administrative sciences

MDPI

Article

Institutional Frameworks and Entrepreneurial Mindset Development in Emerging Economies: Evidence from Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe

Moses Nyakuwanika

Department of Management Accounting, Faculty of Economics and Financial Sciences, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha 5099, South Africa; mnyakuwanika@wsu.ac.za

Abstract

Entrepreneurship is recognised globally as the vehicle for economic development and poverty eradication, yet in developing economies, it is not receiving the support it deserves. Based on the institutional framework, this study explores its role in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. Being grounded in the interpretivist research philosophy and following an inductive qualitative research design, the study adopted a case study strategy. Data were collected through in- depth interviews with 12 participants, purposively selected from industry leaders and entrepreneurs. Thematic analysis was used to inductively generate contextual insights from the interaction between the regulatory, socio-economic, and cultural pillars of the institutional framework and individual capabilities. The findings show that entrepreneurship development in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, is influenced to a greater extent by the institutional framework, which is characterised by economic volatility, infrastructure gaps, and evolving regulatory demands. The formal institutional framework was noted to confer legitimacy while, at the same time, imposing obligations on institutions; informal institutional frameworks rooted in communal values, social capital, and professional bodies helped fill gaps in the formal framework. The study also demonstrates that entrepreneurial mindset development is an integrated output of continuous learning, strategic networking, and individual capability. In reinforcing the normative dimensions of institutional theory, it was noted that entrepreneurs do not only have profit-maximisation goals but also long-term sustainability and survival targets. The study contributes to scarce empirical research on the nexus between institutional framework and entrepreneurship development in emerging economies. The findings reinforce the need for an integrated approach that streamlines the regulatory process, strengthens infrastructure, supports capacity building, and recognises the role of the informal institutional network in enhancing entrepreneurship development. Even though the qualitative, cross-sectional design limits the generalizability of the study's findings, the study offers insights into fostering entrepreneurship development in emerging markets.

Keywords: institutional theory; entrepreneurial success; regulatory environment; contextual dynamics; cultural values; social networks

Check for updates

Received: 21 February 2026
Revised: 21 April 2026
Accepted: 22 April 2026
Published: 25 April 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is seen as a driver of economic development and renewal, employment creation, and innovation in both developing and developed countries

(Zarkua et al., 2025). Due to its importance, entrepreneurship has been positioned at the centre of many governments' sustainable development initiatives, with the support of multinational companies, following the global COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered a financial crisis and technological disruption (Kaftan et al., 2023). Research shows that the institutional environment, comprising regulations, cultural values, and normative values, plays an essential role in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour and performance beyond individual traits such as risk-taking and creativity (Ogunsade et al., 2021; Zhuang & Sun, 2024). Therefore, institutional theory offers a compelling account of how legal structures, cultural norms, and normative values shape the development of the entrepreneurial mindset. The situation regarding entrepreneurship in Africa is complex. On the one hand, high unemployment rates, limited formal employment opportunities, and the need to survive have been shown to drive entrepreneurship activities in Africa (Gervase Iwu & Opute, 2019). On the other hand, researchers indicate that entrepreneurship has been constrained by institutional factors, including an inconsistent regulatory environment, resource constraints, and social and cultural values (Bui et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2020). Although several reforms have been introduced by many African governments to ease the business environment and promote entrepreneurial development, implementation has been inconsistent, thereby creating barriers (Gervase Iwu & Opute, 2019; Webb et al., 2020). This disconnect motivated the study to explore the role of the institutional framework in fostering entrepreneurial development in Africa. Researchers argue that the often-overlooked informal institutional framework is as important as the formal one in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset (Bui et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2020).

Within Africa, Zimbabwe presents an instructive case. The country is facing economic challenges characterised by high inflation, liquidity constraints, policy changes, and currency reforms that have impeded the development of entrepreneurship (Chishamba, 2025; Hupile & Siambombe, 2024). The economic challenges being experienced have created a complex structure that has reshaped the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the need for entrepreneurs to respond in an uncertain environment (Chishamba, 2025; Roundy et al., 2018). In all provinces of Zimbabwe (including Masvingo), entrepreneurship has become the vehicle for survival and searching for opportunities (Jongwe, 2024). The extent to which institutional forces enforce or prohibit the development of entrepreneurship has not been adequately examined, which motivated this study (Grimaldi et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Although entrepreneurship research has been undertaken in Zimbabwe, it has focused on macroeconomic instability and resource access, with no attention to how institutional frameworks shape the development of an entrepreneurial mindset (Zvavahera, 2025).

Institutional theory has been widely explored to explain organisational behaviour in developed Western and Asian countries (Webb et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2024), yet its contextual application to Zimbabwe, a developing country, remains unexplored. There are a few qualitative studies that have been undertaken to explore the role of institutional frameworks, such as regulatory, cultural, and normative values, in influencing the development of the entrepreneurial mindset by drawing on real-world experiences of business executives and entrepreneurs (Bläse et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024), which will constitute the contribution of this study.

The aim of this study is to examine the role of the institutional framework in shaping the development of the entrepreneurial mindset in Zimbabwe, using Masvingo Province as the case study. The study transitions from abstract theoretical notions to the realities of how institutional pressures shape entrepreneurial development in emerging economies, incorporating industry perspectives. The study contributes to the institutional theory literature by providing context-specific insights from industry practitioners regarding the

development of entrepreneurial mindsets within Zimbabwe. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research objectives:

(a) To explore entrepreneurs' perceptions of the institutional environment in Masvingo Province.
(b) To analyse how institutional arrangements enable or constrain innovation, risk management, and long-term business sustainability among entrepreneurs.
(c) To examine the interaction between informal norms (such as cultural values and social networks) and formal regulatory frameworks in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes.

Beyond examining how institutional theory influences entrepreneurial mindset development, this study will advance the literature on institutional theory by showing how entrepreneurs in developing countries interpret and respond to institutional instability. While previous studies have largely focused on how formal and informal institutions enable entrepreneurial activity, this study shows how entrepreneurs adapt their thinking to changing institutions. In the Zimbabwean context, where entrepreneurs must deal with both formal and informal networks, they must seek opportunities and strategize in an ever-changing economic environment. The findings of this study, therefore, extend institutional theory by demonstrating how institutional instability can function as a catalyst for entrepreneurial cognition and adaptive behaviour in volatile contexts.

2. Literature Review

Institutional theory posits that formal structures, such as regulations, and informal norms, such as cultural values and social networks, can shape a society's entrepreneurial mindset. Institutions are described as the 'rules of the game (North, 1990), and the pressure they exert through a regulative and normative framework can influence organisational behaviour (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Researchers have shown that the institutional environment is associated with entrepreneurial initiatives and risk-taking (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2019). Following the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy and formal employment, informal entrepreneurs now employ much of the Zimbabwean workforce (Bango et al., 2018). Researchers have demonstrated that weak and corrupt formal institutions create substantial uncertainty for would-be entrepreneurs, which, in the long term, increases transaction costs, whereas reliable formal frameworks foster the development of an entrepreneurial mindset (Komba et al., 2025; Züfle & von Carlowitz, 2025). Therefore, entrepreneurship development can be described as the outcome of a conducive framework of both formal and informal institutions.

2.1. Entrepreneurial Mindset: Conceptual Foundations

To show that entrepreneurship is dynamic, it has been conceptualised in multiple ways in the literature, thereby reflecting its multidimensional nature. Rather than being a collection of static attributes, the concept of entrepreneurial mindset development is increasingly evident as a cognitive behavioural orientation that has enabled individuals to seek opportunities, mitigate risk, and ultimately deliver value under uncertainty (Pidduck et al., 2023). The concept of the entrepreneurial mindset has attracted significant global attention to entrepreneurship research as a cognitive framework that influences how individuals see opportunities, understand uncertainty, and allocate resources to create value (Daspit et al., 2023). Kuratko et al. (2021) define the concept of entrepreneurial mindset as a dynamic mode of thinking that encompasses opportunity recognition, creativity, and proactive behaviour, thereby highlighting action and strategic responsiveness over static personality traits. This perspective positions the entrepreneurial mindset as an evolving capability shaped through experience and engagement with the environment, and which does not

focus solely on development at the firm level but also considers how people respond to business opportunities as they arise.

