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Article

Indigenous Igbo Entrepreneurship Scheme: Relevance, Restraints, and Remedies

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Abstract: African traditional entrepreneurship schemes have gained growing scholarly attention in recent times, with the Indigenous Igbo Entrepreneurship Scheme (IIES) recognized as the most impactful. Although scholars have explored various dimensions of the IIES, they agree that the phenomenon requires more exploration in order to position it properly in the global literature of entrepreneurship and support its adoption in other regions beyond the Igbo context. Currently, very few studies have investigated the roles, impediments, and possible solutions to the challenges faced by the IIES, and none is known that covers these three areas simultaneously. By deploying a mixed research method involving in-depth interviews with IIES enrollees and trainers, and a systematic literature review, this study proposes the 3Rs framework to the IIES. Thus, it anchors on the entrepreneurial venture creation theory and the multidimensional construct to explore the IIES's relevance, restraints, and remedies. Several findings relating to the relevance of the scheme, such as its economic, social, financial, and environmental contributions, the restraints (informality, lack of regulation, eroding trust, and dwindling enrolment), and the remedies (including the formulation of regulatory policies, formalization of the scheme, talent hunting, and rekindling the spiritual side) are highlighted. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.



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Keywords: Igbos; indigenous Igbo entrepreneurship scheme; 3Rs; African traditional entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Africa is recognized as one of the continents with traditional systems of entrepreneurship that have made significant positive impacts on global entrepreneurship development. For instance, [Ifeanyichukwu et al. \(2023\)](#) noted that the numerous ethnic groups in Africa, such as the Igbos in Nigeria, the Gurage in Ethiopia, the Ewes in Ghana, the Guns in the Benin Republic, and the Zulus in South Africa, have unique structures that encourage entrepreneurship development and sustainability. However, among these groups, the Indigenous Igbo Entrepreneurship Scheme (IIES), popularly known as “Igba Boi/Igba Odibo, Imu Ahia, or Imu Oru”, has received wider global and scholarly recognition, being the largest business incubator in the world today ([Adeola, 2023](#); [Ekekwe, 2021](#); [Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2021](#)). The scheme is an apprenticeship system that is rooted in the Igbo tradition of helping one another to defeat poverty by imbibing the Igbo entrepreneurial culture and mindset. It is a communal enterprising framework where successful businesses develop others, and over time provide capital and give away their customers to

the new businesses (Ekekwe, 2021). Viewing it from an educational/training perspective, the IIES has been described as The Igbo Traditional Business School (Adeola, 2020; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020; Agozino & Anyanike, 2007). In the words of Agu and Nwachukwu (2020): “The Igbo Traditional Business School (ITBS) is as old as the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. This traditional business school (called Imu ahia or Imu oru) is the apprenticeship system of training and developing entrepreneurs in the region. Even in the midst of government founded formal entrepreneurial education and training schemes, the ITBS still flourishes, with an increasing enrolment of university graduates in some sectors”.

Although commendable scholarly attention has been given to the Igbo model of entrepreneurship development, the last decade has witnessed an unprecedented interest among scholars, more so, given the interest of editors of indexed entrepreneurship journals in the Igbo entrepreneurship phenomenon. Various dimensions of the IIES have been explored by previous research including its role in: global commerce (Agozino & Anyanike, 2007); building stakeholder capitalism and entrepreneurial intentions (Ekekwe, 2021; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020); managerial development and employment creation (Chikere, 2023); attenuating the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Agu et al., 2022); nurturing and developing transgenerational entrepreneurial behavior (Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2021; Igwe et al., 2018); and its unique framework and rules of operation (Adeola, 2020). However, no study has conceptualized the IIES from the 3Rs perspective (relevance, restraints, and remedies). That is, exploring the relevance, restraints, and remedies in relation to the IIES. Fragmented studies indicate that the IIES is relevant in building the entrepreneurship ecosystem that drives economic development/growth, well-being of the society, innovativeness, and resilience (Ekekwe, 2021; Agu et al., 2022). Other studies have captured the challenges and their remedies (Agozino & Anyanike, 2007; Iwara, 2020). However, unlike previous research that adopted a desktop review approach to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the IIES using the SWOT analysis approach (Iwara, 2020), this study is interested in unraveling the lived experiences of critical/primary IIES stakeholders using the 3Rs framework—a gap that remains uncovered in the existing literature. By exploring this path, this study is anchored on the entrepreneurial value creation theory (Mishra & Zachary, 2014) and the multidimensionality of construct to extend global entrepreneurship literature in this direction.

