Qualitative Mindset behind Grounded Theory: Implications to Qualitative Research Training

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the essential link between developing a qualitative mindset and the successful use of Grounded Theory (GT). While traditional academic training often prioritizes data-heavy, positivist methods, this study argues that a qualitative mindset is a functional requirement for building abstract theories. This mindset consists of five core areas: awareness of how knowledge is created, self-reflection, sensitivity to social context, flexible methods, and analytical rigor. By synthesizing the history of GT across three generations—Classic, Straussian, and Constructivist—the research shows how these approaches are used in fields like Nursing, Business, and Education. The findings demonstrate how specific tools like memo-writing and constant comparison turn philosophical ideas into a rigorous research process. Finally, the paper suggests a teaching path that moves from basic observation in early education to advanced theorizing at the graduate level.

Keywords*:* Grounded Theory, Qualitative Mindset, Research Pedagogy, Constructivism, Epistemological Awareness, Reflexivity

INTRODUCTION

The transition into a modern Information and Knowledge Economy has fundamentally reshaped Grounded Theory (GT), moving it from a localized method of discovery to a sophisticated framework for navigating global digital complexity. In this contemporary era, the primary commodity is the generation and application of knowledge, which requires researchers to adapt the traditional "constant comparative method" developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to account for a "digital goldmine" of naturally occurring data. Unlike the previous era of physical transcripts, today's scholars utilize digital footprints from professional networks and social media to observe social processes in real-time. This abundance of data allows for a more robust path toward theoretical saturation, provided the researcher can manage the inherent noise of the information age. To handle this shift, the integration of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has become a necessity, yet the core of GT remains the researcher's "theoretical sensitivity" (Birks & Mills, 2023).

This digital evolution is inextricably linked to the rise of a global community, where the "ground" of research is no longer a single physical site but a distributed network of actors and cultural flows. Such a landscape requires researchers to employ Multi-Sited GT to track phenomena across different geographic and virtual locations (Marcus, 1995). Within these interconnected spaces, the methodology leans heavily toward a constructivist perspective, emphasizing that "truth" is culturally situated and co-constructed. Charmaz (2014) posits that in a world where information is highly subjective, researchers must acknowledge their role in creating reality alongside their participants. This is particularly relevant in an age of post-modernity, where the idea of a single, universal truth is replaced by a focus on fragmentation and multiplicity.

As GT moves away from its original "positivist" roots (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) toward the reflexive, situational mapping of post-modernity (Clarke, 2005), a significant challenge arises in research education. There is currently a limited understanding of how specific epistemological orientations are developed and practically applied during the iterative process of theory generation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Many academic programs remain dominated by positivist traditions, creating a divide between qualitative theory and practice.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to foster a "qualitative mindset"—a synergistic combination of conceptual depth and methodological flexibility—to ensure that researchers can effectively filter conceptual signals from the noise of modern Big Data. This paper seeks to address this gap by describing the reciprocal relationship between the cultivation of this mindset and the rigorous application of the GT approach.

GT Research in the Age of Social Media

Applying GT to social media represents a shift from scheduled, researcher-led data collection to the analysis of "unobtrusive," persistent digital interactions. In this age, traditional reliance on interviews is supplemented or replaced by massive quantities of user-generated content, such as posts and hashtags. Unlike traditional settings, social media provides a longitudinal view of social processes as they unfold in real-time. As Snelson (2016) notes, the "persistent" nature of digital data allows researchers to revisit interactions multiple times, facilitating the constant comparative method with a level of precision that memory-dependent field observations cannot match.

