CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF KARNATAKA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Ravikumar K.

Research Scholar, Department of Studies & Research in Sociology, Karnataka State Open University Mysuru
Assistant Professor   Department of Sociology, Government First Grade College Kunigal- Tumkur District, Karnataka, India

Santhosh Naik R.

Assistant Professor and Research Guide
Department of Studies & Research in Sociology, Karnataka State Open University Mysuru
Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education seeks to ensure that all children, regardless of disability, socio-economic background, caste, or language, have equitable access to mainstream schooling. This study examines the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive education in government schools of Karnataka using secondary data derived from national policies, state reports, audits, and peer-reviewed literature. Drawing on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), the National Education Policy (2020), Samagra Shikshana Karnataka reports, and UNESCO/UNICEF studies. This paper synthesizes evidence concerning policy frameworks, teacher capacity, infrastructure, identification of children with special needs (CWSN), community participation, and monitoring mechanisms (RPwD Act, 2016; NEP, 2020; Samagra Shikshana Karnataka, 2024). From a sociological perspective, the study situates inclusive education within the broader context of structural inequalities, social stigma, and institutional capacity. Findings indicate that while Karnataka benefits from strong policy support and significant funding, persistent gaps exist in trained personnel, accessible infrastructure, accurate identification of CWSN, and community engagement (UNESCO, 2017; CAG, 2023). The study concludes with actionable recommendations such as strengthening district, model resource centres, expanding in-service teacher training, institutionalizing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), improving data systems, and fostering community ownership through functional School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs). Implementing these strategies could enhance equity and learning outcomes for all students in Government schools of Karnataka.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Children with Special Needs (CWSN), Samagra Shikshana, NEP 2020, RPwD Act, sociology of education

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in India has evolved from a peripheral policy concern to a central objective of the national education agenda. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD Act, 2016) and the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) underscore the right of children with disabilities to access mainstream education and mandate measures such as reasonable accommodations, accessible infrastructure, and trained personnel for the mainstreaming of children with special needs (Government of India, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2020). Regarding Karnataka, through its flagship initiative Samagra Shikshana (SSK), has adopted a comprehensive approach to operationalize

inclusive strategies across government schools, evidenced in state reports, annual plans, and program audits (Samagra Shikshana Karnataka, 2024).

Despite the existence of a progressive policy framework, a gap remains between policy intent and classroom reality. Government audits and field studies indicate uneven implementation across districts, inadequate numbers of trained resource teachers, infrastructural barriers, incomplete identification of CWSN, and limited community participation (CAG, 2023; SSK Annual Report, 2024; Times of India, 2025).

This paper seeks to answer a central sociological question: What structural, institutional, and cultural factors influence the implementation of inclusive education in Government schools of Karnataka and what opportunities exist to strengthen inclusion? Using secondary data sources including policy documents, state reports, and peer-reviewed literature. The study frames inclusion as both an educational and social process that intersects with caste, class, language, and disability. It also examines how unequal social structures and institutional capacity shape the practical outcomes of inclusion in everyday school life (UNESCO, 2017; NEP, 2020).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ramchand (2021), in the study *"Conceptions, perceptions and practices of inclusive education in Karnataka"*, explored teachers' perspectives on inclusive education. The study aimed to understand how national policies translate to classroom practices. Ramchand hypothesized that teacher beliefs and resource constraints significantly mediate policy uptake. Using qualitative interviews and classroom observation, the research found that while teachers maintained positive attitudes toward inclusion, large class sizes and limited teaching materials constrained effective implementation. The study acknowledged limitations such as a small, non-representative sample and restricted generalizability.

Samagra Shikshana Karnataka (2024), in its annual report *"Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs 2023–24"*, aimed to document programmatic implementation. Using administrative data and program audits, it reported increased budget allocations, deployment of resource teachers, and the establishment of model resource centres. Nevertheless, limitations included uneven district-level capacity and gaps in data quality.

UNESCO (2017), in *"Inclusive Education in India"*, mapped the national status of disability-inclusive education. It hypothesized that systemic barriers, rather than a lack of legislation, hinder meaningful inclusion. Employing desk reviews, national statistics, and case studies, UNESCO found that accessible infrastructure, teacher training, and community engagement are crucial for inclusion. Limitations were noted as national aggregates masking sub-national variation.

The Government of India (2023) produced *National Guidelines and Implementation Framework on Equitable and Inclusive Education* (NGIFEIE), with the objective of guiding state-level operationalization under NEP 2020. The guidelines assumed that standardized implementation frameworks improve uniformity. Through policy synthesis and stakeholder consultations, the study recommended norms for IEPs, resource centres, and monitoring mechanisms. Limitations included heterogeneity across states and financial constraints (Ministry of Education, 2023).

