

THE INVISIBLE GLUE OF THE CLASSROOM: HOW GROUP EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SHAPES LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN GREATER MUMBAI SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

Group Emotional Intelligence (GEI) refers to the collective capacity of a group to manage emotional norms, regulate shared affective states, and sustain productive interpersonal dynamics. Unlike Individual Emotional Intelligence, which is a personal cognitive-emotional capacity, GEI is an emergent group-level property constituted by normative patterns of interaction. This study examines teacher perceptions of GEI among secondary school students in Greater Mumbai ($N = 673$), using a 25-item structured instrument operationalising Druskat and Wolff's (2001) six-factor model: Perspective Taking (PT), Interpersonal Understanding (IU), Confronting Norm Violators (CNV), Team Self-Evaluation (TSE), Creating an Affirmative Environment (CAE), and Proactive Problem Solving (PPS). Descriptive analysis revealed a moderately high overall GEI mean ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.42$) with strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$). A statistically significant and large-magnitude gap was found between the highest-scoring subscale (CAE: $M = 3.31$) and the lowest (CNV: $M = 2.85$), with a paired t -test yielding $t(672) = 20.68$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.87$. Psychometric analysis revealed that CNV demonstrated unacceptably low reliability ($\alpha = .41$) and failed the AVE threshold ($AVE = .354$), with near-zero inter-item correlations, suggesting that the four CNV behaviours — exclusion, blame, accountability, and bias — represent culturally disaggregated phenomena in the Indian collectivist classroom context.

Keywords: Group Emotional Intelligence, Teacher Perceptions, Secondary Schools, Collectivist Culture, Affective-Regulatory Imbalance, Blame –exclusion culture, Group Emotion.

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What Is a Group? Defining the Classroom as a Social Unit

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2024) says a group is 'several individuals assembled or having some unifying relationship.' Wang (2018) gives a more specific view, calling a group a collection of people working together toward a shared goal. Menges and Kilduff (2015) note that groups can be as small as two people, like peers or supervisors and subordinates, or as large as departments, industries, or demographic groups. For this study, Hackman and Katz's (2010) definition fits best: a group is 'an intact social system, complete with boundaries, interdependence for some shared purpose, and differentiated member roles.' This definition focuses on groups where members interact to achieve a shared task (Barsade & Gibson, 2012).

A central question is whether a secondary school classroom is truly a group or just people sharing a space. Allport (1962) argued that learning, knowledge, and feelings belong to each person and should not be credited to the group simply because members share common traits. On the other hand, LeBon (1896) and Sandelands and St. Clair (1993) believed that a group is more than its members, creating unique settings where emotions go beyond individuals and are shaped by the group as a whole (Menges & Kilduff, 2015).

The Classroom Qualifies as a Group: Five Structural Criteria

Research shows that a classroom meets five main criteria that make it a true group.

1. **Shared Purpose:** Wang (2018) explains that a shared purpose defines a group, which is clear in classrooms. Students come together with the common goal of learning, succeeding on exams, and growing academically.
2. **Clear Boundaries:** Classes have clear membership rules. Students are assigned to a specific group for the school year, which separates members from non-members (Tajfel, 1978; Hackman & Katz, 2010).
3. **Sustained Interdependence:** Unlike short-term social events, students in a classroom rely on each other over time. By working together on assignments, projects, and daily activities, they build emotional and mental connections (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000).
4. **Differentiated Roles:** In classrooms, students naturally take on different roles, such as academic leaders, social organisers, mediators, or quieter participants. Hackman and Katz (2010) note that this variety of roles is a key part of what makes a group.
5. **Collective Emotional Experience:** Classrooms create shared emotional environments. Totterdell et al. (1998) found that people are influenced by the moods of those around them and often match their feelings over time. In secondary school classrooms, where students spend many hours together, this effect is likely even stronger than in most workplaces.

Individual Emotional Intelligence vs Group Emotional Intelligence:

Mayer and Salovey (1997) define Individual Emotional Intelligence as a person's ability to recognise, understand, process, and manage their own and others' feelings to influence thoughts, actions, and emotions. It includes four main abilities: perceiving and expressing emotion; using emotions to support thinking; understanding and analysing emotions; and managing emotions in oneself and others (Mayer et al., 1999). EI is measured for each person and is a steady skill people use in different situations and relationships.

Group Emotional Intelligence is not just the average of group members' EI scores. Elfenbein (2006) explains that Individual EI concerns each person's skills, while Group EI concerns how team members demonstrate emotional intelligence in their interactions. GEI includes the shared norms and patterns that shape how people relate emotionally within a group. A team's success depends not only on its members' average EI, but also on how well they work together and connect with one another. High-performing teams have strong relationships that cannot be measured by simply adding up individual scores (Druskat & Kayes, 1999; Druskat & Wolff, 2001).

