

# Teachers' Perceptions of the Teacher-Student Relationship among Students with Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Difficulties (SEBD) in Residential Schools in Thailand and Hong Kong

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## Abstract

*Students with Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Difficulties (SEBD) pose a major challenge to inclusive education. A positive teacher-student (t-s) relationship has been confirmed a vital factor in the development of students with SEBD. In Hong Kong, students with SEBD may study in mainstream schools, or special schools with residential service, while in Thailand, parents can only choose mainstream schools (either public or private) for their children with SEBD. A qualitative study was conducted in two Hong Kong special schools (one primary and one secondary) and one private school (with both primary and secondary schools) in Thailand to explore teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship among students with SEBD. The three schools offer residential services. Information was collected mainly from individual interviews with 21 teachers from these three schools. Themes emerging from the analysis reflect that the cultural concerns about the difference between 'relationship' and 'guanxi' require further elaboration and discussion.*

Keywords: Students with SEBD, Teacher-student relationship, Inclusive education, Guanxi

## 1. Introduction

In addition to academic development, the enablement of students' social and emotional development is a major task of a school to achieve the goal of whole-person development in Hong Kong. Under the policy of inclusive education, schools need to make extra effort to take care of students with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) to develop their social and emotional competence. The inclusion of students with SEBD is generally agreed to be a major challenge in achieving inclusive education (Chong & Ng, 2011; Poon-McBrayer & Lian, 2002; Burton et al., 2009). The challenging behavior of students with SEBD in mainstream schools makes the policy of inclusive education more difficult than the inclusion of students with other special educational needs in Hong Kong and other places (Thomas, 2015; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Forlin & Cooper, 2013).

### 1.1 Students with SEBD

In Hong Kong, the term SEBD is not formally defined. There are no specific guidelines for teachers' reference. When a student is identified as having SEBD, it typically means that he/she has been diagnosed with 'Emotional and Behavioral Disorder' (EBD) (Tong & Zhang, 2014). According to the definition of EDB by the Department for Education (1994) in the UK, students with EBD display difficulties ranging from social maladaptation to abnormal emotional stress. This is why the two terms, SEBD and EBD, are often used interchangeably in the literature (e.g. Evan et al., 2004). EBD is one of the categories of special educational needs, but most students with mild to moderate difficulties in social and emotional development are in mainstream schools under the policy of inclusive education.

Students with SEBD typically display disruptive, aggressive, and unsociable behavior externally. Internally, they may suffer from different kinds of learning disabilities, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or mental disorders. Therefore, their academic performance is usually below average (Farrell & Humphrey, 2009). They may have experienced long-standing problems at home due to unsolvable conflicts with their parents (Farrell & Polat, 2003; Hajdukova et al., 2014).

### 1.2 Schools for Social Development (SSD) with Residential Homes

#### 1.2.1 Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, students with moderate to severe levels of emotional, and behavioral difficulties (EBD) will be referred to the Schools for Social Development (SSD), which is one of the categories of special schools in Hong Kong. The referral process involves a vetting procedure by the Education Bureau and Social Welfare Department. Some SSD provide Residential Homes (RH) for students with such difficulties. The students will be taken care of by other professionals, such as social workers, after school.

Such referrals would only be successful with the endorsement by the students' parents or legal guardian. Not until the controversy about the movement of an SSD from South Lantau (a remote district) to Tuen Mun (a prosperous town) in 2006, had the public been aware of the contribution of SSD to society (Au-yeung & Chiu, 2016).

Allocating students with special educational needs (SEN) to special schools may label them and prevent them from having equal access to mainstream social and curricular opportunities (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009; UNESCO, 1994). Therefore, there has been a discussion on whether we should segregate students into 'special schools' and 'mainstream schools' (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). The existence of special schools for these students seems contradictory to the policy of inclusion. As a result, there have been arguments concerning effective educational provision for students with SEBD (Avramidis et al., 2000). On the other hand, teachers' attitude is also a barrier to successful inclusive practices in mainstream schools (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). However, it is undeniable that students with SEBD pose a major challenge to mainstream schools, and the students might have received inadequate support from their teachers because of the high student to teacher ratio (Wise & Upton, 1998). On the contrary, it is evident that residential special schools can have positive impacts on students with SEBD in terms of their development (Farrell & Polat, 2003), though it does not guarantee every special school can offer a similar quality of schooling. In Hong Kong, parents can also choose to send their children to private schools, which parents consider having more resources and less labeling.