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG, 2023) conducted a performance audit on Karnataka's primary educational institutions. The audit sought to assess governance and school functioning, hypothesizing that institutional weaknesses affect service delivery. Using records audits and field verification, it found missing SDMCs, insufficient teacher deployment, and infrastructural deficits, with limitations in cross-sectional data and potential underreporting of local innovations.

UNICEF (2021), in *Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in India*, synthesized programmatic achievements and challenges. It hypothesized that central funding mechanisms like Samagra Shiksha could increase access if state capacity is present. Using secondary data analysis, it found that while funding had expanded, identification and learning supports remained insufficient. Limitations were noted in data comparability across states.

ResearchGate article (2023) , *"Study on Issues and Challenges of Government Schools in Karnataka"*, sought to map systemic issues including dropouts and learning gaps. The study hypothesized that socio-economic and administrative factors jointly produced poor outcomes. Using descriptive secondary data analysis, it found that inclusion is limited by teacher shortages and remedial learning needs. Limitations were associated with reliance on secondary data.

Inclusive Education Initiative (2020) analyzed the relationship between RPwD Act and NEP 2020 in the policy piece *"Examining Disability Inclusion in India's New National Education Policy"*. It hypothesized that ambiguities between RTE and RPwD create implementation gaps. Policy comparison methodology highlighted unresolved tensions around home-based education and special school regulations. Limitations arose as it was not an empirical study.

In summary, these studies indicate strong policy frameworks and dedicated funding, yet persistent implementation gaps remain in teacher capacity, identification of CWSN, school accessibility, and community participation (UNESCO, 2017; Samagra Shikshana Karnataka, 2024; CAG, 2023). Many studies rely on administrative data, underscoring the need for district-level analyses and mixed-method approaches.

3. RESEARCH GAP

While policies and descriptive studies document major constraints, there is a lack of synthesis connecting sociological structures such as caste, class, language, and household social capital with institutional capacity (teacher training, resource centres, SDMC functionality). Existing literature focuses largely on policy outputs (budgets, teacher deployment) rather than micro-level social processes, including stigma, school culture, and parental negotiation, which shape inclusive outcomes. Moreover, there is limited secondary-data synthesis combining audits, state program reports, and international assessments into actionable district-level recommendations. This study seeks to fill that gap by integrating governance, programmatic, and scholarly evidence through a sociological lens.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives are:

- To synthesize policy and programmatic evidence on inclusive education in Karnataka.

- To identify structural and institutional challenges that impedes implementation.

- To examine opportunities for strengthening inclusion at school and community levels.

- To provide sociologically grounded, evidence-informed recommendations for policymakers, civil society, and school administrators

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative, secondary-data based study using systematic document analysis. Primary sources include legislation (RPwD Act, 2016), national policies (NEP, 2020), national guidelines (NGIFEIE, 2023), Karnataka program reports (SSK, 2023–24), CAG audits (2023), and UNICEF/UNESCO

country analyses. Peer-reviewed articles and research reports relevant to Karnataka were collected from academic databases, government portals, and institutional repositories.

The methodology involved purposive collection of documents, thematic coding of challenges and opportunities (teacher capacity, infrastructure, identification), and sociological interpretation. Being a secondary study, it relies entirely on published data and carries limitations regarding timeliness, completeness, and representation of grassroots innovations.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE)

The study applies three sociological lenses:

1. **Structural-Functionalism:** Schools are institutions reproducing social order and human capital. Inclusive education promotes social integration; however, underfunded schools and absent resources limit its effectiveness (Durkheimian perspective).

2. **Conflict Theory:** Inequalities of caste, class, and language mediate access to inclusion. Marginalized families often lack social capital to access assessments, assistive devices, or advocacy, perpetuating disadvantage (Marxist perspective).

3. **Symbolic Interactionism:** Micro-level interactions, including teacher expectations, peer attitudes, and labeling, shape the daily realization of inclusion. Even with strong policy, exclusion can occur in everyday classroom practices.

These perspectives together provide a comprehensive lens to analyze macro-policy, institutional capacity, and micro-level social interactions.

➢ **Policy and programmatic on inclusive education in Karnataka**

Inclusive education in Karnataka has progressively become a cornerstone of educational policy, reflecting both the state's developmental priorities and its social commitment to equity. The recent formulation of a Karnataka-specific Education Policy (2025), led by Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat, marks a major step toward contextualizing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to local realities. It proposes a bilingual model, allowing instruction in Kannada or the mother tongue alongside English up to Class 5 to strengthen comprehension and reduce early dropout among marginalized learners (India Today, 2025).

