A Systematic Review of Values-Based Leadership Training for Middle Leader Teams in Schools: Methods, Impact, and Challenges

Latihan Kepimpinan Berasaskan Nilai untuk Pemimpin Pertengahan di Sekolah Satu Tinjauan Sistematik : Kaedah, Impak dan Cabaran

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Abstract

The evolving landscape of 21st-century education demands school leaders who are not only instructional experts but also ethical and values-driven change agents. Among them, middle-leader teachers such as department heads and curriculum coordinators play a pivotal role in bridging strategic leadership and classroom practice. This systematic literature review (SLR) explores the integration of values-based leadership within professional development programs for middle-leader teachers. The review employed the PRISMA framework and analyzed 31 empirical studies from the Scopus and Web of Science databases, published between 2022 and 2024. Four key themes emerged: (1) the evolution of leadership training methods, with a shift toward interactive, reflective, and tech-enabled models such as virtual communities of practice; (2) the embedding of core leadership values including ethical reasoning, collaboration, and distributed leadership; (3) the impact of training on middle leaders' competencies in decision-making, communication, and instructional leadership; and (4) the challenges and barriers, such as resistance to change, limited institutional support, and contextual disparities. The findings emphasize the need for educational systems to adopt holistic and values-centered leadership training frameworks. This review contributes to leadership theory and practice by offering actionable insights for policy-makers, educators, and leadership trainers aiming to cultivate competent and principled middle-leader teachers. Recommendations for future research and leadership program design are also provided.

Kata kunci: middle-leader teacher, values-based leadership, educational leadership training, professional development, systematic literature review, 21st-century education

Abstrak

Dalam landskap pendidikan abad ke-21 yang semakin kompleks, pemimpin pertengahan sekolah—seperti ketua panitia, penyelaras kurikulum, dan ketua bidang—memainkan peranan penting dalam menjembatani visi strategik pihak pengurusan atasan dengan amalan pengajaran di bilik darjah. Kajian ulasan literatur sistematik (SLR) ini bertujuan untuk meneliti peranan latihan kepimpinan berteraskan nilai dalam pembangunan profesional guru pemimpin pertengahan. Kajian ini menggunakan kerangka PRISMA dan menganalisis 31 kajian empirikal terkini yang diperoleh daripada pangkalan data Scopus dan Web of Science antara tahun 2022 hingga 2024. Empat tema utama telah dikenal pasti: (1) evolusi kaedah latihan kepimpinan, termasuk pendekatan reflektif, interaktif dan penggunaan komuniti amalan maya; (2) nilai-nilai utama dalam latihan kepimpinan

seperti etika, kolaborasi, dan kepimpinan distributif; (3) kesan latihan terhadap kecekapan guru pemimpin pertengahan dari segi komunikasi, pembuatan keputusan dan kepimpinan instruksional; dan (4) cabaran pelaksanaan, termasuk kekangan sumber, ketahanan terhadap perubahan dan perbezaan konteks sekolah. Dapatan kajian ini menegaskan keperluan latihan kepimpinan yang menyeluruh dan berteraskan nilai untuk melahirkan pemimpin pertengahan yang beretika, berwibawa dan mampu memacu transformasi pendidikan secara lestari. Kajian ini memberikan sumbangan penting terhadap amalan kepimpinan pendidikan dan mencadangkan hala tuju penyelidikan serta reka bentuk program latihan kepimpinan masa hadapan.

Kata Kunci*: pemimpin pertengahan, latihan kepimpinan berteraskan nilai, pembangunan profesional, kepimpinan pendidikan, pendidikan abad ke-21.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of middle leader teams in schools has gained significant attention due to their influence on student achievement and the cultivation of positive school environments (Evans, 2021; Zadok, 2023; Harris, 2022). These teams typically comprising department heads, team leaders, or curriculum coordinators serve as strategic intermediaries between senior leadership and classroom practitioners, contributing directly to the operationalization of school vision and instructional improvement (Ahn, 2019; Nelson, 2019; Shaked, 2023; Bush, 2013).

To perform effectively, middle leader teams require specialized professional development that is not only skill-based but also grounded in ethical and transformational leadership values. The literature has increasingly highlighted the role of values-based leadership training, which integrates principles such as integrity, collaboration, and equity into leadership development (Day, 2024). These values are essential for promoting inclusive school cultures and enhancing educational outcomes (Abdullah et al., 2018; Al-Taie et al., 2017; Bryant et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2022; Kwan, 2019; Day et al., 2014).