Researchers have recently attempted to bring together the ideas and constructs that underpin this paradigm. The entrepreneurial mindset has been described as a set of cognitive skills that enable people to identify opportunities, navigate uncertainty, and generate innovative ideas in complex business environments (Daspit et al., 2023). It has therefore been contended that the entrepreneurial mindset comprises the behavioural and cognitive orientations that facilitate the recognition of opportunities, flexibility, and business resilience in uncertain economic environments (McLarty et al., 2023).

At this stage, it is essential to differentiate between the entrepreneurial mindset and its related constructs in the entrepreneurship literature. At the corporate level, entrepreneurial orientation refers to strategic behaviours that involve innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking, while entrepreneurial intention concerns the individual's planned decisions to start a venture (Wach et al., 2023). In contrast, the entrepreneurial mindset highlights the cognitive patterns and interpretive frameworks that shape individuals' perceptions of possibilities and responses to the external environment (Pidduck et al., 2023). In this regard, the entrepreneurial mindset primarily operates at the human cognitive level rather than exclusively at the organisational level (Kuratko et al., 2023).

The cognitive aspect of the entrepreneurial mindset is what makes it compatible with institutional theory. The cognitive pillar of the institutional theory posits that collective beliefs, values, and interpretive frameworks influence people's understanding and reactions to their surrounding environment (Jonas Frödin, 2024). Consequently, institutional factors influence entrepreneurial conduct and the cognitive processes by which entrepreneurs perceive and interpret opportunities and constraints (Chen et al., 2023). In developing countries like Zimbabwe, characterised by institutional uncertainty, institutional frameworks play an essential role in shaping how entrepreneurs perceive risk, interpret the regulatory environment, and mobilise social networks to support the development of entrepreneurial ventures (Bläse et al., 2025).

Building on this argument and perspective, this study conceptualises the entrepreneurial mindset as a cognitive orientation shaped by context, enabling entrepreneurs to evaluate institutional conditions, identify opportunities, and formulate strategies for venture survival and growth. This study, therefore, examines the interplay between the formal and informal institutional frameworks and individual cognitive orientations in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset through an analysis of lived experiences in Masvingo province.

In this study, the entrepreneurial mindset is empirically identified through participants' narratives that reflect opportunity recognition, adaptive problem-solving, risk orientation, and strategic responses to institutional constraints.

2.2. Formal Frameworks and Entrepreneurship

Researchers argue that robust, stable formal frameworks are associated with the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, as clear and consistent laws and regulations attract investors (Haq & Soetanto, 2026). On the other hand, weak and unpredictable institutional frameworks create significant uncertainty, hindering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset (Widhajati, 2024). Most investors and entrepreneurs have reported bureaucracy, corruption, and inconsistent policies as major barriers to entrepreneurial development across many African countries (Mombeuil et al., 2021). Previous studies found that many entrepreneurs in Africa lack access to formal credit lines, face high licencing fees, and encounter corrupt government officials, all of which act as barriers to entrepreneurial development despite having viable ideas (Bilan & Apostoaie, 2025; Mombeuil et al., 2021). These are the same challenges faced by Zimbabwean entrepreneurs, who have reported

inconsistent government policies, high licencing costs, high tax rates, and the government's selective application of policies as factors discouraging the formalisation of their ventures (Lecuna et al., 2020). Bilan and Apostoaie (2025) found that bureaucracy and regulatory rigidity impeded the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, as entrepreneurs with ideas often abandoned them due to challenges encountered in venture implementation.

Further barriers to entrepreneurial mindset development in Zimbabwe come from the economic collapse, which has resulted in Zimbabwe not having a currency of its own (multicurrency system), corruption, and poor infrastructure (Kabonga et al., 2021; Lecuna et al., 2020). Weak formal frameworks impose costs, such as bribery, uncertainty, and delays, which ultimately create barriers to entrepreneurial development in a country (Dhobale, 2025). In response to these challenges, entrepreneurs may opt to remain small and operate outside the formal framework (Dhobale, 2025; Kabonga et al., 2021). This aspect of the literature highlights that a strong institutional framework, such as a stable economy, clear regulations, and low tax rates, tends to foster the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, whereas a weak institutional framework creates a hostile environment for investors.

2.3. Informal Institutions and Networks

Entrepreneurship development depends not only on formal structures but also on informal frameworks, especially when formal systems are weak or absent. In this regard, social networks such as family ties, friendship groups, religious networks, and informal financial institutions, such as friendly loans, are often seen as links to entrepreneurial development (Igwe et al., 2020; Kebede, 2020). In many African countries, the majority of entrepreneurs lack the security required by the formal banks to borrow, and they tend to turn to informal money lenders who charge exorbitant rates for startup capital (Kebede, 2020), which, in the end, hinders their development, as all the generated profits are used to offset borrowing costs, with no money returned to the venture's development. Most entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe (including Masvingo province) are adapting by leveraging community trust and savings clubs to avoid punitive lending rates and the hyperinflationary environment (Hupile & Siambombe, 2024; Igwe et al., 2020; Züfle & von Carlowitz, 2025). This aligns with broader research findings that formal institutional deficiencies are compensated by social capital networks of trust that facilitate resources and knowledge sharing (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2019; Zvavahera, 2025). It must, however, be noted that, in practice, a strong institutional framework can act as both an enabler and a prohibitor of entrepreneurship development by providing mutual support to entrepreneurs whilst also imposing obligations, such as paying taxes or avoiding nepotism (Dhobale, 2025). This, therefore, implies that the absence of formal, reliable frameworks breeds social and cultural frameworks that become the backbone of entrepreneurship development in many African countries.

2.4. Innovation, Risk-Taking, and Institutional Constraints

Entrepreneurial mindset development and risk-taking are influenced by the quality of the institutional environment (Zhuang & Sun, 2024). If the institutional framework is well-defined and has transparent, clearly defined regulations, it tends to create a safe environment for the development of entrepreneurial ventures, as investors know they are protected and stand to benefit from their experimental initiatives in the future (Bläse et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024; Zhuang & Sun, 2024). Poor institutional frameworks, characterised by erratic policies, corruption, and power-based governance, tend to create an uncertain environment that hinders entrepreneurship development, as emphasis shifts to short-term survival rather than long-term innovation, which is key to poverty eradica-

tion (Bläse et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Research findings indicate that the renewal of parastatals and government ministries is possible when institutional hurdles are removed, thereby motivating the adoption of entrepreneurial practices such as innovation, proactive planning, and risk-taking (Ncube & Sibindi, 2025), which are key to economic development and poverty eradication. In this regard, unpredictable policy changes, bureaucratic hurdles, and costly regulatory processes lead entrepreneurs to avoid risk-taking and to scale back bold initiatives that could stimulate economic growth. Hence, it can be argued that a strong and supportive institutional framework can foster the development of an entrepreneurial mindset by encouraging creative ventures, whereas a weak institutional framework channels entrepreneurial activities toward short-term survival strategies.

It is equally essential to note that entrepreneurship can be a driver of institutional change within a country, given the demands it imposes on governments (Elert & Henrekson, 2021). Research evidence shows that in emerging markets, local entrepreneurs often become institutional entrepreneurs with a voice that is heard and work to create industry regulations (Chowdhury et al., 2015; Elert & Henrekson, 2021). It has been noted that in economies with weak institutional frameworks, successful entrepreneurs would push for a change through alternative legitimate mechanisms such as trade associations and private certifications, and due to their societal standing, use their position in pressing for a strong institutional framework that not only protects their ventures, but also promotes entrepreneurial mindset development (Chowdhury et al., 2015). This may involve forming an entrepreneurs' group to lobby for change or reduced tax rates, or establishing a collective savings scheme that provides members with lower-cost loans, thereby promoting entrepreneurial development (Robinson et al., 2025). Therefore, while weak institutional frameworks may constrain entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs can act as agents of change by advocating for improved institutional frameworks, though progress may take time.