### **1.2.2 Thailand**

In another Asian country, Thailand, there is no special school for students with SEBD. Parents can send their children to either mainstream public or private schools. There is a private boarding school in Thailand, where the teachers emphasize students' social and emotional development in the school curriculum. The school admits some students with emotional and behavioral difficulties without giving them a 'special' label. In fact, it has been criticized that the field of special education in Thailand is still in its infancy (Kosuwat et al., 2014). On one hand, the Thai government recommends that students with SEN attend conventional or mainstream schools to capitalize on inclusion, as there may not be enough places in special schools. On the other hand, parents prefer to send their children to private schools to eliminate the labeling effect. Regardless of the types of schooling, the keys to students' social and emotional development are the care and support that they receive during their stay at school.

### **1.3 Teacher-student (t-s) relationship**

Teacher-student relationships are interdependent interactions between teachers and students. Emotionally close, safe support, quality communication, positive affect, and trust are the key elements in this connection (Wentzel, 2012). A positive relationship between children and committed teachers is a vital ingredient of effective schooling for students with SEBD (Cole et al., 1998; Forlin & Cooper, 2013). The teacher's ability to form positive relationships with students is one of the top ten characteristics of an effective teaching style for students with EBD. A supportive teacher style and approach have big impacts on minimizing the challenging behaviors of students with EBD (Cole et al., 1998). A similar finding is also evident in Chinese students (Forlin & Cooper, 2013). It has even been discovered that teachers' attitudes and behaviors have the biggest influence over students, not the school itself (Reynold, 2010; Muijs & Reynolds, 2005). Tong and Zhang (2014) affirmed that Hong Kong teachers' beliefs about the development and maintenance of positive t-s relationships can facilitate the development of students with SEBD.

Therefore, it is important to establish respectful and supportive, but not strained relationships between teachers and students with SEBD. It requires teachers to be willing to connect with students. If teachers take time to know more about their students and are willing to listen to them, their relationship will improve (Goodman & Burton, 2010). However, although a positive t-s relationship is an important factor in enabling students with SEBD to develop more positive social and emotional competency, students' perceptions of this relationship are different in day-time mainstream schools and schools with residential services. Students have reported that the teachers in schools with residential services are more willing to build positive t-s relationships than those in mainstream schools without the services. (Hajdukova et al., 2014).

Students with SEBD in mainstream schools perceive that the more caring side of the t-s relationship is their need for individualized help and support (Wise & Upton, 1998). They suggested, 'schools should attempt to introduce more opportunities for communication and relationship building between pupils and teachers and in particular the chance for pupils to talk and be heard' (p.11). Research from teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship among students with SEBD in special schools and boarding schools can certainly provide more insights to understand t-s relationships.

### **1.4 Aims of the study**

Given the t-s relationship is one of the keys to facilitating the social and emotional development of students with SEBD, it is worth exploring how teachers perceive this t-s relationship in their daily practices in the context of two public special schools in Hong Kong and a private mainstream school in Thailand. The three schools in this study provide residential services to their students, but the duties of teachers in the services are different.

The exploration of teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship in these two different places is sparse in studies. The aims of the current study are:

1. To explore teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship among students with SEBD in boarding schools in Thailand and Hong Kong.
2. To understand how residential services support students with SEBD in Thailand and Hong Kong.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do Hong Kong teachers in special schools and Thai teachers in a private school perceive the relationship with their students with SEBD?
2. How do Hong Kong teachers in special schools and Thai teachers in a private school perceive the residential services that support students with SEBD?
3. What are the political and cultural factors that lead to teachers' different perceptions of the t-s relationship between Thailand and Hong Kong?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Student helpers**

The department of psychology at the Education University of Hong Kong organized a learning tour for 15 students to Thailand in 2018. The purpose of the tour was to conduct a study of two special schools with residential services in Hong Kong and a private boarding school in Thailand.