Despite growing awareness of these frameworks, empirical evidence on how values-based leadership is embedded in training for middle leader teams particularly within the complex realities of today's education systems remains limited (Lipscombe et al., 2021, Gurr, 2024, Beram, 2022). The demands of educational reform, technological transformation, and learner diversity necessitate a closer investigation into the relevance and impact of values-centered leadership training.

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR), guided by the PRISMA framework, addresses this gap by synthesizing 31 recent studies from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The review is structured around three key research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics and instructional approaches of values-based leadership training programs for middle leader teams in schools?

2. What empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of such training in improving leadership capacity, student outcomes, and school culture?

3. What are the main challenges in implementing values-based leadership training for middle leader teams, and what strategies have been proposed to address them?
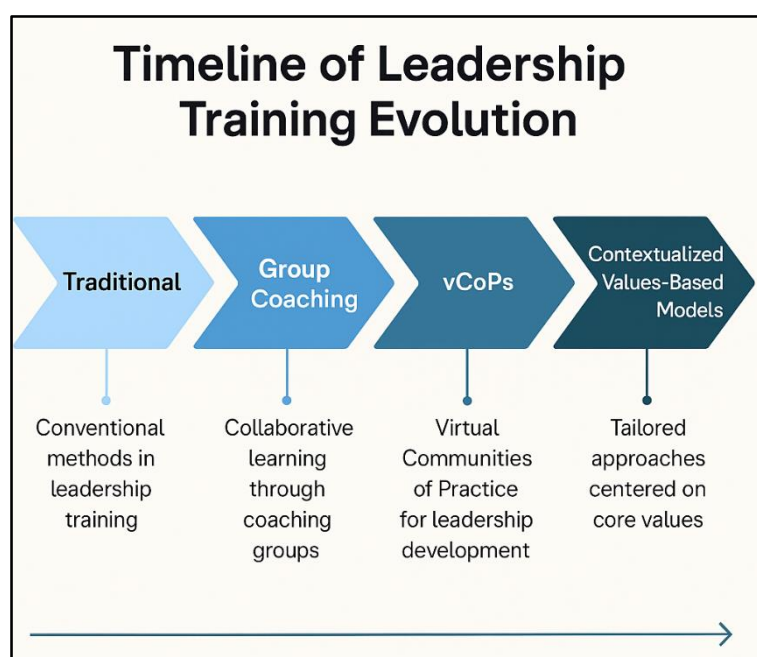
Through a critical synthesis of global literature, this review aims to inform leadership policy, practice, and program design by providing insights into how values-based training can empower middle leader teams to drive sustained educational improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The landscape of educational leadership continues to evolve in response to increasingly complex pedagogical, social, and technological demands. Contemporary leadership requires a careful balance between modern instructional innovation and enduring professional values. As noted by Lowe (2020), middle leader teams in schools serve as critical conduits between senior leadership's strategic goals and the operational realities faced by teaching staff. By embodying values such as integrity, empathy, and resilience, middle leader teams play an instrumental role in fostering a shared vision, cultivating professional collaboration, and encouraging innovation in teaching practices (Al-Taie et al., 2017; Barni et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2021; Giouvanopoulou et al., 2023; Rasidi et al., 2021; Tang, 2023). These capacities are increasingly essential in developing a school culture that supports both educator agency and student achievement (Daučianskaitė & Žydžiūnaitė, 2020; Demir & Çetin, 2021; Hasan Al-Banna Mohamed, 2018; Lipscombe et al., 2021; Abd Rahim et al., 2020; Wooldridge et al., 2008; Yusak & Jumahat, 2023).

Figure 1 presents a timeline summarizing the evolution of leadership training strategies, reflecting the field's transition from linear models to more holistic and adaptive approaches in response to global educational challenge

Figure 1 : Evolution Of Leadership Training

Research suggests that leadership among teacher teams, particularly those occupying middle leadership roles has emerged as a key mechanism for driving school reform from within (Bryant et al., 2020; Nelson, 2019; Shaked, 2023; Zadok, 2023). Wang and Ho (2020) emphasize the importance of building teacher capacity and promoting professional agency, both of which are closely linked to middle leaders' ability to mentor, coach, and inspire their peers. As Fullan (2014) argues, leadership is fundamentally about mobilizing others toward shared goals, reinforcing the notion that investment in the leadership development of middle leader teams can yield significant improvements in instructional quality and school-wide performance.

