulfill a mission.” According to Christian belief, after Jesus was crucified, he rose from the dead on the third day, gathered his disciples, and instructed them, saying: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creation (*Mark 16:15-16*).” Hence, he entrusted them with the mandate of evangelization, commonly referred to as “mission” in Christian theology.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the concept of apostolic objectives should be understood in this context, namely, missionary vocation centered on the proclamation of the Christian faith (Ulutürk, 2005, p. 50). The Jesuit Constitutions emphasize that “since assistance is to be provided through engagement with humanistic literature in various languages, logic, natural and moral philosophy, metaphysics, scholastic and positive theology, and Sacred Scripture, these subjects must be taught in colleges and schools (Jesuits, 1996, p. 150).” Hence, education constitutes a vital instrument in realizing the Jesuits’ ultimate apostolic aims.

In the *Ratio Studiorum*—the earliest document articulating the Jesuit educational framework—the purpose of education is defined as “educating students in service to God and the virtues indispensable for such sacred service” (Farrell, 1970, p. 62). Accordingly, subsequent documents, such as “*The Characteristics of Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*,” both composed under the supervision of Jesuit leadership, intensified the pedagogical and theological articulation of educational objectives.

The 1986 document “*The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*,” issued by the Jesuit Institute, outlines the essential principles that constitute the foundation of the Jesuit educational identity. This document articulated the educational mission in a systematic manner and provided a coherent framework to ensure that Jesuit schools adhered to a shared vision. According to this document, Jesuit education is an apostolic instrument that: views the student as a whole person; encourages learning through both curricular and extracurricular activities; advocates lifelong education; connects knowledge

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<sup>4</sup> The responsibilities assigned to the apostles are referenced in various passages of the Holy Scripture. For instance, “He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach...” (Mark 3:14), and “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:18–19).



with values; pursues genuine understanding; emphasizes justice and concern for the poor; nurtures individuals who act on behalf of others (Boryczka & Petrino, 2012, p. 106); highlights the humanity of Jesus Christ; supports dialogue between faith and culture; and prepares students for active participation in the Church and Jesuit communities through service to others (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 8). In light of this framework, Jesuit education aims to form a spiritually and morally integrated human person devoted to the service of God. In line with this objective, Jesuit schools provide education in all branches of knowledge (Farrell, 1970, p. 1), with particular emphasis on Christian doctrine (Županov, 2019).

The *Ratio Studiorum*, prepared in 1599 and used as the official educational document of the Jesuits until 1773, systematizes the structure and content of Jesuit education. It delineates schedules, curricula, recommended reading materials, classical Latin and Greek authors, and pedagogical strategies. Among the subjects taught in Jesuit schools, as outlined in the *Ratio Studiorum*, are: Scriptural studies, classical languages such as Hebrew and Greek, scholastic theology rooted in Thomistic thought, philosophy, moral philosophy, mathematics, rhetoric, the humanities, and Latin grammar. Today, prominent Jesuit schools feature a “core curriculum” (*Core Requirements*, 2024) in addition to their specialized academic programs. These core courses reflect the curriculum described in the *Ratio Studiorum* and function as pillars of Jesuit education. For example, the globally renowned Boston College is divided into eight departments, each offering specialized courses while also including shared core courses aligned with the Jesuit curriculum. Its arts department, for instance, offers theology courses in theology in addition to courses in the arts. The nursing department requires students to take one or two core courses each semester (*Connell School of Nursing*, 2025). Similarly, at Georgetown University—one of the world’s most prestigious institutions—an equivalent core curriculum framework is in place (*Core Curriculum, Georgetown University*, 2025). These examples demonstrate that the *Ratio Studiorum* continues to play a central role in curriculum planning at Jesuit institutions.