Constructivist GT vs. Classic Perspectives. The methodology in this digital context often leans toward Constructivist GT (CGT), as the online environment is a space where identities are performative and co-constructed. While Classic GT (Glaserian) might argue for entering the field as a "tabula rasa" to let the theory emerge purely from the text, CGT acknowledges that researchers must be aware of how digital "affordances"—platform features like "likes" or "shares"—shape the data itself (Charmaz, 2014). A critical gap in earlier GT traditions is the failure to account for these sociotechnical influences. For instance, a GT study on online communities must critique how algorithms promote certain voices while silencing others. This requires "theoretical sensitivity" not only toward participants but toward the digital architecture, ensuring the theory is grounded in the medium's reality rather than just isolated text (Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

Theoretical Saturation Challenge. Social media introduces a significant contradiction regarding "theoretical saturation." In an environment where millions of data points are generated every second, the traditional Glaserian notion of "exhausting the data" becomes impossible. This creates a tension between the need for depth and the reality of infinite data. Scholars like Birks and Mills (2023) suggest a more bounded approach: saturation is reached when new conceptual insights cease within a specific digital phenomenon, rather than the entire platform. Furthermore, the ethical landscape is fraught; researchers must navigate "blurred" lines between public data and private intent, ensuring that theory development does not decontextualize lived experiences (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

GT Research in the Age of a Global Community

GT research has evolved from studying localized social groups into a framework for understanding “transnational” and “interconnected” processes. In a globalized world, the “ground” is no longer a single physical site but a distributed network of actors and cultural flows.

Multi-Sited GT. This shift necessitates Multi-Sited GT, tracking phenomena across geographic and virtual locations. As Marcus (1995) argued, "following the thing"—be it a policy or a digital trend—captures global complexity rather than a simplified, local version. This contrasts with earlier Straussian GT, which often focused on bounded social settings and specific "basic social processes" within a more contained organizational or institutional context.

Culturally Situated Truth. Modern global GT is heavily influenced by the Constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that "truth" is culturally situated—a sharp departure from the "universal" laws sought by early practitioners. Charmaz (2014) highlights that researchers must account for "linguistic and cultural translation." A significant advancement in this tradition is the use of theoretical sampling to seek "disconfirming cases" across borders. This ensures a theory is not ethnocentric but possesses "formal" potential—the ability to explain processes across multiple settings. For example, a GT about "digital activism" must be critically tested against both Western democratic frameworks and authoritarian regimes to be truly robust (Birks & Mills, 2023).

Virtual GT. The rise of Virtual GT defines "community" by shared interest rather than shared space. While the integration of "Global Imaginaries" (Steger, 2008) allows scholars to theorize global self-perception, it also introduces a gap regarding "Global Data Justice." Critics argue that researchers must ensure their theorizing does not "extract" knowledge from marginalized communities without returning value, maintaining a reflexive stance against global power imbalances (Heeks, 2017).

GT Research in the Age of Post-Modernity

GT in the age of post-modernity represents a significant departure from the method's original "positivist" roots (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which sought to discover an objective, external reality. In a post-modern context, the idea of a single, universal truth is replaced by a focus on fragmentation and multiplicity. This shift is most notably embodied in Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), championed by Kathy Charmaz (2014).

Rejection of the "Neutral" Researcher. A defining critique of both the Glaserian and Straussian traditions by post-modernists is the rejection of the "neutral" researcher. Post-modernity demands reflexivity, requiring researchers to examine how their own social location and biases shape the theorizing process. Clarke's (2005) Situational Analysis took this a step further by integrating post-structuralist critiques. While traditional GT focuses on a single "basic social process," Situational Analysis creates a "situational map" that includes non-human elements like technology and institutional power. This approach addresses a major limitation in classic GT by recognizing that human action is always embedded in complex, non-human structures.

Crisis of Representation. Finally, post-modern GT must navigate the "crisis of representation," questioning whether language can ever truly capture lived experience. Unlike early versions that viewed the resulting theory as a definitive "discovery," post-modern theories are viewed as "provisional" and "perspectival." To address this, researchers often use "polyvocal" coding—incorporating conflicting voices to highlight the contradictions of social life (Birks & Mills, 2023). This approach ensures that the resulting theory reflects a messy, non-linear reality rather than forcing data into a clean, artificial category—a frequent critique of more rigid, structured versions of the methodology.