The digital transformation of education adds a new layer of complexity to school leadership, demanding greater adaptability, technological fluency, and cross-cultural communication skills (Ahn, 2019; Al Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2018; Evans, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2022; Nelson, 2019; Shaked, 2023; Zadok, 2023). The OECD (2016) underscores the need for leaders who can design innovative learning
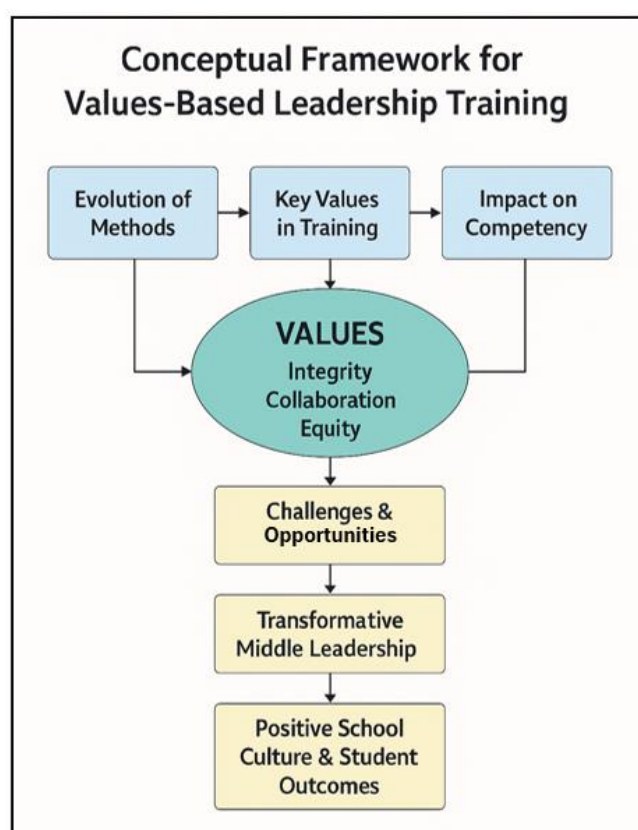
environments and support learners in navigating uncertain futures. In response, training programs for middle leader teams must integrate competencies such as systems thinking, digital leadership, and data-informed decision-making (Gurr et al., 2019). However, the literature cautions that such competencies must be grounded in values-based leadership frameworks to ensure that innovation is matched by ethical integrity, inclusivity, and a commitment to student well-being (Day& Gurr, 2024).

This synthesis supports the argument that effective leadership training must incorporate both transformational values and pragmatic leadership strategies. Harris et al., (2022) contends that middle leader teams function as the "connective tissue" of school organizations, linking policy to practice. As such, their leadership development should foster a culture of reflective inquiry, continuous improvement, and collaborative professionalism traits essential for navigating and leading change in dynamic educational systems.

In conclusion, the literature points to the necessity of a balanced leadership training model one that honors the ethical foundations of educational leadership while equipping middle leader teams to meet the evolving demands of contemporary schooling. By developing the competencies required to lead with values in complex and uncertain environments, middle leader teams are positioned to play a transformative role in shaping the future of education.

To guide this study, a conceptual framework was developed based on a synthesis of the reviewed literature. As shown in Figure 2, this framework illustrates the interaction between leadership values, training methodologies, and the anticipated impacts on teacher leadership competencies.

Figure 2 : Conseptual Framework For Values-Based Leadership Training

MATERIALS AND METHODS

a. Identification

This systematic literature review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency and rigor. The identification phase began with the formulation of a structured search strategy informed by academic dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, prior reviews, and expert feedback. Key terms were organized under three thematic pillars: middle leadership in education, leadership training models, and values-based leadership frameworks.