The cultivation of theologically grounded and spiritually committed educators in Jesuit education is essential for achieving its educational objectives. This emphasis necessitates a focused investment in theological education. As one of the core subjects in Jesuit schools, theology serves as both a primary and indispensable medium for understanding the Jesuits’ commitment to religious instruction. Theology thus emerges as the coherent intellectual framework for realizing these aims and occupies a central position in Jesuit universities (Jesuits, 1996, p. 180). Alongside theology, the humanities, natural sciences, and philosophy also form integral components of the curriculum. Humanistic texts, logic, natural and moral philosophy, metaphysics, scholastic and positive theology, and scriptural studies (Jesuits, 1996, p. 150) all contribute to a deeper understanding of theology, the cultivation of the intellect, and the strengthening of analytical capacities (Farrell, 1970, p. 40). Accordingly, from the Jesuit perspective, all other disciplines serve as auxiliary pathways to a fuller understanding of theology, ultimately guiding individuals toward knowledge and love of God.

In this sense, theology is the path to God, while all other sciences function as means to this end. The Jesuits regard theology as a field not only for the formation of clergy but also for cultivating devout individuals who are fully developed in every aspect. Since every academic program can serve as a means to discover God, the school’s religious dimension places a shared responsibility upon all faculty members and disciplines. In the process of discovering God and understanding the truth of human life, theology—offered through religious and spiritual education—acts as the unifying element. Religious and spiritual formation is thus an inseparable component of Jesuit education (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 7).

In Jesuit education, moral development is considered equally important to academic achievement. Jesuits approach education from a holistic perspective, aiming to nurture students who are intellectually, emotionally, and morally developed, and who possess their own system of values (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 8). The goal is to cultivate individuals with virtues, evaluative attitudes, and the ability to fortify moral agency (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 10). The rationale behind this objective is expressed as follows: “Jesuit schools must offer students opportunities to explore human values critically and to experiment with their own value systems. Personal integrity rooted in moral and religious values that lead to action is far more important than the ability to recite others’ beliefs and opinions. It is increasingly evident that individuals of the third millennium will require new technological skills. But more importantly, they will need the

ability to understand and critique all aspects of life with love in order to make better decisions—personally, socially, morally, professionally, and spiritually (ICAJE, 1993, p. 151)." Jesuit education maintains that knowledge must be united with virtue (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 11). To comprehend good and evil, moral relativity, and the factors that influence freedom, and to exercise freedom effectively, it is necessary to unite knowledge with virtue. Therefore, Jesuit education cannot be detached from a moral context (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 10). Within this moral framework, the school is seen as a place where adolescents can acquire values, education, and undergo moral and religious formation (Kainulainen, 2018, p. 532). Moral traits such as trust, respect for diverse opinions, care, forgiveness, and tolerance are developed and learned in school. According to the Jesuits, this is possible only through a trust-based and friendly teacher-student relationship (ICAJE, 1993, p. 14).

One of the core principles of Jesuit education is the emphasis on "care for the individual and integrity" (*What Is a Jesuit Education?*, 2025), which is encapsulated in the concept of *cura personalis*. This foundational idea of Jesuit pedagogy refers to "care for the whole person," encompassing the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual development of the individual (Bninski & Boyle, 2020, p. 122). *Cura personalis* signifies a holistic approach to education, whereby the individual is nurtured in both corporeal and spiritual dimensions. Importantly, *cura personalis* is not limited to the relationship between teacher and student. Rather, it permeates the curriculum and the entire life of the educational institution. Within this framework, all members of the educational community—students, teachers, support staff, Jesuit administrators, lay collaborators, alumni, and parents—are expected to demonstrate mutual care and engage in participatory learning. To foster such a learning environment, it is essential to utilize all available resources, pedagogical principles, educational strategies, methods, and techniques. Thus, every individual and element within and beyond the institution shares responsibility for the formation of the student. This comprehensive model of education serves as a vital means of preparing individuals to proclaim and embody the message of Jesus Christ throughout the world. In this context, Jesuit education may be understood as a form of religious or faith-based education—a significant and direct path toward achieving religious aims. It can therefore be argued that Jesuit education, grounded in a holistic and continually evolving pedagogical vision, has endured to the present day due to its openness to renewal and growth.

