



Older Adults' Narratives of Lifespan Development: A Qualitative Exploration of Developmental Experiences in Ibadan, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Development is a lifelong process shaped by individual experience and by the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which people live. Older adults are valuable sources of developmental knowledge because their narratives offer retrospective accounts spanning childhood through later life. This qualitative study explored the life experiences of older Nigerian adults and examined developmental themes in their narratives, using Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory as a guiding, primarily deductive framework. Ten older adults aged 65 and above (four men, six women) were interviewed individually in familiar settings, including homes and shops, in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria; seven participants were Yoruba, two were from Calabar, and one was from Benue. Eight open-ended questions derived from Erikson's psychosocial stages guided the interviews, which were conducted with the support of a research assistant fluent in participants' native languages, audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Eight developmental themes were identified: early relationships and trust; autonomy within parental guidance; curiosity and initiative; self-acceptance and competence; identity formation within family expectations; intimacy and marriage; generativity through parenting and community contribution; and later-life reflection on achievement and regret. Findings underscore the centrality of family, religion, education, marriage, and historical context to development. The study contributes Nigerian older adults' perspectives to lifespan developmental psychology and shows how a theory-informed qualitative approach can illuminate culturally situated development across the life course.

Keywords: older adults, Erikson's psychosocial theory, life-course narratives, qualitative research, Nigeria, reflexive thematic analysis

INTRODUCTION

Development is a lifelong process shaped by individual experience and the social and cultural contexts in which people live (Baltes, 1987). Although developmental research has historically devoted considerable attention to childhood and adolescence, development continues throughout adulthood and later life. Older adults are particularly important sources of developmental knowledge because their narratives encompass experiences accumulated across several decades and provide opportunities to examine how individuals retrospectively understand major events, relationships, challenges, and transitions across the life course.

Erikson's psychosocial theory provides an important framework for understanding development as a lifelong process. Erikson (1950, 1963) proposed eight psychosocial stages involving the developmental challenges of trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority,



identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and ego integrity versus despair. Unlike theories that locate development primarily in childhood, Erikson's framework extends developmental processes into adulthood and later life.

The psychosocial perspective emphasizes the interaction between the developing individual and the social environment. Developmental challenges are therefore experienced within relationships, families, communities, and broader cultural contexts (Erikson, 1963). The meaning and expression of developmental tasks may consequently differ across societies.

This cultural consideration is particularly important when examining the experiences of Nigerian older adults. Older Nigerians may have grown up within family and community structures that differ substantially from those experienced by younger generations. Family authority, religious instruction, gender expectations, marriage practices, educational opportunities, and intergenerational responsibilities may all shape the ways in which developmental experiences are understood.

Erikson's framework was intended to describe psychosocial tasks of broad, cross-cultural relevance, yet its applicability outside the Western, individualist settings in which it was developed has long been debated. Early anthropological work applying Erikson's stages among Nigerian populations suggested that, while the broad psychosocial tasks were recognizable, their specific expression was substantially shaped by local kinship structures, religious practice, and community life (Salamone & Salamone, 1993). This body of work points to the continued value of empirical attention to how Erikson's stages are experienced and narrated within Nigerian contexts specifically.

Research among older Nigerians has demonstrated the importance of family relationships and spirituality to later-life wellbeing (Oyinlola et al., 2023). Other research has shown that cultural values, reciprocity, altruism, and moral responsibility may shape older adults' caregiving and intergenerational roles (Ezulike et al., 2024).

Recent Nigerian and cross-cultural gerontological scholarship has begun to address this cultural embeddedness more directly, documenting older Nigerians' own perspectives on family caregiving relationships (Agbawodikeizu et al., 2024; Jika et al., 2026), the culturally contested boundary between appropriate caregiving and abuse within family settings (Okolie et al., 2025), and lived experience during periods of societal disruption using narrative qualitative methods (Elugbadebo et al., 2025). However, relatively limited attention has been given specifically to older Nigerian adults' retrospective narratives of development across the full lifespan, from childhood through later life, and to how such narratives might be organized in relation to an established lifespan developmental framework such as Erikson's. Listening directly to older adults provides an opportunity to examine how developmental experiences are remembered and interpreted by individuals who have lived through multiple developmental periods.

