

Manuscript No.: IJAR-59098

Title: How School Middle Leaders Navigate Competing Demands.

Recommendation:

Accept as it is

Accept after minor revision.....

Accept after major revision

Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity	✓			
Significance	✓			

Reviewer Name: Dr. Mithilesh kumar shukla

Reviewer's Comment for Publication:

This systematic review examines how school middle leaders navigate competing demands in their leadership roles. Synthesizing ten qualitative studies from 2020-2026 across diverse contexts, it identifies tensions between policy expectations, professional judgment, organizational priorities, and relational commitments. Middle leaders manage these through practices such as translation, negotiation, adaptation, coordination, and relational sensemaking. The review introduces the concept of "workable alignment," describing how middle leaders exercise situated agency to create provisional arrangements that allow organizational work to continue despite unresolved tensions. This agency is shaped by organizational conditions including role position, authority, relationships, culture, workload, and policy environments. The study highlights that middle leadership involves ongoing adjustment rather than fixed strategies, emphasizing the relational and context-dependent nature of their work. It calls for supportive organizational conditions to enable effective navigation of these persistent demands.

Recommendation: Accept after minor revision,

Detailed Reviewer's Report

STRENGTHS:

- 1- It Addresses a critical and specific issue—how middle leaders navigate competing demands.
- 2- The study Provides rich, in-depth understanding of leadership practices from diverse contexts.
- 3- Studies from multiple countries enhance the breadth and relevance of findings.
- 4- Emphasis on Relational and Contextual Factors.
- 5- Its Introduces the novel concept of "workable alignment" to explain middle leaders' agency.
- 6- The paper Examines tensions across policy, professional judgment, organizational priorities, and relationships.

WEAKNESSES:

- 1- Limited Number of Studies and Lack of Quantitative Data.
- 2- Focusing solely on English-language, peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus and ERIC may exclude relevant research from other languages or sources.
- 3- The paper emphasizes conceptual synthesis but offers limited concrete case examples illustrating navigation in practice.