These characteristics allow us to assess Jesuit education within the framework of religious education models. Religious education models are classified based on different criteria. Broadly, they are divided into traditional and modern religious education (Kaymakcan, 2008, pp. 49–50). Within these two categories, models further differ based on their role in the education system and their specific objectives (Köylü, 2017, pp. 239–241). Other classifications also exist due to differences in approach (Kızılabdullah & Yürük, 2008, p. 108). When examining these models in relation to the purpose and methodology of Jesuit education, it can be said that Jesuit education aligns with the confessional, doctrinal, and instructional approaches found in traditional religious education models. This conclusion is supported by the exclusion of texts related to other religions or denominations, as well as the explicit focus on nurturing Jesuit members or faithful adherents of the Jesuit tradition. The doctrinal and confessional approaches emphasize a single religion or denomination, aiming to nurture believers, strengthen faith, and increase religious activity (Tosun, 2017, p. 132; Usta Doğan, 2015, p. 74). The instructional religious education model shares similar objectives and content. In all three models, the educator is expected to be a believer of the religion or denomination being taught. In Christian countries that follow this model, religious education typically falls under the Church's jurisdiction (Köylü, 2017, p. 241). Fundamental aspects of these models—such as the teacher's religious conviction, curricula aimed at internalizing faith, and encouragement of religious practice—are also found in Jesuit education (Farrell, 1970, p. 25). The integration of religious knowledge into life and the shaping of character and morality accordingly are further indicators of this alignment. Therefore, Jesuit education can be understood as being founded on the Instructional religious education approach.

## **2.2. Stakeholders in Jesuit Education**

### **2.2.1. Teachers in Jesuit Education**

In a system where the content of education is determined in the utmost detail, the qualifications

sought in a teacher must be aligned with this comprehensive structure. Within Jesuit education, the teacher's primary responsibility is to inspire students to love and serve God, and to guide them in the practice of the virtues expected of them. The teacher's entire mission centers on this purpose, and both instructional time and extracurricular moments are to be viewed as opportunities for fulfilling this mission (Farrell, 1970, p. 25). Accordingly, a prerequisite for entering the teaching profession within Jesuit institutions is the willingness to devote one's entire life to serving God through the act of teaching (Farrell, 1970, p. 10). In order to ensure this commitment, teachers are expected first and foremost to demonstrate full faithful submission to both the Jesuit institution and to God. Additionally, teachers must be fully aware of the aims and objectives of Jesuit education. For this reason, Jesuit schools hold liturgical ceremonies at the beginning and end of the academic year, and a prayer is read aloud in class before each lesson to remind the teacher of the spiritual telos of education and the nature of their role (Farrell, 1970, p. 25). Teachers are also expected to be both knowledgeable in their fields and devout believers who adhere to the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas (Farrell, 1970, p. 3). These expectations reveal the Jesuits' dual emphasis on both intellectual competence and spiritual strength in their educators. Such a vision not only ensures academic effectiveness in the classroom but also shapes students into well-rounded individuals through the exemplary conduct of their teachers. The emphasis on faith among teachers highlights the religious learning dimension inherent in Jesuit education and affirms the teacher's function as a role model (Akhan & Çiçek, 2021; A. R. Aydın, 2009; Demir & Köse, 2016).

In Jesuit institutions, where the teacher is considered a model figure, they are also expected to be dynamic, formatively evolving, and committed to self-improvement. Thus, teacher education holds a central place in the Jesuit educational model (Dellebovi, 2013, p. 62). Highly qualified and field-expert educators are appointed to train teaching staff. For instance, the *Ratio Studiorum* explicitly states that groups of teachers should regularly meet—two or three times a week—for practice and review sessions in subjects such as Hebrew and Greek (Farrell, 1970, p. 15).

In summary, Jesuit education places a great deal of responsibility on teachers, requiring a broad range of qualifications. The Jesuits understand that the quality of both the teaching and the students is closely tied to the quality of the teachers. The deeply rooted nature of Jesuit education, the exceptional quality of its students, and their strong attachment to the Jesuit community can all be attributed, at least in part, to the exemplary character and conduct of Jesuit educators.