Study Framework

The qualitative mindset is a specific way of searching for answers that values deep understanding over simple cause-and-effect explanations. It is based on the belief that human knowledge cannot be separated from its context and is built through the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At its core, this mindset assumes that reality is not a single truth but is made up of multiple versions of the world (Lincoln et al., 2018) created by society. Unlike research that seeks to prove a hypothesis, a qualitative mindset in GT is inductive and abductive, meaning the researcher enters the field with curiosity to let a theory emerge from people's actual experiences. This requires a mix of deep thinking and flexibility, allowing the researcher to find meaning within vast and often messy digital data.

This aligns with a constructivist epistemology, suggesting that knowledge is a product of ongoing interpretation and social engagement. Unlike positivist approaches that aim to establish universal laws, the qualitative mindset emphasizes the value of "thick description," "emic" (insider) perspectives, and the intricate details of specific contexts as the primary markers of valid research (Geertz, 1973).

The qualitative mindset in GT is characterized by a unique blend of openness, intellectual curiosity, and "theoretical sensitivity." Unlike quantitative research, which often seeks to verify existing models, the qualitative mindset in GT is fundamentally inductive and abductive, meaning the researcher approaches the field not to prove a hypothesis, but to allow a theory to emerge from the lived experiences of the participants. In the context of the Information and Knowledge Economy, this mindset must be even more resilient, as researchers are tasked with finding deep meaning within vast, often fragmented, digital and global data streams.

The qualitative mindset in GT is defined by a synergistic combination of conceptual depth and methodological flexibility, beginning with "theoretical sensitivity," which allows researchers to identify significant data patterns

and assign them conceptual meaning while balancing prior knowledge with the need to "bracket" existing theories (Glaser, 1978; Birks & Mills, 2023). This approach thrives on an embrace of ambiguity and openness, where a constructivist orientation views the researcher as a co-creator of meaning rather than a neutral observer, allowing for the exploration of "messy" or non-linear post-modern phenomena (Charmaz, 2014). This openness is maintained through a process of "constant comparison" and iterative thinking, requiring the cognitive flexibility to continuously dismantle and refine emerging theories to effectively filter conceptual signals from the noise of modern Big Data (Nelson, 2020). Ultimately, this mindset is anchored by deep reflexivity, as researchers must critically evaluate how their personal backgrounds and digital literacies influence their interpretations, ensuring that the final theory remains ethically grounded in the participants' authentic experiences rather than the researcher's own biases (Clarke, 2005).

The qualitative mindset is structured around several interconnected domains that provide the philosophical, ethical, and methodological scaffolding for qualitative research. These domains dictate how a researcher interacts with participants, interprets data, and handles the production of knowledge.

Epistemological and Ontological Awareness. At the heart of this mindset is the understanding that knowledge is co-constructed through the relationship between the researcher and the participant, rather than being an objective "discovery" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers prioritize subjectivity and the influence of social, historical, and cultural settings on meaning. This awareness requires an acceptance of the inherent complexity and contradictions within human experience, moving away from a desire for oversimplified explanations (Lincoln et al., 2018).

Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality. Maintaining integrity and ethical responsibility requires constant self-reflection regarding the researcher's own biases, identity, and the power dynamics present in the study (Berger, 2015). This domain demands ethical mindfulness in how others' stories are represented and a willingness to evolve one's own perspectives through an iterative relationship with the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Sensitivity to Meaning and Context. This domain emphasizes the pursuit of depth over breadth, focusing on the nuanced, multi-layered interpretations participants give to their lives. Achieving this requires active listening, empathy, humility, and a keen eye for how sociocultural and historical factors shade the data (Tracy, 2020).

Methodological Flexibility and Creativity. A qualitative mindset involves the agility to adapt research designs as new insights emerge. This supports the use of diverse data sources and the development of "thick descriptions" that capture the full scope of a narrative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It encourages methodological innovation while ensuring the work remains aligned with its philosophical roots.