More specifically, this study conceptualizes the entrepreneurship development trajectory of the IIES using the 3Rs framework: relevance, restraints, and remedies. Thus, the following research questions (RQ) are addressed:

RQ1: How relevant is the IIES in the development of global entrepreneurship?

RQ2: What factors restrain the ability of the IIES to actualize its full potential?

RQ3: What remedial actions can be taken to improve the situation?

By providing answers to these pertinent questions, this study makes several contributions. First, it responds to the ongoing calls by IIES researchers for studies that explore novel dimensions of the Igbo entrepreneurship model (Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2021; Chikere, 2023; Igwe et al., 2018; Adeola, 2020), thereby providing new insights from the conceptualized 3Rs framework. Secondly, by revealing its relevance, restraints (impediments), and remedial actions, this study situates the IIES as a global entrepreneurship development model that has the capacity to catalyze economic development across the globe. Thus, this study exposes practitioners and policymakers to the areas of critical need in enabling the IIES to scale up. Theoretically, this study demonstrates the applicability of the entrepreneurial value creation theory and multidimensionality to the context of the IIES, a path that has not yet been explored in the literature. The rest of this study is structured as follows: in the next section, the literature review and theoretical reviews are presented. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology of the research. Thereafter, the findings based on the

3Rs framework are presented. Finally, the conclusion is drawn, following a section that includes the discussion, implications, limitations, and directions for further studies.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

2.1. *The Indigenous Igbo Entrepreneurship Scheme*

The Igbos are the people of Southeastern Nigeria and are recognized among the major ethnic groups of the country (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo). Igboland currently covers five states in Nigeria, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. While official records put the population of Igbos behind that of Hausa and Yoruba, current facts emerging from the 2023 Nigerian election reveal that there are many Igbos in other ethnic groups that are not captured in the working population estimate. For instance, the Igbo population is the second largest population in Lagos after the indigenous Yoruba people, with some estimates suggesting that the population of Igbo is above 40 percent in the State (Nnanna, 2023). Generally, Igbos have been described as “naturally enterprising and ingenious” and can be found throughout Nigeria and West Africa (Igwe et al., 2018). This enterprising spirit is noticeable in Nigeria as Igbo-owned enterprises are found in virtually every part of the country. In fact, the Igbo culture is largely rooted in entrepreneurship. The culture promotes its indigenous entrepreneurial system (the IIES) by propelling entrepreneurial zeal and managerial prudence among its people (Madichie et al., 2008).

Several attempts have been made to explain the Igba boi scheme of the Igbos, and indeed, scholars have given comprehensive explanations (Adeola, 2020; Iwara, 2020). Like some entrepreneurship training schemes (see Kotter, 1997), the IIES involves matching a young boy or girl with an established entrepreneur for an agreed period of mentoring, usually not less than five years, and it is culturally expected/agreed upon that the mentor will establish the mentee in that line of entrepreneurship at the end of the agreed period. Iwara (2020) disclosed that the IIES involves three stages, including talent identification, learning, and settlement. One important attribute of the scheme is its non-forceful but persuasive approach toward encouraging young people to pursue their chosen or recommended entrepreneurial paths. For instance, in some climes, once the parents identify a mentor for their child, the child is allowed to spend an initial time, usually five to six months with the master prior to signing the agreement and commencement of the process. Within this period, the intending apprentice understudies the business, the environment, and the master so as to decide whether to go or not.