The study was conducted separately for each school, and the university students were invited to be the helpers for data collection. The tour to Thailand was partially subsidized by the university. As part of the study, the students were required to visit the three schools: Schools A, B, and C. Schools A and B are SSD with residential services in Hong Kong, providing primary and secondary education respectively to students with SEBD. School C is a private boarding school in Thailand, providing primary and secondary education to students. Although not specified as a special school, nearly 40% of the students at School C displayed the behaviors of SEBD, as reported by a teacher with five years of teaching experience at the school. The student helpers were required to interview the teachers at each school to gather information for the study.

### **2.2 Informants**

Informants of this research were the teachers from the three schools. 21 teachers in total were involved. They were assigned by the school principals because they were available for interviews during our visits. Their participations were totally voluntary, and consent forms were obtained from them before conducting interviews

### **2.3 Data collection**

Helpers paid a whole-day visit to Schools A and B separately. During each visit, the helpers had a half-hour talk with the school principal. After the school introduction, the helpers participated in a school tour to become familiar with the facilities and to explore the atmosphere in the school. 60-minute of job shadowing was arranged for the helpers so that each helper could accompany and observe an experienced teacher in a classroom. The helpers tried to immerse themselves in an authentic situation of teaching duties in the school. After the job-shadowing exercise, 15 helpers conducted a 20-minute semi-structured interview (table 1) with the teacher whom they shadowed.

For the School C, helpers stayed for three days and two nights in the school. In addition to the same arrangement conducted in School A and B, helpers had more time to spend with the teachers and students there. They participated in job shadowing practices. Helpers also conducted exchange programmes with the students in School C. They taught the students practical skills, such as language, music, and cultural etiquette. The helpers were able to gain a comprehensive sense of the whole-school climate during their visits to the three schools (table 2).

### **2.4 Data analysis**

Interview transcripts were analyzed by the author to identify the main contextual aspects emerging from the data. The transcripts were read several times and the preliminary categories that emerged from the data were noted. During reading the transcripts, relevant statements made by teachers were highlighted. The first coding labels were linked to key terms in the interview questions, such as teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship, residential services, roles and functions of the teachers, and related cultural issues. The second coding process was conducted after the first-round reading. Sub-codes were created when necessary to refine a deeper meaning of the statements. In other words, coding labels were able to reflect higher-order attributes at the category level after reading the transcripts several times. The findings were shared with all the teachers in a workshop at School B after analysis.

## **3. Findings**

### **3.1 Better Teacher-student Relationship than that of Other Mainstream Schools**

In response to the question, 'What do you think about the t-s relationship in the school compared with mainstream schools?', most of the teachers (18 out of 21) in the three case schools expressed that the t-s relationship in their schools is better than that of other mainstream schools. This likely confirms the findings from previous research (Farrell & Polat, 2003; Hajdukova et al., 2014)

The major reason for the better t-s relationship is the greater resources that their schools can obtain. For instance, their student to teacher ratio is small so that teachers can spend more time on the needs of individual students. The professional support for the two Hong Kong special schools is greater than that of other mainstream schools in Hong Kong. For instance, more social workers in the schools can provide immediate support to the students when their needs are urgent.

*'Because of the relatively small student to teacher ratio, there appears to be more opportunities to have personal contact. Therefore, it will make teachers and students closer.'* (B02)

*'Teachers in our school can spend more time with students than those in mainstream schools.'* (A05)

Teachers perceived that the reason for a better t-s relationship is the quantity of time spent with the students, particularly the perceptions from Thai teachers.

*'The relationship between the teacher and the student here is better because we are living together 24 hours a day.'* (C02)

*'The relationship between teacher and student is very close because we are living in the same dormitory..... It is a privilege to know each other.'* (C05)

The teachers in Thailand are required to stay with the students in the school overnights and have three meals with the students every day, whereas there is no such requirement for teachers in the Hong Kong SSD, and they can leave for home after school. The students are taken care of by the wardens or residential tutors in the residential home, which is attached to the schools. Some of the wardens and tutors are social workers. This is one of the big differences between the boarding school in Thailand and the residential services in the Hong Kong schools.

