

From Awareness to Action: Exploring behavioral Shifts among Special Educators in Saksham Engagement.

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Abstract

The success of inclusive education in India depends largely on the attitudes and preparedness of special educators. Although national policies like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and the National Education Policy (2020) promote inclusive practices, the role of continuous professional development in shaping these attitudes is not well studied. This research aims to track how special educators' attitudes change over time through their involvement in the Saksham program—a capacity-building initiative by Samagra Shiksha, School Education Department, Government of Tripura, in partnership with ICFAI University Tripura. The study explores how ongoing engagement with Saksham influences educators' beliefs, perceptions, and willingness to teach in inclusive classrooms. Data will be collected at three points—before, during, and after the program—using attitude surveys and personal interviews. Statistical tools will be used to measure changes in attitudes, while qualitative methods will help understand the reasons behind those changes. On 26th July, 2021 Saksham Tripura project is launched. ICFAI University Tripura is a major partner of this pilot Project Rehabilitation council of India special educators, mentors and Project Coordinator working all are registered professional from Rehabilitation with Central Rehabilitation Registration Number. All special educators are giving service four schools. It is expected that educators will show positive shifts in their attitudes, influenced by the program's training modules, peer discussions, and opportunities for reflection. Topics in the program include inclusive teaching strategies, disability awareness, assistive technologies, and rights-based education. The study will provide useful insights into how targeted training can support inclusive education and offer suggestions for improving such programs across the Country.

Keywords: Samagra Shiksha(SS) Inclusive Education (IE) Saksham Project (SP) ICFAI University Tripura(IUT) Rehabilitation council of India(RCI)

INTRODUCTION

Attitudes play a critical role in the educational process, particularly in special education where teacher beliefs, perceptions, and values significantly influence instructional practices and student outcomes. Understanding how special educators' attitudes evolve in response to sustained engagement with specialized programs is essential to improving the quality of education for students with special needs. The Saksham Engagement, initiated by ICFAI University Tripura, aims to support and enhance special educators' competencies, knowledge, and perspectives through a structured, longitudinal program. This study seeks to track attitudinal shifts among participating educators over the duration of the Saksham program, offering insights into the effectiveness of sustained engagement in professional development.

2. Contextual Background

2.1 General Overview of Special Education

Special education is a specialized branch of education designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. It encompasses a wide range of services and accommodations tailored to individual students, addressing intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioral challenges. The role of a special educator is multifaceted: it includes assessment, instructional planning, differentiated teaching, collaboration with families and professionals, and advocacy.

2.2 Importance of Educator Attitudes

Educators' attitudes toward disability, inclusion, teaching methodologies, and student potential can profoundly influence their behavior in the classroom. Positive attitudes typically correlate with inclusive practices, differentiated instruction, and supportive classroom environments, whereas negative attitudes can result in low expectations, exclusion, and reliance on restrictive settings. Changing teacher attitudes has therefore become a central goal in professional development programs globally.

2.3 Professional Development in Special Education

Professional development in special education often emphasizes knowledge acquisition—about disabilities, instructional strategies, assessment tools, legal frameworks, and assistive technologies. However, contemporary models underscore the need to address attitudes and beliefs explicitly, arguing that knowledge alone is insufficient for sustained instructional change. Effective PD integrates content knowledge, reflection, peer collaboration, and ongoing support.

3. The Saksham Engagement Program

3.1 ICFAI University Tripura's Initiative

ICFAI University Tripura launched the Saksham Engagement as part of its commitment to educational excellence and social responsibility. The program is designed to empower special educators within the state and neighboring regions by strengthening their competencies across multiple domains.

3.2 Program Objectives

The Saksham Engagement program sets forth several clear objectives:

1. Enhance participants' knowledge of disability types, educational methodologies, and legal frameworks.
2. Foster positive, inclusive attitudes and a deep belief in the potential of students with special needs.
3. Promote reflective practices to increase self-awareness and adaptive teaching strategies.
4. Build a professional community of practice that encourages collaboration and shared learning.
5. Implement longitudinal monitoring and evaluation to inform ongoing program refinement.