Analytical and Interpretative Rigor. Rigor is maintained through systematic yet adaptable analysis. This involves identifying patterns within non-linear data, utilizing triangulation to bolster credibility, and applying theoretical sensitivity to reach deeper levels of interpretation (Charmaz, 2014). These practices ensure that the resulting research is both trustworthy and profound.

Statement of the Problem

This paper seeks to describe the reciprocal relationship between the cultivation of a **qualitative mindset** and the application of the **GT** research approach. This inquiry is particularly relevant to current gaps in research education, as it addresses a limited understanding of how specific epistemological orientations are developed and practically applied during the iterative process of theory generation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

By exploring how the qualitative mindset informs key methodological choices—such as theoretical sampling, constant comparison, and initial coding—and how these practices, in turn, refine the researcher's mindset, this study contributes to bridging the divide between theory and practice (Tracy, 2020). Furthermore, it responds to

the urgent need for a greater emphasis on researcher development within qualitative paradigms, a domain that remains underrepresented in academic programs often dominated by positivist traditions (Cooper et al., 2021).

By focusing on this symbiotic relationship, the study supports calls for fostering deeper epistemological awareness among novice researchers and enhancing the pedagogy of GT to ensure that theoretical sensitivity and reflexivity are at the forefront of qualitative training (Pratt et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Positioning: A Conceptual Framework

This study is a conceptual paper that employs an integrative review to explore the intersection of the qualitative mindset and Grounded Theory (GT). Unlike an empirical study that collects primary data from the field, this paper focuses on the "theoretical touchstones" found in existing literature to map out how philosophical orientations are operationalized in research practice. The goal of this integrative approach is to critique and synthesize diverse perspectives—ranging from classic Glaserian roots to modern constructivist turns—to create a new, developmental framework for qualitative research pedagogy.

The Role of Literature Selection and Synthesis

The literature was selected through an iterative process of identifying core academic concepts and methodological justifications. The selection focused on three key areas: the philosophical roots of qualitative inquiry (Constructivism and Interpretivism), the functional application of GT tools (such as constant comparison and memoing), and established best practices in research training. By aggregating perspectives from key scholars like Glaser, Strauss, and Charmaz, the review identifies "theoretical gaps" in current research education, particularly the lack of focus on how a researcher's mindset influences theory generation.

In the Philippine context—where sociocultural factors such as language diversity, colonial history, and indigenous practices deeply influence pedagogy—a literature review helps frame how GT can be used to generate substantive theories that reflect local realities. Unlike empirical studies that collect new data, this review aggregates perspectives to contextualize GT's core principles: **theoretical sensitivity, constant comparison, and theoretical sampling** (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

Establishing Methodological Rigor and Transparency

To ensure rigor, the synthesis of literature was guided by abductive reasoning, where existing theories were continuously compared against the practical needs of the Philippine educational landscape. The paper uses constant comparison as a conceptual tool to analyze the differences between GT variations, ensuring that the proposed pedagogical model is grounded in historical evidence and contemporary needs. This transparent mapping of the "qualitative mindset" onto specific GT domains provides a structured and trustworthy foundation for the study's conclusions.

By reviewing the development of GT—from the classic works of **Glaser and Strauss** to the constructivist turn by **Charmaz** and the situational analysis of **Clarke**—researchers gain a deeper understanding of the qualitative mindset (Morse et al., 2021). Furthermore, comparing different GT designs (e.g., emergent vs. systematic) provides insights into how researchers apply the method in diverse learning environments, from rural indigenous schools to urban universities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Framework for Synthesis

The synthesis was organized around three primary objectives designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice:

Philosophical Grounding. Integrating discussions from hermeneutics and social constructivism to move beyond mechanical data processing.

Operational Mapping. Demonstrating how the domains of the qualitative mindset—such as reflexivity and sensitivity—directly inform GT actions like initial coding and theoretical sampling.

Pedagogical Progression. Developing a tiered training model that aligns GT tools with the developmental stages of researchers in basic, undergraduate, and graduate education.