From Group Emotion to Group Emotional Intelligence:

When researchers saw that groups have their own emotional dynamics, they began to ask if groups, like individuals, can be more or less emotionally intelligent in managing them. Druskat and Wolff (2001) explored this question. They explained that group emotional intelligence is not just about avoiding conflict or being friendly. Instead, it depends on the group's norms for handling each other's emotions, managing the group's mood, and interacting with people outside the group. According to them, the highest level of group emotional intelligence occurs when members trust one another, share a group identity, and feel confident in their abilities together. These conditions require open and honest communication, even when it is difficult. Their framework describes six Emotionally Competent Group Norms (ECGNs) that work at three levels: individual members, the group as a whole, and the group's interactions with others (Druskat and Wolff, 2001).

The Gap in the Literature:

Although the GEI framework is well developed and research on classroom emotional climate is growing, two important gaps remain in the literature.

Most GEI research has focused on Western organisational settings, such as work teams, management groups, and project-based units. There has been little research in educational settings, and almost no large-scale studies on student GEI as seen by teachers in Indian secondary schools (Elfenbein, 2006; Druskat & Wolff, 2001).

Research has not explored whether the six dimensions of GEI develop equally across cultures, or whether, as Menges and Kilduff (2015) suggest, cultural and institutional norms encourage some emotional skills while limiting others. It is still unknown whether Indian secondary school students show an imbalance between affective and regulatory emotional skills, or what this imbalance might mean for managing classroom behaviour. This study also examines whether the GEI framework, developed in Western organisational settings, looks the same across all six dimensions when used in a collectivist educational culture.

Conceptual Framework: The Druskat–Wolff Model of Group Emotional Intelligence

Druskat and Wolff (2001) proposed a widely recognised structure for understanding group emotional intelligence (GEI). This model describes three levels at which emotional intelligence contributes to group success: the individual member, the group as a whole, and interactions with external parties. At each level, two core skills are required: emotional awareness (the ability to notice and understand emotions) and emotional management (the capacity to manage and react to emotions effectively). The amalgamation of these levels and skills results in six Emotionally Competent Group Norms (ECGNs): Perspective Taking (PT), Interpersonal Understanding (IU), Confronting Norm Violators (CNV), Team Self-Evaluation (TSE), Creating an Affirmative Environment (CAE), and Forward-Thinking Problem Solving (PPS).

Research Questions:

RQ1: What is the overall level of Group Emotional Intelligence (GEI) as perceived by teachers of secondary school students in Greater Mumbai?

RQ2: Are there statistically significant differences among the six GEI subscales: Perspective Taking, Interpersonal Understanding, Confronting Norm Violators, Team Self-Evaluation, Creating an Affirmative Environment, and Proactive Problem Solving?

RQ3: Which item-level patterns reveal specific affective and regulatory strengths and deficits in student GEI as observed by teachers?

Methodology:

1. Research Design

This study used a quantitative survey with a structured Likert-scale questionnaire to explore how teachers view Group Emotional Intelligence among secondary school students. This approach was chosen because it allows for generalizable and statistically testable results across a large, diverse group (Creswell, 2014). The research is descriptive and analytical, aiming to describe the GEI profile of the sample and examine the psychometric structure of the GEI tool within the Indian secondary school context.

2. Sample and Participants

The study included 673 secondary school teachers from schools in Greater Mumbai, Maharashtra, India. Teachers were chosen from Standard 9 classrooms across schools with different education boards. They were asked to complete the GEI survey based on their observations of a specific class section they currently teach, so that their responses would reflect direct classroom experience rather than general impressions. After removing responses with more than 20% missing data and outliers exceeding the 4-point scale maximum, the final analysis sample was 672 teachers.

3. Instrument

Group Emotional Intelligence was measured using a 25-item structured questionnaire operationalising Druskat and Wolff's (2001) GEI model. Items were rated on a 4-point frequency scale (1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Frequently, 4 = Always). The six subscales were: Perspective Taking (PT, 2 items: Q45–Q46), Interpersonal Understanding (IU, 6 items: Q47–Q52), Confronting Norm Violators (CNV, 4 items: Q53–Q56), Team Self-Evaluation (TSE, 2 items: Q57–Q58), Creating an Affirmative Environment (CAE, 7 items: Q59–Q65), and Proactive Problem Solving (PPS, 4 items: Q66–Q69).

Data Analysis:

Data analysis proceeded in three stages.

