



**“Karma” and Human Rights: Bhutanese Teachers’ Perspectives on Inclusion and Disability.**

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3 **Article Title: “Karma” and Human Rights: Bhutanese Teachers’**  
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5 **Perspectives on Inclusion and Disability.**  
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11 **Abstract**  
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15 The Sustainable Development Goals call on countries to ensure that all children, especially the  
16 most vulnerable, are included in education. The small kingdom of Bhutan has clearly embraced  
17 inclusion in education at the policy level. However, research on inclusion and disability in this  
18 context is limited, and there are few studies focusing on the perspectives of Bhutanese teachers.  
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20 The study presented in this article was led by the question ‘how are Inclusion and Disability  
21 understood by teachers in Bhutan? The research aims were to a) explore the above concepts  
22 from the perspective of participants and b) construct these concepts in a way that is contextually  
23 relevant to Bhutan. Data collection comprised qualitative interviews with 15 Bhutanese  
24 teachers. Findings revealed that participants saw disability predominantly from a ‘medical  
25 model’ perspective, but at the same time held conflicting views as to what inclusion means.  
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27 They moreover mentioned lack of teacher training as an obstacle to the implementation of  
28 inclusion in Bhutan, and some believed that the country is not yet ready for inclusion. We argue  
29 that our findings call for Bhutan to strengthen the preparation of its teachers for inclusive  
30 education in order to narrow the current gap between policy and practice.  
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49 **Keywords:** inclusion/inclusive education, disability/special educational needs, teacher understanding,  
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51 Bhutan, South Asia  
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### Introduction: Setting the Context

We are now over 20 years after the signing of the historic Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994), which laid a strong foundation for the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities (SEN/D) in education around the world. Exactly 15 years after Dakar, when the international community first committed to achieve Education for All (UNESCO 2000), the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the United Nations (UN 2015) to highlight that more work is still required in many countries, in order to ensure the participation in education of all the world's children. With a population of approximately 775.000 people (World Bank 2015), Bhutan is a small state on the Himalayas, bordering two much larger states, India and China. Schuelka (2012) explains that since the 1960s, Bhutan has led laborious efforts to modernise its traditionally Buddhist school system, within a much wider context of transformation, development and modernisation of the entire country. In an article examining this encounter of the traditional and modern systems of education in Bhutan, Phuntsho (2000, 97) notes that:

‘this rapid development in modern education has brought about unprecedented changes in the social, cultural, political and economic structures, and has in particular revolutionized the education system.’

Bhutan has embraced inclusion in education with the signing of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010. Moreover, it has adopted a National Policy on Special Educational Needs, with the vision ‘to strive towards a caring, inclusive and enabling society’ (Ministry of Education 2012, 7). Furthermore, Article 9.15 of the Constitution of Bhutan (2008, 19) states:

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3 'The State shall endeavour to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing  
4 knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the  
5 full development of the human personality.'  
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11 This striving for an education system for all -or 'inclusive of all'- is aligned with  
12 Bhutan's wider emphasis on human rights and the unique concept of Gross National  
13 Happiness (GNH), which guides Bhutan's development and is central to its education strategy  
14 (Schuelka 2012). The GNH principle maintains some traditional Buddhist values, such as for  
15 example the emphasis on spiritual, emotional, psychological and social development as  
16 opposed to the accumulation of material wealth (The Centre for Bhutan Studies 2012).  
17 According to the GNH philosophy, every citizen of Bhutan should enjoy equal rights in  
18 political, economic, cultural, social and other aspects of life (Sherab 2014). Hence it seems  
19 that the newer notion of inclusion in education fits perfectly with much older Buddhist  
20 cultural values that continue to influence and shape the Bhutanese education system within a  
21 wider context of modernisation (J. Dorji 2003, cited in Schuelka 2012).  
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38 Today several other policy documents seem to reflect inclusion as an important priority  
39 of the Bhutanese education system (Schuelka 2012) and many Bhutanese classrooms have  
40 seen an increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds, especially of those children  
41 with disabilities (R. Dorji 2015). Furthermore, the Bhutanese education system seems to have  
42 undergone a shift from teacher-centred to child-centred when the Ministry of Education  
43 launched the pilot child-friendly school initiative (CFS) in 2005. Of the five dimensions of  
44 CFS, the first is its inclusive aspect, which states that CFS celebrates and responds to  
45 diversity by ensuring that each child irrespective of their differences is provided with equal  
46 opportunities (Sherab 2014). Moreover, in 2000, the Ministry of Education set up a separate  
47 Unit for SEN, which was upgraded to a Division in 2011. Part of the Division's work is to  
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3 support the 12 designated ‘integrated’ schools that accept children with disabilities. The  
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5 objective of the SEN division is to “break the cycle of invisibility and deprivation by bringing  
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7 every child with Special Educational Needs into the forefront of any developmental activity” (MOE  
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9 2012, 6).  
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14 While Bhutan has undergone significant policy changes and has witnessed some  
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16 initiatives designed to promote the participation in education of children with diverse needs,  
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18 at the level of practice, there are gaps that Bhutan still needs to address. UNICEF-Bhutan’s  
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20 latest annual report (2015) highlights an increase in gender inequality with a bias against  
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22 boys, and a rise in dropouts from the highest grades of primary school. In specific relation to  
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24 children with disabilities, it states that ‘they are often marginalised or discriminated against and are  
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26 not offered the opportunities to achieve their full potential’ (18). In this paper, we present findings  
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28 from a research that explored Bhutanese teachers’ understanding of inclusion and disability,  
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30 and on the basis of our findings, we argue that the preparation of teachers for inclusion in  
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32 education is one of the significant gaps that Bhutan needs to address in order to make its  
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34 education system more inclusive. In the next section, we explore the relevant literature and  
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36 why it seemed pertinent to explore Bhutanese teachers’ views on inclusion and disability.  
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## 41 **Literature Review**

### 42 ***The Role of Teacher Preparation for Inclusion***

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44 It is well known that inclusion in education is a complex concept, and there is lack of clarity  
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46 as to what it is and how it should be implemented in practice (Farell and Ainscow 2002;  
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48 Mitchell 2005; Erten and Savage 2012; Smyth et al. 2014). According to Norwich (2008),  
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50 inclusion is about schools being able to accommodate the needs of all children. In an inclusive  
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52 school, students with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in all academic and  
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54 social activities. Historically, the shift towards inclusion primarily started as a challenge to the  
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3 barriers experienced by children with disabilities, who were excluded from the mainstream,  
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5 and the term 'integration' was initially used to refer to the mainstream placement of those  
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7 children (Hodkinson 2010). Although it is now commonly accepted that integration is not a  
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9 synonym for inclusion (authors' names 2015), the terms integration and inclusion may still be  
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11 used interchangeably in different contexts (Avramidis and Norwich 2002). Similarly, the thus  
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13 far predominant models or conceptualisations of SEN/D offer very different possible  
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15 explanations of their causes (Reindal 2008). In a nutshell, the medical model of disability  
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17 perceives disability as caused by factors lying within the individual, whereas the social model  
18  
19 perceives disability to be caused by the environment that does not meet the needs of a  
20  
21 disabled person (Llewellyn and Hogan 2000). It follows that the complex and context-specific  
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23 meaning of concepts such as inclusion and disability, may lead to many different  
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25 interpretations of these concepts as well as quite different approaches to the education of  
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27 children with SEN/D.  
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34 In relation to this, Mitra (2006) explains that the way concepts, such as disability, are  
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36 defined and understood will have fundamental implications for framing policies and  
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38 implementation. Lawson, Parker, and Sikes (2006) argue that the way individuals understand  
39  
40 inclusive education influences significantly how policy translates into practice. Interestingly,  
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42 research shows that teachers' prior knowledge and understanding of inclusion is a key factor  
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44 to its successful implementation (for a review of the relevant literature, see authors' names  
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46 2015). Moreover, teachers' attitudes to and understanding of inclusion have been shown to  
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48 change after specialised training or further studies (Cologon 2012; Boyle, Topping and Jindal-  
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50 Shape 2013; Costello and Boyle 2013; Lawson, Norwich and Nash 2013; Cameron and  
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52 Jotveit 2014). It thus seems to be the case that preparing and educating teachers for inclusion  
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54 is a key factor in promoting positive attitudes and best practices.  
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### ***Bhutanese Teachers' Preparation for Inclusion***

