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QUALITATIVE STUDY

### Navigating Structural Constraints and Entrepreneurial Agency

*A Qualitative Diagnostic of Ghanaian Business Challenges, 2000–2024*

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#### ABSTRACT

The persistent challenges faced by enterprises in Ghana are often attributed to a complex interplay between institutional structures and individual entrepreneurial action. Prior research has frequently examined these factors in isolation, lacking a holistic diagnostic that captures their dynamic interaction over an extended period. This study aims to provide a comprehensive, qualitative diagnostic of the principal challenges confronting businesses, specifically examining the navigation of structural constraints through entrepreneurial agency. A qualitative, multi-method design was employed, comprising 42 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with founders and senior managers, alongside a thematic analysis of archival business reports and policy documents. Purposive and snowball sampling ensured a diverse range of sectors and firm sizes. Analysis identified three core, interlinked thematic challenges: infrastructural deficits, access to finance, and regulatory bureaucracy. A dominant theme was the strategic, yet costly, agency entrepreneurs exert to circumvent systemic hurdles; for instance, approximately 70% of participants described creating parallel, informal systems to ensure reliable electricity supply. The findings illustrate that business challenges are not merely external constraints but are actively negotiated and reshaped through persistent entrepreneurial action, though often at a significant personal and financial cost to the enterprise. Policymakers should focus on co-designing interventions with business owners to address infrastructural gaps. Financial institutions ought to develop lending products recognising non-traditional collateral. A review of business registration and tax compliance procedures is urgently needed to reduce bureaucratic burdens. entrepreneurial agency, structural constraints, business environment, qualitative diagnostic, institutional voids This paper provides a novel, longitudinal diagnostic framework that synthesises institutional theory with entrepreneurial practice, offering a nuanced understanding of how structural challenges are perpetually navigated rather than statically endured.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial agency, Institutional theory, Structural constraints, Sub-Saharan Africa, Qualitative case study*

#### Article Highlights

- Identifies three core, interlinked challenges: infrastructural deficits, access to finance, and regulatory bureaucracy.
- Reveals how entrepreneurs strategically create parallel, informal systems to circumvent systemic hurdles like electricity supply.

#### Core Finding

Approximately 70% of participants described creating parallel, informal systems to ensure reliable electricity supply, exemplifying the costly agency exerted to navigate structural voids.

- Argues for a diagnostic framework synthesizing institutional theory with entrepreneurial practice.
- Calls for policy interventions co-designed with business owners to address infrastructural and bureaucratic gaps.

*This longitudinal study offers a nuanced diagnostic of how challenges are navigated, not just endured.*

## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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