To ensure comprehensive coverage, search strings were developed for Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), two leading databases known for indexing peer-reviewed scholarly work in educational leadership and teacher professional development. The final search string (see Table 1) combined multiple relevant terms using Boolean operators, wildcards, and grouping logic to retrieve studies that reflect the intersection of leadership roles, professional training models, and values-based practices in education.
The search was limited to English-language journal articles published between 2022 and 2024. This 2-year window was deliberately selected to capture the most recent developments, especially post-pandemic educational shifts, the growing integration of AI and digital leadership tools, and contemporary challenges in leadership training. By focusing on this timeframe, the review aims to reflect the current state of research and practice in values-driven leadership training for middle leaders.

In total, 1,753 records were initially retrieved. After applying inclusion filters such as publication type (journal articles only), language (English), and publication status (finalized) and removing duplicates, a total of 439 articles remained. These articles were then advanced to the screening stage, forming the basis for deeper title and abstract analysis.

Table 1: Search String and Boolean Operators

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("middle leader teacher" OR "middle leadership" OR "teacher leadership" OR "school leadership" OR "head of department" OR "senior teacher" OR "lead teacher" OR "subject leader" OR "curriculum leader" OR "head of panel") AND ("model training" OR "professional development" OR "teacher train*" OR "leadership model*" OR "mentoring model" OR "coaching model" OR "action research model" OR "collaborative learning model" OR "reflective practice model" OR "blended learning model" OR "online learning model" OR "competency-based model" OR "school-based training model" OR "peer learning model" OR "communities of practice" OR "evidence-based practice") AND ("value-based leadership" OR "ethical leadership" OR "moral leadership" OR "authentic leadership" OR "servant leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "school culture" OR "organizational values" OR "teacher values" OR "leadership development" OR "social justice" OR "equity" OR "inclusion")
Web Of Science (WoS)	TS=(("middle leader teacher" OR "middle leadership" OR "teacher leadership" OR "school leadership" OR "head of department" OR "senior teacher" OR "lead teacher" OR "subject leader" OR "curriculum leader" OR "head of panel")

AND
("model training" OR "professional development" OR "teacher training" OR "leadership model*" OR "mentoring model" OR "coaching model" OR "action research model" OR "collaborative learning model" OR "reflective practice model" OR "blended learning model" OR "online learning model" OR "competency-based model" OR "school-based training model" OR "peer learning model" OR "communities of practice" OR "evidence-based practice")
AND
("value-based leadership" OR "ethical leadership" OR "moral leadership" OR "authentic leadership" OR "servant leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "school culture" OR "organizational values" OR "teacher values" OR "leadership development" OR "social justice" OR "equity" OR "inclusion")
)

Table 1. Refined search string applied to Scopus and Web of Science databases, tailored to identify empirical studies focused on leadership training models, middle-leader teacher roles, and values-based educational leadership between 2022 and 2024.

b. Screening

The screening phase involved a rigorous review of potentially relevant articles to identify studies that met the research objectives and pre-defined inclusion criteria. This stage consisted of two levels: title and abstract screening, followed by full-text evaluation.

In the first level, 1,314 articles were excluded based on titles and abstracts that did not align with the research focus such as studies unrelated to middle leader teams, leadership training, or values-based practices in school settings. In the second level, 419 full-text articles were reviewed in detail using the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 2.

Articles were retained only if they met the following conditions:

- They were empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods),
- Focused on middle leader roles in schools, and
- Reported on leadership training that incorporated ethical or values-based dimensions.

Studies focusing exclusively on principals, school administrators, or higher education leadership were excluded to maintain the scope. In addition, non-empirical publications (e.g., theoretical papers, editorials, reviews) were not included.

Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2022 and 2024, in English, and within the field of education, were retained. Articles not published in final form (i.e., in press), or those published in books or conference proceedings, were also excluded. An additional 20 duplicate records were removed at this stage.