This paper offers an extended IIES process that involves five sequential stages as follows. Talent identification and mentor matching: seeing the innate traits of the child, parents/relatives are able to identify the line of trade/vocation/entrepreneurship that is suitable for the child and be able to match the boy with a successful/established entrepreneur. Parent–mentor negotiation is the stage where parents discuss with the intended master of their intention/willingness to have their child trained in that line of business. The experimentation as discussed earlier requires that the intended mentee (boi or odibo) spends an initial time with the intended master prior to the signing of the agreement. It helps both parties to decide whether the union will be possible or not. The learning stage is the period of training that takes five years or more. The mentee who is harbored by the master becomes part of the master’s family and business. He is exposed to the business secrets and introduced to the customers, suppliers, and business associates of the mentor. The final stage is the establishment stage where, having fulfilled the agreed terms and found worthy and capable of being independent, the master “settles” the mentee by offering capital to the mentee to enable him/her to start the independent entrepreneurial journey. Thus, this stage involves graduation from the scheme and settlement.

In the IIES, young people learn vocational skills and crafts, trade, entrepreneurial skills, and business management skills. The master grooms the mentee in all areas of life, including religious, social, cultural, and business domains. This is to ensure that when settled, the mentee will be capable of running his/her enterprise and also be able to pass the training to others. The IIES requires patience, commitment, honesty, and respect on the part of the mentee, while the mentor is required to pass the knowledge without reservations. Before now, the scheme was male-oriented as participants were mostly boys. Little wonder it was named “Igba Boi” from the onset.

2.2. Theoretical Reviews: Entrepreneurial Value Creation Theory and Multidimensionality

This study is underpinned by the entrepreneurial venture creation theory (EVCT) and the multidimensional constructs. EVCT explains how entrepreneurial value is created and realized through the establishment of an entrepreneurial venture (Mishra & Zachary, 2014). This strengthens the notion that entrepreneurship seeks to create value through an established business venture. Scholars differ on the process of entrepreneurship value creation but agree that the process is largely iterative (Bhave, 1994; Mishra & Zachary, 2014). According to Bhave (1994), the following processes are involved: opportunity recognition, commitment to physical creation, set-up of production technology, organization creation, product creation, linking with markets, and customer feedback. Mishra and Zachary (2014) argue that only two stages are involved, including venture formulation and venture monetization. Arguing from the marketing perspective of the exchange-based view, value co-creation, Pinelli et al. (2022) affirm that “entrepreneurs and stakeholders are tied by exchange relationships, through which they co-create value by reciprocally making and realizing promises of value”. Another central issue raised by previous research is that the process of entrepreneurial value creation begins with opportunity recognition and exploitation. This paper, therefore, argues that the IIES is appropriately situated as a relevant tool in global entrepreneurial value creation. The scheme is helpful in enabling entrepreneurial opportunity recognition and exploitation and plays a key role in enabling entrepreneurial venture monetization. In sum, people who pass through the IIES are trained to identify opportunities, exploit opportunities, set up and manage entrepreneurial ventures, and relate with various business stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, intermediaries, the media, trade unions/competitors, etc.

Like other aspects of business education, entrepreneurship has a number of constructs that are difficult to measure, thus, justifying the adoption of a multidimensional construct approach (Agu, 2021). According to Law et al. (1998), a construct is multidimensional when it refers to several distinct but related dimensions treated as a single theoretical construct. Multidimensional constructs provide holistic representations of complex phenomena, allow researchers to match broad predictors with broad outcomes, and increase explained variance (Hanisch et al., 1998; Roznowski & Hanisch, 1990; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996). Given that the IIES is a construct that is still emerging, scholars approach it from different perspectives, since there is yet no agreement about how best to measure it. This paper conceptualizes and explains the IIES from the 3Rs perspective by exploring its relevance, restraints, and remedies in relation to global entrepreneurship development. This is the first attempt to x-ray the IIES using the conceptualized framework. The framework guiding this study is presented in Figure 1. More specifically, the “relevance” construct attempts to unravel, among others, the economic, social, financial, and environmental essence of the IIES. Knowing this will motivate adequate attention to the scheme to enhance its contribution to the economy. The “restraints” are the challenges and obstacles limiting the ability of the scheme to upscale and play its expected role. By identifying the challenges, formulating appropriate solutions becomes easy. Thus, the “remedies” are possible solutions to the