### 2.2.2. Students in Jesuit Education

Within the Jesuit educational framework, the student, like the teacher, serves as a witness and representative of the Order. For this reason, students must be educated in all domains and equipped to enter society as well-rounded individuals (Farrell, 1970, p. 1). The ideal graduate of a Jesuit education is described as: “a person who respects other religions and cultures; feels a sense of love and service toward the world; values solidarity; is imaginative and creative (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 6); mature intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally; proficient in communication and media literacy; practices both personal and communal worship regularly; is aware of their responsibilities and freedoms; aspires to lifelong learning driven by a love of learning developed at school; and is open to change” (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 9). Accordingly, Jesuit schools aim to prepare students for eternal life and foster their holistic development. In this context, success is not measured by academic performance alone but by the extent to which the education is reflected in the student's life (Jesuit Institute, 2014, p. 7).

For the Jesuits, education is not a finite activity confined to the boundaries of school; it is a lifelong endeavor. As a result, Jesuit institutions maintain strong connections with their alumni. This ongoing relationship reflects an awareness that the world is constantly changing, and that the individual called for by contemporary society differs significantly from those educated in the past. Keeping alumni engaged and their knowledge up to date ensures the renewal of both the graduates and the communities they serve (Jesuit Institute, 2014, pp. 23–24).

Jesuit texts emphasize this responsibility, stating that: “We must continue to engage with and offer guidance to our former students so that, imbued with Gospel values, they may take their place in society, work for their own well-being, and assist one another in their duties” (Jesuits, 1996, p. 306). This indicates



that alumni also play a role in the Jesuit apostolic mission. To fulfill this mission effectively, former students must remain in contact with both the Jesuit institutions and one another. Furthermore, Jesuit schools are viewed not only as educational institutions but also as centers of faith and culture for a broader community, including lay collaborators, students' families, and alumni. Thus, continual institutional development is necessary (Jesuits, 1996, p. 307). According to the Jesuits, the cultivation of faith and culture is effected through educational formation. Educating the lower social strata is seen as a means to foster an emergent leadership class equipped with Jesuit values.

### 2.2.3. Parents in Jesuit Education

From its earliest stages, Jesuit education has recognized the significant role of parents in the educational process. Jesuits have examined the familial and social conditions of students and emphasized the necessity of collaboration with families. According to Jesuit thought, the family bears the primary responsibility for education (Jesuits, 1996, p. 307). Therefore, the parent cannot be considered separate from the educational process. Notably, in contemporary educational sciences, collaboration with parents is regarded as one of the primary techniques for understanding the individual learner (Yeşilyaprak, 2006, pp. 326–327). A concrete example of this parental collaboration can be seen in the *Parent Handbook for the Academic Year 2024–2025*, published by the Jesuit Academy (Jesuit Academy, 2024). Revised annually, this handbook outlines specific expectations for parents: they are encouraged to monitor their child's homework (Jesuit Academy, 2024, p. 11), review both quarterly printed and weekly online academic reports provided by the school, attend biannual parent-teacher conferences (Jesuit Academy, 2024, p. 12) and maintain active communication in cases of absenteeism (Jesuit Academy, 2024, p. 20). In this way, the student's development is supported not only within the boundaries of school and by the teacher but also within the home and daily life, ensuring that education remains a dynamic and continuous process.

In addition to cooperation with parents, Jesuits also prioritize parent education. The "Parents in Partnership" (*Parent Education*, 2025) (PIP) program was established to serve this purpose and is committed to fostering deeper parental engagement in education. Operating within all Jesuit schools, the program organizes initiatives tailored to the specific needs of the school community. Both in-school and out-of-school social activities and volunteer programs are notable examples of its work (*Parent Experience*, 2025). Based on these indicators, it can be inferred that the Jesuit aim is to reach the wider world through the parent using the student.