2.5. Institutional Theory and Entrepreneurial Mindset Development

The institutional theory has been described as essential in providing the lens for understanding how entrepreneurial behaviour is shaped by the wider socio-economic environment (Randerson et al., 2020). The institutional theory posits that institutions operate through the regulatory, normative, and cultural–cognitive dimensions, which are interconnected and mutually dependent (Krenn, 2016). The regulatory institutional framework refers to the formal rules, policies, government structures, and standards that shape economic activity, while the normative pillar encompasses social expectations, cultural values, and professional standards that define accepted societal behaviours (Saeed Lodhi et al., 2025). However, the cultural–cognitive pillar is essential for understanding the development of the entrepreneurial mindset, as it focuses on shared beliefs, interpretive frameworks, and taken-for-granted assumptions that shape how people perceive opportunities and respond to uncertainty (Perić & Nedović-Budić, 2026). In an entrepreneurial context, these cognitive structures are essential in that they influence how individuals interpret institutional signals, recognise opportunities, and make strategic decisions under conditions of risk and uncertainty (Foss et al., 2019).

In this regard, and in the context of entrepreneurship, the institutional framework pillars do not operate in isolation, but rather they interact to influence the environmental conditions in which entrepreneurs operate and how they interpret the given situation to be able to recognise an opportunity, evaluate it, and come up with a valuable innovation under the conditions of uncertainty. The regulative and normative pillars of the institutional framework define the structural environment, whereas the cultural–cognitive pillar is essential for understanding how entrepreneurs perceive institutional constraints, identify opportunities, and convert them into strategic action. It must be noted that this

provides a foundation for integrating the institutional framework with the entrepreneurial mindset, as cognition becomes an essential link between the institutional environment and entrepreneurial behaviour.

Recent studies show that the institutional framework not only shapes the development of the entrepreneurial mindset at the structural level but also influences entrepreneurs' cognitive frameworks (Ludwig & van Laak, 2025). The institutional framework, composed of a strong and consistent regulatory pillar, cultural norms, and social networks, has the potential to affect individual risk perceptions, the assessment of an opportunity, and resource mobilisation (Liew, 2022). In developing economies like Zimbabwe, marked by a weak institutional framework, entrepreneurs develop adaptive cognitive strategies to navigate the uncertain business environment (Langevang et al., 2018). The institutional framework in Zimbabwe has created a sophisticated business environment that requires entrepreneurs to interpret and analyse market signals and respond strategically (Chigaga, 2024). This implies that the cultivation of the entrepreneurial mindset stems from the institutional framework and individual cognitive perspectives. This study, therefore, integrates institutional theory into the development of the entrepreneurial mindset to analyse how entrepreneurs perceive the institutional environment and convert that perception into entrepreneurial activities and strategies in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.

While previous research has investigated the impact of institutional frameworks on entrepreneurial mindset development, it has predominantly viewed this as a direct and fundamentally predetermined link. This study contributes to the literature by advancing the entrepreneurial mindset as a mediating cognitive mechanism that explains how institutional conditions are interpreted and translated into actual entrepreneurial implementation. Institutional theory explains how the regulative, normative, and cultural–cognitive pillars of the institutional framework shape the environment in which entrepreneurs operate. Even though these structures do not influence behaviour directly, because they are filtered through individual cognitive processes, the entrepreneurial mindset enables individuals to interpret institutional signals and access constraints and opportunities, leading to the formulation of adaptive strategies by entrepreneurs.

In resource-constrained developing economies characterised by institutional instability, such as Zimbabwe, this mediating role becomes crucial. In this regard, it implies that entrepreneurs in resource-constrained and developing economies must navigate legislative ambiguity and changing sociocultural expectations. The entrepreneurial mindset, therefore, enables entrepreneurs to frame institutional pressures, utilise informal networks, and formulate context-specific strategies that promote sustainable entrepreneurial development. This study, therefore, enhances institutional theory by demonstrating that the association between the institutional framework and entrepreneurial conduct is nonlinear and influenced by cognitive processes. By integrating an entrepreneurial mindset into the analysis, this study elucidates how entrepreneurs engage with institutional environments in emerging contexts, thereby helping develop strategies that align with these contexts.

Cultural Context and Social Norms

Within the African context, entrepreneurship is embedded in the cultural and societal norms (Adeleye et al., 2020). This implies that local culture and norms play an essential role in fostering entrepreneurship development and in shaping how it is perceived (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2019). Research has shown that, in the African context and in communities studied, entrepreneurship is a family- or group-based endeavour rather than an individual effort, thereby highlighting its communal and relational dimensions (Adeleye et al., 2020). In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, it was found that members of an artisanal miners' group pooled resources and shared responsibilities based

on a cultural ethos of the ubuntu principle, which emphasises togetherness and mutual support (Bango et al., 2018; Tshikovhi, 2021). Another interesting finding was that artisanal miners took pride in preserving traditional culture and heritage through their trade (Adeleye et al., 2020; Masuku, 2021). This therefore suggests that social and cultural values influence the entrepreneurial mindset, and that issues such as respect for elders, community reputation, and social obligations serve as vehicles for business ventures. It is therefore essential to understand cultural dimensions, as they bear on how rules are interpreted and how the informal infrastructure operates. African entrepreneurs may therefore value communal benefits rather than personal benefits in their business endeavours.

Researchers have indicated that Ubuntu, though associated with values such as solidarity, social responsibility, and mutual assistance, should not be regarded as universally advantageous (Udah et al., 2025). In African research, the concept remains contested, and its implications vary depending on social and institutional contexts. According to Manyonganise (2015), Ubuntu can function as a liberative on one hand and as an oppressor on the other hand, since it can promote social cohesion, cooperation, and mutual assistance within communities, while on the other hand, it can generate social obligations, expectation of resource sharing, and pressure that may constrain entrepreneurial decision making. In the context of entrepreneurship, these dynamics can create both opportunities and hindrances to its development. In this regard, it means that community support networks could enhance access to informal capital, labour, and market connections, while community expectations may deter individual risk-taking (Williams, 2020). Recognising this dual nature would help us understand how cultural norms shape the evolution of the entrepreneurial mindset in African nations.

2.6. Synthesis and Gaps in the Literature

Research findings indicate that formal, informal, and social networks interact to shape and reinforce the development of entrepreneurship (Lecuna et al., 2020; Mombeuil et al., 2021). Strong institutional frameworks, such as clear and unambiguous regulations, respected property rights, and effective governance mechanisms, tend to foster the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, whereas weak institutional frameworks force entrepreneurs to rely on social capital (Chishamba, 2025; Haq & Soetanto, 2026; Zvavahera, 2025). This, therefore, implies that, within the African context, family- and community-based networks are more essential in driving the agenda for entrepreneurship development than the formal framework (Dhobale, 2025; Igwe et al., 2020). It can therefore be argued that cultural factors such as community values and social obligations play a key role in shaping the development of the entrepreneurial mindset (Bango et al., 2018; Gumede et al., 2026).

Most existing empirical evidence comes from other contexts, and direct studies of Zimbabwean entrepreneurs' perceptions of the institutional framework remain scarce (Lecuna et al., 2020; Tshikovhi, 2021). Much of the research on the nexus between institutional theory and entrepreneurship development has focused on conducting literature reviews and examining other African countries (Bamfo et al., 2023; Eijdenberg et al., 2019; Li & Bosma, 2025; Murithi et al., 2020). Li and Bosma (2025) found that the institutional framework strongly shapes entrepreneurial development within the global village, but they noted that Africa was underrepresented in empirical studies. This gap motivated this study to examine the role of the institutional framework in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province.

3. Materials and Methods

This study adopts the research onion Arbale and Mutisya (2024) in developing the research methodology; a summary is provided in Table 1. In the first layer of the research onion, the study adopts an interpretivist research philosophy to understand social phenomena through participants' subjective meanings and interpretations. The interpretivist research philosophy emphasises the influence and impact of cultural values and social norms on individual understanding and interpretation of things (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). This aligns with the study's objective: to examine the role of the institutional framework in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in Zimbabwe, with Masvingo Province as the case study. In the second layer, aligned with the interpretivist research philosophy, the study employs an inductive research approach, which involves developing theory by generating concepts from data rather than theory testing. An inductive research approach is rather desired in exploratory qualitative studies (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022), which aligns well with the objective of this study.