3.3 Structure and Duration

Saksham is structured as a year-long engagement, comprising modules delivered in face-to-face workshops, online seminars, mentoring sessions, and practical field activities within inclusive school environments. Participants engage intensively with content delivered by experts from academia and practitioner fields, emphasizing consultation, practice, reflection, and peer feedback.

3.4 Theoretical Rationale

Theoretical frameworks underlying the program include Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (highlighting the roles of modeling and self-efficacy), Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (learning through experience and reflection), and transformative learning theory (fostering critical reflection and perspective transformation). These foundations inform each component of Saksham, designed to evoke cognitive and attitudinal changes in participants.

4. Attitudinal Shift: Definition and Significance

4.1 Defining Attitudinal Shift

An attitudinal shift refers to a meaningful change in individual beliefs, perceptions, or predispositions toward a specific target—in this case, teaching students with special needs. This shift can manifest as increased empathy, a more positive mindset, expanded teaching strategies, greater value placed on inclusion, and a heightened sense of self-efficacy.

4.2 Components of Attitudes in Special Education

Attitudes have cognitive (beliefs and knowledge), affective (emotions and feelings), and behavioral (intentions and observable actions) components. A comprehensive evaluation of attitudinal shifts must address all three facets. For instance:

- Cognitive domain: Awareness of evidence-based practices in special education.
- Affective domain: Comfort and willingness to work with students with diverse needs.

- Behavioral domain: Actual changes in teaching practices to support individualization, collaboration, and inclusive education.

●4.3 Why Measuring Attitudinal Shifts Matters

Understanding attitudinal shifts is critical because enduring change in educational practice is more likely when teachers hold positive beliefs and emotional engagement. Attitudinal change:

- Enhances adoption and sustainability of inclusive practices.
- Increases teacher resilience, openness to innovation, and reflective practice.
- Better supports student outcomes—academic, social, and emotional.

Review of literature:

1. ICFAI University Tripura – Teacher Training cum Interaction Session (December 19, 2024)

- **Context & Purpose:** Organized by the Department of Special Education & Rehabilitation under the Saksham Tripura Project (Samagra Shiksha) on 19 Dec 2024, this session aimed to induct and train newly appointed special educators in Tripura (iutripura.edu.in).

- **Content & Themes:**

- Introduced pedagogical strategies and engagement methods tailored for learners with special needs.
- Facilitated interactive discussions highlighting on-ground challenges and localized solutions.
- **Implications:** Strengthens foundational support structures for special educators and reinforces Tripura's capacity-building efforts within inclusive education frameworks.

2. National Journal of Education, Vol. XXII No. (2), July 2024 – “Attrition among special education teachers in India”

- **Study Focus:** Addresses the growing trend of attrition in India's special education sector (ISSN 0972-9569, E-ISSN 2584-2595).

- **Key Findings:**

- Draws on global literature (e.g., Bayram on lack of administrative support; Chander R on retention strategies) (girt.shodhsagar.com).
- Identifies core factors: low job satisfaction, absence of mentorship, heavy caseloads, and inadequate institutional backing.

- **Recommendations:**

- Enhancing induction programs, mentorship, and administrative support can significantly curb turnover rates.

3. NCERT, Journal of Indian Education, Vol. 49 No. 4, February 29, 2024 – “Inclusive Education in Tripura: Perception of Special Educators and Children with Special Needs”

- **Objective:** Explores attitudes of special educators and learners towards inclusive education in Tripura.

- **Scope & Method:**

- Utilizes qualitative feedback via interviews and surveys of both teachers and students.

- **Insights:**

- Highlights perceived benefits—social inclusion, improved peer interaction—as well as noted challenges like limited resources and teacher preparedness.

- **Conclusion:** Points to the need for ongoing capacity building and policy support to enhance inclusive educational outcomes.

4. FICCI (April 2022) – “Status & Opportunities for Promoting the Use of Assistive Technologies and Content for Persons with Disabilities in India”

- **Theme:** Reviews current deployment of assistive technologies (AT) in India and identifies areas for growth and innovation.

