

COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the prospective application of cooperative organizational models within the administration and governance of special education school units. It posits that a cooperative framework, underpinned by principles of shared responsibility, collaborative effort, and democratic participation, offers a robust paradigm for achieving more inclusive and sustainable educational management. Within the domain of public administration, the integration of cooperative governance practices has the potential to enhance synergistic teamwork among educators, parents, and local communities, concurrently optimizing decision-making processes and improving student outcomes. The investigation delves into how specific elements of the cooperative model, such as collective leadership and mutual support mechanisms, can be effectively adapted and implemented within the unique context of special education schools. Emphasis is placed on elucidating the intrinsic alignment between cooperative values and the overarching objectives of inclusive education, particularly highlighting their shared focus on participation, equity, and empowerment. The paper concludes by articulating policy recommendations aimed at fortifying cooperative practices within educational institutions, thereby suggesting that a cooperative perspective in school management can substantially contribute to the long-term

Keywords: public administration; educational management; school organization; special education school units; management practices in education; educational leadership.

INTRODUCTION

This paper critically examines the prospective application of cooperative organizational models within the administration and governance of special education school units, exploring how such frameworks can enhance educational services and promote equitable outcomes. It posits that a cooperative framework, underpinned by principles of shared responsibility,

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collaborative effort, and democratic participation, offers a robust paradigm for achieving more inclusive and sustainable educational management (Ébersold, 2020).

PUBLIC POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ACTIVE INCLUSION OF COOPERATIVES IN THE SOCIAL AND SHARED ECONOMY

A comprehensive understanding of public policies for sustainable development and the active inclusion of cooperatives in the social and shared economy is crucial. This necessitates a detailed examination of current public policies and their efficacy in promoting inclusive education, along with an assessment of how cooperative models can enhance the active inclusion of special education communities in the social and shared economy (Alsowait et al. 2023). A robust public policy framework is needed that not only supports but actively incentivizes the establishment and growth of cooperative enterprises within the social and shared economy, particularly those dedicated to special education, by providing clear guidelines and fostering an enabling environment. This holistic perspective underscores the necessity of a regulatory environment that not only permits but actively encourages the development of cooperative business models, especially those that prioritize social responsibility and shared economic benefits within the special education sector. Such a framework would promote comprehensive cross-sector collaboration and inclusive policies, ensuring the effective utilization of available technologies and resources to enhance learning experiences for all students with special educational needs (Voultsiou, Moussiades, 2025). This comprehensive framework necessitates robust public policies that champion sustainable development and actively integrate cooperatives into the social and shared economy, thereby leveraging their inherent capacity for inclusive educational advancement (Halsall et al. 2022). These policies must specifically target Sustainable Development Goal 4, emphasizing equitable, inclusive, and quality education, while also dismantling existing barriers between general and special education through resource equity and social integration (Yang et al. 2025). This approach aligns with principles of social responsibility and shared economy, promoting active inclusion and sustainable development by empowering all stakeholders to contribute to an equitable and responsive special education system (Lopes et al. 2023).

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT, INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY, AND SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVE BUSINESS

The stratification of policies requires a nuanced understanding of how regulatory environments and institutional capacities can either foster or hinder the development of cooperative businesses within the educational sector. This necessitates an examination of the systemic challenges and opportunities presented by current frameworks, particularly concerning how they support or impede the collaborative governance structures essential for special education inclusion (Temitope, 2023). Such an examination would involve analyzing existing legal and administrative frameworks to identify provisions that explicitly support or implicitly obstruct cooperative models, along with assessing the institutional readiness and capacity of special education units to adopt and sustain these collaborative approaches (Woodin, 2019). This analysis will also explore how the regulatory environment influences