As explained in the introduction, Bhutan has embraced the philosophy of inclusion at the policy level. However, even though schools are required to accept students with diverse learning needs, teachers are not appropriately prepared to meet those needs (R. Dorji 2015). In a review of research conducted on teacher education for inclusion in developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region during the period 2007-2012, Sharma et al. (2013) found in relation to Bhutan, 'shortage of appropriately trained teachers' and 'lack of suitable and effective professional development opportunities for teachers endeavouring to implement inclusive practices' (9). They moreover noted '*a lack of any systematic national teacher education programs*' (10). Even today, the two Colleges for teacher education in Bhutan do not offer any qualification specific to inclusive education or SEN/D. As a result, Sharma et al. (2013) stress that the country relies heavily on external experts, and express their concerns over 'the lack of participatory involvement by local stakeholders' (10) in the implementation of inclusion. Schuelka (2015) picked up the same issue in his research that we review in the following section. Dawa (2009) mentions some opportunities for teachers in Bhutan to attend short training courses, usually led by the Ministry of Education and Non Governmental Organisations.

It thus seems that formal teacher preparation for inclusive education in Bhutan is almost non-existent. As a result, most teachers in Bhutan working with students with disabilities have not had any specialised training. However, as we have already seen, the successful implementation of inclusion depends significantly on teachers' prior knowledge and understanding of inclusive education and disability, and teacher preparation has been found to improve teachers' ability to implement inclusion in practice. It thus seemed worthwhile to explore Bhutanese teachers' understanding of inclusion and disability.

### *Bhutanese Teachers' Understanding of Inclusion and Disability*

In an ethnographic study on how disability is constructed by the wider Bhutanese society, Schuelka (2015) found that in modern Bhutan, a traditional conceptualisation of disability influenced by Buddhist beliefs seems to coexist with two other models of disability, which are coming from outside, namely, the medical and the social models of disability. He argues that the latter two discourses exist 'not only in tension with themselves, but also in tension with the pre-existing socio-cultural constructions of disability' (821). He specifies that:

'a belief in karma allows a general mistrust of an individual with disabilities because it is believed that they had committed a sin in their previous life that has consequently led them to their current disposition' (822).

These observations suggest that although Bhutan has embraced inclusive education in theory, in practice the situation is more complex, because traditional cultural beliefs and external influences -that may sometimes be contradictory to each other- are likely to shape the way inclusion and disability are understood by the Bhutanese society.

Research on Bhutanese teachers' understanding of inclusion and disability is scarce (Gyamtsho and Maxwell 2012; R. Dorji 2015). According to Wangmo (2013), the dearth of studies calls for research that is contextually relevant to Bhutan. This is why we were interested to explore in some depth the understanding of inclusion and disability from the perspective of Bhutanese teachers. Do teachers in Bhutan share a similar understanding of inclusion? How do they perceive inclusion and disability? What views do they have regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities? Our study aimed to generate some answers to these questions. The following section outlines our methodology.



## Methodology

### *Rationale and Aims*

As stated before, the rationale behind this study was to shed some light on the understanding of inclusion and disability from the perspective of Bhutanese teachers. We were directed by the following main research question: *How is a) inclusion and b) disability understood by teachers in Bhutan?* Accordingly, the research aims were mainly to explore and capture the concepts as seen by teachers in Bhutan, and at a broader level to help construct the concepts in a way that is contextually relevant to Bhutan.