Table 1. The research methodology map.

Research Layer	Chosen and Interpretation	Justification	Reference
Philosophy	Interpretivist—subjective, content-rich	Captures multiple realities and meanings	(Arbale & Mutisya, 2024; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022)
Approach	Inductive—qualitative theory building	Fits in unexplored settings and develops by letting themes emerge from in-depth interviews	(Azungah, 2018; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022)
Choice	Qualitative—through conducting interviews	Depth needed to understand behaviour and beliefs	(Arbale & Mutisya, 2024; Azungah, 2018; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022)
Strategy	Case study	Enables focused, in-depth study of selected communities	(Hollweck, 2015; Ridder, 2017)
Time horizon	Cross-sectional	Provides a timely snapshot of issues	(Bremer & Zhang, 2007)

In the next layer of the research onion, a case study strategy that allows an intensive, contextual examination of the subject matter (Hollweck, 2015; Ridder, 2017) was chosen for the study. This strategy aligns with the objective of this study, which is to probe participants on the role of the institutional framework in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in Zimbabwe, using Masvingo as its case study. Within the time horizon, the study adopts a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time to provide a snapshot of current perspectives and issues as they occur, aligning with the study objective to understand the role of entrepreneurship theory in advancing entrepreneurship development in Zimbabwe.

3.1. Sampling and Participants

The purposive sampling technique (Table 2) was used to recruit participants for the study. Participants in this study were drawn from the mining, farming, construction, manufacturing, and informal sectors of the economy.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Age	Above 18 years	Below 18 years
Consent	Those able	Those unable
Industry experience	2 years and above	Below 2 years

Participants eligible for this study were briefed on the study's purpose, and recruitment was conducted through community leaders and ZIMSTAT (https://zimstat.co.zw, accessed on 15 January 2026), the centre that provides all essential national data to support economic analysis, policy development, and investment decisions.

3.2. Data Collection Procedures

Primary data for the study were collected through in-depth interviews, which were ideal for exploring individual experiences while allowing for comparisons of participants' responses. An interview protocol was first developed and piloted, and the results were used to refine the interview guide. Each interview lasted 45–60 min, which gave participants sufficient time to reflect on their entrepreneurial experience and institutional challenges. During interviews, the researcher adopted an open, non-leading stance, and the interviews were audio-recorded with their consent. The audio recording was complemented with note-taking for accuracy. Participants were assured of anonymity, with pseudonyms being used during transcribing.

3.3. Ethical Approval and Consent

This study was granted ethical clearance by the Walter Sisulu University Ethical Committee (SREC, Ref. 07/03/10/2025/PG). Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent to participate in the study, maintaining participants' privacy, and avoiding potential distress. Participants were informed of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as the study's objectives.

3.4. Data Management and Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed alongside the audio files to ensure accuracy. Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which provides a systematic framework for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data.

The first phase of thematic analysis involved familiarisation with the data, during which the researcher regularly reviewed the transcripts to understand participants' experiences and viewpoints, and documented preliminary observations and notes. This was followed by the second phase, which involved manually generating initial codes. Significant portions of the transcripts were methodically coded to identify essential concepts and persistent themes related to institutional frameworks and the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset. This was followed by the third phase, which entailed identifying themes, during which related codes were analysed and consolidated into more comprehensive conceptual categories. The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes by refining them against the coded data and full dataset to ensure internal cohesion and conceptual distinction between themes. During this phase, overlapping themes were merged and unclear themes redefined. The next phase of thematic analysis involved defining and naming themes, in which the core meaning of each theme was clarified in relationship to the research objectives and institutional theory. The final phase of thematic analysis involved producing the analytical narrative, in which themes were interpreted in relation to the institutional theory and illustrated using direct quotations from the participants.

The researcher believed this systematic approach to the analysis ensured transparency and analytical rigour in the interpretation of qualitative data. Although the analysis employed an inductive coding process based on participants' narratives, the interpretation of themes was subsequently informed by institutional theory to contextualise the findings within the theoretical framework.

During the coding process, related codes were grouped to create a larger conceptual theme that revealed recurring patterns. For example, codes on regulatory barriers, licens-

ing costs, and bureaucratic procedures were grouped under the regulatory framework, which allowed the analysis to move from detailed empirical observations towards broader conceptual insights.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To ensure the trustworthiness of the whole process, we took steps to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced by checking transcripts against participants to ensure the captured data was accurate and by triangulating a summary of findings against participants of different economic sectors. Transferability was addressed by including direct quotes in the discussion so readers could judge the context themselves, while dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of decisions and by using thematic analysis, an established analytical protocol. Confirmability was enhanced by linking the findings to the study's objective.

Reflexivity was also considered throughout the research process. It was essential to recognise how personal background, academic training, and familiarity with the Zimbabwean socio-economic context could influence the interpretation of participants' narratives. As the primary researcher responsible for conducting the interviews, the researcher maintained a reflective stance during data collection and analysis by documenting observations and analytical reflections, thereby helping ensure interpretations remained grounded in participants' experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions. In addition, the researcher adopted an open, non-directive interview approach, allowing participants to share their experiences without the researcher directing them toward a particular opinion.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings derived from participants' narratives, and the subsequent discussion explicitly links them to institutional theory to maintain a clear distinction between data and analysis. During data analysis, data saturation was reached when participant number 12 was interviewed. At this stage, the interviews no longer generated new insights, and participants' responses began to reiterate patterns already identified in earlier interviews. The thematic analysis of twelve participants resulted in 6 (six) themes, which are local socio-economic context as opportunity/constraint, institutional and regulatory environment, cultural and community influences, entrepreneurial mindset and skills, networking and support systems, and business sustainability impact. The six themes were derived inductively from the interview data.

This section presents the empirical themes derived from the interview data. The themes represent patterns identified through the thematic analysis of participants' narratives regarding their entrepreneurial experiences within the institutional environment of Masvingo Province. While participants' quotations are presented as empirical findings, the interpretation of these insights is discussed in relation to institutional theory to situate the empirical observations within the broader academic literature. These themes are discussed in much detail below:

4.1. Theme 1: Socio-Economic Context as Opportunity/Constraint

Several participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P11, P12) indicated that Masvingo province faced significant economic challenges, including rising inflation rates and an economic meltdown, which have impacted the operations of entrepreneurs in the province. Participants indicated that it was not a matter of recognising opportunities as they arise, but rather of responding to the prevailing situation, as it has created significant uncertainty. Most participants went on to state that they have resorted to short-term survival strategies because things continue to change. Participants noted that, due to economic challenges,

the market has been characterised by unreliable electricity supply, liquidity constraints, and fluctuating household incomes, creating hardships for community members and market gaps for those with capital. In this regard, participants portrayed entrepreneurship development as adaptive problem-solving driven by a constrained economic environment rather than by opportunities and innovation for competitive advantage. As one participant (P2) explained:

> "*Due to the economic challenges the country is facing, Masvingo province is not spared. There are frequent power cuts, to the point that we can go for more than 48 h without electricity, forcing residents to switch from electric to gas stoves. This has resulted in the emergence of some entrepreneurs who have invested in gas, and the sector has grown.*"

This study demonstrates how economic and infrastructural instability, such as load shedding, can reconfigure consumption patterns and thereby generate new demand structures that may shape the direction of entrepreneurship development.

A few participants (P1, P5, P7, P9) described how the economic situation has influenced pricing and sustainability strategies. Participants noted that the economic meltdown has heightened attention to sustainability and financial viability, especially in low- income areas like Masvingo Province. They indicated that to remain viable, they had to keep changing product prices based on the currency in use, though USD was viewed as the hedging currency and safe to use for transactions. One participant (P1) had this to say:

> "*Running a venture in this current economic situation requires balancing by charging sustainable prices with quality products.*"

The study's findings demonstrate that participants responded not only to economic conditions and infrastructure gaps but also to societal expectations, as economic challenges created an affordability barrier. The findings of this study, therefore, align with institutional theory, which holds that entrepreneurial development is influenced by regulative, normative, and cognitive structures that can enhance or hinder it. In situations characterised by institutional voids, such as inadequate service provision and weak infrastructure, entrepreneurs would take the opportunity to fill the gap. Opportunity recognition, therefore, is context-driven and shaped by the economic situation and structural deficiency rather than the creativity of individuals.