Synthesizing the Qualitative Mindset and Research Pedagogy

The literature review on the qualitative mindset across GT was conducted through an iterative process of synthesizing academic concepts and methodological justifications. The review was guided by three key objectives:

1. **Understanding the philosophical underpinnings** of qualitative research (Constructivism and Interpretivism)
2. **Examining how the qualitative mindset is embedded in Grounded Theory**, specifically through the lens of abductive reasoning
3. **Identifying best practices** for fostering qualitative thinking in research training

By integrating theoretical discussions from **hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1981)** and **social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978)**, the review establishes a philosophical grounding that encourages researchers to think interpretatively rather than applying methods mechanically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This synthesis highlights the importance of training researchers to embrace the "messiness" of data, fostering a mindset that is critically reflective, ethically grounded, and epistemologically nuanced.

RESULTS

Comparing Grounded Theory Variations

Grounded Theory has evolved from an "objective" stance toward an interpretive one. In the **Classic (Glaserian)** approach, the researcher is an objective observer who tries to stay neutral—acting as a "tabula rasa"—to "discover" a universal theory hidden in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This moved toward the **Straussian** model, which uses highly structured coding, such as axial coding, to verify social processes through a technical lens (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, **Constructivist GT** redefined the method by viewing the researcher as a co-participant who helps create meaning within specific cultural contexts (Charmaz, 2014). While early versions sought a single "truth" through neutrality, the modern qualitative mindset values self-reflection and views theories as provisional interpretations of a complex world.

Below is a comparison of the three main "generations" of GT aligned with the philosophical shifts above.

Table 1 Comparison of Grounded Theory Perspectives

Aspect	Classic (Glaserian) GT	Straussian (Systematic) GT	Constructivist (Charmaz) GT
Philosophical Root	**Objectivism / Post-Positivism.** Similar to Husserl's search for objective essence.	**Pragmatism & Symbolic Interactionism.** Focus on action and change.	**Constructivism.** Similar to Heidegger's hermeneutics/context.

Aspect	Classic (Glaserian) GT	Straussian (Systematic) GT	Constructivist (Charmaz) GT
Focus	**Discovering** an emergent theory hidden within the data.	**Verifying** social processes through structured coding.	**Interpreting** how participants and researchers co-construct meaning.
Role of Researcher	**Objective Observer.** Must be "tabula rasa" (blank slate) to avoid bias.	**Technical Expert.** Uses specific tools (Axial coding) to ensure rigor.	**Co-Participant.** Acknowledges that their background shapes the theory.
Use of Bracketing	**Strict.** Delayed literature review to prevent "contaminating" the data.	**Methodological.** Uses systematic procedures to maintain "objectivity."	**Not Emphasized.** Uses **Reflexivity** instead; the researcher's perspective is vital.
Goal	To find a **Basic Social Process** that explains "what is going on."	To provide a **Structured Description** of a phenomenon.	To understand **Subjective Realities** and multiple perspectives in context.
Data Analysis	**Open & Theoretical Coding.** Focus on "constant comparison" and emergence.	**Axial Coding.** Highly structured; relates categories to subcategories.	**Initial & Focused Coding.** Emphasis on "gerunds" (actions) and meaning-making.
Outcome	A parsimonious, abstract **Substantive Theory**.	A detailed **Conceptual Framework** or model.	A **Provisional Theory** that is context-bound and interpretive.

Key Theoretical Transitions

From Husserl to Heidegger in GT. The transition from **Classic GT** to **CGT** mirrors the shift from Husserlian to Heideggerian thought. In Classic GT, the researcher tries to "bracket" their knowledge to find a singular, objective theory (Husserl). In CGT, the researcher recognizes that they are "being-in-the-world" and that their interpretation of the participant's culture and history is what creates the theory (Heidegger).

Bracketing vs. Reflexivity. The modern "Qualitative Mindset" in GT favors **Reflexivity**. Instead of trying to hide one's biases, the researcher uses them as a lens to deepen the analysis.