### *Research Approach and Method*

Because we had to capture and explore participants' own understanding, we chose to use the qualitative interview method, which helps capture the perceptions of local actors (Punch 2009). We developed a semi-structured interview guide to direct the interview process and to keep the focus on the topics pertinent to our research questions (Robson 2011). Fourteen questions asked participants to provide their understanding of inclusion/inclusive education, disability/SEN, and their broader views about inclusion in Bhutan. Prior to main data collection, we conducted a pilot study to test the validity of the interview questions. This provided feedback on the questions and the interview process, and as a result, we made minor adjustments to the initial interview guide to maximise its clarity.

### *Research Setting: Participants and Procedures followed*

We used a purposive sampling method in order to gather suitable participants, as is often the case in qualitative research (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle 2010). The goal of purposeful sampling is to select participants that are able to provide the richest and most relevant information that will help address the research question (Ibid 2010). Our target group were teachers in Bhutan, and we were particularly interested in including teachers with some

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3 experience in teaching children with SEN/D or with any experience in the field of Inclusion  
4 and SEN/D. We initially sent an email to 20 teachers selected from different schools and  
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6 regions in order to make the sample as representative of all regions as possible. Out of the 20  
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8 people who were invited to take part, 15 accepted and signed the consent form. Accordingly,  
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10 15 Bhutanese teachers with and without experience of teaching children with SEN/D took  
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12 part in the research. The majority came from Western Bhutan (N=7), and the rest from  
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14 Eastern Bhutan (N=4), Southern Bhutan (N=3) and Central Bhutan (N=1). An overview of  
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16 participants' characteristics is provided in Table 1.  
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22 [INSERT TABLE 1 NEAR HERE]  
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27 It is relevant to stress that out of the 15 participants, 1 worked in a special school and  
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29 3 worked in 'integrated' mainstream schools. Only these 4 teachers had received some short-  
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31 term training on SEN/D in the form of workshops. Short tailor-made training is usually  
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33 provided to teachers in special and in "integrated" schools during the winter vacations,  
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35 coordinated by the Ministry of Education and usually supported by UNICEF-Bhutan. The  
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37 remaining 11 participants did not have any specialised training on SEN/D or inclusion. Out of  
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39 the 15 interviews, 6 were conducted via Skype and 9 face to face, and each of the interviews  
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41 lasted for up to 30 minutes. Interviews were voice recorded with participants' permission, and  
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43 the audio files were deleted upon the completion of the research.  
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### 48 ***Data Analysis***

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50 In preparation for the analysis, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. To  
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52 maintain participants' anonymity and right to confidentiality, at this stage code names were  
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54 introduced in the transcripts to replace participants' real names, and all other identifiable  
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56 names were removed from the transcripts. To analyse the data, we used the thematic  
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3 approach, guided by the research question (Braun and Clarke 2008), which was broken down  
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5 into two sub-questions:

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7 (1) How do teachers in Bhutan understand 'Inclusion'?
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9 (2) How do teachers in Bhutan understand 'Disability'?
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14 Accordingly, findings were grouped under 2 main themes:

- 15  
16 (1) Understanding of Inclusion
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18 (2) Understanding of Disability
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22 During the analysis, a third theme emerged, i.e. *Challenges to and opportunities for*  
23 *Inclusion in Bhutan*. In the following section we present the three main themes that emerged  
24 from the analysis alongside illustrative quotations from the interviews.  
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## 28 29 **Presentation of Findings**

### 30 ***Theme 1: Understanding of Inclusion***

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32 From participants' responses to the question '*How do you understand 'Inclusion'?*' the  
33 following 3 sub-themes emerged: *human right, participation of all, and participation of the*  
34 *disabled*. Interestingly, participation of the disabled was conceptualised solely as physical  
35 placement in regular schools. We provide a summary of theme 1 with some illustrative  
36 quotations in Table 2.  
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52 In summary, although participants perceived inclusion predominantly as a human  
53 right, some differences emerged in their views about whom inclusion concerns. On the one  
54 hand, some seemed to understand inclusion as accommodating all children and their  
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3 individual differences. Participants who shared this view mentioned that in an inclusive  
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5 classroom there should not be any form of discrimination and that there should be respect for  
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7 diversity. On the other hand, others seemed to strongly associate inclusion more specifically  
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9 with disability, and consequently as concerned only with the participation of a narrow group  
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11 of children.  
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### 13 14 15 16 ***Theme 2: Understanding of Disability*** 17

