

Postcolonial Influence and Cultural Reclamation: Students' Perspectives from West Africa

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Abstract

This study examines how students in a British-colonized West African nation interact with the enduring legacy of colonialism in shaping their cultural identity across academic and social contexts. Guided by postcolonial and cultural hybridity frameworks, the research explores how Western epistemologies, religious structures, and cultural paradigms intersect with indigenous worldviews to form complex identity negotiations. Utilizing qualitative methods, including open-ended interviews and narrative analysis, the study foregrounds personal reflections on ancestral values, evolving gender roles, spiritual autonomy, and symbolic practices such as weaving and agriculture. The findings reveal that colonial influence persists not only through institutional remnants but also through internalized norms that participants actively resist, reinterpret, and reconfigure. Through this process, identity emerges as a dynamic and relational construct—rooted in tradition, shaped by historical inheritance, and reimagined through communal and existential awakening.

Keywords

Postcolonial Identity, Cultural Negotiation, Ubuntu Philosophy, Cultural Reclamation, and Gender Dynamics

1. Introduction

The influence of colonialism continues to linger in African countries long after decades of independence. Africa, from north to south, east to west, and everywhere in between, boasts the most diverse cultures, languages, and ethnicities (Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013). However, the common thread that connects these myriad

cultural and ethnic differences is the culture and values left behind by the colonialists (Ahmed et al., 2022). The legacy of colonialism continues to shape the cultural, educational, and social landscapes of many African nations, especially in higher education (Dartey-Baah et al., 2025; Chikerema & Nzewi, 2021). In West Africa, this intersection is particularly pronounced, as students navigate the complexities of cultural identity within academic environments that often privilege Western norms, languages, and epistemologies (Dartey-Baah et al., 2025; Parashar & Schulz, 2021).

Therefore, the influence of colonization affected the peoplehood, a deep-seated sense of belonging within a community, which is a fundamental pillar of social existence (Allen et al., 2019; Boyd & Richerson, 2009). As sociologist Clifford Geertz (2017) emphasized, culture is not just a backdrop but a dynamic force that permeates every facet of society, shaping identity, fostering economic and political cooperation, and nurturing shared traditions and collective well-being. Economically, it manifests in collaboration, mutual support, and communal

Initiatives that drive prosperity and resilience (Fan et al., 2025). Politically, it plays a crucial role in civic participation, representation, and the pursuit of common goals, ensuring that governance reflects the collective needs and aspirations of the people (Dahl, 1998).

2. Background

2.1. Disruption of Social Cohesion

The ideals that have strengthened and sustained African societies across generations survived colonization and evolved. However, the independent African countries have not divorced themselves from colonial practices and values of individualism, which are in contrast to the African philosophy of Ubuntu, “*I am because you are,*” which conveys the idea that an individual’s identity and existence are shaped by their relationships with others (Gade, 2012: p. 492). According to Khapoya (2015), traditional customs, rituals, and social structures that had shaped these societies for centuries were often suppressed or replaced by European norms. This erosion led to a loss of social harmony and a sense of disorientation, as communities struggled to adapt to the values imposed upon them by the colonial masters (A Brief History of the World Since 1500, 2025).

Although formal colonial rule has ended, the lasting impact of cultural imperialism remains visible across Africa. Social cohesion remains essential for the resilience and continuity of communities, especially in regions still dealing with historical divisions (Inyang & Hamilton, 2025). Furthermore, Packer and Ungunson (2024) explained that shared cultural practices and traditions foster unity within a community. Therefore, in the African context, where colonialism disrupted indigenous governance and social systems, cultural foundations have become even more crucial for restoring communal bonds and reaffirming identity (Parashar & Schulz, 2021). Sangmor (2023) provides empirical evidence from Ghana and South Africa to demonstrate that indigenous cultural practices have not only endured

but are actively reclaiming space in postcolonial identity formation, emphasizing their importance in societal healing.