obstacles, which, if implemented, will position the IIES for more impactful economic and societal roles at national and international levels.

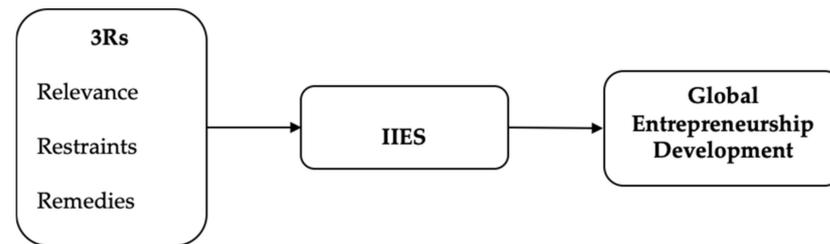


Figure 1. Explanatory chain model. Source: Authors' own conceptualization.

3. Methods

To investigate the 3Rs in relation to the IIES as a global entrepreneurial venture creation scheme, this study adopts a mixed methods approach: a qualitative survey based on face-to-face and phone interviews with IIES stakeholders and an in-depth literature review of previous research (qualitative systematic review). Two factors justify these approaches. First, a qualitative survey is suitable for its role in obtaining a nuanced perspective of the phenomenon under investigation (Agu et al., 2023). Second, there is still a dearth of empirical research in this area of investigation, and therefore, there is a need to assemble the collective evidence of studies exploring this phenomenon (Snyder, 2019).

In the first approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which allowed for informants to be asked a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Given, 2008). The interview protocol was developed based on the set research questions, which emanate from the guiding theory/model. The goal was to explore the personal lived experiences of stakeholders (mentors and mentees) in the IIES. Data collection commenced from a purposive sample of 10 informants—five mentors and five mentees currently participating in the IIES. Qualitative research typically aims to discover contextually specific elements. In this sense, according to Sandelowski (1995), the number of subjects is not important in itself and depends in particular on the focus of the research, the type of research question, available resources and time, requirements of the institutional committee, the judgments of the epistemic community, the nature of the selected group and research domain (Bekele & Ago, 2022). Furthermore, in the case of a sample of this nature, the informants have very homogeneous characteristics (Berg Johansen & De Cock, 2017). As a result, this homogeneity can provide access to interesting information in a concentrated way (Rego et al., 2018).

The participants operate in the Owerri Industrial Cluster (Auto Mechanic and Electrical Section). Informants were selected based on convenience and the judgment of the researchers. To qualify for inclusion, the mentor must have trained and graduated someone in the IIES, while the mentee must have spent not fewer than three years in the scheme. The focus was only on masters and mentees who are living together for the purpose of the IIES. There are some mentees who operate from their own parents' homes. These were excluded. The researchers explained the purpose and benefits of the research to the participants, sought their consent, and also guaranteed their privacy in the process. The process of data collection, which took place in the month of February 2024, lasted for six days, with each interview taking an average of 41 min. Four interviews were conducted via phone, while six were conducted face-to-face. All the participants agreed to the recording of the interview. English and Igbo were the language of the interview. Data saturation was actualized, thereafter, the data was transcribed.