The findings of this study align with research on institutional gaps in developing economies, which suggests that entrepreneurship development arises as an intermediary to compensate for a weak institutional framework (Luiz & Guchu, 2022; Oriaifo et al., 2020). In this regard, unreliable energy is viewed as an infrastructure breakdown (weak institutional framework), which can stimulate entrepreneurship development to the extent of covering the unreliable energy. Participants of this study interpreted a weak institutional framework not only as a barrier to entrepreneurship development but also as a catalyst for opportunity. This finding aligns with the literature, which suggests that the institutional framework can both enable and hinder the development of an entrepreneurship mindset (Chishamba, 2025; Zhuang & Sun, 2024). The findings of this study show that entrepreneurship development depends on the prevailing situation, and regulators need to create a conducive environment and enabling policies to support it.

4.2. Theme 2: Institutional and Regulatory Framework

Several participants (P1, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12) noted that the formal institutional framework, comprising regulations, policies, and governance, plays a key role in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in Masvingo Province. Participants indicated that inspection standards, compliance costs and requirements, and licensing costs within a province and country structure how investors view the province

or country and would act as an enabler or a hindrance to entrepreneurship development. Participants viewed the regulatory framework not as a hindrance to an entrepreneurial mindset but as something that confers legitimacy and operational dripline in an area. To emphasise this point, participant (P1) had this to say:

> "*It is not that people don't want to start ventures, but it is what is being demanded by city councils that prohibit them from investing. Just imagine that for my business, I must pay health, operating, safety and inspection licence fees. The amounts required are exorbitant, and look at the service given in return, and this is what is delaying business development within our province.*"

This aspect of the finding shows how formal frameworks set minimum service standards for businesses and guide accountability, which is key to enforcing entrepreneurship development within a province and country.

Many of the participants (P1, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12) indicated that the institutional framework can also serve as a platform for participants to identify opportunities, as some entrepreneurs take advantage of local authorities and government training programs, such as grant programs, training programs and business initiatives, to grow their ventures. As (P7) explained:

> "*I have benefited from government programs and use the institutional framework to identify opportunities such as government grants and training programs. I have been able to identify opportunities by interacting with government officials during these workshops, which has made it easy for me to do business. People always complain, but the truth is they don't have information about how to do business, and they underrate government training programs at their own cost.*"

This study's findings show that the formal institutional framework, despite being viewed by many as coercive, can also serve as a resource distribution structure that helps develop entrepreneurship at the provincial and national levels. This aligns with the regulatory pillar of institutional theory, which holds that behaviours can be shaped by formal rules and incentives (Ncube & Sibindi, 2025; Webb et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2024). In this regard, aligning with the institutional framework not only secures an operating licence through legitimacy but also provides access to training and financial support, thereby increasing the chances of succeeding in running ventures.

Within the institutional framework, however, the data findings reveal tensions. Most of the participants (P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P11, P12) pointed to the fact that there was a lot of inefficiency with the bureaucratic systems employed by the local authorities and the government as exhibited by complex administrative procedures that entrepreneurs have to go through and high licencing fees they had to pay, which aspect in the end prohibit the formalization of their business ventures. In this regard, this implies there is an institutional gap that calls for reforms aimed at supporting entrepreneurship development. The aspect of the study finding of the dual function of the institutional theory to support entrepreneurship development alongside bureaucratic authority of imposing some expectations aligns with the literature that the institutional theory imposes a complex structure that entrepreneurs must navigate (Balzano et al., 2025; Eijdenberg et al., 2019). This, therefore, means compliance is not only a necessity but also a strategic financial obligation for success, and that it could impede the implementation of ventures.

Though a few participants provided nuanced perspectives, the majority indicated that regulatory procedures and licensing costs hindered the development of an entrepreneurial mindset. Some of the entrepreneurs suggested that a formal regulatory framework might enhance business credibility and provide access to government training programs. The divergence in this finding suggests that entrepreneurs do not have a single experience, but

rather interpret them variably, depending on their experiences, knowledge, and interactions with institutional actors.

The findings of this study therefore indicate that the removal of bureaucratic administrative procedures may be achieved through digital licensing, reduced licensing fees, simpler compliance requirements, and improved governance, which could help enforce the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and the formalisation of the informal sector. The strengthening of the institutional framework should therefore move from policy formulation to effective implementation of those policies.

4.3. Theme 3: Cultural and Community Influences

Some of the participants (P1, P2, P7, P8, P9, P11), in addition to the formal institutional framework, the informal institutional framework of the culture, norms and community relationships played an equally essential role in shaping entrepreneurship development in Masvingo and other provinces. They argued that entrepreneurship is strongly tied to the culture, norms and community relationships, which aspects must be overlooked. Participants highlighted that shared cultural beliefs influence business venture initiatives to secure social licence to operate with the community. One participant (P9) remarked:

> "*In my community, the business ventures we get into are shaped by our shared cultural values, which demand care and respect. For a venture to succeed, it must be rooted in the traditional culture; otherwise, no one will come and support you.*"

The aspect of this study that aligns with the literature shows how the community's normative expectations, cultural values, and norms create an informal institutional framework that fosters an essential supportive environment for the development of the entrepreneurial mindset (Bläse et al., 2025).

Most of the participants (P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, P9, P11, P12) indicated that community relationships were key to entrepreneurship development as they provided both tangible and intangible support services, which range from raising capital as social capital manifested through church networks, peer groups, family ties, and business associations. Participants noted that most entrepreneurs were unable to access finance from formal financial institutions and instead relied on informal sources to fund their ventures. As one participant (P11) remarked:

> "*Not everyone is able to access funding from the banks due to the security required, which most of us don't have, despite presenting a good and bankable business idea. We stand together as a family and pool resources for a venture, though sometimes one must rely on friends, church members and the local business association for mentorship and resource sharing.*"

This aspect underscores the importance of community relationships in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset by facilitating social capital when formal capital is not readily accessible.

The study's findings align with the normative pillar of institutional theory, which holds that entrepreneurship development is shaped by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and community relationships (Emon & Khan, 2023). This, therefore, means community norms like ubuntu, collective efforts and mutual assistance play an essential role in approving entrepreneurial initiatives that appear to be socially oriented. This, therefore, implies that entrepreneurs who align their business ventures with community values tend to be granted a social licence to operate by the community, which is also key to unlocking funding. Hence, social networks, which are a normative pillar of institutional theory, function as an enforcer of entrepreneurship development, thereby substituting the formal institutional framework. The implications of the findings are that, when formulating policies, regulators must

recognise the importance of informal structures such as community relations, churches, business associations, and cooperatives, and thereby formulate policies that acknowledge their role as a strategic move to unlock entrepreneurship development in Zimbabwe. Though the informal framework is a powerful enabler of entrepreneurship development, the government must not rely too much on it, as this could scale down entrepreneurship development due to the limited funding it can generate.

4.4. Theme 4: Entrepreneurial Mindset and Skills

Most participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12) indicated that factors beyond the formal and informal institutional framework promote entrepreneurial development. They pointed out that what is central to entrepreneurship development is the individual mindset and capabilities, including risk orientation, adaptive capacity, and personal agency. Several participants indicated that, in the prevailing Zimbabwean economic situation, entrepreneurship requires courageous, resilient, and strategic thinkers. As one participant (P7) remarked:

> "*Entrepreneurship does not require those who are lazy since it involves risk-taking, finding solutions to problems, and turning ideas and dreams into viable business ventures. Entrepreneurs must have a personal push to do things and not relax, which leaves them without time for a social life.*"

The cognitive dimensions of entrepreneurship of risk taking, taking opportunity, and value creation are thus highlighted in this study as an essential competency of entrepreneurial development, which aligns with prior studies (Pennetta et al., 2024).