2.2. Cultural Negotiation in Higher Education

The legacy of colonialism continues to influence the cultural, educational, and social landscapes of many African nations, especially within higher education (Atanda et al., 2024). Universities, often based on Western models, act as crossroads where global academic standards meet local cultural identities (Gwaravanda, 2019; Atanda et al., 2024). In West Africa, students face academic environments that favor Western languages, ways of knowing, and institutional practices, making the negotiation of personal and community identity a daily struggle (Adegbola et al., 2018; McAllester, 2024). As Dartey-Baah, Bawole, and Mumin (2025) show, tensions between community ethics and Western academic standards remain a key feature of university life in the region. Meanwhile, Ocholla (2020) highlights that symbols of intellectual authority in academic libraries are still influenced by colonial epistemologies, marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems. These dynamics show that universities are not just centers of learning but contested cultural spaces where colonial legacies and local realities meet (Dartey-Baah et al., 2025; Ocholla, 2020). Other scholars have examined the lasting impact of colonial rule on today's African education systems (Matasci, 2022; Dabie, 2025). Postcolonial theories, especially those of Fanon (1961) and Said (1978), play a key role in this critique, providing insights into how colonial ideologies continue to shape curricula, institutional values, and student identity development. Fanon's focus on psychological colonization and Said's idea of Orientalism show how Western norms still define intellectual authority and cultural relevance in higher education.

While globalization has intensified cultural exchange, it has also deepened tensions between indigenous values and imported ideologies (Ihejirika & Asike, 2018; Adedeji & Michael-Olomu, 2024). For many students, the university becomes a space of negotiation where traditional beliefs, communal values, and ancestral heritage are confronted by Western ideals of individualism, secularism, and modernity (Anofuechi & Klaasen, 2025; Eybers, 2025). This dynamic is particularly pronounced in African higher education, where colonial legacies continue to shape institutional structures and epistemologies (Majee & Ress, 2020; Mashilo & Govender, 2023).

2.3. Conceptual Framework: Colonial Legacy and Cultural Identity

This research adopts a conceptual synthesis informed by foundational works in postcolonial theory, cultural hegemony, Ubuntu philosophy, and identity negotiation theory. Drawing on Fanon (1961), Said (1978), and Mapara (2009), postcolonial theories offer critical insights into the enduring impact of colonial structures on identity, culture, and knowledge systems. Ubuntu philosophy, as articulated by Lefa (2015) and Mabvurira (2020), offers an indigenous African lens that

emphasizes relational identity, communal ethics, and interdependence. Ting-Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation theory and recent extensions by Anofuechi and Klaasen (2025) contribute to understanding how individuals reconcile culturally conflicting identities, especially within postcolonial contexts. Together, these frameworks form a nuanced analytical base for interrogating cultural dynamics in contemporary societies. Consequently, collectively, these frameworks illuminate how students in postcolonial African universities navigate cultural identity and norms and engage in the reclamation of peoplehood. Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes communal identity, empathy, and interconnectedness, values that conflict with the individualistic and competitive models common in Western academic discourse (Gade, 2012; Lefa, 2015). Thus, in African society, Ubuntu serves as both a philosophical foundation and a cultural resource that helps individuals shape meaningful identities. Adding a psychological and interpersonal dimension, Ting-Toomey's (2005) Identity Negotiation Theory examines how individuals navigate multiple cultural affiliations. This theory helps to unpack the strategies students use to affirm their cultural belonging while adapting to dominant educational norms. Therefore, the research question for the study is: How do students in one West African country, enrolled in both government-affiliated and private Christian universities, interpret and engage with colonial legacies, and how does this engagement influence the development of inclusive cultural narratives?

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Study Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the lived experiences of students attending government-affiliated and private Christian institutions, as they navigate the enduring legacies of colonialism within academic environments. Data were collected through open-ended interviews and participant reflections, enabling deep engagement with personal narratives. By foregrounding participants' voices, the study aimed to generate culturally grounded insights that informed inclusive and diverse perspectives within the postcolonial contemporary society of the country selected.