The application of GT varies significantly across academic disciplines, with each field selecting a specific iteration—Classic, Straussian, or Constructivist—based on its unique ontological requirements and research goals. In **Nursing and Healthcare**, for instance, the **Straussian (Systematic) GT** approach is frequently favored. This is due to its highly structured coding procedures, such as the "conditional/consequential matrix," which allows clinician-researchers to map complex patient care pathways and institutional workflows with a high degree of procedural rigor (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By providing a systematic framework, Straussian GT helps translate messy clinical experiences into clear, actionable conceptual models that can inform healthcare policy and nursing practice (Morse et al., 2021).

In contrast, the field of **Business and Management** often leans toward **Classic (Glaserian) GT**. Organizational researchers frequently use this approach to "discover" basic social processes within corporate cultures, such as leadership transitions or organizational change, without the "pollution" of pre-existing management theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The Glaserian emphasis on "emergence" and the "t*abula rasa*" mindset allows business researchers to identify truly novel strategies or behaviors that quantitative metrics might overlook. As highlighted by Birks and Mills (2023), the inductive nature of Classic GT is particularly potent in fast-moving industries where traditional models are rapidly becoming obsolete.

Finally, **Education and Social Sciences** have largely embraced **CGT**. Given that learning and social identity are deeply embedded in power dynamics and cultural contexts, the CGT approach allows researchers to

acknowledge their own positionality and co-construct meaning with their participants (Charmaz, 2014). In the Philippine educational context, for example, CGT is used to theorize how students navigate "context collapse" between traditional indigenous values and modern digital learning environments. This version of GT is valued for its "reflexive" qualitative mindset, ensuring that the resulting theories are not just abstract models but are grounded in the lived, subjective realities of the global community (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The Qualitative Mindset–Grounded Theory Integration Model (QM-GTIM)

The original contribution of this study is the Qualitative Mindset–Grounded Theory Integration Model (QM-GTIM). This framework explicitly maps the philosophical and psychological "domains" of a researcher's mindset onto the functional "mechanics" of Grounded Theory (GT). In this model, the qualitative mindset is not merely a background attitude but the essential cognitive engine that allows a researcher to transition from raw, descriptive data to high-level abstract conceptualization.

1. Epistemological and Ontological Awareness: The Foundation of Reality

In the QM-GTIM, this domain serves as the "compass" for the research design. Every coding decision is dictated by the researcher's conscious choice between different versions of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While Classic GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) operates on a post-positivist ontology—suggesting a single reality exists to be "discovered"—the integration model highlights the shift toward Constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2014). Here, a researcher with a qualitative mindset recognizes that they are "co-constructing" theory with participants, a stance that fundamentally changes how data is weighted and interpreted.

2. Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality: The Engine of Integrity

Reflexivity is the model's mechanism for maintaining analytical integrity. Moving beyond the outdated notion of the researcher as a "blank slate," the QM-GTIM demands an active acknowledgment of positionality—how one's gender, class, and academic background influence "theoretical sensitivity" (Berger, 2015). In this framework, reflexivity is operationalized through **memoing**. By tracking evolving thoughts and biases, the researcher ensures the resulting theory is authentically grounded in the data rather than projected from personal experience (Birks & Mills, 2023).

3. Sensitivity to Meaning and Context: The Priority of Depth

The model prioritizes depth over breadth, particularly during **initial coding**. A qualitative mindset allows the researcher to look past surface-level statements to identify "basic social processes." This is achieved through the use of "gerunds" (action words) to capture lived experience in motion (Charmaz, 2014). In a specific context like Philippine education, this sensitivity allows the researcher to account for "colonial history" or "indigenous knowledge" as the invisible scaffolding for modern classroom decisions (Tracy, 2020).