The Present Study

The present study used Erikson's psychosocial theory as a theory-informed, primarily deductive framework for exploring older adults' life experiences. The theory was used specifically to guide the development of the interview questions. The study did not seek to statistically test Erikson's theory or assume that participants' experiences would necessarily conform to all eight psychosocial stages.

Rather, participants were invited to describe their experiences in their own words, and their narratives were subsequently analysed for recurring meanings and patterns, including meanings that extended beyond the eight theoretical domains. The identified themes were then interpreted in relation to the psychosocial domains that informed the interview.

The study therefore sought to answer the following research question:

How do older Nigerian adults describe their developmental experiences across the lifespan, and what developmental themes are evident in their narratives?



The study contributes to developmental psychology by providing Nigerian older adults' perspectives on lifespan development and by examining how psychosocial developmental experiences are embedded within family, cultural, religious, interpersonal, and historical contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative exploratory design. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences and the meanings they attached to those experiences rather than to quantify relationships among predetermined variables.

The study was theory-informed, with Erikson's psychosocial theory serving as the conceptual framework. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) account of reflexive thematic analysis as flexible enough to support either a primarily inductive or a primarily deductive analytic orientation, the present analysis is best characterized as theory-informed and primarily deductive: the interview questions and the initial thematic structure were derived directly from Erikson's eight psychosocial stages. Coding nonetheless remained open to content that extended beyond these theoretical categories; such content was retained and reported as an inductive supplement to the theory-derived structure rather than discarded or forced into an existing domain (see Data Analysis, below, and Findings).

Participants

The study involved 10 older adults residing in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics. Inclusion criteria were residence in Ibadan, age 65 years or above, and willingness and perceived capacity to discuss one's life history in an individual interview. Participants were met in familiar settings, including their homes and shops, where the interviews were conducted individually. These settings provided participants with environments in which they could discuss their experiences comfortably.

Table 1 Summary of Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Summary (N = 10)
Gender	4 men, 6 women
Ethnic/regional background	Yoruba (n = 7), Calabar area (n = 2), Benue area (n = 1)
Approximate age	Born around the 1950s (65 years and above at interview); exact ages not uniformly available
Interview setting	Participants' homes and shops in Ibadan, Oyo State
Education	4 Primary School; 4 Secondary School; 2 Tertiary Education
Occupation	Trader, Farmer, Artisan, Teacher, Civil Servant, Market Vendor, Clergy, Retired Nurse, Tailor, and Farmer

Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who could provide detailed retrospective accounts of their life experiences. The selection was based on the relevance of participants' experiences to the purpose of the study rather than statistical representativeness. Participants were identified and approached directly within the community — in their homes and places of business — based on their availability and willingness to take part.



Participants were recruited through personal and family networks, with referrals facilitated by community leaders in Ibadan. This purposive approach ensured access to older adults willing to share detailed life histories.

The sample size of 10 participants was considered appropriate for the exploratory nature of the study and the depth of the individual interviews. The focus was on obtaining detailed, information-rich narratives rather than achieving numerical generalizability.

Research Assistant and Language Considerations

A research assistant who could understand the native language of the participants was employed to assist with the interview process. This was important because participants could communicate their experiences in a language with which they were most comfortable.

Interviews were conducted primarily in Yoruba ($n = 7$), Efik ($n = 2$), and Tiv ($n = 1$), with occasional use of English where participants were comfortable. The research assistant was fluent in these languages and assisted with interpretation.

The research assistant assisted with communication during the interviews and helped ensure that participants' responses were adequately understood. Where participants expressed themselves in their native language, the meanings of their responses were considered during transcription and interpretation.