This methodological approach emphasizes reflexivity and the co-construction of knowledge. As Engel and Schutt (2017) suggest, intensive open-ended interviews avoid predetermined response frameworks and instead invite participants to express themselves freely in their own words. Such an approach is especially vital in multilingual and multiethnic contexts where English, although the official language, is not the native tongue of the participants, as language barriers can otherwise distort meaning and marginalize authentic voices (Piller, 2016). Furthermore, open-ended interviews foster a dialogic space that centers participants lived experiences and sociocultural backgrounds, an essential component of decolonizing research methodologies (Chilisa, 2012).

3.2. Participants and Procedures

Following formal approval from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Institutional Review Board (IRB: F18-02), granted as part of the lead researcher's sabbatical project, a corresponding letter was secured from the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ghana. With all ethical approvals in place, the lead researcher traveled to Ghana to begin participant recruitment. Supported by the co-author, who was a doctoral student at the time, the research team utilized purposive sampling to identify individuals whose backgrounds and experiences aligned with the study's objectives. Recruitment targeted two distinct higher education institutions: one government-affiliated university and one private Christian university. It is essential to note that the lead researcher, originally from Ghana and of Ewe ethnic background, brought a culturally grounded perspective to the study, which enriched the sensitivity and depth of the interview process. Although now based in the U.S., their transnational experience fostered a nuanced understanding of both Western and African sociocultural contexts, allowing for thoughtful questioning and interpretation. This enculturated lens helped mitigate potential biases and supported more authentic engagement with participants.

Participants were engaged through multiple channels, including academic departments, administrative offices, and faculty referrals. Participants were intentionally selected to represent a diverse mix of students across age, gender, academic level, and discipline in undergraduate programs. Students came from programs including journalism, governance studies, human resources marketing, and integrated developmental studies. Each discipline contributed distinct perspectives (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Demographic information by gender, age, academic, and discipline (N = 10).

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	6	60
Female	4	40
Age		
Less than 20 years old	3	30
21 to 30 years old	6	60
30-plus years old	1	10
Academic level		
Level 300	4	40
Level 400	6	60
Discipline		
Governance Studies	2	20
Human Resource Management	4	40
Integrated Development Studies	1	10
Journalism	3	30

Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality was assured. Before providing consent, each participant received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To protect participants' identities, everyone was assigned a unique alphabetical identifier (e.g., Participant A, Participant B), with their true names known only to the lead researcher. This anonymization ensured that personal information remained confidential throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. The interview was conducted entirely in English, ensuring consistency across all sessions and minimizing the risk of misinterpretation or translation errors. Each interview lasted about 45 to 60 minutes. All sessions were audio-recorded with prior consent, using secure digital devices.

Qualitative research typically utilizes smaller sample sizes to enable an in-depth examination of complex issues (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Accordingly, the final cohort consisted of approximately 10 participants, five participants from the government-affiliated university and five from the private Christian university, a size frequently employed to achieve thematic saturation while maintaining depth and nuance in data collection (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020).

3.3. Data Analysis

This study adopted a constructivist thematic analysis to explore how participants constructed meaning from their lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Analysis progressed through three iterative stages. Initially, open coding was applied to verbatim transcripts and field notes, generating preliminary categories that emphasized colonial legacy and Western influence (Ezzy, 2002). These early codes uncovered complex sociocultural perspectives embedded in participants' reflections. The subsequent stage involved applying a critical interpretive lens to examine how narratives resisted, reinforced, or reshaped dominant cultural and institutional discourses (Said, 1978). Finally, researchers synthesized the data into coherent narrative structures that elevated participant voices and contextualized their accounts within broader historical and cultural frameworks (Riessman, 2008). For reliability, another researcher who was not part of the research team but was familiar with the dataset replicated the process, and comparisons between coders enhanced the validity of thematic interpretations.

Since English served as the language for both the interviews and the analysis, translation and back-translation were unnecessary. This streamlined the data validation process and maintained the authenticity of participants' responses. Not having to translate kept the original linguistic nuances intact, which improved the integrity of the findings. The direct match between spoken and analyzed language contributed to a high level of data quality and transparency.