4. Methodological Flexibility and Creativity: The Iterative Flow

The QM-GTIM is characterized by an iterative, non-linear flow. The mindset allows for **emergent designs**, where the analysis of an initial interview dictates the direction of **theoretical sampling** (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This domain requires the "creativity" to identify novel patterns and the "flexibility" to abandon initial hypotheses when data points elsewhere. This adaptive approach supports the crafting of "thick descriptions" that convey the full complexity of social worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

5. Analytical and Interpretative Rigor: The Validation Loop

Rigor in the model is maintained through the **constant comparative method**. This systematic loop ensures that every new data point is compared with previous codes and categories to create a "dense" and "well-integrated" theory (Charmaz, 2014). The mindset pushes the researcher toward **theoretical saturation**—the point where no new conceptual dimensions emerge. By actively seeking "negative cases" and utilizing triangulation, the researcher ensures the final theory meets the criteria of "fit" and "workability" (Lincoln et al., 2018).

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Table 2 Domains and Indicators of the Qualitative Mindset in Grounded Theory

Domains	Indicators	Grounded Theory Literature Support
Epistemological & Ontological Awareness	Recognizes knowledge as co-constructed and socially mediated.	**Constructivist GT** posits that data and theories are not discovered but are created through the shared experiences of researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2014).
	Values subjectivity and contextuality in knowledge production.	GT emphasizes that social processes are situated within specific environments; meaning is derived from symbolic interactionism and pragmatism (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
	Accepts complexity and ambiguity in understanding reality.	GT researchers embrace "provisional" theories, acknowledging that social life is fluid and that multiple perspectives may exist within a single process (Clarke, 2005).
Reflexivity & Researcher Positionality	Encourages self-awareness and researcher reflexivity.	Rather than "bracketing," GT researchers use **memoing** to document how their background and "theoretical sensitivity" influence the coding process (Birks & Mills, 2023).
	Ethical considerations in interpretation and representation.	Ethical rigor in GT involves ensuring the theory remains "grounded" in the participants' voices to avoid forcing data into pre-conceived categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
	Adapts perspectives based on iterative engagement with data.	The **constant comparative method** requires researchers to continuously refine their codes and categories as they encounter new data (Charmaz, 2014).
Sensitivity to Meaning & Context	Prioritizes depth over breadth in knowledge construction.	GT seeks "theoretical saturation," where the researcher delves deep into a category until no new properties emerge, ensuring conceptual density (Nelson, 2020).
	Recognizes sociocultural and historical influences.	Modern GT (Situational Analysis) maps out the broader social "situation," including non-human elements and historical discourses that shape action (Clarke, 2005).
	Encourages active listening and empathetic engagement.	Effective GT interviewing (Intensive Interviewing) relies on a relational approach to uncover the "why" and "how" behind social actions (Charmaz, 2014).
Methodological Flexibility & Creativity	Allows for emergent research design and adaptive methods.	GT uses **theoretical sampling**, where the emerging theory dictates the next steps of data collection, allowing the study to evolve organically (Glaser, 1978).
	Incorporates multiple, holistic data sources.	The GT dictum "all is data" allows researchers to integrate interviews, field notes, documents, and even quantitative data into the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
	Uses rich, thick descriptions in interpretation.	While GT aims for abstraction, it relies on vivid "memo-writing" and descriptive data to provide the evidence for the emerging theoretical categories (Birks & Mills, 2023).
Analytical & Interpretative Rigor	Identifies themes and patterns in complex data.	Rigor is maintained through a multi-staged coding process (initial, focused, and theoretical coding) to identify core social processes (Charmaz, 2014).

Domains	Indicators	Grounded Theory Literature Support
	Uses triangulation and cross-validation for credibility.	GT employs "constant comparison" across different participants, times, and places to validate the "fit" and "workability" of the theory (Glaser, 1978).
	Draws on theoretical sensitivity to enhance interpretation.	Researchers use their professional and personal "theoretical sensitivity" to recognize nuances in the data and elevate them to conceptual levels (Birks & Mills, 2023).