The review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2022 and 2024, in English. This timeframe was strategically chosen to reflect recent transformations in educational leadership including post-pandemic shifts in school leadership demands, the rise of AI-driven educational technologies, and the growing adoption of hybrid training models. These rapid developments have significantly influenced the values and competencies expected of middle leader teams in schools, making earlier literature potentially less relevant to current leadership training needs. By focusing on the most current three-year window, this review ensures the inclusion of up-to-date, empirically grounded studies that address emerging leadership practices and challenges in contemporary educational contexts.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Used During Screening

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Publication Years	2022–2024	Before 2022
Literature Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, books, reviews
Publication Status	Final published	In press or incomplete
Subject Area	Education	Other than education
Study Type	Empirical (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods)	Conceptual/theoretical papers
Population Focus	Middle leader teams (e.g., department heads, curriculum leads)	Principals, higher education staff, central administrators

c. Eligibility

The eligibility phase involved a detailed evaluation of the remaining 419 full-text articles to determine their relevance, empirical rigor, and alignment with the study's objectives. Each article was assessed by the review team using the updated inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2), with a particular emphasis on:

● Empirical research focus (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods)

● Post-2022 publication (reflecting current educational leadership trends)

● Values-based leadership training for middle leader teams

Articles were excluded if they lacked relevance to middle leadership roles, did not integrate values or ethics in leadership training, or focused on conceptual frameworks without empirical data. Studies without full-text access or outside the education field were also excluded.

As a result, 388 articles were excluded, and a final 31 empirical studies were selected for synthesis. This set represents the most current and contextually relevant research to inform leadership development strategies for middle leader teams in schools.
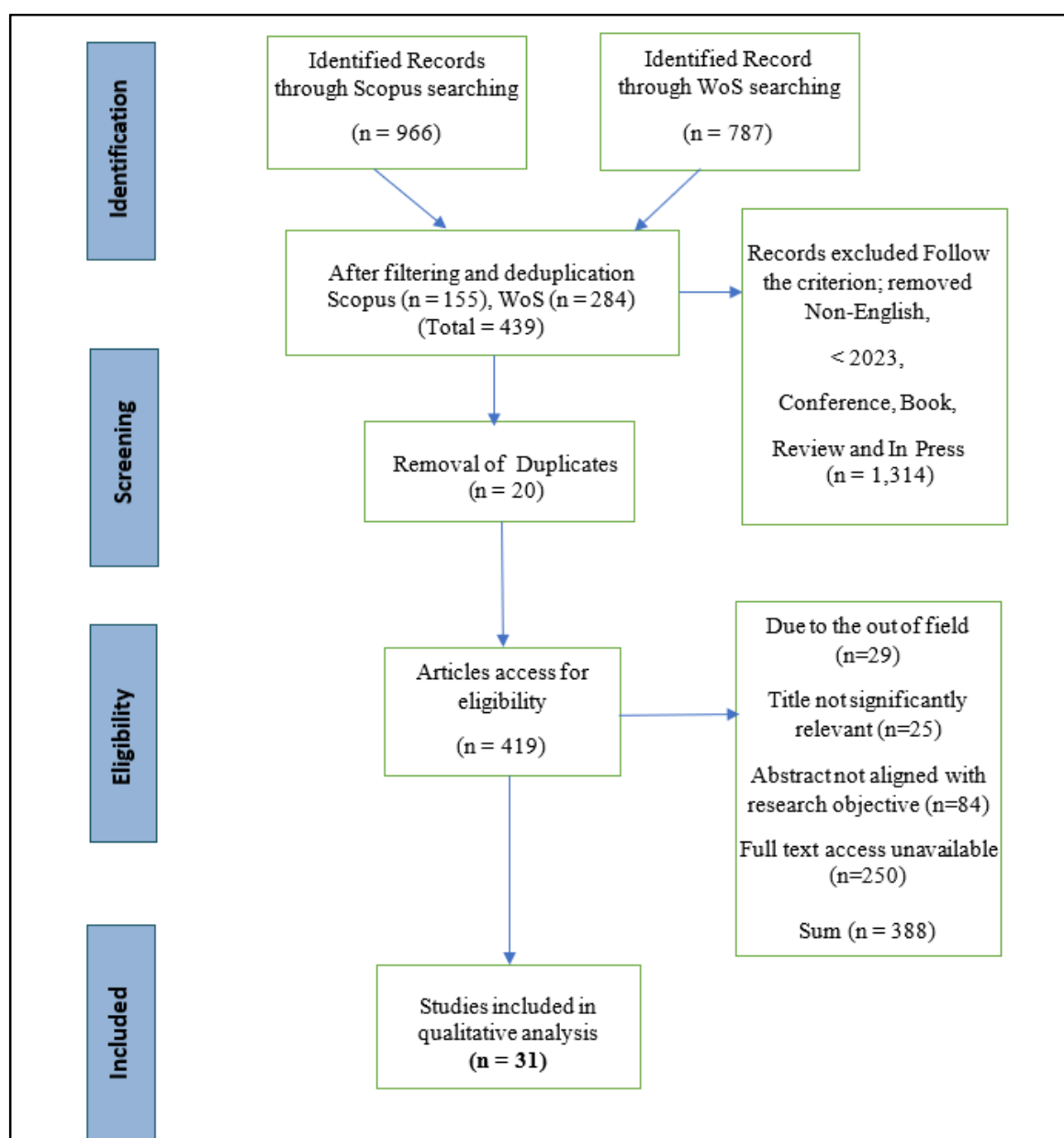
Description of PRISMA Flow