Transcription was carried out by the lead researcher, with translation accuracy verified through joint review with the research assistant. Where necessary, back-translation was employed to ensure fidelity to participants' intended meanings.

Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide consisted of eight open-ended questions derived from Erikson's psychosocial theory of development (Erikson, 1950, 1963). Each question addressed a major psychosocial developmental domain represented in Erikson's framework.

The questions explored participants' experiences concerning:

- Early relationships with parents or caregivers and the development of trust;
- Autonomy, independence, and parental guidance during childhood;
- Curiosity, exploration, and initiative;
- Competence, confidence, and experiences of inferiority;
- Identity formation and the influence of family expectations;
- Intimate relationships, relationships with the opposite sex, and marriage;
- Parenting, mentoring, and contribution to younger people and the community; and
- Later-life reflections concerning achievements, regrets, and the meaning of one's life.

Although the questions were derived from the theory, they were open-ended and allowed participants to provide detailed accounts in their own words. Participants were also encouraged to elaborate on experiences that they considered personally important, including experiences that did not correspond directly to the theoretical domains.



Data Collection Procedure

Participants were approached in their homes, shops, and other familiar settings. The purpose of the study and the nature of the interview were explained to each participant before the interview.

Data collection took place between 30th March, 2025 to 30th April, 2025, with interviews lasting between 40 minutes and 60 minutes.

The interviews were conducted individually using the semi-structured interview guide. Participants were encouraged to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, and follow-up prompts were used where clarification or elaboration was required.

With participants' permission, the interview sessions were audio-recorded. The recordings were subsequently transcribed for analysis. Where native-language responses occurred, the research assistant assisted with their interpretation and translation into English while attention was given to retaining the intended meaning of participants' accounts.

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Department of Psychology Ethics Committee, University of Ibadan and granted on 29th January 2025.

Beyond formal institutional approval, the following ethical procedures were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of their involvement before the interviews commenced. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained orally from each participant. Participants were also informed that the interview would be audio-recorded, and permission to record the sessions was obtained before recording commenced.

Participants' privacy and confidentiality were respected during data collection and reporting. Interviews were conducted individually in participants' familiar settings, including their homes and places of business. Identifying information was excluded from the presentation of the findings, and participant codes (P1–P10) were used in place of participants' names to protect their identities.

A research assistant who understood the native language of participants assisted with communication where necessary. This was intended to enable participants to express their experiences and perspectives as clearly and naturally as possible. The information obtained from the interviews was treated as confidential and was used solely for the purpose of the study.

The study did not involve any experimental manipulation or intervention. Participants were invited to discuss their life experiences, and care was taken to conduct the interviews respectfully, particularly when participants discussed personal or potentially sensitive experiences from earlier periods of their lives.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed following data collection. The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with the participants' accounts. Meaningful segments of the narratives were identified and assigned initial codes based on the content and meaning of participants' responses.

The initial coding was informed by the areas explored during the interviews but was not restricted to predetermined theoretical labels. Codes captured recurring experiences and meanings expressed by participants, including parental warmth, parental control, childhood freedom, curiosity, confidence, religious instruction, family expectations, peer influence, marriage, parenting, contribution to younger generations, achievement, and regret. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories. The categories were reviewed against the transcripts to determine whether they adequately represented the experiences described by participants. Recurring patterns across participants were then developed into broader themes.



The identified themes were subsequently interpreted in relation to Erikson's psychosocial framework. This approach allowed the study to examine how participants' experiences reflected, extended, or provided contextual meaning to Erikson's developmental concepts.

Thematic analysis was used to organize and interpret recurring patterns within the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Consistent with a reflexive approach to thematic analysis, the emphasis was on the researcher's active, interpretive engagement with participants' accounts and the meanings participants attached to their experiences, rather than on the mechanical application of a fixed coding frame.