Apart from resources, the teachers in the three schools are aware that only a good t-s relationship can facilitate effective teaching in daily school life. It is the teachers' intention and effort to build good relationship with the students.

*'Our school focuses on the relationship with students. We will take the initiative to develop relationships with students compared with mainstream schools.'* (B05)

*'If you have a bad relationship with them (the students), teachers will find it more difficult to deal with the students when they lose their temper.'* (B08)

*'Once we have established relationships with students, students will have fewer problems....In fact, we intentionally let students trust us.'* (A02)

*'The relationship built inside a classroom only works during the class. The relationship built beyond the classroom can raise the level of the t-s relationship to the belonging of friendship. It first depends on whether the teacher is willing to spend the time and make the effort.'* (A05)

*'If I am helping a student, I have to start a good relationship with him/her. So, it takes time.'* (C07)

However, some teachers in the study, especially the teachers in Hong Kong, perceive the t-s relationship as complicated. It is not static but dynamic. This becomes the second theme of the findings.

### **3.2 Teacher-student (t-s) Relationship with Tension in Hong Kong Special Schools**

The term 'tension' was coined by a teacher in School B to describe the t-s relationship he perceived in his school.

*'Apparently, we have a harmonious relationship with the students, but in fact, it will be fine only if nothing happens. There was always an underlying tension present.'* (B01)

Coincidentally, a teacher from another SSD used 'tense', the adjective of 'tension', to describe the t-s relationship:

*'If the relationship was not good, students would not listen in class, and they will rebel and cause troubles, resulting in a very tense atmosphere here.'* (A01)

Another teacher from the same school described that the t-s relationship as being of 'high complexity'.

*'The teacher-student relationship in this school, I think... should be closer than that of the mainstream schools, and the complexity was higher..... The complexity and closeness were deeper than the mainstream teacher-student relationship.'* (A05)

Interestingly, another teacher from school B mentioned that teachers should avoid the t-s relationship becoming 'Renqing', when dealing with conflicts. 'Renqing' is a Mandarin Chinese term, that refers to a special process of resource exchange in personal relationships (Lu, 2012).

*'The relationship between teachers and students is helpful for classroom management and makes it easier to teach them. A school, as a microcosm of society, we should also teach them that not all conflicts can be settled by "renqing", but by laws and rules.'* (B01)

The same teacher also emphasized:

*'As long as you don't violate the mechanism, you can slowly establish a relationship with the students. I think we need a mechanism before establishing a relationships with students. If there is only a relationship without*

*a mechanism, it could be mistake for a bribe. In fact, we need to differentiate between what is a relationship and what is cheating, eating, and drinking inside a classroom.’ (B01)*

When the terms ‘Relationship’, ‘Renqing’, and ‘Bribe’ come together, it associates the construct of ‘Quanxi’, a Mandarin Chinese term for ‘relationship’. It is interesting to note that these terms or similar descriptions did not appear in the interviews in the Thai schools. ‘Quanxi’ has been regarded as a unique culture to describe relationships in the Chinese context. In this construct, relationships are no longer unconditional. Unconditional positive regard is one of the facilitative conditions for human development that humanistic psychology emphasises in their tradition (Seligman & Seligman, 2006). Further elaborations on this topic will be discussed in another part of this paper.

### **3.3 Necessary Special Arrangement in Schooling**

In response to the question, ‘What kind of service models do you prefer to support students with SEBD? (e.g. inclusive mainstream schools, special schools, service schools with residential services, private schools)?’, most of the teachers (19 out of 21) expressed that special schools are more resourceful in supporting the needs of students with SEBD. This is the key reason why parents send students with SEBD to special schools.

*‘The students here are not adaptive to the mainstream environment. There are nearly 40 students in mainstream, but we have only a few students in a class. Teachers here are therefore more patient with them. In addition, if they display disturbing behavior, it will lead to a disaster to the teacher-in-charge.’ (B01)*

In this connection, they are likely to agree that private schools are most suitable for students with SEBD if the family is in a good financial condition.