4. Findings

Due to the study's open-ended and unstructured design, multiple interpretations

emerged regarding the post-colonial influence on students from this British-colonized West African country. These interpretations reveal interconnected themes shaped by colonial legacy and ongoing efforts toward cultural reclamation. Given the richness and complexity of the data, much of which extended beyond the scope of this article, we chose to highlight the most prevalent themes identified by participants (see **Figure 1**).

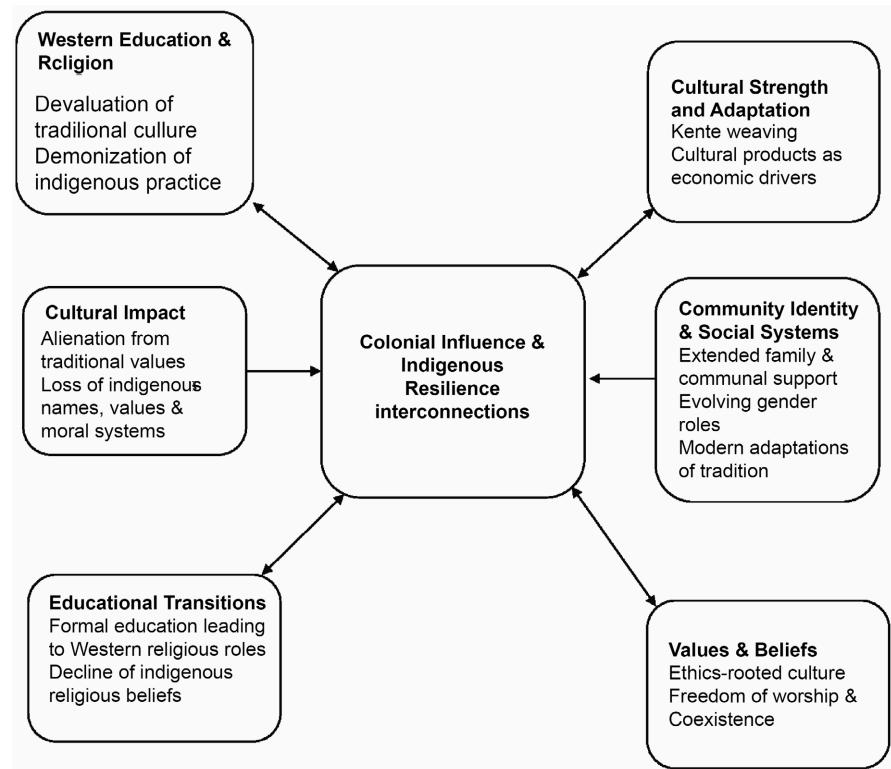


Figure 1. Framework of interconnections of colonial influence and indigenous resilience. (Note: **Figure 1** Interconnections of colonial legacy and indigenous resilience, using arrows to illustrate the relationships between themes).

Emerging Core Themes

Theme 1. Western Education & Religion

The narratives of two of the participants highlight a strong tension between inherited institutional structures and changing personal beliefs. Participant A describes their academic journey within a university influenced by colonial and religious legacies, an unspoken reminder of how educational systems still reflect historic worldviews. Meanwhile, Participant F illustrates a personal shift away from religious identity, offering an honest critique of its divisive role in society and embracing the flexibility of self-guided learning. Together, these voices emphasize the dynamic relationship between collective heritage and personal awakening, prompting important questions about how belief, knowledge, and identity develop in postcolonial contexts.

Participant A: *I am a student at Evangelical Presbyterian University College,*

which continues the legacies of colonial-era educational and religious systems that often shaped African academic frameworks.

Participant F: *Personally, I am not religious. Personally, I am reading a lot, so every now and then, I am changing my mindset when it comes to the issue of religion; I have come to realize that religion is a separatist movement... people are not coexisting because of religion; so personally, I don't delve too much into religion.*

Theme 2. Cultural Alienation

Two participants have shared voices that speak to a shared sense of frustration: both participants want African culture to be respected on its own terms, not filtered through a Western lens that often distorts and diminishes its value. B acknowledges how cultural imitation can feel like self-erasure, while O points to how this erasure is moralized and weaponized.