The initial search yielded a total of 1,753 records, with 966 articles retrieved from Scopus and 787 from Web of Science (WoS). After applying basic filters such as language (English), publication type (journal articles), and year range (2022–2024) a total of 439 articles remained (Scopus = 155; WoS = 284). Following the removal of 20 duplicate records, 419 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility.

Of these, 388 articles were excluded for the following reasons:

● Out of field (n = 29)

● Title not significantly relevant (n = 25)

● Abstracts not aligned with research objectives (n = 84)

● Full-text access unavailable (n = 250)

This rigorous screening and eligibility process resulted in the inclusion of 31 empirical articles for qualitative synthesis. The complete search and selection workflow is illustrated in Figure 3 (PRISMA diagram).

Figure 3. Flow diagram of the proposed search study

Source: Adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

d. Data Abstraction and Analysis section

An integrative thematic analysis approach was adopted to synthesize findings across diverse research designs, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and action research studies. This approach enabled the identification of converging patterns and distinct insights relevant to the training of middle leader teams in schools.

The process began with independent data abstraction by the research team. Each eligible article was reviewed, and key information was extracted systematically. The following data points were captured from each study:

- Study objectives and methodology
- Type of leadership training model used
- Values or ethical frameworks emphasized

- Target population (e.g., middle leaders, head of departments, subject leaders)
- Key findings and reported outcomes
- Contextual factors influencing leadership training (e.g., digital transformation, school setting)

Each data point was coded and categorized according to its relevance to the research questions. Emerging themes were developed through iterative comparison and consolidation of codes across studies.

To ensure transparency and reliability, the researchers maintained a reflective analytic log to document coding decisions, interpretive notes, and emerging conceptual connections. Discrepancies in coding or thematic assignment were resolved through collaborative discussion until consensus was reached.

Two external experts in educational leadership were invited to evaluate the thematic structure and provide feedback on clarity, relevance, and domain validity. Their input contributed to refining subthemes and validating the interpretive consistency of the findings.

This rigorous, multi-phase analysis ensured that the thematic synthesis was both evidence-grounded and methodologically sound, enhancing the credibility and scholarly contribution of the review.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This systematic literature review synthesized findings from 31 empirical studies on values-based leadership training for middle leader teams in schools. The analysis produced four key themes: (1) the evolution of leadership training approaches, (2) key values underpinning modern leadership programs, (3) the impact of training on teacher leadership competencies, and (4) the challenges and opportunities inherent in leadership training implementation.

a. Evolution of Leadership Training Approaches

Recent studies emphasize the dynamic nature of educational leadership in the digital era. Innovative methodologies such as group coaching (Abrahamsen, 2023), professional development models (Ghamrawi et al., 2024), and virtual Communities of Practice (vCoPs) (Shal et al., 2024) are increasingly adopted. These methods foster continuous learning, shared decision-making, and teacher agency. Ghamrawi et al. (2024) found that vCoPs facilitate reciprocal empowerment and metacognitive collaboration, reinforcing the importance of collective professionalism.

Figure 4 presents a visual summary of the evolution of leadership training practices for middle leaders, illustrating the shift from traditional models to more contextualized and values-driven approaches. This progression reflects the increasing complexity of educational demands and the growing emphasis on distributed, collaborative leadership development.

Figure 4 : Leadership Training For Middle Leaders in Education Field

Leadership in the 21st century demands adaptability and global awareness (Shal et al., 2024). Leaders are expected to embrace technological transformation, cultural competency, and future-oriented skills. Visionary leadership fosters inclusive, innovative learning ecosystems that respond effectively to rapid changes in education.