Most participants emphasised that continuous learning and skills development were essential for sustaining venture projects. They indicated that entrepreneurs need to pursue higher qualifications, such as MBAs and online entrepreneurship courses, to sharpen their entrepreneurial capabilities. Participants described continuous learning tools such as budgeting, cost control, and strategic planning not as symbolic for achievement but as tools for enhancing and unlocking the entrepreneurship capabilities. One participant (P10) remarked:

> "*Our greatest challenge to entrepreneurship development in Zimbabwe is the education system. Zimbabwe has continued to use the education system it inherited from its colonisers, which focused on the training of royal and committed employees. This aspect has not promoted the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, and there is a need for change.*"

Therefore, a curriculum change that prioritises entrepreneurship across most courses can be viewed as a vehicle for developing an entrepreneurial mindset. In developing economies characterised by inflationary pressures and liquidity challenges, continuous learning in entrepreneurship skills such as financial planning, cost optimisation, and cost management is critical for mental change and entrepreneurship development.

The findings of this study align with the cultural–cognitive pillar of institutional theory, which posits that shared beliefs shape individuals' behaviours and actions. Risk- taking, innovation, and proactive learning appear to be enhanced when individuals engage with others, which, in the long term, is key to developing the entrepreneurial mindset. While the institutional framework would create an enabling environment for venture implementation, the entrepreneur's mindset and skills are critical to understand how things must be done. Hence, continuous improvement plays an essential role in the entrepreneurial mindset and in the development of individual capacity.

The implication for this aspect of the finding for entrepreneurship development is that Masvingo Province should not only focus on regulatory reforms and access to finance, but

also on capacity-building programs to shift its people from job seekers to job creators. This, therefore, calls for an integrated approach to learning that uses mentorship, internships, workshops, and experiential learning to strengthen the entrepreneurial mindset.

4.5. Theme 5: Networking and Support Systems

Several participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P12) indicated that industry-based networking and broader professional engagement play an essential role in entrepreneurship development. Participants emphasised that to access industry-based knowledge, current developments, and structured mentorship, accountants must be members of professional bodies such as ACCA and CIMA. Participants described these platforms as vehicles for entrepreneurship development and critical for entrepreneurs' capacity development, as they facilitate practical problem-solving and market expansion. One interviewee (P8) remarked:

> "*I have been able to create a market for my products through networking. I have contacts with many people within the industry, and this has assisted me in solving technical challenges since I communicate and have created many social networks.*"

Participants indicated that they have gained access to foreign markets through membership in trade associations and peer forums. Access to timely and reliable information is a strategic asset in economic situations like Zimbabwe, and participants indicated that information moved faster through social networks than through formal communication platforms, thereby reducing uncertainty and improving decision-making.

In this regard, formal networks can be regarded as governance structures that link entrepreneurs with the environment, functioning as conduits for normative alignment and the diffusion of best practices. In addition, professional networking groups may serve as advocacy bodies that represent their members' interests in policy discussions and regulatory reforms. The aspect of this research finding aligns with prior scholars (Bamfo et al., 2023) and reinforces the regulatory pillar of institutional theory, facilitating dialogue between entrepreneurs and state institutions and shaping a responsive business ecosystem in Masvingo Province.

The implication of the finding is that if entrepreneurs are members of professional bodies, this could strengthen and enhance entrepreneurial resilience and scalability within the province. In this regard, regulators may consider crafting policies that support clusters or sectors to foster the diffusion and exchange of knowledge.

4.6. Theme 6: Business Sustainability Impact

Some of the participants (P3, P4, P6, P7, P10) in this study indicated that they considered sustainability issues in their business ventures, motivated not only by profitability but also by the long-term survival of their ventures. Participants pointed out that they were concerned with generating social and economic value for the community, despite their primary goal being the maximisation of return on equity. One participant (10) remarked:

> "*When you consider the Zimbabwean situation, the primary goal is survival. But if I focus solely on survival without considering the long-term sustainability of the business, I will create future problems. What will happen to my business if the situation in Zimbabwe improves? I must, therefore, strategize to be able to survive in such a situation and to contribute to societal expectations to be granted the social licence to operate and be acceptable in future.*"

Participants emphasise the need to invest in long-term survival by adopting reinvestment strategies that position them in the market through the provision of quality products and services and by enhancing resilience in the face of economic challenges. Participants

acknowledged that, because of globalisation, their market was no longer constrained to Zimbabwe, and that these necessitated reforms to meet global standards.

A few participants (P2, P5, P6, P9, P10) noted that reinvestment should extend beyond the renewal of internal business to include social contributions, such as donations to local education, healthcare, and church infrastructure development, an aspect they viewed as key to developing the entrepreneurial mindset. This aspect of the study's findings suggests that in volatile economic environments, entrepreneurship can function as an economic and social stabiliser by providing employment and a source of living to many.

This aspect of the finding aligns with the emerging institutional theory of sustainable entrepreneurship (stakeholder theory), which falls within the normative pillar, holding that entrepreneurship initiatives are shaped by community expectations (Haq & Soetanto, 2026; Ncube & Sibindi, 2025; Zhuang & Sun, 2024). Hence, entrepreneurship ventures that contribute to society's well-being gain a social licence to operate, thereby reinforcing their long-term viability through community trust and support. In this regard, regulators must frame policies that prioritise sustainability training, community reinvestment projects and social measurement tools, aspects which can strengthen the local ecosystem and inclusive growth.

The themes of this study indicate that the cultivation of the entrepreneurial mindset is influenced by the interplay among institutional constraints, cultural networks, and individual adaptation mechanisms. When entrepreneurs operate in unstable environments where rules are unclear, they often must rely on informal networks for direction, which changes how they seek opportunities. The institutional framework not only limits entrepreneurial activity but also fosters adaptive cognitive responses, thereby prompting entrepreneurs to cultivate resilience, seek opportunities, and develop strategies to mitigate challenges.

5. Conclusions

This study explored the role of the institutional framework in fostering the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in Zimbabwe, with a focus on Masvingo Province. The study's findings show that the development of the entrepreneurship mindset is a product of the interaction among the formal and informal institutional frameworks, cultural norms, and the individual mindset. The study's evidence indicated that the institutional framework can both enable and hinder entrepreneurship development.

The study establishes that the informal institutional framework, including community relations, values, norms, and professional associations, plays a key role in enforcing and sustaining entrepreneurship development. Cultural norms, rooted in collective responsibility and ubuntu, provide entrepreneurs with a pillar to lean on and a social licence to operate, while social networking platforms facilitate the diffusion of knowledge and market expansion. Entrepreneurial mindset and continuous learning emerged as critical mediating factors that shape how individuals interpret the prevailing conditions. In this regard, entrepreneurial success is co-produced by structural context and personal agency, reinforcing the relevance of institutional theory in explaining the development of entrepreneurship within emerging economies.

The findings suggest that promoting entrepreneurship in Masvingo requires an integrated, cohesive approach that goes beyond the formal institutional regulatory framework. This implies that administrative procedures must be simplified, the licensing system must be digitalised, infrastructure investment must be increased, and the curriculum must be reformed to include entrepreneurship. It is also worth recognising the role that informal networking and sustainability initiatives play in fostering economic growth. Though the study offers rich, context-specific insights, it is difficult to generalise its findings due to its qualitative and cross-sectional design. Future studies could use mixed-method approaches

to further test and refine the findings of this study, though this study makes a valuable contribution to the literature of contextualising the institutional theory within the Masvingo ecosystem and offering grounded insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to benefit from creating an enabling environment.

Despite the valuable insights generated, this study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. This study did not collect valuable, detailed demographic data on participants, such as age, gender, educational level, or years of experience, which could influence participants' perceptions and responses to the subject matter. The absence of these demographic data could limit the ability to assess how participants' backgrounds have shaped the findings and constrain the depth of contextual interpretations. This study prioritised capturing rich, experience-based narratives from actors in diverse sectors across Masvingo Province to explore shared patterns in entrepreneurial development and its association with the institutional framework. Future research could mitigate this limitation by incorporating participants' demographic profiles and adopting a mixed-methods approach to further strengthen the generalisability and explanatory power of the study's findings.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Walter Sisulu University Senate Research Ethics Committee approval (FREC) (protocol code: 07/03/10/2025/PG; date of approval: 11 March 2026).