Participant B: *Western culture has been in the system, and we try to copy them; that is one thing that has taken us from our culture, so we try to understand the Western culture—what they do and what they do better.*

Participant O: *They have demonized our religious life in an unbelievable way, and I would like them to see the other side of it—that no African culture is demonic, and African culture is not the way the West tries to paint it. “The names that they used to be called have some spiritual connotations to them, like ‘this name is not a good name,’ ‘this name is a curse,’ and so on, making it look as if our way of life is so demonic compared to the Western type of system, which is very bad to me.”*

Theme 3. Educational Transitions

Participants E and Participant O offer incisive critiques of how colonial legacies, particularly through education and religion, have disrupted African cultural and spiritual identity. E argues that Western-style schooling fosters religious conformity at the cost of indigenous belief systems, pushing individuals toward roles steeped in scripture while subtly eroding ancestral traditions. O, on the other hand, passionately defends African spirituality against Western misrepresentation, especially the labeling of sacred names and customs as demonic. E does so through questioning scripted morality, and O through reclaiming spiritual heritage.

Participant E: *I do not need the Bible or the Quran to tell me that if you steal, it is a sin; if you kill, it is a sin; so personally, I am not religious. Today, education is taking a lot away from the Africans, people go to school and come back and they are always pastors, they return and they are reverend fathers... with time, if we are deviating because of education... a lot of [traditional beliefs] are going down the drain today and it is purely because of education... they tell you stories about the Bible and stories in the Quran and you come back and don't want to be so relevant to your traditional religion. I want to make a point here which is very critical because as often as people stand to chastise those deity worshipers and people can solely depend on anointing oil, blessed salt, water, etc., the Bible says in the book*

of Acts... if we cannot align our faith to Jesus, then we are aligning our faith to oils, blessed water, wrist band, and all things, it is just the same as deity worship... the future trend is going to follow this way where those very people will have to seek solution to the current happening and those.

Participant O: *How demonized our religious life has been is unbelievable, and I would like them to see the other side of it, that no African culture is demonic, and African culture is not the way the West tries to paint it to be. The names that they are used to being called have some spiritual connotations to them, like "this name is not a good name," "this name is a curse," and so on, making it look as if our way of life is so demonic compared to the Western type of system, which is very bad to me.*

Theme 4. Economic & Cultural Resilience

Participants B and G passionately expressed pride in their cultural heritage, emphasizing that practices such as kente weaving, farming, and salt mining are not just economic pursuits but deeply ingrained traditions. Kente weaving empowers youth by providing employment and sustaining cultural continuity across generations. Its export to neighboring countries showcases the distinctive artistry and transnational impact of their craft, even in regions already renowned for weaving. Additionally, the historical account of the term "kente," including its linguistic roots and a triumphant court case, underscores the community's resilience and pride in preserving their identity.

Participant B: *First and foremost, Agbozume is known as a town of creativity; we weave kente, a local cloth; we also farm; that is, our northern sector engages in farming like the Exi areas; we also have salt that we mine in the south along the coast of Adina and Sonto areas, Srohume areas too; if a stranger should come to my area, these are some of the things that I will introduce him or her to so that if there is any help that they can offer, we give them the go-ahead to do that. I don't know much about the history, but what I know is that it is our culture and we are noted for weaving; our youths are into weaving, and it gives them employment, and some of our woven cloth is sent to foreign countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Nigeria, and Benin; even though Nigeria is noted for weaving, when they see our cloth, they like it and want to come and learn how we weave ours and how we go about it; it creates a lot of jobs for the youth.*

Participant G: *The kente that they call today in Ghana originated from Agotime Kpetoe, the meaning of Kente before the war with the Asante, during the war, they took away some of our grandfathers to Asante; the meaning of Kente is Ke (open) and te (press); when you open, you press back; but the Asante could not pronounce it well since the Ewe language is not their language. Instead of Kete, they called it Kente; they have introduced 'n' into it. So, some years back, by 1997, when there was a dispute as to who should celebrate the Kente Festival, and the Asante wanted to celebrate, we took this issue to the court; by the works of our chiefs, we won the battle.*