Programmatic evidence from Samagra Shikshana Karnataka (SSK, 2024) reveals steady progress. More than 4,100 government schools have been approved to introduce bilingual sections for the 2025–26 academic year (Times of India, 2025a). Furthermore, the state's extensive Mid-Day Meal and Nutrition Program benefits over 53 lakh children, providing ragi malt, milk, and eggs, thereby improving attendance and learning readiness (India Today, 2025).

However, despite robust policy support, infrastructural barriers persist. A New Indian Express (2025) report highlights that over 52,000 schools lack disabled-friendly toilets, while only about 86,000 of 3.3 lakh children with disabilities aged 5–19 are enrolled in government schools. Such figures underscore the gap between legislative promise and on-ground practice.

Overall, Karnataka's inclusive education framework is well-conceived but unevenly implemented. Synthesizing the policy and programmatic evidence reveals that the state possesses a strong institutional foundation, yet requires greater coordination, monitoring, and local-level accountability to ensure that inclusion is not merely symbolic but experiential for every learner.

> ➤ **Structural and institutional challenges in Inclusive Education**

Despite clear legal mandates under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and NEP 2020, Education system of Karnataka faces significant structural and institutional constraints that limit full inclusion. Recent audits illustrate that among nearly 49,000 government schools, over 1,000 lack electricity, 2,600 have no toilets for boys, and 1,000 lack toilets for girls (New Indian Express, 2025). More critically, over 43,000 schools do not have disabled-friendly toilets, and 12,000 schools lack ramps or handrails, rendering many campuses inaccessible for children with disabilities.

Enrollment data reveal a worrying trend. Between 2022 and 2025, government schools lost nearly 4.7 lakh students, equivalent to a 10.38% decline (The News Minute, 2025). For children with disabilities, the participation gap is wider: only about 26% of Karnataka's 3.3 lakh CWSN are enrolled in government schools (New Indian Express, 2025a). Such figures signal the persistence of deep-rooted social barriers tied to poverty, stigma, and limited awareness.

Institutionally, resource utilization remains weak. The state education department underutilized approximately ₹138 crore earmarked for mobility and accessibility support between 2017 and 2023 (CAG, 2023). Furthermore, teacher vacancies and inadequate in-service training undermine inclusive pedagogy. Of 11,124 sanctioned teacher posts in bilingual and inclusive schools, only 7,276 are filled, revealing a shortage of skilled educators (The Hindu, 2025).

These challenges are sociologically rooted in structural inequalities. Marginalized families, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, often lack the social capital or advocacy mechanisms to demand accommodations for their children. Thus, inclusion remains constrained not only by material deficiencies but also by cultural and institutional inertia. Addressing these systemic barriers requires a holistic approach integrating infrastructural investments with attitudinal and organizational reform.

> ➤ **Opportunities for strengthening inclusive education**

Amid challenges, Karnataka also presents several promising opportunities to deepen educational inclusion. The state's ongoing Karnataka Education Policy (2025) prioritizes bilingual instruction and mother-tongue-based learning, expected to bridge language gaps and promote comprehension, especially in early grades (India Today, 2025). The policy's implementation in over 4,100 schools by 2025–26 marks an important milestone in curriculum diversification (Times of India, 2025a).

Nutritional and welfare interventions also serve as inclusive mechanisms. With 53 lakh children benefiting from daily mid-day meals, milk, or bananas, Karnataka addresses both classroom hunger and attendance barriers, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged families (India Today, 2025).

Further opportunities lie in the Marusinchana programme, expanded to 27 districts in 2025 to tackle post-pandemic learning loss. This initiative, aligned with inclusive pedagogy, offers a pathway for integrating remedial education with support for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) (Times of India, 2025b). Moreover, the recruitment of 50,000 new teachers under the Karnataka Public Schools (KPS) modernization drive provides an ideal platform to embed inclusive values and training from the outset.

Community-level engagement is also strengthening. Active School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) and partnerships with NGOs such as Mobility India (2024) demonstrate the potential of participatory governance. These collaborations facilitate localized solutions assistive devices, awareness programs, and parent engagement that can sustain inclusion beyond policy cycles.

Collectively, these initiatives suggest that Karnataka is poised to move from policy rhetoric to practical transformation. By harnessing community energy, aligning inter-sectoral programs, and integrating inclusive design into all reforms, the state can become a benchmark for equitable public education.