Because the eight resulting themes correspond closely to the eight theory-derived interview domains, it is important to specify where the analysis moved beyond the interview questions themselves. Several elements of the reported findings were not directly solicited by the interview questions and instead emerged from participants' own elaboration: the retrospective reinterpretation of early hardship as a source of later strength (Theme 1); the framing of strict parental supervision as protective rather than restrictive (Theme 2); spontaneous comparisons between participants' own childhoods and those of contemporary children (Theme 3); and the role of extended family in vetting and arranging marriage partners (Theme 6). These elements are treated in the Findings and Discussion as inductive additions to, rather than direct products of, the theoretical framework.

No statistical analysis was conducted because the study was qualitative and exploratory.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Consistent with established criteria for evaluating rigor in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the credibility of the analysis was supported by audio-recording the interviews, transcribing the recordings, repeatedly reviewing the transcripts, and systematically organizing recurring ideas into codes and themes.

The researcher also recognized that participants were reporting experiences that, in some cases, occurred several decades earlier. The narratives therefore represent participants' retrospective memories and present interpretations of past experiences rather than objective records of every event in their lives.

No second researcher independently coded the transcripts or reviewed the themes; accordingly, no independent-coder procedure is claimed for this study.

Researcher Positionality

As Nigerian psychologists trained in lifespan development, we approached participants as cultural insiders familiar with Yoruba and broader Nigerian traditions. Our disciplinary background in Erikson's theory shaped the interview design, while our relative youth compared to participants influenced rapport and interpretation. We recognize that our insider status facilitated trust but may also have shaped the emphasis placed on family and religious themes.

Findings

Analysis of participants' narratives identified eight developmental themes corresponding broadly to the developmental domains that informed the interview guide. Although the themes were informed by Erikson's theoretical framework, participants' narratives also provided culturally and contextually specific meanings within each domain.

As detailed in the Data Analysis section, four elements across the themes below extend beyond the interview questions themselves and are treated as inductive additions to the theoretical structure; these are noted explicitly where they occur. Illustrative quotations are indicated with placeholders below and should be inserted by the authors from the interview transcripts, using anonymous participant codes (P1–P10), before submission.



Theme 1: Early Relationships and Trust

Participants described relationships with parents and caregivers as important childhood experiences. Accounts of parental love, care, discipline, and emotional availability were connected to feelings of security and later relationships with others.

“My mother always prayed with us before sleep, and that gave me peace even when life was hard” (P4).

These narratives broadly reflected Erikson’s concept of trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1950, 1963). Participants’ accounts were not uniform, however: some participants recalled early relationships in straightforwardly positive terms, while others described more difficult early circumstances that they came, over time, to reinterpret as sources of strength rather than continuing sources of insecurity. This retrospective reworking of difficult experiences — an inductive pattern not directly solicited by the interview question — was itself a recurring feature of participants’ accounts, rather than a simple positive-versus-negative judgment of the parent-child relationship.

“My father was very harsh when I was young, but I later realized his discipline taught me resilience and prepared me for life’s struggles” (P6).

Theme 2: Autonomy Within Parental Guidance

Participants recalled strong parental supervision during childhood. Parents often determined what children could do and closely monitored their activities. At the same time, participants described opportunities to engage in activities that were considered appropriate for their age.

“My father would not allow us to wander far, but he gave me small tasks like fetching water and helping in the shop. Those were the things we could do freely” (P3).

Rather than describing parental control exclusively as restrictive, participants frequently interpreted it as protection and responsible parenting — an inductive framing that extended beyond what the interview question asked about directly. Their accounts therefore suggest that autonomy was experienced within a framework of parental authority, rather than against it.

This corresponds broadly with Erikson’s autonomy versus shame and doubt stage while also illustrating the culturally situated expression of autonomy (Erikson, 1963).

“My mother was very strict, but I see now it was for our safety. She watched us closely so we would not mix with bad company, and I am grateful for that guidance” (P7).

Theme 3: Curiosity, Exploration, and Initiative

Participants recalled childhood play, curiosity, exploration, and interaction with peers. Some remembered getting into trouble because of their curiosity, while nevertheless viewing these experiences as meaningful parts of childhood.