Informed Consent Statement: All participants provided informed consent. Before participation, verbal informed consent was obtained, with participants informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and informed of their right to withdraw at any time. All identifying information was anonymised to protect participants' identities. Participants have provided informed consent for the publication of anonymised excerpts from their narratives in this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this case study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions that protect participant confidentiality. Transcripts and raw interview data may contain identifiable information and are therefore accessible only to the principal investigator upon reasonable request, provided that appropriate ethical clearance has been obtained.

Acknowledgments: During the preparation of this manuscript/study, the author(s) used the Quill Bot tool (v4.66.0) for the purposes of paraphrasing and improving grammar. The authors have reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

Adeleye, I., Luiz, J., Muthuri, J., & Amaeshi, K. (2020). Business ethics in Africa: The role of institutional context, social relevance, and development challenges. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *161*(4), 717–729. [CrossRef]

Arbale, H., & Mutisya, D. N. (2024). Book review: "Research methods for business students" (Eighth edition) by Mark N. K. Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill (Pearson Education, 2019). *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, *1*(2), 8–21. [CrossRef]

Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: Deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *18*(4), 383–400. [CrossRef]

Balzano, M., Marzi, G., & Turzo, T. (2025). SMEs and institutional theory: Major inroads and opportunities ahead. *Management Decision*, *63*(13), 1–27. [CrossRef]

Bamfo, B. A., Asiedu-Appiah, F., & Ameza-Xemalordzo, E. (2023). Developing a framework for entrepreneurship ecosystem for developing countries: The application of institutional theory. *Cogent Business and Management*, *10*(2), 2195967. [CrossRef]

Bango, S. P., Ndiweni, E., Galloway, L., & Verhoeven, H. (2018). Survivalism, collectivism and proud heritage: A study of informal arts and crafts entrepreneurship in rural Zimbabwe. *South African Journal of Business Management*, *49*(1), a233. [CrossRef]

Bilan, I., & Apostoaie, C. M. (2025). Tax policy, corruption, and formal business entry: Cross-country evidence from emerging economies. *Economic Change and Restructuring*, *58*(2), 26. [CrossRef]

Bläse, R., Filser, M., Weise, J., Björck, A., & Puumalainen, K. (2025). Identifying institutional gaps: Implications for an early-stage support framework for impact entrepreneurs. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *32*(1), 679–697. [CrossRef]

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. [CrossRef]

Bremer, R., & Zhang, Z. (2007). Extensions of the standardised cross-sectional approach to short-horizon event studies. *Journal of Financial Research*, *30*(4), 495–513. [CrossRef]

Bui, D. T., Nghia Vu, T., Tran, T. V. H., Duong, C. D., & Loan Le, T. (2023). Impact of institutional environment on social entrepreneurial intentions. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, *9*(3), 100120. [CrossRef]

Chen, C., Huang, Y., & Wu, S. (2023). How do institutional environment and entrepreneurial cognition drive female and male entrepreneurship from a configuration perspective? *Gender in Management*, *38*(5), 653–668. [CrossRef]

Chigaga, B. (2024). Entrepreneurial journey: Management accounting as a tool for success in the Zimbabwean business landscape. A literature review. *Jurnal Manajemen Strategi Dan Simulasi Bisnis (JMASSBI)*, *5*(1), 1–13. [CrossRef]

Chishamba, J. (2025). Currency regime transitions in Zimbabwe: Charting a path through dollarisation, de-dollarisation, and mono-currency reform. *Acta Universitatis Danubius*, *21*(5), 15–45.

Chowdhury, F., Terjesen, S., & Audretsch, D. (2015). Varieties of entrepreneurship: Institutional drivers across entrepreneurial activity and country. *European Journal of Law and Economics*, *40*(1), 121–148. [CrossRef]

Daspit, J. J., Fox, C. J., & Findley, S. K. (2023). Entrepreneurial mindset: An integrated definition, a review of current insights, and directions for future research. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *61*(1), 12–44. [CrossRef]

Dhobale, J. (2025). Entrepreneurial law and innovation: Exploring legal barriers and enablers for startups in developing nations. *International Journal of Business Management and Legal Affairs*, *1*(2), 64–76. Available online: https://ijbmla.com/index.php/home/article/view/13 (accessed on 21 April 2026).

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organisational fields. *American Sociological Review*, *48*(2), 147–160. [CrossRef]

Eijdenberg, E. L., Thompson, N. A., Verduijn, K., & Essers, C. (2019). Entrepreneurial activities in a developing country: An institutional theory perspective. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *25*(3), 414–432. [CrossRef]

Elert, N., & Henrekson, M. (2021). Entrepreneurship prompts institutional change in developing economies. *Review of Austrian Economics*, *34*(1), 33–53. [CrossRef]

Emon, M. M. H., & Khan, T. (2023). The impact of cultural norms on sustainable entrepreneurship practices in Bangladesh's SMEs. *Indonesian Journal of Innovation and Applied Sciences (IJIAS)*, *3*(3), 201–209. [CrossRef]

Escandon-Barbosa, D., Urbano-Pulido, D., & Hurtado-Ayala, A. (2019). Exploring the relationship between formal and informal institutions, social capital, and entrepreneurial activity in developing and developed countries. *Sustainability*, *11*(2), 550. [CrossRef]

Foss, N. J., Klein, P. G., & Bjørnskov, C. (2019). The context of entrepreneurial judgment: Organizations, markets, and institutions. *Journal of Management Studies*, *56*(6), 1197–1213. [CrossRef]

Gervase Iwu, C., & Opute, A. P. (2019). Eradicating poverty and unemployment: Narratives of survivalist entrepreneurs. *Journal of Reviews on Global Economics*, *8*, 1438–1451. [CrossRef]

Grimaldi, M., Troisi, O., Papa, A., & de Nuccio, E. (2025). Conceptualising data-driven entrepreneurship: From knowledge creation to entrepreneurial opportunities and innovation. *Journal of Technology Transfer*. [CrossRef]

Gumede, V., Mokone, N., Ndhlovu, E., Maziya, T., & Sambo, C. (2026). *Social policy in Southern Africa: Prospects and possibilities*. Taylor & Francis.

Haq, I., & Soetanto, D. (2026). Reframing the ideal investor through entrepreneurial experience. *Management Decision*, *64*(13), 17–41. [CrossRef]

Hollweck, T. (2015). Robert K. Yin. (2014). Case study research: Design and methods (5th ed.). *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, *30*(1), 108–110. [CrossRef]

Hupile, M., & Siambombe, A. (2024). Economic inclusion in crisis: Challenges and opportunities for policy reform in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Inclusive Societies*, *4*, 35–49. [CrossRef]

Igwe, P. A., Odunukan, K., Rahman, M., Rugara, D. G., & Ochinanwata, C. (2020). How the entrepreneurship ecosystem influences the development of frugal innovation and informal entrepreneurship. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *62*(5), 475–488. [CrossRef]

Jonas Frödin, O. (2024). Cognitive microfoundations and social interaction dynamics. The implications of complexity for institutional theory. *Theory and Society*, *53*(5), 1019–1047. [CrossRef]

Jongwe, P. (2024). *Entrepreneurship skills and growth of SMMEs in Zimbabwe: The case of Masvingo City* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa].