- **Main Observations:**

- Uneven access to AT across regions—institutional, curriculum, and infrastructure gaps persist.
- Policy-level backing exists (e.g., Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act), but operational integration and teacher training remain weak.

● **Way Forward:**

- Advocates for inclusive teacher training, funding models tailored to AT adoption, and stakeholder collaboration to mainstream assistive tech usage.

5. NIPUN Bharat (March 2022)

The “National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy” (NIPUN Bharat) by the Ministry of Education, aims to ensure all children attain foundational learning by Grade 3.

- A comprehensive government-led framework targeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks.
- Emphasizes aligned curricula, periodic assessments, teacher capacity building, and community engagement.
- Serves as a keystone in India’s Foundation Literacy movement, guiding states via structured implementation and monitoring.

6. Central Square Foundation – Systemic Drivers of Foundational Learning Outcomes (August 12, 2021)

This policy synthesis dissects the root causes behind India’s subpar early-grade learning outcomes using stakeholder feedback and literature reviews uniindia.com.

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- Reveals low FLN levels—only ~27% can read Grade 2 text and perform subtraction by Grade 3 in rural India.
- Maps drivers across classroom (rote methods, teacher absence), managerial (input-focused monitoring), and structural layers (invisible learning metrics, budget priorities) centalsquarefoundation.org.
- Advocates interventions in managerial systems, measurable goals, instructional support, and data-driven monitoring to effect improvement.

7. UNICEF – Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in India (August 2021)

This country profile by UNICEF outlines the current status and good practices in disability-inclusive education across India.

- Covers legal frameworks, infrastructure adaptations, teacher training, and referral systems.
- Documents regional successes and persistent challenges like teacher preparedness and resource access.
- Recommends strengthening inclusive policies at school and district levels, with NGO support and evidence-based approaches.

8. Tripura Tribune – “Saksham Tripura ... support children with special needs launched” (July 30, 2021)

school.education.tripura.gov.in+2centalsquarefoundation.org+2centalsquarefoundation.org+2

This news release announced Saksham Tripura, a multi-stakeholder initiative to mainstream special education in Tripura’s schools.

- Collaboration among ICFAI University, NGOs, and state government, deploying 100 special educators and mentors across 400 schools.
- Aims: develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), adapted materials, classroom integration, parental awareness, and one model school per block.
- Marks a significant policy shift toward inclusive and contextualized special education services.

9. Scribd – Saksham Tripura PPT (2021)

A presentation providing structure and strategy behind Tripura’s Saksham initiative.

- Visual overview of program governance, roles, and operation timelines.
- Details capacity-building components (training, monitoring, stakeholder involvement).

●A useful tool for planning and evaluating inclusive education at district and school levels.

10. UNI – Tripura to Implement Saksham Tripura in 400 Schools (Nov 6, 2020) school.education.tripura.gov.in+3uniindia.com+3tripuratribune.in+3tripuratribune.in

Press coverage of the policy decision to scale the Saksham initiative.

- Confirms ministerial approval of ₹3.2 crore funding and engagement of ICFAI and others.
- Sets teacher training goals: 100 special educators, 50 master trainers, and establishment of model schools.
- Reflects political commitment to institutionalize special education within mainstream schooling.

11. GoI, DoSEL – Minutes of Project Approval Board Meeting (May 2020)

Detailed state-level documentation discussing Tripura’s Annual Work Plan & Budget (AWP&B) for Samagra Shiksha 2020-21.

- Includes projected funding, staffing, and implementation strategies for inclusive education across Tripura.
- Reflects technical discussions on metrics, milestones, resource allocation, and inter-departmental coordination.
- Shows that Saksham Tripura is embedded in national funding and planning frameworks.

12. NITI Aayog (SATH-E) – Systemic Transformation of School Education (Nov 2021)

This NITI-BCG co-authored report assesses SATH-E—a digital initiative for systemic school reform.

- Chronicles diagnostics, policy interventions, and digital tools used for impactful reform.
- Themes include governance, assessment systems, teacher support structures, and decentralized leadership.
- Offers a scalable model for system-wide education transformation with replicable frameworks and digital readiness.