Theme 5. Community & Social Systems

Participant E emphasizes a deeply rooted cultural framework in which respect is instinctive rather than performative, particularly toward elders through hierarchical gestures and behavioral norms, while also advocating for the preservation of ancestral customs and spiritual heritage, cautioning against the influence of modernity. E's worldview reflects reverence for tradition as a foundational, even sacred, societal principle, though this rigidity may clash with contemporary ideals of equality and youth agency. Meanwhile, participant D explores shifting gender roles within a community, aiming to move beyond outdated stereotypes such as "a woman's place is in the kitchen," striving to foster fairer opportunities while still delineating domestic and societal responsibilities along gendered lines. D's commentary highlights an openness to progress and adaptation, although subtle reinforcement of traditional roles reveals an ongoing tension between cultural expectations and the pursuit of true gender equity. Together, the narratives reveal contrasting perspectives on tradition versus transformation, respect versus reform, and hierarchy versus inclusion.

Participant E: *Respect in our setup always has to do with people who are older than you. Giving them reverence, for instance, I define those things as unconscious moments of your life, because any respect that you give somebody that is conscious is pretense and hypocrisy. Yes, for instance, an adult can ask a younger one "how are you," but the younger one cannot ask the adult "how are you"... If you wear a cap and you want to greet an elderly person, you must remove it... that is what the culture accepts in the society. The elderly can enter your room without knocking, but you must knock before you enter their rooms. You have to give them respect. When you are eating with an elderly person, no matter how much you are enjoying the food, you should devise a means to eat honourably with the person... one of the respects is that you do not touch the meat until you are given or ordered to take it, and you do not stand up first after eating because it means that you expect him to finish and pack the bowls... so I think it is a step in the right direction.*

Participant D: *We don't create an uneven opportunity among the male and female, even though there is the misconception that the place of a woman is the kitchen. But for my community, that is changing. We, as much as possible, try to create an even opportunity for both the males and females in my community. Men must maintain law and order... your first and foremost responsibility is to provide for your home. Women... are responsible for the environmental cleanliness... cleaning of the home, environment... preparation of meals.*

Theme 6. Values & Beliefs

Both Participant K and Participant E offer deep insights into the evolving relationship between cultural identity and social behavior. Participant K emphasizes the importance of sharing the positive aspects of one's culture with outsiders, promoting cultural pride and education while acknowledging that some traditions may be outdated and need reform. Valuable practices—such as prohibiting visits to rivers on specific days or resting from farming—serve dual purposes: environ-

mental preservation and promoting personal health, showing how culture can reflect a deep respect for both nature and human well-being. Meanwhile, Participant E draws attention to the erosion of traditional values under modern socialization, where respectful behavior is often misunderstood or neglected, leading to long-lasting consequences that ripple through families and even ancestral reputations. Both voices highlight that culture is more than custom; it is a living system of values, expectations, and responsibilities that, when overlooked, can result in both environmental and social loss.

Participant K: *Well, if any stranger pays a visit to my area, I will first of all expose my culture to him; that is, the positive aspects of my culture, I will tell them about that and how it has been helping us. For instance, there are some cultural practices that are primitive and should be abolished; but there are some which also help in many ways. When we say do not go to the riverside on this day or do not go farming on this day, it is a good practice which helps the community, it is just to preserve the water body, not to pollute the water body. Others say they prevent people from visiting the riverside because it helps to save the water, this prevents pollution. In relation to farming, it is to enable farmers to take some rest and regain their energy and good health. In our daily activities, we do a lot of things just to earn a living, but we must also rest in order to have a healthy life. So, talking about culture, it is a whole lot.*

Participant E: *I think because of the current trends of socialization, those things are not actually in place now, it is the right thing because, to my knowledge, it is assumed that when you stand up, you want him to pack the bowls and clear the table, which is gross disrespect...so it happens in different forms, and most of the time, it does not have a short-term or short connection to the one who is misbehaving; it goes a long way to affect an ancestry; so they may say uncultured person, and you see, that language travels far to both the nuclear and the extended family and has effects on both the maternal and paternal jurisdictions.*

5. Discussion

The study illuminates the enduring complexity of post-colonial influence in shaping academic identity, spiritual inquiry, and self-conception among participants from a British-colonized West African nation. Utilizing an open-ended, unstructured research design, the inquiry allowed the unfolding of multilayered personal narratives, which highlights how colonial residues continue to permeate educational institutions, religious ideologies, and cultural norms. These narratives resist reductionist interpretations and instead point to a dynamic tension between inherited colonial frameworks and emergent self-guided epistemologies, underscoring the necessity of context-sensitive approaches in postcolonial scholarship.