> ➢ **Recommendations for policymakers, civil society, and school administrators regarding inclusive education**

Inclusive education succeeds when it addresses both structural inequities and everyday social dynamics that shape classroom interactions. From a sociological standpoint, inclusion must be rooted in accessibility, awareness, and accountability.

a. **Strengthen infrastructure and accessibility**: Every government school should meet minimum accessibility standards functional ramps, handrails, and disabled-friendly toilets. UDISE+ (2024) data should guide targeted infrastructure investments in underserved districts.

b. **Improve identification and support for CWSN:** Only one-fourth of children with disabilities currently access government schools. Expanding assessment camps, providing transport allowances, and developing resource rooms can bridge this gap (UNICEF, 2024).

c. **Address human resource gaps:** Teacher shortages, especially in bilingual and special education, must be filled. Inclusive pedagogy should be integrated into pre-service curricula and reinforced through mentorship-based in-service training (Ramchand, 2021; SSK, 2024).

d. **Strengthen community and institutional participation:** Active SDMCs should include parents of children with disabilities, social workers, and local NGOs. Awareness campaigns can dismantle stigma and promote social acceptance of diversity (CAG, 2023).

e. **Integrate policy coherence:** Coordination across the RTE Act (2009), RPwD Act (2016), NEP (2020), and the new Karnataka Education Policy (2025) is essential to ensure inclusive objectives are uniformly implemented.

f. **Monitor learning outcomes, not just access**: In the 2023 SSLC examinations, 80% of differently-abled students passed, but rates varied widely only 64% among students with intellectual disabilities (CareerIndia, 2023). Monitoring such data can guide targeted academic support.

Inclusion is not merely a bureaucratic target but a societal transformation. Policymakers must work with civil society, teachers, and communities to create an environment where every child regardless of background or ability can learn with dignity, confidence, and belonging.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- **Policy and Finance**

Karnataka has a robust policy and funding framework through RPwD Act (2016), NEP (2020), and Samagra Shikshana (2024). Nonetheless, audits reveal gaps in resource deployment and district-level capacity (SSK Annual Report, 2024; CAG, 2023).

- **Identification of CWSN**

  Identification of CWSN is inconsistent due to insufficient assessment teams and irregular camps. Many children remain unregistered or misclassified, affecting access to IEPs and assistive devices (UNICEF, 2021; SSK, 2024).

- **Human Resource Limitations**

While resource teachers exist, their deployment is uneven. In-service teacher training lacks follow-up mentoring and classroom coaching, limiting the implementation of inclusive pedagogy (Ramchand, 2021).

- **Infrastructure**

Physical accessibility and learning materials are inconsistent. Ramps, accessible toilets, Braille textbooks, and assistive devices are present in some schools but missing in others (RPwD Act, 2016; CAG, 2023).

- **Community Participation**

SDMCs, intended to enhance community involvement, are often inactive or incomplete. Active SDMCs can mobilize resources and parent engagement for CWSN (CAG, 2023; Times of India, 2025).

- **Learning Recovery**

Post-COVID remedial initiatives, such as Marusinchana, highlight the need to address learning loss among CWSN, showing that remedial programs must align with inclusive pedagogy (SSK, 2024; Times of India, 2025).

- **Opportunities**

Model Resource Centres, NGO collaborations, and targeted state initiatives provide scalable models for improving inclusion (SSK Annual Report, 2024; Mobility India, 2024).

8. SUGGESTIONS

- ➢ **Governance and Institutions:** Establish functional Model Resource Centres, strengthen SDMCs, and organize intersectoral identification camps.
- ➢ **Human Resources:** Expand in-service teacher training with mentorship, deploy resource teachers strategically, and recruit para-professionals from local communities.
- ➢ **Pedagogy:** Implement IEPs, provide accessible learning materials, and integrate remedial education with inclusion strategies.
- ➢ **Data and Infrastructure:** Improve CWSN data systems, prioritize accessibility upgrades, and leverage NGO partnerships for devices and training.
- ➢ **Community Engagement:** Conduct awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, involve parents in school decision-making, and document district best practices for replication.

CONCLUSION

Karnataka has strong policy support, dedicated funding, and promising local innovations for inclusive education. However, gaps remain in identification, trained personnel, infrastructure, and community governance. A multi-level, sociologically informed approach strengthening resource centres, improving data systems, training teachers, and mobilizing communities can translate policy intent into meaningful classroom inclusion. Future research should focus on district-level, mixed-method evaluations of inclusion outcomes.

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