18 Overwhelmingly it emerged from the data that participants shared a view of disability as  
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20 deviance from normality. Several descriptions were given by different participants of a  
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22 disabled person as being different and inferior to other people, meaning that ‘they are not able  
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24 to do things like other people’ (P1). Furthermore, some participants seemed to strongly associate  
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26 the causes of disability with biological reasons, e.g. genetic factors and innate medical  
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28 conditions or accidents. Even more interestingly, some participants said that disability was  
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30 due to karma from past life (i.e. fate). We provide some quotations illustrative of these sub-  
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32 themes, in table 3.  
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### 42 43 ***Theme 3: Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusion in Bhutan*** 44

45 In terms of challenges, participants were divided in their views about whether inclusion is  
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47 possible for Bhutan. One group held the view that inclusive education is not at all realistic or  
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49 contextually relevant to Bhutan. For example:  
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54 ‘In my opinion, in our country inclusive education is not appropriate because teachers are not  
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56 qualified or trained in special education’ (P15).  
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3 A second group saw integration, i.e. physical placement in a mainstream school, as the  
4 furthest Bhutan can go for the time being in the inclusion process. For example,  
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10 ‘When it comes to inclusive school or education, we can include them, but then when it comes  
11 to giving them the knowledge they need, we are not able to do that.’ (P4)  
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16 Finally, a third group of participants suggested that special schools are more suitable  
17 for children with disabilities, because ‘all the teachers there are trained to deal with those children.’  
18 (P3). Another participant was skeptical about inclusion depending on the type of disability,  
19 because in his view, ‘the success of an inclusive classroom depends upon the challenges created by  
20 the disability in question’ (P8).  
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29 Furthermore, across our sample, there was a common perception that there is currently  
30 lack of teachers trained on inclusion in Bhutan. The following quotation captures this view:  
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36 ‘The main challenge of making schools inclusive is the lack of capacity especially on the part  
37 of the teacher.’ (P6)  
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42 Participants also expressed the view that the government should invest more in  
43 training teachers:  
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48 ‘We should train more teachers and basic training should start from the training institutes  
49 where teachers are educated.’ (P5)  
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55 ‘Government should think about educating and training teachers in line with inclusive  
56 education, especially train teachers to work with children with special needs.’ (P4)  
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3 In terms of opportunities, it is worthy of mention that some participants claimed that  
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5 their perception of children with disabilities changed positively after working with them:  
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10 ‘To go to the class it was a night mare, coz these children will act abnormal and you will not  
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12 want to go to the class, but later on when we got to know each other, when we learnt about  
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14 each other, we developed the feeling of belongingness, and now I see that I am very  
15  
16 comfortable with them.’ (P3)  
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20 ‘Before I used to say that a disabled people they can’t do this, I always underestimated the  
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22 disabled people [...] but now I see lots of potential because they are so clever and we can’t  
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24 undermine them, if they are given the right opportunity, they are really intelligent.’ (P5)  
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### 28 ***Summary of Findings***

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30 Findings revealed that teachers in Bhutan constructed disability primarily based on the  
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32 medical model or view of disability, and saw it mainly as the product of factors lying within  
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34 the individual, such as Karma or an inherited or acquired medical condition. All teachers in  
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36 our sample described disability as deviance from the norm. Another finding however was that  
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38 although teachers broadly understood inclusion as a human right, some thought it concerns all  
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40 children while others thought that it only concerns those children with disabilities and in  
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42 particular, their placement in regular schools. Participants also shared what they think are  
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44 some of the challenges in the implementation of inclusion in the context of Bhutan, such as  
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46 for example the lack of trained teachers. Interestingly, some teachers in our sample who had  
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48 experience of working with children with disabilities reported an increase in positive attitude  
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50 towards inclusion. These findings are discussed in the following section.  
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### Discussion and Implications for Practice

The main objective of this study was to take a snapshot of the understanding of inclusion and disability from the perspectives of the participants selected. Given the scope of our research, we were not able to interview a larger sample or to follow up with participants in order to capture somewhat richer narratives. Future research on this topic could focus on increasing the sample size and using a multiple stage interview approach. Bearing in mind that the results of this study may have some limited generalisability, because of the sample size and the approach adopted, in this section we discuss our key findings and their implications.