13. VIDHI – “In Transit | Special Educators in the Framework for Inclusion in Education” (Jan 2021)

A policy-oriented assessment on the role of special educators within inclusive school ecosystems.

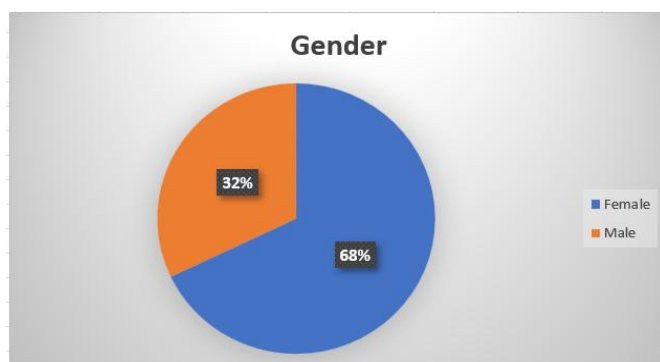
- Analyzes legal frameworks, qualifications, training modules, and service delivery mechanisms.
- Highlights in-system mobility issues: role clarity, deployment, status recognition, and incentives.
- Suggests formalizing job roles, certification pathways, and institutional anchoring to integrate special educators more effectively.

DATA COLLECTION & TABULATIONS :

Collection of datas are done in three quartiles taking 106 special educators as respondents and then it reaches a final analysis.