The table illustrates how the qualitative mindset serves as the functional core of Grounded Theory (GT), transforming philosophical abstractions into rigorous methodological actions. By aligning **epistemological awareness** with the constructivist view that knowledge is co-created (Charmaz, 2014), the researcher moves away from the passive "discovery" of truth toward an active, context-sensitive interpretation of social processes. This mindset is operationalized through **reflexivity and positionality**, where the use of constant memoing replaces traditional bracketing to ensure the theory remains authentically grounded in participant experiences (Birks & Mills, 2023). Furthermore, the table highlights how **methodological flexibility**—specifically through theoretical sampling and emergent design—allows the researcher to prioritize depth and conceptual density over mere breadth (Glaser, 1978). Ultimately, the integration of these domains ensures **analytical rigor**, as the constant comparative method and theoretical sensitivity work in tandem to produce a "workable" and "fitting" theory that can explain complex social realities in a globalized, post-modern world (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

DISCUSSION

Training researchers in GT should be tailored to their level of education, moving from basic qualitative literacy to advanced theory building. The goal is to ensure students do not just follow GT as a mechanical "recipe" but learn it as a way of thinking (Pratt et al., 2020). In **Basic Education (K-12)**, the focus should be on building curiosity and basic skills like identifying patterns and open coding in daily life. At the **Undergraduate** level, students should learn methodological rigor by using the constant comparative method to see how categories are formed from different data sources. Finally, **Graduate** training requires a shift toward "theoretical abstraction," where students learn to move beyond simple themes to create categories that explain complex social processes through theoretical sampling. At this level, students must be deeply self-reflective, ensuring their theories account for power dynamics and cultural nuances in a global community.

Basic Education (K-12): Building the Foundations. In basic education, the goal is not to produce professional theorists but to foster **curiosity, active listening, and categorization skills**.

- **Implications:** Training should focus on "Pre-GT" skills, such as identifying patterns in daily life or school environments. Students can practice **initial coding** by labeling themes in stories or interviews with peers (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
- **Mindset Focus:** Emphasis is placed on **Sensitivity to Meaning** and **Empathy**. By learning to ask "What is happening here?" rather than "Is this right or wrong?", students develop the early reflexive habits necessary for qualitative inquiry.

Undergraduate Education: Developing Methodological Rigor. At the undergraduate level, students begin to engage with the formal structures of GT, moving toward a more disciplined approach to data.

- **Implications:** Curricula should introduce the **Constant Comparative Method**. Students can be tasked with small-scale projects where they compare data across at least two different sources to understand how categories are formed (Birks & Mills, 2023).

- **Mindset Focus: Methodological Flexibility** and **Analytical Rigor**. Students learn that research design is emergent; they must be taught to be comfortable when their data contradicts their initial "hunch," shifting from a deductive to an inductive mindset (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Graduate Education: Achieving Theoretical Abstraction. Graduate training (Master's and Doctoral levels) requires a shift from descriptive reporting to the generation of **substantive theory**.

- **Implications:** Training must emphasize **Theoretical Sampling** and **Theoretical Sensitivity**. Doctoral candidates are challenged to move beyond "themes" to "categories" that explain the relationship between social processes (Charmaz, 2014). This often involves navigating the different "schools" of GT (Classic vs. Constructivist) to align their methodology with their philosophical worldviews.

- **Mindset Focus: Epistemological Awareness** and **Deep Reflexivity**. Graduate students must critically evaluate their positionality within the "Global Community," ensuring their theorizing accounts for power dynamics and sociocultural nuances, particularly in diverse contexts like the Philippines (Clarke, 2005; Tracy, 2020).

Table 3 Summary of Training Goals by Level

Education Level	Primary Goal	Key GT Tool	Mindset Indicator
Basic (K-12)	Observation	Open Coding	Sensitivity & Curiosity
Undergraduate	Comparison	Constant Comparison	Rigor & Objectivity/Subjectivity
Graduate	Theorizing	Theoretical Sampling	Epistemological Awareness

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