Table 3. Summary of Leadership Training Approaches

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings
Abrahamsen H.N. & Helstad K.	2024	Case study	Teacher leader roles foster collective professionalism.
Shal et al.	2024	Semi-structured interviews	vCoPs promote distributed leadership and teacher agency.
Ghamrawi et al.	2024	Professional development study	Group coaching strengthens leadership capacity through collaborative learning.
Abrahamsen L.	2023	Action research	Group coaching enhances professional relationships and reflective practice.

b. Key Values in Modern Leadership Training

Values-based leadership training prioritizes integrity, empathy, inclusivity, and equity. These values support ethical decision-making and foster trust, respect, and collaboration (Stewart-Hall et al., 2023). Programs integrating coaching protocols and distributed leadership models encourage reflective practice and enhance leadership identity (Baker, 2022; Galdames-Calderón, 2023).

Creating professional learning environments that support shared decision-making and reflective dialogue is essential. Collaborative models like vCoPs empower middle leaders to lead regardless of formal titles (Shal et al., 2024). This promotes job satisfaction, lowers attrition, and improves student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Table 4. Summary of Key Values in Leadership Training

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings
Baker C.K.	2022	Case study	Decision-making protocols enhance collaboration and self-efficacy.
Galdames-Calderón M.	2023	Interviews	Distributed leadership boosts teacher leadership competencies.
Swars Auslander et al.	2023	Survey, interviews	Collaborative culture strengthens reflective practice and learner-centered pedagogy.
Qadhi et al.	2023	Life history	Leadership identity built on empathy, trust, and inclusivity.

c. Impact of Leadership Training on Teacher Leadership Competencies

Leadership training significantly enhances teacher competencies in areas such as instructional leadership, communication, and decision-making. Brauckmann et al. (2023) and Quaisley et al. (2023) found that training programs incorporating distributed leadership practices yield stronger leadership performance and improved school outcomes.

Other studies noted improvements in professional development design, learner-centered pedagogy, and evidence-based decision-making (Swars Auslander et al., 2023; Velasco et al., 2022). Leadership grounded in research fosters a culture of inquiry and innovation within schools.

Table 5. Summary of Training Impact on Competencies

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings
Brauckmann S. et al.	2023	Critical analysis	Leadership programs improve teacher leadership capacities.
Maqbool S. et al.	2024	Quantitative survey	Leadership training supports SDGs and educational transformation.
Murphy G. & Brennan T.	2024	Vignettes, discussion	Supports distributed leadership using developmental theory.
Swars Auslander et al.	2023	Surveys, interviews	Informed decision-making promotes pedagogical development.

d. Challenges and Opportunities in Leadership Training

Despite the benefits, leadership training programs face challenges including resource limitations, resistance to change, and contextual barriers. Studies emphasize the need for context-responsive training that accounts for sociocultural, political, and institutional dynamics (Agridag & Muijs, 2023; Bryant & Walker, 2024).

Comprehensive leadership development must address governance, instructional leadership, and autonomy, particularly in relation to global education goals (Ghamrawi, 2023). Personalized support such as coaching and peer mentoring can enhance training effectiveness (Stewart-Hall et al., 2023; Torrance et al., 2023).

Table 6. Summary of Challenges and Opportunities

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings
Agridag O. & Muijs D.	2023	Quasi-experimental	Contextual factors influence leadership outcomes.
Bryant D.A. & Walker A.	2024	Case studies	Principal-designed models support middle leader learning.
Ghamrawi N.	2023	Interviews	Autonomy and governance are critical for sustainable leadership.
Torrance et al.	2023	Literature review	Supports informal and formal learning for complex leadership.

DISCUSSION

The results of this review underscore the strategic importance of designing leadership training programs that are not only contextually relevant but also deeply aligned with the core values of middle leader teams. As schools increasingly rely on these leaders to bridge policy and practice, the evolution of training methods—such as group coaching (Abrahamsen, 2023), professional development models (Ghamrawi et al., 2024), and virtual Communities of Practice (Shal et al., 2024) demonstrates the field's shift toward more reflective, relational, and participatory models. These methodologies support middle leaders in addressing systemic challenges while fostering school-wide collaboration and innovation (Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Swars Auslander et al., 2023).

