

CHAPTER 3 STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research findings are deemed universal when appropriate methodologies are employed (Bell & Warren, 2023). This chapter presents the research design and philosophy guiding the study on the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe, emphasizing the significance of a well-defined methodological framework in producing reliable and valid results.

The researcher adopted a qualitative methodology, recognizing its strengths in capturing the complexities of social phenomena. This approach was particularly suitable for exploring the multifaceted historical and legal contexts of the FTLRP. By employing a legal historical approach, the researcher sought to assess the events leading to the FTLRP and their implications for land ownership and rights in Zimbabwe.

To gather a comprehensive understanding of the topic, the researcher examined a range of sources, including journal articles, published works on colonialism and land, media narratives, and various statutes, notably the 2013 Constitution. This extensive review enabled the researcher to contextualize the FTLRP within broader historical and socio-political frameworks. Developing a prescriptive, descriptive, and analytical framework was essential for addressing the legal and factual challenges inherent in the study, particularly regarding the contentious issue of constitutional obligations to compensate for improvements made to agricultural land. This framework provided clarity on the ownership model for newly resettled beneficiaries, which remains a critical aspect of the ongoing land reform debate.

Key informant interviews were integral to the research process. The researcher conducted qualitative, in-depth discussions with 15 carefully selected individuals who possessed first-hand knowledge of the subject

matter (Mugisha *et al.*, 2021). These informants included officials from the Ministry of Lands, representatives from the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers Union (ZCFU) and Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), war veterans, parliamentarians, and legal scholars.

To ensure a diverse range of perspectives, purposive sampling was employed to identify key informants. This method allowed the researcher to target individuals whose insights would be particularly valuable in understanding the complexities of the FTLRP. Moreover, recognizing the sensitivity of the topic during an election year, the researcher incorporated a snowball sampling approach. This strategy facilitated further data collection, as initial informants recommended additional participants, thus expanding the network of knowledgeable contributors.

The researcher utilised open-ended questionnaires during the interviews to capture a wide array of perspectives from stakeholders. This qualitative data collection method encouraged participants to provide detailed responses, allowing them to express their views freely and creatively. The open-ended format was instrumental in revealing nuanced insights into the participants' experiences and opinions, thereby enriching the data gathered (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023). Such depth of information is crucial for understanding the intricate dynamics surrounding land reform and its socio-political implications.

Data analysis was conducted thematically, focusing on identifying significant patterns and themes within the responses. Thematic analysis entails a systematic approach to organising and interpreting qualitative data, allowing the researcher to highlight critical insights relevant to the research questions. By identifying recurring themes, the researcher was able to draw meaningful conclusions that contribute to the academic discourse on land reform in Zimbabwe.

Ethics played a central role in the research design, ensuring that participant protection and engagement were prioritised. Key ethical principles included "informed consent," which involved clearly communicating the study's purpose to participants, enabling them to understand their roles and the significance of their contributions. Furthermore, maintaining "anonymity" and "confidentiality" was essential to protect participants' identities and personal information (Omegun, 2015). Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe's political landscape, the researcher was vigilant about potential "conflicts of interest." This awareness was particularly important, as political critiques could endanger participants, underscoring the need for discretion and ethical rigor.

In summary, this chapter outlines the research design and philosophy that guided the study of the FTLRP in Zimbabwe. By employing a qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to explore the historical, legal, and socio-political dimensions of land reform. The integration of key informant interviews and thematic data analysis enriched the research findings, providing valuable insights into the ongoing discourse surrounding land rights in Zimbabwe. The commitment to ethical research practices further ensured the integrity of the study, fostering a respectful and secure environment for participants. Through this comprehensive approach, the researcher aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in land reform and its broader implications for justice and equity in Zimbabwean society.