One critical locus of analysis is the role of institutional frameworks that stem from colonial-era religious and educational systems. Evangelical Presbyterian University College exemplifies how Eurocentric values remain embedded within academic environments. This institutional legacy, shaped by missionary pedagogy-

ies, perpetuates Western epistemologies and marginalizes indigenous frameworks of knowledge and cultural representation (Zembylas, 2024; Ward, 2013). In response, several participants voiced a conscious disengagement from organized religion, framing their spiritual evolution as a journey toward self-awareness, critical reflection, and epistemic autonomy. This shift resonates with existential inquiries into belief systems beyond institutional boundaries, aligning with psychological perspectives that view spirituality as both individualistic and socially constructed (Vail & Routledge, 2020; Legare & Visala, 2011).

Further, it is important to note that coder agreement was not assessed, as the coding process was not used for the formal evaluation of the data. Instead, codes were applied for descriptive or exploratory purposes, and emphasis was placed on thematic richness as illustrated rather than inter-rater reliability (see Figure 1). As such, metrics like percentage overlap or Cohen's κ were not applicable in this context (Halpin, 2024).

Ubuntu philosophy, anchored in the African axiom "I am because we are," offers a compelling counterpoint to Western individualism and serves as a meaningful interpretive lens through which to understand these shifts (Gade, 2013; Lefa, 2015). Ubuntu emphasizes relational personhood, communal ethics, and mutual responsibility, providing participants with a culturally congruent framework that affirms collective identity and well-being (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Khapoya, 2015). This philosophical orientation enables a reconceptualization of autonomy that is deeply embedded in social interdependence rather than isolation.

As participants engage with inherited colonial infrastructures, educational and religious, they simultaneously undertake a broader journey of reclaiming cultural and spiritual autonomy. The pursuit of indigenous knowledge systems and culturally situated meaning-making reflects a decolonial ethos, one that is simultaneously affective, philosophical, and political (Datta & Starlight, 2024). Chigan-gaidze (2021a, 2021b) outlines how Ubuntu facilitates mental health and societal healing by restoring dignity and affirming interconnectedness in postcolonial contexts. Within this framework, individuals reconcile imposed epistemic hierarchies with locally grounded narratives that elevate traditional cosmologies and relational ethics.

The study further reveals the evolving dynamics of gender roles, where traditional domestic responsibilities are reinterpreted through the lens of Afrocentric feminist thought (Cornwall, 2007; Okafor, 2020). Participants described a gradual shift toward gender equity, emphasizing how women's roles in environmental stewardship and civic engagement redefine domestic labor as leadership rather than subservience. This shift reflects Tamale's (2020) argument that meaningful gender transformation must emerge from indigenous cultural frameworks rather than be shaped by externally imposed Western binaries. Nzegwu (2006) similarly posits that African feminism gains legitimacy when rooted in localized epistemologies, challenging colonial distortions of gender and authority.

These narratives are supported by broader social trends observed in Ghanaian peri-urban communities, where men increasingly contribute to domestic duties and women assume influential roles in local governance and community health initiatives (Owusu-Ansah & Boateng, 2021). These authors document how such transformations reflect shifting social norms, contributing to community resilience and redefining gender expectations. These authors emphasize how women's involvement in public health enhances their social capital, turning routine tasks into expressions of civic agency and societal leadership.

Furthermore, the tension between communal values and personal expression emerged as a recurring theme among the participants, who seek to assert individual autonomy within traditional structures. This negotiation echoes Gyekye's (1997) notion of moderate communitarianism, where individual rights coexist with communal responsibility. The balancing act between authenticity and performativity is especially evident in intergenerational discourse, as participants grapple with cultural expectations while striving to forge meaningful self-representations. These reflections intersect with sociological theories of symbolic interactionism, which explore how cultural norms are internalized and enacted within everyday life (Blumer, 1969; Nukunya, 2003).