“I used to sneak into the neighbor’s farm to see how they planted yams, and though I was scolded, I learned a lot from those adventures” (P2).

Participants also compared their childhood experiences with those of contemporary children, particularly with regard to opportunities for outdoor play and peer interaction — a spontaneous, inductive comparison not prompted directly by the interview question. These narratives demonstrate how developmental opportunities are shaped by changes in the wider social environment.

The theme broadly reflects Erikson’s concept of initiative and the child’s developing capacity to explore and act purposefully (Erikson, 1963).



“In our time, we played outside until sunset with friends, but now children stay indoors with phones and television. They miss the joy of running freely” (P8).

Theme 4: Self-Acceptance, Confidence, and Competence

Participants described parental affirmation, religious teaching, moral instruction, and lessons concerning self-acceptance as important to developing confidence.

“My father always told me, ‘You are capable, don’t fear,’ and those words gave me courage to face challenges” (P1).

Several participants emphasized the importance of not comparing oneself negatively with others. Their narratives suggest that competence was understood not only through achievement but also through self-acceptance, moral development, and social relationships.

This corresponds broadly with Erikson’s industry versus inferiority domain while demonstrating the broader cultural meanings attached to competence.

“I learned not to envy others; everyone has their own path. Confidence comes from knowing your worth, not from competing with neighbors” (P9).

Theme 5: Identity Formation Within Family Expectations

Participants described adolescence as a period in which family expectations strongly influenced education, behaviour, relationships, and future direction.

“My parents insisted I attend teacher training school instead of learning a trade, because they believed education was the only way to succeed” (P5).

Some participants described parental authority as limiting independent decision-making, while others recalled conflict with parents as they attempted to establish greater independence. Participants’ narratives therefore portrayed identity formation as involving negotiation between personal aspirations and family expectations.

This finding corresponds with Erikson’s identity versus role confusion framework (Erikson, 1963) and is also consistent with evidence that parenting practices are associated with identity formation among Nigerian youths (Adejuwon, 2005).

“I wanted to marry early, but my father refused, saying I must finish school first. It caused arguments, yet I later saw his point, even though at the time I felt restricted” (P7).

Theme 6: Intimacy and Marriage

Participants described marriage as an important context for adult intimacy. Some participants, particularly women, recalled limited opportunities for relationships with the opposite sex before marriage and described marriage as a major transition away from the parental home.

“Before marriage, I was not allowed to spend time alone with men. When I married, it felt like stepping into a new world of responsibility and companionship” (P6).

Family involvement in marriage decisions was also emphasized — an inductive elaboration beyond the interview question as originally framed. Participants recalled practices in which families investigated prospective spouses and played a role in marriage arrangements.

The theme therefore corresponds with Erikson’s intimacy versus isolation domain while demonstrating that intimacy and marriage were culturally embedded in family structures and social expectations.



“My uncle went to ask about my husband’s family before the marriage was agreed. They wanted to be sure he came from a good home before giving their blessing” (P3).

Theme 7: Generativity Through Parenting and Community Contribution

Participants described parenting, teaching, mentoring, volunteering, and guiding younger people as important ways of contributing to others.

“I always encouraged the children in my street to stay in school. I would gather them and tell stories that taught them respect and hard work” (P2).

These accounts closely correspond with Erikson’s concept of generativity, which involves investment in the development and wellbeing of subsequent generations (Erikson, 1950). The findings also align with Nigerian research showing the relevance of altruism, reciprocity, and moral responsibility to older adults’ caregiving roles (Ezulike et al., 2024).

“Helping the younger ones gives me joy because I see myself in them. If they succeed, it feels like my own success too” (P8).

Theme 8: Later-Life Reflection, Achievement, and Regret

Participants reflected on their lives in terms of achievements, relationships, parenting, marriage, material accomplishments, and the outcomes of their children.

“Looking back, I feel proud that all my children finished school and are doing well. That is my greatest achievement in life” (P10).