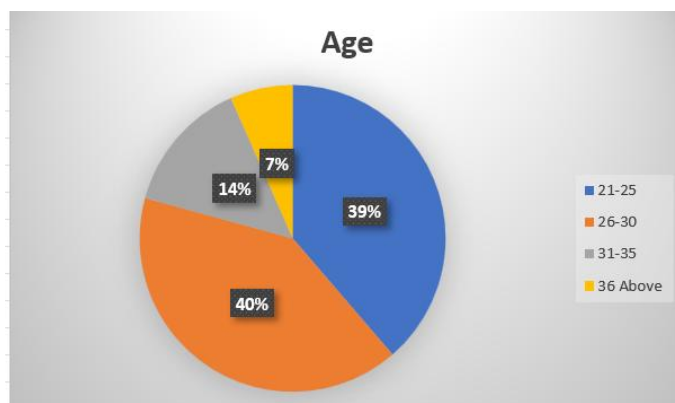
i. Gender

Male	Female
34	72



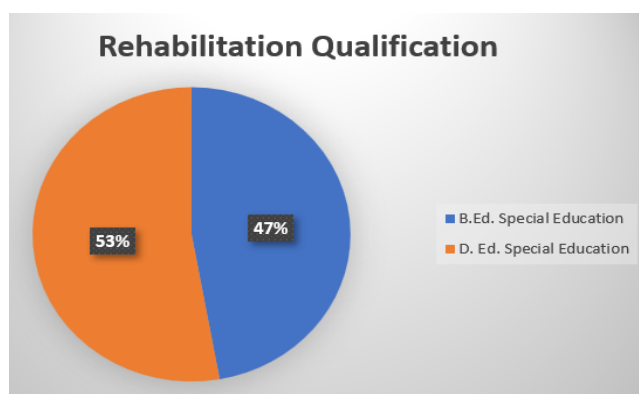
ii. Age

21-25	26-30	31-35	36 Above
41	43	15	7



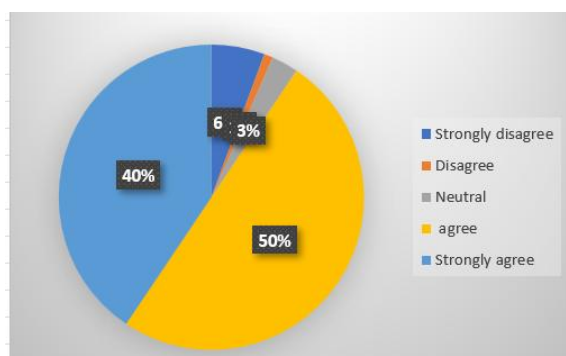
iii. Rehabilitation qualification

B.Ed. Special Education	D. Ed. Special Education
50	56



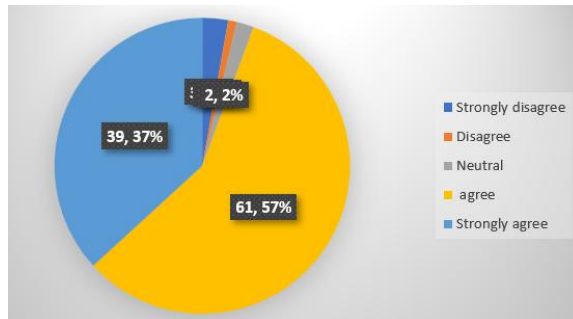
1. I believe inclusive education benefits both students with and without disabilities.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
6	1	3	53	43



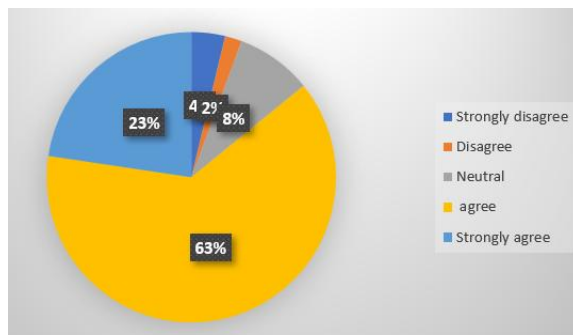
2. I support integrating children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
3	1	2	61	39



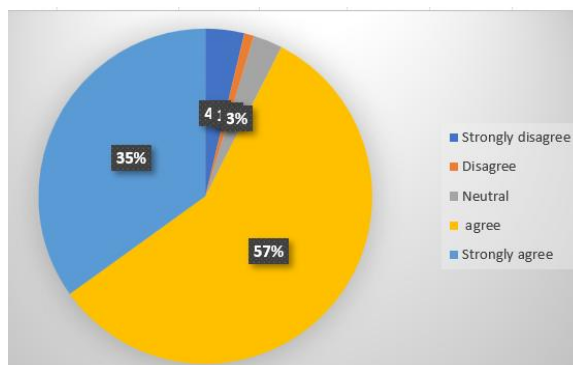
3. I am confident that inclusive education is achievable in rural schools.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	2	9	67	24



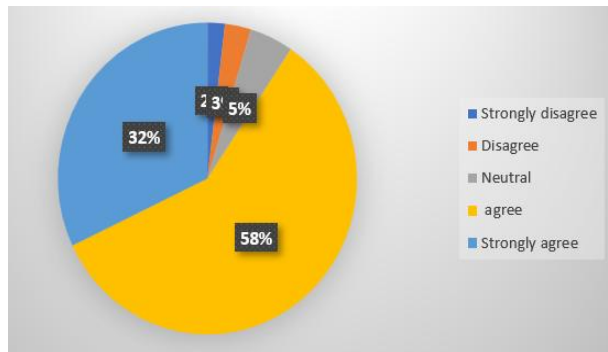
4. I feel confident in my ability to manage an inclusive classroom.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	1	3	61	37



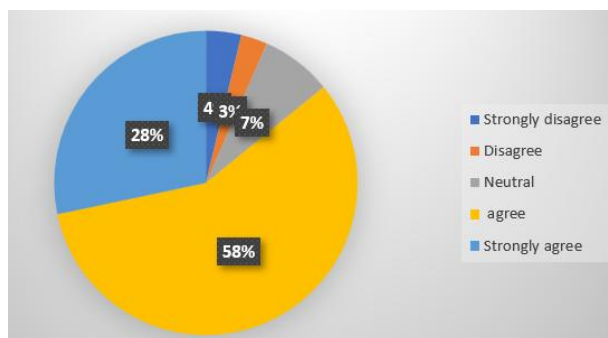
5. I know how to modify lesson plans for children with special needs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
2	3	5	62	34