the development of cooperative businesses within the special education sector, identifying best practices and areas for reform that could foster more robust cooperative governance models (Abdussamad, 2022). This involves evaluating how existing policies facilitate or impede the establishment and growth of cooperative enterprises within the special education sector, particularly concerning financial incentives, legal recognition, and administrative support. Such an evaluation would also critically assess the institutional capacity and support mechanisms available for fostering the development of cooperative businesses, especially in bridging the gap between policy intent and actual practice (Beamish et al. 2024). Ultimately, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive roadmap for integrating cooperative governance into special education, emphasizing the critical role of supportive public policies and robust institutional frameworks in achieving genuine inclusivity and sustainable educational development. This includes a deep dive into the regulatory environment and institutional capacity, examining how existing frameworks either facilitate or hinder the development of cooperative businesses in this specialized educational context (Jones, 2023). This further involves a critical analysis of current policy gaps that may limit the effective implementation of cooperative models and identifying opportunities for legislative reform to better support these innovative governance structures (D'Elia et al. 2025; Ezeafulukwe et al. 2024). The exploration of these policy gaps further extends to understanding how existing funding mechanisms and resource allocation strategies either enable or constrain the operationalization of cooperative governance within special education settings (Park, 2024). To achieve these objectives, it is imperative to establish a regulatory environment that not only accommodates but actively promotes the formation and growth of cooperative enterprises within the special education sector, acknowledging their unique capacity to foster innovation and shared responsibility (Nordvall, 2022). This includes developing dedicated legal frameworks for social economy organizations, which can then serve as a foundation for targeted public support schemes like procurement and tax benefits (Hueske et al. 2023). The regulatory environment must foster an ecosystem where cooperative businesses, particularly those focused on social and shared economies, can thrive through streamlined registration processes, access to capital, and tailored legal frameworks that recognize their unique governance structures. Effective public policies must therefore articulate clear guidelines for the establishment and operation of cooperative ventures within special education, facilitating their legal recognition and providing financial incentives for their development. This includes ensuring that regulatory frameworks are sufficiently flexible to accommodate innovative cooperative models while also providing clear standards for accountability and quality of services (Wells, 2025; Woulfin, Jones, 2023).

STRATEGY AND VISION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVES

Effective strategies for integrating cooperative principles into special education governance involve meticulous planning and stakeholder engagement (Ébersold et al. 2018; Obah, 2024). Effective communication channels are paramount to successfully implement these strategies, ensuring that all parties, from teachers to parents and community members, are fully engaged in the decision-making processes and organizational preparedness (Alsowait et al. 2023;

Vlachou et al. 2023). This multifaceted approach aims to cultivate an inclusive culture where all stakeholders are not only informed but also actively participate in shaping the educational landscape for students with disabilities (Vlachou et al. 2023). To this end, research must focus on continuously evaluating innovative methodologies, such as cooperative learning and differentiated assessment, to ensure these practices meet the dynamic needs of students and improve their long-term career prospects (Park, 2024; Ramírez-Solórzano, Navas, 2024). This also involves a critical analysis of current policy gaps that may limit the effective implementation of cooperative models and identifying opportunities for legislative reform to better support these innovative governance structures (D'Elia et al. 2025; Ezeafulukwe et al. 2024). The long-term effectiveness of these digital and cooperative frameworks hinges on sustained stakeholder engagement and ongoing research into their practical application and impact (Peng et al. 2024; Yildirim, 2024). The integration of students' voices, including those with disabilities, in co-planning initiatives represents a pivotal governance tool for fostering truly inclusive educational environments and ensuring that proposed solutions effectively address their needs (D'Angelo et al. 2020; Naess et al. 2024). This participatory approach not only enhances the relevance of educational programs but also cultivates a sense of ownership and empowerment among the students themselves (D'Elia et al. 2025). These pedagogical strategies also aim to foster essential employability skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which are vital for students' future success and societal integration (Adam et al. 2025). This approach aligns with principles of cooperative learning, problem/project-based learning, and service learning, which collectively foster self-regulated learning and critical thinking skills vital for navigating real-world challenges (D'Elia et al. 2025). These methodologies collectively contribute to a more comprehensive and adaptive educational experience, preparing students for future academic and professional endeavors by cultivating critical literacy, decision-making, and problem-solving capabilities (Karagianni, Drigas, 2023). This comprehensive educational strategy also emphasizes the development of interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility, which are crucial for students' holistic development and successful integration into society (D'Elia et al. 2025). Furthermore, integrating real-world scenarios and clear learning goals into these educational frameworks enhances student engagement and provides a clear roadmap for achieving desired outcomes (D'Elia et al. 2025). Such governmental support is crucial for bridging the knowledge gap regarding special needs learner support, fostering the development of inclusive digital content and curricula, and equipping educators with the necessary skills to effectively integrate technology and assistive devices (Malta et al. 2024; Mpu, 2023). This holistic approach would facilitate the widespread adoption of inclusive methods like problem/project-based learning, cooperative learning, and service learning, which have been identified as highly effective for diverse student populations, including those with special educational needs (D'Elia et al. 2025). This includes promoting related projects through a centralized, one-stop system, potentially managed by the Ministry of Education, to streamline support for integrated vocational education base schools, special schools, and school companies that are crucial for students with disabilities (Park, 2024). Such a system would underscore the critical role of career and vocational education in enhancing the quality of

special education and preparing students for successful integration into the workforce and higher education (Park, 2024). This necessitates a dynamic and adaptive curriculum development process, rooted in the collective expertise of various stakeholders, to ensure that educational offerings are directly applicable to the unique circumstances of each school and the individualized needs of students with disabilities (Park, 2024). This involves developing clear guidelines for resource sharing, collaborative decision-making, and conflict resolution that are culturally sensitive and promote mutual trust among all participants (Ébersold et al. 2018).