The study also highlights the critical role of symbolic practices in cultural identity preservation. Participants B and G, for instance, described traditional crafts like weaving and farming not only as economic activities but also as vehicles for intergenerational knowledge transmission. Their connection to kente cloth serves as a potent symbol of cultural pride, economic autonomy, and transnational visibility. Appadurai (1996) contends that globalization can intensify local identities through symbolic enactment, which is evidenced by the participants' use of traditional arts to assert their place within both local and global cultural landscapes.

Finally, the concept of cultural identity as "lived experience" reinforces Hall's (1990) assertion that identity is not fixed but is continuously shaped through historical and cultural engagement. Participant narratives reflect a fluid, ongoing negotiation of belonging that transcends binary categories and embraces multiplicity. This fluidity allows for the redefinition of personhood, knowledge, and morality in ways that are grounded in indigenous philosophies yet responsive to evolving realities (Masolo, 2023).

5.1. Limitations

Several methodological limitations shape the interpretive boundaries of this study.

First, while qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the small sample size inevitably restricts generalizability. As Creswell and Poth (2016) note, purposefully selected samples allow for deep contextual engagement but do not claim universal representation.

Second, the use of English, though Ghana's official language, as the primary medium for interviews presents linguistic challenges. Many participants communicated in a second or third language, potentially limiting their ability to articulate

culturally nuanced meanings.

Third, the institutional scope of the study, focusing on one government-affiliated and one private Christian university, may inadvertently reflect specific educational and religious frameworks. [Guest, Namey, and Chen \(2020\)](#) emphasize the need for institutional diversity in qualitative education research to capture a wider variability in student experiences.

Finally, narrative research necessitates the selective presentation of participant accounts. In curating the most thematically salient stories, there is an inherent risk of excluding less dominant but equally valid voices. [Riessman \(2008\)](#) acknowledges that narrative construction involves editorial choices that shape which perspectives are foregrounded and which remain peripheral.

5.2. Suggestions for Future Research

To enrich and broaden the insights offered by the current study, future research might consider expanding the institutional scope beyond government-affiliated and Christian private universities. The inclusion of technical colleges, Islamic institutions, and polytechnics could offer a more comprehensive view of how diverse educational paradigms engage with colonial legacies and shape student identities.

Additionally, the integration of multilingual interview practices incorporating Ghanaian indigenous languages such as Ewe, Twi, Ga, and Dagbani would enable more culturally nuanced data collection. This could help capture expressions and concepts that may be diluted or lost when communicated solely in English, which, while official, often lacks the emotional and epistemic depth needed for rich narrative inquiry.

5.3. Conclusion

The present study elucidates the intricate entanglements of postcolonial influence within the lived experiences of participants from a British-colonized West African context. By leveraging an open-ended, unstructured methodology, we foregrounded narratives that resist reductionist interpretations and instead reveal dynamic negotiations of identity, epistemology, and belonging. The recurring motifs of colonial legacy manifested in educational institutions, spiritual transitions, and cultural expression demonstrate how inherited structures continue to shape aspirational trajectories while simultaneously being contested and reimagined.

Ubuntu philosophy emerges as both a conceptual and affective anchor, providing a relational framework through which participants navigate autonomy, social responsibility, and cultural resilience. Gender transformation and intergenerational exchange further illustrate how indigenous paradigms foster gradual yet profound shifts in communal norms and individual agency. The weaving together of traditional crafts, spiritual introspection, and environmental stewardship underscores the multiplicity of ways in which participants articulate selfhood and social contribution beyond colonial binaries.

In totality, these findings contribute to a decolonial understanding of identity formation, one that is reflexive, culturally embedded, and ethically grounded. The narratives presented affirm the ongoing relevance of African philosophical traditions in shaping contemporary moral imaginaries and sociopolitical engagements within postcolonial contexts.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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