Our findings suggest that the teachers we interviewed had a quite mixed understanding of inclusion, and their views on inclusion and disability seemed to reflect some very different discourses. Firstly, the perception of inclusion as a human right was a consistent finding strongly emerging from almost all interviews and it is in line with previous research on how teachers understand inclusion (authors' names 2015). The recognition of education as a human right for all children can be traced back to Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that 'everyone has the right to education'. This right was reaffirmed in the historic Salamanca Statement, as follows: 'every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning' (UNESCO 1994, viii). From the Education For ALL Goals (UNESCO 2000) through to the recent Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015), it is clear that 'the philosophy of educating children has gradually focused more on providing equal educational opportunities from a rights-based perspective' (Forlin et al. 2011, 51). Hence the global movement towards inclusion has been well embedded within a discourse of human rights and social justice (Farrell 2000; Lindsay 2003, 2007), and this was clearly reflected in how our participants understood inclusion at the broader level. Schuelka (2015) argues that the rights-based conceptualisation of disability is the same as the social model of disability (Barnes

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3 2000), in that they both suggest a social justice approach and a focus on respecting diversity  
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5 and making changes to the environment rather than the individual. Schuelka moreover argues  
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7 that both the rights-based and the social models coexist in modern Bhutan, and this was  
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9 further supported by our findings.  
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14 However, when asked about the nature of inclusion in more depth, i.e. about who is  
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16 the focus of inclusion, it seems that teachers in our sample held conflicting views. On the one  
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18 hand, some perceived inclusion as concerning all children and their participation in the  
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20 regular school irrespective of their individual differences. The definition of inclusion provided  
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22 by these participants reflects broader conceptualisations of inclusion as a social justice  
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24 approach that concerns the right to education, participation, and learning of all pupils and not  
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26 only those with SEN/D (Norwich 2008). Stubbs (2008) argues that inclusive education is a  
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28 broad concept and 'represents a shift from being pre-occupied with a particular group to a focus on  
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30 overcoming barriers to learning and participation' (38). Similarly, in Bhutan's Draft National  
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32 Policy on Special Educational Needs, inclusion is described as: 'to include every child regardless  
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34 of her/his disabilities, colour, creed, culture, religion, language, regions and ethnic background for  
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36 her/his education' (MOE 2012, 19). The understanding of inclusion by this group of teachers  
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38 was therefore compatible with the broader view of inclusion as the elimination of all forms of  
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40 discrimination and with the rights based/social model approach.  
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47 On the other hand, some participants had a quite different view in relation to who is  
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49 the focus of inclusion, and primarily associated it with practices for supporting those children  
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51 with disabilities and especially their placement in regular schools. This means that they  
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53 understood inclusion as specialised provision and support for specific children rather than as a  
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55 change in the wider school culture and practices in order to include all children, and this  
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3 finding is also in line with previous research on teachers' understanding of inclusion (authors'  
4 names 2015). Vislie (2003) and Nilholm (2006) remind us that the idea of inclusive education  
5 for children with SEN/D was first introduced to the world by the Salamanca statement  
6 (UNESCO 1994). This means that from early on, inclusion has been associated with those  
7 children with SEN/D. Sikes, Lawson and Parker (2007) argue that inclusion is still often  
8 associated with these specific groups of children, and similarly Hodkinson (2010) observes  