*‘Some parents won’t send their children to SSD (special schools) because they will be labelled as the naughty ones. If they can afford (in terms of financial situation), they prefer to send them to international (private) schools.’ (A01)*

*‘(Parents will consider) we have more resources to deal with the students.’ (C07)*

This may imply that the goal of inclusion can be easily achieved if a mainstream school has more resources.

## **4. Discussion**

The findings express three concerns that need to draw the teachers’ attention. The first concern is to reconfirm the t-s relationship is still one of the key factors to facilitate the development of the students. It has been evident that building positive, supportive, and trusting relationships with students is a foundation of any effective approach to classroom management, particularly useful in addressing student challenging behaviors (McCready & Soloway, 2010). The second concern is to address that time is a key resource to foster the t-s relationship. It can explain why most of the teachers in this study expressed that special schools are more resourceful and t-s relationship in their schools is better than that of other mainstream schools. It is because the student to teacher ratio is small, and they can spend more time taking care of the students. The third concern is the awareness of cultural impact on the relationship. Further elaboration and discussion are as follows:

### **4.1 Cultural awareness: Relationship vs Guanxi**

McCready & Soloway (2010) acknowledged that the relationships and social dynamics are complex in the daily classroom environment. They reminded that teachers should develop cultural awareness and generate context-specific solutions to challenging behaviors. Relationship is a key concept in humanism (Buhler, 1971). It is a substantial element with unconditional nature in building trust among people (Seligman & Seligman, 2006). Another similar term in Western concept is ‘Rapport’ (Han & Han, 2019). However, we should be very careful and pay attention to cultural sensitivities. The components of a relationship include not only the interactions between the relational partners, but also the external influences (e.g. culture) on the whole system, in which the relationship is embedded (Pianta et al., 2003). Therefore, we should carefully consider the influence of societal culture on educational policies and practices (Walker & Dimmock, 2000).

The Chinese term for relationship is translated as Guanxi, which is one of the significant Chinese cultural domains, originating from the Confucian idea (Tse, 2014; Han & Han, 2019). Relationships in Chinese culture are mainly governed by the notion of guanxi, which literally describes the interpersonal connections. They have been deeply embedded in the Chinese culture for thousands of years (Tse, 2014). The practice of guanxi (the use of guanxi for instrumental purposes) is prevalent and important in Chinese society (Chen et al., 2011). Guanxi is the process of instrumentalization of human relationship. It refers to the ‘connection between two individuals with particular rules of exchanges which may be implicit to outsiders’ (Tse, 2014, p.viii). It is regarded as a Chinese indigenous construct (Chen and Chen, 2004).

Once guanxi is developed between two people, it ‘guides relationships according to an implicit set of rules’ (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p.170). It is not easy to reject any request from the other party, or openly disagree with

each other. Guanxi implies power via hierarchy, which is one of the three components of guanxi (i.e. hierarchy, respect, and harmony) and it can help to achieve benefits as well as to avoid conflict (Han & Han, 2019).

In terms of guanxi, Hwang (2000) categorized human relationship among Chinese into three ties. Mixed Tie is the second tie, which is between the Expressive Tie and Instrumental Tie. Together with other relationships, such as classmates, colleagues, and relatives, t-s relationship is in this middle tie. This tie is characterized by 'the rules of *renqing* (favor) and *mianzi* (face) are the means that people use the most in this tie to expand their human network and obtain resources from resource allocators.' (Hwang, 2000, p.224). This resonates the findings in this study.

#### **4.2 Exploitation of personal relationship**

Seeing that education is becoming more commercialized nowadays (Lingard, 2019), we should pay close attention to the Instrumental Tie, which is closely related to doing exchanging for equity, such as the relationship between salesperson and customers. In an educational setting, if the power between teachers and students is not equal (usually imbalanced in Chinese culture), either one will choose to manipulate guanxi to obtain various sorts of resources or to strive balance under the inequity of power. This activity, such as giving gifts, to exploit personal relationship, is called 'Gao Guanxi'. 'The suppressed class often uses to show their association with power and solve their practical, daily life problems.' (Hwang, 2000, p.227).