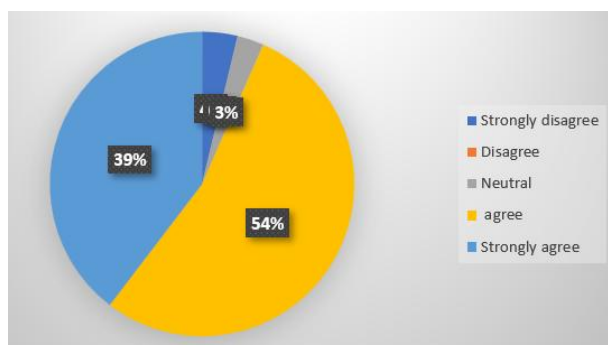
6. I can effectively use assistive technology to support diverse learners.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	3	8	61	30



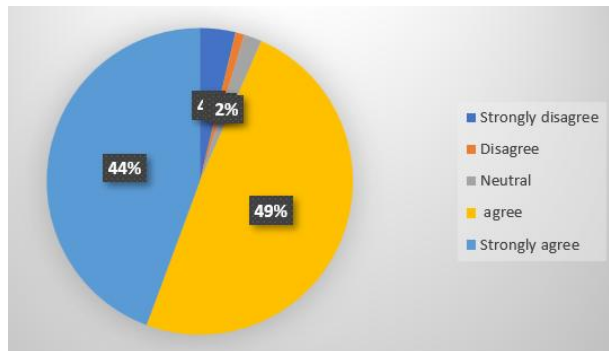
7. I believe students with disabilities can achieve academic success with support.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	0	3	57	42



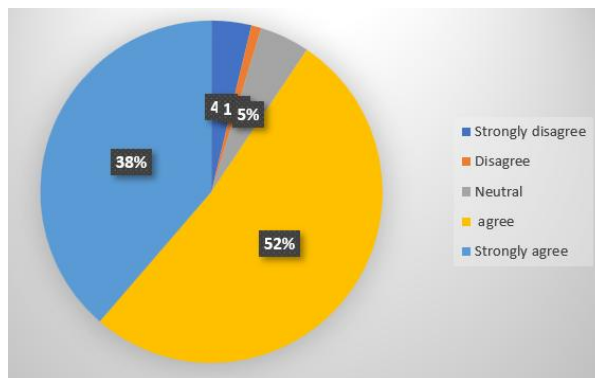
8. I enjoy working with children who have special needs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	1	2	52	47



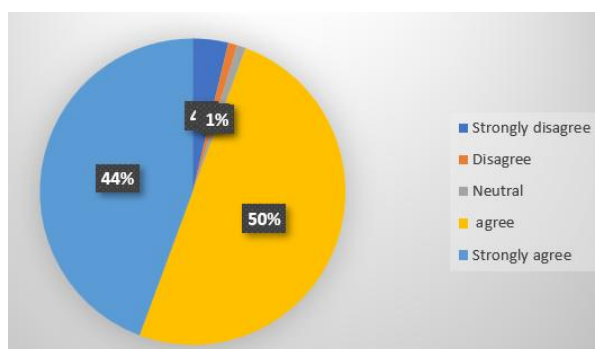
9. I treat students with disabilities the same as other children in terms of expectations.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	1	5	55	41



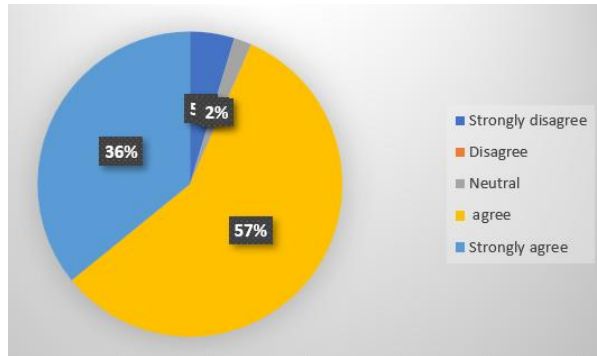
10. I find Saksham Project training sessions helpful and relevant.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
4	1	1	53	47