Thereafter, a deductive thematic analysis was carried out following a four-stage approach: selection of the unit of analysis (whole interviews); the determination of meanings

by coding and thematic analysis; extracting key themes by condensing generated phrases; and interpretation of themes. The recorded/transcribed data were listened to/read thrice by the researchers. The coding proceeded manually with notes and personal computers used to separate various concepts that emerged from the data. The coding structure was in the form: data—concepts—themes—theoretical model (Agu et al., 2023). Inter-coder reliability and validity were ensured by involving two independent coders, while the findings were presented back to the participants (Madichie & Agu, 2022).

For the systematic literature review, the approach described by Snyder (2019) was adopted. First, the terms Igbo traditional entrepreneurship scheme, Igbo apprenticeship scheme, Igba Bio, Imu oru, and Imu ahia were searched for on the Scopus database. Only articles published in Scimago-ranked outlets were selected, yielding 15 initial articles, which were then screened based on relevance, restraints, and remedies. While there were several book chapters (Adeola, 2020, 2023 edited books) related to the topic, only those that have contents relating to the 3Rs were selected. All 15 papers qualified for inclusion, justifying their careful perusal to identify the points relating to the objectives of this study.

4. Results

The analyses are preceded by the descriptive characteristics of the interview participants (see Table 1) and a list of authors included in the systematic literature review. The findings from the in-depth interviews and systematic literature review (see Table 2) are presented in three parts based on the set research questions, thus, one section for each of relevance, restraints, and remedies.

Table 1. Demographic analysis of the interview respondents (n = 10).

Participant	Status	Sector	Age	Marital Status	Education	Years in Business/Sector
A	Mentor	Mechanic	55	Married	Primary	21
B	Mentor	Mechanic	49	Married	Primary	19
C	Mentor	Mechanic	43	Married	Secondary	14
D	Mentor	Mechanic	43	Married	Secondary	17
E	Mentee	Mechanic	24	Single	Primary	4
F	Mentee	Mechanic	26	Single	Secondary	5
G	Mentor	Electrical	56	Married	Secondary	23
H	Mentee	Electrical	21	Single	Secondary	3
I	Mentee	Mechanic	24	Single	Primary	6
J	Mentee	Mechanic	22	Single	Secondary	4

Table 2. Authors of articles selected for systematic review (n = 15).

Serial No.	Author(s)	Title	Publisher
1	Ezekafor et al. (2023)	Case studies on business ethics and values: insights from the southeastern Igbos of Nigeria.	<i>Casebook of Indigenous Business Practices in Africa</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
2	Udeh (2022)	Responsible Management: the Igbo apprenticeship system.	<i>Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 2: Ethical Work and Sustainability</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
3	Agu et al. (2022)	COVID-19 pandemic and entrepreneurial intention among university students: a contextualization of the Igbo traditional business school.	<i>African Journal of Economic and Management Studies</i> . Emerald Publishing.
4	Agu and Nwachukwu (2020)	Exploring the relevance of Igbo traditional business school in the development of entrepreneurial potential and intention in Nigeria.	<i>Small Enterprise Research</i> . Taylor and Francis.

Table 2. Cont.