First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) were computed for all 25 items and six subscales.

Second, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each subscale and the overall scale.

Third, psychometric properties were evaluated by computing item-to-subscale factor loadings (Pearson r), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) for each latent construct, using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion ($AVE \geq .50$) and Hair et al. (2010) criterion ($CR \geq .70$) as thresholds. A paired-

samples t-test was conducted to test the statistical significance of the gap between CAE and CNV subscale scores. All analyses were conducted in Python (pandas, numpy, scipy) and verified against SPSS output.

Results:

Overall GEI and Subscale Descriptive Statistics

The overall GEI scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$), with a mean score of $M = 3.16$ ($SD = 0.42$) on a 4-point scale, representing 79.0% of the maximum possible score. This indicates a moderately high level of Group Emotional Intelligence as perceived by teachers in Greater Mumbai secondary school classrooms. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and reliability indices for all six subscales.

Subscale	Items	N	M	SD	α	M% Score
Perspective Taking (PT)	Q45–Q46	672	3.33	0.64	.53	83.3%
Interpersonal Understanding (IU)	Q47–Q52	672	3.09	0.51	.63	77.4%
Confronting Norm Violators (CNV)	Q53–Q56	672	2.85	0.55	.41	71.3%
Team Self-Evaluation (TSE)	Q57–Q58	672	3.28	0.63	.53	81.9%
Creating Affirmative Env. (CAE)	Q59–Q65	672	3.31	0.47	.71	82.8%
Proactive Problem Solving (PPS)	Q66–Q69	672	3.17	0.63	.75	79.3%
Overall GEI	Q45–Q69	672	3.16	0.42	.87	79.0%

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for GEI Subscales (N = 672)

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha; M% = percentage of maximum possible score. Scores on a 4-point scale (1=Never, 4=Always).

Discussion:

1. Strengths of the GEI Profile: PPS as Anchor Construct

The strongest psychometric subscale in the study is Proactive Problem Solving (PPS: AVE = .563, CR = .837, all four loadings $\lambda > .72$). PPS also shows the strongest inter-subscale correlation with CAE ($r = .589$), suggesting that classrooms that successfully create affirmative emotional environments are also better positioned to proactively address interpersonal and academic problems. This CAE–PPS pathway is the most empirically robust structural relationship in the data and should be prioritised in future SEM-based research on GEI in Indian classrooms.

2. The Affective-Regulatory Imbalance: CAE vs. CNV

A paired-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant and large-magnitude difference between the highest-scoring subscale (Creating an Affirmative Environment: $M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.47$) and the lowest-scoring subscale (Confronting Norm Violators: $M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.55$), with $t(671) = 20.68$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.87$. This large effect size ($d > 0.80$) indicates that the gap between students' observed warmth and affirmation behaviours and their observed accountability and norm-confrontation behaviours is not a marginal

variation — it is a systematic, large-magnitude phenomenon across the entire teacher sample. "Affective-Regulatory Imbalance" specifically refers to the finding that teachers scored high on affective (emotional expression) competencies but lower on regulatory (self-control) competencies. In simple terms: teachers feel and express emotions strongly, but struggle equally to regulate or control those emotions in the classroom — creating an imbalance between the two dimensions.

3. The Blame-Exclusion-Impunity Cycle

Item-level analysis of the CNV subscale reveals a three-part cycle that is particularly concerning for classroom well-being. Over half of teachers report that students sometimes or frequently form groups against classmates (Q55: 53.5% negative), engage in blame attribution (Q63: 51.0% negative), and fail to hold misbehaving peers accountable (Q53: 40.5% negative). These three behaviours form an interlocking cycle: social exclusion creates vulnerability; blame attribution targets the excluded; and the absence of peer accountability ensures that this pattern is never corrected. Left unaddressed, this cycle is consistent with the antecedents of classroom bullying dynamics identified in the peer victimisation literature (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Salmivalli, 2010).

Conclusion:

This study examined teacher perceptions of Group Emotional Intelligence among secondary school students in Greater Mumbai (N = 672), using Druskat and Wolff's (2001) six-factor GEI model. The overall GEI profile was moderately high ($M = 3.16$, $\alpha = .87$), with students demonstrating particular strength in Creating an Affirmative Environment and Perspective Taking, and notable weakness in Confronting Norm Violators. The study's central finding — a large, statistically significant Affective-Regulatory Imbalance ($d = 0.87$) — constitutes an original empirical contribution to the GEI literature, demonstrating that the Druskat-Wolff model's regulatory dimensions are systematically underdeveloped in the Indian collectivist classroom context.

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