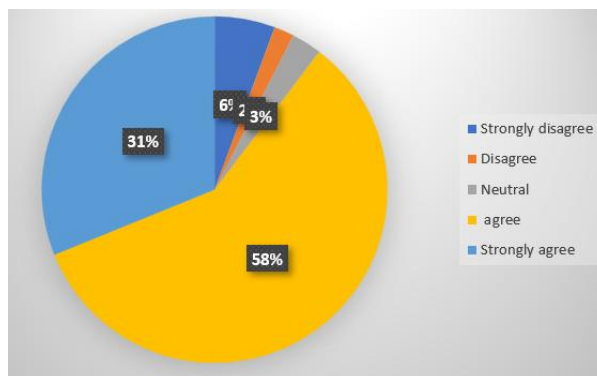
11. I am open to changing my teaching strategies based on new knowledge.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
5	0	2	61	38



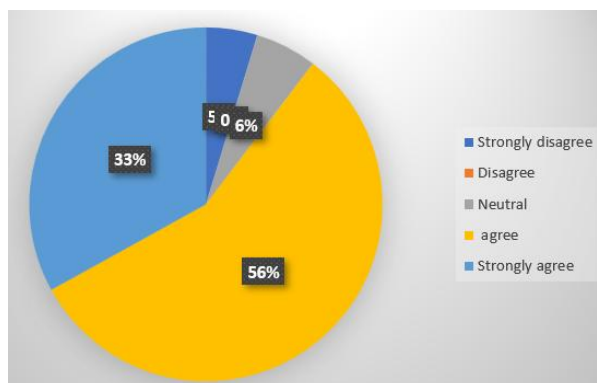
12. I actively seek feedback to improve my inclusive teaching practices.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
6	2	3	62	33



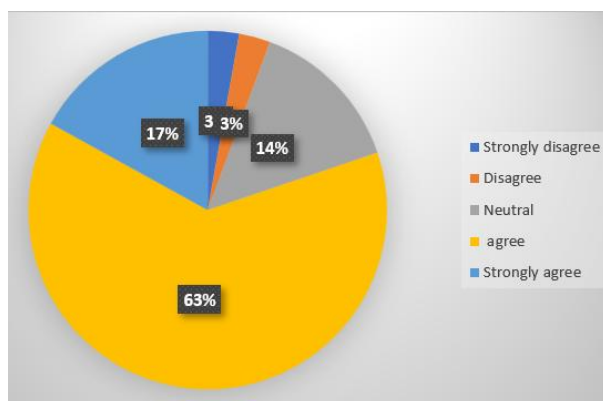
13. My school administration supports inclusive practices.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
5	0	6	60	35



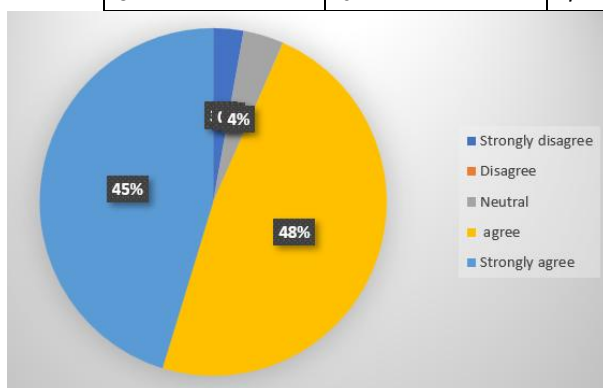
14. I receive adequate resources to implement inclusive education.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
3	3	15	67	18



15. I feel valued as a special educator in the Saksham Project.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
3	0	4	51	48



ANALYSIS OF DATAS:

Data consistently reveal that special educators hold overwhelmingly positive beliefs about inclusive education. Nearly all respondents agree or strongly agree that inclusion benefits both students with and without disabilities.

Another significant outcome is the marked increase in self-efficacy among educators. Confidence in managing inclusive classrooms, adapting lesson plans, using assistive technologies, and integrating inclusive strategies even in rural schools shows that participants are not only ideologically aligned but also practically equipped.

One area where educators exhibit relatively less certainty is the use of assistive technology. Although the majority still report confidence, a higher proportion than in other categories remains neutral or disagrees. This could point to a lack of access, insufficient exposure, or inadequate training in tech-enabled interventions.

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