Serial No.	Author(s)	Title	Publisher
5	Chikere (2023)	Apprentice training, mastership, and managerial development of Igbo entrepreneurs in Nigeria.	<i>Casebook of Indigenous Business Practices in Africa</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
6	Ogbu (2020)	Understanding the conflict management and transformation mechanisms in the Igbo traditional business model.	<i>Indigenous African Enterprise</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
7	Adeola (2020)	The Igbo traditional business school (I-TBS): an introduction.	<i>Indigenous African Enterprise</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
8	Igwe et al. (2018)	Keeping it in the family: exploring Igbo ethnic entrepreneurial behaviour in Nigeria.	<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
9	Madichie et al. (2008)	Cultural determinants of entrepreneurial emergence in a typical sub-Saharan African context.	<i>Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
10	Iwara (2020)	The Igbo traditional business school (I-TBS): a SWOT review synthesis.	<i>Indigenous African Enterprise</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited
11	Nkamnebe and Ezemba (2020)	Entrepreneurship incubation among the Nigerian Igbos: the Igba-Boi indigenous model.	<i>Indigenous African Enterprise</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited
12	Ikwuegbu et al. (2020)	Igba-Boi: comparison with the German model and recommendations for the Nigerian economy.	<i>Indigenous African Enterprise</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited
13	Agozino and Anyanike (2007)	IMU AHIA: traditional Igbo business school and global commerce culture.	<i>Dialectical Anthropology</i> . Springer.
14	Ekesiobi and Dimnwobi (2021)	Economic assessment of the Igbo entrepreneurship model for entrepreneurial development in Nigeria: evidence from clusters in Anambra state.	<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited.
15	Ifeanyichukwu et al. (2023)	Exploration of apprenticeship and business succession models in Nigeria, Ghana, and the Benin Republic: a cross-case analysis of selected ethnic groups.	<i>Casebook of Indigenous Business Practices in Africa</i> . Emerald Publishing Limited

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Out of the 10 informants, five (50%) were mentors, and the remaining 50% were mentees. All the participants attempted secondary education, with only six (60%) holding a West African Examination Certificate (WAEC), General Certificate of Education (GCE), or National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTAEB). The participants were aged between 21 and 58 years old. The oldest mentee, aged 28 years, had served his master for six years.

Table 3 presents an analysis of the literature and, where applicable, draws parallels between the literature and the interviews conducted.

Table 4 summarizes the factors that restrain the ability of the IIES from actualizing its potential, addressing RQ2.

In order to answer research question 3 (What remedial actions can be taken to improve the situation?), Table 5 was developed, where the different remedies to improve the IIES can be analyzed.

Table 3. Evidence of IIES Relevance.

Relevance	Supporting Quotes
Economic empowerment	<p>“The indigenous entrepreneurship practice has produced millions of entrepreneurs who have found economic space for themselves in Nigeria and abroad, lifting families out of poverty.” (Adeola, 2020).</p> <p>“Any young man who patiently graduates from this scheme, is sure of being economically relevant. He can certainly create wealth through the acquired knowledge.” (Participant A).</p>
Poverty eradication	<p>“The IAS ¹ prevents poverty by mass scaling opportunities for everyone.” (Ekekwe, 2021).</p> <p>“When I finish this training, I am sure that I cannot be poor in my life. So I put in my effort in learning the work well.” (Participant J).</p>
Collective prosperity	<p>“Togetherness and solidarity in business and building family/social ties were key strengths of the model.” (Iwara, 2020).</p> <p>“IAS as a business philosophy targeted towards economic equilibrium.” (Udeh, 2022).</p>
Business sustainability	<p>“The IAS facilitates the transfer of business knowledge, practices and principles from one generation to another.” (Ogbu, 2020).</p> <p>“IAS promotes sustainability, which involves the protection, creation and maintenance of social, environmental and economic business values.” (Udeh, 2022).</p> <p>“Even in times of economic crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ITBS equips enrollees to be resilient and to overcome the challenges on entrepreneurial vocation.” (Agu et al., 2022).</p>
Guaranteed future	<p>“It is an informal apprenticeship system provides entrepreneurial learning that prepares the younger generation to take to business as a way of life.” (Igwe et al., 2018).</p> <p>“As soon as the successful apprentice is settled, he can engage in other lines of business and even expand beyond this environment.” (Participant B)</p>
Creativity and innovation	<p>“The ITBS positively and significantly influences entrepreneurial potential and intention.” (Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020).</p> <p>“The IAS is the largest incubator of business startups.” (Adeola, 2020).</p>
Emergence of global business giants	<p>“The IAS has been recognized as the largest business incubator in the world as thousands of ventures are developed and established yearly through it.” (Ekekwe, 2021).</p>
Business management ability	<p>“Entrepreneurs who participated in the IEM have higher business survival rate, business growth rate and access to trade and informal credit.” (Ekesiobi & Dimnwobi, 2021).</p>
Transfer of business knowledge	<p>“The Igbo apprenticeship system facilitates the transfer of business knowledge, practices and principles from one generation to another.” (Ogbu, 2020).</p>
Contributes to sustainable development goals (SDG)	<p>“IAS does not only practice responsible management but promotes the idea of responsible management in Nigeria and across the continent.” (Udeh, 2022).</p> <p>“IAS promotes sustainability, which involves the protection, creation and maintenance of social, environmental and economic business values.” (Udeh, 2022).</p>