9 that increasingly inclusion is conceptualised as being about the participation of children with  
10 SEN/D in regular schools. This narrow view of inclusion as concerning only some children  
11 and their placement seems to be closer to the understanding of inclusion as integration  
12 (authors' names 2015). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) point out that inclusion is nowadays  
13 often used as meaning placement in regular schools and that the terms integration and  
14 inclusion are still used as synonymous in many contexts. Our findings seem to support this,  
15 and it seems that in this context some teachers saw mere placement in a regular school as a  
16 synonym for inclusion. Furthermore, in relation to placement, a few participants expressed the  
17 view that a special school serves children with disabilities better. Those participants  
18 maintained that special schools have better trained teachers. The view that some children  
19 should be excluded from mainstream education strongly echoes the medical model of  
20 disability, which is discussed next.  
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45 Kroeger (2010) explains that prior to the era of the active disability movement, which  
46 gained momentum in the 1970s, disability was primarily seen as arising from the limitations  
47 of an individual. Similarly the teachers in our research understood disability as caused by  
48 within person factors. The belief in one's Karma as a reason for one's disability emerged  
49 strongly and supports findings of previous research that has highlighted traditional Bhutanese  
50 cultural notions about disability that can be incompatible with inclusive values (Schuelka  
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3 2012). Our participants had a shared notion that disability means deviance from normality, in  
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5 that they described being disabled as being different and not being able to perform tasks like  
6  
7 other people. Thus their understanding of disability strongly reflected the medical model of  
8  
9 disability, and this is another significant contradiction, given that the majority expressed an  
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11 understanding of inclusion from a social or human rights model perspective.  
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16 Interestingly, participants specifically and consistently mentioned lack of teacher  
17  
18 training as an obstacle to the implementation of inclusive approaches in Bhutan, and some  
19  
20 even argued that Bhutan is still not ready for inclusion. This is in agreement with previous  
21  
22 research on teachers' views about inclusion in developing countries (Chireshe 2011) that  
23  
24 points to the lack of teacher training as a factor perceived by teachers to be hindering  
25  
26 inclusion and making it seem unrealistic to teachers in these contexts. Moreover, views  
27  
28 echoed by our participants such as for example that the success of inclusion depends on the  
29  
30 nature of the disability in question reflect findings of previous research in other contexts that  
31  
32 has shown teachers to be reluctant to include certain groups of children with disabilities (Croll  
33  
34 and Moses 2000; Avramidis and Norwich 2002). Finally, the rise in teachers' positive  
35  
36 attitudes about inclusion after contact with children with disabilities is an encouraging finding  
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38 that is also in agreement with previous research (Chireshe 2011).  
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46 As stressed earlier, teacher training has been found to be a factor contributing to the  
47  
48 success of inclusion in practice by shaping positive teacher attitudes and by improving their  
49  
50 knowledge. A breadth of research suggests that teacher education for inclusion supports its  
51  
52 successful implementation (Cologon 2012; Boyle, Topping, and Jindal-Snape 2013; Cameron  
53  
54 and Jortveit 2014). Erten and Savage (2012) highlight that there is a general lack of teacher  
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56 training for inclusion worldwide and as we have seen, currently in Bhutan it is almost non-  
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3 existent (Sharma et al. 2013). Bhutanese scholars (Dawa 2009; R. Dorji 2015) have stressed  
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5 that lack of teacher training on inclusion is a key challenge to its implementation in practice,  
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7 and have argued that in order for inclusion to move forward in Bhutan, importance should be  
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9 placed to developing training programmes on inclusion for teachers. According to the  
10  
11 Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994, 26): ‘appropriate preparation of all educational personnel  
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13 stands out as a key factor in promoting progress towards inclusive schools’. The voices from our  
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15 study strongly argue for the need to appropriately prepare teachers for inclusive education in  
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18 Bhutan.  
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### 20 21 22 23 **Conclusion and Recommendations**