Some participants expressed satisfaction with their achievements, whereas others identified areas of concern or regret. These accounts broadly reflected Erikson’s concept of ego integrity versus despair, which involves retrospective evaluation and acceptance of one’s life (Erikson, 1963), and correspond with the process of life review described among older adults more generally (Butler, 1963).

“I regret not furthering my own education. I see how it limited me, even though I tried to give my children what I could not have” (P5).

The theme demonstrates that later-life development involves continued reflection and meaning-making rather than simply the completion of earlier developmental stages.

DISCUSSION

The study explored the life experiences of older Nigerian adults and examined developmental themes within their narratives using Erikson’s psychosocial theory as a guiding framework. Because the interview questions were derived from Erikson’s theory, the findings should be understood as theory-informed, primarily deductive qualitative evidence rather than an inductive discovery of Erikson’s eight stages. At the same time, and as identified in the Data Analysis section and noted throughout the Findings, several specific elements of participants’ accounts were not directly solicited by the interview questions; these inductive elements are the clearest evidence of what the analysis found beyond the theoretical starting point, and they are drawn together across themes below rather than repeated theme-by-theme.

The Cultural Embedding of Psychosocial Domains

A consistent pattern across the autonomy, identity, and intimacy themes (Themes 2, 5, and 6) was that participants did not describe these domains in individualist terms. Strong parental supervision was interpreted as protection rather than restriction; identity formation was portrayed as a negotiation between personal aspiration and family expectation rather than a purely internal process; and family involvement in vetting and arranging marriages was recalled as a normal, often valued, feature of courtship rather than an intrusion on a



private relationship. Thus, the meaning of autonomy, identity, and intimacy in these narratives differed from a purely individualistic reading of Erikson's stages, and instead reflected family- and relationship-embedded expressions of the same underlying psychosocial tasks. This pattern is consistent with earlier observations that Erikson's stages remain broadly recognizable in Nigerian contexts while acquiring locally specific meanings (Salamone & Salamone, 1993), and with more recent Nigerian gerontological research documenting the continued centrality of family structures to older adults' caregiving relationships and social roles (Agbawodikeizu et al., 2024; Okolie et al., 2025). Together, these findings support the view that psychosocial development among Nigerian older adults is embedded within interpersonal and cultural contexts rather than being exclusively an individual psychological process.

Continuity, Change, and Retrospective Meaning-Making

A second cross-cutting pattern concerned how participants related their past to their present. In Theme 1, some participants reinterpreted difficult early experiences as sources of later strength rather than continuing sources of insecurity; in Theme 3, participants spontaneously compared their own childhoods with those of contemporary children; and in Theme 8, participants evaluated their lives retrospectively, weighing achievement against regret. None of these three patterns was directly requested by the interview questions, and together they suggest that participants were not simply reporting fixed memories but were actively constructing meaning from their life histories at the point of narration — a process consistent with the broader tradition of narrative and life-review approaches to later-life development (Butler, 1963; Elugbadebo et al., 2025). This active, interpretive quality of participants' accounts also supports the appropriateness of a reflexive thematic analysis, which treats meaning as constructed through the interaction between participant, researcher, and interview context rather than as a fixed property of the data waiting to be extracted (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021).

Generativity and Intergenerational Contribution

Generativity was strongly and consistently evident in participants' descriptions of parenting, mentoring, teaching, and community contribution (Theme 7). This corresponds with Erikson's concept of generativity and suggests that contribution to younger generations remained a central source of meaning in later life (Erikson, 1950). Nigerian research likewise indicates that older adults' contributions to others are shaped by cultural expectations and moral values around reciprocity and altruism (Ezulike et al., 2024), and recent qualitative work on Nigerian family caregiving similarly foregrounds older adults' own accounts of their relational roles and motivations rather than only the perspectives of those who care for them (Jika et al., 2026).