Kabonga, I., Zvokuomba, K., & Nyagadza, B. (2021). The challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in informal trading in Bindura, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *56*(8), 1780–1794. [CrossRef]

Kaftan, V., Kandalov, W., Molodtsov, I., Sherstobitova, A., & Strielkowski, W. (2023). Socio-economic stability and sustainable development in the post-COVID era: Lessons for the business and economic leaders. *Sustainability*, *15*(4), 2876. [CrossRef]

Kebede, G. F. (2020). Network locations or embedded resources? The effects of entrepreneurs' social networks on informal enterprise performance in Ethiopia. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *11*(2), 630–659. [CrossRef]

Komba, N. M., Shepherd, D. A., & Wincent, J. (2025). Paddling against the tide: The micro-level strategies entrepreneurs employ to resist endemic corruption in Tanzania. *Journal of Management*, *51*(7), 3099–3147. [CrossRef]

Krenn, M. (2016). Convergence and divergence in corporate governance: An integrative institutional theory perspective. *Management Research Review*, *39*(11), 1447–1471. [CrossRef]

Kuratko, D. F., Fisher, G., & Audretsch, D. B. (2021). Unravelling the entrepreneurial mindset. *Small Business Economics*, *57*(4), 1681–1691. [CrossRef]

Kuratko, D. F., Hornsby, J. S., & McKelvie, A. (2023). Entrepreneurial mindset in corporate entrepreneurship: Forms, impediments, and actions for research. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *61*(1), 132–154. [CrossRef]

Langevang, T., Hansen, M. W., & Rutashobya, L. K. (2018). Navigating institutional complexities: The response strategies of Tanzanian female entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, *10*(4), 224–242. [CrossRef]

Lecuna, A., Cohen, B., & Mandakovic, V. (2020). Want more high-growth entrepreneurs? Then control corruption with less ineffective bureaucracy. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, *45*(4), 525–546. [CrossRef]

Li, X., & Bosma, N. (2025). Institutional theory in social entrepreneurship: A review and consideration of ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *200*(3), 529–556. [CrossRef]

Liew, C. L. (2022). Let's talk about risks: A pillar framework for social media risk management in memory institutions. *Online Information Review*, *46*(2), 375–390. [CrossRef]

Ludwig, D., & van Laak, J. (2025). Development of a conceptual framework for entrepreneurial culture. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, *15*(1), 72–89. [CrossRef]

Luiz, J. M., & Guchu, B. (2022). Building markets between institutional discontinuities: Intermediation between formal and informal sectors in developing countries. *Africa Journal of Management*, *8*(2), 218–237. [CrossRef]

Manyonganise, M. (2015). Oppressive and liberatve: A Zimbabwean woman's reflections on ubuntu. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, *36*(2), 7. [CrossRef]

Masuku, C. (2021). *Sustainability and stakeholder relationships in embedded mining communities in Zimbabwe* [Ph.D. thesis, University of Johannesburg]. Available online: https://www.proquest.com/openview/09e0469f7eff440175c4a31013da3952/1?cbl=2026366&diss=y&pq-origsite=gscholar (accessed on 15 January 2026).

McLarty, B. D., Hornsby, J. S., & Liguori, E. W. (2023). Advancing entrepreneurial mindset: What do we know and where do we go? *Journal of Small Business Management*, *61*(1), 1–11. [CrossRef]

Mombeuil, C., Fotiadis, A. K., & Aimable, W. (2021). Institutional reforms, control of corruption, and diaspora entrepreneurship: Insights and perspectives on America's poorest economy. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, *10*(4), 471–491. [CrossRef]

Murithi, W., Vershinina, N., & Rodgers, P. (2020). Where less is more: Institutional voids and business families in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *26*(1), 158–174. [CrossRef]

Ncube, L., & Sibindi, N. (2025). Enhancing public-sector entrepreneurship: Evidence from Zimbabwean parastatals. *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review*, *13*(1), 10. [CrossRef]

North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press.

Ogunsade, A. I., Obembe, D., Woldesenbet, K., & Kolade, S. (2021). Entrepreneurial attitudes among university students: The role of institutional environments and cultural norms. *Entrepreneurship Education*, *4*(2), 169–190. [CrossRef]

Oriaifo, J., Torres de Oliveira, R., & Ellis, K. M. (2020). Going above and beyond: How intermediaries enhance change in emerging economy institutions to facilitate small to medium enterprise development. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *14*(3), 501–531. [CrossRef]

Pennetta, S., Anglani, F., & Mathews, S. (2024). Navigating through entrepreneurial skills, competencies and capabilities: A systematic literature review and the development of the entrepreneurial ability model. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, *16*(4), 1144–1182. [CrossRef]

Perić, A., & Nedović-Budić, Z. (2026). Culturised planning practices in urban megaproject development: The case of Lincoln Yards in Chicago. *Habitat International*, *170*, 103743. [CrossRef]

Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, *11*(2), 419–428. [CrossRef]

Pidduck, R. J., Clark, D. R., & Lumpkin, G. T. (2023). Entrepreneurial mindset: Dispositional beliefs, opportunity beliefs, and entrepreneurial behaviour. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *61*(1), 45–79. [CrossRef]

Randerson, K., Seaman, C., Daspit, J. J., & Barredy, C. (2020). Institutional influences on entrepreneurial behaviours in the family entrepreneurship context: Towards an integrative framework. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, *26*(1), 1–13.

Ridder, H. G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research*, *10*(2), 281–305. [CrossRef]
Robinson, B. L., Pemba, W., Ninsiima, V., Muhindo, G., Chiumia, A., Clifford, M. J., Hewitt, J., & Muvule, M. (2025). Is bigger better? Exploring sustainable delivery models for multi-scale east african smart biogas systems. *Energies*, *18*(5), 1045. [CrossRef]
Roundy, P. T., Bradshaw, M., & Brockman, B. K. (2018). The emergence of entrepreneurial ecosystems: A complex adaptive systems approach. *Journal of Business Research*, *86*, 1–10. [CrossRef]
Saeed Lodhi, M., Raghib Zafer, M., & Farrukh Adeel, M. (2025). A comparative study of societal norms and values in different societies. *International Journal of Social Science and Entrepreneurship (IJSSE)*, *5*, 2790–7716. [CrossRef]
Setiawan, M. E., Suwono, H., Alias, S. H., Sulisetijono, S., & Nur, H. (2025). Qualitative exploration of factors influencing the development of entrepreneurship courses in select Indonesian universities with fuzzy logic integration. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *25*(2), 203–226. [CrossRef]
Tshikovhi, N. (2021). A theory of indigenous entrepreneurship in the modern African State: The case of South Africa and Zimbabwe. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, *16*(2), 21–60. [CrossRef]
Udah, H., Tusasiirwe, S., Mugumbate, R., & Gatwiri, K. (2025). Ubuntu philosophy, values, and principles: An opportunity to do social work differently. *Journal of Social Work*, *25*(4), 433–451. [CrossRef]
Wach, K., Maciejewski, M., & Głodowska, A. (2023). Inside entrepreneurial orientation: Do risk-taking and innovativeness influence proactiveness? *Economics & Sociology*, *16*(1), 174–190. [CrossRef]
Webb, J. W., Khoury, T. A., & Hill, M. A. (2020). The influence of formal and informal institutional voids on entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *44*(3), 504–526. [CrossRef]
Widhajati, E. (2024). The role of entrepreneurial mindset in facing market uncertainty in New Entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*, *2*(3), 463–472. [CrossRef]
Williams, C. (2020). An institutional theory of tax non-compliance in Bulgaria: A tax morale approach. *Economic Alternatives*, *26*(1), 33–49. [CrossRef]
Zarkua, T., Heijman, W., Benešová, I., & Krivko, M. (2025). Entrepreneurship as a driver of economic development. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, *13*(1), 61–77. [CrossRef]
Zhang, Q., Zhu, X., & Lee, M. J. (2024). Exploring institutional pressures, green innovation, and sustainable performance: Examining the mediated moderation role of entrepreneurial orientation. *Sustainability*, *16*(5), 2058. [CrossRef]
Zhuang, J., & Sun, H. (2024). Perceived institutional environment and entrepreneurial behaviour: The mediating role of risk-taking propensity and moderating role of human capital factors. *SAGE Open*, *14*(1), 21582440241. [CrossRef]
Züfle, S., & von Carlowitz, P. (2025). Navigating institutional voids in African entrepreneurial ecosystems: Insights from innovation hubs in Ghana and Kenya. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, 1–20. [CrossRef]
Zvavahera, P. (2025). The role of supportive ecosystems in nurturing resilient startups and entrepreneurship: A case of Zimbabwe. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, *6*(3), 193–207. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.