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25 To sum up, our findings suggest that teachers in Bhutan had some contradictory and  
26  
27 sometimes completely incompatible understandings of inclusion and disability. In other  
28  
29 words, our findings support ‘the existence of a multiplicity of disability discourses that [...] task  
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31 local actors to negotiate these discourses’ (Schuelka 2015, 820). For example, their  
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33 understanding reflected both a medical and a social model/human rights discourse at the same  
34  
35 time. Schuelka (2012) explains that the recent big changes that Bhutan’s education system has  
36  
37 been undergoing have been influenced by numerous factors: major UN-led human rights  
38  
39 initiatives have been signed by Bhutan, educational policies have been imported from India,  
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41 and at the same time, international organisations like UNICEF currently work in collaboration  
42  
43 with the Ministry of Education and help shape the development of the country’s education  
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45 system. These organisations introduce the social justice and human rights discourses to the  
46  
47 country. At the same time, ‘medical experts’ from abroad introduce a medical model  
48  
49 discourse when advising local professionals in Bhutan (Schuelka 2015). Last but not least,  
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51 some Buddhist ideas such as that of disability as the result of Karma that are incompatible  
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53 with inclusive principles are still influencing the way disability is understood in Bhutan. All  
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3 those influences, external or internal to Bhutan seem to be shaping the way teachers in Bhutan  
4  
5 understand inclusion and disability. We would therefore argue that the way forward for  
6  
7 Bhutan is to focus on developing more consistent approaches to the preparation of its teachers  
8  
9 for inclusive education. Educating and training teachers is a crucial step in taking inclusion  
10  
11 forward in Bhutan. It is worthwhile to mention here that the Royal University of Bhutan in  
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13 collaboration with the Ministry of education, UNICEF, and a University in Australia is  
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15 currently developing the first post-graduate programme in special and inclusive education for  
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17 teachers (Paro College of Education 2013), and this is a step in the right direction.  
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23 As stressed earlier, research related to inclusion and disability in Bhutan is extremely  
24  
25 limited. We argue that the lack of research is one of the biggest challenges for academics and  
26  
27 practitioners in the field of inclusive education, and the findings resulting from our research  
28  
29 contribute to the small pool of knowledge that is locally and contextually relevant to Bhutan.  
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31 It is imperative that further research is conducted to shed more light on some of the factors  
32  
33 that foster and hinder inclusion in this specific context. We would imagine that future  
34  
35 research on this topic could also include the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as the  
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37 children with and without disabilities, their parents and policy makers.  
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40 **Word count: 5152**  
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## Tables

Table 1. Overview of participant characteristics

Gender		Age			Teaching experience in years			Total
Male	Female	<25	25-45	>45	<1	1-10	>10	
7	8	2	12	1	3	9	3	15

Table 2. Summary of Theme 1

Theme 1	Sub-theme	Example quotations
Understanding of Inclusion	Human right	<i>'Every child is entitled to inclusive education'. (P1)</i> <i>'Inclusion is when the right of children to education is respected' (P11)</i>
	Participation of all	<i>'Inclusion...what I understand is including children with different backgrounds and different needs [...] Inclusion is including everybody irrespective of one's cast, creed, religion and ability.'</i> (P3)
	Participation of the disabled	<i>'Inclusion is taking care of children with disabilities and educating them along with other children who are not disabled' (P15)</i>  <i>'Inclusion provides opportunity for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms' (P8).</i>

Table 3. Summary of Theme 2

Theme 2:	Sub-theme:	Example quotations
Understanding of Disability	Deviance from normality	<i>'Disabled children are not able to do things like other people or other children'. (P1)</i> <i>'Someone who cannot walk properly, someone who cannot speak properly, someone who cannot hear properly'. (P2)</i> <i>'Refers to physically or mentally challenged persons with defects of organs...' (P10)</i> <i>'I would define disabled the person who cannot perform his or her duties like other normal persons. [...] For me, disability is anything which a person can't and what the non disabled can do' (P13)</i>

	Sub-theme: Biologically caused	<i>The main cause of disability in terms of physical disability could be biological and medical, diet and genes'. (P3)</i> <i>'When the mother is careless and she abuses unhealthy things when the child is in the womb and after birth when the child is not provided proper diet'. (P7)</i> <i>'Disability is caused by improper diet, genes and accidents'. (P13)</i>
	Sub-theme: Past Life Karma	<i>'For me the main cause of disability is because of past life; God has punished the person for sin and wrong doing in the past. [...] Past life karma...I think disability happens because of someone's fate from their past life.'</i> (P15)