A central finding is the emphasis on values-based leadership. Programs that promote ethical, inclusive, and distributed leadership rooted in integrity, empathy, and shared decision-making enhance school culture and teacher agency (Stewart-Hall et al., 2023; Baker, 2022). Reflective practice, when supported by coaching protocols and collaborative structures like vCoPs, enables middle leaders to act confidently even without formal authority (Shal et al., 2024; So-Oabeb & du Plessis, 2023).

Figure 5 highlights the essential values embedded within effective leadership training programs. These values such as collaboration, inclusivity, and reflective practiceare foundational for nurturing transformative teacher leadership and fostering positive school culture

Figure 5 : Key Values in Leadership Training

Moreover, leadership training improves core competencies such as instructional guidance, communication, and decision-making. Studies by Brauckmann et al. (2023) and Quaisley et al. (2023) show how training that integrates distributed leadership can strengthen leadership identity and improve student outcomes. Training also supports broader goals such as the SDGs through culturally responsive leadership and inclusive education practices (Maqbool et al., 2024; Kivirand et al., 2022).

However, several challenges persist. Limited resources, institutional resistance, and varying local contexts pose barriers to implementation (Bryant & Walker, 2024; Agridag & Muijs, 2023). Leadership development must therefore be personalized, flexible, and grounded in the realities of specific educational ecosystems. Coaching, peer learning, and autonomy-supportive governance—highlighted in the work of Ghamrawi (2023) and Torrance et al. (2023)—are essential enablers of sustainable change.

Taken together, these findings support a holistic model of middle leadership training: one that integrates values, builds adaptive competencies, and accounts for context. The future of educational leadership lies in empowering middle leaders as change agents capable of fostering inclusive, resilient, and future-ready school communities.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review affirms the critical role of values-based leadership training in developing effective middle leader teams within schools. As the demands on educational institutions grow increasingly complex, the cultivation of leadership grounded in integrity, collaboration, and equity is essential for sustained school improvement and instructional excellence (Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Stewart-Hall et al., 2023).

The review's synthesis of 31 studies reveals that dynamic training approaches such as group coaching, vCoPs, and collaborative professional development models not only enhance leadership capacity but also empower middle leaders to foster teacher agency and drive innovation (Abrahamsen, 2023; Shal et al., 2024). These approaches, when coupled with distributed leadership and reflective practice, build leadership identity and promote inclusive school cultures (Swars Auslander et al., 2023; Baker, 2022).

Importantly, leadership training programs must be adaptive to context. The influence of structural, cultural, and policy environments cannot be overstated. As highlighted in multiple studies, differentiated support mechanisms such as coaching, mentorship, and autonomy-oriented governance are crucial for enabling leaders to respond to localized challenges and promote system-wide transformation (Ghamrawi, 2023; Bryant & Walker, 2024).

For future research and practice, it is essential to explore leadership training frameworks that integrate values-based education with emerging global priorities such as digital transformation, inclusive learning environments, and sustainable development (Maqbool et al., 2024; Murphy & Brennan, 2024). Scholars should also investigate longitudinal impacts of training on teacher retention, school climate, and student outcomes.

In conclusion, empowering middle leader teams through coherent, contextually responsive, and values-driven leadership training is not merely a strategy for school improvement, it is a necessary foundation for navigating the evolving future of education. These leaders hold the potential to bridge policy and practice, strengthen professional learning cultures, and lead schools into a more equitable and innovative educational era.

To summarize the key takeaways from this review and highlight the future directions for values-based leadership training, the following visual infographic encapsulates the essential findings and their

implications for leadership development in the 21st century.

Figure 6 : Key Outcomes and Future Pathways of Middle Leadership Training

This visual underscore the strategic importance of aligning leadership training with values-based and context-responsive frameworks. It reiterates the review's call for dynamic, ethically grounded, and future-oriented leadership models empowering middle leaders not only to lead change but to sustain educational innovation across diverse school contexts. The highlighted priorities also serve as a blueprint for policy makers, school leaders, and researchers seeking to transform middle leadership development for long-term impact.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT in a limited capacity to improve the clarity and language flow of certain sections. After using the tool, the author carefully reviewed, revised, and edited the content, taking full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

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