¹ Igbo Apprenticeship System. Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Table 4. Evidence of IIES Restraints.

Restraints	Supporting Quotes
Absence of regulatory system	<p>“The IAS model lacks regulations to monitor irregularities.” (Iwara, 2020).</p> <p>“The system is poorly regulated. And this makes it easy for some Ogas (mentors) or boys (mentees) to default.” (Participant C)</p>
Infidelity of some mentors	<p>“In some cases, mentors refuse to live up to the agreement. Some mentees will spend six to seven years and their bosses will find it difficult to settle them.” (Participant J).</p> <p>“False accusations of mentees, breaching settlement agreement, unfair dismissal of mentee are some of the setbacks of the ITBS.” (Iwara, 2020).</p>

Table 4. Cont.

Restrains	Supporting Quotes
Reducing enrolment into the scheme	<p>“These days, young people hardly show willingness to enroll into this apprentice scheme. They now prefer ‘quick money’ to learning a trade or skill.” (Participant A).</p> <p>“This is serious lack of interest among young boys today. Majority will not want to spend six years to serve their master.” (Participant B).</p> <p>“Many people now prefer to be coming from their parents’ houses instead of living with their masters.” (Participant H).</p>
Growing distrust among contractual parties	<p>“In some cases, the Ogas will be suspecting their boys, and this might lead to conflict between the two.” (Participant I).</p> <p>“Some boys steal from their mentors. This can lead to a situation whereby the master will hide some knowledge from the mentee. None will have full trust on the other.” (Participant C).</p>
Unfriendly attitude of mentors’ wives	<p>One of the challenges I had during my first year is the maltreatment my Oga’s wife was giving to me. Sometimes, feeding was a problem.” (Participant E).</p> <p>“The wife of my boss was hostile to me, until my people visited my master to address the issues.” (Participant J).</p>
Largely informal agreements	<p>“There is lack of solid ground for justice as agreements are mostly informal.” (Iwara, 2020).</p> <p>“I hadn’t any written agreement with my boys during their enrolment. But everyone knows that six years is the duration, and what I’m meant to do for them is well known.” (Participant A).</p>

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Table 5. Evidence of remedies to IIES restraints.

Remedies	Supporting Quotes
Formulation of regulatory policies	<p>“There is need to formulate policies to regulate and support the operations of ITBS. This will specify the roles of each party and what punishment to be given to any defaulter.” (Adapted from Agu and Nwachukwu (2020)).</p>
Formalization of agreements	<p>Given the level of defaults in the scheme, using legal means to back up the traditional agreements will be helpful.</p>
Talent hunting and motivation	<p>To increase enrolment into the scheme, parents and mentors are encouraged to resuscitate the ancient talent hunting approach where prospects are encouraged and motivated to enroll into specific lines of trade, vocation and entrepreneurship. According to Agu and Nwachukwu (2020), mentors should aim at inculcating skills that drive desirability, feasibility, propensity to act and entrepreneurial intention in the mentees, with emphasis on the advantages of owning an enterprise. Thus, when people see that those who passed through the scheme are successful business owners, others will be motivated to enroll.</p>
Spirituality	<p>Invoking the spiritual side of the Igbo culture where the entire community commits any defaulter into the hands of the Igbo deities will instill fear in the parties. A more powerful alternative approach is to follow the Christian religious approach whereby the Almighty God is invited to intervene. For instance, in the last years of some mentees, during the time their masters are expected to settle them, a lot of wicked acts are experience—Mentors may lay false accusations on the mentees just to avoid settling them. Being aware of the spiritual implications of these acts will help to reduce it.</p>
Periodic orientations by unions	<p>Since most business lines have registered unions, the role of the union should extend to include providing periodic orientations that involves the mentors, mentees, and wives of mentors since all are stakeholders in the scheme. The union should also ensure that complaints brought by any party are handled justly.</p>
External institutional support	<p>Institutions such as the government, media, and tertiary institutions are encouraged to provide more supports and synergy with the operators of the IIES. This will help to scale them up speedily.</p>