## Conclusion

The Jesuit order, originating from the Christian tradition, has historically utilized education as a means to fulfill its missionary purpose, frequently referenced throughout the Bible. Since its establishment in 1540, the Jesuits have conducted educational activities worldwide, developing their own pedagogical philosophy and practices. This study examines the educational philosophy of the Jesuits and the roles of key educational stakeholders within the context of official Jesuit documents.

Jesuit education presents a deep pedagogical approach that emphasizes not only the transmission of knowledge but also the holistic development of the individual. The ultimate goal of Jesuit education is to form students in the service of God and to cultivate the virtues necessary for this service. In this regard, the Jesuit curriculum supports the pursuit of knowledge in all fields, ultimately oriented toward deepening the understanding and love of Jesus Christ as both the Creator and the Redeemer. The inclusion of moral education demonstrates that Jesuit pedagogy is not limited to theoretical instruction but integrates intellectual, physical, spiritual, and moral formation. Jesuit higher religious education, which trains its own clergy and teachers while setting its educational standards, exemplifies a results-oriented and mission-driven approach.

Within Jesuit education, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of knowledge in the traditional sense. Instead, the teacher serves as a spiritual guide and role model, treating the profession as a sacred calling in the service of God. Teaching in alignment with the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and with a deep awareness of divine service elevates the teaching profession to a sacred responsibility. The expectations of obedience, loyalty, and moral integrity among Jesuit educators reveal that teaching is

regarded not only as a professional task but also as a spiritual duty.

The ideal Jesuit student is not solely an academically competent individual, but also a person of moral depth, social responsibility, and openness to change. This perspective transforms education from a tool of personal advancement into a means of fulfilling both divine purpose and communal responsibility. The emphasis on lifelong learning reinforces the notion that education extends beyond formal schooling, requiring continuous personal development. Notably, the lasting relationship with alumni highlights that Jesuits do not confine educational influence to school years alone; alumni are also expected to contribute to the Jesuit mission. Offering spiritual guidance to graduates is a strategic effort to extend the long-term societal impact of education. This illustrates that Jesuit education is both an instrument of personal transformation and social change.

The inclusion of parents in the educational process reflects an approach parallel to that of contemporary educational theory. However, the Jesuit model goes further by supporting parental involvement through structured educational programs. Recognizing the family as an integral component of the learning process affirms that child development occurs not only within the school environment but also within the home. Programs aimed at parents institutionalize their involvement and establish a collaborative framework between students, parents, and teachers. This demonstrates that education, within the Jesuit model, addresses not only the student but the entire community surrounding them.

Taking all these factors into account, the Jesuit educational model—rooted and standardized over nearly five centuries—deserves scholarly attention. Remarkably, Jesuit education has adopted methods akin to modern education as early as 500 years ago, despite its missionary intent. Examples of such progressive approaches include collaboration with families and alumni, teacher training, interdisciplinary curricula, holistic education (Altan & Yıldırım, 2022), adapting content to changing contexts, and prioritizing love, trust, and friendship in teacher-student relationships. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that Jesuit education continues to adapt to contemporary needs and technological advancements. Despite employing traditional teacher-centered and rote-based methods of the time, the Jesuits also emphasized the importance of teacher quality, student development, and collaboration between schools and families.

In summary, Jesuit education aims to form individuals who not only achieve success but also lead meaningful and virtuous lives. The Jesuit educational system constructs a multilayered pedagogical network built around teachers, students, parents, and alumni. Its educational principles blend spiritual values, personal growth, and social responsibility. Consequently, education is seen not merely as a path to personal success but as a sacred vocation for serving God and contributing to humanity. This underscores that Jesuit pedagogy is not a superficial educational approach, but rather a transformative and profound vision for life.

Jesuit education has always stood out as an innovative model, even in comparison to the conventional practices of its era. Further research into contemporary Jesuit schools—particularly regarding the intersection of Jesuit religious education and general education—will contribute to both the fields of general pedagogy and religious education, offering valuable insights into the historical and current implementation of Jesuit educational ideals.

### Declarations

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