Interpreting Erikson's Framework in a Nigerian Context

Taken together, these patterns suggest that Erikson's psychosocial framework provides a useful structure for exploring developmental narratives among Nigerian older adults, but that the narratives also demonstrate that psychosocial development is culturally situated rather than universally expressed in the same form. The framework is therefore most useful when its concepts are interpreted in relation to the social and cultural environments in which development occurs, consistent with earlier observations that Erikson's stages retain broad relevance in Nigerian contexts while acquiring locally specific meanings (Salamone & Salamone, 1993).

Practical Implications

These findings carry several implications for gerontological practice, family-oriented intervention, and developmental psychology in Nigeria and similar cultural settings. First, because generativity through parenting, mentoring, and community contribution featured so prominently in participants' accounts of a meaningful life, structured opportunities for older adults to mentor younger people — for example, intergenerational mentoring schemes based in schools, religious institutions, or community associations — may support wellbeing in later life by providing a recognized outlet for this motivation.



Second, because autonomy and identity were experienced within, rather than against, family authority, practitioners working with Nigerian older adults and families (for example, in counselling, social work, or gerontological care) should be cautious about applying individualist assumptions about independence and self-determination, and should instead attend to how these values are expressed through relational and family-embedded pathways.

Third, the prominence of religious instruction and moral development in participants' accounts of confidence and self-acceptance (Theme 4) suggests that faith communities may be valuable partners in later-life psychosocial support and life-review interventions.

Finally, participants' engagement in retrospective evaluation of their achievements and regrets (Theme 8) is consistent with the potential value of structured life-review or reminiscence approaches (Butler, 1963) for Nigerian older adults — an approach that remains underused in Nigerian gerontological and mental health practice and that could be integrated into community-based elder-care programming.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the sample comprised only 10 participants drawn from a single city in southwestern Nigeria, and most participants were Yoruba; the transferability of the findings to older adults from other Nigerian ethnic groups, regions, or urban and rural contexts should therefore be considered cautiously. Second, participants' accounts were retrospective and depended on long-term memory of events spanning several decades; as with all retrospective narrative research, recollections may have been reconstructed or reinterpreted through the lens of later experience rather than reflecting the meaning participants attached to events at the time they occurred. Third, some interviews were supported by a research assistant and required interpretation and translation into English; although care was taken to preserve intended meaning, some nuance may not have been fully captured in translation, and the specific verification procedure used for translations should be reported (see Method). Fourth, coding and theme development were undertaken by a single researcher without an independent second coder, which is consistent with much small-scale qualitative research but means that inter-coder reliability was not formally established. Finally, because the interview guide was derived directly from Erikson's psychosocial stages, the resulting themes were necessarily shaped by this theoretical starting point; an inductive design not anchored to a specific theory might have generated a different thematic structure, although the present analysis attempted to identify and report the specific inductive elements that emerged beyond the theoretical domains (see Data Analysis). These limitations do not undermine the value of the findings but indicate directions for methodological strengthening in future research.

CONCLUSION

The study explored older Nigerian adults' retrospective accounts of their developmental experiences using a theory-informed, primarily deductive qualitative approach. The interview questions were derived from Erikson's psychosocial theory, while participants' narratives provided the empirical basis for identifying and interpreting developmental themes, including several elements that extended inductively beyond the interview questions themselves.

Eight developmental themes corresponding broadly to Erikson's psychosocial domains were identified. However, the narratives demonstrated that these developmental experiences were embedded within family relationships, cultural expectations, religion, gender roles, marriage practices, education, community relationships, and historical circumstances.

The study's principal contribution is its inclusion of Nigerian older adults' perspectives in the understanding of lifespan development. Their narratives demonstrate both the usefulness and the contextual limitations of applying Erikson's psychosocial framework to a Nigerian population, and, as outlined above, point toward concrete practical applications in gerontological and family-oriented practice. Future qualitative research could build on these findings by including larger and more culturally diverse samples of older Nigerians and



by examining how developmental experiences vary across ethnic groups, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographical regions.

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