In traditional Chinese classrooms, teachers usually possess higher social status. Parents presented gifts to the teachers to show their respect under this hierarchy in ancient China (Nan, 2016). They also look for a good return from the teacher, such as having teacher's special care to their children. Students would behave well to avoid the punishment being exercised by a higher power figure. In other words, a student will probably not obtain his/her returns, unless he/she intends to earn good guanxi with the teacher.

It is common in Hong Kong for teachers to grant the students an opportunity to redeem themselves. For example, to avoid demotivating students because of the cumulative punitive effects, students are allowed to perform several good deeds (merits) to offset a demerit. (Chong & Ng, 2011). As a result, students choose to behave well in front of some teachers (not all) because the teachers, who have more power, can grant them opportunities to delete their bad records.

As time changes, students become 'consumers' in this edu-business (Lingard, 2019). The power shifts from teachers to students invisibly. Teachers will easily lose their jobs if they are complained about by the parents or students. In this connection, teachers might choose to offer favors to the students and gain returns or support from them. This is probably how teachers earn guanxi from students. To maintain harmony in a classroom, when students perform challenging behaviors and threaten the face of the teacher, Chinese teachers might respond in two different ways. Experienced or senior teachers who are at higher rank are likely to hold up their own power to control students' misbehaviors. However, for some inexperienced teachers, they might need to bribe the students by offering guanxi to the students to make the teaching jobs more stable. The trade could involve obtaining some privileges from the teachers, such as exemption from consequences after breaking other school rules, or allowance to obtain a higher grade if the students choose not to cause any disturbance in the classroom.

Rogers (1967) emphasized that 'significant positive personality change does not occur except in a relationship' (p.73). A therapeutic relationship is regarded as the prime determinant of the therapeutic process, and it is also the catalyst leading to personality change (Corey, 1991). The relationship for development is built on the person's freedom, choice, values, responsibility, autonomy, purpose, and meaning under a climate of respect and trust. It implies that if the relationship is earned by exchange, it is not a favorable condition for good development. A therapeutic relationship bears no power or control over others and themselves (Corey, 1991).

It was claimed that guanxi 'has both positive and negative connotations' (Gold et al., 2002, p.3). On the positive side, this widely recognized but containing complicated relational dynamics is believed to help the promotion of social harmony in Confucian society (Ting-Toomey, 1988; King, 1991). It ties in with affection for loved ones (i.e. *qinqing*) and emotional closeness to friends (i.e. *ganqing*) to satisfy the personal need for love and a sense of belonging (Hwang, 1987). On the negative side, it ties in with instrumental exchange, which is driven by physical or invisible benefits (Hwang, 1987). Of course, it could be mixed and involves both sides. Guanxi is regarded as a form of gift exchange (Barbalet, 2018). This exchange for social interdependence refers to the premise of operant conditioning. This exchange is not limited to material goods, but also non-material goods. It even relates to rational expectations rather than immediate reinforcement. Legally, guanxi is not equivalent to corruption or bribery. However, Qi (2013) mentioned 'there is a tendency to associate it with corruption, bribery and malpractice' (p.311-312). However, it has been argued that 'Guanxi involves power and it is a form of coping mechanism in the absence of impartial government' (Tse, 2014, p.108). Collectivism and high-power distance are two noteworthy features in Hong Kong culture (Walker & Dimmock, 2000), and using power to manipulate other people is fundamentally a social exchange process (Hwang, 1987).

In connection to the paradigm of behaviorism, there is no unconditional favoring of guanxi. It has instrumental value to the parties involved (Tsui & Farh, 1997). The experimental and operant conditioning tradition is related to the social psychological discussion of guanxi (Hwang, 1987). The relationship involves only utilitarian exchange which is entirely instrumental. The interactions between people are therefore superficial and mainly dominated by utilitarian concerns, which focus on personal gains and losses.

