

Identifying the Components of Cognitive Decline from the Perspective of Older Adults: A Qualitative Study

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Abstract, the statement “17 older adults were selected as the sample through theoretical sampling” requires further methodological clarification. The authors should specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria, age range, gender distribution, educational status, marital status, and health status of participants. Without these details, it is difficult to evaluate whether the sample adequately represents the older adult population under study or whether the findings may be shaped by unreported demographic characteristics.

In the Abstract, the sentence “The qualitative analysis of the interviews resulted in 20 initial codes” seems methodologically incomplete because qualitative studies usually report not only the number of codes but also how the codes were generated, refined, and organized into categories. The authors should clarify whether coding was inductive, deductive, or hybrid, and whether the 20 codes emerged directly from participants’ narratives or were partly informed by prior theoretical assumptions about cognitive decline.

In the Abstract, the sentence “For each component, 10 items were proposed” conflicts with an earlier sentence in the Method section stating that “5 items were designed for each identified component.” This inconsistency should be corrected throughout

the manuscript. Since Table 4 includes 10 items for each component, the Method section should be revised accordingly to avoid confusion regarding the actual questionnaire development procedure.

In Table 2, the subtheme “Social consequences and quality of life” includes “physical inactivity” and “sleep deprivation,” but these two codes may be better conceptualized as lifestyle-related or health-related correlates rather than direct social consequences. The authors should reconsider whether physical inactivity and sleep deprivation belong under psychosocial consequences or whether a separate subtheme such as “lifestyle and physiological contributors” would better reflect the data.

In Table 3, the main theme “Core cognitive decline” includes “changes in memory and thinking,” while “decline in executive functions and information processing” includes slowed thinking and decision-making. This creates conceptual overlap between memory, general cognition, and executive functioning. The authors should clarify the theoretical boundaries among “core cognitive decline,” “executive decline,” and “attentional impairments” so that the final model does not contain redundant or overlapping constructs.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Method section, the sentence “The reason for collecting qualitative data at the beginning of the present study was that there was no comprehensive and holistic model of enrichment experience appropriate for Iranian older adults” requires conceptual correction. The phrase “enrichment experience” appears inconsistent with the topic of cognitive decline and may have been carried over from another study. The authors should replace it with a conceptually accurate phrase, such as “a comprehensive and culturally grounded model of perceived cognitive decline among Iranian older adults.”

In the Method section, the paragraph beginning “One of the main characteristics that distinguishes scientific writing from other texts...” is too general and reads like a textbook explanation of research methodology rather than a study-specific methodological justification. This paragraph should be shortened and redirected toward explaining why a qualitative design was appropriate for identifying cognitive decline components from older adults’ lived experiences. The manuscript would benefit from a more direct justification of qualitative content analysis in relation to the research aim.

In the sampling paragraph, the sentence “Participants were selected using theoretical sampling” should be expanded by explaining how theoretical sampling was operationalized. The authors should clarify whether early interviews informed the selection of later participants, what emerging categories guided subsequent recruitment, and how diversity in participants’ experiences was ensured. Without this information, the use of the term “theoretical sampling” remains declarative rather than methodologically demonstrated.

In the paragraph on theoretical saturation, the sentence “After interviews with 17 older adults, the main categories and subcategories of the components had developed to the extent that new data could no longer enrich them” requires stronger evidence. The authors should explain how saturation was assessed, whether saturation was documented through a saturation grid or memo-writing, and whether both code saturation and meaning saturation were considered. This would strengthen the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

In the data analysis paragraph, the sentence “The analysis process was conducted line by line” is appropriate, but the authors should provide more detail about the coding stages. For example, the manuscript should state whether coding was performed manually or using qualitative analysis software, whether codes were reviewed by multiple researchers, how disagreements were resolved, and how movement from meaning units to codes, subthemes, and main themes was documented.

In the paragraph on credibility and dependability, the sentence “strategies such as peer debriefing and constant comparison of data were used” should be elaborated. The authors should specify who participated in peer debriefing, how many review sessions were held, what aspects of coding were reviewed, and whether participant checking was conducted. Merely naming trustworthiness strategies is insufficient unless their implementation is clearly described.

In the Findings section, the sentence “Table 1 presents examples of the initial codes extracted from the data” is useful, but Table 1 is very long and includes many repeated participant quotations. The authors should consider shortening the table by selecting the most representative quotations for each initial code. This would improve readability while preserving analytic transparency. Repeated quotations, such as those under reduced navigation ability and word-finding difficulty, should be removed or replaced with more diverse examples.

In Table 1, some initial codes appear conceptually overlapping or placed at different levels of abstraction. For example, “everyday forgetfulness,” “forgetting names,” “forgetting appointments,” and “difficulty recalling new information” are specific manifestations, whereas “changes in memory and thinking” is broader and more interpretive. The authors should revise the coding structure to ensure that all initial codes are at a comparable conceptual level before grouping them into subthemes.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.