COOPERATIVE MODELS, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND MUNICIPALITIES

The successful implementation of cooperative governance models in special education hinges on understanding the "long tail" nature of rural special education and designing tailored approaches for both exclusive and comprehensive special education schools (Li et al. 2021). This also necessitates a critical assessment of existing district capabilities to effectively support students in general education settings, as well as an examination of how current policies might inadvertently promote trends in special education student placement (Russell, Bray, 2013). Strategically, policies should prioritize the development of robust data infrastructure to monitor these trends and inform responsive interventions, ensuring that cooperative models can adapt to specific regional and demographic challenges. Moreover, fostering the development of strong, inter-agency networks is crucial for addressing the multifaceted needs of students with disabilities, thereby requiring policymakers to actively engage various stakeholders in key implementation activities (Pettit, 2023; Ward et al. 2022). Stratification of these policies should also consider the unique cultural and socio-economic contexts of diverse communities, ensuring that interventions are both relevant and effective in promoting genuine inclusivity and equity within special education (Mursalim, Haq, 2022). The effectiveness of these policies hinges on consistent funding formulas and implementation strategies nationwide, addressing the systemic inequity where a student's geographic location often dictates the availability and quality of postsecondary support services (Wells, 2025). This ensures that cooperative governance models, by fostering shared decision-making and resource pooling, can directly mitigate such disparities and enhance institutional capacity across diverse educational settings.

THE COOPERATIVE MODEL AND THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Within the domain of public administration, the integration of cooperative governance practices has the potential to enhance synergistic teamwork among educators, parents, and local communities, concurrently optimizing decision-making processes and improving student outcomes (Almahdawi et al. 2023; Narot, Kiettikunwong, 2024). The investigation delves into how specific elements of the cooperative model, such as collective leadership and mutual support mechanisms, can be effectively adapted and implemented within the unique context of special education schools, thereby fostering value co-creation and active participation from all stakeholders (Narot, Kiettikunwong, 2024). Emphasis is placed on elucidating the intrinsic alignment between cooperative values and the overarching objectives of inclusive education,

particularly highlighting their shared focus on participation, equity, and empowerment (Garg, 2024). The integration of students' voices, including those with disabilities, in co-planning initiatives represents a pivotal governance tool for fostering truly inclusive educational environments and ensuring that proposed solutions effectively address their needs (D'Angelo et al. 2020; Naess et al. 2024). This participatory approach not only enhances the relevance of educational programs but also cultivates a sense of ownership and empowerment among the students themselves (D'Elia et al. 2025). Moreover, fostering an environment where students with special educational needs learn alongside their peers in inclusive settings can significantly close achievement gaps and promote deeper friendships, necessitating tailored strategies and additional resources for successful implementation (Mateu et al. 2021; Park et al. 2023). This approach aligns with principles of cooperative learning, problem/project-based learning, and service learning, which collectively foster self-regulated learning and critical thinking skills vital for navigating real-world challenges (D'Elia et al. 2025). These pedagogical strategies also aim to foster essential employability skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which are vital for students' future success and societal integration (Adam et al. 2025). Furthermore, effective public policies must address the disparities in funding and resource allocation across different regions, ensuring that all students with disabilities have equitable access to high-quality special education services, comprehensive transition planning, and robust disability resource centers (Wells, 2025).

FINANCE AND CURRENCY CHANGES – CHALLENGES, ADAPTATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COOPERATIVES

The exploration of policy gaps extends to understanding how existing funding mechanisms and resource allocation strategies either enable or constrain the operationalization of cooperative governance within special education settings (Park, 2024). This integrated approach will inevitably lead to a re-evaluation of current funding models, advocating for equitable resource distribution that supports the long-term viability and growth of cooperative special education initiatives (Marsetyo, Nurhadi, 2021). Furthermore, policies must cultivate an environment where grassroots efforts and ethical engagement are prioritized, along with strategic financial planning, to build a strong foundation for cooperative identities and overcome operational challenges (Zhang et al. 2024). This holistic approach not only addresses immediate educational needs but also promotes the long-term sustainability and scalability of cooperative governance models within special education, ensuring their widespread adoption and impact. This includes prioritizing state accountability measures for students with disabilities, aligning with frameworks such as the „Every Student Succeeds Act“ of 2015, which necessitates collaboration among general and special educators to rethink traditional approaches and promote inclusive education (Lane et al. 2022). Moreover, the effectiveness of these policies hinges on consistent funding formulas and implementation strategies nationwide, addressing the systemic inequity where a student's geographic location often dictates the availability and quality of postsecondary support services (Wells, 2025). This ensures that cooperative governance models, by fostering shared decision-making and

resource pooling, can directly mitigate such disparities and enhance institutional capacity across diverse educational settings.

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