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

5. Discussion

This study explored the relevance, restraints, and remedies of the IIES using a conceptualized 3Rs framework while leveraging the entrepreneurial venture creation theory and the multidimensional construct. A mixed approach, involving in-depth interviews and a systematic literature review, was applied. The findings indicate that the IIES is relevant as it serves as a means of achieving economic empowerment, poverty eradication, collective prosperity, business sustainability, a guaranteed bright future, creative innovation, the emergence of global business giants, business management ability, transfer of talents, and sustainable development. These findings align with previous research (Agu et al., 2022; Adeola, 2020; Iwara, 2020; Madichie & Agu, 2022).

Furthermore, certain restraints that limit the growth and relevance of the IIES were identified. These include the absence of a regulatory system, infidelity of some mentors, reduced enrolment, growing distrust among contractual parties, the unfriendly attitude of some mentors' wives, and the largely informal nature of IIES agreements. These findings are in line with previous research (Iwara, 2020; Nkamnebe & Ezemba, 2020). Furthermore, some remedial actions are proposed, including the formulation of regulatory policies, formalization of agreements, talent hunting, spirituality, periodic orientation by unions, and external institutional support. These findings validate the assertions from previous research (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2023; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020; Adeola, 2020).

6. Conclusions

By exploring the 3Rs perspective in the context of the IIES, this study makes theoretical and practical contributions. First, it adds to the ongoing research on the IIES and traditional African entrepreneurship by adding the 3Rs framework to the discussion and proving the applicability of the entrepreneurial venture creation theory and the multidimensional construct to this context. This novel theoretical perspective contributes towards situating the IIES within modern global entrepreneurship theories. Again, this study provides directions to stakeholders and policymakers on how to enable the IIES to scale up. First, it proposes a five-stage process to the IIES, which involves talent identification and mentor matching, parent-mentor negotiation, experimentation, learning stage, and establishment. By managing the IIES through this process, from inception to graduation, stakeholders, including parents, mentors, mentees, the government, and other regulators (e.g., trade unions), can easily monitor the scheme and reduce the factors limiting it. Secondly, by revealing the 3Rs factors, relevant stakeholders are provided with a clearer direction on the critical areas of benefits to consolidate, challenges to tackle, and remedies to implement to enhance the values of the IIES.

Being limited in scope and methodology, further and ongoing studies are required that can take this study further. For instance, only the mechanical and electrical sections of the IIES in Owerri were covered in the in-depth interviews. Future studies should cover other areas and also attempt to validate the 3Rs framework. Finally, the issue of sample size in qualitative in-depth research remains a subject of debate. Yet, scholars mostly support the use of saturation as a benchmark for determining the size of participants. While the sample size can be seen as a limitation, the present study is peculiar given that the results are not wholly dependent on the interview outcome but also include a systematic literature review. In several reports, scholars advocate for sample sizes ranging from 5 to 12 to ensure theoretical, thematic, code, or data satisfaction (e.g., Morse, 2000; Malterud et al., 2016; Boddy, 2016; Guest et al., 2006). Nevertheless, future studies should expand the sample size to deepen the findings.

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