Although the relationship between the helper and the client under the behavioral approach is criticised as mechanically manipulative and highly impersonal (Corey, 1991), contemporary behavioral researchers assert that establishing a good interpersonal relationship is also an essential aspect of the helping process. They contend that 'factors such as warmth, empathy, authenticity, permissiveness, and acceptance are considered necessary, but not sufficient, for behavior change to occur' (Corey, 1991, p.299). They believe that controlling environmental factors can lead to behavioral change. 'Learning cannot occur in the absence of some kind of reinforcement, either positive or negative' (Corey, 1991, p.292). We may need a more appropriate term to describe this relationship between the behavioral and humanistic approach.

In fact, behavioral modification is one of the most familiar strategies adopted by the teacher samples in the research to change the behaviors of students with SEBD in Hong Kong (Chong & Ng, 2011). In teaching students with SEBD, when we talk about relationships, we should differentiate which one we are addressing. Otherwise, it may create a big confusion and the strategies being adopted will be mismatched. Relationships under humanism and guanxi under behaviorism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They may appear on a continuum with two ends. Along this continuum, one end is totally unconditional. At the other end, it is entirely characterized by utilitarian exchange, which bears no affection or emotion.

## 5. Conclusion

The nature of this qualitative study was exploratory. It does not generalize what the t-s relationship is. Instead, it was discovered that teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship among students with SEBD in different contexts are not static, nor pure. There is another force, which may lead to different outcomes. It is not to argue which direction is good. However, in teacher training, teachers should learn how to pay attention to the dynamics of the t-s relationship. The differentiation of relationship and guanxi should be addressed. Without this awareness, teachers and students may be confused by the action or reaction of the other party. In addition, to avoid potential corruption in education, arousing teachers' awareness about the nature of the t-s relationship is the first step. Education on anti-corruption for parents and students is also important (Yang, 2012; Coughlan, 2013). At the school management level, it is essential to secure the system of reward and punishment. Teachers are not encouraged to abuse the system to achieve their own agendas. The flexibility of the system should only be allowed by the consent of the communities in a school. There was a good reminder from a teacher in School B:

*'We need a fair system before we can foster the t-s relationship....As long as you don't violate the system, you can gradually establish relationships with the students' (B01).*

In order to promote the inclusive policy in public mainstream schools, resources must be a priority. Nowadays, special schools (i.e. SSD) for students with SEBD in Hong Kong play a role as transitional agencies, which help students to adopt social and emotional skills during their stay before returning to mainstream schools. In this case, the roles and functions of special schools should be unreplaceable even under the inclusive policy. In terms of small class size, residential services, more school social workers, and more trained teachers, SSD can provide resourceful support to students that mainstream schools cannot afford. In other words, if a private school, which has the same resources as an SSD, and the parents can also afford the high tuition fee, it may serve the same function as an SSD. This implies that when resources between public and private schools are comparable, parents, regardless of their SES will no longer resist sending their children with SEBD to public mainstream schools. The notion of guanxi in education is still not well developed in research. More research to reveal the nature of the t-s relationship is vital for further enrichment of teacher education.

Since there are no special schools for students with SEBD in Thailand, it seems that not possible to compare the 3 schools in such a context. Therefore, this study has a limitation in using a mainstream private school to illustrate the concerns of SEBD in Thailand. The number of students with SEBD in School C is based solely on information from one teacher at the school, and the assignment of teachers in the 3 schools to attend the interviews was based on availability, which could introduce potential bias. Furthermore, data collection was carried out independently by 15 different student helpers, raising concerns about reliability. However, this study represents a small step towards exploring teachers' perceptions of the t-s relationship among students with SEBD in two specific cities. We anticipate more insightful studies that can shed light on this issue in different cultural contexts.

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### Declaration of interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Table 1: Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. What do you think about the student-teacher relationship in the school compared with mainstream schools?
2. What kind of service models do you prefer to support students with SEBD? (e.g. inclusive mainstream schools, special schools, service schools with residential services, private schools) What is the advantage of the model?
3. How do the boarding / residential services support the development of students with SEBD?
4. What are the political and cultural factors that can support or harm the development of students with SEBD in your school?

Table 2: The framework of data collection

Cities	Hong Kong (China)		Bangkok (Thailand)
School types	Public special schools with residential services		Private mainstream school with residential services
Education the school provides	School A Primary	School B Secondary	School C Primary and Secondary
No. of Teachers interviewed	5	9	7